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The effect of COVID-19 on the teaching and learning relationship between learners, educators, and parents: A case study of a school in Soweto

A report on a research study presented to

The Department of Social Work

School of Human and Community Development

Faculty of Humanities

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In partial fulfilment of the requirements

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by

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SOCIAL WORK

THE SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT (SHCD)



THE UNIVERSITY OF WITWATERSRAND
THE SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
THE SOCIAL WORK DEPARTMENT
RESEARCH REPORT

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the impact that COVID-19 had on the learning and teaching relationship between learners, educators, and parents/guardians. A qualitative research method and multiple case study research design were used in this study. The convenience sampling method was used to select participants for this study. The present study employed thematic analysis as a method of data analysis utilised a thematic analysis method to identify and make sense of participants experiences of the phenomenon of COVID-19 and its effects on the teaching and learning relationship. The research participants were derived from a school in Soweto. The recruited research participants were limited to 7 parents/guardians with learners in the school, 7 learners that were at the chosen school when the COVID-19 pandemic occurred, and 4 educators that were teaching at the school during the pandemic. Data was collected using semi-structured individual interviews with parents and educators and focus groups with learners. The themes that emerged included the different ways the education system was affected by the pandemic, the different ways that the pandemic affected the wellbeing of learners, parents and educators, the support systems put in place to strengthen parental involvement during the pandemic, and the ways in which the pandemic shaped the roles of learner, parents and educators. Results suggest that the teaching and learning relationship between learners, parents and educators in this township school were severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, the study revealed that learners from low socio-economic status families in the school had limited to no access to teaching and learning during the pandemic due to challenges that include lack of resources, illiteracy amongst parents, lack of computer knowledge and inconclusive home environments to accommodate studying from home.

Key words

Home-school relationship; learning inequalities; COVID-19; parental involvement; support systems; academic performance.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The emergence of coronavirus (COVID-19) all over the world has impacted and changed the education system greatly and further crippled an already fragile economy and education system in South Africa. The World Health Organisation declared the corona virus disease on the 12th of March 2020, and since then governments worked hard to curb the spread of the virus (Reimers, 2022; Weaver & Swank, 2021; Human Rights Watch, 2020; Soudien, Reddy & Harvey, 2022). To curb the rapid spread of COVID-19, governments had to enforce strict restrictions across different spheres of life and society (Reimers, 2022; Bhamani et al., 2020). Human Rights Watch, 2020). According to Reimers (2022) and Abuhammad (2020), the education system was no exception as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation reported that a week after the declaration, approximately 107 nations closed their school doors. By mid-April 2021 about 1.725 billion students globally had been affected by the closure of schools and higher-education institutions in response to the coronavirus pandemic (Reimers, 2022). According to Soudien, Reddy and Harvey (2022), the UNESCO report states that 192 countries had implemented nationwide closures, affecting about 99% of the world's student population.

Like other parts of the world, COVID-19 took its toll on the education system in South Africa. When President Cyril Ramaphosa announced COVID-19 a national disaster on the 15th of March 2020, policies and strategies were introduced as a way to curb the spread of COVID-19 (Soudien et al., 2022). Everything in the country came to a standstill as recommended strategies and policies such as restricted movement, business closure, limited gathering for different purposes and closure of schools were introduced. With schools closed, educators needed to quickly adapt and implement new ways of delivering teaching such as online/remote learning which was suggested and implemented (Abuhammad, 2020; Calear et al., 2022). This meant that most learning and teaching activities had to shift from school to the home setting (virtually/remotely). In his study, Dube (2020) argues that the South African government promoted online learning as the only alternative in the context of COVID-19, and this has excluded many rural learners from teaching and learning due to lack of resources to connect to

the Internet, learning management system and low-tech software. Thus, the move to remote learning has marginalized and has proven to be challenging for other learners as there was a high increase of drop-out by learners from disadvantaged schools and communities. According to the article by Soudien et al., (2022), approximately 1.2 million children in South Africa dropped out in 2020 and a further 500,000 in 2021. Numerous research has documented the importance of the engagement of parents and availability of resources for continued learning at home, especially where there is no access to technology as there is strong evidence that demonstrates the link between home literacy environment and children's academic scores (Abuhammad, 2020; Simweleba & Serpel 2020; Carrilo & Flores, 2020: 466; Dube, 2022). Therefore, since these learners had no access to resources, the strategy to implement and continue learning remotely disadvantaged them further and left them behind.

The South African School Act 108 o" 199' (RSA, 1996; Dube, 2020) emphasises the importance of parental involvement and calls for a system that facilitates supportive and meaningful school-parents' relationships to be put in place. Several theories in social work and outside of it have engaged on the importance of the school and parents involving themselves in their children's education to ensure that every learner's right to education is made possible. Studies conducted by Krane and Klevan (2018) and DePlanty, Coulter-Kern and Duchane (2007) found that home and school are pivotal contexts in the lives of junior secondary students as they greatly contribute to the development of a relation between educators, learners and parents. These provisions vouch for the inclusion and participation of parents in the schools. A positive connection between learners, parents and educators have been shown to improve children's academic achievement, social competencies, and emotional wellbeing (Roorda, Koomen, Spilt & Oort, 2011; Krane & Klevan, 2018). Furthermore, these authors assert that when a collaborative approach between parents and teachers is established, learner's attitudes about the school, their habits and academic marks improve. Learners with involved educators and parents at school demonstrate improved social skills, less behavioural challenges at school and at home, and can adapt to different situations and get along with others (Roorda et al., 2011). When working together as partners, it has been found that parents and teachers communicate more effectively, develop stronger relationships with one another and develop skills to support children's behaviours and learning (Krane & Klevan, 2018; Roorda et al., 2011). This all means that strong partnerships support children's learning and ability to develop lifelong skills and networks, while also strengthening parents' capacity to be engaged in their child's school experience.

With children currently studying from home, the importance of learning at home was amplified, and parents were tasked with the role of supporting children's learning. Even though this worked for others, for some parents it proved to be a huge burden as they either had no/limited education themselves or were battling with working online themselves. The lack of education by caregivers/parents impedes the support they can provide to their children's learning and severely affects the child's learning outcomes, especially when schools are closed (Dube, 2020; Weaver & Swank, 2021). In addition to this, some parents and caregivers had to take on the role of supervising home-school, together with their other commitments such as work, personal and parenting, which had a toll on them as well (Weaver & Swank, 2021; Soudien, Reddy & Harvey, 2020). According to Dube (2020) an article by UNICEF (2020) reported that parental involvement and support in disadvantaged communities were low even before COVID-19 as these parents are concerned with providing for the physiological needs of the young person (Dube, 2020). The disparities in the home-learning environment such as homework support and availability of study material are striking across household wealth levels within most countries. This suggests that home-schooling and supervising learners would be the last thing on this parent's mind. This move to remote learning has deprived many learners in South Africa many education opportunities because of not having support and guidance from teachers and parents they could not cope.

1.2. PROBLEM STATEMENT AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

When COVID-19 struck in March 2020 in South Africa, and the President called for the closure of schools and the move to online learning, learners from disadvantaged school/communities such as the rural areas were cut off from education (Dube, 2020). Supporting the notion Soudien et al. (2022) maintain that the South Africa education system is extremely underequipped that the COVID-19 pandemic has ended education for many students, especially those from disadvantaged communities. Most learners in South Africa have missed a considerable period of schooling since March 2020, with evidence emerging of high rates of attrition and drop out. According to a report by Spaull et al. (2021), an estimated 750 000 learners in South Africa may have dropped out at school because of the pandemic. In her speech in November 2020, Angie Motsekga, the Minister of Basic education confirmed that approximately 300 000 children in primary schools in South Africa have dropped out over a period of six months. The disruptions by the pandemic played a huge role in these stats, as learners were forced to learn

from home, with little or no educational support. Furthermore, even though online-learning was implemented, in South Africa only 10 % of households have internet access (Dube, 2020).

Since parents had the responsibility of supervising learners, parents from disadvantaged townships, with little or no education could not provide appropriate support and environment for maximum learning. According to Garbe, Ogurlu, Logan and Cook (2020), feelings of parents towards remote learning are mixed as others experience it as an additional burden, and others as connecting them to their children's schoolwork. Other parents did not have to take this role as "most South African schools were not able to implement online or remote learning during the pandemic lockdown" (Dube, 2020). Whereas in their study, Bhamani et al. (2020) found that with the appropriate support, parents in Pakistan adapted quickly to address learning gaps and online learning during COVID-19. Sibanda (2021) argues that because of the sociocultural and economic situation of most parents in townships in South Africa, parental apathy is experienced because they prioritise putting food on the table over involvement in school activities. Parents have little or no time to provide homework support to their children like middle-class parents do (Dube, 2020; Sibanda, 2021). With the pandemic, parents from disadvantaged backgrounds were occupied with either their own commitments such as work and ensuring that their children have food instead of playing teacher. Suggesting that the sudden closure of schools has resulted in high numbers of learners in South Africa missing out on education.

Moreover, in their articles about the voices of educators about parental involvement, Munje and Mncube (2018) state that parental involvement is discouraged by the inability of schools to clearly outline parental roles from those of the school, and this is where the point of conflict occurs. These authors call for the need to empower educators with family and community involvement skills that will provide them with the capability to identify the potential of parents. As citied in Munje and Mncube (2018:81) Luxomo and Motala (2012) and McDowall and Schaughency (2017) maintain that "educators from disadvantaged schools are more likely to have a negative perception of parental involvement and ignore the potential of parents to supervise learners and partake in school activities". These authors found that the training educators go through does not sufficiently prepare them for addressing issues related to homeschool partnerships (Munje & Mncube, 2018). Hence the failure to put structures in place that supported parents from disadvantaged communities to be equipped to undertake the role of supervision learner's educational activities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Inability of teachers to recognise the Importance of parents in their children's education and the incapability of parents to support online learning even during difficult times such as the COVID-19 pandemic period failed millions of learners in South Africa. This is problematic as it seems government and the education system did not support educators and empower them with skills to prepare and involve the parents as well during COVID-19 and online learning. Furthermore, complexities experienced by disadvantaged parents and caregivers were not put in consideration when coming to the decision of online learning. They failed to put systems in place that would support and enable parents from such backgrounds to contribute to their children's education. This disconnection between the school and the home system is what has resulted in approximately 1.2 million learners in South Africa dropping out of school during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Therefore, it is hope that this study will contribute to the gap in literature about the relevance of parental involvement in remote learning in disadvantaged communities. According to Patrikakou (2015) the available research regarding parental involvement and the challenges in children's learning experiences focus mainly on traditional school-based settings. There is insufficient research on the dynamics of parental involvement in an online environment, and authors call for additional research to understand parental involvement in remote learning (Patrikakou, 2015). Furthermore, McCallum et al. (2022) argue that there is limited research focused on home-schooling during the COVID-19 pandemic. These authors argue that research that is there places more focus on learners and how they were affected by COVID-19 pandemic, while the need to study the psychosocial impact of home-schooling on parents and other caregivers is needed as well. It is hoped that the study will add to the existing knowledge about the involvement of parents in their children's education in remote environments. Also, the study will contribute to the existing knowledge about the impact of COVID-19 to the education system and on the home-school relationship by providing a contextualised perspective that captures the lived experience of learners, parents and educators experiencing the relationship. Furthermore, it is hoped that the study can be utilised to find different strategies/policies on how school social workers and school personnel can enhance parental involvement and how the relationships between the school and home can be strengthened to ensure learners are supported in both environments.

1.3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1.3.1. Research questions

- What is the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the education system?
- How did COVID-19 affect learners, parents, and educators?
- How did COVID-19 shape the learners', parents', and educators' roles in teaching and learning?
- What are the support systems available in strengthening parental involvement in their children's education?

1.3.2. Primary Aim and objectives of the study

The main aim of the study is to explore the effects of COVID-19 in the teaching and learning relationship between parents, learners, and educators in schools.

Objectives

- To investigate the influence of COVID-19 on the education system
- To explore how COVID-19 has affected learners, parents, and educators.
- To explore how COVID-19 has shaped the learners, parents and educator's roles in teaching and learning.
- To determine the support systems available in strengthening parental involvement in their children's education during the pandemic.

1.4. OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY APPLIED IN THE STUDY

This study was conducted utilising the qualitative research methods. Qualitative research method is undertaken to investigate how larger contextual factors shape the reality constructed by people (Merriam,2002) This study was aimed at understanding the dynamics of how

COVID-19 pandemic has affected the learning and teaching relationship between learners, parents/guardians, and educators from the participants point of view**.** The data in this study was collected through semi-structured interviews with a convenience sample of parents/guardians and educators within the high school in Soweto, and a focus group discussion with seven high school learners between the ages 16 and 21 years. The semi structured interviews allowed the research to explore the phenomenon studies in detail (Zainal, 2007), while the convenience sampling method allowed an easy access to the participants (Blaikie,2004). The study employed thematic data analysis to analyse the data and identify common themes amongst the participants' experiences of how their relationships were affected by the COVID-19 Pandemic.

1.5. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The limitations to the research study were the lack of cooperation from participants due to fear of being exposed as having failed to contribute into making the teaching and learning relationship work during the pandemic. To address this, the researcher explained her experience of working in a school and explained the purpose of the study. Furthermore, the lack of time to come to school for the interviews because of time and other commitments was a challenge. However, the researcher made means to ensure that guardians that are not able to attend weekdays, avail themselves on weekends for the interview. Lastly, the use of a case study as a research strategy can be a limitation as the little of number of participants might make it difficult to generalise the findings.

1.6. DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

Conceptualisation is a vital part of research as it refers to the specification of what exactly is meant or not, by the concepts used in the study. These following are key concepts that are frequently used in the study and what they mean.

1.6.2. COVID-19:

For this study, COVID-19 pandemic is referred to as an on-going global pandemic of coronavirus disease 2019 caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (Soudien et al., 2022).

1.6.3. Relationship:

The term relationship refers to the way in which things are connected or work together (Rosenbury, 2006). For this study, the term "relationship" will be used to refer to the way learners, parents and educators interact, communicate and behave around each other in relation to teaching and learning.

1.6.4. Learners:

The term is used to refer to a person who is learning a subject or skills (Dong, Cao & Li, 2020). For this study, a learner refers to any person who goes to school to learn and engages in school processes.

1.6.5. Parents:

A parent is referred to as a person who begets, gives birth, nurtures and raises a child (Dong, Cao & Li, 2020). For this study, a parent will be used to refer to an adult, biological or nonbiologically, that lives with the learner at home and serves as their primary caregiver.

1.6.6. Parental involvement:

Parental involvement refers to the participation of parents in their children's activities (Dube, 2020). In this study, parental involvement will be used to refer to the ability of biological and non-biological parents and guardians to maintain communication between home and school, support learning activities at home and involvement in school activities (Weaver & Swank, 2021).

1.6.7. Social emotional support systems:

For this study, this term will be used to refer to the social interaction and networks of learners, parents and educators that assisted them to cope with learning/ remote learning even at home (Fontenelle-Tereshchuk, 2021).

1.7. ORGANISATION OF THE REPORT

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter of the study focuses on the introduction and background of the study. It provides the statement of the problem, research questions, aims of the study, research design, research methodology (sampling procedures, research instruments), definitions of key terms used in the study and how the chapters have been divided.

Chapter 2: Theoretical framework

Chapter two of this study is focused on the theoretical frameworks that inform this study. There is a detailed explanation of the proponents of the ecological system theory and its subsystems which include microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and the chronosystem. This chapter also outlines the proponents of the intersectional theory as a theory that provides the lens through which this study was conducted. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Chapter 3: Literature review

Chapter three is focused on the literature review. This is where the relevant sources on the research topic such as books and articles are reviewed by the researcher. This chapter also provides a review of literature around the effects of COVID-19 pandemic on the education system international and local and provides literature on parental involvement and how it was affected as well. The chapter is concluded with a chapter summary.

Chapter 4: Research design and methodology

Chapter four of this research report presents the research design and methodology. It discusses the qualitative approach and case study research design as underpinning this study. It also discusses the two data collection methods, semi-structured interviews, and the focus groups. It also discusses the sample procedure, ethical considerations, and the site of the research study. This chapter is concluded with a summary.

Chapter 5: Results and Discussion

Chapter five contains the analysis of the result of the study, with the focus being on the posttest rather than the pre-test. It discusses the perceptions of all the research participants, including learners, parents/guardians, and educators on how COVID-19 affected the learning and teaching relationship. Also, it discusses the different roles that the participants had to take on

because of the pandemic. It also discusses the parental involvement, and the support systems put in place for parents to assist their children continue learning during the pandemic.

Chapter six: Main findings, conclusions and recommendation

In this chapter, there is a summarization of the main findings of the study, and the recommendations by the researchers to improve the learning and teaching relationship between learners, parents and educators, and strategies to improve parental involvement and a positive relationship between home and school. Furthermore, the chapter concluded with a summary of the main findings, conclusions made from the data, and the recommendations suggested.

1.8. CONCLUSION

This chapter will offer a conclusion of the report, and the findings from the study. The conclusion will outline the research methods used, literature reviewed, theoretical frameworks that informed the study, results and discussions from the study; and the recommendations after the study was carried out to fulfil the motivation behind the conduction of the research study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents and examines available literature on the impact of COVID-19 on the education systems, expanding more on the different trends and debates globally, regionally, and nationally. The literature presents COVID-19 as a phenomenon that has severely impacted education systems all around the world, regardless of whether they are high, middle, or low/poor-income countries. It also examines the importance of parental involvement in education during such critical times and the dynamics of how relationships and roles of parents, learners, and educators have been impacted by COVID-19, thus identifying the gaps that will be filled by this study.

