



UNIVERSITY OF
KWAZULU-NATAL
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YAKWAZULU-NATALI

**Teachers' views on the psychological influence
of COVID-19 on underprivileged primary
school learners**

by

Natlee Naicker

213537567

**A research dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of MASTER OF EDUCATION**

(Educational Psychology)

Supervisor: Mrs Sibusisiwe Ndinisa

School of Education

Edgewood Campus

University of Kwa-Zulu Natal (2023)

Declaration

I, Natlee Naicker declare that:

This study is a presentation of my original research work. Wherever contributions of another individual are involved, every effort was made in indicating this clearly, with due reference to the literature, acknowledgement of collaborative research and discussions. This research task was compiled under the guidance of Ms Ndinisa from the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal (Edgewood Campus).

Students' signature: n.naicker Date: 30/11/2023

Supervisors' signature:  Date: 01/12/2023

Dedication

I dedicate this study to my son, it was a difficult journey to have him. I pursued my Masters in Education Psychology to dim my attention from being unable to conceive. I began my journey without him, compiled my research whilst he was still in my womb and completed my study when he turned one. This research task is dedicated to him, Lebron Kole Naidoo. You made mommy aim for the stars while praying for her angel

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The journey to the completion of my Masters degree in Educational Psychology has demanded a lot of time, perseverance in times of adversity and hard work. I place on record my sincere thanks and gratitude to:

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2. My husband Dillen Naidoo, who continuously encouraged me to pursue my dreams and was so patient and helpful throughout my study. The wisdom, love, guidance and support that I have received from him are undoubtedly the reason I am able to succeed.
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5. And most importantly, my supervisor, Mrs. S. Ndinisa, for the guidance and wisdom in compiling this research, her warm care and compassion towards her students is impeccable.

Acronyms

COVID-19	Corona Virus Disease
NICD	The National Institute for Communicable Diseases
SARS COV 2	Severe acute respiratory syndrome corona virus 2
SGB	School governing body
WHO	World Health Organisation
WIFI	Wireless Fidelity

Key Words:

Aetiology, Covid-19, Epidemic, Pandemic

Abstract

In March 2020, South Africa had its first positive case of the deadly Corona virus (COVID-19). This was an unknown virus that had taken the livelihoods of many individuals. Not only did this virus steal the lives of loved ones, it had shifted and changed the growing mind of young learners and placed a hurdle in the way of the academics and future of our young learners. This study has therefore sought to explore the psychological influence of Covid-19 on underprivileged primary school learners from the teachers' point of view. We had to adhere to Covid-19 protocols and data could not be generated in person.

The study adopted a case study design drawing on an interpretive approach. A total of five teachers in one school were selected using a purposive sampling method and one on one focus group interviews and questionnaires were used to conduct this research. Upon gathering the data which was thematically analysed, the conflict theory was the lens through which the data was viewed through. The findings revealed that many learners have been psychologically affected due to Covid-19 mostly as a result of their financial standing in society, which had made it much harder for these learners to access the resources needed to cope well. Further, it became evident that Covid-19 has brought about a decrease in the mental well-being of young learners. Through remediation and support it may be possible to assist the affected learners to mental health.

Table of contents

DECLARATION.....	II
DEDICATION.....	III
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	IV
ACRONYMS.....	V
KEY WORDS:.....	V
AETIOLOGY, COVID-19, EPIDEMIC, PANDEMIC	V
ABSTRACT.....	VI
TABLE OF CONTENTS	VII
TABLE OF TABLES	X
TABLE OF FIGURES	X
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY.....	1
1.1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.2 BACKGROUND	1
1.3 RATIONALE	3
1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY	6
1.5 PROBLEM STATEMENT	6
1.6 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY	7
1.7 RESEARCH QUESTIONS	7
1.8 LOCATION OF THE STUDY	7
1.9 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	8
1.10 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS ISSUES.....	8
1.10.1 <i>Research methodology</i>	8
1.10.2 <i>Paradigm</i>	8
1.10.3 <i>Research approach</i>	8
1.10.4 <i>Research design</i>	9
1.10.5 <i>Sampling</i>	9
1.10.6 <i>Data generation</i>	9
1.10.7 <i>Trustworthiness</i>	9
1.11 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	9
1.12 LIMITATIONS TO THE STUDY	10
1.13 ARRANGEMENT OF CHAPTERS.....	10
1.13.1 <i>Chapter 1: Introduction</i>	10
1.13.2 <i>Chapter 2: Theoretical framework</i>	10

1.13.3	Chapter 3: Literature review.....	10
1.13.4	Chapter 4: Methodology.....	10
1.13.5	Chapter 5: Findings.....	11
1.13.6	Chapter 6: Conclusion and recommendations.....	11
1.14	SUMMARY	11
CHAPTER 2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....		12
2.1	INTRODUCTION	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
2.2	CONFLICT THEORY	12
2.3	INSIGHT OF THE THEORY.....	17
2.4	KEY TAKEAWAYS OF THE THEORY	18
2.5	LIMITATIONS OF THE THEORY	19
2.6	RELEVANCE OF THE THEORY TO THE STUDY	20
2.7	SUMMARY	21
CHAPTER 3 LITERATURE REVIEW		22
3.1	INTRODUCTION	22
3.2	BACKGROUND TO THE VIRUS	22
3.2.1	<i>Covid-19</i>	23
3.2.2	<i>Pandemic</i>	23
3.2.3	<i>Epidemic</i>	23
3.2.4	<i>Aetiology</i>	23
3.2.5	<i>Underprivileged schools:</i>	23
3.2.6	<i>Psychological impact:</i>	23
3.3	IMPACT ON LEARNERS' EDUCATION DUE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC	23
3.4	PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF COVID-19 ON LEARNERS	24
3.5	HOW THE PANDEMIC AFFECTED THE NEEDS OF LEARNERS	25
3.6	WHY DID THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AFFECT UNDERPRIVILEGED LEARNERS IN THE WAY THAT IT DID?.....	26
3.7	CHALLENGES DURING COVID-19 AND THE IMPACT IT HAD ON LEARNERS PSYCHOLOGICALLY	27
3.8	PSYCHO- SOCIAL AND MENTAL HEALTH WELL-BEING OF LEARNERS DURING COVID-19	29
3.9	EMPOWERMENT OF LEARNERS	32
3.10	SUMMARY	33
CHAPTER 4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....		34
4.1	INTRODUCTION	34
4.2	RESEARCH PARADIGM	34
4.3	RESEARCH APPROACH	35
4.4	RESEARCH DESIGN	36
4.5	SAMPLING	37
4.6	DATA GENERATION METHODS.....	38
4.6.1	<i>Focus group interviews</i>	38

4.6.2	<i>Open-ended questionnaires</i>	38
4.7	DATA ANALYSIS.....	39
4.8	TRUSTWORTHINESS.....	41
4.9	ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS.....	42
4.10	SUMMARY	43
CHAPTER 5 DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION.....		44
5.1	INTRODUCTION	44
5.2	PARTICIPANT DETAILS.....	44
5.3	THEMES FROM THE FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW.....	45
5.3.1	<i>Teachers understanding of Covid-19</i>	46
5.3.2	<i>Teachers understanding of the psychological impact of Covid-19 during lockdown</i>	47
5.3.3	<i>Pandemic’s effect on underprivileged learners</i>	48
5.3.4	<i>Challenges linking to psychological distress</i>	51
5.3.5	<i>Then versus now</i>	52
5.4	QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES.....	55
5.5	SUMMARY	59
CHAPTER 6 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION.....		60
6.1	INTRODUCTION	60
6.2	INSIGHT OF COVID-19 ON THIS RESEARCH TASK	60
6.3	SUMMARY OF THE STUDY	61
6.4	DISCUSSION.....	62
6.5	LIMITATIONS	62
6.6	RECOMMENDATIONS.....	63
6.7	SUMMARY	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
REFERENCES.....		65
APPENDIX 1: PERMISSION FROM KWAZULU NATAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION.....		72
APPENDIX 2: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO ACCESS SCHOOLS.....		73
APPENDIX 3 ETHICAL CLEARANCE.....		76
APPENDIX 4: LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT.....		77
APPENDIX 5: FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW SCHEDULE.....		79
APPENDIX 6: QUESTIONNAIRE		80
APPENDIX 7: EDITOR’S LETTER.....		83
APPENDIX 8: TURN IT IN REPORT		84

Table of tables

Table 5.1 Details of participants	45
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Table of figures

Figure 2.1 Representation of conflict theory in society (illustration by Hugo Lin)	18
Figure 3.1 Map on school closures during the Covid-19 pandemic	27
Figure 3.2 Data collected from a psychiatric learners's hospital in the United Kingdom	30
Figure 3.3 Reasons parents could not get specialty mental health services for their learners	31

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

Covid-19 is a pandemic which has affected the entire world, particularly learners, who attempts to make sense of the world were thwarted through the isolation imposed on them due to lockdowns. Their future academic growth and their psychological health were compromised. This research aims to identify the psychological influences of Covid-19 on underprivileged learners in a primary school and the challenges that these learners are faced with daily.

This chapter set out the introduction to this research study, firstly through the analysis of the background of the study as well as the rationale from a personal, professional and contextual view. This chapter also expands on the location in which the study is to be carried out.

1.2 Background

The World Health Organization (2020) mentions, the Coronavirus-19 (Covid-19) disease is known as an infectious disease which was caused by a scientifically newly discovered coronavirus. Most badly affected individuals have been those of which had underlying comorbidities such as heart disease, cancer, diabetes and so on, of which were most likely to develop serious illnesses. Further, the World Health Organization (2020) highlights the fact that the Covid-19 virus spreads primarily through a discharge from the nose or droplets of the saliva when an infected person coughs or sneezes. The National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD, 2021) adds, on the 3rd of March 2020, South Africa encountered its first Covid-19 positive case. In response to this discovery and the increase in positive cases, according to the South African Government News Agency, Mr Cyril Ramaphosa (The President of the Republic of South Africa) announced the initiation of a nationwide lockdown which began on the 26th of March 2020. The president's announcement followed a nationwide lockdown which came forward due to the number of confirmed positive cases increased in six-folds in just eight days from just 61 cases to an increased 402 cases. As a result of the lockdown measures, the Government of South Africa implemented strategies on containing the outbreak which includes the closure of schools, implementation of remote working policies, travel restrictions as well as the ban on the sale of alcohol.

According to Van Der Berg (2020), prior to the lockdown, 2.5 million learners had experienced a feeling of hunger and more than one third of learners who had died were severely malnourished. A Survey undertaken immediately by STATS SA and the Human Sciences Research Council (STATSA, 2021) have displayed an increase in child hunger since the lockdown, ever since many workers lost their income and led to learners no longer being able to receive subsidized meals at school. Further, Statistics SA (2021) makes reference to latest surveys in various countries that have demonstrated a consensus view (Figure 3.2) showing that many learners are at an increased risk for lasting psychological distress which also includes depression.

A significant number of days at school were lost by South African learners, of which the extent being dependent on their grade. According to the Department of Health (2021) and the government regulations in reviewing the size of the classrooms in South Africa (South African Schools Act, Norms and Standards, 2009), it is evident that almost half of South African learners were unable to practise social distancing in their classroom. Schools had to ensure that learners came to school on a rotational timetabling basis. They were required to sanitize and to use their masks at all times. In some cases, according to the rotational timetabling, learners were only present at school once a week, which influences the teacher being unable to complete the school curricular which would leave a gap in a child's education and such learning losses would have much lasting implications. Piragliatin (2020) mentions that learners were already going through mental health issues, however, since Covid-19 there was an evident increase in psychological reactions such as anxiety, tension and fear that would evidently proceed to psychological disorders such as an acute stress disorder, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and suicide. According to Shabane et al. (2021), 1.5 billion primary school learners were impacted globally. Psychological distress increases as pressure is put on a child to meet the standards of others around them in order to fit into society.

