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Exploring the experiences of educators on the effects of COVID-19 on Further Education and Training (FET) learners in Gauteng East District

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Exploring the experiences of educators on the effects of COVID-19 on Further Education and Training (FET) learners in Gauteng East District



A Research Report presented to the Department of Social Work School of Human and Community Development, Faculty of Humanities University of the Witwatersrand

In partially fulfillment of the requirements for

Master of Arts in Social Work by Coursework and Research Report in the field of School Social Work

by

Tiyisela Suzan Connie Makamu

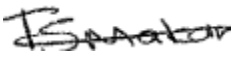
March 2024

DECLARATION

This research report is the result of my own work, and I, Tiyisela Suzan Makamu, hereby declare that I have given due credit to all the sources I used. There is no prior submission of this report for a university examination.

Suzan Makamu

Signature



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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the background to the research study. The problem statement and rationale for the study is explained. The research question, aim and objectives of the study are. described. A brief overview of the research methodology applied is presented. The key concepts relevant to the study are defined. The limitations and delimitations of the study are highlighted, and the chapter concludes with an outline of the structure of the research report.

1.2 Introduction and background to the study

Research on high school learners on the effects of COVID-19 is still emerging. The aim of this study was to explore the experiences of educators of Further Education and Training (FET) learners during the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 was first detected in China in 2019. The virus spread from person to person and has been linked to serious respiratory difficulties (Cucinotta & Vanelli, 2020; Huang et al, 2020). The development of the virus has subsequently altered the lives of people all around the world, particularly once it was proclaimed a pandemic (World Health Organization, 2020).

In March 2020, the virus made its way to South Africa through a family that was coming from Italy. When it arrived in South Africa within a week, the government through the leadership of President Cyril Ramaphosa imposed a lockdown to try and stop the further spread of the virus (Statistics South Africa, 2020). One of the lockdown requirements was for the Department of Basic

Education to close its schools. Learners were not attending school since they were required to be indoors. The school closures disrupted learner's academic engagement in South Africa and other places throughout the world.

After fifteen weeks since the virus entered South Africa, the country was declared to be in Alert level 1 and the Department of Basic Education was declared ready to start admitting learners into schools (South African Government, 2020). The Department of Basic Education developed guidelines for the management of Coronavirus to prepare for the schools reopening. Guidelines for schools in maintaining the hygiene during the pandemic and standard operating procedures were developed and published (DBE, 2020). The indicated documents were developed to ensure the safety of the school community which encompasses, educators, school administrators and the learners.

In South Africa, a lot of research has been done on learners and the challenges they face in school, however research on the effects of COVID-19 in FET learners in South Africa is still scarce. Other countries such as China have embarked on studies to evaluate the effects of COVID-19 on learners. The outcomes of a study conducted in China with learners during the COVID-19 pandemic revealed that it had an influence on their mental health (Fu et al, 2021; Wang & Zhao, 2020). The study revealed that online education was able to enhance their cleanliness and engaging in home duties (Pan, 2020). The author, on the other hand, paid no attention to the challenges that learners faced because of the pandemic.

Another research conducted in the United States of America looking at the effects of stress on high school learners during the pandemic revealed that prior to the pandemic, learners experienced stresses brought on by academic demands. However, when the pandemic arrived, the stress levels

among the learners increased. The additional stress was caused by social constraints, a lack of physical exercise, concern for their own or loved ones' safety, and changes in school attendance as well as lack of support offered to the students in question (Williams et al, 2021). The authors acknowledge the effects of the pandemic on high school learners and the steps that must be taken to address these difficulties.

The findings of the research done by Hsieh et al (2020) on high school learners on coping methods and emotional wellness during the COVID-19 pandemic revealed that most adolescents were concerned about the welfare of their friends, family, and their own physical health being harmed by the pandemic. Furthermore, feeling distracted, apprehensive, and having negative thoughts were among the most prevalent general distress symptoms reported by the study's participants (Hsieh et al, 2020).

Studies conducted with educators in the United Kingdom and the Philippines by Jain et al (2020) and Barot et al (2021) revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact on learners' education. This was exacerbated by living conditions because some learners come from underprivileged backgrounds, making participation in education difficult despite online teaching methods. This also had a harmful influence on educators. Even though the studies were done at separate times, they have one thing in common: they both focus on high school students and the challenges they experience throughout the pandemic.

In South Africa a body of knowledge exists on the challenges faced by learners in high schools, however research on the impact of COVID-19 in schools is still emerging. The study conducted with students of higher learning in South African institutions on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic, showed that the pandemic has brought about changes in students’ way of living and

learning which resulted in a slew of negative emotional states and adjustment difficulties (Naidoo & Cartwright, 2020). Furthermore, the authors indicated experiences of negative emotional and psychological effects of the COVID-19 pandemic which has been exceptionally painful and unpleasant. These effects were due to its sudden onset, its unique nature, possibly lethal implications, as well as the plethora of personal and financial losses caused by major socioeconomic upheavals.

The researcher agrees with the scholars that the pandemic has had a detrimental influence on the well-being of students. Furthermore, the researcher believes that there is insufficient research in South African literature on the effect of the pandemic on FET learners during COVID-19, therefore this study was conducted to investigate the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on FET learners' well-being.

1.3 Statement of the problem and rationale of the study

Education remains the basic right of every individual as stipulated in section 29(1a) of the Constitution of South Africa (Act 110, 1996; Schools Act,1996). However, this right came under threat during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic. Learners in South Africa had to remain indoors for a period of fifteen weeks without attending school because of lockdown regulations imposed by the government (Ramaphosa, 2020). It is noted that the lockdown was introduced to restrict the spread of the pandemic. However, it has had a negative effect on the educational outcomes of learners.

The COVID-19 pandemic affected the curriculum for schools starting from early childhood development centers to the institutions of higher learning (UNICEF, 2020). According to UNICEF (2021) learners in South Africa are behind with one year because of COVID-19 regulations and highlights that South African learners cannot afford to lose another hour of learning. Soudien et al

(2022) also underline the curriculum challenges faced by the education system as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. They reflect on the dilemma of readjusting school and term days and designing material to enable learners to learn on their own remotely. This shows the seriousness of the education challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. Research shows that independent learning is another problem that has affected the learning experiences of learners in schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. Learners were left to conduct classwork activities on their own through online learning. Furthermore, homework was done with minimal supervision (Mukuna & Olaka, 2020; Maphalala et al, 2022). The research also shows that during post lockdown class attendance was minimal due to rotational attendance (Maphalala et al, 2022). The scholars further stated that schools in order adhere to social distancing protocols implemented different strategies of teaching such as WhatsApp, prerecorded voice notes and messaging. Some schools were able to cope with the set multiple mode of teaching because they had technological devices and access while in other schools it created a larger gap on teaching (Maphalala et al, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed already existing socio-economic inequalities within the South African education system.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 coupled with already existing inequalities has affected the educational outcomes of learners in schools. Many South African schools have been experiencing overcrowding and inadequate resources (Equal Education, 2021; Ntsala, 2021). Many schools in poor communities are under resourced and this affects the learning process (Soudien et al, 2022). Schools in the township prior the pandemic experienced challenges with overcrowding and a shortage of textbooks (Mothatha, 2022; Matumba, 2015). According to the section 5(3) of the Schools Act 84 of 1996 it stipulates that no public school is expected to deny a learner placement, and this causes the schools to have a high number of learners and very few resources to support

these learners. Learners share textbooks, do not have enough chairs and tables and the abolition facilities are not functional (Mabona, 2019; Ndimande, 2016). These problems have been experienced before the COVID-19 pandemic and is still evident.

According to Equal Education (2021), West and Meier (2020) and Muthusamy (2015) overcrowded classrooms are one of the key variables connected with low performance and grade repeat in quintile 1 to 3 no fee-paying schools. Furthermore, the authors indicated that overcrowding in classrooms are caused by a teacher shortage, a lack of school infrastructure, and a lack of resources in no- fee paying schools. These challenges were amplified during COVID-19 pandemic. Hence measures such as social distancing were introduced to protect the health of all people in South Africa. However, these measures were difficult to execute in under resourced schools which lack adequate infrastructure and other learning resources (Van Der Berg et al, 2021; Soudien et al, 2022). As a result of these challenges the academic success of learners is hugely affected (Adebayo et al, 2020).

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic forced a shift to online learning for many schools in South Africa. The Department of Basic Education played an important role in aiding learners by providing tools to facilitates online learning during the pandemic. However, learners from underprivileged communities experienced challenges accessing online learning due to their geographical environment and network challenges (Maree, 2021). Chisango and Morongwe's (2020) study showed that insufficient Information Communication Technologies (ICT) and the technological skills to operate online were huge challenges that affected learner performance during this COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the authors continued to highlight that not all learners from senior phase were given ICT tools due to resource constraints.

Despite having literature on the impact of COVID-19 on the South African education system, there is limited literature on how COVID-19 affected high school learners, especially FET learners in South Africa.

Therefore, this research investigation is significant that seeks to address this gap. The research study also intended to add to the limited literature on educator's experiences on the effects of COVID-19 on learner well-being. The potential contribution of this study is that it will further add to existing literature on FET learners' experiences during COVID-19 in high schools. The study also had the potential to inform how school social workers can assist educators and learners during other pandemics like the COVID-19 pandemic. This study will further contribute to policy on how educators and learners can be assisted to improve learning outcomes during national disasters such as COVID-19.

Finally, this study provided information on the experiences of educators before, during, and after COVID-19, which could help school social workers and educators determine the kind of support that is needed to meet the needs of FET learners during pandemics.

1.4 Research question

The overarching research question was:

What were the experiences of educators working with FET learners in a school during the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.5 Research aim, and objectives of the study

The primary aim of the study was to explore the experiences of educators working with Further Education and Training (FET) learners in the Gauteng East District on the effects of COVID-19 on educators and learners' well-being.

The objectives of the study were

1.5.1 To describe the experiences of educators in dealing with FET learners' well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic and the meanings they attach to these experiences.

1.5.2 To explore the psychosocial issues faced by educators working with FET learners during the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.5.3 To determine possible assistance available for learners and educators during COVID-19 pandemic that can improve quality of education.

1.5.4 To establish the potential role played by the school social workers working with FET learners and educators during the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.5.5 To elicit suggestions from educators on what strategies educators can use during pandemics.

1.6 An Overview of the Research Methodology

A qualitative research approach was utilised in this study to understand how different educators experienced the impact of COVID-19 on FET learners. Qualitative research is a method of research that explores in-depth understanding of the participants problems. Creswell (2014) articulated that the research approach includes plans and procedures that specify the steps to be followed in deciding on the relevant methods of data collection, analysis, and procedures to be followed. Furthermore, it is an approach that is used when a researcher wants to explore and understand human experiences within their own surroundings and make interpretations of its meaning (Leavy, 2017; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The advantage of using the qualitative research approach is that it allows for the collection of in-depth information from the people who are experiencing the problem. In this case the researcher seeks to collect in-depth experiences on how educators

experienced learners during this COVID-19 pandemic and the qualitative approach was the best approach to achieve the aim and objectives of this study.

In this study, a phenomenological design was utilised to gain a deeper comprehension of educators' perspectives of COVID-19 pandemic. Phenomenology is a qualitative research design that allows the researcher to obtain a profound grasp of the nature or significance of the participants lived experiences. According to Fain (2017) phenomenology is the methodical discovery and description of the essence or essences of an experience. In phenomenological research, the research question focuses on the meaning of the experiences. The purpose of phenomenological research is to create rich, comprehensive, and insightful accounts of lived experiences (Fain, 2017).

Creswell and Poth (2018) state that phenomenological design seeks to discover and describe the shared meaning derived from individuals' lived experiences based on specific phenomena. Furthermore, the phenomenological design focuses on human consciousness and allows the researcher to gain a thorough grasp of how participants think and feel about their own experiences (Leavy, 2017; Fain, 2017). The advantage of the phenomenological design is that it focuses on exploring the common lived experiences of the participants (Leavy, 2017; Fain, 2017). The phenomenology design is applicable and guided the researcher to explore the experiences of educators working with FET learners during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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This design was also employed because it gave the researcher the chance to get comprehensive and distinctive data from the participants. A secondary school was the population from which the

study's sample was drawn. Purposive sampling was used to identify and select eleven educator participants who participated in this study. Most suitable to support the investigation in addressing the research question.

One on one in-depth interviews were employed as a data collecting method, with a semi-structured interview schedule serving as the research tool. The information gathered was analysed using thematic analysis, a procedure wherein data patterns were identified, and themes were developed to establish meaning that would be conveyed in data analysis.

1.7 Definition of concepts

Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Coronavirus is described as a novel strain of Coronavirus that belongs to the same family that causes severe acute respiratory syndrome (Cuccinotta & Vanelli, 2020). UNICEF, WHO & IFRC (2020) define Covid-19 as a new virus linked to the same family, such as Severe, Acute respiratory syndrome, and some types of the common cold.

Educator

An educator means any person solely dedicated to extracurricular duties, who teaches, educates, or educates other persons, or who provides professional educational services, including professional therapy and educational services at school (Schools Act, 1996). An educator is any person who teaches or educates other people or who provides professional educational services (Department of Education dictionary, 2011). The research will view an educator as those professionals teaching in high schools having qualification as an educator with three years of experience and registered with the South African Council of Educators (SACE).

Further education and Training

According to the South African Council for Educators Act (2000), Further Education and Training institution means any school provided for in the South African Schools Act (1996). The further Education and Training phase refers to the fourth phase of the public-school programme, which includes grades 10, 11 and 12 (DBE dictionary, 2011). The researcher's understanding of the FET phase is the education at the high school level. In this research the researcher chose this age group of older learners who are exposed to challenges and are about to go to matric. In this age group FET learners are prone to fail and often the blame is placed on educators (Mhlolo, 2022; Awofala, 2023).

Learners

DBE dictionary (2011) broadly defines a learner as a person attending an ECD center, school, or ABET Centre. Learner refers to any person who receives training or is obliged to receive training in terms of the Schools Act (1996). The learner for the purpose of this research is any person below the age of 21 who is at the senior phase (FET).

School Social Worker

School social work is defined as the application of social work principles and methods within the education system to render holistic social work services to learners, parents, educators, and the school as a community, with the main goal of addressing learning and personal, emotional, socioeconomic, and behavioural barriers to create an environment where a learner can reach his/her optimal potential (Vergottini, 2019). Furthermore, Reyneke (2020) points out that school social workers are social workers who provide interventions that support development and capacity building for learners in school settings. Additionally, school social work is described as

a specialised field that takes place in educational settings to address social, emotional, and behavioural barriers experienced by learners (Pretorius, 2020). For this study the researcher defines a school social worker as a social worker working in a school setting who focuses on learners psychosocial functioning in order to promote, preserve their health, wellbeing and to enhance their academic performance.

Well-being

Dacey et al (2016) define well-being as the psychological ability to cope with demands that arise over time, circumstances, and environment. Barkham et al (2019) state that student well-being is a socio-demographic expression that characterised positive feelings about oneself and reflects an innate ability to manage forces and adversities of academic life and school. The word wellbeing comprises physical, mental, and social health concerns, and these are indicators used examine the well-being of students (SACE, 2020)

Well-being is a blend of functioning with positive effects such as joy, fulfillment, expanding personal perspective, possession, leadership, determination, and experiencing constructive relationships (Ruggeri et al, 2020). For the purposes of this study, the researcher will define wellbeing as a state of being mentally balanced, healthy, being able to cope with life stressors and improvement in self-knowledge and self-care.

1.8 Limitations and delimitations

Limitations	**Delimitations**
Fouche and Delport (2011) argue that prospective limitations are often numerous because the study must be well designed to limit them. In this regard, the limitation of the study, is the study	The researcher will close the gap by interviewing educators of different age groups.

only focuses on one school with the same set of challenges and not a diverse environment	
A limitation of the study was that educators might be exhausted if the interviews were to be conducted at the school.	Researcher will ask participants' permission to conduct interviews at a place and time of their choice.
The COVID-19 pandemic is a new pandemic with only a few South African research studies conducted about it.	The research to be conducted, will assist in adding to the studies conducted about COVID-19 and potential future pandemics.
The sample size is relatively small, only 10 participants.	The phenomenological design allows for exploring the experiences of participants in-depth and it is likely that experiences of the selected sample will produce key findings in the research.