2.2. IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

Due to the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, countries all over the world have put in place measures to curb the spread of the virus, thus calling for a temporary closure of all educational institutions including primary, secondary, and tertiary (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021; Dube, 2020). The pandemic has not only affected students but their parents and educators all over the world. In their article, UNESCO (2020) shared that over 1.5 billion students all over the world were reported to be out of school due to the restrictions placed by governments on closing educational institutions. Furthermore, the pandemic has affected every sphere of life and the education system including learning and teaching, examinations, and evaluation.

2.2.1. Learning losses

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic has intensified the pre-existing global education crisis and affected education in unprecedented ways. The UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 2020) estimates that approximately 1.25 billion students worldwide were affected by the pandemic, which presented challenges in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4. Out of the 258 million children and youth who were out of school worldwide, 97.5 million are based in SSA (45.5 males and 52.0 million females) (UNESCO-UIS, 2018). This number includes primary, lower secondary, and

secondary level education, and out-of-school rates increase by age group and school level (UNESCO, 2020b).

The closure of schools by governments all over the world has resulted in children spending less time learning. The results of the study conducted by Engzell, Frey, and Verhagen (2021) in the Netherlands suggest that students made little to no progress in learning from home, implying that losses are even larger in countries with no access to proper infrastructure or longer periods of school closure. In Germany, Huber et al. (2020) found that between March and April, learning time for students that were between 10 and 19 years was reduced by between 4 and 8 hours during the pandemic.

According to a report by UNESCO (2020) before COVID-19 hit, approximately 258 million primary and secondary school-aged children were not attending school. When schools closed in April 2020, 1.6 billion children worldwide were out of school, and approximately 700 million students studied from home, in a context of huge uncertainty as they had to navigate through options of hybrid and remote learning, or no school at all (UNESCO, 2020). Furthermore, when COVID-19 was at its peak, approximately 45 countries in Europe and Central Asia closed, affecting about 185 million students (Shmis et al., 2020).

The situation was worse in sub-Saharan African countries as they warned that Africa is facing a severe learning crisis. According to the report by World Bank (2020), learning in low and low-middle-income countries is estimated to be around 53% globally, meaning that approximately half of all 10-year-old children struggle to read and comprehend. In South Africa specifically, it is estimated that this figure is close to 90 % as lack of basic competency is systematically lower for learners from poor households and backgrounds (World Bank, 2017). Other contributing factors to the high rates of poor learning include a lack of qualified and trained educators, poor infrastructure, and a lack of resources for educational purposes.

In South Africa, it is estimated that the loss of school learning time during the pandemic has moved the education system backward by 5 years (Shepherd & Mahohlwane, 2021; Dube, 2020; Soudien et al., 2022). Furthermore, it was found that learning loss for students from poor/ less resourced households and schools was 4.2%, slightly higher compared to more resourced and affluent schools at 3.4%. Ardington, Wills, and Kotze (2021); Shepherd, and Mahohlwane (2021) analysed the short-term learning losses in reading for grade 2 and 4 learners from underresourced school contexts. They found that grade 2 learners lost between 57% and 70% of a year of learning, whereas grade 4 lost between 56% and 60 % of contact teaching due to

school closure. In the below table retrieved from a study by Ursula Hoadley (2020), it is demonstrated that learners in grade 4,5,8 and 9 suffered the greatest school day loss, while learners in grade 12 had more school days available and attended due to the staggered reopening for different grades that was implemented. This demonstrates the negative impact that school closure has had on education, especially literacy skills.

Table 1: Table by Ursula Hoadley (2020) indicating number of school days available for instruction in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Grade (in order of staggered return to school)	Term 1 school days available (pre-COVID-19 calendar	Term 2 school days available (COVID-19 calendar up to 24 July)	Term 3 school days available (COVID-19 Calendar up to 23 October)	Term 4 school days available 2020 (COVID-19 calendar up to 15 December)	Total school days available in 2020 (COVID-19 calendar)	% of school days of pre-COVID-19 2020 Calendar (204 days)
Grade 12	48	35	58	0	141	100%
Grade 7	48	35	53	32	168	82%
Grades R,1,2,3,6,10,11	48	15	44	32	139	68%
Grade 4,9	48	0	44	32	124	61%
Grade 5,8	48	0	39	32	119	58%

2.2.2. Assessments and evaluation during COVID-19

The shift from physical classes to virtual learning has also affected assessments and evaluation systems in schools. Educators have reported that conducting online assessments and evaluations has been challenging as they found it difficult to monitor students' engagement online and to ensure that they are not cheating during exams (Tadesse & Muluye, 2020). Furthermore, educators have reported that with the closure of schools, they have had to suspend laboratory tests, practical tests, and performance tests as it is impossible to conduct them online. As reported, students who do not have access to the internet have had challenges partaking in

assessments and evaluations (Fontenelle-Tereshchuk, 2021). Supporting this notion, Osman (2020) found that during the implementation of virtual learning, the assessment and evaluation of students were difficult for both educators and students, particularly in a teaching practice, technical competencies, and the assessment of practical skills are difficult.

In their article, UNESCO (2020) reported that even in countries with access to reliable internet access and resources such as computers, students and educators expressed severe challenges with online learning. Suggesting that learners, parents, and their educators required training to enhance their ability to deliver and participate in virtual learning effectively. Dube (2020) argues that ICT support in developing countries is limited as other areas have limited or no internet access at all, no access to ICT resources such as computers, and a lack of computer training among teachers. Suggesting that even though virtual learning might have been a good opportunity for education systems to ensure that learning continues, it has proven to be challenging for developing countries.

2.2.3. The emotional and mental well-being of learners, educators, and parents

UNESCO (2020) reported that the pandemic has had a huge impact on the mental and physical well-being of students, parents, and educators all around the world, especially in developing countries. In their study regarding the impact of social distancing and school closure on children's socioemotional development, Watts and Pattnaik (2020) shared that social deprivation experienced by learners such as the absence of peer learning and communication, playtime and lack of friendships impacted their ability to socialize, high order thinking and mental health. Furthermore, research has documented the impact of social isolation and school closure on the psychological well-being of children. These studies maintained that learners experienced COVID-19-related emotional reactions such as fear and worry around the pandemic predicated on their mental outcomes (Egan et al., 2021; Save the Children, 2020).

Since the outbreak of the pandemic, educators have also been reported to have also accumulated high levels of stress (Cachon-Zangalaz et al., 2020). Studies conducted recently have pointed out that during the closure of schools, educators experienced stress from having to rapidly adapt to virtual learning to ensure that learning continues (Egan et al., 2021; CachonZangalaz et al., 2020; Besser et al., 2020). The stress is reported to be accompanied by anxiety and fear around contracting the virus, depression, and abnormal sleeping patterns because of the increased

workload resulting from home teaching. In Spain, Prado- Gasco et al. (2020) reported that educators also reported having workloads, psychosomatic problems, and exhaustion.

For many parents, the policies and strategies implemented resulted in many families working from home and home-schooling at the same time. According to October et al. (2022), this rapid change introduced a shift of responsibilities and roles. For example, parents were tasked with the roles of teaching curriculum to their children and childcare while working from home. Even though the lockdown could have impacted the family positively in that it presented opportunities to build strong bonds and spend more time as a family, parents reported feelings of distress and loneliness. In South Africa, many families are from impoverished backgrounds and households, and losing jobs during the pandemic brought financial stress as most families could not afford the required resources that enabled their children to participate in virtual learning (Pather & Booi, 2020; Dube, 2020).

2.3. INEQUALITY AND DIGITAL DIVIDE

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the inequalities in education worldwide. According to Robin and Patrinos (2022), global literature reports that students from poorer countries and households experienced higher losses in education due to the strategies implemented to curb the spread of COVID-19. The weak digital infrastructure and socio-economic dynamics of some households created by the pandemic have resulted in inequalities and divisions.

2.3.1. ***Access to technology and unequal learning environments***

Numerous research on home-school learning demonstrates the importance of an appropriate and supportive social and physical learning environment (Kim & Yang, 2022; Hamdan et al., 2020). However, in most developing countries like Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa, students do not have the minimum basic conditions to learn at home. Like in any country, when COVID19 emerged, educational institutions and school personnel in South Africa had to find ways to rapidly respond to ensure teaching and learning continue (Bhamani et al., 2020). Educators, parents, and learners had to quickly adapt to remote learning and learning from home, which became an alternative way to learn because of school closures in South Africa. The transition from face-to-face to remote/virtual teaching has not been smooth in most parts and has presented several challenges, especially in disadvantaged areas such as rural ones (Parker, Morris & Jane, 2020; Dube, 2022).

In addition, the pandemic had intensified the inequality gaps in South Africa as the inequalities seem to be a huge factor in limiting the implementation of virtual learning in South Africa. Numerous studies demonstrate that even though developed countries have access to virtual learning resources such as the internet and computers, schools in South Africa are still struggling (Dube, 2020; Hlatshwayo, 2022). In his study, Hlatshwayo (2022) shares that some students in tertiary expressed experiencing issues with data accessibility, and sometimes having to leave their homes to seek accommodation in other areas so that they could access the school resources. Students in tertiary from townships had to go back to their homes when schools closed, which are small, and overcrowded (Hlatshwayo, 2022).

Students from rural areas had to return to areas that had poor or no access to the internet and network that was required for online learning (Dube, 2020; Hlatshwayo, 2022). Even though these students were provided with resources such as data provided by institutions, students who did not have any alternative areas except the rural experienced challenges with inconclusive environments to study, internet connection, and self-study (Landa, Zhou & Morongwe, 2021). These spaces were not conclusive for studying, resulting in failure at school. Furthermore, many individuals experienced unstable networks due to the increased rate of online learning.

In the USA, approximately 55.1 million students from public and private schools were severely affected by the pandemic and school closure. Furthermore, a report by Schleicher (2020) reveals that in Europe about 5% of children live in homes in which they do not have a reliable internet connection and 6.9% have no access to the internet. 10.2% of children live in homes that cannot be heated adequately, 7.2% have no access to outdoor leisure facilities, and 5% did not have access to books at the appropriate reading level. In the USA, an estimated 2.5% of students in public schools do not live in a stable residence. In New York City, where a large proportion of COVID-19 cases in the USA have been observed, one in ten students was homeless or experienced severe housing instability during the previous school year (Schleicher, 2020).

2.3.2. Socio-economic disparities

Students from low and low-middle-income countries and households were severely affected by the emergence of COVID-19 due to a lack of resources and support that assist in the successful navigation of remote learning. According to World Bank (2021), most low-income countries

had cut their education budgets to accommodate the prioritization of health and social protection during the pandemic, and these included Ukraine, Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa.

Even though everyone was affected by the pandemic, less well-off students were in a worse position as their schools were not prepared for remote learning. While affluent schools were better prepared as they had a more intensive use of technology even before the pandemic hit.

Supporting this motion, Jaeger and Blaabaek (2020) found that in Denmark the pandemic increased inequalities in learning opportunities as well-off families were more successful at using libraries and taking out digital books than poor families. In Ethiopia, approximately 80 % of the population lives in rural areas that do not necessarily have access to electric power, radios, and televisions that were mostly used to learn (Tiruneh, 2020; Tzifopoulos, 2020). Whereas schools in urban areas were able to continue teaching and learning through uploading resources using emails and social media platforms.

Measuring the relationship between family socioeconomic status and students' experiences of remote learning in Russia. Bekova, Terentev, and Maloshonok (2021) found that students from low-income households experienced technical and self-regulation challenges, and lacked the skills required for effective virtual learning. In support of this notion, other studies conducted in the Netherlands confirm that less educated parents reported feeling less capable to assist their children with schoolwork during the pandemic and their children's learning was less than their peers with high-educated parents (Haelermans et al., 2022; Bol, 2020).

In the USA, Levinson, Geller, and Allen posit that approximately 62 million students of colour from low-income households were physically out of school for over a year due to the pandemic. Andrews et al. (2021) found that in England inequalities worsen over the course of lockdown as poorer students lived in homes that had no access to resources that enable continued learning and less access to school support with home learning. Suggesting that most students from poor homes and backgrounds were excluded/ had limited access to education during the pandemic.

Furthermore, several studies in Sub-Saharan Africa agree with this notion. Datzberger et al., (2022); Datzberger (2022); Parkes et al., (2020); Anas and Musah (2023) conducted studies in Uganda and Ghana respectively and found that structures of virtual learning in these countries were less developed, which greatly amplified inequalities in the households and communities with regards to education access during the pandemic. Most of the young people who were interviewed in Uganda and in Ghana had no access to or very limited engagement with distance

learning resources during the pandemic. In their study through phone surveys, Bundervoet et al. (2022) found that 30 percent of children in 31 low-middle-income countries did not continue in alternative learning activities when schools closed due to the pandemic, and most of these children came from poor households.

For South Africa, the government has been struggling to deliver quality teaching and learning in rural areas and some township schools even before the COVID-19 pandemic (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019; Dube, 2020). In South Africa, poor and vulnerable learners suffered the most because of COVID-19 as even though better-resourced homes and schools were able to transition to virtual learning, there was little structured learning taking place in areas where the majority of learners are learning. This is because most rural areas in South Africa are characterised by poor road networks, lack of electricity, limited access to information and communication technology, and low economic status. According to Dube (2020) and Hlatshwayo (2022) when the pandemic hit, not enough attention was given to rural education, and considering that they did not have access to resources for online learning and experienced network signal issues, their challenges magnified and were further marginalised. In his study, Dube (2020) argues that the majority of students in the Eastern Cape experienced issues with data accessibility and thus were struggling or failing to access learning resources remotely, thus resulting in failure at school.

As a result, education scholars estimate that there was a loss of 60% of school contact in 2020 and 50% in 2021, with less-resourced schools suffering the most (UNICEF, 2021). Additionally, according to statistics by UNICEF (2021), approximately 400 000 to 750 000 learners living in informal urban and rural settings have dropped out of school (Soudien et al., 2022). These students from vulnerable and disadvantaged households are currently at risk of significant academic, mental, and social harm due to the loss of learning they have suffered due to the pandemic.

2.3.3. Poor digital literacy amongst educators and students

The rapid compulsion to use virtual learning as an alternative way of learning made it difficult for educators, learners, and parents, exposing digital illiteracy among some students and educators (Ramsetty & Adams, 2020; Dube, 2020). Digital literacy is referred to the ability to utilize information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate

information (Mudi, 2020). Teaching and learning online requires different skills and expertise than traditional classroom instruction. Therefore, an untrained educator might have challenges engaging students, creating effective assessments, and utilising their resources effectively for virtual learning, thus resulting in low student attendance and poor performance (Mudi, 2020).

According to a report by Digital Center Foundation (2020), in some countries, almost 85% of qualified and working educators had never conducted any online classes before the pandemic. Validating this notion, Fontenelle-Tereshchuk (2020) revealed that even with access to resources for remote learning, the focus of teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic became the technology, and not necessarily the curriculum, teaching, and the learning process in Canada. The findings of the study expressed that educators did not necessarily have the skills and the support they needed to develop their skills in creating contextualized lesson plans that attended to learners' individual needs utilizing technology (Fontenelle-Tereshchuk, 2020).

In South Africa, 68.4% of learners that moved to virtual learning and had access to resources expressed that they had difficulties adapting to virtual learning. Furthermore, Dlamini and Ndzinisa (2020) maintain that many students and lecturers have not been adequately equipped to transition to online learning and do not have the necessary technological skills. Carrilo and Flores (2020) assert that educators' incompetence in the use of digital instructional formats was also identified during the implementation of virtual learning (Carrilo & Flores, 2020: 466). Most educators struggled with using platforms such as learning management systems (LMS), video conferencing tools such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams, or other online tools.

2.4. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCHOOL AND HOME DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Home-school relationships are vital to the success of students at school. Research studies demonstrate that when a partnership approach between parents and educators is evident, children's attitudes about school and their performance improve (Hill & Reimer, 2022; Fontenelle-Tereshchuk, 2021). Thus, it is vital that strategies to improve the home-school relationship and communication are put in place.

2.4.1. Parental involvement in their children's education during covid-19

There has been a controversy around the influence of parental involvement in the education of their children as vital and affecting academic performance at school. According to Kanapathipillai and Narayanan (2021), parental support refers to the involvement of parents or primary caregivers in their children's learning processes both at home and at school. Several scholars in research have demonstrated that parental support and involvement are significantly associated with high performance (Garcia & Thornton, 2014; Balli, 2016). In their study, Lara and Saracostti (2019) demonstrate that positive parental involvement improves children's academic performance and self-esteem.

Furthermore, they assert that children with involved parents or caregivers have a positive attachment to the school. In alignment with this notion, Simweleba and Serpel's (2020) study about parental involvement and learners' performance in two rural primary schools in Zambia concluded that interventions that aim at empowering parents with knowledge and skills encouraging greater involvement in their children's education are effective in improving the learner's performance. However, even though this is the case, as suggested by Borup et al. (2013), the phenomenon of parental involvement in virtual learning is different from engaging in traditional education. Thus, it requires that the scope of responsibilities and tasks that a parent needs to partake in be redefined totally.

With the emergence of COVID-19 and the school transfer learning to the home sphere, Mukuna, and Aloka (2020) report that in South Africa, they have found that poor parental involvement in children's homework in rural areas was evident during the pandemic for numerous reasons. These include language barriers, wherein parents struggled to assist so that learning continues but they could not understand the language, especially learners living with their grandparents (Dube, 2020; Hlatshwayo, 2020; Mukuna & Aloka, 2020). Illiteracy also became a challenge for parents as it resulted in them being unable to assist learners with their schoolwork. Furthermore, studies conducted before and beginning of the pandemic show that parents' knowledge of the curriculum is insufficient, making it difficult for them to assist their children at home (Mazza et al., 2020; Brossard et al., 2020). This is especially prominent in developing countries, where parents themselves are illiterate (Mukuna & Aloka, 2020). The pandemic has also been a challenging period for parents as well because even though some parents, especially in developed countries felt at ease with intervening in their children's

education, others experienced difficulties and were not confident about their ability to homeschooling (Bol, 2020; Heers & Lipps, 2022).