When the President of the Republic of South Africa decided to re-open the economy after the level 5 lockdown, whilst schools continued to remain closed, this had increased the risk of the learners being left unattended and alone which in turn raised questions over learners' safety and well-being. According to UNICEF (2021), rotational timetabling has resulted in primary school learners losing 54% of learning time. Sadly, this has put some learners one or two grades behind in content. Due to their failing or underperforming, they tend to lose their value and self-worth and often times poor performance leads to depression and anxiety when associating with learners who are above average. The coronavirus has taken South Africa by storm.

Unfortunately, South African learners bear the brunt of the repercussions Covid-19 has on the country and their schooling. Covid-19 has impacted the livelihoods of learners and their families, most especially impacting learners' psychological health and academic well-being.

Many parts of the World were affected due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Countries such as China and USA established a total lockdown which compromised the schooling curriculum in primary and high schools as well as also impacting tertiary institutes as well. In relation to Wikipedia (2021), the Covid-19 pandemic had also affected many educational systems across the world, which had led to the near-total closure of many or most schools, early childhood education services, universities and colleges. Wikipedia (2021) specifically highlighted school closures in USA which not just impacted students, their families and teachers but also had far reaching societal and economic consequences. In response towards the pandemic, school closures had also shed some light on various economic and societal issues, amongst others, student debt, food insecurity, digital learning and, in extreme cases, homelessness. Such an impact placed severe stress on disadvantaged families, causing an interruption in learning, childcare problems, and unemployment. Such detriments of the pandemic may hold a lasting psychological impact on school going learners. Chaabane et al. (2021) further mention that, even though a school is meant to mainly provide knowledge and skills, schools also provide a healthy environment for the functioning and well-being of a child. For learners with mental health needs, schools are seen as a crucial provider of resources that learners depend on.

1.3 Rationale

The Covid-19 pandemic had an extensive impact on the growth and development of mostly learners in primary schools in specific ways. In this stage of a child's life, education and schooling serve as a fundamental foundation for their entire schooling career. If a child has missed a gap of 2 years due to an interrupted school calendar, this could be a set-back to achieving a firm foundation of knowledge and skills, leading to promotion to the next grade, and resulting in a lack of sufficient content and structure.

Personal rationale:

As an educator in a government school in a designated poverty-stricken area. I have witnessed a significant change in learners' attitudes and behaviour as compared to previous years. In one specific encounter at school, it has been observed that learners are more violent in various situations, as compared to the past. Some learners are victims of sexual and physical abuse owing to the lockdown and alcohol restrictions, as some parents are dependent on alcohol and

took their withdrawal frustrations out on their kids in the form to abuse. A distinct scenario that transpired during my break duty was at the food nutritional station where lunch is offered daily. I had witnessed a child take his lunch container and violently throw it at another learner for cutting the line, and the other learner retaliated by taking his fork and piercing it into the learner's skin. Given my surprise of witnessing such a situation, I was in extreme shock as I had taught both learners for almost three years and I have never witnessed such unacceptable behaviour as such. Upon questioning both learners, I had brought to my attention that they are both extremely hungry and it had been days since their last meal. One had mentioned that both his parents no longer work due to the Covid-19 pandemic and could not afford to cater for all their learners. The other mentioned that he is alone with his younger siblings at home and very seldom do they get freshly home-cooked meals. Therefore, he longed for the meals which have been prepared at school. Through such a volatile experience the huge ripple effect that Covid-19 has had not just on adults but on learners as well was highlighted. Learners were left hungry, which caused them to become violent. In other cases, learners came from child-headed homes which has also resulted in malnutrition and in addition added adult responsibility on young learners. Such factors not only impaired the learners' character and their personality but also impacted their psychological behaviour and academic performance in schools.

Professional perspective:

Covid-19 has changed the face of childhood in South Africa, according to UNICEF (2021), which further mentions that the effect of the pandemic was determined partly by the length of time the crisis persisted. The longer time taken, the more extensive the repercussion would be on the child's education, nutrition, mental health and well-being. Even though learners are more susceptible to getting sick and spreading the disease, this may be a minor issue as compared to the other effects that the easing of the lockdowns restrictions and the gradual reopening of economic activities would have displayed, of the pandemic's increased impact on youth and childhood.

Learners' nutrition, safety and health have been compromised while their education has been continuously disrupted. According to the statistics from the South African Child Welfare Society (Child Welfare South Africa, 2021), there has been a 38,99% increase in child abuse as compared to previous years. This data coincides with reports from healthcare facilities of a consistent and concerning number of severe injuries amongst child abuse referrals, according to UNICEF South Africa (2021). Such data can further provide evidence that the Coronavirus-

induced lockdown had an effect on the increase of child abuse which impacted both the psychological and academic development of the child. Given the repercussions that Covid-19 had on learner's academic performance as well as the physical and psychological challenges, it had aroused in me a great motivation towards this research, hoping to gain knowledge in assisting learners to hand to such volatile challenges.

Professionally trained teachers have found it increasingly difficult to assist learners that have been affected directly by the Coronavirus pandemic. Teachers were not professionally trained to assist learners in overcoming their psychological distress; these affected learners were unable to get any assistance and suffered in silence. Professionally trained psychology healthcare workers were at this time standing at the forefront during this pandemic, hospitals were more than full to capacity with patients and there was no availability for mental help and counselling.

Contextual perspective:

According to South African Consensus (2022), it has been reported that 2.2 million jobs between April- June 2020 in South Africa have been lost. Livelihoods have depreciated which has a direct impact on learners. Christina Muhinga, a UNICEF SA Representative mentioned that the lives of learners as well as their future have been threatened in South Africa. Clark (2020) makes mention that the restrictions for the lockdown regulations played a negative role on the future of both women and learners. The ban on the sale of alcohol played a significant role on the increase of Gender Based Violence (GBV) statistics as parents who are alcoholics but do not have access to alcohol tend to build up their anger and frustration and tend to take out that frustration on more vulnerable individuals, such as women and learners (Lander et al, 2013). The loss of jobs impacted on families, which had almost no income, causing learners to starve; in some cases, the school nutritional plan was the only meal that some learners got to eat. In relation, the SAHRC Charter of Learners Basic Education Rights (SAHRC, 2012) mentions that every child has a right to a basic education and as well as the right to shelter. The Bill of Rights (section 28) in the Constitution mentions that every child has a right to basic nutrition, shelter, healthcare and social services as well as the right to be protected from maltreatment, neglect, abuse or degradation. According to Save the Learners (2020), although schools opened again in 2020 and schools started to regain a semblance of life, interviews with learners indicated that they feel uninspired, lacked motivation and needed support. The Covid-

19 pandemic has impacted learners not only on their academic achievements in the classroom but as well as their mental well-being.

Covid-19 has not only made headlines in South Africa, of course. According to OECD Policy Responses to Corona virus (Covid-19) 2022, the Covid-19 crisis has been the driving force behind school closures in 188 countries. This has heavily disrupted 1.7 billion learners, youth as well as their families as distance learning prowled into homes, disrupting traditional timetabling as well as adding additional costs to parents, many of whom had to make provision for Internet access in their homes to enable a successful platform for distance learning. In addition, according to the New York Times (2020), distance learning presents many challenges, largely undocumented, which in actuality increase the risk of a larger disengagement or dropout rate, mainly amongst learners who find themselves in homes with difficult socio-economic backgrounds and family situations. Such an impact may have detrimental effects on a learner's future endeavours as a whole.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The Covid-19 pandemic has affected every individual no matter their diverse locations in society. More so, the biggest impact of Covid-19 is the psychological impact on learners. The study is significant in the aspect that it focuses on the influence that this virus had on the socio-economically disadvantaged learners their lived experiences in society and the everyday challenges that these learners face that affects them. These experiences will be viewed through the lens of their teachers. Upon analysing this study, a strategic plan can be achieved to assist learners who were impacted psychologically by the virus. An understanding of the challenges that both learners and teachers faced during the pandemic due to their lack of financial resources during the national lockdown has had a ripple effect on the psychological well-being of learners.

1.5 Problem Statement

According to Formplus Blog (2022), a research problem statement captures the purpose of a study in a clear, simple and direct term. The research problem in this research task is the psychological influence of Covid-19 on underprivileged learners, or, in other words, the repercussions of Covid-19 on learners, in particular in under-privileged areas. This research aims to achieve an understanding of the influence that the virus has had on these learners, from a psychological perspective, due to the fact that the pandemic required a national lockdown. The lockdown was initiated by the President of the Republic of South Africa, Mr Cyril

Ramaphosa. During this lockdown, schools were closed and remote learning was established. This was imposed as a disadvantage to learners who come from poor families, as parents were not in a position to adapt to technological advancements, especially not during a pandemic. This impacted learners academically, as well as psychologically, which will further be discussed in this study. This research is relevant as it serves to understand the psychological influence of learners which is relevant in the study of Educational Psychology, to establish strategies to assist learners that were affected psychologically during this pandemic.

1.6 Objectives of the study

1. To understand teachers' views of the psychological influence of the Covid-19 pandemic on underprivileged primary school learners.
2. To explore teachers' views of how the Covid -19 pandemic influenced underprivileged primary school learners.
3. To explore teacher's views of why the Covid-19 pandemic influenced underprivileged primary school learners in the way that they do.

1.7 Research questions

1. What are teachers' understandings of the psychological influence of the Covid-19 pandemic on underprivileged primary school learners?
2. How does the psychological influence of Covid-19 pandemic, from teachers' perspectives, affect underprivileged primary school learners?
3. Why does the psychological influence of Covid-19 pandemic, as viewed by teachers, affect underprivileged primary school learners in the way that they do?

1.8 Location of the study

Teachers from Cornubia Primary School (The actual school name has been replaced with a pseudonym) are the research participants chosen for this study. Data was gathered from this school in the Cornubia area in Durban which falls into the Mafukuzela Pinetown District, Department of Education. The school is an under-resourced mainstream Government-funded, non-school fees paying school, which provides a breakfast and lunch meal daily for the learners and parents in the community as well as stationery and uniform to all learners admitted to the school. There are an estimated 1 300 learners with 34 teachers' at present. The school is located within a community of RDP houses; this community comes from poverty-stricken

backgrounds. The majority of the residents are unemployed. Violence and substance abuse are rife in this community. The community lacks municipal libraries and education centres. The community does not have many resources available to young growing minds.

1.9 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework draws on conflict theory. Conflict theory (Conflict theory, 2013) is attributed to Karl Marx, who was a 19th Century German political philosopher and who argued that competition over limited resources was inherent in society. According to Nickerson (2021), conflict theory focuses on the competition between different groups of people based on their status within society. This theory will be analysed in understanding how competition for resources during this pandemic has impacted underprivileged primary school learners psychologically. Learners that came from homes that lacked financial stability prior to the pandemic were unable to acquire basic needs, thus making it even more difficult to function during this pandemic.

1.10 Research methodology and trustworthiness issues

1.10.1 Research methodology

Sileyew (2019) states that research methodology is the path through which researchers conduct their research on their specific phenomena. An array of methods was used to determine how the research should be carried out. Further, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) add that research methodology refers to the strategic and scientific manner in obtaining information that is relevant to a study, which would involve the paradigm, approach, research design, sampling, data generation methods and sampling

1.10.2 Paradigm

According to Cohen et al. (2011), a paradigm can be seen as a shared identity of a research community that engages in a common belief system or a set of principles and have a consensus with regards to the type of questions that will be answered and the type of problems to be conducted and investigated. The research paradigm used in this research task is the critical paradigm. This paradigm is also critical regarding the discriminatory and unequal ways in which society is organized; this paradigm will focus on the inequality of the learners that has been affected during this pandemic.