1.9 Structure of the Research Report

This chapter serves as an introduction to the research study and contextualised the study. The background to the study, problem statement and rationale for the study, the research question, aim and objectives of the study concepts employed, were highlighted. A brief overview of the research methodology used, and the limitations and delimitations of the study were explained. In chapter two, the theoretical framework and literature review are presented. The research methodology is

explained in chapter three, and the findings of the research study are presented and discussed in chapter four. Chapter 5 will conclude with a discussion of the key findings considering the research question, aim and objectives of the study, conclusions, and recommendations.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the theoretical framework fundamental to the research study is explained. The literature review contextualises the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects in schools. The challenges learners and educators experienced are explained. The role of school social workers in times of disasters such as the COVID-19 pandemic is contextualised.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

For the purposes of this study, an ecological perspective was applicable because it focuses on the relationship between an organism and its environment. An ecosystem is a set of different biotic and abiotic environmental factors that interact and influence each other (Langer & Lietz, 2017). The perspective was utilised to explore how people experience their interactions with environmental elements. The theory is applicable as it suggests that changes in the environment have a direct impact on a child's development. Therefore, the researcher acknowledges that FET learners have been significantly affected since the onset of the pandemic. Bronfenbrenner (1979, as cited in Langer & Lietz, 2017) describes ecological theory from a developmental perspective and identified various elements which encompasses microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, macrosystems, and temporal systems. Understanding these different systems helps social workers see learners holistically.

The research took place in an educational context where educators and learners interact constantly. Implementing an ecological perspective allowed for a broader understanding of all systems

involved in the South Africa education system. The researcher can say that this theory provided a lens to potentially understand how systems such as school and family were key to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 on learners in South Africa. This research was conducted at the district level where educators, learners and parents are interacting and fulfilling different functions. The framework assisted to better understand educators' experiences on the impact of COVID-19 on the well-being of FET learners. Educators and school social workers collaborate to enhance the welfare of learners. The researcher further selected the theoretical framework as it can be applied by both educators and school social workers when rendering intervention to FET learners.

2.3 Literature review

The purpose of this section is to present a review of existing literature on the effects of COVID-19 in schools. The goal of reviewing the existing literature about the study and to identify existing gaps in the current literature to locate my own study within this body of literature about the impact of COVID-19 on FET leaners in the South African education system. The section provides a brief history of the COVID-19 pandemic, and a brief context of the South African education system. The challenges faced by learners and educators in schools during the pandemic is also focused on, as well as the role of school social workers during the disasters like COVID-19 pandemic in the school settings.

This research study explored experiences of educators teaching FET learners during COVID-19, and their adjustment during COVID-19 and how the pandemic impacted on their lives.

2.3.1 History of COVID-19 Pandemic

COVID-19 was initially identified in December 2019 in China in the City of Wuhan, after a series of pneumonia cases surfaced. It was later identified that the coronavirus was the cause of this pneumonia outbreak. This outbreak was very deadly, and it started spreading across the globe.

During the beginning of the year 2020 the World Health Organization declared the Coronavirus a global pandemic (WHO, 2020). At that moment it had already started spreading quickly across the globe to countries like Thailand, the Republic of Korea, Japan, the United States of America, the Philippines, and Vietnam. were amongst the countries that were seriously affected by the pandemic. The virus quickly spread killing many people around the world (Wu et al, 2020; Zhang, 2020; Holshue et al, 2020; Kumar et al, 2021).

The virus later came into South Africa in March 2020 it was detected on a South African couple who had recently visited Italy for a vacation. The Minister of Health made the announcement about the imported virus (SA Government, 2020; NICD, 2020; Moonasar et al, 2020). Fearing further loss of life, on the 20th March 2020, President Cyril Ramaphosa declared a state of disaster. Within a week, there were 22583 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and over 429 deaths (SA Government, 2020). The South African government immediately closed its boarders and introduced a series of measures to combat the spread of the pandemic. One of the most significant measures was the initiation of a nationwide lockdown. All the people in South Africa were ordered to stay at home. Shops banks schools were closed, and only essential personnel could travel. The sale of alcohol was temporarily banned, and people were only allowed to go out to buy essential goods (Ngarava et al, 2022; Matzopoulos et al, 2020).

In the first three months of the pandemic an estimated 2456 people had died in South Africa due to the corona virus (National institute for communicable disease, 2020). Other measures introduced by the South African government included social distancing, wearing of mask, mandatory hand sanitizing. (SA Government, 2020). The South African government implemented

these measures to ensure that the wellbeing of the citizens is protected including that of the learners.

The Ministry of Education in responding to lockdown requirements ordered the schools to be closed (Motshega, 2020). The lockdown was intended for 14 days but as the cases of COVID-19 were escalating universally the South African government extended the lockdown with two more weeks to contain the escalation of the virus (SA Government, 2020). During the same period the Ministry of Education introduced multi-media learner support project aimed at minimising the loss of learning (SA Government, 2020). The Department of Basic Education (2020) highlighted that the programs were broadcasted on three SABC TV channels and 13 radio stations and the series were offered to support Grades 10, 11, and 12, as well as Early Childhood Development (ECD) learners. Additionally, other scholars remarked that alternative methods of learning such as online methods and blended learning were introduced to ensure continuity of education (Mbunge, 2020; Mahaye, 2021).

After the 15 weeks of the remote learning the government finally made the decision to reopen schools (South African government, 2020). On Thursday, July 23, 2020, the President addressed the nation on the status of the COVID-19 pandemic and made the announcement of scheduled reopening of schools on the 24th of August 2020 (SA Government, 2020). The Minister of the Department of Basic Education welcomed the president's decision and called for a meeting with stakeholders and conducted briefing sessions outlining the Departmental readiness to reopen schools, measures put in place and its readiness to safeguard the welfare of the learners and educators (South African Government, 2020). Heads of Education Committee (HEDCOM) and Council of Education Ministers (CEM) provided guidance on the amendment to the school

calendar and directed its sub-committee on school calendars to develop amended school calendars. Through its consultative process, the sub-committee made its submission and the CEM accepted the recommendations, and the Minister published the 2nd amended school calendar on the 11th of August 2020 (DBE, 2020).

The Department of Basic Education further promulgated documents such as school recovery plan to assist the schools to tailor their curriculum, guidelines for ensuring hygiene and orientation guide during the pandemic. All the efforts by the ministry of education ensured that learning continues by airing lessons using different methods. However, this cannot be seen to have met the needs of all the learners in the country noting that the South African education system is characterised by inconsistencies (Pretorius 2020; Soudien et al, 2020). Although COVID-19 has affected the South African education system greatly one cannot understand the impact of Covid-19 without understanding the context of education itself and the legacy of apartheid.

2.3.2 Contextualising South African educational system

The legacy of apartheid continues to impact on the South African education system. During the apartheid government there was segregation of learners according to their race. Some racial groups were disadvantaged, and equal education opportunities were not provided to everyone. These disadvantages continue to impact South Africa especially in the education system even after the new government came into power in 1994. In South African schools, especially schools in rural areas and townships, learners have been facing challenges of poverty due to funding constraints. Learners also find themselves in less resourced schools and overcrowded classrooms. As a result of these poor learning conditions, some learners end up dropping out of school or failing academically (Pillay, 2021; Mpu & Adu, 2021; Landa et al, 2021; Equal Education., 2021; Baloyi, 2019; Nortjie, 2017). Furthermore, existing literature shows that socioeconomic issues such as

lack of infrastructure, poor parental participation in their children's education, HIV/AIDS infection, poor government service delivery, and poor policy implementation are all factors that have a significant impact on the teaching and learning process and this affects the learner's level of achievement (Baloyi, 2019). Baloyi (2019) further, asserted that inequity is an issue in the South African education system therefore, schools in rural areas have a serious problem of resource shortage and teacher shortage. A study by Equal Education (2021) highlighted that over 74% of classrooms across nine schools in Gauteng township were overcrowded. Seven of the nine schools visited have at least 15% more learners enrolled than the original building was built to hold. Finally, this has a negative impact on educational outcomes of learners in these schools (Equal Education, 2021).

The South African government after taking over in 1994 as a way of addressing inequalities introduced policies such as the Constitution of South Africa (1996) in order to protect the rights of all the citizens. The Children's Act to ensure that children are protected (2005) and South African Schools Act to ensure that the educational rights for everyone is secured including adult basic education. These efforts were taken to ensure that even those who were deprived from the previous education system get equal opportunity to partake in education. Ndimande (2016) emphasised that the South African Schools Act (SASA) of 1996 was adopted by the new government to reverse all types of unfairnesses in schooling and to meet the needs of those schools that were impacted by the laws of the apartheid government. Ndimande (2016) further highlighted that despite the effort taken by the government of adopting a democratic constitution, the socio-economic conditions in the townships are still characterised by social and economic disparities and hardships. Van Dyk and White (2019) also cited that quintile ranking of schools was introduced

by the new government to redress the inequality in education whereby less privileged schools got more funding.

De Klerk and Palmer (2021) cited that the inequalities were intensified due to the pandemic between privileged and underprivileged schools which impacted on learning. In addition, De Klerk and Palmer (2021) highlighted that to provide equal learning opportunities, COVID-19 necessitates a rebuilding, reconnecting, and redefining of school education priorities. Despite these efforts, legislation is being reviewed to adjust to current circumstances, more support is being given to lowly ranked schools according to quantile system, inequality still exists in the system which negatively impacts the academic performance of learners (De Klerk & Palmer, 2021; Van Dyk & White, 2019). Other scholars highlight that rural schools in South Africa are distinguished by poor teacher quality, inadequate infrastructure, and ineffective service delivery. Some of these problems that the South Africa learners are facing in schools can be linked to the shortage of resources (Pillay, 2021).

2.3.3 Current challenges that are being faced by learners in education during COVID-19 pandemic in schools

Studies show that South African schools are faced with overcrowding because of shortage of infrastructure. (Equal Education, 2021; Pillay, 2021; Muremela et al, 2021; Adebayo et al, 2020; 2021; Nuga & Gustafsson, 2020). The Department of Basic Education is consistently working towards infrastructure shortages still faced by South African schools, even during the time of the pandemic. Adebayo et al (2020) hypothesised that the South African education system is distinguished by uneven educational frameworks between affluent and non-affluent schools and poor academic performance which can be traced back to resource deprivation.

Other scholars assert that academic achievement of South African pupils in rural and urban schools is severely lacking (Muremela et al, 2021). According to Nuga and Gustafsson (2020) COVID-19 pandemic will worsen educational inequalities with long term social and economic consequences. Pillay (2021) argued that South Africa's primary, secondary, and tertiary education systems have always faced major challenges, such as large numbers of learners in classrooms, insufficient learner support material, a lack of clean water, insufficient and unsanitary 'bathroom' facilities, poor quality of teaching, and inadequate support, particularly in disadvantaged communities. Equal Education (2021) emphasised in their study conducted in Gauteng province, that resources are unequally distributed among different classes and schools which has negative impact on learners' performance.

The existing research shows that the other challenge that is facing education system is overcrowding (Likuru & Miwila, 2022; Ntsala., 2021; West & Meier, 2020; Equal Education, 2021) which impact negatively on learner's performance. During the pandemic some schools were unable to open due to overcrowding, those who could open had to report on rotational basis to make sure that all learners continue receiving education and following social distancing regulations. Overcrowding in most South African schools' results in learners not receiving specialised individual attention since there are too many learners in one classroom.

Research findings indicate that overcrowded classrooms prevent educators from performing educational duties effectively such as formal and informal assessments (Ntsala, 2021; Linkuru & Miwila, 2022). West and Meier (2020) asserted that the South African education system is characterised by a shortage of educators and a lack of suitable school facilities which contribute to the overcrowding of classrooms. These researchers further emphasised that teaching in an overcrowded classroom can result in problems; severe concerns include widespread noise, less

focused concentration, discipline issues, struggling children falling behind, and a lack of personal connection. Equal Education (2021) articulated that overcrowding influences learner's behavior, has detrimental psychological effects and impacts on physical environment of the classroom restrict educators from moving around.

2.3.4 Loss of learning

Other challenges faced by learners during the pandemic was loss of learning. COVID-19 has impacted negatively on learning especially in schools situated in rural and township who have challenges with resources. The COVID-19 pandemic threatened the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) number four of: Promotion of dignity to people through implementing inclusive and equitable education and lifelong learning opportunities for all (UN, 2015). This global goal was extremely affected during lockdown because there was no equitable and availability of education for all learners.

The Minister of Basic Education in her speech asserted that many days of learning were lost during the lockdown which may result in long-term learning deficits and an even greater disparity in learning outcomes (Motshega, 2020). According to Nuga and Gustafsson (2020), Van der Berg and Spaull (2020) and Van der Berg et al (2020) the scholars emphasised that due to schools closing during the pandemic there was a great loss of learning experienced by learners. Nuga and Gustafsson (2020) further highlighted those learners in disadvantaged communities had less access to digital devices, the internet for remote learning, nutrition, safe drinking water, and sanitation. Gustafsson (2020) pointed out that these learners were more likely to require catch-up educational programmes when they return to school.

Scholars further emphasised that loss of learning is likely to take up more time in the portion of the year than the teaching and learning that was supposed to take place. (Van der Berg et al, 2020).

Finally, UNICEF (2021) highlighted long term impact school closures of any kind, even normal ones, frequently raise dropout rates and reduce lifetime educational attainment. A study by Baloyi (2021) showed that learners in Limpopo faced serious learning gaps because of the lockdown which impacted on their learning. Research by Mbunge (2020) revealed that the suspension of teaching and learning activities has an impact on learning and the academic calendar.

2.3.5 Nutritional challenges

Lack of nutrition was another challenge faced by learners during COVID-19 pandemic (UNICEF, 2021; Pillay, 2021; Van der Berg & Spaull, 2021; Kwatubana & Molaodi, 2021; STATS SA, 2021). South Africa remains to be one of the countries where learners are benefiting from the school nutrition programme (UNICEF, 2021). COVID-19 contributed to nutritional difficulties experienced by learners during lockdown as learners did not attend school and were not receiving their nutritional supplements. Before the pandemic schools were an environment where the nutritional needs for learners were being met. The pandemic onset threatened the SDG's number two of ending hunger to achieve food security and improved nutrition through sustainable agriculture (UN, 2015; UNICEF, 2021). During this time billions of learners globally were unable to access school nutrition. The report by STATS SA (2020) highlights that the majority of the learners use national nutrition programmes and receive their daily meal at schools. Van der Berg and Spaull (2021) the scholars emphasised that lockdown and school closures are believed to have exacerbated hunger and acute malnutrition. The scholars further highlight that informal labourers lost their income and children no longer got free meals in school all this negatively impacted on the wellbeing of the learners. The report by Statistics South Africa further highlights that 2,37 billion people universally did not have access to adequate food in 2020 (STATS SA, 2021). The scholars also cited in their study that because children were unable to attend school for safety

reasons during the pandemic, millions of children were left without a guaranteed meal, putting children's health and academic progress at risk. (Pillay, 2021; Kwatubana & Molaodi., 2021). Research findings further indicate that when learners go without food it significantly impacts on learners' health and wellbeing (UNICEF, 2021; Kwatubana & Molaodi, 2021).

2.3.6 Psychological impact of COVID-19 on learners

A further challenge experienced by the learners during COVID-19 pandemic was psychological difficulties (Pillay, 2022; Lentoor & Maepa, 2021; Van der Berg & Spaull, 2021; Shepherd & Mohohlwane, 2021; Laher et al, 2021; Mahlangu et al, 2022; Naicker et al, 2021; Van Der Berg & Spaull, 2020; Lee et al, 2020; Louw & Louw, 2014).

COVID-19 affected different aspects of learners especially the need to interact with peers, educators and receive psychosocial support from schools. The school remains a relatively safe haven for most children, as South Africa is characterised by incidences of domestic violence and other social ills that impact negatively on the wellbeing of learners. Lockdown meant that learners were to remain indoors without support from the school systems. This study features on FET learners, who are in the adolescent stage which is the most important stage of development with complex life challenges to overcome. Louw and Louw (2014) highlighted that most common characteristics of the late adolescent stage is that an individual is likely to experience a stormy phase as their psychosocial functioning undergo major changes to prepare them for adult life. Research findings highlighted fear, tension, anxiety, and family connections as significant challenges encountered by South African teenagers throughout the COVID-19 lockdown period (Pillay, 2022).