2.4.2. Communication between home and school during COVID-19

Strong communication is vital to parent-teacher partnerships and assists to foster a sense of community for the learner between home and school (Hill & Reimer, 2022). Furthermore, communication between schools, parents/caregivers, learners, and teachers is critical to ensure that everyone has a clear understanding of what needs to be done, by whom, and how (UNICEF, 2020). Carrion-Martinez et al. (2021) report that schools have had challenges in committing to forge stronger bonds between home and school, and between students and their families during the pandemic, further suggesting that the relationship between these three groups must be improved to meet the needs that align with virtual learning.

The COVID-19 pandemic also had an impact on the interaction between the home and the school. Multiple authors argue that the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic has blurred the boundaries between the home and the school, making it difficult to separate the two (Fontenelle-Tereshchuk, 2021). This means that with schools closed, the physical space that separated the school and home realms has diminished, resulting in the merging of educational and personal spaces. The merging of these spaces has resulted in challenges for parents and learners in terms of maintaining a healthy school or work balance and communicating clearly.

Meier and Lemmer (2015) argue that even though some schools utilise platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and newsletter as a means of communicating with parents about the changes in government guidance, this communication is reported to be “one way”. Suggesting that these sources were used to send information to parents, rather than initiating a dialogue. However, this also suggests that there might have not been any communication between the school and parents that did not have access to emails, WhatsApp, or even Facebook.

In her study about parent’s insights on curriculum and remote learning in Canada, FontenelleTereshchuk (2020) found that there was no clear and constructive line of communication between the school and home during the period that parents were facilitating the continuation of learning at home through “home-schooling”. Furthermore, Wrigley (2020) posits that the absence of a smooth transition and handover between educators and parents/carers, where parents were expected to step into the teacher’s role, had resulted in a strained relationship between educators and parents.

However, in contrast, a few studies are emerging that reveal the pandemic as having facilitated more collaboration and partnership between home and school (Levy, 2023; Martinez, Martinez, Esteban & Sanchez, 2021). According to Morgan Polikoff (2020), Understanding America Study also found that approximately 77% of parents felt satisfied with the communication channel between themselves and the school to ensure that learning is supported. This literature shows that there is a large gap in parents' experiences of their communication with the school during the pandemic. Educational institutions need to work especially hard to ensure that there is communication between them and parents that do not necessarily have access to the internet and lack technology skills.

2.4. CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has reviewed literature about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education systems internationally, regionally, and locally. The literature reviewed and discussed challenges that were experienced because of policies and strategies put in place to curb the spread of COVID-19 such as learning losses, the digital divide, social and mental impacts of the lockdown on learners, educators, and parents all around the world, and in South Africa. Furthermore, the chapter explored the importance of the relationship between school and home, and the challenges that prevailed when ensuring that the relationship is maintained and continued.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1. INTRODUCTION

The theoretical framework chapter is divided into two sections, namely the ecological systems theory and the theory of intersectionality. This study is underpinned by these two theories as they will provide an understanding of how the COVID-19 phenomenon affected the relationship between learners, parents, and educators in a township school in Soweto. The first part unpacks the ecological systems theory as an approach rooted in the understanding of the impact of one's environment and the systems, they are part of. The second section discusses the theory of intersectionality as a resourceful approach to understanding how interlocking systems of power affect disadvantaged and marginalised people in society.

3.2. ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS THEORY

This study utilises the ecological systems theory by Bronfenbrenner as its theoretical framework. The ecological systems theory is an interdisciplinary theoretical framework developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner about the complexities of the system and demonstrates how behaviour/ development can be influenced by different factors that work together within the context of the system (Ryan, 2001; Ettekal & Mahoney, 2017). This means that one's development is influenced by different environmental settings that they are part of.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory divides learners' ecology into five systems, namely the micro-system, meso-system, macro-system, exo-system, and chronosystem (Ryan, 2001; Ettekal & Mahoney, 2017; Darling, 2007). These five systems affect learners' lives, development, and relationship with others around them.

3.2.1. Microsystem

According to Crawford (2020), Bronfenbrenner defined the microsystem as "a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced over time by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics" (Crawford, 2020: p1). Ettekal and Mahoney (2017) refer to the microsystem as the most proximal level as it includes settings that the child directly interacts with. These are the learner's closest systems that they engage with every day.

This includes members that the child is directly involved with like family members, other people living in the child's household like siblings, and grandparents of the child, and people that do not necessarily stay with the child in their household but are in constant and regular contact with the child-like schools, church, health services and organisation in their communities (Ettekal & Mahoney, 2017; Crawford, 2020).

Since the microsystem is the closest to the child, it is believed to be the most impactful. In the context of parent-child relationships during the COVID-19 pandemic, a lot of unpredicted changes happened because of the pandemic and the strategies implemented to slow the spread of the virus. One strategy was that of the stay-at-home which resulted in the closure of schools, childcare services, parents' workplaces, and a shift with regard to work expectations and socializing opportunities. In their study, Marchetti et al (2020), report that even though it is unclear how parent's new roles during COVID-19 affected their relationship with their children, however, it's possible that with the limited outside interaction and additional roles, there could be increased strain on the parent-child relationship. According to their study, adolescent participants reported feeling isolated and having more arguments with their parents during this time. This proves that the parents' state does influence the development of the child. This study also establishes the importance of the microsystem in understanding how the relationship between learners, parents, and educators was affected by COVID-19.

3.2.2. Mesosystem

The mesosystem describes the interaction that occurs between and among two or more systems or settings that the developing child is part of (Ettekal & Mahoney, 2017; Crawford, 2020). As stated by Barbara, Newman, and Newman (2020), the mesosystem concept gives us a perspective on social networks and how people are linked to different systems in society that influence one another. Some examples of the mesosystem include the connection between the child's home and the school environment and the child's teacher and the relationship between the child's siblings and their friends from school. These are vital relationships the manner of interaction between and amongst this system affects the developing child.

According to Niehaus and Adelson (2014), when considering learners' performance academically and socially, it is vital to examine the support that the learner receives from their homes in the form of parental involvement and at school. Research conducted by Topor, Keane, Shelton, and Calkins (2011) and Niehaus & Ade Niehaus & Adelson found that parental

involvement or positive relations between the learner's home and school is linked to fewer behavioural issues, better academic grades/marks, and advanced social-emotional skills. Furthermore, in their study conducted in Chile, Lara, and Saracostti (2019) concluded from the results that there are differences in children's academic achievement between parental involvement profiles, indicating children whose parents have low involvement have lower academic achievement.

3.2.3. Exosystem

The exosystem is the third level in Bronfenbrenner's ecological model and encompasses the microsystems that the child is involved with, but not directly embedded (Ettekal & Mahoney, 2017; Crawford, 2020). This means that these are institutions that the child is not directly involved with or has a personal relationship with, however, still influence them. Furthermore, even though the exosystem is not directly in contact with the developing child, it should not be deemed as a distant or abstract influence (Ettekal & Mahoney, 2023). Examples of the exosystem include mass media influence, the kind of training teachers have, the policies stipulated by the government, and their parent's occupations.

In his study, Adam (2004) depicts that frequent family shifts negatively affect a child's academic performance and that this negative impact continues throughout the academic year (Adam, 2004). In the case of the COVID-19 pandemic and the policies put in place to curb the spread of the virus, families were faced with multiple unexpected shifts such as loss of employment by breadwinners, school closure, and learners having to learn from home, navigating online learning. Furthermore, with the teachers not receiving proper teaching methodologies after implementing online learning, it is clear that there is a great difference in the quality of education received by learners from the rural/township disadvantaged and private schools (Dube, 2020). From all this, one can tell that even though the developing child is not directly involved, family shifts, policies implemented by the government, and the quality of teaching methods used affect them and how they perform at school.

3.2.4. Macrosystem

The macrosystem is the fourth level in Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory and comprises cultural values, customs, and laws as reflected in the religious, cultural, and socioeconomic positioning of the society the child is part of (Ettekal & Mahoney, 2017;

Crawford, 2020; Ryan, 2001). The macrosystem is one of the broadest systems and speaks to the attitudes, ideologies, and cultural and societal structures that the developing child is raised in. The economic condition of the developing child is raised in one of the vital macrosystems as it shapes their psychosocial development.

For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, hundreds of workers, who are parents had to be laid off from work, which did not only affect their children but themselves as well as this meant that they could no longer afford basic needs such as food and clothing, and other resources the learners could have used for online learning. Furthermore, since parents influence their children's values, parents that believe that education is vital and are involved increase positive outcomes for the developing child. Considering the macrosystem of the child is vital as it can help us understand ways in which their personality has been shaped.

3.2.5 Chronosystem

Lastly in Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, the chronosystem is defined as factors, events, and circumstances occurring over the lifetime of the developing child and affects their development (Ettekal & Mahoney, 2017; Barbara, Newman & Newman, 2020). This means that the chronosystem includes the dimension of time as it relates to the environment of the child (Ettekal & Mahoney, 2017; Crawford, 2020). Examples of the chronosystem include normative and non-normative life transitions. Normative transitions are predictable life changes that occur in the developing child's life such as retirements by parents, marriage, and the birth of the child. Whereas non-normative life transitions cannot be predicted and planned for, and thus can be difficult to manage like the decline in economy, decline in health, a pandemic, and parental divorce.

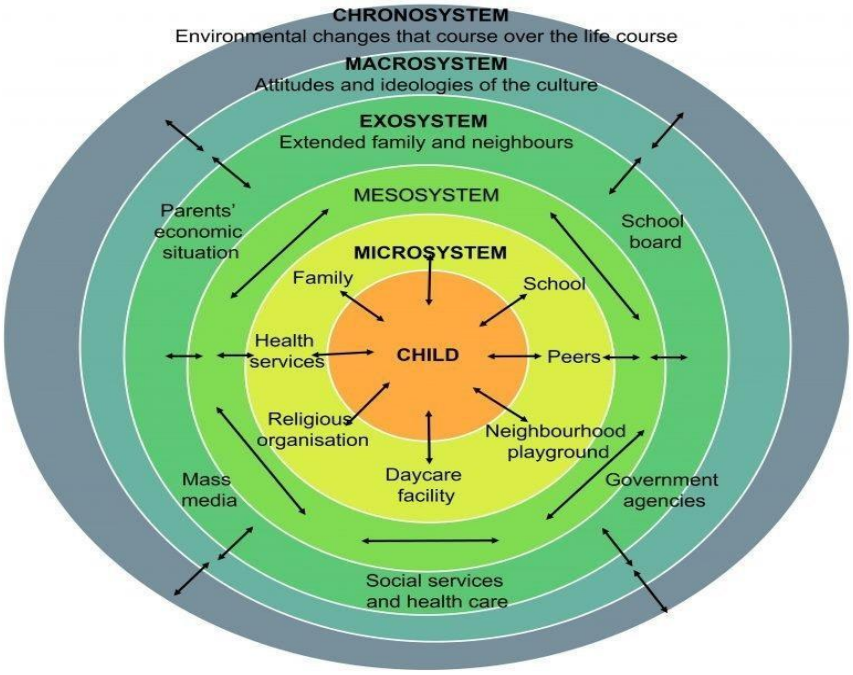


Figure 1: Summary of the Ecological Systems Model by Urie Bronfenbrenner (Bronfenbrenner (1977)

The ecological systems theory is appropriate for this study in assisting me to get an understanding of how the learners, parents, and educators' roles within the school system have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and the policies implemented to curb its rapid spread. Utilising this theory, one can see how each system contributed to the current relationship dynamics we see between learners, school, and family environment and which points are of conflict. By gaining this information, educators and social workers will be able to come up with interventions that target the points of conflict within the systems, whether it is school, parents/primary caregivers, or policies that were implemented. This is vital in the development of strategies and policies that will support positive relationships and communication between family and school to ensure positive academic outcomes for learners.

3.3. INTERSECTIONAL THEORY

This study also utilises intersectionality, which is a term first coined by Kimberle Williams Crenshaw as its second theoretical framework. The term intersectionality was coined to portray bias and cruelty towards black women between the 1980s and 1990s and particularly focused on race and gender. Intersectionality is defined as an analytic tool to assist one understand the complexity of the world and the dynamics of how people's overlapping identities relate to social structures of racism, domination, and oppression (Walby, Armstrong & Strid, 2019;

AlFaham, Davis & Ernst, 2019). The intersectional theory seeks to examine how different social, cultural, and biological characteristics/categories such as race, gender, class, ability, sexual orientation, age, and other axes of identity interact in multiple and simultaneous levels (Gandolfi, Ferdig, Kratcoski, 2021; Walby et al., 2019; Al-Faham et al., 2019). This suggests that the theory of intersectionality argues that identity markers such as race, gender, class, and ability do not exist independently of each other, as each informs the others, thus creating a "complex, convergence of oppression".

Since its establishment, the theory of intersectionality had been used in various fields and disciplines. According to Gandolfi et al (2021:2), the intersectional theory has been "increasingly used in the field of education to understand how underserved learners and their families experience the educational system and suffer, absorb, and negotiate the structures of power within it". In their research, these authors highlight how the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the learning technologies disparity in the United States, Gandolfi et al (2021) found that during the pandemic, low-income and minority students and families were particularly disadvantaged in accessing hardware and software technologies to support teaching and learning. Furthermore, a report released by Amnesty (2020) asserts that during the COVID-19 pandemic, educational inequalities were more pronounced in South Africa as in disadvantaged areas such as Northwest and Limpopo, only 3.6% and 1.6% respectively have access to the internet at home. Whereas students from wealthier families and communities had access to computers and were able to continue with their education through online learning provided by better equipped schools. This suggests that during this time, children's experiences of education depended on different identity markers, including how wealthy they were, the colour of their skin, and where they lived or were born.

The theory of Intersectionality encourages that we acknowledge that everyone has their own unique experiences of discrimination and oppression and that multiple factors that marginalised people need to be considered like race, age, class, gender, religion, and physical ability (Walby et al., 2019; Al-Faham et al., 2019). This means that intersectionality shows us that social identities work on multiple levels, resulting in unique experiences, opportunities, and barriers for each person. This theory is appropriate for this study as during COVID-19, learners from rural and township areas were left behind when remote learning was introduced by the Department of Education. Furthermore, the stresses that come with the frustration of not accessing education through online learning, untrained educators for online learning, losing

jobs, and children staying at home, one way or another affect the relationship between children, their parents, and educators. Through these lenses, we can tell that factors such as race and class came into play as people who struggled are the ones from disadvantaged schools and are mostly black learners, educators, and parents. This understanding of such a theory is vital to combatting the oppression and prejudices that people face in their daily lives.

3.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The theoretical framework chapter comprehensively presented the theoretical frameworks of the study. This chapter examined ecological system theory and intersectional theory as appropriate and relevant theoretical frameworks to inform this study. The presented theoretical frameworks show the importance of considering the different dynamics to understand the effect of COVID-19 on learners, educators, and parents from township schools such as the communities they are from, their support system, access to resources, and identifying features such as class, race, and gender. Systems that support learners, parents, and educators from disadvantaged schools need to be put in place to ensure that they have access to resources such as online learning like others.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the research questions, methods and procedures followed when conducting the study, starting with an outline of the research questions and the qualitative approach to research. The study utilised a single case study research design to explore the phenomenon of COVID-19 and the effects it had on the teaching and learning relationship. Furthermore, this chapter details the selection of the case study site, population, sample and sampling procedure, research and pre-testing instruments, methods of data collection, methods of data analysis, data trustworthiness, and ethical considerations. Lastly, this chapter gives an outline of the limitations of the study.

4.2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What is the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the education system?
- How did COVID-19 affect learners, parents, and educators?
- How did COVID-19 shape the learners', parents', and educators' roles in teaching and learning?
- What are the support systems available in strengthening parental involvement in their children's education?

4.3. QUALITATIVE RESEARCH APPROACH

A qualitative method was chosen for the research study as the study involves the collection and analysis of participants' experiences with the aim of understanding the dynamics of the learning and teaching relationship between learners, parents, and educators and the involvement of parents in a township school during the COVID-19 pandemic from their point of view. In his piece, Blaikie (2000) defines qualitative research as research undertaken to construct social reality and meaning attached to it, so that the researcher captures an understanding of the lived experiences and perceptions of those that are participating in their own words and environment.

Merriam (2002) concurs that a qualitative research approach is used to investigate how larger contextual factors such as social and political aspects shape the reality constructed by people.

This means that the qualitative research method is conducted with the aim of better understanding participants' feelings, opinions, and reasons behind their experiences of a specific phenomenon. The main objective of this research study is to determine the different ways that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the learning and teaching relationship between learners, parents, and educators in township schools. The absence of clarification in this issue requires an exploratory methodological approach that grants one an opportunity to explore and ask questions that are specific to the phenomenon. The qualitative research approach is appropriate for this study due to the following reasons:

4.3.1. Emphasis on context and researcher understanding people from their own frame of reference

According to Blaikie (2000) and Merriam (2002), qualitative research is context specific and is aimed at understanding reality as people experience it. This means that qualitative research is concerned with life as it is lived, things as they happen, and as they are constructed by individuals daily. This is vital as it enables researchers to understand the participants' uniqueness and the social contexts they live (Blaikie, 2000). Furthermore, this approach is appropriate for this study as it enables the researcher to study participants in their natural settings, thus avoiding artificial environments (Blaikie, 2000; Merriam, 2002).