1.10.3 Research approach

The research approach is a standpoint of which is used by researchers when producing new knowledge or developing an insight of a specific topic or issue (Singleton & Straits, 1999).

This study will follow a qualitative approach as five teachers will be selected to gain an understanding of the impact of Covid-19 on underprivileged primary school learners. According to Stephens (2009), a qualitative approach to research displays an understanding from the views of a unique participant who is part of a particular context and interaction.

1.10.4 Research design

According to Cohen et al. (2011), a research design refers to the strategic framework which adopts methods as well as procedures to obtain data about a specific topic, which includes sampling methods and data collecting tools. The research design is a case study. In relation to this, Stephens (2009) mentions that a case study design can be understood as a personal enquiry in investigating a phenomenon in its natural context.

1.10.5 Sampling

Sampling is a strategy used when selecting participants that can be seen as a representative of the population about which the researcher aims to investigate (Terreblanche & Durrheim, 1999). The participants, teachers from an underprivileged primary school were purposely selected by the researcher to participate in the study to share their significant experiences.

1.10.6 Data generation

Mears (2009) mentions that data collection is seen as a process of gathering information about the investigated topic. Since the research will be based on the experiences of the impact of Covid-19 on underprivileged primary school learners from an educator's view, data will be generated through the means of a questionnaire and a focus group interview with teachers. Wodak and Krzyzanowski (2008) mentions that a focus group is seen as a group of individuals sharing ideas about some common interests stipulated by the researcher, in order to gain knowledge.

1.10.7 Trustworthiness

Davis (2021) mentions that trustworthiness had become an important concept as it allows researchers in describing the virtues of the research. There are four components of trustworthiness which are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. The research task will ensure trustworthiness is maintained.

1.11 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations were established as the researcher firstly requested permission from the research ethics committee of the University of KwaZulu Natal to commence the research. Further a consent letter was sent to the Department of Education requesting permission to

conduct research in a mainstream school in Durban. A gatekeeper consent form was sent to the School Principal requesting permission to commence research in that particular school. Lastly, a consent form was given to participants, which are teachers, requesting consent to be interviewed and to complete a questionnaire. In all aspects, each stakeholder will be advised that no personal details of the School or participants will be divulged.

1.12 Limitations to the study

It is of great importance to note that the research was conducted during Covid-19, where experiences was current. Remediation, in the sense of counselling, in assisting both teachers and learners is poor or often times absent. The study is limited as only one school was sampled. It can be helpful to suggest responses from other participants from other areas broader than Durban to respond to similar issues that have been affecting learners academically and psychologically.

1.13 Arrangement of chapters

1.13.1 Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter focuses on introducing the research task by providing a clear indication of the research issue. The research problem is structurally defined and is placed into context. The background and objectives are explained in detail. This chapter serves as an outline of this research task and the layout design of this chapter.

1.13.2 Chapter 2: Theoretical framework

This chapter provides a theoretical vision to the study through the presentation of conflict theory. This theory will look at inequality in different areas and how conflicts due to resources will impact the issues being considered in the study.

1.13.3 Chapter 3: Literature review

This chapter aims to present literature based on how Covid-19 has impacted underprivileged primary school learners, giving a more in-depth understanding of the research task.

1.13.4 Chapter 4: Methodology

This chapter is to closely discuss the research procedures that were used, then the research paradigm. It sets out the research approach followed, as well as the methodology of the research and the method in which the data generation would be analysed.

1.13.5 Chapter 5: Findings

This chapter makes provision for a detailed analysis of the primary research, i.e. questionnaire and focus group interviews, which will build up to the conclusion and final chapter. This chapter details the research findings in relation to the research aims and objectives and the primary data collected. In this chapter, conclusions will be drawn and these findings will be linked to strategically find solutions in assisting these learners which have been impacted by Covid-19. This chapter focuses on understanding the influences on the psychological development of affected learners.

1.13.6 Chapter 6: Conclusion and recommendations

This chapter comprises a summary and concluding comments for this research study, as well as offering recommendations, based on the findings from primary data captured in chapter 5.

1.14 Summary

Chapter 1 has been an introductory chapter that enables the reader to understand the aim of this research. Factors explaining the focus of the research are explained in this chapter. The arrangements of chapters are also discussed to acknowledge the flow of this research task. Chapter 2 will focus on the theoretical framework in relation to the study.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter served as an introduction to this research study by setting out what this study is based on and what will follow. This chapter will focus on the theoretical framework that is used in this study. It aims to demonstrate the specialized concepts that are relevant to the topic of this research study as well as to relate profoundly to the broader areas of knowledge being considered. Conflict theory focuses on the competition over limited resources between different groups of people, based on their status within society. The chapter will further explore the relation between conflict theory and the proposed research. It investigates how inequality in access to resources has had an impact during the Covid-19 pandemic. This chapter will focus on the theory, its key takeaways, limitations of the theory and as well as the relevance of this theory in relation to this study.

2.2 Conflict theory

The theoretical framework draws on conflict theory. The origin of conflict theory is attributed to Karl Marx, who was a 19th Century German political philosopher and a famous advocate for communism. He argued that competition over limited resources was inherent in society. Karl Marx developed this theory in response to his understanding of the exploitation of the poor by rich capitalists. He therefore advocated for the poor to rise against the rich to gain equality in society. (Nickerson, 2021)

Omer and Jabeen (2016) mentions that Karl Marx views society as an arena of social conflict. The function and role of social institutions can be greater understood by their economic system. In Marxist doctrine, social institutions and educational systems work in conjunction with each other. There are two main classes that makes up the basis of the social institution, first being the bourgeoisie (the middle class) and the proletariat (those in poverty). A status quo is built for the elites, providing a higher standard of education, greater resources and superior facilities that are easily available to the bourgeoisie.

According to Hayes (2020), conflict theory is based on the ideology that society is in a profound state of perpetual conflict due to the competition for limited resources within society. Through conflict theory it can be assumed that the social order is primarily maintained by power and domination, rather than by conformity and consensus. In addition, conflict theory addresses how those with wealth and power try to hold on to the power by suppressing the poor and powerless. In the basic premise of conflict theory, individuals/groups within the society will ensure that they work to the maximum to make sure their own wealth and power is not compromised.

Conflict theory is best suited for this research study as the theory focuses on the inequality and marginalization of individuals based on their empowerment or disempowerment in society. Covid-19 has impacted schooling in an extensive manner, whereby schools had to make provision for remote learning despite their functionality in society. Many school going learners had no access to technology and WIFI connection needed to give them access to virtual learning. This has impacted those learners from underprivileged backgrounds as, once school has reopened, learners that were from underprivileged households were behind in classwork and curriculum content and in often cases were either failing the year or dropping out of school as they had fallen behind. Often times, learners were unable to complete extensive content coverage at home as either homework or self-learning, due to the lack of financial aid to assist with access of technology. Often libraries and resource centres were closed as the surge in Covid-19 positive cases were on a rise and in some cases parental involvement was limited as parents work odd hours of their shifts to ensure they could earn extra money to assist in the running order of the household.

Viner et al. (2015) state that such inequalities can pressure learners in developing a low self-concept, where school and academic failure can lead to psychological harm such as depression or suicidal thoughts. The pressure that many learners faced during the pandemic has had an overall lasting detriment towards their future self mentally, emotionally and physically. Conflict theorists believes that conflict exist between socio-economic groups. This research study through conflict theory will ensure understanding of how social structures can affect learners that are admitted into public school systems.

Conflict theory can also provide an understanding of how experiences in schools can affect learners for the rest of their lives (Hayes, 2020). Such experiences may be linked to parental and caregiver loss, which can lead a child into depression and psychological harm. Given the

environment of this research study, the social group identified through their socio-economic status in society will be explored, by looking at inequality in society and how such inequality had impacted a child's education during the Covid-19 pandemic, further resulting on implications for a child's psychological well-being that has also been on the forefront during this pandemic.

According to Open Education Psychology Dictionary (2013), conflict theory can suggest that the elite group of individuals use their power to enact and pass laws to increase and protect their own economic interests and thus lower classes can be reduced to poverty. Due to this mind-set of communities, areas in such disproportionate situations find extreme difficulty in overcoming poverty and being able to promote the betterment of their future. In relation to Covid-19, many households in impoverished areas were unable to making an income as many companies were closed due to lack of profit margins and many establishments were retrenching workers as there was no need for them. This has put on a further strain as parents and caregivers were unable to meet the monthly household expenditure but to also maintain technological advancements in assisting home schooling and online learning which could not be met. This in turn disadvantaged learners who belonged to the underprivileged households as they lacked funds to further access teaching and learning materials on a virtual platform.

From conflict theory perspective, the focal point is the social inequality reached from this pandemic. In relation to social distancing policies being put in place, individuals earning in the middle- or high-income brackets are much more unlikely to encounter the virus as they were in a position to afford to take time off from work or have their duties being performed from home. However, people in low income homes are more likely to encounter the virus and in turn lose their income and source of provision. It was evident that social disparities displayed a role in determining who was vulnerable to the virus. Therefore, this confirms through conflict theory that a certain array of population was more vulnerable than others. Consequently, individuals of lower income households are not financially equipped to live in environmentally clean neighbourhoods and therefore face higher risks of being infected with this virus and dying from it. The higher rates of death amongst disadvantaged communities display evidence that there is inequality in our healthcare provision. However, individuals belonging to a higher socio-economic status are more likely to receive prompt medical aid as they could afford a medical insurance. This inequality in society has driven many lower income households to experience major losses in their homes, resulting in psychological distress not only for adults in the household but little learners as well.

According to Mishra (2013), conflict arises out of the depths of inequality. Inequality can form a broad spectrum of economic, political and social marginalization. Based on materialism, Karl Marx posited that groups and individuals within a society have different amounts of material and non-material resources. However, this relationship is unequal and empowers the powerful groups to dominate, for example, in educationally structured programmes.

It follows from conflict theory that the elites control the weak and poor in society. This is directly linked to the impact of Covid-19 on mental health, where the wealthy are at an advantage as they have better access to quality healthcare. The less advantaged people in society are therefore particularly affected by mental health problems. The pandemic has created major economic challenges that have increased the financial pressures of many families. Economic pressures, as demonstrated in previous recessions, are having a significant impact on mental health, even when not accompanied by Covid-19-related restrictions such as social distancing and lockdowns (Friedline et al., 2021). First, the period of economic downturn is associated with factors such as job losses, declines in income and increased debt, which are associated with lower psychological well-being and increased prevalence of mental disorders. The pandemic-related recession has further exacerbated the situation as learners shifted from their childhood towards a stressful environment of a lack of nutrition and basic needs.

According to Du Plessis and Cain (2017), conflict theory engages in the purpose of education being to maintain social inequality and to preserve the power to those individuals who dominate society. However, conflict theorist does not sift upon education as being a social benefit or opportunity but rather act as a powerful means of maintaining power structure and creating a docile workforce for capitalist. The prevailing educational system perpetuates the status quo using indoctrination of the lower classes to ensure they become obedient workers (Du Plessis & Cain, 2017). In relation, schools develop the same skills, attitudes and values in the working classes to accept their position in the lower-class members that form society.

Mishra (2013) further states that conflict theorists contend the curriculum of schools' curriculum which favours the elite. Research shows that placement of learners is not based on their needs or merit however on the basis of their social class, race or their ethnic characteristics. In society there are two kinds of schools: Government schools and private schools.