Van der Berg and Spaull (2020) cited that children in South Africa were discovered to be at a high risk of acquiring psychological distress such as despair, fear, loneliness, child maltreatment, and

exposure to domestic violence. Other scholars cited that closing of the schools caused mental health problems for learners, teachers, and parents, particularly those who were unable to provide for their children's basic needs (Shepherd & Mohohlwane, 2021; Laher et al, 2021). Laher et al (2021) also cited that the switch to emergency remote teaching, combined with common anxieties and fears associated with the disease, is likely to have had an impact on learners' mental health during the pandemic. The scholars further emphasised that learners were experiencing symptoms of depression, anxiety, and burnout. Laher et al (2021) further highlighted that learners were concerned about the virus and becoming infected, as well as their academic performance and the possibility of losing loved ones to the virus. Many students expressed sadness and emotional exhaustion, irritability was a common response, and it was associated with a tendency to withdraw socially. The research showed that learners experienced severe emotional discomfort during lockdown which created difficulty in adjusting academically, and were feeling socially isolated (Visser & Van Wyk, 2021). Another research study showed that during the pandemic children experienced domestic violence (Mahlangu et al, 2021) which negatively impacts on the psychological wellbeing of learners.

2.3.7 Online learning challenges

The other challenge faced by learners during the COVID-19 pandemic was online learning difficulties. Some scholars highlight that inequality, lack of digital equipment, challenges with internet access, lack of skill of operating equipment and geographical environment have been a major challenge that impacted on online learning (Adu et al,2022; Glietenberg et al, 2020; Mkhize, 2021; Landa et al, 2021; Makuna & Olaka, 2020; Dube, 2020; Mbunge, 2021).

The South African context is characterised by inequalities in education during the onset of the pandemic these difficulties were intensified (Nortjie, 2017). Mkhize (2021) and Mukuna and

Olaka (2020) highlighted that township schools have challenges with regards to lack of ICT infrastructure, poor network connectivity, and a lack of learning devices were the hurdles to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. This made it impossible for learners to cope into online learning. According to Dube (2020) despite the support by the South African government of giving various academic relief resources to help learners facilitate online learning, learners in remote regions lack access to internet devices such as laptops, phones, and other technology to help them succeed academically during COVID-19. Access to online teaching and learning platforms and resources is difficult for students from poor rural communities in South Africa (Landa et al, 2021). The pandemic did not only impact on the learner but also affected the entire schools' systems including the educators who were expected to facilitate the curriculum.

2.4 Challenges experienced by educators during the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic brought about different challenges on educators that impacted negatively on learning.

2.4.1 Health risk

Many educators were at risk of being infected and potentially dying of COVID-19. Research shows that the pandemic was impacting more on older people (Blumberg et, al, 2021, Pillay et al,2020). Many educators were heavily affected by COVID-19, and these impacted negatively on learning. (Jackson et al, 2022; Weinert et al, 2021; AFTRA, 2021). Research shows that the educators faced a lot of risk factors prior and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Educators were expected to teach during the unsafe period of the pandemic. Educators faced health risks because learners at schools were not adhering to COVID-19 safety measures' such as the wearing of masks. As a result, educators had to ensure that learners put on their masks and monitor learners to ensure the safety of everyone in schools (Maree, 2021). Furthermore, the school environment was not supportive to

social distancing which was placing educators more at risk of contracting the COVID-19 pandemic (Maree, 2021; van Der Berg & Spaull, 2021). Shepperd and Mohohlwane (2021) highlighted that during the pandemic 10% of educators lost their life. Also, Padmanabhanunni et al (2020) and Padmabhanunni and Pretorius (2021) scholars argued that educators were terrified and were in hopelessness especially at the time of returning to do their work as they view themselves to be vulnerable during COVID-19. Research conducted by Olawale et al (2020) about the aftermath of the COVID-19 stringencies, staff reported feeling emotionally drained, lonely, and lacking adequate support services, according to the research study.

2.4.2 Lack of technical skills to facilitates remote learning.

Existing literature shows that another challenge during COVID-19 pandemic was the lack of technical skills for remote learning amongst educators in high school (Mncube et al, 2022; Dube. 2020; du Preez, 2018). It should be noted that the pandemic came unexpectedly as a result some educators were not skilled in implementing online education and utilising technology which also impacted negatively on the learning process. Mncube et al (2022) and Dube (2020) asserted that many educators who had access to electronic devices lacked digital literacy skills and online teaching capabilities that would allow them to confidently engage students in online learning. Mkhize (2021) also cited that educators were unskilled to operate technology to implement online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.4.3 Shortage of skilled educators

The study shows that the shortage of educators had a negative impact on learners' educational outcomes (du Preez, 2018). Du Preez (2018) further, highlights that schools in remote and disadvantaged areas frequently lack access to qualified teachers and the necessary resources to ensure effective teaching and learning.

Existing literature shows that South African schools face the challenge of skill shortage. Though this challenge existed prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the pandemic further exposed these gaps (Mateus et al, 2014). Scholars asserted that the scarcity of educators in critical disciplines such as mathematics, science, technology, language, and business have been a major source of worry (Makgato & Khoza., 2015). Ogunniyi and Mushayikwa (2015) asserted that in rural communities there are a few educators teaching specialized subjects because Department of Basic Education does not have retention strategies which results in these educators being overworked and have negative impact on learner's performance and dropout. Nortjie (2017) highlights that South African learners perform poorly, than in other developing countries because educators lack expertise of teaching. Du Plessis and Mestry (2019) argue that learners in rural secondary schools have minimal access to highly skilled educators which also impact negatively on educational outcomes. Other scholars also cited cases of teacher shortages in most rural schools, forcing parents to hire and pay teachers because the department is slow (Baloyi, 2019). The scholar further highlights that public schools that lack basic resources, qualified teachers, and specialized equipment have lower educational outcome (Baloyi, 2019).

2.5 Role of school social workers during disasters

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, South African schools faced poverty, inequality, substance abuse, HIV/AIDS, and other social issues, preventing learners from reaching their academic potential and exhibiting behavioral issues (Pretorius, 2020). Research showed that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused mental health and wellbeing issues, requiring social services such as prevention and early intervention to protect children and families (Tomlinson et al, 2021). The scholar's state that schools are expected to provide counselling to learners (Tomlinson et al, 2021). Other studies claim that the pandemic has increased the urgency of addressing the population's

social needs, and social workers play a critical role in all areas of this context, including education (Cifuentes-Faura, 2020). Some scholars emphasised that during disaster situations, social workers are responsible for providing counseling and psychosocial support to affected populations (Dickson et al, 2022; Matlakala et al, 2022). School social workers possess skills that can be applied in schools to meet the needs of learners and school systems.

Other researchers claim that despite significant professional stress and personal challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, school social workers quickly and smoothly adapted their traditional practice role to the new context to meet the needs of the learners (Kelly et al, 2021). Furthermore, scholars highlight that, school social workers are essential for providing mental health support services to learners, as the COVID-19 pandemic has increased the urgency to care for society (Cifuentes-Faura, 2020). The Children's Act 38 of 2005, highlights that the best interests of the child are paramount, hence ensuring the implementation of the Act by school social workers. School social workers are critical role players for protecting children's rights as stipulated in the Constitution of South Africa by ensuring that children should not be exposed to abuse, neglect, maltreatment, violence, or harmful behaviour (Children's Act,38, 2005, section 7(l)(iii)).

From the literature review we can determine that COVID-19 has highlighted the challenges faced by learners and educators in the school system. The pandemic has brought on new understanding of the schooling system and how learning can take place. It has also highlighted the many challenges faced by the education sector that were not addressed or little progress is made in addressing these challenges. Some studies were conducted to establish the effects of COVID-19 on schools in South Africa, however, more studies are needed in this area, a gap that the study is likely to help address.

2.6 Summary

This chapter explained the theoretical framework underpinning the research study. A thorough review and examination of the existing literature on COVID-19 and the effects thereof in school settings were highlighted. The COVID-19 pandemic, within the South African context and education system and the challenges faced and experienced by learners and educators during COVID-19 were explored. The role of school social workers in times of disasters, like the COVID-19 pandemic were explained. In chapter three, the research methodology that was utilised during research study will be presented.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter centers on the research methodology employed in the research study. This chapter aims to provide a more in-depth explanation of the research methodology. This will encompass the research approach and design, population, sample and sampling procedure, the research instrument and pre-testing of the research instrument utilised in the research. Additionally, the chapter covered in-depth the data collection methodology, data analysis, trustworthiness of this study and the study's ethical considerations.

3.2 Research question, aim and objectives

The research question essential to this study was: What are the experiences of educators working with FET learners in schools during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The primary aim of the research study was to explore the experiences of educators working with Further Education and Training (FET) learners in the Gauteng East District on the effects of COVID-19 on learner well-being in secondary schools.

The objectives of the study were.

- To describe the experiences of educators in dealing with learner wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic and the meanings they attach to these experiences.
- To explore the psychosocial issues faced by educators working with FET learners during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- To determine possible assistance available for learners and educators during COVID-19 pandemic that can improve quality of education.
- To establish the potential role played by the school social workers working with FET learners and educators during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- To elicit suggestions from educators on what strategies educators can use during pandemics.

3.3 Research approach

A qualitative approach rooted in interpretivism as a worldview was employed in this research study. Qualitative research is a method of research that explores in-depth understanding of the participants problems. Creswell (2014) articulated that the research approach includes plans and procedures that specify the steps to be followed in deciding on the relevant methods of data collection, analysis, and procedures to be followed. Furthermore, it is an approach that is used when a researcher wants to explore and understand human experiences within their own surroundings and make interpretations of its meaning (Leavy, 2017; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The advantage of using the qualitative research approach is that it allows for the collection of in-depth information from the people who are experiencing the problem. In this study the researcher collected in-depth experiences on how educators experienced the effects of COVID-19 pandemic on FET learners' well-being and the qualitative approach was the best approach to achieve the aim and objectives of the study. This method was pertinent to the study since it allowed for the exploration and greater understanding of each participant's unique perspective and experiences.

3.4 Research design

This study adopted a phenomenology research design. Phenomenology is a qualitative research design that allows the researcher to obtain a profound grasp of the nature or significance of the

participants lived experiences. According to Fain (2017) phenomenology is the methodical discovery and description of the essence or essences of an experience. In phenomenological research, the research question focuses on the meaning of the experiences. The purpose of phenomenological research is to create rich, comprehensive, and insightful accounts of lived experiences (Fain, 2017).

Creswell and Poth (2018) state that phenomenological design seeks to discover and describe the shared meaning derived from individuals' lived experiences based on specific phenomena. Furthermore, the phenomenological design focuses on human consciousness and allows the researcher to gain a thorough grasp of how participants think and feel about their own experiences (Leavy, 2017; Fain, 2017). The advantage of the phenomenological design is that it focuses on exploring the common lived experiences of the participants (Leavy, 2017; Fain, 2017). For this study the phenomenology design was utilised since was applicable and guided the researcher to explore the experiences of educators working with FET learners during the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.5 Population, sample, and sampling procedure

Population can be defined as the overall group of people that the researcher seems to study. In this case the population was all educators working with FET learners during the Covid-19 pandemic in one of the schools in the Gauteng East District (Bryman, 2012). The population of this study was roughly 50 Educators of the 65 staff at Kenneth Masikela Secondary school.

3.5.1 Sampling

Sampling refers to a subset of the total population that is chosen to participate in the study. The researcher sampled 11 participants that participated in this study. Creswell and Poth (2018) argue that when using the phenomenological design there is no need for too many participants because the richness and depth of the experiences are more important. The sample consist of 11 educators

of grade 10 to 12 learners, who have been teaching in one of the secondary schools in Kwa-Thema since the COVID-19 outbreak.

The participants were recruited by being informed about the study and its possible benefits to the literature. All educators at Kenneth Masikela Secondary School were informed about the above and interested parties were recruited as participants. After being informed about the study, a participant information sheet (Appendix A) was distributed to the educators who showed interest in participating in this study. Educators were also given the consent forms (Appendix B). The educators signed the consent forms and given to the researcher during the time of one-on-one interviews.

The scholars emphasised that researcher should provide inclusion criteria to locate acceptable individuals for the sample (Koch et al, 2014). In this research the participants had to be educators, employed as educators by the Department of education rendering services at Kenneth Masikela secondary school, between the ages of twenty-five and fifty-eight years, they were both males and females, registered with South African Council of Educators, had three to twenty-seven years of experienced in rendering services to FET learners. Moreover, these educators had been working with FET learners during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and capable of communicating in English.

Exclusion criteria in this study included Educator assistants working at Kenneth Masikela secondary school, educators not a member of the SACE, Educators that have less than three years of experience providing educational services to FET learners and educators inability to communicate in English. Furthermore, the researcher acknowledges the saturation principle. Saturation refers to the threshold that the researcher reaches when collecting data and no new data is coming out of the study.

It is anticipated that when 11 interviews are done saturation might have been achieved. the saturation was achieved during the eleven interviews. Applying the data saturation principle to this research study, the researcher stopped gathering data when it became repetitive and stopped introducing new perspectives or insights from the participants (Creswell 2014: 239)

3.5.2 Sampling procedure

The researcher utilised Purposive sampling, a type of non-probability sampling when recruiting participants. Non-probability sampling is mostly used in the qualitative approach where the specific features of individuals are relevant to select them as part of the sample (Flick, 2018). Purposive sampling is a technique whereby researchers use their judgement to select participants who have the characteristics required by the research (Fain, 2017). An advantage of this sampling technique is that it saves time, the researcher already knows who has the information needed to answer the research question and it allows the researcher to approach participants who are knowledgeable about the study topic to be examined (Strydom & Delport, 2011). In this case 11 FET educators teaching in Kenneth Masikela secondary school in KwaThema had the required information needed by the researcher hence they were sampled to participate in this research.

3.6. Recruitment

In this research the researcher approached the school principal, to obtain permission to conduct the research with Grade 10-12 educators. The data were obtained from voluntary and consenting participants (educators) after the researcher had been given permission from the GDE and the school principal to conduct the study has been granted. The researcher arranged a meeting with the participants and presented the study at the staff meeting. The educators were individually informed about the research study's nature, goals, and processes using the Participant Information Sheet (See Appendix A). The researcher provided all the FET educators with the participants

information sheet and request them to contact the researcher when interested to participate in the study. The researcher was telephonically called by the Deputy principal to come to the school to meet with potential participants at the school during break time and after school.

The researcher went to the school had a meeting with potential participant, gave an in-depth explanation of the study, and provided them consent form to sign. Interviews dates were arranged with the potential participants at a time and venue, during break and after school hours suitable for the potential participants. The interviews were conducted after the participants signed the consent forms. The interviews were conducted in a quiet, secure venue and at times convenient for the participant.

3.7 Research instrument and pretesting of research instrument

3.7.1 Research instrument

The research instrument used in this study was a semi-structured interview guide (Appendix C). An interview guide is essentially a series of organised questions that have been developed to aid the researcher in gathering information about a given topic. An interview guide is a collection of questions produced by the researcher that are relevant to the study topic. (Bryman, 2012; Fain, 2017). The advantage of the semi-structured interview guide is that it enables for probing of individuals' responses and reduces the chance of unclear answers (Creswell, 2013). In addition, it helps to guide the researcher not to go off track (Creswell, 2013, Fain, 2017). Another advantage is that it is flexible because it does not dictate to the participants how to respond to the questions but rather allows them to express themselves in their own way (Bryman, 2012). A semi-structured interview guide also allows the researcher to probe the responses given by the participants. Another advantage of a semi-structured interview guide is that the researcher does not have to follow the logic of the question but has complete leeway in how the interview is conducted (Bryman, 2012).

With the above stated advantages, the shortfalls or disadvantages of semi-structured interview guide are that it takes a lot of time, effort, and research experience from the interviewer (Adams 2015).

Other research shows language barrier to be another drawback of semi-structured interviews as it restricts the researcher to probe the participants (Kakilla, 2021). The researcher formulated the interview guide with ethical considerations in mind, considering the potential effects that questions might have on the participants. Seventeen semi-structured interview questions were developed with the interview guide that was divided into two parts. The first part were demographic questions and the second part open-ended questions (see Appendix C). The interview guide's questions were created with the aim of accomplishing the study's objectives.

3.7.2 Pretesting of research instrument

The researcher interviewed two educators from Kenneth Masikela Secondary School who worked with FET learners during the COVID-19 pandemic to pretest the semi-structured interview guide. This was done prior beginning data collection with the entire sample. To ensure that the interview questions were pertinent to the study as a whole and appropriate, a pretesting phase was undertaken. The research sample did not include the educators who took the pretest, and their data were not examined as part of the investigation. The two educators who were pretested gave their consent to be pretested, so they were aware that they would be pretested. After giving their consent, the two educators were approached and explained the participation information sheet.