Likewise, in this study, the researcher tries to understand the reality of COVID-19 and how it affected the learning relationship between learners, parents, and educators at a township school in Soweto experience it. This approach also enables the researcher to utilise personal experience and empathetic insights as part of the relevant data. Based on reasons, qualitative research is appropriate for this study. However, this can also be a disadvantage as the subjectivity and context dependent nature of a qualitative approach can make the replication of this study more challenging (Blaikie, 2000). This means that this study might be difficult to apply in other contexts.

4.3.2. Flexibility and adaptability

Blaikie (2000) asserts that qualitative research is flexible and adaptive, allowing researchers to modify methods and questions as they gain insight from the data they are collecting. He further concurs that qualitative research allows researchers to formulate and reformulate their research study to enable a deeper exploration of the subject (Blaikie, 2000; Merriam, 2002). This was applied in this current study as the research added questions that explored the background of the participants, which were not incorporated in the data collection instruments.

4.3.3. Qualitative research is hypothesis-generating, rich and descriptive information

Merriam (2002) argues that qualitative research is not aimed at testing preconceived hypotheses, rather it is aimed at generating hypotheses and theories for the data collected by researchers. This means that theories and hypotheses are created through qualitative research. Additionally, qualitative research is detailed and richly descriptive as it utilises words and pictures rather than numbers to communicate what the researcher had found about a phenomenon (Merriam, 2002).

In this study, participants' quotes from interviews about their context and experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic are used to stipulate what the researcher has learned about this phenomenon. It also allowed the researcher to encourage participants to elaborate further on their responses, thus potentially opening new topics that could have not been considered at first (Blaikie, 2000; McMillan, 2015). However, this can be a disadvantage as well as gathering rich and descriptive information can be time-consuming due to the need for prolonged engagement with participants and the need to thoroughly analyse the collected data.

4.4. INTERPRETIVIST RESEARCH PARADIGM

The different approaches and designs used in research are rooted in research paradigms. According to Creswell (2009), a research paradigm refers to the set of beliefs, values, and assumptions that influence the researcher's approach to their research and understanding of the world. Alharahsheh and Pius (2020) concur that research paradigms serve as frameworks that provide the research with guidance through the research process, including the research and data collection methods they use, and the way they analyse and interpret the results of the research. It is vital that a researcher carefully considers and utilises an appropriate paradigm that will allow an appropriate response to the questions posed by the study, and successfully

achieve the aims of the study. This research study is aiming at gaining insights into learners, parents, and educators whose relationship was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Informed by the research aim, this study is rooted in an interpretive paradigm as it will help to understand the participants' opinions, beliefs, and behaviours while in their context.

According to Alharahsheh and Pius (2020) interpretivism, also known as the interpretive research paradigm, is referred to as a paradigm in social sciences that focuses on understanding and interpreting human behaviour, experiences, and social phenomenon. Interpretivism argues that reality is complex, subjective, and socially constructed (Creswell, 2009). This suggests that interpretivism asserts that meaning exists through the lens of participants, and thus it is important to consider and appreciate the diversity in people, and to understand how these differences influence the way people find meaning (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). This study appreciates that participants might have different experiences of how their relationships have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, this study is concerned with subjective meanings as it aims to unveil the participants' experiences and understanding of how COVID-19 affected the learning and teaching relationship in township schools. The use of focus groups and semi-structured interviews was aimed at understanding how COVID-19 has affected the relationship between learners, parents, and educators through the participants' perspective, rather than that of the researcher. The paradigm was also chosen because of the following benefits:

4.4.1. Allows for subjective insights

According to Siddiqui (2009), the advantage with utilising the interpretivist paradigm/approach is that it allows and recognises that an individual's experiences and perspectives are inherently subjective. Suggesting that people can have different experiences of the same phenomenon. Thus, it grants researchers an opportunity to delve deeper into the unique experiences and meanings that are attributed by participants in the research study (Hughes, 2020). However, interpretivism is criticized for its potential lack of objectivity (Siddiqui,2009). This is because it becomes difficult for researchers to be objective when they are part of the research process. This subjectivity by researchers can make it difficult to ensure the reliability and replicability of the findings to other research sites (Hughes, 2020).

4.4.2. Contextualisation

Furthermore, the interpretivism paradigm/approach considers the social context of the phenomena that is being studied (Siddiqui, 2009). This means that the approach emphasises the importance of the researcher understanding the phenomena within their natural context, which is vital for exploring human behaviour and social processes as per this study. However, even though this is vital, it poses an advantage as it limits generalizability. According to Hughes (2020) and Siddiqui (2009), findings in interpretivist research may not be easily generalised to broader populations or contexts because the emphasis is on understanding specific situations deeply. So, this means that this study may not be easily generalised to the other township schools in Soweto, that might be in the same conditions as the school that the research was carried out in.

4.4.3. Comprehensive and in depth understanding

Hughes (2020) maintains that the interpretivism paradigm/approach allows room for researchers to gain a comprehensive, deeper, and rich understanding of the social and cultural context in which the study is being conducted. This means that the research will be able to capture in depth information from the people in the school about how their relationships were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, thus giving the research a clear picture of the phenomenon. However, even though this is the case, Siddiqui (2009) argues that qualitative research within an interpretivist paradigm can be time consuming due to the need to have prolonged engagements with participants and the thorough analysis of the data. Suggesting that the approach can be time-consuming.

4.5. SINGLE CASE RESEARCH DESIGN

In qualitative studies, various research designs can be employed by researchers to gather and analyse data. According to Zainal (2007) research designs are generally referred to as a framework of research methods and techniques that are usually chosen by the researcher to conduct a study. Researchers are often guided by the design, as it enables them to sharpen research methods suitable for whatever subject matter they are focusing on. The research design that was utilized in this study is the single case study design. According to Gaya et al (2006:532), case study research is defined as “an investigation and analysis of a single or collective case aimed at capturing the complexity of the object of the study”. Zainal (2007:2)

asserts that in its true essence, a case study method "explores and investigates contemporary real-life phenomenon through detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions, and their relationships.

Single case study research design is the most basic form of case-oriented research as it is the type of research methodology that facilitates intervention evaluation through an individual case (Zainal, 2007; Nock, Michel & Photos, 2007). This means that in single case study research designs, the phenomenon that the researcher is interested in is studied using a single subject or a small group of research subjects (Blaikie, 2000). Schoch (2020) concurs that a single case study design is defined as research that involves an analysis of a particular event or situation that is detailed and intensive and has a defined space and time frame. Also, this study is aimed at exploring the phenomenon of COVID-19 and its effects on relationships in one school located in Soweto as experienced by learners, educators, and parents. This means that every one that is part of the study is connected to the school, including learners, parents, and educators. A single case study research design was appropriate for this study for the following reasons:

4.5.1. In-depth analysis and understanding

Zainal (2007) states that single-case study research methods provide rich explanations and descriptive details as to why a phenomenon that is researched occurs, and these can then be used for further investigation by applying them to additional cases in other settings. This study applies this as it is aimed at understanding how these groups of participants' relationships in the school have been affected by the pandemic. A single case study allows the researcher to capture the opinions and beliefs of learners, parents, and educators in-depth, and no important details are missed.

However, even though this is the case, one of the primary drawbacks for the single case study method is that it cannot be easily generalised to a broader population (Blaikie, 2000). This means that the results that the research gathers from the school that she is focusing on might not necessarily apply in other township schools within the same area. Furthermore, Zainal (2007) argues that single case research designs lack a basis for comparison. This means that it makes it difficult for researcher to assess how unique or common the observed phenomenon is because there is only a single case.

4.5.2. Flexibility to collect data through different means

Single case study methods allow the researcher to gather detailed and rich qualitative data through different methods, for example, interviews, observations, and document analysis. This is crucial as it can result in the researcher getting subtle insights that provide a holistic view of the case or phenomenon that they are studying (Blaikie, 2000; Zainal, 2007). This research study utilises focus groups with learners and semi-structured interviews with parents and educators as the methods of data collection. This has assisted in collecting data that is rich and detailed.

However, single case study research design requires a significant amount of time and resources, including data collection and data analysis (Zainal 2007). Suggesting that researcher might have challenges with time constraints and resources as well. To address this, the researcher gave participants the options of either coming to the social workers offices based within the school premises for interviews or conducting interviews online. Ensuring that the process does not become time consuming, and less resources are needed. Furthermore, another disadvantage of utilising the case study design is that it might be difficult to establish causation. According to Zanal (2007) and Blaike (2000), single case study designs make it hard to determine whether the observed effects are directly caused by the variables under the study, or if there are other factors contributing. This suggests that it might be difficult for the researcher to establish that the state of the learning and teaching relationship between learners, parents and educators is solely due to the COVID-19 pandemic, or that there are other factors that influenced this turn out. To address, the use of triangulation, wherein multiple sources of data such as observations, and interviews were used to validate findings. Furthermore, the leveraging both the intersectional and ecosystems theory was useful in explaining how various levels of influence interact, and to account for social and contextual factors that may confound causal relationship.

4.6 RESEARCH SITE

This study utilised one site, which is a secondary school based in Soweto, White City Jabavu. Soweto is deemed an African community because it is rich in diverse cultures and is a home to people from around South Africa and some parts of Africa. According to Selebano and Khunou, (2014) most black people were drawn towards Johannesburg by the need to search for better opportunities and lives. They left their rural homes with the hope of obtaining better opportunities, jobs, and wealth. Due to the high number of people moving to Johannesburg, the

apartheid government was forced to deal with the influx of black people coming into the city and put measures in place to control the everyday movements of black people in the city (Aycard, 2014; Selebano & Khunou, 2014). The apartheid government began to drive black people out of the suburbs and the city and segregated them to live in their own separate area (Aycard, 2014). The area called Soweto started out small and then began to expand as the black population grew rapidly. Soweto is referred to as a poor area lacking in basic services and amenities, characterized by small, confined houses and yards (Selebano & Khunou, 2014). However, through a combination of unity, pride, and sense of community, the people of Soweto were able to perceive their spaces differently through the given circumstances and make it their own.

The school that the research conducted is based within the White City Jabavu community, which was named after the concrete roofed "elephant houses" that were initially painted white. The township is one of the most populated in Soweto with more than two families at times occupying one yard or space ordinarily allocated for only one house. The houses are single, free-standing structures, divided into three parts shared by three families in either two or three rooms and have electricity and clean running water (Selebano & Khunou, 2014). As a lowincome community, working adults in White City, Jabavu hold various positions in the nearby city and the informal sector is growing. About 40% of the households do not have any means of generating income, while a daunting 60% of the adult population is unemployed (Selebano & Khunou, 2014; Aycard, 2014). This means that the community experiences high levels of poverty, which means that the learners cannot afford to go to schools outside the community and cannot afford to attend and pay school fees. The school as a study site was selected by the researcher because it is one of the schools that were affected by the pandemic around Soweto, and this in turn affected the dynamics of the relationship among learners, parents, and educators.

The educational institution, Morris Isaacson Secondary School is a school in Soweto. It was founded in 1956, when a need for schools for black student arose. The educational institution was founded and named after Morris Isaacson, who was a Lithuanian Jewish immigrant. Morris Isaacson was passionate about education and empowerment of black students hence he started the school. Morris Isaacson was trading and had set up a fund for black students in Soweto to access education and reach tertiary level. The philanthropist donated enough money to have 10

classrooms built. During the same year, the school was called Mohloding School, and it opened its doors to 300 students.

Morris Isaacson High School has very deep historical roots and was involved in one of the prominent fights against apartheid and the imposition of Afrikaans as the language used in all school. Learners from Morris Isaacson Secondary School such as Tsietsi Mashinini, one of the leaders of the Soweto uprising led the student protest through Orland stadium on the 16nth of June 1976 that ended in shootings and bloodshed. 176 young people lost their lives on the day protesting against the use of Afrikaans as a language of instruction as they felt it was another tool of oppression used to subject them to menial jobs.

The school educated some of the prominent leading figures in the South African Liberation movement such as Tsietsi Mashini, Murphy Morobe and activist Abraham Onkgopotse Tiro. In addition, in May 1993, the school was visited by Nelson Mandela as appreciation and acknowledgement of its role in the history of the struggle. Despite the restrictions by Bantu Education system, the school managed to produce good quality education during the 1960s and early 1970s. The school then started having challenges around the 1980s and before facing struggles that came with the democratic era. Today, the school is not only an epicentre of the June 16 Uprising, it also serves as a focal point for memorials and annual commemorations.

4.7 POPULATION, SAMPLE, AND SAMPLING PROCEDURES

Participants	**Number of participants**
Learners	7
Educators	4
Parents/Guardians	7

Source: Researcher's diagram

4.7.1. Population

For this research study, the population comprised learners, educators, and parents with children from a township school in the community of Soweto. According to Zainal (2007), the research population is generally a large collection of individuals or objects that are the focus of a study,

and it is usually for their benefit that the research is done. While Blaikie (2004) asserts that the population is a well-defined collection of individuals or objects known to have similar characteristics. In this instance, the collective individuals include individuals in the school community which are learners, educators, and parents/guardians.

4.7.2. Sample size

The sample size for this study was 18 participants, which included seven (7) learners from grades 8 to 11 ages between 13 and 21, four (4) senior educators who were teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, and seven (7) parents with children from a township school in which the research was conducted. Qualitative research studies allow for the use of a small sample size compared to other research approaches (Merriam, 2002). Blaikie (2000) asserts the focus on rich and descriptive details of participants' experiences in qualitative research as it allows the use of small sample sizes. This means that much focus is placed on depth as research participants experienced COVID-19 deeply. However, Zainal (2007) alludes that handling and analysing qualitative research data can be complex and open to multiple interpretations. This means that researcher can interpret the data differently, thus potentially leading to disagreement amongst researchers.

4.7.3. Sampling procedure

According to Blaike (2004), sampling refers to the process of choosing a subset of items from a defined population to include in a study. Zainal (2007) concurs that sampling is useful in assisting researchers deepen their understanding of the phenomenon they are studying. For this study, the convenience sampling method was used to attain participants to take part in the study. According to Blaikie (2004), convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling method that involves utilising participants who are "convenient" to the researcher.

The convenience sampling method was chosen and deemed appropriate for this study because of the ease of access. According to Blaikie (2004) convenience sampling method is a quick and cost-effective way to gather information because researchers can easily access participants. This was particularly useful with regards to saving time and utilising as little resources as possible. Furthermore, the method is convenient as researchers can collect data without extensive planning (Blaikie, 2004, Zainal, 2007). The convenience sampling method is easy to carry out because of the limited rules that exist on how the data should be gathered. Thus,

allowing the researcher to utilise different methods to collect data, which includes focus groups and semi-structured interviews. However, it is vital to note that the researcher in a convenience sampling method may inadvertently select participants who are more readily available, or willing to participate in the research study (Blaikie, 2004). This can potentially introduce selection bias, thus affecting the reliability of the results.

For the purpose of this study, the researcher selected participants based on proximity, meaning that the researcher interviewed educators, learners, and parents/guardians within a school in Soweto that were easy to reach. Anyone that met the criteria and wanted to participate was allowed by the researcher. The inclusion criteria were that participants needed to have been in the school as educators, learners, or parents during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research study was announced at assembly by the research, and learners were invited to voluntarily participate in the study. The learners that were interested in participating in the study were approached by the researcher to enrol their parents for participation as well. Learners were provided with interview invitation letters to handout to their parents to see whether they were interested. Most interviews, including the focus group interview, were held in the social worker's offices on the school premises. All the participants in the study were black and are part of the school in which the research was conducted. The targeted population was selected because the participants were all affected and exposed to the challenges that came with the emergence of COVID-19 in a school setting and all participants can be accessed at the school.

4.8. DATA COLLECTION METHODS

For this study, multiple methods of data collection were used, namely semi-structured individual interviews and a focus group. According to Zainal (2007) utilising multiple data collection methods can be useful in the enhancement of the validity and reliability of the findings in a study. In addition to this, the interviewer got consent to audio record all the interviews from participants in both the semi-structured interviews and the focus group discussion. The researcher held semi-structured interviews with educators and parents/guardians. Focus group interviews/discussions were conducted with learners from the school.

4.8.1. Semi-structured interviews

The method of data collection that was used in this study is a semi-structured interview. According to Blaikie and Mouton (2001), a semi-structured interview is a method of data collection that allows the researcher to explore the phenomenon being studied in detail. Zainal (2007) concurs that semi-structured interviews allow researchers to have pre-planning questions, while also allowing them to ask follow-up questions or further explore themes, or topics that come up during the conversation. Semi-structured interviews are flexible. According to Blaikie and Mouton (2001), the questions and responses in semi-structured interviews are not pre-determined and standardized, thus allowing the researcher to add questions and explore further.

The researcher added a few questions for the interview which were not in the interview guide about the participants' backgrounds. This addition was important to capture the essence of intersectionality in participants' experiences. The choice of the semi-structured interviews was useful in this case. However, even though this is the case, this flexibility can be a disadvantage as it can make it challenging to standardize the interview process, thus potentially leading to variations in data collection and analysis (Blaikie and Mouton, 2001). Interviews with the educators and parents/guardians took approximately about 40 to 90 minutes. Also, the flexibility, which allows for additions of follow up questions, can be time consuming and emotionally and mentally demanding for the participants, especially if the research topic is sensitive or personal (Zainal, 2007).

Semi-structured interviews were also appropriate for use in this study because they allow for the use of open-ended questions that motivate participants to provide in-depth and comprehensive responses, thus capturing their experiences in full (Blaikie, 2001). When conducting semi-structured interviews with educators and parents/guardians, the researcher was able to capture the richness and complexity of their experiences with COVID-19 and its effects on the relationship between school and home. However, as stated by Zainal (2007) when participating in semi structured interviews, participants may provide responses that they think are socially desirable, or that aligns with the interviewer's expectation. Furthermore, the presence and behaviour of the interviewer can also influence the response of the participants (Zainal, 2007). Both these factors can introduce bias and compromise the accuracy of the data.