Private schools are meant for the upper elite classes who are privileged in society and can afford to pay a higher salary, attract teachers who have had extensive technological experiences and

are more suitably qualified, and are in a financial position to purchase newer texts and more technological advancements. Students who are privileged enough to attend such schools gain substantial advantages in getting into elaborate colleges and universities, thus resulting in better job opportunities and professional higher paying placements. Students in less affluent government schools do not enjoy such privileges, as they are less likely to get accepted at good universities and institutions and hence are more likely to be attracted to low paying manual professions.

In relation to Covid-19 most schooling organizations were on complete lockdown and were therefore forced to close. In this result, students were asked to continue with teaching and learning on a virtual platform, such as online teacher-learner consultations which usually took place via Zoom with the use of WIFI internet connection and a computer device. Many students from the underprivileged social group did not have access to such devices and could not join such platforms as they were limited. Parents of the lower class were unable to assist learners as content may not fully be understood. Learners in underprivileged areas were unable to access local municipal libraries as those institutes were also closed due to the outbreak of Covid-19. When schools were reopened, learners of the lower class were disadvantaged as they missed online classes and were unable to self-learn due to lack of parental support and educational services. This however has marked a huge gap between academic achievement between the lower- and upper-class students, in turn affecting lower class learners psychologically, as they feel they are behind in academics and could be a major stressor (Sharp et al., 2020).

According to Omer and Jabeen (2016), social class inequality is deeply rooted in society. All organizations of life are subjected to the disparity, including educational institutions. Karl Marx believed that between the two classes being the ruling and the subject, the ruling remains on the same positions in society due to the economic superiority over the years as compared to the proletariat who has restricted social mobility. The existing social structure is based on class, according to Karl Marx, it is the ruling class which determines the choice of educational institution and consequently the future success or failure of learners.

There are a number of variances in relation to conflict theory; however, the principle involved will remain the same: competition in society with limited resources causes struggle and division in social classes. Conflict theory applies well to education and the situation of underprivileged learners, as resources are limited for lower-class learners. This restrains them from completing

the academic year due to lack of resources which in turn affects them psychologically due to their failure rate and lack of participation during lessons.

2.3 Insight of the theory

Nickerson (2021) mentions that conflict theory is a general term that covers a number of sociological approaches, which opposes functionalism and shares the common idea that the basic feature of all societies is inevitably the struggle between different groups for access to limited resources.

Figure 0.1 Representation of conflict theory in society (illustration by Hugo Lin)



Many individuals work extremely hard to make a living and break the chain of poverty. In this representation, the proletariat tries their best to ensure they survive on a daily basis (on the left) whereas the bourgeoisie (on the right) is able to live a lavish lifestyle. According to Karl Marx this system is called capitalism.

2.4. Key takeaways of the theory

- Conflict theory emphasizes looking at the history and events in a society in terms of structural power divisions, such as social class.
- Even though many modern sociologists call themselves conflict theorists, these early scholars are notable:
 - Karl Marx (1818 -1883)
 - Max Webber (1864-1920)
 - Talcott Parsons (1902-1979)
 - Ralf Dahrendorf (1929 -2009)

These scholars have formulated theories as to what causes conflict, the normalcy as well as the impact it has on society. Marxism emphasizes class conflict over economic resources. However, Weber (2019) suggests that conflict and inequality can be caused by power and status independently of class structures

Nickerson (2021) mentions that extreme poverty reveals the omnipresence of the divides of social class. The general cause of conflict, sociologists agree, is that conflict occurs due to the fact that groups have either excessive or limited resources.

2.5. Limitations of the theory

The main limitation of conflict theory is the fact that it overlooks society's stability. However, while society is in a constant state of change, the majority of the change is particularly small and often times goes unnoticed. Many of the broader elements of societies remain remarkably stable over time. Conflict theory focuses on both change and conflict, also keeping in mind the fact that neither conflict nor change necessarily leads to good outcomes (Cragun, et al.2011).

Regarding Nickerson (2021), one of the main limitations is the lack of presence of conflict theory in mainstream research. Much of the research carried out on conflict deals primarily with individual conflict rather than interclass conflict. Therefore, for this reason there may not be a sufficient developed scientific basis for upholding conflict theory. In such studies, the problem relates to data generation as typically only one set of participants, from one class, are used, as the basis for research, which limits the final conclusion.

Another limitation is viewed as the *obstacles of integration*, as this theory is effectively limited to certain environments. Incorporating conflict theory into environments such as home, throws up challenges. While conflict theory relates to social class relationships, it is much more difficult to bring that concept into family dynamics as the link between the two is extremely limited.

According to Hussein and Al-Mamary (2019), the negative view of society can be examined as a limitation to this theory as the conflict perspective on society presents a negative and conflicted state of society as normal behaviour. This theory acts to challenge the status quo and firmly believes that the elite class is responsible for enforcing social order on those who are destitute. Furthermore, conflict theory discounts all acts of kindness as having ulterior motives or a personal agenda. Humanitarian efforts such as acts of altruism, democracy and civil rights movements are regarded, in conflict theory, as designed to control the masses rather than to promote peace and social order.

Conflict theory lacks efficiency as tasks and responsibilities are divided amongst members of society in order to maintain balance and each individual or social unit must work together to create efficiency in the system. These systems are prompted to be exhibiting control of the environment and the tendency to change the systems.

2.6. Relevance of the theory to the study

Mishra (2013) mentions that conflict theory is solely based on dialectical materialism, and further that individuals and groups in social classes have a differing amount of material and non-material resources. According to Marx, in all stratified societies there are two major social groups, a ruling class and a working class. The ruling class (called the bourgeoisie) derives its power from ownership and control and the working class (called the proletariat). As a result, there is a basic conflict of interest between the two classes. In our society there are two kinds of schools, i.e. Government schools and private schools. The private schools are meant for the upper-class elite who are rich, as they can afford qualified and expertly trained teachers and purchase technologically advanced resources and were therefore able to continue with distance learning during the pandemic as they had access to technology. In contrast, students in less affluent government schools did not enjoy such advantages. They are less likely to go to tertiary institutions and therefore more likely to end up in labouring jobs, if at all. These learners were disadvantaged during the pandemic as they lacked money to purchase these devices and continue with distance learning. Conflict theory is relevant in this research as it serves to ensure the understanding that learners who came from an underprivileged background were disadvantaged during the pandemic as they fell part of the working class in society and resources were not easily accessible as they struggled with poverty. This displays the impact that Covid-19 had on social classes in society due to the resources that one had access to.

Further, this theory indicates the injustice between the two different classes. The pandemic was harsh and cruel to the underprivileged learners; they were not fortunate to receive good healthcare for loved ones that were severely affected by the virus and due to the inability of reaching towards prompt medical assistance, many loved ones succumbed to death. Often times, loved ones passed away in the presence of these learners. Due to this exposure of watching their loved ones die, they were affected psychologically and sadly were further limited in terms of access to counselling and mental health treatment to assist with such mental trauma.

2.7. Summary

This chapter serves to use critical theory in considering the psychological impact of underprivileged learners and in seeking to understand the social struggle between societal classes (upper and lower classes). This led to very different levels of access to resources during the Covid-19 pandemic which caused a lifelong effect on learners from the lower classes, affecting them psychologically. The next chapter provides a literature review based on the research study. It explores the work of past scholars on this phenomenon.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1. Introduction

The previous chapter focused on the theoretical framework through which the study will be analysed. This chapter serves to understand the phenomena through the basis of literature that captures the work of other researchers. This chapter will aim to understand the literature on the effects of Covid-19, learners' needs during the pandemic, the challenges that learners faced that impacted them psychologically, the psycho-social and mental health well-being of learners and lastly how empowerment could be provided during this pandemic.

3.2. Background to the virus

The Covid-19 (3.1.1) virus first became established in December 2019 when the China health authority had alerted the World Health Organization (WHO) of several cases of pneumonia of unknown aetiology in Wuhan in Central China. This virus was confirmed by testing a patient by using a sample of a throat swab. This pathogen was later renamed from 2019-nCov to a severe acute respiratory syndrome corona virus 2 (SARS-Cov-2) (3.1.4). As of January 2020, the World Health Organization declared Covid-19 outbreak as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) (Harapan et al., 2020).

The Covid-19 virus was identified as a pandemic. A pandemic is defined as an epidemic (3.2.3) that occurs worldwide or in very large areas, that crosses international boundaries and usually affects a very large number of people. The Covid-19 virus began in China and continued to spread in other regions in the world affecting millions of people as they come into contact with this virus, which in many cases led to death (Heath, 2011).

In relation to this study, an in-depth understanding was established in the comparison between the pandemic and how it has affected underprivileged learners. These learners are those who do not enjoy the rights and advantages that most learners in their age group have. Often times, underprivileged learners are equated to those being poor. However, being underprivileged is far more than just them coming from a low-income background. They also do not have access to quality education, food, medical care and shelter, which makes them vulnerable to malnutrition, diseases and exploitation. In essence, these learners who fall into the underprivileged group are robbed of a normal and happy childhood, something that every child deserves (Our Fathers House Soup Kitchen, 2021).

This pandemic (3.2.2) has robbed the livelihoods of many learners who are vulnerable due to situations beyond their control which would sadly impact on their future dreams and aspirations.

Definitions of key terms beside Covid-19: (Definitions derived from the Oxford English Dictionary)

3.2.1. Covid-19

An acute disease in humans caused by a coronavirus, which is characterized mainly by fever and cough and is capable of progressing to pneumonia. Galea et al. (2020)

3.2.2. Pandemic

Of a disease: epidemic over a very large area; affecting a large proportion of a population. Also: of or relating to such a disease.

3.2.3. Epidemic

Of an acute disease, esp. one that is not usually present in a region or population: affecting many individuals within a short period of time

3.2.4. Aetiology

An explanation or exposition of the origin or causation of a disease

3.2.5. Underprivileged schools:

Having less money and resources as compared to other schools

3.2.6. Psychological impact:

Any factor arising in the mind related to the mental and emotional state of a person

3.3. Impact on learners' education due to the Covid-19 pandemic

Thakur (2020) mentions that education is an important tool that enables an individual to understand their rights and duties towards their family, society as well as their country. The main weapon of education to improve both the present and future life. It also improves the confidence of a person, which is an important key to success. King (2011) reiterates this point by mentioning that education is fundamental to development and growth, and is achieved through development of the human mind.

Education is the most important asset that an individual can acquire. Education can break the chain of poverty, where a child can push out of their situation and grow a more successful future. During the pandemic, learners from underprivileged backgrounds were at a

disadvantage as they were asked to do online classes and remote learning. There was no parental support or help that was given to them. This resulted in many learners failing and dropping out of school as they felt disgruntled about the fact that they could not progress to the next grade.

Due to the National State of Disaster when the Covid-19 variant was detected in South Africa, since March 2020 South African schools went through irregular school timetables. Government school learners were asked to attend school once a week and others were encouraged to join the home-schooling. Thus, this study intends to explore the psychological influences of the Covid-19 pandemic on learners.

3.4. Psychological effects of Covid-19 on learners

According to the Department of Education (2020), the National School Nutrition Programme aids in providing a nutritious meal daily to all poorer primary and secondary schools. The objective of this initiative is to make provision of nutritious meals to those learners as to improve their ability to learn. According to the 2013/2014 annual report from the Department of Education (2020), this initiative Programme has reached more than nine million learners in quintile 1,2 and 3 schools. In relation to schools being closed due to the increase spread of the pandemic, many learners who fell part of quintile 1, 2 and 3 schools were left in starvation, as that 1 nutritious meal was probably the only meal they would eat for the day. According to APA (2020), hunger can harm the health and educational outcomes of learners and can also cause toxic stress. Learners tend to spend their limited mental reserves on their lack of resources and focus all their energy on food, which could lead to them neglecting other areas of their lives, such as their school work. Often times hunger can lead a child into health conditions such as kwashiorkor which could further contribute to depression as they continuously ponder on where their next meal will come from (Galler et al., 2010).