Scholars highlighted that a pre-test should be informal with a few participants who possess the same characteristics as those who will participate in the main study (Hurst et al, 2015, Strydom & Delport, 2011). Pre-testing the research instrument helped the researcher to see if the research

questions are clear and easily understandable (Bryman, 2012). If the questions are not clear, the researcher will have to adjust them. In addition, pre-testing an instrument can helped finding problems in cross-cultural language relevance and word ambiguity, as well as identify potential weaknesses in the research instrument (Hurst et al, 2015). It can also offer early notice about how or why a primary research endeavors can fail by revealing areas where research methods are not followed or are not viable (Hurst et al, 2015). The data collected during the interviews to pre-test the instrument was not analysed with the data collected during the study.

3.8 Method of data collection

The researcher negotiated with the educators on a suitable and convenient place where the interviews will take place. Interviews were to be conducted after hours in specific spaces with ample privacy where the educators can feel comfortable.

The method of data collection was one on one in-depth interviews with the participants, aided by an interview guide at a quiet venue (the office of the deputy principal at the Kenneth Masikela secondary school) at the time convenient for the educators during the break time and after school hours. The definition of an interview is a discussion aimed at obtaining information. In-depth interviews allow for the collection of rich data from the subjectiveness of participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Fain, 2017), and are appropriate for a phenomenology design because it facilitates the exploration of the essence of human experiences. The in-depth interviews allowed for the collection and description of the experiences of FET educators during the COVID-19 pandemic and enabled the researcher to record and build meaning from the personal experiences of educators offering educational services to FET learners in the Gauteng East District. The interviews were audio recorded with the consent of the research participants. The interviews time frame was between 30 to 60 minutes. The interviews were conducted by the researcher who is a

qualified social worker possessing a wealth of years of expertise in the field of school social work. Because the educators' years of experience varied, certain interviews had longer durations than others, and some respondents gave more details in their responses.

3.9 Method of data analysis

The process of qualitative data analysis entails organising the obtained data, analysing an interview transcript, identifying, and developing patterns, themes, and categories (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The researcher used the thematic analysis to analyse the data collected in this study (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The purpose of the thematic analysis is to identify key themes, or fascinating patterns in data, and make observations on a study subject using these themes to guide research (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017).

The data were analysed by paying attention to the key statement of the participants. The connotation of this statement was established by discreetly reviewing how the statement was expressed by the participants. Subsequently, the crux of the phenomenon was examined and determined. This study employed thematic analysis because it allows for the development of themes according to the experiences of participants. The use of theme analysis made it possible to summarise important aspects of a sizable data set while also giving a thorough description of the data set, making it understandable to researchers with little prior experience in qualitative research (Braun & Clark, 2006). Hence the researcher utilised (Braun & Clark, 2006) the model. Below are the six steps that the researcher followed during the analysis process.

Step 1: Familiarise myself with the data.

This step the researcher had fully immersed in the data and actively engaged with the data first transcribing the interaction, then reading the transcription, and or listening to the recording. The researcher paid attention to the original idea by noting them down. The key is that the researcher

needed a comprehensive understanding of interactions and make the researcher familiar with all aspects of the data. This step is the basis for further analysis.

Step 2: Generate initial codes (first codes)

After familiarising herself with the data, the researcher began to identify tentative codes, which are features of the data that seem interesting and meaningful. These codes are more numerous and specific than the topic, but they indicate the context of the interactions.

Step 3: Searching for themes.

The third step of the process is the beginning of the interpretive analysis of the completion code. Relevant data extracted was organised (combined or broken down) according to general themes. The researcher's thought process referred to the relationships between the subthemes and themes.

Step 4: Reviewing potential themes.

After an in-depth review of the identified themes, the researcher assessed whether to combine, improve, separate, or discard the original ones. Data was meaningfully grouped within subjects and there were clear and identifiable differences between themes. This was typically done in two steps, examining items related to encoding retrieval (step 1), followed by the entire data set (step 2). This step created a thematic map.

Step 5: Defining and naming themes.

This step involves refining and defining themes and possible sub-themes. The researcher provided theme titles and clear working definitions that concisely and convincingly convey the essence of each theme. At this point, the researcher tried to see a unified history of data that comes from the themes.

Step 6: Produce the report.

Finally, the researcher translated her analysis into an interpretable paper using vivid and compelling examples related to the theme, research question, and literature. The report presented the result of the analysis in a way that convinces the readers of the value and validity of the analysis. The report went beyond a simple description of the theme and builds an analysis based on empirical evidence to address the research question. The researcher examined the unprocessed data in accordance with her personal writing style.

3.10. Trustworthiness of the research study

Trustworthiness is one-way researchers can ensure the rigor of the research (Nowell et al, 2017). To ensure trustworthiness in the intended study, criteria such as credibility, dependability, confirmability, transferability, and authenticity were utilised.

3.10.1 Credibility

Credibility manages the "fit" between respondents' opinions and the researcher perspectives of their representation (Nowell et al, 2017). To ensure the credibility of the study, researcher will be checking the results and interpretations of the participants responses. According to Korstjens and Moser (2018), in qualitative studies, credibility may be accomplished by providing a detailed explanation of the data to the readers and enabling them to choose whether the findings are transferrable to their own specific situations. Establishing the credibility of findings requires both ensuring that research is conducted in accordance with good practice canons and submitting research findings to the participants who were investigated for confirmation that the researcher has accurately comprehended their social world (Bryman, 2012).

To ensure credibility in this study, the researcher provided a detailed explanation of the collected data and conducted member checking with three of the participants. The researcher summarised the findings in a way that it will be easily understood.

3.10.2 Transferability

The goal of transferability is to provide readers with the chance to relate to the findings provided to them in one research study and those of other publications (Creswell, 2014; Tracy, 2013). The purpose of qualitative research is not to generalised, but to Contextualise. In qualitative research, this can be achieved by providing readers with a detailed description of the data and allowing them to decide whether the results fit their context (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Therefore, the researcher produced a detailed description of the research study to afford the readers and opportunity to read and use the report to understand similar settings under research.

3.10.3 Dependability

In achieving dependability, researchers can ensure that the research process is logical, traceable, and clearly documented (Nowell et al, 2017). To ensure that the findings are dependable the researcher followed the right methods and processes and document it from the beginning until the end of the research process. According to Bryman (2012) this requires keeping thorough records of all aspects of the research process, problem formulation, study participant selection, fieldwork notes, interview transcripts and data analysis choices in an accessible format The researcher kept an audit trail to ensure that the study is dependable. The researcher also provided a detailed description of the design and methodology of the study as well as the documentation of the process's execution.

3.10.4 Confirmability

Confirmability involves making sure that the researcher's interpretations and findings clearly come from data, requiring researchers to show how conclusions were reached and giving a detailed explanation (Nowell et al, 2017). Furthermore, it should be clear that he or she has not openly allowed personal views or theoretical tendencies to influence the conduct of the study and

the conclusions drawn from it (Bryman, 2012). A researcher's professional and personal experience can influence decisions about the choice of specific research methods and the research. For this study the researcher ensured confirmability by following all processes applied in the study until the study was completed.

3.11 Ethical considerations

According to scholars, ethics is defined as the discipline of moral principles, justice, and fairness in human behaviour (Leavy, 2017). Arifin (2018) articulates that ethical considerations are very important at all stages of qualitative research to maintain a balance between the potential risks and possible benefits of the study. The researcher ensured that the research process is governed by ethical standards through all the processed followed. Permission was requested from Department of Basic Education Provincial Office (GDE) to conduct the research in Kenneth Masikela secondary school and received. In addition, permission was requested from the school principal of Kenneth Masikela Secondary school and received (Appendix, D). An Ethics Clearance certificate Protocol Number: SW23/03/01 was received form the Wits non-medical Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). The research was conducted taking the following ethical principles into consideration.

3.11.1 Voluntary participation

Scholars articulated that voluntary participation occurs when a participant decides to participate on their own, rather than seeking permission from others (Marshal et al, 2014). Other research showed that participation should always be voluntary, and no one should be coerced into participating in a project (Strydom, 2011). The researcher ensured that voluntary participation was applied by informing participants that their participation is voluntary and that they can withdraw their participation anytime with no penalties attached. Furthermore, the participants signed a

Consent Form to show that they understand and agree with what was presented in the participant information sheet (See annexure A). The participants agreed to participate in this research voluntarily without undue influence from the researcher.

3.11.2 Informed consent

Informed consent is one of the most important moral principles indicating that participation in a study must be voluntary (Neuman, 2014). Arifin (2018) stated that informed consent should be given freely and that participants need to understand the study. Furthermore, Bell & Waters (2014) stated that participants should never be expected to sign all contracts forms unless they were given time to read and consider the implications of being part of the study. In this study, the participants were made aware of their rights and responsibilities. The participants were also informed of the research aims and objectives. The researcher shared Participant Information Sheet with the participant who voluntary agreed to participate in the study, the researcher thereafter gave the participants the consent form (Appendix B) to sign Sharing and ensuring participants understand what the study entails, gives participants power to make their own choices regarding participating or not participating in the study.

3.11.3 Anonymity, confidentiality, and privacy

The scholars' state that anonymity means. Therefore, the researcher made the participants aware that in this research study anonymity cannot be fully guaranteed because they are working in a school setting where everyone knows each other. However, participants were assured that there will be no trace of their identifying particulars or any link to their views in the research report, and anonymity can be guaranteed in the research report or publications emanated from the study. Bell and Waters (2014) indicate that if the researcher states to the participants that the research will be anonymous, they should not be identifiable in any way.

Furthermore, scholars highlight that confidentiality is the promise that participants will not be presented in an identifiable form (Bell & Waters, 2014). Arifin (2018) states that protecting participants' anonymity and confidentiality is done by not disclosing their names and identities in data collection, analysis, and reporting of research findings. Researchers define confidentiality as keeping information shared by the participants private (Saunders et al, 2014). To ensure that the privacy of the participants was protected in this research study, the interviews were conducted in a deputy principal's office, the office environment was conducive, and participants felt comfortable because the office was locked during the interview sessions. The researcher further informed the participants that only the researcher and her supervisor had access to data. Arifin (2018) stated that interviews should be conducted in a quiet and private place, without outside interference. Privacy is an ethical principle whereby the researcher takes precautions to protect participants' personal information through confidentiality (Neuman, 2012).

3.11.4 Do no harm

The principle of do no harm implies that the researcher has an ethical obligation to protect participants from any harm that may occur because of their participation in research (Strydom, 2011). In this research the researcher did not expose the participants to risk due to that the venue where the research took place and the kind of questionnaires asked posed no harm to the participants. The researcher did not rule out the potential of harm noting that educators faced negative experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic which can bring about negative emotional reactions. In the event of such happening the researcher arranged for counselling services with the Department of Social Development in Springs Office (contact details are as follows: 011 365 9000/

082 4916558/0731171222, Supervisor: Matamela Mamilasigidi). A formal referral could be completed and sent to the respective unit should a participant express the need for counselling.

3.11.5 Ethics of positionality

The researcher informed the participants that although the researcher is a school social worker, the researcher is coming to conduct the interview wearing a cap of a student registered with Wits University. Furthermore, the participants have got no obligation if they want to withdraw at any given time, they are free to do so. The researcher also informed the participants that if they choose not to participates in the research there will be no negative consequences as this is intended for a research study purpose only. Shaw et al., (2019) indicate that the conventional position of the social researcher is to obtain useful information about the studied phenomenon, they need maintain impartiality in an interview context. Creswell and Creswell (2018) indicate that the researcher needs to be aware of their role when embarking on research with the participants so that it will not have an impact on the study. This can be done by explaining the role in relation to the research to be conducted. Shaw et al., (2019) argue that researcher positionality and the researcher's standing as an insider/outsider have consequences for the participants we examine, how we do research and interact with research participants, how we analyse data, and how we communicate our findings.

3.12 Summary

The chapter centered on the research methodology utilised during the research study. The following was discussed in detail in this chapter, the research approach and design, as well as the population, sample, and sampling procedures employed. The research instrument and pretesting of the research instrument were also discussed. The method of data collection utilised and thematic analysis as a method of data analysis were explained. The trustworthiness of the study was also

explored and ethical considerations for the study were discussed. In chapter four, the data collected and analysed will be presented and discussed.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses the data gathered during semi-structured interviews with eleven educators at a secondary school in Kwa-Themba, Springs, Gauteng. The demographic profiles of the participants are presented in Table 4.1, followed by a description of the research site. In Table 4.2, the themes and subthemes developed from the thematic analysis of the collected data are presented. The findings are presented and explained per theme and subthemes. These are critically discussed and supported or contrasted by direct quotations from participants, applicable literature, and the theoretical framework relevant to the research study. A summary concludes the chapter.

4.2 Demographic profile of the participants

In Table 4.1, the demographic profiles of the study participants are presented**.**

Table 4.1 Profile of the participants (N=11)

Demographic Factors	Subcategories	No
Gender of Educators	Male	2
	Female	9
Age of Educators	25-34	5
	50-56	6
Years of Experience	3-10	3
	11-19	2
	20-30	6

Levels of teaching	Grades 10-12	8
	Grade 12	2

Table 4.1 shows that eleven educators participated in the study. The participants were educators from Kenneth Masikela Secondary School educating the further education and training (FET) learners. All participants were Black South Africans. Of the eleven participants, eight were female and two were male. The ages of the participants ranged between 25 and 56. Of the 11 participants five (one male and four females), were between 25 and 34 years of age; six (one male and four females) were between 50 and 56 years old. Of the eleven participants, eight (one male and seven females) teach Grades 10 to 12; two (one male and one female) only teach Grade 12. Of the eleven participants, three have between 3 to 10 years of teaching experience; two have between 11 and 19 years of experience and six have between 20 and 30 years of experience.

4. 3 Profile of the school

Kenneth Masikela Secondary School was the organization where the study was carried out (KMSS). The address of the school is 2740 Malaza Street, Masimini, Kwa-Thema, Springs, 1575. The overcrowding at two of the secondary schools (Phulong & Tlakula) led to the establishment of the school in 1979. The school was originally called PHUTLA, which is an acronym for the two combined institutions. Initially the entry grade eight learners of the two schools titled PHUTLA were housed at the at the Muzomusha Primary School. The new school was later constructed during the year 1979. The institution was renamed Kenneth Masikela Secondary School during 1980 in recognition of a businessman who made a significant contribution to education by giving bursaries to the most impoverished learners to pursue higher education. Since its founding, the institution has produced high-caliber outcomes, earning it the label University of Kwa-Thema.

Three principals have led the school since its founding. The school has 1414 learners. The school has 65 employees, which consist of educators, school management team, HOD's, Administration staff, assistant educators, and grounds man. The institution consists of 38 educators and 12 school management team members, 2 administrative staff, 7 grounds man and 6 assistant educators.

4.4 Themes and subthemes developed from the analysed data

In Table 4.2 the themes and subthemes developed during the analysis of data are presented.

Table 4.2 Themes and sub themes

Themes	Subthemes
1.Difficulties of adjustment to the COVID-19 regulations.	1.1 Difficulties to implement social distancing in school setting during COVID-19. 1.2 Learners' noncompliance to wearing masks in school. 1.3. Challenges to operationalise and implement the COVID regulations. 1.4 Learners with Covid symptoms attending school 1.5 Plan in dealing with learners with COVID symptoms attending school 1.6 Non-adherence by Educators to the COVID-19 Regulations
2.Wellbeing of the educators during the COVID-19 pandemic.	2.1 Physical wellbeing of the educators during COVID-19. 2.2 Psychological wellbeing of the educators during COVID-19. 2.3 Social wellbeing of the educators during COVID-19.

3. Unpreparedness of the school to deal with the challenges posed by COVID-19 as per the regulations.	3.1 Shortage of personal protective equipment and crowded classrooms. 3.2 Adapting the curriculum to ensure academic achievements. 3.3 Lack of technology to enable online learning and monetary resources to build sufficient classrooms.
4 Exacerbation of psychosocial issues experienced by learners during the COVID-19 pandemic.	
5.Rendering school social work services during the COVID-19 pandemic.	
6. Coping strategies implemented by the school during the COVID-19 pandemic.	6.1 Provision of extra curriculum classes to learners. 6.2 Support offered by the school, the management team, and the education district office.