4.8.2. Focus group discussion

The research study also utilised focus groups as another method of collecting data. A focus group is referred to as a qualitative data collection method wherein a group interview of approximately six to twelve people who have similar characteristics or common interest is conducted (Dilshad & Latif, 2013). Blaikie, (2000) concurs that focus groups are usually an extended way of the interview methods and are more specific and an in-depth interview/discussion with a group about specific topics. Except for being quickly and relatively easy to set, a focus group was appropriate for this study because the group dynamics provided useful information that individual interviews do not (Dilshad & Latif, 2013). For this study, the researcher conducted a focus group with seven (7) learners from the school from grades 811. The first session took 60 minutes, and the second session took 30 minutes. This suggests that all in all, the focus group took 90 minutes. For this focus group, learners were given participants' forms, parental consent, and assent forms for signing. The researcher also asked permission to audio-record the session, and permission was granted when parents and learners signed.

4.9. RESEARCH INSTRUMENT(S) AND PRE-TESTING OF THE RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

The study utilised a semi-structured interview guide and focus group discussion guide as research instruments. According to Babbie (2001), an interview guide is like a cheat sheet for the interviewer, as it contains a list of questions and topic areas that the researcher would want to cover in the interview. Both these instruments contain structured questions that the researcher has prepared to serve as a guide (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Silverman (2013) concurs that in an interview guide, the researcher prepares a "set of questions, however, these are only used as guides, and departure from the guidelines is not seen as problematic but is often encouraged. For this study, the researcher formulated questions before the individual and focus interviews that served as a guide in the interviews with participants.

Even though there was preparation, during the interviews, the researcher added extra questions about unexpected themes that emerged when participants were answering questions. These are the most appropriate research instruments for this study as they will increase the credibility and reliability of the collected data as the question has been planned, well-thought and targets exactly what the researcher aims to investigate (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Savin-Baden &

Major, 2010). The advantage of using these instruments is that there is a high chance that the results and the interview may be influenced/suffer from the bias of the research (Savin-Baden & Major, 2010).

Furthermore, before the actual data collection process began, the researcher had an interview with an educator, a parent, and with 7 learners to pre-test and ensure that problems with guides are identified and amended. According to Blaikie and Mouton (2001), pretesting is usually the administration of the chosen data collection instruments by the researcher with some participants from the population to test and amend them before the actual data collection occurs. Meetings with the above-mentioned participants were held by the researcher and were aimed at exploring issues/vague questions in the guides. There were some questions that appeared to be unclear for the participants, and the researcher had to amend and change those questions so that every question was clear. The modifications included rewording complex or ambiguous wording to ensure participants easily understand the intended meaning, long and confusing questions were broken down into shorter, more direct questions, and questions that seemed too broad or irrelevant to the study's focus were refined to align more closely with the research objectives. It is imperial to note that the information collected from the pretest interviews was not used for the study.

4.10. *METHOD(S) OF DATA ANALYSIS*

After data has been collected, it is vital that the data is analysed and interpreted, so that we derive insights from it. According to Bogdan & Biklen (as cited in Wong, 2008), data collection is a process of systematically searching and arranging interview transcripts, observation notes, and other non-textual materials that the researcher gathers to increase the understanding of the phenomenon. The present study employed thematic analysis as a method of data analysis. Blaikie & Mouton (2001) and Kiger & Varpion (2020) refer to thematic analysis as a method of analysing qualitative data that entails searching across a data set to identify, analyse and report repeated patterns. They further concur that thematic analysis is a good method to utilize to identify and make sense of the commonalities expressed by different participants about the subject. Hence, Wong (2008) argues that the process of analysing in themes also involves coding and categorising information. The purpose of utilising thematic analysis for this study was to identify themes from the opinions expressed by participants on how COVID-19 affected

the teaching and learning relationship. When organising and analysing the data, the researcher followed the following steps suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006):

4.10.1. Step 1: Familiarise yourself with the data

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), the first thing that researchers need to do is to get to know the data. This means getting a thorough overview of the data collected and getting familiar with it. In this study, the researcher went through the audio recordings and the transcription scripts of all the interviews separately and repeatedly so that she gets familiar with the data and the meanings behind the ideas presented by participants.

4.10.2. Step 2: Create your initial codes

In this step, Braun, and Clarke (2006) suggest that researchers code the data, which means highlighting some parts of the data and labelling them to describe the content. For this study, the researcher went through each interview transcription per group, and per participant to get a general understanding of the information there. While doing this, the researcher developed codes to capture key analytic ideas in the data collected. This was useful in ensuring that all codes are captured.

4.10.3. Step 3: Generate themes

Researchers then need to generate themes by grouping codes that relate to a particular concept (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the present study, the researcher did this by looking over the codes she created, identifying patterns amongst them, and then creating themes from this content. This step of the analysis of data was useful in creating potential themes that tell the researcher something helpful and useful about the data for the purpose of the research.

4.10.4. Step 4: Reviewing themes

In this step, Braun, and Clarke (2006) argue that researchers focus on reviewing the themes created in relation to the coded data and the data as a whole. In the present study, the researcher returned to the collected data and coded data and compared it with the themes she created to see if she missed anything, and whether the themes she created were a true reflection of the data collected. In this step, the thematic map was useful in assisting to structure the analysis and defining the relationships between the themes identified.

4.10.5. Step 5: Defining and naming themes

The researcher named and defined each of the themes she created and reviewed. Braun and Clarke (2006) state that when defining and naming themes, researchers need to construct an analytic narrative that provides a breakdown of what is happening within the data they are presenting, and how this relates to their questions. For this present study, the researcher defined the themes by formulating what she means exactly by each theme, and how each theme helps one understand the data. The researcher used easily understandable names for themes as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006).

4.10.6. Step 6: Producing the report

Lastly, the analysis needs to be written up in a report as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). This means that the researcher prepares a final report that communicates the thematic analysis findings, that includes clear descriptions of the themes, supporting data and their implications (Braun and Clarke, 2006). It is vital that the report is structured and organised in a manner that is understandable and compelling for reviewers. These authors state that like all other academic write-ups, a thematic analysis needs an introduction, methodology, the findings of the study, and the conclusion.

The thematic analysis was appropriate in this study as it assisted the researcher to identify themes or patterns from the answers provided by participants. These patterns or themes could be based on similarities, differences, and contradictions in the data (Blaikie & Mouton 2001; Wong, 2008; Kiger & Varpion, 2020). Also, to ensure data management is possible and the protection of participants' information, the researcher will ensure that data is stored safely in a password-protected computer only accessed by the researcher. The data that will be stored includes audio from interviews, transcripts, and field notes.

4.11. DATA TRUSTWORTHINESS

According to Connelly (2016), the trustworthiness of a research study refers to the level of confidence in the data, how it is interpreted, and the methods/techniques used to ensure quality research. The criteria for the trustworthiness of a qualitative study is determined by its credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Credibility refers to the level of confidence in which the study is conducted in an honest, true, believable, and appropriate version of the research finding (Connelly, 2016; Blaikie & Mouton, 2001).

To maintain credibility for this study, the researcher made use of peer debriefing and member checking. According to Connelly (2016), peer debriefing is when the researcher asks a coworker to browse over the study to see if the results seem to align with the data, whereas member checking is when the researcher asks participants to review the collected data and confirm whether it presents what they have shared or not. The researcher first provided the coworker with background information about the study including its objectives methodology and key finding. This assisted the co-worker to understand what to look for when reviewing. The researcher shared raw data, the analysis process with the co-worker in structured format such as tables to facilitate comparison. Furthermore, the co-worker was requested to check for consistency and inconsistencies between the collected data and the conclusion drawn, so that concerns were addressed, and necessary adjustments were made to improve the accuracy and credibility of the study. Furthermore, to clarify biases, the researcher kept a journal of her thoughts and emotions as it is important for a researcher to keep note of their standpoint in the research process as a researcher and not a participant.

Transferability refers to the ability of the results from the research study to be applied in other settings or contexts to get its generalization (Connelly, 2016; Korstjens & Moser, 2018). For this study to be transferable, the researcher provided a detailed description/thick description of the school in Soweto as a site to study, the participants interviewed and the procedures used throughout the research to enable other researchers to assess whether the results of this study are a good match or not, and that it makes sense to generalise it.

On the other hand, dependability refers to the stability of the research findings over time whereas confirmability refers to the degree to which the findings of the research study could be confirmed by other researchers (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). To ensure the dependability and confirmability of this study, the researcher utilises an audit trail, wherein they transparently describe the research process taken from the start of the research project to the development of a report of the findings (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). This is done to make sure that records of the research path are kept throughout the whole research process.

4.12. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical consideration is a collection of principles and values that should be followed while doing human affairs (Ogletree & Kawulich, 2012). The ethical considerations make sure that no one acts in such a way that is harmful to society or an individual. It refrains people and

organizations from indulging in vicious conduct. In the present study, the research considered the following ethical considerations:

4.12.1. Avoidance of harm

To minimise the risk of harm by participants, the research ensured that they are not subjected to any form of harm, including physical harm, invasion of privacy, psychological distress, and their financial status (Ogletree & Kawulich, 2012). Considering that the research talks about the traumatic era of COVID-19 for many, there is potential harm as the research might cause potential psychological issues. Had it happened that any learners or participants became distressed, the researcher would have utilised the Department of Education protocol, which allows for immediate referral and facilitation of participants and learners to be attended at the nearest health facility. Furthermore, arrangements had been made by the researcher to refer participants that requires debriefing to a local NGO already working in the school, Youth Opportunities South Africa. Participants were going to be referred to the Director of the agency the researcher had negotiated with for assistance. Also, because the study included minors, who might be vulnerable and need to be protected from exploitation. The researcher ensured that minors are given parental consent forms and assent as well to the research.

4.12.2. Permission to conduct the study

To ensure that permission is granted, the researcher wrote letters for permission and access to the school to the the Department of Education, school principals, and school management teams. These institutions were provided with a proposal that included information about the study, including the questions that will be used to interview the learners, educators, and parents. Approval by the Department of Education and by the school was granted for the researcher to conduct her study in the school. Furthermore, the researcher submitted her proposal to the University of Witwatersrand Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-medical) and approval was granted under protocol number H22/09/15.

4.12.3. Informed consent

To obtain informed consent, the researcher provided participants with an explanation about the study and what is expected from them. Babbie and Mouton (2001) define informed consent as a mechanism put in place to ensure that participants understand what the study is about, before deciding to participate in the study. To seek informed consent, a research information sheet

with further details about the research was provided and explained to participants by the researcher (Ogletree & Kawulich, 2012; Babbie & Mouton, 2001). All adult participants were given a consent form to sign to demonstrate that they are participating in the study without any coercion and that they understand the study and what is expected of them. Parents/guardians of learners that participated were also given parental consent forms. Learners whose parents have given parental consent also had to assent to take part in the study. Ogletree and Kawulich (2012) maintain that when conducting research with minors, consent from parents is vital.

4.12.4. Privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality

The researcher also negotiated recording and taking notes of the interview with all with learner. Parents and educators through consent in the provided consent forms. Also, to ensure the participants' privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality, the research ensured that shared private information about the participants is held private. This was done by the researcher utilising pseudo names in her transcript to separate participants from the research and fictitious names of schools. Furthermore, the researcher had the interviews in the social worker's offices, which are private and not as busy as other rooms within the school premises. The researcher also ensured that interviews and any research material that connects participants to the research are stored in a password-protected file on the researcher's password-protected computer. Lastly, the researcher shared and assured participants that their information will be confidential and would be only used/seen by the researcher and possibly the supervisor.

4.12.5. Avoiding deceptive practice

To ensure that participants are not subjected to any deceptive practices, the research was truthful and transparent to the participants about the process of how the research would be conducted and the possible implications (Ogletree and Kawulich, 2012). This was done by explaining the intended and the possible unintended consequences of partaking in such a study before they commit to participating. This was helpful in making sure that participants are not misled and provided with false information.

4.12.6. The right to withdraw

Moreover, the researcher ensured that the principle that participants be given the right to withdraw from the study was observed throughout the research process, and this was clearly communicated to participants (Ogletree and Kawulich, 2012). The researcher ensured that she

grants participants the autonomy to continue or withdraw from participating in the study whenever they feel uncomfortable. Furthermore, the researcher ensured that she communicated to participants that there would be no harsh repercussions should they decide to drop out of the study.

4.12.7. Voluntary participation

Lastly, to ensure that all participants were not coerced into participating in the study, the researcher provided consent forms to all participants. She gave educators and parents consent forms to sign after explaining the study and reading an information sheet to them. This was then used as an indication that they wanted to participate in the study voluntarily. Learners that are part of the study were also given parental consent forms for their parents to sign after reading the information sheet as an indication that they are allowing their children to participate in the study. In addition to this, the researcher gave the learners assent forms as well to confirm that they are interested in participating in the study.

4.12. LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS

The limitation of the research study was the lack of cooperation by teachers and parents due to the fear of being exposed as having failed to work on the relationship during COVID-19. To address this, the researcher explained her experience of working in schools and explained the purpose of the study. Also, with educators, the challenge was time constraints. Most educators did not have enough time to conduct the interviews, so we had to target after school or when educators have two periods that were free. The lack of attendance to the interviews by parents because of other commitments and time constraints was a limitation to this study, however, the researcher made means to ensure that parents/guardians who fail to attend the interview at school, attended on days suitable for them even on weekends. Since this is a school, time with learners was limited. To address this, the researcher was forced to have two separate sessions of the same focus group so that all aspects of the interview schedule are covered. Lastly, the use of a case study as a research strategy can be a limitation as well as due to the little number of participants, it might be difficult to generalise the findings.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The methodology chapter was useful in explaining the processes of research that the researcher followed. It started by discussing and explaining the notion of the research paradigm, which is

the interpretivism through which the present study is conducted. This chapter also discussed utilising the qualitative approach and single-case study approach as the approach and methods informing the study. Furthermore, this chapter discussed and explained the population, sample, and sampling methods followed to recruit participants. The study utilised semi-structured and focus group interviews to collect data, and this is explained in this chapter. It also discusses thematic analysis as the method of data analysis used and the process followed when writing. Finally, this chapter breaks down how the trustworthiness of the study was ensured, ethical issues considered and the limitations of the study.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

5.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the findings on the four objectives of the study, which includes, investigating the influence of COVID-19 on the education system, exploring how COVID-19 has affected learners, parents, and educators, exploring how COVID-19 has shaped the learners, parents and educator's roles in teaching and learning; and to determining the support systems available in strengthening parental involvement on their children's education during the pandemic in a township school in Soweto. The data was generated from the focus group interview and the semi-structured interviews with learners, parents and educators respectively. The study determines that the school was severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in multiple ways. The responses presented in this chapter were elicited from learners, parents and educators. This chapter also discusses findings of the study based on the literature that also includes those theories.

5.2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In this study, the semi-structured and focus group interviews were conducted with participants linked to one school in the Johannesburg Central District with three educators, seven learners and seven parents/guardians. Interviews with learners, educators and some parents took place at the school, meanwhile two interviews with parents 2 and 5 were held telephonically because parents/guardians did not have time to attend at the school. In total, eighteen participants were involved in the study. The biographical data of the participants are presented in the tables below:

Table 5.2.1. Demographic information of educators

	Educator 1 (Michelle)	Educator 2 (Letswalo)	Educator 3 (Khizwana)	Educator 4 (Khubeka)
Gender	Male	Female	Female	Male
Race	African	African	African	African
Age	31 years	60 years	53 years	34 years
Highest qualification	Bachelor of Science	Bachelor of Education	Bachelor of Education	Bachelor of Education
Teaching experience	8 years	33 years	17 years	10 years
Teaching grades	9-12	9-12	8-12	8-12

The table in 5.2.1. above demonstrates the demographic information of the educators interviewed in this study. The table indicates that two (2) of the educators interviewed were between the ages of 30-40, one (1) participant was between the ages of 50-59, and one (1) participant fell under the age range of 60-69. It can be concluded that the study was dominated by age range 30-40 as two participants were within that age range. Furthermore, the study in terms of educator's participants indicates that the study was balanced in terms of gender as it comprised of two (2) male and two (2) female participants. Three (3) educators interviewed in the study hold a Bachelor's degree in education and one (1) had a Bachelor's degree in Science. Amongst the educators, one (1) has 8 years' experience in teaching, one (1) for 33 years, one for 17 years, and the last one (1) has been teaching for 10 years. Two (2) educators have been teaching between 1-10 years, one (1) has been teaching for 10-20, and one (1) has been teaching for 20 to 30 years. All the educators interviewed are African/Black, asserting that majority of educators in the school are African.

Table 5.2.2. Demographic information of parents/guardians

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7
Race	African	African	African	African	African	African	African
Age	34	54	38	26	59	46	30
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Male	Female	Female	Female
Highest qualification	Bachelor of social work	Grade 10	Grade 12	Grade 12	Grade 9	Grade 11	Grade 12
Home language	Xitsonga	IsiZulu	IsiZulu	IsiZulu	Sesotho	IsiZulu	Sesotho
Employment status	Employed	Self-employed	Employed	Employed	Unemployed	Unemployed	Employed

Table 5.2.2. demonstrates the demographics of the parents/guardians that participated in the study. Seven parents were interviewed, and one (1) was between the 20-26 age range, three (3) were between the ages of 30-39, one (1) between the age range 40-49, and two (2) between 5059. Study was dominated by African female parents as all parents interviewed were Black/African, and six (6) out of the seven (7) parents were female. One out of the seven parents had tertiary qualifications, and the other six (6) finished school between grade 10 and 12. Three (3) out of seven (7) parent's home language is IsiZulu, while two (2) Sesotho, and one (1) Xitsonga. Four parents amongst the participants were employed at the time of the interviews, one self-employed, and two (2) employed. Therefore, the results demonstrate that parents in the school are dominantly black/African and dominated by females.