During the lockdown, not only were schools closed due to rise in infections, but adults were also requested to work from home to curb the infection rate. Alcohol availability was banned due to the many accidents that were caused adding pressure to healthcare providers and hospital admissions. Many adults are affected by substance abuse, mainly of alcohol. Due to their lack of access to alcohol, individuals tended to become violent to the vulnerable (women and learners). This act of violent and aggressive behaviour in a household has a ripple effect on learners and instils a growing fear in them of being abused physically and emotionally.

According to the World Health Organization (2019), learners become victims of violence and abuse, and in many cases, school is seen as the escape from reality. According to UNICEF (2021), school is seen as a safe haven for many learners as they feel protected from physical and emotional abuse. With schools being closed, learners had no escape from the abuse and were often affected by violence and aggression. Such abuse and violence impact a child's ability to think and function logically. Covid-19 has a ripple effect not only on learners' academics through the curriculum being trimmed in order to fit in with the time available, but also on their psychological health and well-being.

Due to the school calendar being trimmed, many curriculum changes were made with regard to completing the academic year. Thakur (2020) points out that there are different calibres of learners that make up the classroom. Slower learners may find immense difficulty in keeping up with the restricted curriculum which could lead to stress on the learner, as they realise the possibility of their incompetence or failure. Lack of interaction due to the learner having a learning difficulty could lead to the child being belittled or teased, which influences the learner's psychological well-being. (Thakur, 2020).

3.5. How the pandemic affected the needs of learners

According to the OECD policy responses to Coronavirus (OECD, 2021), the pandemic has had a profound impact not only on the health of learners but also on how they learn and live in society. At the peak of Covid-19, in more than 188 countries, 91% of enrolled learners worldwide had full school closure to prevent the spread of the virus. School closures had major influences especially on vulnerable students, who face further additional barriers. According to the US Department of Education (2020), the needs of learners differ in different socio-economic communities.

Often times, learners have a need for food supplies, where a school meal nutrition programme may be of assistance. According to UNICEF (2021), not only did the pandemic impact the health and economic outcomes in households but it also impacted the psycho-social well-being of learners. During the lockdown, learners had constrained access to play, socialization and physical contact that would have a critical impact on their psycho-social well-being and development. School closures have prevented learners from access to learning and limited their interaction with peers. Learners might feel that the new normal had left them lost and confused, which could lead to frustration and anxiety and may also cause mental lapses. This causes learners to isolate and hide their emotions and feelings.

UNICEF (2021) further explains that the lockdown has brought about an increase in violence, which includes gender-based violence, domestic violence or corporal punishment against learners and women. In relation to the movement restrictions, girls and boys who are victims of violence faced major obstacles in seeking help and accessing a good support system. Learners were traumatized by the pandemic, not only by losing loved ones but also by their lifestyle changes. Learners needed extreme support and care to move ahead and beyond the pandemic, which was harsh to their psychological well-being.

3.6. Why did the Covid-19 pandemic affect underprivileged learners in the way that it did?

According to United Nations (2020) learners were the biggest victims of the pandemic; even though it did not impact their health directly in many cases, it did have an impact on their psychological being. Covid-19 has impacted underprivileged learners due to the following factors:

- Falling into poverty:

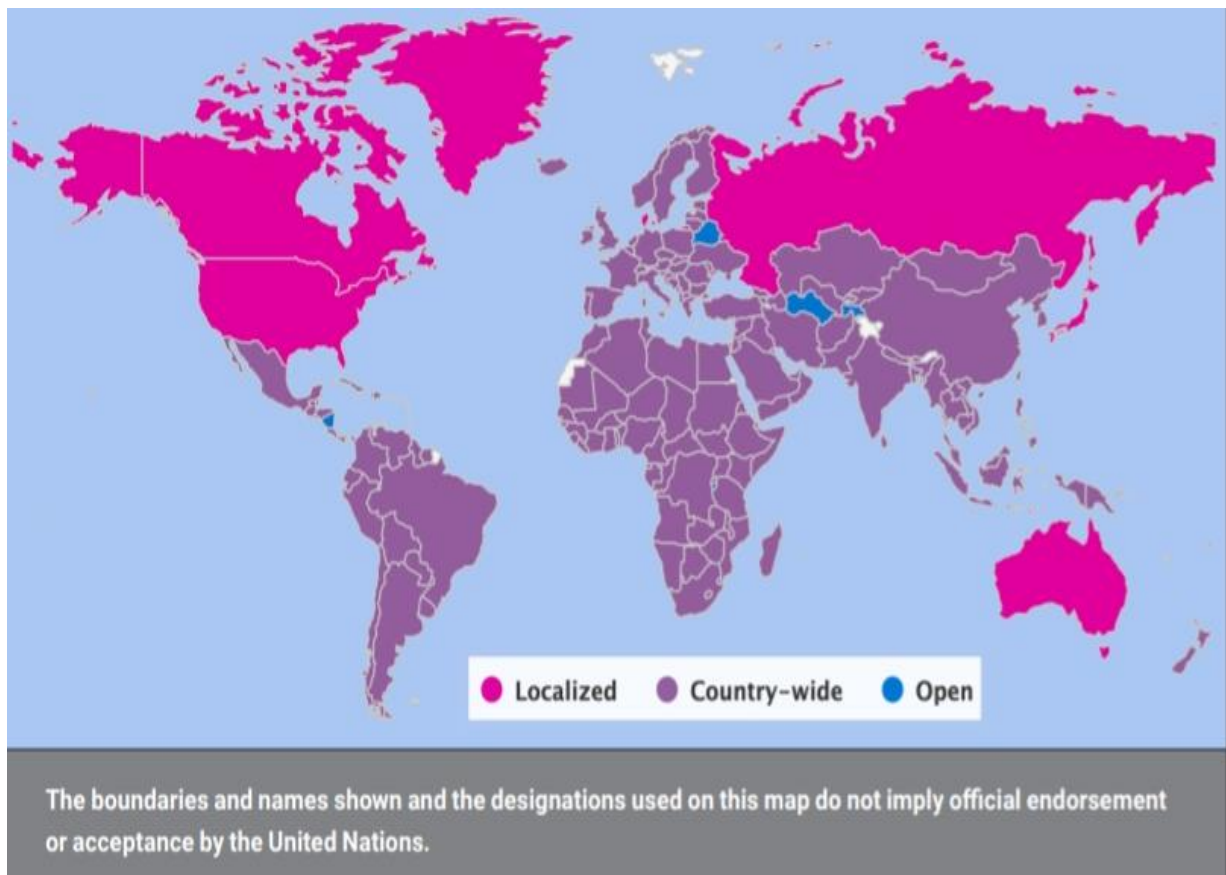
United Nations (2020) records that an estimated 42 million to 66 million learners could fall into extreme poverty as a result of the Covid-19 crisis in 2020 alone, adding to the estimated 386 million learners already in extreme poverty in 2019. Poverty was rife even before Covid-19. However, after the pandemic surfaced, poverty increased drastically. Learners lacked access to resources for remote learning and to basic necessities such as food and basic needs, due to extreme poverty. Many learners did not have the ability to walk into healthcare facilities and get assistance, due to their status in society.

- Exacerbating the learning crisis:

188 countries have imposed country wide school closures, affecting 1.5 billion learners and youth. More than two thirds of countries have introduced a national distance learning platform, and in low income countries only 30% of learners had access to this platform (United Nations, 2020). Before this crisis, almost one third of the world's youth were already digitally excluded. School closures affected learners drastically; learners were set back almost two years behind with cognitive development and grade content, resulting in learners failing and dropping out of school, which eventually affects their mental well-being.

Figure 0.1 Map on school closures during the Covid-19 pandemic

Source: UNESCO (2020)



The map above depicts the school closures that had taken place throughout the world. Many countries were closed locally and country wide.

Goudeau et al. (2021) mention that learning was disrupted as 188 countries imposed countrywide closures affecting more than 1.5 billion learners and youth. Learners lost two years of schooling and development. Learners living in informal settlements, camps with limited infrastructure and no access to internet were particularly impacted. Learners with special needs and disabilities are hard to serve through distance programs. Distance learning was possible, but only in the English medium, which disadvantaged learners who did not speak English as a mother tongue. These effects challenged learners's psychological perseverance and hindered their mental capabilities as they felt they had fallen behind due to circumstances beyond their reach (Gordeau et al., 2021).

3.7. Challenges during Covid-19 and the impact it had on learners psychologically

According to Praghlapati (2020), with the increasing spread of Covid-19 most governments around the world temporarily closed educational institutions in an effort to limit the spread of

the Covid-19 pandemic. The national closures impacted more than 91% of the world's student population (Pragholapati, 2020). UNESCO supported countries in their efforts to reduce the direct impact of school closures, especially in communities that are disadvantaged and vulnerable, and to facilitate education through distance learning. Teaching and learning in many areas were addressed through online learning, both interactively and non-interactively; however not all students could do this due to infrastructure.

The pandemic put a strain on healthcare workers. Due to this shortage, elderly people that fell sick were left to be cared for by young learners. This made it difficult for younger learners to focus on their academics and education as they now had a further responsibility to assist the sick elders (Viner et al., 2020).

Akat and Karatas (2020) mention that, when school closures take longer, learners' learning and social relationships are negatively affected. Schools, however, offer face-to-face education and due to the pandemic, schools had to use distance and online learning, which may be considered a problem as not every student could access online education due to financial constraints, or be home schooled, due to the lack of parental involvement and a support structure.

According to Masonbrick et al. (2020), educational losses during Covid-19 led to lower test scores, lower educational attainment and a decreased learning potential. During these closures, learners needed reliable access to technology and parents with the necessary time and skills to support remote learning and a stable learning environment.

Mukhtar et al. (2020) state that, although remote learning was presented as a challenge for the majority, those in poverty were at a greater disadvantage. Many learners were part of low-income communities and lacked home internet access. Parents within these low-income communities faced poverty and might also face their own pandemic related stressors, such as unemployment and retrenchment. Some parents lacked the time or resources to support remote learning.

Mukhtar et al. (2020) mention that a school nutritional programme serves 35 million learners living in poverty daily, which is provided by schools and childcare centres. During the pandemic, school-based meal distribution and family nutrition programmes came to a halt due to the spread of the virus, however a grocery voucher programme from religious organizations as well as a grant offered by the government was given to offset the loss of school meals provided in South Africa. However, despite these efforts, adequate nutrition amongst learners in poverty remained insufficient. Lack of food posed a major challenge during the pandemic,

as many learners went to bed hungry which further impacted on health issues and affected them psychologically in Indonesia (Amir et al., 2020).