Theme One: Difficulties of adjustment to COVID-19 regulations

This theme is about the findings regarding the insights of educators on difficulties of adjustment to regulations during COVID-19 pandemic. Education systems experienced sudden implementation of COVID-19 regulations challenging. The following six sub-themes developed from this theme during data analysis process. Each of these sub-themes will be discussed in detail.

1.1 Difficulties to implement social distancing in school setting during COVID-19

It was key to explore educators' experiences on the impact of COVID 19 to later explore their perceptions regarding challenges experienced in relation to social distancing in school settings. This study found out that it was difficult to implement social distancing in school due to overcrowding and other challenges experienced in schools during the pandemic. The participants shared their own experiences as follows:

Participant 6 felt that:

> It was very difficult for us especially in township schools because our classes are overcrowded for us to maintain social distancing. With us it was very difficult to do social distancing, when learners came to school, they were hugging like never before" hence we ended up children were coming to school in turns, other grades were coming to school two weeks and other grades two weeks and the workload was then behind.

In addition**,** Participant 6 confirmed that:

> Learners did not do those things (I mean social distancing) the way you are seeing the learners that is how it has been during COVID-19(the participant pointed her hand to the learners on the school premises) even me and my friends we were even kissing and hugging a social distancing it was one of the areas we neglected. Until one day when we were in the meeting informed that one of my friends an admin clerk test positive, that was the only time when I was very scared thinking that maybe I might also be infected.

Participant 7 indicated that:

> Some wouldn't even respect social distancing regulations. And children were very traumatized they wouldn't listen because they did not understand how true it is., and the most frustrating part our school was not fully, fully complaint to the rules that was set in place.

Participant 10 expressed the viewpoint that:

> Social distancing was an issue because the school is having high number enrolled students and less educators". It was a terrible experience. We were needed to teach while being afraid that you might get infected and again the social distancing was an issue because you could not deal with the learners all at once because of the restrictive number in a class.

Participant 9 also highlighted that:

> Learners did not even worry about social distancing to them it was normal, when going to the class and during break time you will find them together without respecting 2-meter distance as required by the COVID-19 regulations., They were relaxed but if it affected them with their family members they would not come to school. You will be kind to them, I think.

The study discovered that the participants shared common understanding in terms of how challenging it was for school systems to implement social distancing regulations. Research findings confirmed that many people found it difficult to follow social distance instructions, either out of ignorance or outright defiance (Agusi et al., 2020). Other studies have indicated that non-compliance with social distancing is linked to several factors such as feeling low risk, environmental constraints, the inability to control keeping a 2-meter distance, and social responsibility, to inadvertent adherence to social distancing (Eraso & Hills, 2021). Also, in this study there were different grounds that made the implementation of social distancing to become an obstacle such as overcrowding of learners, defiance and ignorance which impacted negatively on the school system.

1.2 Learners' noncompliance to wearing masks in school

This study further highlights that learners were not compliant with wearing masks at schools during COVID-19 pandemic. The schools adopted COVID-19 regulations such as wearing masks incorporated with washing of hands as a measure to protect learners and educators from contracting the COVID-19 virus. The purpose of the COVID-19 regulations adoption was to enforce and stop the spreading of COVID-19 virus.

The following verbatim response by participant 6 summarises this sub-theme:

> Learners when they come to my class did not put mask. In other children they are those who were very scared I would not mind but most of them were like their mother(the educator was [pointing at herself with a sense of humor) Some of them will tell me that they cannot breathe okay when putting on the mask , Then I will tell them to take it out., I will even say to them that if we will be sick, we will be sick, if we will die, we will die, are you scared of dying?

Participant 4 indicated that:

> They did not care when going to the class they started wearing mask when you are in the class, and they were separated due to the 2-meter social distancing but when you went to the class unannounced you find them siting together so we had that problem of everyday of reminding them about Covid 19.

Participant 5 shared her experience:

> Remember we were the first one to be called those who were teaching grade 12 learners it was very tense firstly. It was very tense for us and for the learners themselves., You could tell that everyone is not relaxed, and because the virus was still here. It was still very much so to us. But having to use the mask and we were not even allowed to take out the mask.

The participant further highlights the uncomfortable feeling of wearing mask by stating that

> when teaching we had also… that also on its own, mask is suffocating. Sometimes you need to take it out and even for the learners also understand what we are saying when you are talking through a mask they will even complain at times, Ja.

Participant 2 also confirmed noncompliance of wearing mask by stating that… *during the COVID it was very tense because others could not understand they were not wearing mask, were losing educators, family members, relatives but still wearing of a mask was a challenge.*

Participant 6 further stated that… *they were putting on masks but me in my classroom learners did not do those things of masks.*

Participant 7 perceived that… *it was frustrating to us because some people did not respect the precautions put in place because some wouldn't put on their mask.*

Participant 5 described that:

> The experience of putting mask to be uncomfortable...a mask is suffocating sometimes, sometimes you need to take it out and even for the learners also understand what we are saying when you are talking through a mask they will even complain at times (frown facial expression observe).

This study revealed that most of the participants were concerned about seeing learning not wearing masks. Only one participant indicated to be comfortable with learners not wearing masks. Another participant views the experience of putting on of the mask as uncomfortable and frustrating. The findings in this study reveal that learners were not compliant with the mearing of the mask during

COVID-19 pandemic which negatively impacted other school systems especially educators. Literature shows that the pandemic was impacting more on older people (Blumberg et, al, 2021, Pillay et al,2020). The study conducted by (Techasatian et al (2020) highlighted that there are some unfavorable skin reactions on the face that are connected to the frequent use of face masks. Other Scholars confirmed that wearing a mask has become more and more required in public settings however people with anti-mask attitudes beliefs that masks are ineffective hence refusal in wearing of mask (Taylor & Asmundson, 2021). Even in this study the schools' systems were expected to comply with wearing of masks, however there were those who were non complaint to the regulation.

1.3 Challenges to operationalise and implement the COVI-19 regulations

The research findings revealed that it was very difficult to operationalise and implement COVID-19 regulations in schools because school systems were not compliant in maintaining and observing regulations.

The following quote by participant 4 describes the experience expressing that… *when you went to the class unannounced you find them siting together so we had that problem of everyday of reminding them about COVID- 19, they were not adhering to COVID regulations*.

The school was not compliant to observing covid regulations. Participant 7 noted that…*things such as sanitizers need to be readily available, access to masks had to be available, your social distancing even in classes but I'm, it was stressful time because our school was not hundred percent covid compliant*. The participant further articulated that… *I could start with some classes were overcrowded as a teacher here is the virus that is killing people, and you were scared, because your life.*

This research found that participants shared common views about challenges experienced when operationalising and implementing COVID regulations. The participants responses confirmed that the challenges affected both educators and learners. One participant highlighted that during COVID-19 she was attending funerals which was contributing to spreading of the virus. In South Africa, COVID-19 citizens were prohibited to be in larger gathering with the purpose to reduce the transmission rate of the Covid disease (Yan Loo et al, 2022). Dukhi et al, (2021) also highlighted that preventative measure was introduced to fight the spread COVID-19 turned into an essential intervention.

1.4 Learners with Covid symptoms attending school

The results from this study show that learners came to school with COVID 19 symptoms which was risky towards other school systems considering that COVID was declared a pandemic worldwide. The following quotes echoes this point of view.

Participant 3 shared that:

> I can say that we find it difficult because some of them(learners) they were even sick, and you know with this COVID if somebody is sick is in denial and will always fight other learners and fight the educators and he does not listen, does not write his work, does not even submit his work so it's difficult, it was really difficult.

Participant 7 further reported that:

> I was involved in a situation where it was exam time and there was a learner who was infected who came to write an exam. It was reported that her parents know that she was infected, but they insisted that she must come to and write, and I was part of the exam committee.

Participant 11 described the experience by stating *even learners that were not feeling well because were infected by the Covid pandemic well was sent home.*

Participant 9 felt:

> They knew that they have Covid 19, but they really did not take it seriously, you know, so if anything, we were the once that were because we are the older one, we are more likely to die than them and getting infected and die than them.

Participant 1 also highlighted:
Even us as educators we got sick and from here, from school. We took this covid to our home and everybody got sick at home. They came to school maybe. positive because they are learners, and their immune system is strong so teachers were afraid that we are teaching these learners are sick they will infect us, we are adult will die very soon.

Participant 4 expressed a different opinion by stating, *remember during the pandemic, learners were not sick only teachers were sick, the only problem that the school encountered its learners losing their parents and grandparents.*

This study revealed that most participants expressed similar difficulties they encountered when rendering services to learners during COVID-19 pandemic. Most of the participants expressed common sentiments on the fact that learners reported to school with COVID symptom which impacted negatively on other school systems. One of the participants presented a discrepancy finding by stating that learners were not sick during the pandemic but only educators were infected by the COVID-19 symptoms during the pandemic.

The scholars support that there was the prevalence of asymptomatic infections seems to be influenced by age, with older adults especially men exhibiting more severe symptoms than

younger adults (Hantoosh, 2023). However, other research fundings show that school transmissions were uncommon (Falk et al, 2020). Findings from this study in chapter 2 confirm that COVID-19 is exceptionally contagious (Liu et al, 2020) which was the reason most participants felt it was overwhelming when learners reported to school with covid symptoms. When learners come to school with covid symptoms it poses risk to other school systems.

1.5 Plan in dealing with learners with COVID symptoms attending school

This study reveal that the school systems had to address the challenges of learners coming to school with Covid symptoms by implementing quarantine as a measure to address the challenge and to safeguard the school systems. When participants were asked to describe their perceptions, these following quotes are presented.

The participant 3 highlighted the efforts taken by the school system after discovered that the learner reported to school with COVID symptoms:

> Here at school, we had an isolation room whereby if I can see that this learner has symptoms so forth the we will put that learner to isolation and then here at the gate there was a monitoring tool with questions that will be ask about temperature.

Participant 11 also reported that

> Even learners that were not feeling well was sent home because as a school we had informed the caregivers that when learners are not feeling well the caregivers needs to inform the school as indicated we do have learners who comes to school when they are ill.

Participant 7 described perceptions by stating that:

> I was part of the exam committee, we had a situation where a learner came with COVID - 19, so we were responsible to remove that learner and Our head, she was responsible

removing that learner to another class and it was even a mission for her to get the room or the class.

Participant 5 indicated that:

> By that time when a learner is affected with Covid-19 one as a class educator we'd request parent please make sure that they inform us whenever a learner has a cough or anything please that the learner to be tested and if they were tested. What we do they will stay at home, and we will have extra work for that learner, and I will request the parent to send someone or so me to take whatever that we were doing in class just to be paired with others even though it was a challenge.

The results indicated that most of the participants highlighted that when learners are sick as a measure to rescue the situation will be sent home for quarantine. One of the participants highlighted that another measure schools took was to take learners to a different classroom. The research findings highlighted that Quarantine involves separating and limiting the movement of individuals exposed to the disease to monitor their health while isolation refers to the action of excluding people infected with infectious disease to people who are not ill (Sha et al, 2020). Chatterjee and Chauhan (2020) discovered that people who were placed under quarantine said it was an unpleasant experience because it caused them to feel bored and uncertain.

1.6 Non-adherence by Educators to the COVID-19 Regulations

The findings from this study found out that the educators did not adhere to COVID-19 regulations. The following verbatim responses encapsulate this sub-theme.

Participant 6 related her experience by indicating that *I did not stop anything; everything was normal and most of my friends lost their family members and will go to their families and pay condolences and went to the funerals and it was all fine.*

Participant 4 expressed the following:

> Even though other educators were scared to test they were still going for weddings, funerals. Educators will become angry with other educators who went for weddings and coming back positive. Sometimes as educators will forget their mask because they were tired with them. Educators they were not adhering to the regulations.

Participant 7 alluded that:

> It was frustrating to us because some educators did not respect the precautions, I mean COVID-19 regulations put in place because some wouldn't put on their mask and not practicing social distancing and will still attending parties because they do not care and respect others.

Participant 9 also shared that:

> We followed guidelines when it was level 5, then we were as to have 29 learners in a classroom but soon after that we went back to normal regular programming you know where we had 50 learners and above since we have highest number of enrolled learners.

All the participants agreed that even some of the educators were not complying with COVID regulations which directly affected the school systems negatively. Hence the Department of Basic Education propagated documents such as guidelines for ensuring hygiene and orientation guidelines during the pandemic (DBE, 2020) to enforce adherence to COVID-19 regulations. One of the participants highlighted that some of the educators did not adhere to COVID regulations and they will attend funerals and coming but to school infected with the virus which had negative impacts on educators.

Theme Two: Wellbeing of the educators during the COVID-19 pandemic

The findings of this study show that educators' well-being was affected during the time of COVID-19. This study further highlights that educators were affected in different areas of well-being, namely physically, psychologically, and socially. These three areas are sub-subthemes that came out from this study which confirmed in different areas educators were impacted negatively during the pandemic, the following subthemes reveal that educators were affected.

2.1 Physical wellbeing of the educators during COVID-19

This study revealed that one of the devastating impacts that school systems experienced during the COVID-19 was that educators became infected with COVID-19 symptoms. When describing the experience in terms how the pandemic affected educators' physical wellbeing the following narratives were reported by the participants.

Participant 1 highlighted that:

> Many educators got sick, and it was not that we were careless, but it was the nature of our work. I think at one stage everybody was sick in my house and I took it(covid) from here at school and took it home. The whole family was infected, my children, my husband fortunately we had no little Babbino (baby) all my children are in their twenties, it was difficult because you will see to finish what you are eating you and I will make sure that I woke up at five and sanitize the whole house every day. During the day when everybody is up, I will sanitize the house. Hey, it was tough, I don't wish it for anyone, it was difficult for myself.

Participant 2 also shared a view by revealing that *... even I myself have been infected with a covid virus.*

Participant 3 shared the way in which the participant quarantine by indicating that *if I can see that I have covid symptoms or so fourth, I will therefore quarantine at home, to isolate myself from other people.*

Participant 6 emphasised the impact that COVID had on educators by mentioning that *most of our members here at work got COVID-19. I also believe that me and my friend here were infected, but we did not bother to go for test". Because we did not want to make ourselves mad because of COVID-19.*

Participant 4 also reported how the education district office closed the school due to other members were affected by COVID and mentioned *we have support from district office because our school was closed twice because of COVID-19 as some of our members got infected.* The participant further stated*: Remember during the pandemic learners where not sick only teachers were sick.*

The results from most participants' narratives confirmed how the COVID-19 pandemic infected physical well-being of educators. Majority of the participants shared similar experiences on how COVID-19 affected educators. Research findings in chapter 2 shows that the pandemic was impacting more on older people (Blumberg et al, 2021; Pillay et al, 2020). Furthermore, many educators were heavily affected by COVID-19, and these impacted negatively on learning. (Jackson et al, 2022; Weinert et al, 2021; AFTRA, 2021).

Death of educators due to COVID-19

The findings in this study showed that there was a loss of lives inclusive of educators who died during COVID-19. Research investigated recorded that around 3,300 educators lost their lives during COVID-19 pandemic (Motshega, 2022). The following quotations from the transcripts confirm that during the pandemic the school systems expressed remarkable loss which affected the school system negatively. Participant 3 highlighted that there was loss of life by stating that *parents died, caregivers died, we lost teachers, we lost friends, it was overwhelming, ja we faced a lot during the pandemic which affected us personally, which also made teaching and learning it was tough. Ja that's all I can say and unfortunately, we also lost so many loved ones due to COVID-19.*

Participant 2 described the experience of losing lives to be traumatic by reporting that:

> It was the most traumatic time in our lives because of the fertility that we experienced., we lost colleagues who died from COVID-19, even our family members also lost my son during the pandemic suicide, we also lost other learners in our school who also committed suicide.

Participant 4 expressed the perception of that educators could not grief by stating that:

> Shame we lost 2 educators, so we used any support available, even our school principal's wife died due COVID-19 we could not even attend the funerals due to covid regulations, as you can remember during that time we were not allowed to go to funerals and other social gathering. It really affected us negatively.

Participant 1 also emphasised that:

> Some of us we have lost them, I mean they died during COVID-19. I think I lost three friends of mine who were also educators who also died due to covid. That was the most difficult time of our lives.

Participant 9 felt that COVID was a harsh period by stating that, *it was a terrible time, I think we were all scared. And that it's my experience yo--- especially hearing that other educator died from the nearby schools.*

All participants share similar sentiments about the loss that affected school systems. One of the participants also highlighted that educators were teaching in fear because of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the wellbeing of the educators. The result from this study shows that educators lost their lives even in the school where the study was conducted during the period of COVID-19 which negatively impacted on teaching and learning. Furthermore, COVID-19 regulations introduced resulted in a kind of discomfort because educators could not offer condolences and support to other educators that lost their lives and loved ones which was regarded to be unusual by the participants.