Table 5.2.3. Demographic information of learners

	L1	L2	L3	L4	L5	L6	L7
Race	Black	Black	Black	Black	Black	Black	Black
Age	18	17	18	18	18	17	19
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Male	Female	Male	Male
Grade	12	12	12	12	12	12	12
No. i n school	5	3	5	3	5	5	5
No. people at home	14	4	5	3	4	2	3

Table 5.2.3. outlines identifying details about the learners that were part of the study. All 7 learners interviewed were Africans/Black. In terms of ages, four (4) learners were 18 years old, two (2) learners were 17 years old, and one (1) of the learners was 19 years old. Four (4) of the learner participants were female, and three (3) males. Majority of the learners (5/7) have been in the school for 5 years, while the other two learner have been in the school for 3 years. To get a picture of the learner's home circumstances, six learners are from households with between 1-5 family members, while one (1) learner lives with 14 family members in their household. All the learners interviewed were doing grade 12 at the time of the data collection and were in grade 9 and 10 during the pandemic in the same school.

5.3. THEMES AND SUBTHEME

Table 5.3 EXPERIENCES **OF EDUCATORS, PARENTS AND LEARNERS ON HOW THE EDUCATION SYSTEM WAS AFFECTED BY THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC.**

THEME	SUB-THEMES
5.3. Experiences of educators,parents and learners on how the education system was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.	5.3.1. Learning and teaching losses as a result of school closure. 5.3.2.Content delivery and syllabus trimming 5.3.3. Challenges with online learning.

5.3. MAIN THEME 1: HOW COVID-19 PANDEMIC HAS AFFECTED THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN SOUTH AFRICA

While conducting interviews with the participants, questions posed require them to share their understanding of how the education system was affected by the pandemic. Responses revealed that the South African education system, like many others around the world, was significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, with learners from the public township school dealing with a major blow. Schools were closed for extended periods to prevent the spread of the virus, resulting in disruptions in learning and teaching for learners and educators. The data demonstrates that the closure of schools highlighted the pre-existing inequalities, with many learners in public township schools lacking access to online learning resources and computer\technology literacy, dropping out of school or inconsistent attendance, and schools prioritising certain grades over others. Furthermore, participants expressed worry over the quality of education due to the trimming of the curriculum to make up for lost time.

5.3.1. Subtheme 1.1: Learning and teaching loss as a result of school closure

In the interviews with the participants, it was revealed that school closure during the pandemic resulted in loss of learning and teaching in this school. Learners from disadvantaged, public schools experienced the most learning and teaching time losses compared to the privileged minority in most South African schools (Grobler 2022) . Learners, educators and parents in the

interviews shared the notion that most of the days that could have been used for teaching and learning were spent at home during the pandemic due to the restrictions and the policies that were put in place to curb the spread of the virus, such as lockdowns, social distancing and taking extra precautions.

Educator 1: "We *had to wait until level 2 to come back to school. So, yes in that way, attendance was affected from March up until July for grade 12s and then grade 10 and 11 was up until August, and 8 and 9 returned in September. So, the year was already over. So, school attendance was affected".*

Educator 3: "*It has affected the education system in a lot of manner, for example, the teaching and learning was affected because learners had to attend some days, and not attend on some. Obviously, this staggered attendance in a way that we taught less. For example, let's say learners were attending three weeks, 3 days a week, sometimes 2 days a week. You can imagine that education suffered a lot. Yeah, it's mostly teaching and learning that was affected by the pandemic.*

Learner 3: *"Ma'am, we were impacted because we stayed at home for six months or so, then we started school in July".*

Parent 5: *"They were not going to school for a very long time yazi. We had to be with these at home during the pandemic. During that time, they were not even doing any schoolwork".*

Parent 1: *"So, when they started attending the rotational, which was quite useless because how do you teach someone twice a week after they had been in school for eight years. So when they started going back twice a week since the classes were quite packed, so they say half of the school come to school and that would be like 20 learners so that they can do social distancing and then after that, you come back next week, even if that I would have preferred that they gave the learners work so that they could do school work from home rather than letting them go twice a week to school knowing that they had a lot of work to cover"*

Participants related that the long period of school closure resulted in huge teaching and learning losses. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted the interaction that occurs in the microsystem between learners, educators and families, resulting in direct loss of learning and teaching time. (Jordi & Alan, 2020). In their study Ardington et al (2012) confirmed that grade 2 scholars lost approximately 57 % to 70% (percent), while grade 4 scholars lost 62% to 81% (percent) of a typical year's learning. Van der Berg et al (2022) found that grade 9 learners in

almost all the public schools in Western Cape lost about 155 days across 202 and 2021, offering compelling evidence regarding the loss of learning and teaching time in most South African public schools. Furthermore, the prioritisation of certain grades left behind the unequal effect of COVID-19 on student learning, thus exacerbating inequalities.

Educator 3: "*So, my school prioritised the grades. The grades that were rotating were grade 8s, 9s and 10s. It was grade 11 and 12 attending everything because we knew that they are the most important assets of the school, as you said that a pass percentage of the school is judged by the grade 12s."*

Educator 2: *"I think what COVID-9 did, it made us prioritise grade 12s too much because the panic was grade 12 as it is hard, and what was going to happen."*

Learner 5: *"We were in grade 9 ma'am, so we did not come back to school until later. It was only grade 11 and 12 that opened before us and came more days if I remember well."*

Parent 3: *"We would see grade12s coming to school because they had to write exams, especially after the lockdown was lifted. It's probably because their exam was very important as they took them to Varsity."*

While this notion of prioritising learners from higher grades over those from lower grades during the pandemic is understandable from a certain perspective, the differential treatment of learners in different grades further deepens the existing inequalities and educational disparities, particularly learners who already have fewer educational resources. In their study, Soudien et al (2020) discovered that Grade 12 and 7 learners were the first to return to school, estimating that grade 12 learners lost approximately 35% of contact time, while most learners could have lost almost 60%. In their report by ILO (2020) found that about 65% of young black learners from disadvantaged backgrounds reported lesser learning outcomes since the pandemic. This demonstrates how the combination of race and class are closely intertwined in South Africa, with learners from historically marginalised racial groups in disadvantaged schools disproportionately affected by school closure as a result of COVID-19 pandemic (Maestripieri, 2021).

5.3.2. Sub Theme 1.2: Content delivery and syllabus trimming

In the pursuit of uncovering how the education system was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, the study revealed that the school experienced a backlog of the syllabus because of

prolonged absence by learners due to lockdown strategy. Participants interviewed for this research study expressed that the backlog resulted in the need by the Department of Education to trim the content delivered to learners in terms of the curriculum.

Educator 1: *" Yeah. Took six months and in that way, what happened? We had what is called a backlog of syllabus. So, we could not see learners for that long and it created that backlog number one. Number two now when we came back, we had what is called a catch-up plan or a revised ATP, which is something that was used to try and catch up on the teaching time."*

Educator 2: *"So, the ATP or let me say the curriculum. At that time, it was not trimmed in a way that it will suit the attendance at that time. So especially in the first year of this pandemic. Teaching was affected because the ATP was designed in a way that it was a fully-fledged ATP. But at least the following year it was trimmed, and some topics were removed.".*

Learner 4*: They had to remove some things that we were learning, and I remember our teacher were the ones that were setting out papers. So, they covered what we were going to be tested on."*

Educator 4: "*But at least the following year it was trimmed as some topics were removed. Then we knew what to teach, especially those topics that learners would be assessed with. Teaching was affected because as teachers, we had limited time available because we closed for about two months and just taught what they would be assessed on."*

In line with the findings of this study, Hoadley (2023) maintained that when schools opened, the Department of Education undertook a process of trimming the ATPs in lower grades, while reorganising the grade 12 curriculum to accommodate school closure. Even though others highlight that the realisation and willingness to remove irrelevant content by the government as positive, others warn about the detrimental effects it has on foundation phase learners, as the curriculum covered is important for building a solid foundation in reading, writing and basic literacy (Amin & Mahabeer, 2021). In his article Maree (2020) shares that it was deemed important that foundation phase curriculum neither be trimmed, nor accelerated because if done, the acquisition of the skills taught will be compromised. Furthermore, curriculum trimming creates educational gaps, wherein learners might struggle to grasp certain topics, especially if they missed the basics in previous grades because of trimming (ILO,2020).

5.3.3. Subtheme 1.3: Challenges with online learning and resources

The study also showed how the pandemic exacerbated existing educational inequalities particularly in terms of access to quality education and the disparities in learning material, teacher support and educational opportunities between poor and affluent schools. The digital divide severely affected the abilities of learners, parents and educators in disadvantaged township schools to implement online learning. The common challenges that the participants highlighted included technology infrastructure, internet connection, availability of devices, and computer illiteracy. This study reveals that remote learning was not implemented in this school.

Educator 1: *"There was never online learning. There wasn't any online learning. Yeah, what we depended on, it was just ourselves and just producing copies, which we were also even afraid of when you give it out to say hey, sanitize, wash, sanitize!"*

Parent 7*: "Aiy there was no online learning here. None at all. These kids were home and went back to school when they were allowed. But mh no online learning."*

Educator 4: *"So, it was just not, it was near impossible to have those online classes. we so wished to because we do have an idea of how to go about it. But we couldn't even start, you know, we could not do anything. No laptops for example."*

Learner 1: *"Ma'am, like at our school, they did not implement online classes. They didn't even send notes, things to the group. We didn't even have groups then. Then after that six month, we had to come back to school"*

Educator 3: *"To be honest Ma'am, online learning did not work for us. As you can see, learners do not have tablets. Teachers tried to open WhatsApp groups with some of them. It worked for some, but some of them didn't work because you know our learners' backgrounds are not the same. As some learners have a smartphone, others do not have a cell phone at all."*

The above results that no online learning took place in the school are in line with the survey conducted by SADTU (2021), which revealed that almost two thirds of learners from poorer households had no communication with and from their teachers during the school closure when the pandemic hit. In their research study about the impact of school closure on children and families from various socioeconomic backgrounds in South Africa, Haffejee et al (2024) found that scholars that went to more resourced private schools experienced minimal disruptions to learning, while access was severely limited for scholars residing in poorly resources areas.

Participants expressed that even if willing, it would have been difficult for learners in the school to participate in online learning due to their socio-economic status. Demonstrates how access to education was heavily influenced by the type of school they attend (resourced or poorly resourced), their socio-economic status and the geographical location. These mentioned factors intersected to disadvantage learners from public schools from continuing to access to education during the pandemic.

Parent 2: *"I would say ne that besides the school yeah and resources, load shedding Joh, load shedding was a problem because as much you are using Wi-Fi and have a quiet space when there is no electricity you can't do anything, so when load shedding hit my child would not be able to do much."*

Learner 7: *"Some of us did not have access to resources like laptops, and at the time I was young, even if I had it, I would have not known how to use it."*

Educator 3: "*It is because I feel like learners, they need to be exposed, even teachers. Yeah, that as a teacher, if, let's say I want to create a meeting, I don't even know where to start."*

Learner 5: "*Because my parents had to close their business and they were always cooking so there was isiphithi-phithi (chaos) at home. But now my siblings are also coming back from home, so I must reprimand them for leaving this, and that you, see?"*

Educator 4*: "It was difficult when they returned because it seemed like they were still in the holiday spirit. It was difficult to get them to critically think and get their mojo back in terms of their studies. I think it's probably because they missed a lot, and we were bombarding them with a lot as well since we were trying to cover for lost time."*

When discussing the intersectionality of various factors, participants highlighted how the shift to remote learning in their school often failed to accommodate various socio-economic statuses, geographical limitations, and academic capabilities. This is in line with argument by Haffajee et al (2024:8) that the "historical exclusion of black people from education in South Africa persists to have a negative impact, as the constant intersection of parents social stratifications, income, occupation, and area of residence amplifies inequalities in education". Furthermore, Livingstone et al (2022) and Cheshmehzangi et al (2023) found that the digital divide was often associated with gender, race and income. In the study, participants highlighted factors such as the economic status, environment (geographical positioning and home circumstances), family matters, lack of technological learning resources, and level of education by parents served as

barriers to the continuation of teaching and learning in the school. Dube (2020) posits that learners in rural areas and schools faced unprecedented challenges, including contextual factors and the emergency of the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these difficulties. Furthermore, this study revealed the limitations brought about by the pandemic for learners to interact with their peers and teachers for individualized attention, and thus falling behind and struggling to catch up with the curriculum content. In his book, Reimers (2022) argues that most vulnerable learners disengaged at school because of these limitations during the pandemic.

5.4. THEME AND SUBTHEMES

TABLE 5.4. THE EFFECTS OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE WELL-BEING OF LEARNERS, PARENTS AND EDUCATORS

THEME	SUB-THEMES
5.4. The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the well-being of learners, parents and educators.	5.4.1. Fear of transmission 5.4.2. Emotional toll of COVID-19 pandemic on parents, learners and educators. 5.4.3 Strengthen family bonds

5.4. MAIN THEMES 2: THE EFFECTS OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE WELLBEING OF LEARNERS, PARENTS AND EDUCATORS

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted various aspects of human lives and activities all over the world. People from different backgrounds were engrossed in the fear of transmission due to the rapid evolving nature of the COVID-19 virus (Quansah et al., 2022). When asked to explore the effects of the pandemic on their wellbeing, participants in the study reflected on the various ways that the pandemic affected their overall wellbeing, including physical, emotional and mental well-being. Participants reported experiencing fear of transmission, which in turn affected their physical, emotional well-being and the way they relate with others (socially). Even so, participants also highlighted the positive aspects of

COVID-19 pandemic, and the strategies put in place such as lockdowns such as strengthened family relationships.

5.4.1. Subtheme 2.1: Fear of transmission

The research study explored the extent of anxiety experienced by learners, parents and educators towards contracting the COVID-19 virus. Findings of the study revealed that educators, parents and learners experienced anxiety and fear of transmission during the pandemic, which impacted their ability to fully engage and participate in ensuring that learning and teaching is continued.

Educator 1: "*Yeah, we were, yeah. Like I said, we were terribly affected because you know, from the educators being unable to attend out of fear, some could not attend because sometimes we think we have it, that disease, and then you don't want to, you know, infect other people. I just wished to just teach them, you know, through the window standing outside."*

Parent 6: "*I would be scared even when my children cough because I am thinking it is COVID19. It was scary to go to school. They would be advised not to go to school, you see. So, a lot of things were crazy, sanitising all the time*."

Educator 4: *"And some of our colleagues, they were affected and were laid off for a very long time. Then the anxiety starts all over again and it is just in. And if you wish to just teach and run for cover, dive and all that. But the law doesn't allow you to."."*

Parent 7: *"They were afraid of going to school, but I said to him that he must go to school because if he doesn't go to school and complain about covid he would fail. Put your mask on so that we can see how it goes. We were all safe, nobody got covid."*

Learner 6: *"It was scary ma'am, and I remember that there were many graves made because they thought more people were going to die. I feared going out, and would put two masks when I am going out"*

In their study about classroom management and safety, Quansah (2022) expressed that educators reported experiencing fear of contracting the virus when teaching, which results in feelings of unease when interacting with students. Furthermore, in line with the results by the

study (Nabe-Nielsen et al., 2021) found that educators' fears of infection and transmission highly increased between May and November 2020. However as indicated by the study, the fear of transmission was also experienced by learners and their parents/guardians. In his study with college students, Fang et al (2022) indicates that students reported moderate levels of fear as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Meanwhile, Haffejee (2024) found that children in most South African schools reported feelings of anxiety, boredom and isolation when schools were closed. Participants highlighted the difficulties with continuing the teaching and learning relationship due to the fear of possibly getting infected by the COVID-19 virus. Teachers were uneasy with continuing to teach, learners to continue attending classes, and parents to socialise and engage with others, including the school. This demonstrates that the impact of the disruption of school because of COVID-19 was experienced most acutely within the microsystem (O'Regan et al, 2022).

5.4.2. Subtheme 2.2: Emotional and psychological toll on parents, learners and educators

When schools gradually shifted to remote/online, teaching and learning continued with learners attempting to navigate distance online learning from the educator's virtual classrooms, and consequently parents having to take on new roles as they combined their regular jobs with supporting their children's education (Mifsud,2021). The study found that participants experienced high levels of stress, frustration and loneliness because of the pandemic, which severely affected their overall wellbeing. When asked to reflect on the emotional and psychological effect of the pandemic, the majority of the participants reported experiencing emotional distress and frustrations with having to familiarise themselves with the new way of doing things at school, and at home.

Parent 7: "*It was scary yahoo, you would open your radio, bad news; TV, bad news and even social media. It was just so stressful. Also, imagine we were all home so the squabbles amongst the kids, and the noise the whole day. At some point I felt like I was going to be crazy and started picking up papers."*

Learner 8: *"It was really a struggle ma'am; I don't want to lie. You know, going from seeing your friends and teachers every day to not seeing them at all was depressing for me."*

Parent 5: *"My daughter struggled with sleeping even because now she would sleep during the day. You could see that she was bored and would have loved to see her teachers and friends again."*

Educator 3: *"Meanwhile, when we were on lockdown, you would constantly wonder whether the kids you teach and their families are safe, whether your colleagues are also safe, that time you are worried about your own family. It was just overwhelming and scary."*

Learner 4: *"It felt like I was in jail being at home every day. I would be frustrated because why can't I see and visit my friends? I was so lonely and bored."*

The emergency of the COVID-19 pandemic was associated with emotional and psychological challenges by the participants. Participants reported that their emotional and psychological functioning was negatively affected by the pandemic. Participants express feelings of loneliness, frustration, depression and anxiety during the pandemic. This finding supports the study by Watts et al (2023) that the pandemic has taken a substantial toll on the social, emotional and mental health of scholars and their guardians. Tiruneh et al (2022) asserts that the implementation of strategies such as the lockdown due to pandemic have left people feeling stressed, fearful, and anxious, which in turn affected participants' mental and physical health.