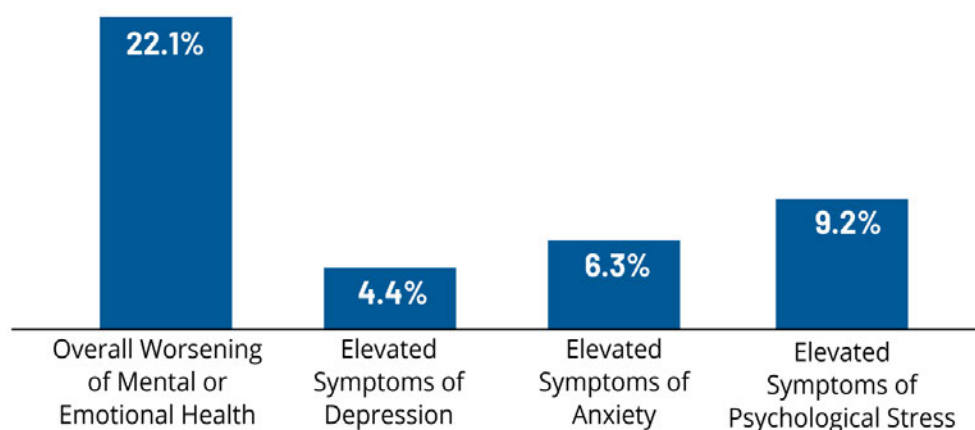
3.8. Psycho- social and mental health well-being of learners during Covid-19

Mental health is important in facilitating a healthy and sustainable life. During the pandemic, according to Panchal (2021), in the United Kingdom in October-November 2020 there was a 22.1% increase from the impact of Covid-19 on young people's mental health, including a 4.4% increase of symptoms of depression, 6.3% increase in anxiety and an overall 9.2% increase in psychological stress.

Figure 0.2 Data collected from a psychiatric children’s hospital in the United Kingdom

Source: Panchal (2021) KFF Online blog

Share of Parents Reporting Worsening Mental Health For Their Children Ages 5-12, October - November 2020



According to UNICEF (2021) learners may express psychological distress, such as anxiety and sadness, by acting out. Some may behave very quietly or come across as being hyperactive. It is important to be patient and understand their emotions. Empathy should be granted to learners, no matter what their emotions are.

According to the World Health Organization (2020), learners should be helped to use creative ways to facilitate the expression of disturbing feelings. A regular routine and schedule are important. Learners experiencing violence at home may display disruptive behaviour. However, in an under-resourced community, it is difficult for parents or caregivers to schedule routines and consistency as many parents work afar and learners are left with aged frail grandparents who cannot institute a routine.

According to Radwan et al. (2020), since the Covid-19 pandemic hit the world and brought about the notion of social distancing all over the world, day to day activities and daily schedules were at a halt. Further, the Covid-19 pandemic will undoubtedly have both long term and short-term consequences on the mental health and well-being of school going learners, especially

those in primary schools. For students with mental needs, school closures meant that there would be an absence of access to necessary needs which they generally had access to in schools.

In relation to the outbreak of the current pandemic, it may be concluded that there would be an increase in panic, fear, loneliness, depression, anxiety and substance use, which will further induce domestic violence, in particular towards the vulnerable such as school learners.

During the Covid-19 outbreak, learners locked themselves out from the world and were left alone with their emotions and thoughts which led to depression. There would therefore be numerous difficulties adjusting back to normal life when school resumes. Further, students who had special educational needs, for example those with autism spectrum disorder, were at a greater risk as they could become frustrated with their daily activity schedule being suspended (Xiang et al., 2020).

According to Masonbrink et al. (2020), 13% of public students have a disability which requires an individual educational plan, which fall under households with a low income. 80% of learners who have mental and behavioural health needs rely solely on school-based services. Further, a school closure means that there is a loss of critical resources for learners who have disabilities, which also includes engagement with specialized teachers as well as a structured learning environment.

Figure 0.3 Reasons parents could not get specialty mental health services for their learners

Source: C.S Mott Children’s Hospital, National Poll on Children’s Health (2008)



According to the Mott Poll Report (2008) statistics from C.S Mott children's Hospital, a national poll on children's health in the United States established the reasoning why parents could not reach mental health services. It was found that 46% of parents found it difficult to find a provider, 43% found that these services costed too much, 35% of parents believed that they could not get an appointment in due time and lastly 33% of parents did not know where to go for help. This data comes (ibid., 2008) from a specific hospital in the United States of America before the pandemic; mental health issues were present in children before the pandemic, however, after the challenges of the pandemic, mental health issues were exacerbated.

According to Praghlapati (2020), the emergence of a pandemic causes stress on different levels of society. During the Covid-19 pandemic, anxiety and depression levels were higher than the national norm. This could suggest that the living conditions and lifestyle changes that learners had to undergo could have caused stress and depression. Learners had, in some cases, to take care of old and fragile family members or younger siblings and sometimes run with the functioning of the household. Such a responsibility puts a strain on a young child and can further lead to detrimental psychological harm. The figure above displays parents' and caregivers' inability in locating professional mental healthcare providers to assist their learners.

3.9. Empowerment of learners

According to UNICEF (2021), it is important that the school, community and family members should help learners deal with stressful events by listening to learners talk about their feelings and by comforting learners in a calm and polite way by showing praise, encouragement and compassion. Lastly, there is a need to reassure learners that they are supported and loved and always have someone they can trust and confide in.

Galea et al. (2020) mention that sectors of the community may not have the opportunity to report abuse and request help. Safe houses should be provided to students who have experienced violence and those likely exposed to domestic violence.

According to Winsper et al. (2013), step-by-step care may come across as a helpful procedure if applied with caution amongst vulnerable learners. When learners feel a sense of love and care, they tend to feel at ease and grow a sense of trust in opening up and speaking about what is affecting them. In relation to psychological stress, many learners feel that speaking up and talking about the challenges they face can act as a dealing mechanism. This could assist learners

in working towards a healing process of overcoming situations such as those that impacted them due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Liu et al. (2020) mention that it may be necessary to train teachers to provide urgent psychological first aid and provide social support. It is integral to create a reliable platform to provide easily accessible psychological counselling as well as a support team in assisting affected learners. Individuals with such expertise have fundamental knowledge as to how to handle a sensitive situation of such a magnitude.

According to Praghlapati (2020), due to the rapid spread of Covid-19, many deaths took place. Learners in impoverished areas did not have access to channels that could assist them with their mental well-being, such as counselling and support. These learners had to deal with this loss and trauma on their own without any assistance. Local health facilities should offer free counselling and support to assist learners that have been affected.

3.10. Summary

As severe as the pandemic was on health and the mortality rate, Covid-19 has caused particular harm to the younger generation with regard to their psychological health and their future dreams and aspirations. School shut downs impacted on those individuals who formed part of the lower-class communities. Such a strain can impact every aspect of one's life.

The next chapter focuses on the methodology of the research task and the structure by which data was generated and analysed.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1. Introduction

The previous chapter surveyed literature relevant to the topic. This chapter focuses on the research methodology that underpins the research. Research methodology is the path through which researchers conduct their study of their specific phenomena; the term referring to the strategic and scientific manner in obtaining information which is relevant to a study. The methodology includes an array of components that are used to carry out the research.

4.2. Research paradigm

Bertram and Christiansen (2014) state that the term *research paradigm* refers to the representation of the particular world view that defines, for the view of the researcher, what is acceptable to research and how this should be done. Historical, cultural and personal experiences enhance an educator's understanding of a particular situation, which allows the researcher to question these interpretations and further draw conclusions viewed through a specific paradigm (Singleton & Straits, 1999).

In this research study, the research paradigm that would be used is the critical paradigm. Bertram and Christiansen (2014) further distinguish the critical paradigm from the post-positivist and interpretivist paradigms. The critical paradigm is critical in the sense that it challenges the discriminatory and unequal ways in which society is organized.

In addition, Bertram and Christiansen (2014) discuss that, in the critical paradigm, the researcher may see reality as shaped by social, political, cultural, economic and other dynamics. Therefore, it may be derived that our perceptions of the world are always subjective, as they are influenced by our society and the values that individuals hold. Researchers using the critical paradigm do not believe that it is possible to collect objective knowledge, as most or all researchers have a particular position in society.

This study looked upon the societal disadvantages that learners faced that may have limited their ability to function during rigorous curriculum changes due to the unavailability of financial aids and resources to accommodate remote learning during the Covid-19 pandemic, which may have had an impact on their physical and psychological well-being. Researchers who adopt such a paradigm focus mainly on bringing about some kind of social change that will be for the betterment of groups of people who have little power and fewer opportunities

or choices open to them. In this research study, the learners came from poverty-stricken areas and thus had fewer resources to cope with the pandemic.

Callaghan (2016) mentions that a crucial aspect of this paradigm is to understand the ways in which power operates in society. One assumption of the critical paradigm is the fact that researchers believe that the world is characterized by unequal power relations, which leads to certain groups holding power and certain groups being oppressed. Researchers who use the critical paradigm take as their main focus the need to critique society and transform it through emancipatory change.

The purpose of the critical paradigm is to address the injustices and inequality in society based on stigmatization of different groups of people. The critical paradigm is suitable for this research study because learners in impoverished areas were extremely disadvantaged during this pandemic as compared to learners who were in upper-class and well-resourced schools. Learners from poverty-stricken areas were not in a position to go onto online teaching and learning as they lacked technological resources. They were however subjected into learning on their own and only receiving specialized guidance from their teachers once a week if they were lucky enough. The critical paradigm is used to foreground injustice and inequality and how that may relate to the teaching and learning of learners who come from impoverished homes.

The critical paradigm followed the research design through a case study to ensure that the study is envisioned through a critical lens of understanding the challenges that were faced during this pandemic that has impacted these learners negatively and how these learners, through such experiences can be liberated through equity in the government systems through the means of remediation.

Research approach

The first approach used in research is the quantitative approach, which emphasizes objective measurements using numbers or statistics on a large scale, which also may be used as a way to test or confirm theories or assumptions. This type of approach can be used as a way to establish generalizable facts about a specific phenomenon. Common quantitative methods include experiments, observations which are recorded through numbers, as well as surveys with close ended questions. This approach works with elements that are measured in numbers, seeking to establish appropriate classification and analysis (Hoover, 2013).

The second approach is the qualitative approach, which in most cases is expressed in words, used mostly to understand thoughts, concepts or experiences. According to Stephens (2009), a qualitative approach to research displays an understanding from a participant's view of the entities that are part of a particular context and interaction. This type of research enables one to gather in-depth insights on topics that are not well established or understood. Common methods pertaining to a qualitative approach include the use of interviews comprising open-ended question, observations that are described in words and lastly literature reviews that explores concepts and theories. Qualitative research involves the act of analysing and collecting non-numerical data (texts, video, and audio) to understand concepts, experiences and opinions. It may also be used to gather in-depth insights into a problem or generate new ideas for research (Bhandari, 2022).

In this study, the research approach used was the qualitative approach. According to Busetto et al. (2020), the word *qualitative* refers to the nature of phenomena which is generally data deduced in a form of words rather than a number. The use of this approach would assist in assessing a complex, multi-component interventional system. In synch with the terminology of a qualitative approach, this research study aimed to explore teachers' views on the psychological influence that Covid-19 had on learners in primary schools. The data generated was further interpreted and used as a means to bring emancipatory change. Due to the needs of this particular qualitative study, this research task was carried out in a mainstream school.

Primary school teachers were selected as the research participants as it would be more effective to gather information on such an extensive topic. If learners were used as participants, a psychologist or counsellor would also have to be present to intervene due to the nature of personal questions in relation to Covid-19, which could trigger emotions due to loss of loved ones or to other psychological harm caused during the pandemic. It is difficult to get a professional to intervene at a school level as many professionals are hospital bound. This approach was suitable for this study as an in-depth understanding was required first hand in relation to an educators experience during the pandemic. A broad understanding would have not been gathered if a quantitative approach was used as individual experiences would have not been sifted upon.

4.3. Research design

According to Sileyew (2019), a research design supports the researcher on how to come to the results of the research, in the form of its findings. Once a researcher has identified a research

question, a research design has to follow. Such a research design sets out how the researcher will systematically generate and analyse the data that would be needed to answer the research questions. The research design would follow through the critical paradigm and then be justified through the qualitative research approach. Such an intensive research, in this case, was undertaken through a case study design.