Research in this area confirms that the South African government through the leadership of the Minister of the department of co-operative governance and traditional affairs issued directives prohibiting social gatherings due to that huge gatherings were playing significant roles in virus transmission (South African Government, 2020). This further confirms the awkwardness of the regulations on the school systems. Moreover, the pandemic itself brought about death which crippled the school systems. The result from this study is in accordance with the findings presented

in Chapter 2 that confirmed the loss of lives during the pandemic including life of the educators (Gustafsson et al, 2023; Shepperd & Mohohlwane, 2021; Van der Berg and Spaul, 2020). This was further supported that its negative impact it had on teaching and learning (Jackson et al, 2022; Weinert et al, 2021; AFTRA, 2021)

2.1 Psychological wellbeing of the educators during COVID-19

In terms of psychological wellbeing educators experienced fear and apprehension, they experience fatigue, they experience depression during COVID-19 pandemic. The followed are different categories which the study identified the following:

Educators experienced fear and apprehension during COVID-19 pandemic.

The findings from this study in the subsequent quotes indicate how the educators were affected by the pandemic**.**

Participant 7 felt that:

> It was very stressful, it was stressful because we came to work first as we were teaching grade 12, I was anxious, I had panic attacks and it felt like I am losing my mind, yes it was stressing to deal with the harsh realities of COVID-19.

Participant 8 narrated how difficult by mentioning that*, it was so challenging knowing that anytime you are being vulnerable to killing pandemic so, Ja, it was frightening, also terrifying and confusing at the same stage.*

Participant 9 stated that, *as home language educators you were scared all the time, apprehensive, confused all the time, I did not know where you were coming or going.*

Participant 10 described the perception as follows *also we were needed to teach while being afraid that you might get infected and again the social distancing was an issue because you could not deal with the learners all at once because of the restrictive number in a class.*

Participant 4 highlighted the emotions of being scared by elaborating that:

> We were all scared, if educators can be the one to be educated first so that can alleviate fears and anxiety towards the COVID-19 pandemic , just because we were all scared, we did not know what was happening., Even other educators absented themselves from work because they thought learners were sick, funny enough learners were not sick even when parents and grandparents were sick. They came to school maybe. positive because they are learners, and their immune system is strong so teachers were afraid that we are teaching these learners are sick they will infect us, we are adult will die very soon.

Participant 2 further indicated that,

> Yes, it was very strenuous even on our path because during that time we were experiencing loss ourselves and at the same time we had to be strong for learners even though it was hard, but we had to be strong for learners. “But the truth it is that we were agitated, we experience terror.

Participant 5 stipulated that *I remember we were the first one to be called those who were teaching grade 12 learners it was very tense firstly. It was very tense for us and for the learners themselves.*

Findings highlight that all the participants experienced some form of negative emotions that were brought about by the pandemic. The other participants further highlighted the fact the pandemic contributed even to the death of their school Principals wife which intensity the participants feeling of resentment. COVID-19 pandemic affected their emotional wellbeing. Findings of this study in Chapter 2 substantiate that educators were terrified and were in hopelessness especially at the time

of returning to do their work as they view themselves to be vulnerable during COVID-19 (Padmanabhanunni et al, 2020; Padmanabhanunni & Pretorius, 2021).

Educators experienced physical and psychological fatigue during COVID-19

The findings of this study validate that educator experienced fatigue during the pandemic. The following quotes indicates that educators experience fatigue during COVID-19 pandemic.

Participant 3 reflected that:

> As a school-based support coordinator, we supported both learners and educators during and post COVID pandemic, if they feel exhausted, overwhelmed with their problems. But we also got worn out because we are human beings having our own issues to deal with.

In addition, Participant 3 also reported that:

> During COVID-19 unfortunately I had so many classes because I am the only educator who has qualifications in tourism and I was providing these services alone as a grade 12 educator and it was very difficult for me to adjust and to cover the syllabus, I got exhausted, I got consumed, I mean burnout and fatigue at the same time ja, (Afrikaans word meaning yes) truly was not coping but because I am rendering this services for my butter and bread I had to persevere.

Participant 5 further described the experience by indication that *You know the institution should employ more educators because we are so overwhelmed.*

The study findings corroborate that all the participants' quotes were similar because they both shared how there were overcome by fatigue rendering educational services to learners during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, one of the participants highlighted that was also affected by burnout during the pandemic Research results authenticate that staff reported feeling emotionally drained, lonely, and lacking adequate support services (Olawale et al, 2020). Other findings

discovered that there was significant relationship between the dimensions of burnout, role of stress, COVID-19 related variables and demographic variables (Padmanabhanunni & Pretorius, 2021). Other scholars demonstrated sense of helplessness and control over circumstances to be the course of burnout amongst educators during the pandemic (Pérez-Luño et al., 2022). Also, in this study educators were exhausted because of the challenges resulted from COVID-19 pandemic.

Educators experienced depression during COVID-19

This study showed that some of the educators were depressed during the pandemic. The following verbatims responses by Participant 2 emphasised the difficulties experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic by reporting that:

> It was hard. It took its toll on me emotionally. I suffered major depression during that time, and I also lost my son who committed suicide. I believe that there were other people who were already suffering from depression that was brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. It became worse for me because that's when it happened when he took his life (referring to the educator son).

Participant 7 highlighted the perspective by mentioning, *it was very stressful, it was stressful because we came to work first as we were teaching grade 12, I was anxious, I had panic attacks and it felt like I am losing my mind, yes it was stressing to deal with the harsh realities of COVID-19.*

Participant 11 echoes these sentiments, *during this time, I suffered melancholy, I experience sorrow of losing fellow educators, loved ones, I experienced doom, always hearing educators from the nearest schools died, mentally it finished me. I think somehow, I was depressed even though I was not medically diagnosed.*

The results in this study indicated that all the participants were affected by the pandemic mentally. Research findings support this study by indicating that a significant portion of teachers experienced signs of stress, anxiety, and depression during COVID-19 pandemic (Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2021). Other scholars confirmed that educators' mental health deteriorated during COVID-19 which further confirmed the negative impact of COVID-19 on educators (Lizana & Lera, 2022). While other scholars presented discrepant results by linked educators' lower levels of resilience and life satisfaction to have contributed higher levels of anxiety and negative emotions (Trejo et al., 2022) Further studies conducted by Santamaría et al (2021) show that a high percentage of teachers had symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression during COVID-19. Further findings showed that loneliness and severe depressive/anxiety/stress symptoms were more common in older adults during the pandemic (Parlapani et al., 2021).

2.2 Social wellbeing of educators during COVID-19

The results in this study show that the social wellbeing of educators was affected negatively during COVID-19 pandemic. Educators were scared to interact with one another, with learners which lead to isolation and because they were scared, interaction was also minimising contact with the learners, family and with one another.

Educators were isolated during COVID-19 pandemic

The participants shared same sentiments of the negative experienced of being at home without being able to reach learners effectively academically during COVID-19 pandemic.

According to Participant 2 the emergence of COVID 19 brought the life of educators to a standstill, *we couldn't go anywhere. We had to stay at home a lot, so I believe that people who were already*

suffering, I think during that time in 2020, on the 29 of July you know it was that time when we were restricted.

Participant 3 also expressed how the school system remained isolated from the learners by stating that *...we were asked to stay home for quite some time. "Without providing lessons to the learners.*

Participant 8 emphasised the fact that were isolated by reporting that, *during COVID-19 we were isolated from the learners as we were stopped for some time due to the regulations put in place to safeguard life. We were separated from the learners which was challenging because learning stopped,*

Participant 5 indicated the comfortability of being at home by stating that *when I was home it sounded much better than when we returned to work, noting that the pandemic was affecting older generation for me isolation was the best experience whereby I was with my family.*

Participant 1 described the perception about being isolated from the school, d*uring that time, we were on lockdown we could not see the learners under those strict regulation, we could not even see each other as educators as we were all restricted to be in contact with one another that changed my life in a pessimistic way. During that time, we had to use own data to give support to learners which costed us financially*.

Most participants had similar experiences about difficulties they encountered when they were confined in their homes without rendering services to the learners. One participant's experience of being restricted to interacting with other systems was positive as the participant viewed the school environment to be not conducive. Another participant highlighted that the pandemic cost her negatively because had to use data to reach learners during the pandemic. According to reports

from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), nearly 90% of students were not allowed to attend school, and approximately 3 billion people were under lockdown globally (Winther & Byrne, 2020). The closing of schools resulted in several negative effects, including difficulties developing, sustaining, and enhancing distance learning as well as disrupted instruction and unfavorable home and environmental conditions (UNESCO, 2020). A study by Leal Filho et al (2021) confirmed that participants experienced lack of interaction and communication during isolation. According to the study, 90% of the respondents said that the closure had interfered with their ability to complete their coursework or do their regular tasks at their institution for one to two months (Leal Filho et al., 2021). Kim and Jung (2021) study further demonstrated a positive correlation between social isolation and psychological distress. Other findings support that the quality of social relationships during the pandemic worsened (Buecker & Horstmann, 2021).

Educators are afraid to interact with learners because of fear of infection.

In this case the participants shared their perceptions in terms of how they experienced negative emotions when interacting with the learners at school during COVID-19 pandemic.

This was evident in the statement by participant 7 who mentioned *I was scared half the time I was at work and frustrated as well and you were scared as well, so when you were teaching these kids, you are teaching from the door.*

Participant 9 highlighted that:

> You [referring to herself] will be able to show more concern. But with covid everyone was just apprehensive., I will speak of myself. I was very apprehensive, and I was very distance, and I would not lie, mainly because of seeing my mother is(mom) is older, my dad was older, my grandfather was older., So, I did not want to come back from work and having

> to infect my parents, so I think during Covid I was so distance with the learners. I do not wanna lie.

Participant 4, the educator who is the school-based support coordinator emphasised the fact that other educators were coming to work while scared:

> Educators were afraid of interacting with learners because of the fear of infection" Even other educators absented themselves from work because they thought learners were sick, so teachers were afraid of that we are teaching these learners are sick they will infect us, educators because are human being we were all scared.

Participant 8 further highlighted that:

> It was very, very challenging experience for me because it was my first time working and started working under those strict regulation because of that when interaction with learners you do that with fear. Because of this killing disease as you will agree the virus was declared to be deadly.

Most participants provided a similar perception on the fact that they feared interaction with learners because they were worried about being infected by the learners. Participant 4 confirmed that educators feared interacting with learners because of the fear of infection. Participants 4 further indicated that learners were not infectors instead educators were the ones infected. The research can securely assume that participants feared interacting with learners because by doing that it was their way of protecting themselves from contracting COVID-19 virus. According to Benksim, et al (2020), older adults have a compromised immune system, which makes them more vulnerable to COVID-19 infection.

The findings of Weinert et al (2021) further confirm that majority of participants who participated in the study were scared contracting SARS-CoV-2 (Covid 19) at school. This will not be surprising for the participants in this study because they were also scared when rendering their services at the school. Padmanabhanunni et al (2020) and Padmabhanunni and Pretorius (2021) in their study

which is highlighted in Chapter 2 of this study found that educators were terrified and felt hopelessness especially at the time of returning to do their work as they viewed themselves to be vulnerable during COVID-19.

Theme Three: Unpreparedness of the school to deal with the challenges posed by COVID-19

The unpreparedness of the school made it difficult for the school systems to deal with the risks of the of the infection adequately. Three subthemes developed during the analysis of the data and will be discussed in more detail below.

3.1 Shortage of personal protective equipment and crowded classrooms

The result of this study indicates that the unpreparedness of the school made it difficult for the school systems to deal with the risk of the infection. The school experienced a shortage of personal protective equipment and having overcrowded classes worsened the situation during the Covid pandemic which placed learners and educators at risk. Though this study was conducted on the impact of the pandemic on educators it had the same impact on other school systems.

Participant 10 highlighted that *it was terrible experience*, *the experience obviously it was different not normal sanitizers were not always ava*ilable*, it was a situation where we had to adjust ourselves.*

Participant 6 mentioned, *soap, masks, and sanitizers were not always there because one time they will be here and after sometimes they are not there. It was very difficult for us especially in township schools because our classes are overcrowded.*

Participant 7 emphasised that:

> The teachers teaching grade 12 had to come to school first after the lockdown period and then when we came back schools had to be COVID-19 compliant... things such as sanitizers need to be readily available, access to masks had to be available, your social distancing even in classes but I'm, it was stressful time because our school was not hundred percent covid compliant because sometimes the school run short of the PPE's.

Participant 7 further *it was even a to get the room or the class that was used for that to be fumigated she had like it was a hustle, it was not easy, it was like nothing was prepared so that it was my experience.*

Participant 5 remarked that:

> Our school is overpopulated, what is the department doing to sort out this problem of overcrowding as it impacts cynically on the performance of our learners. Learners' strength is not the same because our classes are having many learners, we end up losing learners that need individual intervention. Another challenge during COVID our staffroom is too small as a school would be holding of meetings outside which was frustrating.

Most of the participants shared similar experiences about their perception on the fact that the school had challenges with personal protective equipment and that the school is overcrowded which further have adverse effect on teaching and learning. Furthermore, one of the participants revealed that overcrowding made it difficult to give specialised attention to learners with learning barriers. Research findings in Chapter 2 validate that overcrowded classrooms prevent educators from performing educational duties effectively such as formal and informal assessments (Ntsala, 2021; Linkuru & Miwila, 2022). Furthermore, other scholars corroborate that shortage of personal protective equipment's (PPEs) was endangering lives of the health practitioners (Hazell & Stork,

2024; Cohen & Rodgers, 2020). Other research results validates that the South African education system is characterised by a shortage of educators and a lack of suitable school facilities which contribute to the overcrowding of classrooms (West & Meier, 2020).

A study by Equal Education (2021) further backs up this study findings by highlighting that over 74% of classrooms across nine schools in Gauteng township were overcrowded.

3.2 Adapting the curriculum to ensure academic achievements.

Protocols on how teaching is going to occur when schools reopened was one of the issues that needed to be address during COVID-19 pandemic. Working on schedule of how teaching should transpire prior adapting the curriculum to ensure that academic achievements are accomplished was challenging during COVID-19.

Participant 4 indicated that *it was difficult because we had to make work schedule teaching schedules as to how we were going to cater for the learner, which was the most challenging but at the end we end up reaching our goals of ensuring that learning continue as a school.*

Participant 9 indicated that:

> The rotational timetables did not work for us because of the number of learners we have, the shrinking of the ATP did not make sense because we taught some aspects and now, we are paying back for it. The trimming of the work schedules is a problem. Learners not coming to school., We were given educator assistance, but we did not get but we did not get educator assistance, so it was easy for you to forget in class A you did this literature, class B you did language, now you must go back to the class A.

Participant 11 also highlighted that*:*

> They were platooning coming to the school, so most of them only came once or twice in a month the department purpose it was to ensure that the needs of the learners were met but it created content gap even to the current grade 12 that we are working with.

Most participants acknowledged that the management came with contingency plan to mitigate the loss of learning. One of the participants, though in agreement that rotational classes were put in place still perceive that the platooning did not work effectively. The study conducted in chapter 2 substantiate that school recovery plan to assist the schools to tailor their curriculum were published (DBE school recovery plan,2020) Other scholars offers discrepant findings by stating that changes and alteration of the curriculum created confusion and apathy to history teachers (Khethwa & Mabalane, 2022). Other scholars highlighted that despite the effort taken by department of basic education to remediate the effect of COVID-19 there was a huge loss of teaching time and learning (Hoadley, 2023).

3.3 Lack of technology to enable online learning and monetary resources to build sufficient classrooms.

The results show that lack of technology was another impediment which prevented the school systems to implement online learning during COVID-19 pandemic. The other obstruction was that the school system lacked monetary resources to build sufficient classrooms.

According to Participant 3, *township school we did not have equipment such as internet, tablets and etcetera to facilitates online classes which made life to be hectic which made teaching and learning to be affected.*

Participant 10 stated that:

> Learning was affected during the pandemic because our school did not have online classes because our school did not have budget and 90 percent of our learners are coming from disadvantage background. I think our country should better advance technologically because technology is one of the systems this going to make teaching effective and easier should we experience something like even after the pandemic.