5.4.3. Subtheme 2.3: Strengthening family bonds

The emergency of COVID-19 changed family lives, including how they relate with each other, the mental health of family members, their overall well-being and the family resilience. Despite the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, the study revealed that they were positive aspects to COVID-19. Participants reported improvements in their relationship as a result of quality time spent as family, learning new skills and the growing appreciation of life, and loved ones. When asked to reflect on any positive experiences gained through the pandemic, participants expressed that despite the challenges that were brought about by COVID-19 pandemic, there were positive outcomes such as family bonds and increased quality time spent together and with their families.

Learner 3: *"For me, before COVID-19, I never understood or tried to understand my mom.*

Parent 5*: "I held my kids closely you know, because you never knew what will happen tomorrow. I would tell them that I love them Yonela, every day. This was new to them, but now they are used to it".*

Educator 1: *"COVID-19 taught me to value people more, and whatever time I spend with people, I need to be intentional, we don't know what tomorrow has in stores for us. This is what I also say to my students when we were back, that let us love each other more."*

Learner 7: "*So, for me, before COVID-19, I didn't know my parents because I didn't live with them. We used to be those people. when I sit with her it is quiet, we don't say anything So, for six months that I have been spending time with her, she has been talking to me, and said "I want to get close to you because I can see with other people you are talking, but with me you are not.*"

Parent 6: *"I can safely say that I now know this young man because we spent more time together as a family playing games, making jokes. It was good. That is how we keep busy, you could see that the kids were happy too because I am always at work."*

The study revealed that learners and parents had little to no relationship before the pandemic hit. This was due to several reasons, including work related commitments, limited time spent at home, and the emotional disconnection between parents and their kids. As highlighted by Kabongo (2022) many of the black South Africa family members in the townships spend countless hours to, and from work because of the location of their employment. Thus, most children grow up without close and consistent relationships with their parents. However, the emergence of the pandemic, and the implementation of lockdown forced families to spend ample time together. Participants expressed how the pandemic provided an opportunity to spend time together forming emotional bonds with each other, which they valued and appreciated. Chu et al (2021) found that children interviewed described developing closer family bonds during COVID-19 because of the increased time spent as a family. Furthermore, Evans et al (2020) shares that when conducting their study, some families reported developing shared interests and bond over activities. This is in line with the findings of the study and demonstrates even though the pandemic brought uncertainty and distress, there were opportunities for growth in family connections. As suggested by the ecosystem theory, families, which form part of the microsystem, are the foremost source of influence on their children, and positive relations result in positive outcomes (O'Regan et al, 2022).

5.5. THEME AND SUBTHEMES

TABLE 5.5. SUPPORT SYSTEMS AVAILABLE IN STRENGTHENING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND CONTINUED TEACHING AND LEARNING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC.

THEME	SUB-THEME
5.5. Support system put in place to strengthen parental involvement and continued teaching and learning during the COVID-19	5.5.1. Adequacy of school response to educational disruption
pandemic.	5.5.2. Communication and collaboration between school and parents.

5.5. MAIN THEME 3: EXPLORING THE SUPPORT SYSTEMS AVAILABLE IN STRENGTHENING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND CONTINUED TEACHING AND LEARNING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC.

Under the above theme, participants were asked to reflect on the different ways that the Department of Education responded to the challenges they were faced with during the pandemic, and the support that was provided to learners, educators and parents to ensure that no one is behind as far as teaching and learning is concerned.

5.5.1. Subtheme 3.1: Adequacy of school response to educational disruptions

Like in most parts of the world, the study found that the responses by the school to the pandemic were largely driven by adherence to the government policies (Spaull, 2020). In the study, participants expressed that their efforts to ensure continued teaching and learning were heavily influenced by the Department of Education and policies by the government. This includes strategies and measures such as lock downs, school closure, remote learning and catch-up plans.

Educator 4: *"No, unfortunately I don't think there was any other way besides to follow the policy that was there. Yes, our school was shut twice, and the response was to catch up. Yeah, that was just to catch up and try to cover the syllabus. Perhaps we would close for a week in many cases, and they would say that they came to disinfect."*

Parent 2: *"They applied those rotation system, where certain grades would come this week, and a different group attends next week. If ask me Yonela, I think that was useless coz children would come home with lots of work still, and we must teach ourselves.*

Educator 1: "*It is because at that time even if like for example talk about thing such as morning classes, they said that we must stop those and we did that because now if you don't follow protocol, or want to unique as a school, and should there be any case reported especially when it comes to learners, then you are in trouble."*

Learner 6: *"We were given handouts at first and told that we would have to watch TVs and listen to Radios for those educational programmes. But remember ma'am, this is the time we had load shedding for months in Soweto."*

Parent 4: "*Even if the teachers implemented online learning at the school, how many children at the school have access to cell phones and laptops. Remember that Lerato is a school in Soweto, where a lot of parents are not working and many families can barely put food on the table. Imagine having to take money for bread and buying data, money for rent and buying a cell phone, I do not think that would be fair."*

Participants expressed the dissatisfaction and the inadequacy of the Department of Education's efforts to sustain education through alternative means that accommodates the circumstance of the black disadvantaged learners in township schools. The Department of Education's response to the crisis was criticized for being slow and inadequate, especially in providing support and resources during the lockdown. There was a perceived lack of proactive measures until later stages of the pandemic. In their study, Mokoena and Hlalele (2022) argued that even though remote learning was deemed favourable during the pandemic, the South Africa school system was ill-prepared as rural and poorer schools were further disadvantaged due to lack of resources. Intersectionality theory asserts that we live in a broader system of power that shapes our social positions and experiences, and the macro-environment is characterised by various forms of oppression (Collins & Bilge, 2016). In this case, the macro-environment of the participants is characterised by a system of discrimination, racism and marginalisation. As suggested by Azevedo et al (2020) when the Department of Education decided to close schools, families needed to accommodate the changes, however only well-off families had sufficient resources to mitigate the effects of school closure, further marginalising and alienating the disadvantaged.

5.5.2. Subtheme 3.3: Communication and collaboration between schools and parents

Furthermore, in times of crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, constant communication and collaboration between schools and parents' learners is vital (UNICEF,2022). There are different ways in which parents and the school can communicate, and this includes writing newsletters, phone calls, emails and school visits. Learners and parents were largely dissatisfied with the communication between themselves and the school during the pandemic. From this narrative, it appeared that there was limited to no communication between themselves and the school since the first lockdown.

Parent 3: "*During the pandemic, uh, there was really no communication between us, and the school, especially when the kids were no longer going to school. This school utilises a newsletter to communicate with us about meetings and other things, however these were not sent anymore because the kids were not here so that they can deliver the message to us as parents."*

Learner 5: "Lucky *for COVID-19, my mom was a parent who did not attend meetings so maybe she did not have the teacher's contacts to ask about COVID-19. So, it was hard for her to communicate with my teachers because she did not have their contacts. Also, just the idea of her coming to school to ask was unusual*."

Educator 3: "It's *sad, it's very sad because the parent only shows up when the learner did not do well and that's when the parent will show up. I wish it was best in lower grades. It's more visible in grade 12 because obviously if the student is doing grade 12, the parent must show up.*

Educator 1: *We honestly tried to communicate with them through WhatsApp, however the communication was not effective because not everyone that had a smartphone and some numbers we had in our system were no longer working. So, that was demoralising."*

From the above, it is evident that there were great difficulties in ensuring that the connection between the school and the home was maintained during the pandemic. It is notable that one of the limitations was the school utilised newsletters and face to face meeting as the main channel of communication with parents prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The transition to online learning served as a limitation as mentioned by an educator since most parents do not have

smart phones and data to constantly communicate with the school. Suggesting that the socio-economic status of parents affected their communication with the school (Remind,2022). Furthermore, the challenges of not having parents updated contact details in the school system demonstrates that the communication was ineffective even before COVID-19. As reflected by Bhamani et al (2020) lack of communication between the school and parents demonstrates that parent's engagement regarding their children's education is lacking in disadvantaged schools. Therefore, this shows that schools in the township should have ensured that they devise strategies in order to engage with the parents to ensure the access of education for the learners in the school (Josuharyadi et al,2021)

5.6. THEME AND SUB-THEMES

TABLE 5.6: WAYS IN WHICH THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC SHAPED THE ROLES OF LEARNERS, PARENTS AND EDUCATORS IN THE TEACHING AND LEARNING RELATIONSHIP.

THEME	SUB-THEMES
5.6. Different ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic shaped the roles of learners, parents and educators in the teaching and learning relationship.	5.6.1. The impact of shifting roles due to the COVID-19 pandemic

5.6. MAIN THEME 4: EXPLORING DIFFERENT WAYS IN WHICH COVID-19 PANDEMIC SHAPED THE ROLES OF PARENTS AND EDUCATORS IN TEACHING AND LEARNING RELATIONSHIP.

The rapid closure of schools and transitioning to remote learning as a result COVID-19 presented a struggle to balance responsibilities for the learners, educators and parents. The study found the pandemic brought significant changes to the roles of learners, educators and parents, and when asked to explore, participants reported that the shift has had both negative and positive effects. The following subtheme explains the shift of the roles due to the pandemic, and how participants were affected by the shift of roles.

5.6.1. Subtheme 4.1. The shifting roles due to lockdown and its effects

One other effect of the pandemic highlighted by the participants was how families, specifically caregivers, were forced to assume a new role in the education of their children. This is in line with a study by Garbe et al (2020) that found that out of the 122 parents' interview, 62% spent more than an hour per day supporting their children's learning at home. The result in this study highlights how parents have had to become educational agents and take on the roles of being educators and ensure that learning is facilitated.

Parent 1: *"And sometimes even like, he would do his homework, and I would just ask if he did his homework or not. However, during COVID I had to make sure that I was his second teacher, explain stuff to him and make sure that he did the work and like to find ways to help him, even going to the extent of downloading YouTube videos to make sure that he understands, watch channels on YouTube."*

Educator 3*: "Unfortunately at the time, we relied on parents at home to assist their children because we could not communicate fully even though we had given them handouts. We know that some are illiterate so we would encourage learners to use the internet as well as neighbours."*

Learner 6*: "My mother could not help because she did not go to school, but my sister is the one that was helping me ma'am. But it was difficult because she had work, and her schoolwork as well."*

Parent 2: *"When they came back home with the work, I had to be the one that assist. I would have to go through the papers they were given, explain what is needed, and then help them do what is required. That time I was also working online. It was just a lot for me, I don't want to lie Yonela."*

Learner 1: *"My mom was very helpful shame ma'am; she would help me with work. Sometimes she does not even understand what they want, but she will ask that I buy data, and she googles until she understands and explain to me.*

As suggested by Garbe et al (2020) when parents transitioned alongside their children to remote learning, many reported taking on roles as co-educators and emotional supporters to their children. The study discovered that the shift and additional roles and responsibilities created

additional stress due to the pressure of balancing work and home responsibilities alongside the additional roles. Concurring with this, in his report Reimers (2022) found that at the microsystem level, parents and educators expressed feeling overwhelmed by the intersection of work from home demands, care responsibilities and the sudden need to adapt to their new roles. In addition, Doll et al (2022) expressed that the extent to which the parents were engaged with their children's education was influenced by various factors such as their level of education, the demanding nature of their jobs, having multiple children and access to resources such as data and devices to conduct research. Parents who were illiterate, had more demanding jobs and had multiple kids could not assist, whereas those who are literate, have fewer demanding jobs, and less kids were able to assist (Tzifopoulos, 2020). Participants also highlighted that they did not have necessary skills to educate, hence the need to conduct research on certain aspects which proved to be time consuming as well. This revealed the emotional and practical challenges that came with managing education at home.

5.7. CHAPTER SUMMARY

The results and discussion chapter focused on the analysis and interpretations of the quotes and themes from participants' responses to the sub-themes and the main themes of the study. Drawing from the ecological systems and intersectionality theories, the study was able to explore and understand the complex and multiple experiences of learners, parents and educators in the township, public school on how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the learning and teaching relationship. One of the main aspects that had come to light during the interpretation and analysis of the themes in answering the main themes was that of the exclusion and marginalisation of black, poor students from accessing educational opportunities during the pandemic due to several factors including geographical positioning, socio-economic status and parent's educational levels. This builds on both theories as it demonstrates how disruptions at different levels (Micro, macro, mezzo, chrono) affected educational outcomes and relationships. Furthermore, it appeared that the Department of Education and the school tried implementing strategies to enable communication and collaboration with parents to sustain teaching and learning. However, not all the strategies were successful as learners and parents ascertain that the efforts did not accommodate their context and its challenges. This

demonstrates a dire need for transformative education that challenges inequalities and promote inclusive, equitable learning environments for all learners.

CHAPTER SIX:

MAIN FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter will provide the research questions, aims and objectives that guided the study. It will further present the main summary of the study, and the conclusion derived from each subquestion. Following this, this chapter will present recommendations emanating from this study. The study explored how the COVID-19 pandemic affected the teaching and learning relationship between learners, parents and educators in a township school in Soweto.

6.2. AIM AND OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The main aim of the study was to explore the effects of COVID-19 in the teaching and learning relationship between parents, learners, and educators in schools. The achievement of the aim of the study was guided by the following research questions:

- What is the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the education system?
- How did COVID-19 affect learners, parents, and educators?
- How did COVID-19 shape the learners', parents', and educators' roles in teaching and learning?
- What are the support systems available in strengthening parental involvement in their children's education?

The following objectives guided the study, thus ensuring the achievement of the main aim of the study and that the research questions are answered.

1. To investigate the influence of COVID-19 on the education system
2. To explore how COVID-19 has affected learners, parents, and educators.
3. To explore how COVID-19 has shaped the learners, parents and educator's roles in teaching and learning.
4. To determine the support systems available in strengthening parental involvement in their children's education during the pandemic.

6.3. SUMMARY OF THE FINDING OF THE STUDY

In this section of the research report, the main findings of the research study are presented in relation to the objectives and the sub-themes that made the achievement of the study possible.

6.3.1. Objective 1: To investigate the influence of COVID-19 on the education system in South Africa.

6.3.1.1. Subtheme 1.1: Learning and teaching loss as a result of school closure

The study revealed that the South African education system was severely affected by the pandemic, and this resulted in a huge loss of learning and teaching for learners in township, public schools. Learners spent approximately six (6) months at home during the pandemic as schools were closed, losing out on six months of the teaching and learning. Furthermore, the study revealed the implementation of precautionary measures such as sanitising and ensuring social distancing were time consuming, and took away from the time that could have been spent for teaching and learning. Participants highlighted experiencing inequalities with regards to access to education amongst the learners in townships as later on, when the rotational strategy was introduced, learners from certain grades were prioritised over others.

6.3.1.2. Subtheme 1.2: Content delivery and syllabus trimming

Secondly, the study revealed that the prolonged closure of schools resulted in a backlog of the syllabus, which forced the Department of Education to trim the educational curriculum in lower grades, and reorganised the grade 12 curriculum to accommodate the long period of school closure. The trimming of the curriculum was deemed as having disadvantaged learners in the school as it created educational gaps that educators in the school are currently challenged with.

6.3.1.3. Subtheme 1.3: Challenges with online learning and resources.

The pandemic exacerbated existing educational inequalities with regards to access to quality education. Learners and educators in the school did not participate in remote learning due to the digital divide. The study revealed that participants did not have access to the resources needed for remote learning such as laptops, smart phones and TV, and internet connection due

to their socio-economic status. Furthermore, learners could not learn through multimedia platforms such as TVs and radios due to prolonged hours of load shedding in the townships during the pandemic. Moreover, the study revealed that most learners and educators in the school were computer illiterate, which also served as a disadvantage,further alienating and excluding them from accessing educational resources.

6.3.2. Objective 2: To explore how COVID-19 affected learners, parents and educators.

6.3.2.1. Subtheme 2.1: Fear of transmission

The study revealed that learners, educators and parents experienced high levels of anxiety and fear of transmission during the pandemic. Participants reported constantly feeling anxious and fearful about contracting the COVID-19 virus. The fear and feelings of unease reported by the participants negatively affected their ability to engage with and collaborate in ensuring that learning and teaching in the school continues.

6.3.2.2. Subtheme 2.2: Emotional and psychological toll of COVID-19 pandemic on parents, learners and educators.

In addition, the study revealed that participants experienced high levels of stress, frustration and loneliness as a result of the pandemic. Participants reflected on how the precautions implemented such as school closures and lockdown led to feelings of loneliness from not physically interacting with others.The isolation, and inability to connect with others such as colleagues and friends proved to have taken a substantial toll on the emotional and mental wellbeing of the participants.

6.3.2.3. Subtheme 2.3: Strengthening family bonds

Lastly, most of the participants felt that even though the COVID-19 pandemic was a catastrophic time for everyone, it affected the family system in a positive manner. The study revealed improvements in family members' relationships as a result of quality time spent. Furthermore participants reported learning new skills and growing appreciation for life. Most families could not spend time together before COVID-19 due to work commitments and other practical challenges such as spending more time to and from work. The COVID-19 pandemic helped build and strengthen family bonds as family members were forced to spend more together.

6.3.3. Objective 3: To explore how the COVID-19 pandemic has shaped learner, parents and educators roles in teaching and learning.