A case study, according to Crow et al. (2011) is a design which allows an in-depth and multi-faceted exploration of different complex issues in a real-life setting. The research was underpinned by this case study approach, as it is useful in obtaining an in-depth appreciation of an issue in a real-life context, such as how the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted the experiences of the learning processes of learners in a specific school.

According to Yin (2019), case studies can be used to explain, describe or explore phenomena in an everyday context in which they occur. The use of this case study will give an overview of learners' experiences through the perspective of teachers in a school setting during Covid-19. It is important to understand the experiences of the participants in order to understand the turmoil that these learners faced during the pandemic. A case study ensured that the reader is able to make an informed recognition of how the pandemic impacted on underprivileged primary school learners psychologically.

4.4. Sampling

According to Turner (2020), sampling is seen as the selection of a subset of a population of interest in a research study. Sampling from a specified population is often more practical, whereby data can be collected faster and more cost efficiently. A purposive sampling is a sample which is drawn from a source that is specifically sifted out by the researcher. Sampling is a strategy used when selecting participants that can be seen as a representative of the population about which the researcher aims to investigate (Terreblanche & Durrheim, 1999).

Further, Neuman (2014) mentions that a purposive sample is a sample, the characteristics of which are defined for a purpose that is relevant to the study. Therefore, the participants chosen were five senior phase teachers of a primary school in Durban. These teachers were purposively selected as it could easily be observed if there was growing success or decline in academic achievement, as these teachers could make comparisons to their past teaching experiences before Covid-19 and their teaching experiences during Covid-19. Teachers have first-hand

experiences on the challenges that learners face due to Covid-19 and the impact it has made on their students' lives.

Robinson (2014) argues that a small sample allows the researcher to give each participant a chance to be heard within this study and to conduct an in-depth analysis of each interview. Participants were purposively selected from a primary school in Durban, as they were specifically needed in gaining data records. The specific primary school selected lacks resources and is governmentally funded; these participants were teachers from this school, where all learners come from lower income households and do not have resources freely accessible to them. This method of research generation allows experiences to be expressed and give more insight on the difficulties or challenges participants faced beside the global pandemic which influences on their learner's academic performance.

4.5. Data generation methods

According to Goldkuhl (2019), data generation emphasizes the arrangement of a situation to produce rich and meaningful data for further analysis. Mears (2009) mentions that data collection is seen as a process of gathering information about the investigated topic, it comprises the ability of searching, extracting and capturing data. Empirical research generation methods, specifically focus group interviews and open-ended questionnaires, were used as the means to generate data in this study.

4.5.1. Focus group interviews

According to Dilshad (2013), a focus group interview consists of a group of individuals with certain characteristics that focus on a specific set of questions. Wodak and Krzyzanowski (2008) mention that a focus group is seen as a group of individuals sharing ideas about some common interests stipulated by the researcher, in order to gain research findings. The focus group consisted in this case of a small group of participants (from a primary school senior phase department) who explored the experiences of learners during Covid-19.

4.5.2. Open-ended questionnaires

These are exploratory to nature and provide extensive insight into the experiences of participants. Such methods assisted in this research, as participants' lived experiences will be analysed. Open ended questionnaires give the participants an opportunity to freely express their views without any limitations, thus giving the researcher the ability to understand each participant's lived experiences of their students through this pandemic (Gill et al., 2008). The

questionnaire was formulated bearing in mind the participants and the location of which the study will be carried out at.

Focus group interviews were audio recorded with the consent of participants, to allow for a full record of these interviews. Terreblanche et al. (2006) suggest that note taking during interviews is recommended as it assists the researcher to capture additional information or events that may have happened that may not be obvious when gathering information from the audio recording.

The data generation methods used in this study were highly advantageous as participants were not limited in their responses and were able to express their true emotions towards the repercussions of this pandemic.

4.6. Data analysis

Maree (2010) refers to data analysis as being a procedural framework of collecting and interpreting data to extract information that supports decision making. Further, data analysis is seen through a qualitative approach that is based on an interpretivist philosophy which serves to examine meaningful data. In this research task, participants will be partaking in focus groups interviews and open-ended questionnaires which will be in an English instructional medium, as teachers and learners from this geographical location communicate through English as a home language.

Creswell (2017) mentions that qualitative research makes use of inductive data analysis whereby themes are built up by organizing data in a more abstract way from the data collected from a primary source. The data was categorised accordingly in establishing what emerged from the research and finding significant patterns. The research was underpinned through thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is seen as a method of analysing qualitative data and is usually applied to a set of texts such as interviews and transcripts, the researcher closely examines the data to identify common themes, topics, ideas and patterns that come up repeatedly (Caulfield, 2019).

The purpose of thematic analysis is to describe, organize and interpret data in scrutiny (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The following steps towards a thematic analysis, which was outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), were followed:

Phase 1 consisted of the researcher familiarizing myself with the data, knowing the depth and breadth of the content. One method of familiarizing oneself with the data generated is through the process of transcription (Riessman, 1993). When data is being transcribed, as a researcher

you begin to mitigate the data and understand the data being generated from the first persons view. Responses from participants were listed in a table form to identify any similarities in their individual experiences.

Once the transcription of the audible interview was complete, proof reading was done by the researcher to understand the transcripts more vividly. In this phase, the researcher should take down important notes to assist in the future with regard to themes.

In phase 2 the researcher systematically worked through the data and identified interesting features that may form the basis of subsequent themes.

In phase 3, data that has been collated into themes was then sifted through. The researcher could then analyse the coding and seek to devise a method of working the codes into a systemic theme in relation to the study.

In phase 4, themes were reviewed and refined to ensure that they fitted into the study meaningfully as a whole.

Phase 5 comprised of the definition and naming of the themes. Each theme had to be distinctly analysed and viewed to ensure that each theme was uniquely able to fit in the overall research study.

Phase 6 was the final establishment of the research themes. The themes produced should be able to display validity as well as to bridge the gap between the literature and the research questions.

This research study was underpinned by the critical paradigm as it was linked to the challenges in society, to understand the reality of the phenomena. The research was also under taken through a qualitative approach, as this made it easier to get a more in-depth understanding of each participant's experience which would be taken through towards a case study design. Participants had been selected through the means of purposive sampling, as it is clearly understood of whom the participants should be. In order to ensure a qualitative and purposive research is fulfilled, a questionnaire and focus group interviews were used as the means of sifting data. Lastly, this data was analysed through a thematic analysis as the researcher can conclude on such findings.

4.7. Trustworthiness

David (2021) mentions that trustworthiness has become an important concept as it allows researchers to describe the virtues of the research. There are four components of trustworthiness, which are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

- **Credibility**

According to Korstjens and Moser (2018), credibility is concerned with aspects aimed at the truth value of the research. The strategy to achieve credibility is to have a prolonged engagement with participants to gain their trust in aiming to achieve rich data, by using persistent observation to identify the characteristics most relevant to the problem, as well as the use of triangulation by using two different research methods such as open-ended questionnaires and focus group interviews. Stahl and King (2020) mention that a method used to promote credibility is through diverse processes of triangulation.

Triangulation is the use of multiplicity to test the credibility of one's research. It includes the use of several sources of information or procedural knowledge from the field, used repeatedly to establish identifiable patterns. There are various forms of triangulation. Methodological triangulation was the method that was used here to collect data. In this research, methodological triangulation was used, as both a focus group interview and questionnaire were used.

Lastly, credibility makes use of member checking, where the researcher gives feedback on research so outcomes can be assessed through one view and not multiple views, ensuring that the study measures what is actually intended.

- **Transferability**

Transferability, according to Korstjens and Moser (2018), refers to the degree to which the research which can be generalized or transferred to another setting. Nowell et al. (2017) mention that transferability refers to the generalizability of inquiry. Transferability is an important principle in the two main stages of research, first being the data collection and secondly the findings. Transferability focuses on whether the research tools were reliable or not.

The results from this research can be transferred to similar mainstream primary schools in the local KwaZulu-Natal area as many participants are affected with similar experiences, being in a context with limited resources, which made it challenging during this pandemic.

- Dependability

According to Trochim (2021), dependability refers to the ability for the research to be conducted twice with the similar outcome from the research. Tobin and Begley (2004) mentions that dependability can be achieved, as researchers can ensure that the research process is logical, traceable and clearly documented.

As Covid-19 is current and many schools are facing similar challenges, the research can be conducted at another mainstream government school and outcomes can be similar as it is a current problem that many schools are facing. Data need to be clearly documented and traceable to the reader to ensure dependability or reliability can be achieved.

- Confirmability

Korstjens and Moser (2018) explains that confirmability refers to the degree to which results may be confirmed and collaborated by others, where data can always be rechecked at any time throughout the study to ensure awareness and openness of the study. Nowell et al. (2017) mention that confirmability is referred by establishing that the researcher's findings and interpretations are derived clearly from the data, which requires from the researcher to manifest how conclusions and interpretations have been reached. In relation to this study, confirmability will be established as the principal will check the audio transcripts and questionnaires to ensure data was not manipulated and correct data was transcribed.

4.8. Ethical considerations

Ethics in research is a pivotal step in the preparation and implementation processes, as it emphasizes the moral and legitimacy standards of research (Tsoka-Gwengeweni & Wassenaar, 2014). Ethical considerations as well as specific procedures for this research had to conform to the requirements and regulations of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. In addition, I had to seek permission from the Department of Basic Education to continue with research.

As it has been outlined that primary school senior phase teachers were the participants of the research, permission had to be granted from the principal of the school to compile the research in the school, and participants (teachers) had to express their willingness to participate in a focus group interview (which will be audio recorded) and to answer questions from an open-ended questionnaire. Participants were carefully briefed that there would be no breach of

confidentiality that pertains to the identities or performance of individual learners. They would be reassured that they could withdraw from the research at any time.

This is not the real schools name as a pseudonym was used in place for anonymity.

A consent letter was given to each educator, requesting their permission to be audio recorded during the data generation period. Emphasis was highlighted to stakeholders such as principals, teachers and the school governing body that all data would be kept safe and only shared with the university supervisor. Participants' names were replaced with pseudonyms. The principal was given the opportunity to go through the open-ended questionnaires and interviews that have been transcribed to ensure that capturing was done accurately. According to Cohen et al. (2011), respondent validation is an important element in ensuring integrity of the data. The participants were provided with a copy of the transcript to ensure authenticity as well as the protection of their privacy.

4.9. Summary

This chapter focused on the array in which data was collected and the methods by which research will be underpinned. This chapter also assessed the trustworthiness of this research study as well as addressing ethical considerations and limitations towards this study. The next chapter will elaborate on the findings achieved from the research instruments, which were used to draw conclusions.

CHAPTER 5

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

5.1. Introduction

The previous chapter placed emphasis on the research methodology that was underpinned in this research study. This chapter focuses on the data that was generated through a focus group interview and a questionnaire. The data was analysed and interpreted through a thematic approach in relation to the research questions.

The research questions are listed below:

1. What are teachers' understandings of the psychological influence of the Covid-19 pandemic on underprivileged primary school learners?
2. How does the psychological influence of Covid-19 pandemic, from teachers' perspectives, affect underprivileged primary school learners?
3. Why does the psychological influence of Covid-19 pandemic, as viewed by teachers, affect underprivileged primary school learners in the way that they do?

The analysis of data from both the questionnaire and focus group interview will be used as a structure to answer the research questions that has been applied towards this study. Data generated from the interview and from the questionnaire will be analysed and presented independently.