Participant 5 mentioned, *it is a pity that when we think of technology like I said earlier most of our learners comes from disadvantaged families and would not even think of eLearning. Yes, our school have few smart boards which are also not enough.*

Participant 9 stated *you know with model c schools they could continue with online learning, but we could not even do that, if you do that you were expected to use your own airtime, your own data which does not make sense, you understand.*

Participant 6 expressed her concern about a lack of resources and over crowdedness:

> *We have 60 learners per class it becomes very difficult to such because of shortage of schools but I still become surprised ukuthi (that) I am old today we still have got the very same problems which we had once I was still thin, I do not know whether we do not plan very well, or people are eating moneys let's not beat around the bush.so mentioning online equipment is the monster to our government.*

Most of the participants agreed that lack of online equipment impacts adversely on teaching and learning. Two of the participants highlighted the fact that most learners are coming from impoverished communities which working on online may not be favourable option. For example, a study discussed in Chapter 2 validates that some problems that the South Africa learners are

facing in schools can be linked to the shortage of resources (Pillay, 2021). Some scholars confirms that inequality, lack of digital equipment, challenges with internet access, lack of skills of operating equipment and geographical environment have been a major challenge that impacted on online learning (Adu et al,2022; Glietenberg et al, 2020; Mkhize, 2021; Landa et al, 2021; Makuna & Olaka, 2020; Dube, 2020; Mbunge, 2021). Learners in disadvantaged communities had less access to digital devices, the internet for remote learning, nutrition, safe drinking water, and sanitation.

Theme Four: Exacerbation of Psychosocial issues experienced during COVID-19

Educators they experienced exacerbation of psychosocial issues during COVID-19 themselves, they lost their family members, some of their family members became unemployed, they also got infected with COVID-19 and in terms of the learners' psychosocial issues on learners it became manifold during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Educators had to attend to their own issues at the same time having to support learners, which impacted badly on their welfare. The following sub-themes will be discussed in detail below: learners coming to school hungry, Pandemic increased learner absence from school, Pandemic worsened academic barriers on learners and Learners presents Behavioural challenges.

4.1 Learners came to school hungry

The school, in mitigation hunger amongst learners had to make provision of nutritional programmes to improve learning outcomes.

Participant 1 mentioned:

> Hunger was too much during COVID-1I, as a coordinator for nutrition, many learners will come and asking for food because remember they were platooning so maybe a learner is not supposed to come to school but they will come to as for food. And we ended complying

> to the department plea because we were cooking every day and will go to the gate to call all our learners and we serve them lunch and we also served the community.

Participant 5 also confirmed:

> You know and have those concerns and then assist wherever I could assist and sometimes I would even involve SBST coordinator if the problem is too much for it to handle. I would involve them so that we involve social workers and with the food yes, so but pity because they do not get food every day, they will give them food parcels is once in two weeks is not much. It is a challenge; hunger was an issue during COVID-19 I had a learner whom I had to take at least every once a month to buy groceries for his family at least and then the one he gets from the school will be additional.

Participant 1 reported that:

> During the pandemic psychosocial issues increased alcoholism, teenage pregnancy, learners were misbehaving, bullying was bad. Bullying is back mam because they are now all here, bullying is back I am not sure why they all flock to this office. I am dealing with a lot of issues like that. Learners are bullying each other; learners were hungry during the pandemic.

The participants highlighted how COVID-19 increased levels of hungers amongst learners which negatively impacted on learning hence the school had to mitigate the effects of the COVID pandemic by provision of nutrition to the learners and the nearby community. The findings show poor diet can hinder cognitive development, slow down sexual development, and slow linear growth (May et al., 2021). Result from this study reveal that the pandemic increased psychosocial issues on learners, learners came to school hungry which impacted negatively on teaching and learning. Afridi et al (2019) show positive benefits of nutrition on learners to be improvement of learning outcomes. Moreover, other research results validate that nutritional programme increased

learner attendance, decreased tiredness in class and dropout rates in schools (Delbiso et al., 2021). Other findings have confirmed that there is a direct link between school feeding scheme and academic success (Wall et al., 2022).

4. 2 Pandemic increased learner absence from school

The pandemic increased learner's absence from school which impacted negatively on teaching and learning.

Participant 9 stated: *Jo, it was absenteeism. It seems as if they did not care especially, they would, I remember one time they will be 3 days in, 3 days off. If they did not come those 3 days, they would come the rest of the week.*

Participant 6 echoed:

> The other challenge was that learners missed class, did not come to school as expected as you will remember that they were rotating. even after the time when learners came back in full force, they were still absenting themselves maybe because they were scared, but this had negative impact on teaching and learning, because when a learner comes back will try to accommodate the learner so that the learner is not lagging.

Participant 4 mentioned

> I think learners were angry of losing their parents because they are learners, they could not express it fairly well.so there were so many changes after the covid-19. Learners were reporting to school irregular when they came back to school it is still I educators who need to ensure that the learner is at the same level with other it was tough, Ja.

Most of the participants in this study believed learners were absenting themselves. Some of the participants indicated that learners were not only absenting themselves from the school but were affected with some other social issues. One of the educators highlighted that other educators were also absenting themselves. The findings from this study confirm that COVID-19 pandemic

increased learner absence from school which impacted negatively on learners' academic performance.

In other studies, researchers have articulated that absenteeism have a detrimental impact on the social-emotional development of the students (Santibanez & Guarino, 2020). According to Nuga and Gustafsson (2020), Van der Berg and Spaull (2020) and Van der Berg et al., (2020) the scholars emphasised that due to schools closing during the pandemic there was a great loss of learning experienced by learners.

4.3 Pandemic worsened academic barriers for learners

The pandemic worsened academic barriers on learners which had adverse effect on teaching and learning. The following quotes highlights the harsh realities that the COVID-19 brought on the school systems.

Participant 6 highlighted, *during COVID-19 it was very difficult because most of them would not come to school. Absenteeism was too much…*

Participant 10 shared that learners' absence *was because of family members infected by the covid19 which affected teaching and learning because when they come back, they were behind and as the teacher you have to see how to support them.*

Participant 8 described the patterns of school attendances follows: *So, some learners will be absent on Monda y- Tuesday knowing very well that Wednesday and Thursday and Friday will not be allowed to come.*

Participant 11 indicated how literacy levels were affected, *most of them were affected negatively. We have grade twelve students who cannot read and write.*

Participant 1 noted, *learners they cannot cope at this educational system because of their barriers which was also worsened absence rate during COVID-19.*

All the participants highlighted how learners' absence from the school added academic loss of learners and increased learners' academic difficulties which has negative impact on academic outcomes. UNICEF (2021) highlighted the long-term impact school closures of any kind, even normal ones, frequently raise dropout rates and reduce lifetime educational attainment. The Minister of Basic Education in her speech asserted that many days of learning were lost during the lockdown which may result in long-term learning deficits and an even greater disparity in learning outcomes (Motshega, 2020). According to Nuga and Gustafsson (2020), Van der Berg and Spaull (2020) and Van der Berg et al (2020) the scholars emphasised that due to schools closing during the pandemic there was a great loss of learning experienced by learners.

4 4 Learners present behavioural challenges

This study shows that learners displayed behavioural challenges which interfered with teaching and learning during COVID-19. The following verbatim response indicates how the school system was affected.

Participant 1 indicated that during COVID-19, *the learners a not stable up there, mentally, learners started displaying behavioural problems, started bullying each other., As an educator you must deal with that, now you also must deal with them being hungry.*

In addition, Participant 1 shared that *during COVID we noted escalation of different problems in learners such alcoholism, teenage pregnancy, learners were misbehaving and bullying became bad.*

Participant 2 mentioned *like I said earlier on, in our school it was lots of fighting and gangsterism started during the COVID-19 pandemic, and we also experienced a high volume of learners who became pregnant.*

Participant 3 mentioned that *during and post COVID a learner takes his or her frustration to other learners as a teacher when you try to talk to him or her then you can see that is arrogant and fighting against you.*

Participant 4 further emphasised that *most of the challenges we encountered during and post COVID-19 were fights between learners from other schools and in our school premises which affected teaching and learning I think learners were angry of losing their parents because they are learners, they could not express it fairly well, so there were so many changes after the COVID-19.*

Participant 8 also highlighted that:

> During COVID-19 and even now we are teaching learners who are not respectful towards elders, that make our work to be so difficult, there were learners even doing bullying, even

> experience of bullying, discrimination as well, because if you were coughing, learners will say no, no sir your goanna infects us.

Research findings emphasised the significance of boredom as a possible aggravating factor for aggression (Li & Chu, 2022). All participants. Laher et al (2021) also cited that the switch to emergency remote teaching, combined with common anxieties and fears associated with the disease, is likely to have had an impact on learners' mental health during the pandemic. Research findings highlighted fear, tension, anxiety, and family connections as significant challenges encountered by South African teenagers throughout the COVID-19 lockdown period (Pillay, 2022). The research showed that learners experienced severe emotional discomfort during lockdown which created difficulty in adjusting academically, and were feeling socially isolated (Visser & Van Wyk, 2021).

Theme Five: Rendering school social work services during COVID-19

The psychosocial needs of learners are very high. The role of the school social worker as part of the multi-disciplinary team is to address the psychosocial barriers to learning to enable learners to achieve their academic potential to become productive citizens (Van Sittert & Wilson, 2018; Ding et al., 2023). There are 117 School social workers who are assigned to schools in Gauteng province (S, Madella, personal communication, May 09, 2024; Skhosana, 2020; Vergottini & Weyers, 2020; Jiang, 2023). In addition, very few public schools employ a school social worker rendering services only in the school. In the different regions in Gauteng, the ratio between a school social worker and the number of schools he or she must take care of, are also different and some social workers are responsible to render service to 200 schools. In the Gauteng East District, the average ratio per school social worker is 1 to 40 schools.

During COVID-19 the need for school social work services increased. However, access to school social workers was very limited because they had to attend to many learners from different schools. The schools do not have their own school social workers, they had to depend on other support from other government departments. The study confirms that there is no standardisation across all the provinces in terms of how school social work services operate (Vergottini & Weyers, 2020) which added to the challenge experienced during COVID-19 pandemic.

The following verbatim response by Participant 4 highlighted challenges experienced during the pandemic regarding accessing the services of school social workers:

> Their role is very important but during the COVID learners had many problems so getting hold of the school social workers was a big challenge because when we phone for their service will be informed that they are attending other cases in another schools.

Participant 2 reiterated that difficulties were experienced when trying to engage the help of social workers:

> Personally, I have a very good experience with social workers even though I just feel that most of our learners needs are not met in the sense that we will always be told that they are overworked, they have a lot of cases and at times you find learners who are still waiting for counselling for a long time it is not done on time .

Participant 5 mentioned that:

> I am not very much involved in the SBST, but I know that there are social workers that come to the school when they are needed and with that question, I would not be hundred percent sure you can refer you too is Mrs B and Ms J they are the ones who deal with them directly as they are school based support coordinators.

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Participant 8 reported that *they were very, very helpful. I would say, if you I would like to say, if you can recall the main case that I did tell you about of a boy affected or not, so did refer to one of the social workers that is supporting learners in our school.*

School social work refers to the application of social work principles and methods within the education system to render holistic social work services to learners, parents, educators, and the school as community, with the main goal of addressing to learning and personal, emotional, socio economic and behavioural barriers create an environment where the learner can reach his or her full potential (Vergottini, 2019). Research showed that the COVID-19 pandemic has increased the urgency of addressing the population's social needs, and social workers play a critical role in all areas including education (Cifuentes-Faura, 2020). The Children's Act 38 of 2005, further highlights that the best interests of the child are paramount, hence social workers must ensure the implementation of the Act. Social workers are critical role players in protecting children's rights as stipulated in the Constitution of South Africa. Children should not be exposed to abuse, neglect, maltreatment, violence, or harmful behaviour (Children's Act, 38, 2005, sections 7(l)(iii)).

Theme Six: Coping strategies implemented by the school during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Due to the disruptions school systems experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, schools had to implement coping strategies during and post COVID-19 to cope with the repercussions of the covid pandemic. The following sub themes will be discussed in detail: 6.1 One of the sub-themes was the provision of extra curriculum classes to learners 6.2 Support strategies offered by the

school, the management team, and the education district office 6.3 Improved teamwork and support among Educators during COVID-19?

6.1 Extra curriculum classes

The situation at Kenneth Masikela secondary school was that pandemic created academic gaps. This study shows that the schools' systems to manage during the COVID -19 pandemic had to come up with different strategies to ensure that the learning continues in the mist of adversity. The following quotes highlight how the school system mitigated the challenges brought by the pandemic.

Participant 10 mentioned that *we started with the curriculum, and because we were far behind, we had to come in for extra classes. One intervention that helped was going the extra mile to teach learners on Saturdays and to teach them in the mornings.*

Participant 3 shared that *those learners who found it so difficult to adjust I had to give them extra lessons-morning classes and afternoon classes and even during my free periods or during lunch time.*

Participant 11 further elaborated how the government supported learners by indicating that:

> During COVID-19 learners did not attend school, and now the government is offering the Secondary School Improvement Programme (SSIP) classes for learners who attend Saturday classes and [classes] during the holiday at Tlakula secondary school. There was a camp for one week where learners slept there, and they had classes from 7am to 8pm as a strategy to improve their performance.

All the participants in this study shared similar perceptions on the support given to the learners during the pandemic by offering them extra classes and a holiday programme. One participant highlighted how he went overboard by supporting learners that were lagging. All the participant highlighted that the efforts taken by the school system to support learners it was a way of mitigating the effects of the pandemic on teaching and learning. Studies revealed that the department of Basic Education and political figures created multiple draft plans with recommendations for catch-up and curriculum coverage in each of South Africa's nine provinces (Ramrathan, 2020). Other findings MEC of the Department of Basic Education confirmed the benefits of secondary school improvement programme to provides learners with additional learning in subjects like Physical science, life sciences, math, accounting, English as a first language, business studies, economics, history, and geography (Greecy, 2013). Furthermore, the department of education promulgated documents such as school recovery plan to address academic gap introduced by the COVID-19 pandemic (2020). Other research findings revealed that the revised and altered Covid-19 regulations had a detrimental effect on history teachers' professional identities and methods of instruction (Khethwa & Mabalane, 2022). Major findings included the following: teachers were perplexed by curriculum revisions and changes; history teachers were demotivated in the classroom; and teachers' identities were erratic and fluctuating.

6.2 Support offered by the school management team and education district office.

The results of this study show that the support offered by the school management team and education district office to the educators-maintained systems functionality amid the adversity

brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. The following quotes highlight how the educators were supported by the management and the education district office.

Participant 10 shared the following on support offered by the school management team:

> The school management team would give support, I remember we had a COVID-19 task team at the school that included the school-based Support Team (SBST) Coordinator and Life Orientation (LO) educators. But there was nothing from the district office which showed we are here, we want to support you, we want to find out how are you.

Participant 3 expressed this viewpoint, *the support we got from the government; I mean the district office in terms of equipment we were well equipped during COVID-19*.

Participant 8 also highlighted the role of management by mentioning that:

> Management formulated a COVID-19 team to deal with issues of handwashing, sanitization, and masks (PPEs., We were given PPES, so we had to make sure that we check learners at the gate to ensure they were wearing mask and give learners extra masks.

Participant 4 mentioned *we had support from district office because our school was closed twice because of COVID-19.*

Most participants agreed that school management played a positive role while few participants expressed the concern that the district office was not there for them. They mentioned that the COVID 19 period was a very disruptive and traumatic period. They could go to the district for employee wellness services, but it was not perceived as user friendly. Study conducted by Gonzalez et al (2022) school principals were crucial in providing teachers with direction, hope, and purpose. Another research findings show that, in the first month of the 2020–2021 school year,

principals placed a higher priority on the physical and safety well-being of the school community, maintaining their attention on matters of instruction and regulation rather than psychological needs (Spyropoulou & Koutroukis, 2021).

6.3 Improved teamwork and support among Educators during COVID-19

This study reveals that educators were supporting each other during COVID-19 pandemic. The following quotes indicate how the school systems were giving each other support.

Participant 1 mentioned that:

> During pandemic educators supported each other and I remember we will share when you are coughing drink this and this, okay stay at home we will contact each other through phone checking how are you doing that was the support.

Participant 5 said that:

> We support each other as colleagues, learning areas you know, sometimes even we do group teaching whereby I would go and teach another class something that the other educator is not or she finds challenge for her, I would to her class and teach her class.