6.3.3.1. Subtheme 3.1: The shifting roles due to lockdown and its effects.

The emergency of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the transition to remote learning resulted in the shift of the role of facilitating and teaching from educators to parents at home. The study revealed that parents that were literate were able to assist their children, however illiterate parents struggled with facilitating teaching and learning at home. Parents interviewed in the study reported lacking necessary skills to facilitate teaching at home. Furthermore, participants reported feeling overwhelmed and stressed by the additional roles, alongside home demands, care responsibilities, and work demands.

6.3.4. Objective 4: To determine the support systems available in strengthening parental involvement in their children's education during the pandemic.

6.3.4.1. Subtheme 4.1: Adequacy of school response in educational disruptions.

The study revealed that the efforts by the school to ensure continued teaching and learning were guided by the Department of Education and the South African government policies, including social distancing rules, sanitising schools and wearing masks, school closure, lockdowns and implementation of online learning. Participants were dissatisfied and deemed the efforts by the Department of Education and the school as inadequate and having failed to accommodate learners from poor and disadvantaged backgrounds. The Department of
Education and the school were criticised for the inability to put proactive measures in place to ensure continued teaching and learning in public and disadvantaged schools since they could not participate in remote learning until the later stages of the pandemic.

6.3.4.2. Subtheme 4.2: Communication and collaboration between the school and parents.

Even though studies have demonstrated the importance of the communication and collaboration between school and home, the study revealed that there was limited to no communication between the parents and the school during the COVID-19 pandemic in this school. The school mostly depended on learners to deliver newsletters as a means of communication with parents, and with schools closed it was difficult for the newsletters to be sent out to parents. This suggested that communication in the school was one-way in a sense, wherein it is educators

communicating with parents, and not parents engaging with the school, unless invited. Furthermore, it was revealed that the school did not have updated contact details of some parents in the school system, which made it further difficult to maintain constant communication between home and the school. In addition, it was found that even though some educators tried utilising WhatsApp to communicate with parents, the majority of the parents in the school do not have a smartphone, or even internet access to send or receive messages.

6.4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the central purpose of this study was to explore the effect of COVID-19 on the teaching and learning relationship between learners, parents and educators. The COVID-19 pandemic severely affected most township schools, thus exacerbating inequalities between the learners from advantaged and disadvantaged in South Africa. The study concludes that prolonged school closure and remote learning proved to be major stumbling blocks for learners, parents and educators to ensure the continuation of the teaching and learning relationship during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Furthermore, from the above reported results, the study concludes that the challenges that led to the discontinue teaching and learning in township public schools during the pandemic, specifically the lockdown included lack of resources such as technology devices and data, poor network access, digital illiteracy, poor parental involvement and illiteracy amongst parents. The study showed that the discussed challenges experienced existed before, and the COVID19 pandemic exacerbated, further crippling the South African education system. The results of this study are supported by numerous research studies, which demonstrates the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the education system, and lower quintile/disadvantaged schools.

6.5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above-mentioned discussion and findings, it is recommended that the Department of Education and Department of Basic Education closes the gap of digital inequalities in schools through investing in the necessary ICT infrastructure and digital resources such as internet access and ICT devices to ensure digital inclusion. Secondly, different stakeholders within the education sector should ensure that parents, learners and educators in township

schools are sensitised about online learning to ensure that there is collaboration and the continuation of learning and teaching at home.

There is a dire need for learners and educators in township schools to become fully trained in digital literacy. Therefore, it recommended that training in computer skills and the use of technology be made mandatory for all learners and educators. Systems need to be put in place to help improve the relationship between school and home. Furthermore, schools and parents need to collaborate into ensuring that the school has updated, and accurate parents contact details for communication purposes.

Furthermore, mechanisms need to be put in place to improve the communication between parents and educators and enhance parental involvement. To do this, it is recommended that a multi-faceted approach that considers accessibility, affordability and engagement strategies be implemented. For example, the school can implement a mobile based communication system such as SMS system that notify parents about learner's progress, important meetings and urgent matter. Moreover, "parent buddy" system wherein more involved parents guide others can be implemented to encourage parents to be more involved and assist with home-works. Lastly the school can set up a feedback channel or initiate "parents check ins" monthly where parents can easily raise concerns or make suggestions.

Stakeholders within the education sector are also encouraged to offer counselling services to learners, parents and educators in township schools to improve psychological and socioemotional well-being and address any psychological unsafety caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Lastly, disadvantaged township schools should be provided with necessary support to implement their recovery plans and discontinue to perpetuate inequalities amongst different schools in South Africa.

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that social work curriculum focuses on preparing future social workers to address similar cases of COVID-19 and systematic disruptions. This can be done by strengthening training in crisis intervention and resilience building by introducing courses on crisis response, intensive trauma informed care, and disaster management to equip students with skills for supporting families and schools during pandemics. There is a need to incorporate digital and remote social work skills given the role of technology in education and mental health during the pandemic. Social workers need to be taught how to use telehealth, virtual counselling and how they can use digital platforms to support school communities. Furthermore, there is a need to incorporate digital social work

theories since traditional theories have not fully accounted for digital engagement. The COVID-19 pandemic revealed the importance of virtual interaction, digital mental health services and online learning support.

It is recommended that the ecosystems theory be expanded to account for crisis disruptions as it assumes a relatively stable environment and COVID-19 showed how sudden disruptions affect multiple levels simultaneously. It is recommended that a “crisis ecosystem model” be developed that recognizes the rapid shift in microsystem interactions, considering digital environments as a new microsystem affecting learning and social support and integrates policy level responses as active forces that shapes individual’s experiences. Technology should be seen as a primary system of influence rather than a secondary tool.

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6.6. APPENDICES

6.6.1. Appendix A: Participants Information Sheet

Title of the study: The effects of COVID-19 on the teaching and learning relationship between learners, parents and educators: A case study of a school in Soweto

1.1. Participants Information sheet

Dear…….

Re: Request for your participation in research

My name is Yonela Aphelele Mbobo, and I am a postgraduate registered for Master programme in social work (school social work) at the University of Witwatersrand. My supervisor is Dr Zintle Ntshongwana. As part of the requirements for the degree, I am conducting research regarding the effects of COVID-19 on the- teaching and learning relationship between school and home.

I am inviting you to take part in an interview/focus group. If you decide to take part, your participation in the research study will last about 45 minutes to 1 hour and will be arranged at a time and place suitable for you.

With your permission, I would like to audio record the interview/focus group. This data will be stored in password protected file in a password protected computer for 6 years and will be deleted afterwards. Only the researcher will have access to the data.

During the research activity, I will need to ask for some personal information about you, that will be treated with the strictest confidentiality. The interview will be confidential and anonymous. When I share the results of the 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 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 decided not to join. Taking part in the research study will not cost you anything. Since the interviews will be held at the school, which is in Soweto and all participants live in Soweto. If you are unable to come to school, arrangements can be made for the researcher to come to a place preferred by the participants. You will not be paid for being in this research study.

The risks for this research study are no more than what happens in everyday life and some of the questions asked may make you feel sad or upset. If this happens, I will stop the interview/focus group and continue another time. If you need some support or counselling services following the interview/focus group, these are available free of charge at Bara Hospital. Also, the Department of education will make an immediate referral and facilitation for you to attend at the nearest public health facility. This research study will be written up as a research report and/or publication. 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 on 1778162@students.wits.ac.za or 0728800734 my supervisor on zintle.ntshonwana@wits.ac.za. 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 hrecnonmedical@wits.ac.za.

Yours sincerely,

Yonela Mbobo

Researcher:

Yonela Mbobo, 1778162@students.wits.ac.za, 0728800734

Supervisor:

Dr Zintle Ntshongwana, Zintle.ntshongwana@wits.ac.za, 011 717 4482

6.6.2. Appendix B: Consent Forms for the Participants in the Study

Title of the study: The effects of COVID-19 on the teaching and learning relationship between learners, parents and educators: A case study of a school in Soweto

1.1.Consent form for educators and parents

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/focus group may be audio recorded	YES NO
I agree that direct quotations from my interview may be used by the researcher 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.	YES NO
I agree that other researchers may use the information I provide in my interview	YES NO

…… (signature)

…… (name of participant)

…… (date)

…… (signature)

…… (name of researcher)

…… (date) Appendix B2

Title of the study: The effects of COVID-19 on the teaching and learning relationship between learners, parents and educators: A case study of a school in Soweto

1.1.Consent form for focus group

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 focus group may be audio recorded	YES NO
I agree that direct quotations from my focus group may be used by the researcher in their research report	YES NO
I agree that my participation will remain anonymous (my name will not be used by the researcher in their research report)	YES NO
I agree that other researchers may use the information I provide in my focus group (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)

…… (name of researcher/person seeking consent)

…… (date)

6.6.3. Appendix C: Gauteng Department of Education Approval Letter

Appendix J: Gauteng Department of Education Approval Letter



DBE permission letter
.pdf

Appendix K: Ethical Clearance Certificate



ETHICAL CLEARENCE
CERTIFICATE.pdf

Appendix L: Ethics Training certificate



Yonela Mbobo
Introduction to ethics

Appendix M: School Permission Letter



Morris Isaacson
Permision letter.pdf

6.6.4. Appendix E: Interview Guide

Title of the study: the effects of COVID-19 on the teaching and learning relationship between learners, parents and educators.

Focus groups discussion Assent forms

I……hereby confirm that:

I have been given explanation of the research that Yonela Aphelele is conducting on the effects of COVID-19 on the relationship between learners, parents and educators.

I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary

I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time when I wish to do so

I understand that I have the right not to answer questions that I do not feel comfortable with

I understand and give consent to the interview being audio recorded

I understand that the finding of this study will be processed into a research report and/or publication

I understand that any information that I will share will cannot be kept confidential due to the nature of focus groups/group interviews

I understand that pseudonym will be used in all references to the information that I share during the interview

I understand that the university policy allows researchers to keep data at least for 5 years after publication of the findings or 6 years if no publication

If you wish for a copy of the finding summary, please tick below:

I hereby request a copy of the summary findings

Signed by on at

Signed by researcher

Title of the study: The effects of COVID-19 in the teaching and learning relationship between learners, parents and educators

Interview schedule for educators

This research is being conducted on all educators that could have been affected by COVID-19 pandemic at Morris Isaacson Secondary School to gain insights on the effects that COVID-19 has had on the relationship between educators, learners and parents. In addition, the study aims to contribute to the development of services that enhances and strengthens the relationship between home and school, and parental involvement. All the information that you will disclose will only be used for the purpose of this research and will not be revealed and released with anyone who is not part of this research. Furthermore, the researcher will make sure that your identity is protected and anonymous.

This schedule is designed to explore how educators have experienced COVID-19 and how it affected the relationship they had with learners and parents

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. Gender

2. Race

3. Age

4. Highest qualification

5. Experience in education (How long have you been a teacher for?)

SECTION B: AN INVESTIGATION OF THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

1. How has COVID-19 affected the education system?

2. In what ways has COVID-19 affected the school? Attendance, losses, fears and pass rate?

3. How did the school you work at responding to the educational disruptions?

4. How did you find the implementation of online learning and what were the challenges around it?

5. How did resources influence your experience in distance learning such as internet connection, computer malfunctions, lack of a quiet space?

SECTION C: AN EXPLORATION OF HOW COVID-19 HAS AFFECTED LEARNERS, PARENTS AND EDUCATORS

1. How was teaching affected by the COVID-19 pandemic at your school?

2. How has COVID-19 affected you as an educator negatively? Are there any positive experiences that came out?

3. In what ways has COVID-19 affected the relationship between yourself and learners in the school?

4. In your school, in what ways did COVID-19 affect the communication between the school and home?

SECTION D: AN EXPLORATION OF HOW COVID-19 HAS SHAPED THE LEARNERS, PARENTS AND EDUCATOR'S ROLES

1. What roles did you take on as an educator before COVID-19?

2. Are there any additional roles you had to play due to COVID-19 in the school and in education?

3. Are there any roles that you had to stop, and how did that affect you?

SECTION E: A DETERMINATION OF THE SUPPORT SYSTEMS AVAILABLE IN STRENGTHENING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT ON THEIR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

1. In what ways were parents encouraged to be involved in the education of their learners during COVID-19 period by the school?

2. What types of services and support were available for continuous learning and communication between school and home during covid-19 for educators?

3. Do you think the support systems that were provided were effective? Support your answer.

Title of the study: The effects of COVID-19 on the teaching and learning relationship between learners, parents and educators

Interview schedule for parents

Introduction

This research is being conducted on all parents whose children have been academically affected by COVID-19 pandemic at Morris Isaacson Secondary School to gain insights on the effects that COID-19 has had on the relationship between parents, learners and educator. In addition, the study aims to contribute to the development of services that enhances and strengthens the relationship between home and school, and parental involvement. All the information that you will disclose will only be used for the purpose of this research and will not be revealed and released with anyone who is not part of this research. Furthermore, the researcher will make sure that your identity is protected and anonymous.

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. Gender

2. Race

3. Age

4. Highest qualification

5. Where do you live?

6. How many people do you live with?

7. Are you employed?

SECTION B: AN INVESTIGATION THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

1. How has COVID-19 affected the education system?

2. In what ways has COVID-19 affected the school your child (ren) goes to? Attendance, losses, fears and pass rate?

3. How did the school your child (ren) go to respond to the educational disruptions?

4. As a parent of a learner at a school, how did you find the implementation of online learning and what were the challenges you experienced around it?

5. Was there a conclusive space to teach and learn during COVID-19 where you live?

6. How did resources influence your experience in assisting your child with distance learning such as internet connection, computer malfunctions, lack of a quiet space?

SECTION C: AN EXPLORATION HOW COVID-19 HAS AFFECTED LEARNERS, PARENTS AND EDUCATORS

1. How was teaching affected by the COVID-19 pandemic at your school?

2. How has COVID-19 affected you as a parent negatively? Are there any positive experiences that came out?

3. In what ways has the COVID-19 affected the relationship between yourself and children?

4. In what way has the COVID-19 pandemic affected your relationship with the school and educators?

5. In your school, in what ways did COVID-19 affect the communication between the school and home?

SECTION D: AN EXPLORATION OF HOW COVID-19 HAS SHAPED THE LEARNERS, PARENTS AND EDUCATOR'S ROLES

1. What roles did you take on in the education of your child(ren) as a parent before COVID-19?

2. Are there any additional roles you had to play due to COVID-19 in the school and in education?

3. Are there any roles that you had to stop, and how did that affect you?

SECTION E: A DETERMINATION OF THE SUPPORT SYSTEMS AVAILABLE IN STRENGTHENING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT ON THEIR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

1. In what ways were parents encouraged to be involved in the education of their learners during COVID-19 period by the school?

2. What types of services and support were available for continuous learning and communication between school and home during COVID-19 for parents?

Were those available services and support systems effective?

Title: The effects of COVID-19 on the teaching and learning relationship between learners, parents and educators

Focus group schedule

Introduction

As a Social Work Masters student in the School of Human and Community Development at the university of the Witwatersrand, I am conducting academic research study entitled "The effects of covid-19 on the relationship between learners, parents and educators". The main goal for the research study is to find out the different ways that COVID-19 has affected learning and involvement in educations with the hope that it assists with the establishment of better and effective strategies to strengthen the relationship between school and home for the benefit of learners. The information to be gathered by this focus group discussion schedule is highly private and confidential and is going to be used for academic purposes only. You are, therefore, kindly requested to feel free to participate in the focus group discussion. Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time during the process. Any participant is much appreciated, as the completion of this study will result in obtaining my qualification.

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. Gender
2. Age
3. Race
4. Language
5. Grade
6. Number of years have you been at this school
7. Where do you live?
8. Who/how many people stay with you at home?

SECTION B: AN INVESTIGATION OF THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

1. In what ways has COVID-19 impacted your studies/ schoolwork?
2. How did you find the implementation of online learning and challenges did you experience?

3. Did you have a conclusive space to study during COVID-19?

4. How did resources influence your experience in distance learning such as internet connection, computer malfunctions, lack of a quiet space?

SECTION C: AN EXPLORATION HOW COVID-19 HAS AFFECTED LEARNERS, PARENTS, AND EDUCATORS

1. Could you please give us a brief description of your relationship with your educators/school before COVID-19?

5. How has COVID-19 affected your relationship with your educators and your school?

6. Could you please give us a brief description of your relationship with your parents/guardians before COVID-19?

7. How has COVID-19 affected your relationship with your parents?

An exploration how COVID-19 has shaped the learners, parents and educator's roles

1. What roles did you take on during before COVID-19 at school and at home?

2. Are there any additional roles you had to play due to COVID-19 at home or school?

3. Are there any roles that you had to stop, and how did that affect you and your performance at school?

SECTION D: A DETERMINATION OF THE SUPPORT SYSTEMS AVAILABLE IN STRENGTHENING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT ON THEIR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

1. Did you receive any form of support during COVID-19 as learner?

2. In what ways were you supported?

4. What types of services and support were available for continuous learning and communication between school and home during COVID-19 for your parents? and in what ways?

5. Did you find those support services effective?

6.6.6. Appendix F: Permission from school

Morris Isaacson High School

EMIS NO: 132571
Website: www.morrisisaacsonhigh.co.za E-mail: principal@morrisisaacsonhigh.co.za Tel/Fax: (011) 930 2389
Enquiries: Mr X.C. Mayisela - 1349 Mphuthi Street, Central Western Jabavu. Soweto. P.O. Box 11 Kwa-Xuma 1868

TITLE OF STUDY:

- **THE EFFECTS OF COVID-19 ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LEARNERS, PARENTS AND EDUCATORS: A CASE STUDY OF A SCHOOL IN SOWETO.**

We the above-mentioned school hereby granted permission / approval to Yonela Aphelele Mbobo (Student No:1778162) to conduct the research regarding the mentioned above. We highly appreciate to co-operate with you,

YOURS IN EDUCATION