Participant 4 described the experience of the social network that was created during COVID-19 by stating that *school management started a WhatsApp group when educators were sick, they will say that they are sick and will be sent for a COVID-19 test.*

Participant 7 had a different view on teamwork and support and mentioned:

> Honestly the only support structures that I can reason with when we were given the opportunity to get the vaccine besides that I don't believe we were given any support structure, I do not believe we had that much support and from management level, district, government.

All participants shared similar experiences on how the social networks created by the management assisted the school system to deal with the effect of the pandemic. In a study conducted by Gonzales et al (2022) school principals were crucial in providing teachers with direction, hope, and purpose. Another research findings shows that, in the first month of the 2020–2021 school year, principals placed a higher priority on the physical and safety well-being of the school community, maintaining their attention on matters of instruction and regulation rather than psychological needs (Spyropoulou & Theodore Koutroukis,2021). The study conducted by Motaung (2022) shows indisputable evidence of school Management Team (SMTs') efficacy in schools during the pandemic (Motaung, 2022). The research evidence indicates that there are numerous instances of teachers collaborating virtually to provide peer professional and psychosocial support UNESCO,2020). According to the research conducted by Surmeli et al (2024), educators who were a part of collegial relationships or teacher communities were more likely to receive the support they needed to adjust to the abrupt changes. Research findings highlight that improved communication contributes to work efficiency (Porubčanová, 2021).

4.5 Summary

This chapter presented research findings of the study obtained after data analysis was conducted. The participants shared their experiences in relation to the difficulties that the school systems experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. It was evident that the participants experienced

adjustment challenges, and the wellbeing of the educators was severely affected due to the danger posed by the pandemic. The study established that the school system's unpreparedness to deal with the challenge of the pandemic effected school adversely; there was exacerbation of psychosocial issues which was presented that it negatively affected teaching and learning.

It was also discovered that in the mist of horror brought by the pandemic educators' experienced intervention by the management which played an important role in mitigating the effects of the pandemic. There was a shared sentiments about the secondary school improvement plan as another strategy which the management put in place to ensure the safety of the school systems. Findings highlight that collaboration in the school system lessened the impact of the pandemic. In the next chapter the key findings, conclusions and recommendations are presented

CHAPTER FIVE

KEY FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the key findings by integrating relevant sections of the literature review (Chapter 2) and findings from the empirical study (Chapter 4) In addition, the achievement of the aims and objectives of the study will be assessed. The chapter ends with conclusions, and recommendations obtained from the findings.

5.2 Aim and objectives of the study

The primary aim of the study was to explore the experiences of educators working with Further Education and Training (FET) learners in the Gauteng East District on the effects of COVID-19 on learners' well-being.

The following research question guided the achievement of the aim:

What were the experiences of educators working with FET learners in schools during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The aim was achieved through the following objectives:

Objective 1: To describe the experiences of educators in dealing with learner wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic and the meanings they attach to these experiences.

This objective was achieved through a literature review presented in Chapter 2. The relevant sections in Chapter 2 are sections 2.3.2 to 2.3.5 that highlight the challenges within the education system and the challenges learners were facing during COVID-19. Section 2.4 focuses on the experiences of educators. In Chapter 4, the following sections contributed to the

achievement of Objective 1: Theme 1 explains the difficulties experienced to adjust to the COVID-19 regulations and support the difficulties experienced with direct quotations by participants. In Theme 2, the influence of the physical, psychological, and social wellbeing of the educators are explored and substantiated with participants direct quotations. All the participants shared their experiences during the pandemic. There were those who believed the pandemic was over, and those who remained cautious due to the possibility of the virus still being present.

Many participants expressed feeling anxious, frustrated, stressed, overwhelmed, and depressed, during the pandemic. They were worried about their own lives, the lives of their loved ones, the lives of others in the school systems, and the lives of the learners. The experiences the educators shared correlate with findings of other studies (Padmabhanunni & Pretorius, 2021; Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al, 2021; Talidong & Toquero, 2020; Stachteas & Stachteas,2020). Additional experiences mentioned by the participants include staying at home during lockdowns, curriculum modifications, relationships with family, friends, other educators, and how the pandemic affected every aspect of their lives.

Objective 2: To explore the psychosocial issues faced by educators working with FET learners during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This objective was attained through a literature review presented in Chapter 2. The relevant section in Chapter 2 are sections 2.3.2 to 2.3.5 that highlights the challenges learners were facing during COVID-19, and section 2.4, specifically 2.4.1- health risks. In Chapter 4, the following sections contributed to the achievement of objective 2: Theme 2 the wellbeing of

educators, and Theme 4 exacerbated psychological issues experiences by learners during COVID-19 confirms the psychosocial issues with direct quotations from the participants.

Most of the participants believed that after COVID-19, most things had gone back to normal. They believe that the onset of COVID-19 exacerbated psychological problems. Although most of the participants mentioned that COVID-19 brought feelings of discomfort, loss, and pain, it seemed that the participants had adjusted to the changes brought by COVID-19. The participants felt that COVID-19 left them with scars that will heal with time.

Objective 3: To determine possible assistance available for learners and educators during COVID-19 pandemic that can improve quality of education.

This objective was reached through a literature review presented in Chapter 2. The relevant sections in Chapter 2 are sections 2.3.2 to 2.3.5 that highlights the challenges learners were facing during COVID-19, and section 2.4, specifically 2.4.1- 2.4.3 are relevant. In Chapter 4, the following sections contributed to the achievement of objective 3: Theme 1, subtheme 1.1 operationalisation and implementation of the regulations and subtheme 1.2 dealing with learners with COVID-19 symptoms attending school supported by direct quotations speak to this objective. In addition, Theme 3 subtheme 3.1 dealing with the risk of infections, and sub-theme 3.2, adapting the curriculum to ensure academic achievement, as well as Theme 6, subthemes 6.1, provision of extra classes, and subtheme 6.2 support offered by the school, management team, and the district office substantiated by direct quotations from participants are confirming the attainment of objective 3.

The pandemic caused educators to work together and support each other, which improved the teamwork among educators. In the mist of the adversity brought by the pandemic strong

connections were built among the educators by improving the communication and sharing of challenges at work and at home and reaching out to one another when needed. They created a WhatsApp group to communicate regularly. The improved teamwork and efforts to ensure learning takes place to achieve academic performance contributed to the quality of the education.

Objective 4: To establish the potential role played by the school social workers working with FET learners and educators during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This objective was achieved through section 2.5 the role of the school social worker in Chapter 2. In Chapter 4, Theme 5 supported by participants' direct quotations contributed to reaching objective 4.

The participants express their experiences about the services of school social worker in the school. Participants highlighted that since COVID-19 there have been a lot of challenges experienced by the school community that require the attention and support of school social workers. It was highlighted that during COVID-19 it was difficult for the school to receive sufficient school social work services because the ratio between a school social worker and the number of schools allocated to the school social worker brings about challenges and hamper efficient social work service delivery.

Objective 5: To elicit suggestions from educators on what strategies educators can use during pandemics.

This objective was realised through a literature review presented in Chapter 2. The relevant section in Chapter 2 are sections 2.3.4, loss of learning; 2.3.7, online learning challenges; 2.4.2, lack of technical skills to facilitate remote learning, and 2.4.3, shortage of skilled educators. In Chapter 4, the following section contributed to the achievement of objective 5: Theme 6,

subtheme 6.1, provision of extra classes and subtheme 6.2 support offered by the school, the management team, and the education district office.

The participants highlighted the important contribution provided by the education district to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on the school system. The participants indicated the trimming of the curriculum, having rotational systems and extra classes were helpful strategies. There were different opinions about the support provided at the school level. More than half of the participants perceive that the education district was silent on the needs of the educators such as wellness programmes, workshops preparing them on how to deal with the effects of the pandemic. All the participants highlighted that P1 educators are mostly ignored when workshops are offered whilst from P2 upwards educators are included in workshops and the exclusion of P1 educators is killing the morale of the educators.

5.3 Key findings of the study

The main findings from the study are summarised below:

Finding 1: The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the education system in South Africa and particularly this school. The operationalisation and implementation of the COVID-19 regulations were challenging due to existing structural challenges and non-adherence to regulations by both learners and educators.

Finding 2: The COVID-19 pandemic jeopardised the physical, psychological, and social wellbeing of educators and learners. It resulted in educators, and learners being locked down, contracting the virus, and becoming ill, losing loved ones because of the virus, experiencing feelings of fear, anxiety, feeling down, being exhausted and being restricted in social movement like the attendance of funerals, weddings and social events.

Finding 3: The COVID-19 pandemic surfaced the unpreparedness of the school system to deal with the challenges posed by the pandemic. This showed up gaps and required rapid changes to be made within an education context given exiting structural challenges and limited resources. It influenced the teaching and learning process as well as the academic performance and achievements of learners.

Finding 4: The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the psychosocial issues in communities that learners experience.

Finding 5: The desperate need for school social workers rendering services in all schools to address the many barriers that hamper or prevent learners to achieve their potential to becoming a productive member of the community.

Finding 6: There is a definite need for resources like technology, devices to be available and accessible in schools to facilitate teaching and learning. More matured educators require technology skills development to facilitate different methods of teaching.

5.4 Conclusions

The study has demonstrated that the COVID-19 pandemic significantly affected all the participants in a variety of ways, some being more severely affected than others based on their individual experiences. Most of the participants, initially experienced feelings of fear due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but they were able to adapt to the 'new normal' with the help received from their families and the educational systems. The participants were impacted negatively by the pandemic, and for many the impact on teaching and learning appeared to be the most negative impact.

Each participant comes from a distinct background which allowed for a abundant set of experiences that permitted the researcher to explore and understand unique settings and situations. Although the participants said the pandemic was over; however, there must be some awareness

about what precautions like a disaster management plan must be in place should another pandemic appears, that might disrupt the education system. Employee wellbeing programmes must be available during times of crisis and disasters or pandemic. The pandemic was severe and impacted all people in different ways. The effects of the pandemic are still present even though they will eventually fade away.

5.5 Recommendations

In this section recommendations for the School, the Department of Education, and future research are made.

5.5.1 The School

- To manage disasters and risks the school must develop a plan on how to deal with critical incidences and disaster within the school setting.
- A process to consult with a reputable Employee Wellness programme must be establish and communicated to educators.
- To enhance the teamwork amongst educators, workshops must be facilitated.
- The school must employ a school social worker to develop programmes to address the needs and challenges of the learners, to allow the educators to focus implementing the curriculum.
- The school social worker and the school-based support team (SBST) must work together to address the challenges learners are experiencing.

- The roles and the responsibilities of the school social worker and the educators must be clarified to enable them to work collaboratively to facilitate the successful achievement of the learners' academic achievements.

5.5.2 Department of Education

- The Department of Education must have well developed policies to guide how disasters like pandemics must be dealt with specifically related to teaching and learning.
- The education district office should become more visible at the school to give educators the support and affirm educators to ensure that teaching and learning is successfully achieved.
- An effective Employee Wellbeing programme must be accessible to educators should they need to consult with professional services. This will contribute to improving educational outcomes and learner wellbeing.
- Ensure that all schools are sufficiently resourced to prevent overcrowded classrooms and have the necessary resources to facilitate online learning.
- The Department of Education should provide skills development for educators to be empowered to use technology allowing them use online systems to teaching and learning.
- The Department of Education should employ school social workers in schools, to render awareness and preventive services to learners and support educators to ensure learners' positive academic achievements.

5.5.3 Future research

- Explore what is needed to mitigate the impact of future pandemics or disasters on teaching and learning in school settings
- Establish the knowledge and skills levels of educators to engage with online learning
- Determine and define the roles and responsibilities of educators and school social workers as part of a multi-disciplinary team regarding the psychosocial issues impeding the academic progress of learners.

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Annexure A

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

The study title is: Exploring the experiences of educators on the effects of COVID-19 on Further Education and Training (FET) learners in Gauteng East District

Dear Sir/Madam

My name is Tiyisela Suzan Connie Makamu. I am a Masters' student in Social Work in School Social Work at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. My supervisors are Profs. Edmarie Pretorius and Jennifer Watermeyer. I am conducting a research study about the experiences of educators working with Further Education and Training (FET) learners in the Gauteng East District on the effects of COVID-19 on learner well-being in secondary schools.

I am inviting you to take part in an individual interview. If you decide to take part, your participation in this research study will last about 60 minutes. The interview will take place at a place of your choice and at a time most suitable for you.

With your permission, I would like to audio record the interview. This data will be stored in lockable cabinet for a period of two years and will be deleted after two years. Only the researcher will have access to the data.

During the research interview, I will not use your real names, but pseudonyms, however I need to ask for some biographical information like your educational qualifications, age, and work experience.

The interview will be confidential and anonymous. When I share the findings of the research study, I will not include your name or anything else that could identify you. With your permission, other researchers may use the data collected from this research study, but your name and any personal information will not be used or passed on.

If you decide to take part in the research study, it should be because you want to volunteer. You do not have to take part. You can stop being in the study at any time. You do not have to answer any questions if you do not want to. You will not get any direct benefits if you choose to join the research study. You will not lose any services, benefits or rights you would normally have if you decide not to join. Taking part in the research study will not cost you anything. You will not be paid for being in this research study. You will not have to travel to participate in the interview, I will travel and conduct the interview at the place and time of your choice.

The risks for this research study are no more than what happens in everyday life. Maybe, some of the questions asked may make you feel sad or upset. If this happens, I will stop the interview and continue another time. If you need some support or counselling services following the interview you will be referred to the Department of Social Development in Springs. The contact person is Ms Matamela Mamilasigidi, and the contact numbers are:011 365 9000/082 4916558/0731171222. These services are available free of charge.

This research study will be written up as a research report. The report will be available on the university library website. If you would like to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research study, feel free to contact me or my supervisors on the details listed below. If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical procedures of this research study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research

Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za.

Yours sincerely,

Researcher:

Tiyisela Suzan Connie Makamu email address 2530566@students.wits.ac.za

Contact number: 082 469 0377

Supervisor: Edmarie Pretorius: Edmarie.Pretorius@wits.ac.za Phone Number: 011 717 4476

Co-Supervisor: Jennifer Watermeyer@wits.ac.za Phone Number: 011 717 4578

Annexure B



CONSENT FORM

Title of project: Exploring the experiences of educators on the effects of COVID-19 on Further Education and Training (FET) learners in Gauteng East District

Name of researcher: Tiyisela Suzan Connie Makamu

I, ……. agree to participate in this research project.

I agree to the following:

(Please circle the relevant options below)

The research study was explained to me. I understand what this study is about.	YES	NO
I understand that I can volunteer to take part in the study.	YES	NO
I agree that the interview may be audio recorded.	YES	NO
I agree that direct quotations from my individual interviews may be used by the researchers in their research report/manuscript/book chapter.	YES	NO
I agree that my participation will remain anonymous (my name will not be used by the researcher in their research report/manuscript/book chapter).	YES	NO

I agree that other researchers may use the information I provide in my interview (depending on their own ethics clearance being obtained) but my name and any personal information will not be used or passed on.	YES	NO

…… (signature)

…… (name of participant)

…… (date)

…… (signature)

Tiyisela Suzan Connie Makamu (name of researcher/person seeking consent)

10 January 2023(date)

Annexure C



Title of project: Exploring the experiences of educators on the effects of COVID-19 on Further Education and Training (FET) learners in Gauteng East District.

Interview questions

Demographic questions

- What is your educational background?
- How long have you been providing services to Further Education and Training learners?
- How old are you?
- What is your racial background?

Educators' experiences

- Can you please tell me more about yourself and your work.
- Share with me your work experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Tell me about experiences that you can recall where you had to assist learner(s) that were affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

- How did you experience dealing with learners' well-being prior, during and post the COVID-19 pandemic?
- Tell me more about the psychosocial issues you faced when working with FET learners during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- What strategies did you use to cope with the learners and your own situation during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- Share with me the existing support systems available for learners and educators prior, during, and post COVID-19 that support learners and educators that contribute to a conducive learning environment and the quality of education.
- Reflecting on the support structures that was available during the pandemic, what support structures did you find helpful?
- Reflecting on procedures and guidelines implemented in schools during COVID-19 what would you have done differently to ensure that both learners and educators were protected during the pandemic?
- Based on your experiences prior, during and post COVID-19, what are your views on the roles of school social workers with FET learners and educators?

- To elicit suggestions from educators on what strategies educators can use during pandemics
- What support did you find positive within the Institution?
- What support do you think Institutions can give to Educators to assist them with providing effective services to FET learners during pandemics