5.2. Participant details

The sample drawn during this research study was five (5) primary school teachers who had completed the questionnaire as well as the focus group interviews. The return rate of the questionnaire was 100%. The five (5) participants also completed a focus group interview which lasted for 25 minutes. Data that has been generated from both the interview and questionnaire was worked with simultaneously in ensuring that the research questions were adequately answered.

Table 0.1. Details of participants

Participant name	Gender	Teaching experience	Highest qualification	Institution received qualification
Participant 1 – Delicia Veeradoo	Female	6 years	Bachelor of Education Honours	University of KwaZulu-Natal
Participant 2 – Reshmee Jaisunker	Female	16 years	Bachelor of Education	UNISA
Participant 3 – Kayla Sonny	Female	13 years	Bachelor of Education	University of KwaZulu-Natal
Participant 4 – James Naicker	Male	9 years	Masters in Educational Psychology	UNISA
Participant 5 – Kaylene Narainsamy	Female	6 years	Bachelor of Education Honours	University of KwaZulu-Natal

5.3. Themes from the focus group interview

My analysis will follow my research questions that are listed below:

1. What are teacher’s understandings of the psychological influences of the Covid-19 pandemic on underprivileged primary school learners?
2. How do psychological influences of Covid-19 pandemic, from teachers’ perspectives, affect underprivileged primary school learners?
3. Why do the psychological influences of Covid-19 pandemic, as viewed by teachers, affect underprivileged primary school learners in the way that they do?

Table: summary of research questions, data generation methods, themes and sub-themes

Research Questions :	Data generation methods :
1. What are teachers’ understandings of the psychological influence of the Covid-19 pandemic on underprivileged primary school learners?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Focus group interviews - Open ended questionnaires

<p>2. How does the psychological influence of Covid-19 pandemic, from teachers' perspectives, affect underprivileged primary school learners?</p> <p>3. Why does the psychological influence of Covid-19 pandemic, as viewed by teachers, affect underprivileged primary school learners in the way that they do?</p>	
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Themes	Sub-themes
5.3.1. Teachers understanding of Covid-19	5.3.1.1. Awareness of the virus
5.3.2. Teachers' understanding of the psychological impact of Covid-19 during lockdown.	5.3.2.1 Impact of the virus 5.3.2.2 Child Abuse 5.3.2.3 Substance Abuse
5.3.3. Pandemic's effect on underprivileged learners	5.3.3.1. Injustice in society 5.3.3.2 Emotional trauma 5.3.3.3 Mental health issues
5.3.4 Challenges linking to psychological distress	5.3.4.1 Poverty 5.3.4.2 Lack of support
5.3.5 Then versus now	5.3.5.1 Pre-Covid vs Post-Covid

5.3.1. Teachers understanding of Covid-19

5.3.1.1. Awareness of virus

Participants were knowledgeable on what Covid-19 is.

For example, Reshmee Jaisunker stated:

Covid-19 is a highly contagious virus that causes a severe strain on one's immune system, it is air borne and can be life threatening to those who has comorbidities like high blood pressure, diabetes, heart and lung diseases etc.

A teacher is a vessel to knowledge. If an educator is well educated on this new pandemic, educating learners and drawing awareness to learners can be a paving of hope to help learners stop the spread of the virus and understand that this virus has attacked millions of people around

the world, given that there are millions of learners that have been going through loss and mental health issues due to this pandemic.

5.3.2. Teachers understanding of the psychological impact of Covid-19 during lockdown

5.3.2.1. Impact of the virus

This pandemic had affected learners mentally as well as physically. Many learners stood at the forefront witnessing the damage that this virus has caused first hand, due to their disadvantages they have been faced with from their society. James Naicker believed that:

I think there are two aspects to that. Number 1, there were some learners from our school that were coming from informal settlements, so they had around about eight or nine people living in one small room, so they experience a lot of abuse and violence. Those learners want to come back to school because they didn't want to stay in the house because everyone was together causing a lot of abuse. the other type where some learners were emotionally traumatised, especially because for example a few learners from our school lost loved ones they were living with them and this impacted on them coming to school, because they didn't want to come to school. They thinking if they did come to school they might just lose someone else in their family. People were dying left, right and centre at a time.

Kayla Sonny shared:

It had a negative impact on their mental health. When schools were closed, the nutritional programme also came to a halt, which resulted in learners not gaining access to food. For certain learners, the nutritional programme was the only meal that they would have for the day; because schools were closed, learners were not getting that one meal a day. Parents had lost their jobs, abuse increased in households because everyone was at home. Certain parents who had substance abuse became more aggressive because alcohol was banned, which also negatively impacted the child emotionally and physically and certain learners had to take care of their younger siblings because it was a child headed household, where the learners were doing everything, as the parents were engaging in other activities for example going out and trying to find that alcohol and drinking and so on.

Mental health is one of the most important issues during this pandemic. Many individuals felt overwhelmed by their surrounding situations. Especially learners, they felt that they were

imprisoned in their homes; often times they were asked to remain indoors in lockdown, no socializing and no contact with loved ones out of their homes. This put pressure on their mental health and in some cases gave them a feeling of loneliness.

5.3.2.2. *Child Abuse*

Caron et al. (2020) mention that social isolation is known to be a risk factor towards child abuse. Further, researchers have found that all types of child abuse become more frequent during school holidays, disease outbreaks and natural disasters.

Kayla Sonny mentioned: *“Parents had lost their jobs, abuse increased in households because everyone was at home.”*

5.3.2.3. *Substance abuse*

Since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic there had been various influences of societal well-being. Not only did people have to fight against Covid-19 and death, they also had to battle economic collapse and social isolation. Many people turned to substance abuse. Once they had been intoxicated, they tended to turn their anger towards the vulnerable, being young learners.

Kayla Sonny reflected:

Certain parents who had substance abuse became more aggressive because alcohol was banned which also negatively impacted the child emotionally and physically and certain learners had to take care of their younger siblings because it was a child headed household, where the learners were doing everything as the parents were engaging in other activities for example going out and trying to find that alcohol and drinking and so on.

Kaylene Narainsamy added:

Parents who have substance abuse issues took out their frustration on their kids because they had no money and access to alcohol and cigarettes due to the lockdown restrictions. This took a toll on the learners, mentally and physically.

5.3.3. *Pandemic’s effect on underprivileged learners*

5.3.3.1. *Injustice in society*

Kayla Sonny believed that these learners have suffered this pandemic due to the injustice in their community which led them to poverty. Participant 3 further mentions:

There's a wide gap between both these learners. Underprivileged learners also couldn't gain basic needs, such as food and because of the loss of income it resulted in the learners not being able to have a meal for the day. They have to go out and find ways to gain food for that household.

The Covid-19 pandemic impacted the livelihoods of many individuals. However, the lower income individuals were affected the most. The pandemic required the ideology of the concept “survival of the fittest”, in this regard, the fittest were encompassed as individuals who had a strong financial status. The pandemic hit South Africa hard; hospitals and health care facilities were at the greatest demand. According to Campbell (2020), privatized hospital care assisted individuals with facilities that aided in healing and restoration. Many individuals that struggled with poverty had no access to medical facilities and often times succumbed to death if they were infected with the Covid-19 virus. Learners had to witness, in some cases, more than one family member being deceased. This affected learners psychologically, as they were not equipped to deal with loss and grief.

Facilities in schools that were located in the lower income areas were minimal. During the lockdown, many schools were closed due to the spread and this forced learners to be, if possible, home schooled through the means of online teaching and learning. Parents could not afford WIFI Internet or technological devices. Learners in such areas were forced to attend school once a week due to overcrowded and large classrooms. Insufficient teaching and learning could be done, as time was not sufficient and the curriculum had to be trimmed. Many learners were promoted to the next grade without knowing in-depth content and knowledge, which would impact them negatively in the future grades. This put enormous stress on the child and in turn affected them psychologically as they will feel overwhelmed due to their underperformance. According to STATSA consensus (2022), Covid 19 has significantly impacted learners at large. Enrolment in education remained high, however a comparison with 2019 shows that a slightly higher percentage of learners between 8 to 12 years old did not attend school. This meant that the drop-out rate increased due to the variety of situations that learners were faced with.

Injustice between private and public sectors made an evident gap between the academic and psychological decline in both groups of learners. Further, according to STATSA (2022), learners from lower income homes were only sent to school when the SASSA relief grant was

paid. This portrayed learners's financial dependence in relation to their academic performance. Such elements further impact a child's mental state of health.

5.3.3.2. *Emotional trauma*

As people grappled with their health, social and economic influences, mental health was widely affected. A range of learners experienced psychological distress and symptoms of depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress. For some learners and adolescents, being made vulnerable to social isolation and disconnectedness fuelled feelings of anxiety, uncertainty and loneliness which might further lead to behavioural problems. Kayla Singh added:

“They have lost loved ones. They have become emotional due to this. It has led to anxiety. Learners are anxious, it has caused depression as well as they have lost a loved one and don't know how to cope with it.”

5.3.3.3. *Mental health issues*

While mental health needs rose, mental health services were severely disrupted during the pandemic, due to staff and hospital infrastructure being deployed to Covid-19 relief. Social measures such as social distancing and the lockdown prevented people from accessing care at that time. Misinformation and poor knowledge in regard to the virus fuelled fear and worry that prevented people from seeking assistance (WHO, 2019).

Kayla Naidoo mentioned:

It had a negative impact on their mental health. When schools were closed, the nutritional programme also came to a halt, which resulted in learners not gaining access to food. For certain learners, the nutritional programme was the only meal that they would have for the day, because schools were closed learners were not getting that one meal a day. Parents had lost their jobs, abuse increased in households because everyone was at home. Certain parents who had substance abuse became more aggressive because alcohol was banned which also negatively impacted the child emotionally and physically and certain learners had to take care of their younger siblings because it was a child headed household, where the learners were doing everything as the parents were engaging in other activities for example going out and trying to find that alcohol and drinking and so on.

5.3.4. Challenges linking to psychological distress

5.3.4.1. Poverty

Poverty was the biggest challenge during the pandemic.

Kaylene Narainsamy stated:

Underprivileged learners have suffered more as compared to privileged learners. Underprivileged did not have access to many resources and online teaching in addition to not having food or parental support, therefore underprivileged learners have been set back educationally and psychologically. Privileged learners still had resources and parental involvement which allowed them to not be affected by Covid-19 so much. I would say that both underprivileged and privileged learners have been disadvantaged at acquiring socialising skills during the Covid years.

James Naicker agreed by stating, with regards to privileged and underprivileged learners:

I think during the lockdown with Covid, privileged learners could still have access to education, example they had desktops, they had internet access so they continued with their education and curriculum. When it comes to underprivileged learners they don't have that type of technology or the money to spend on those things so what happened to them was, they were the ones that lost out big time when it came to education, especially because most of them came from informal settlements, most parents are maids and garden boys and they had also lost their jobs during Covid time because they weren't allowed to go and work for anyone. Those learners suffered the most with education, because they had no money to bring in as compared to those parents that could bring in money and assist their kids.

According to Nortjie (2017), a recorded 62.1% of South Africans were living in poverty. In South Africa, many learners aged between 17 years of age and younger mostly coming from rural areas are those with little or no education are observed to be the victims of an ongoing struggle with poverty. Further, it has been estimated that 63% of South African learners are currently living in poverty. Poverty has major repercussions for individuals. Nortjie further explains that poverty affects a child's physical, mental and emotional development. Poverty holds back a child from having access to modern day technology devices as well as necessary services due to their lifestyle challenges.

Allen (2014) mentions that there is a clear link between the standard of education in underprivileged areas and poverty. Further, it can be established that many South African learners have limited access to education, due to multiple factors that include impoverished households, lack of resources and poor infrastructure. Learners during the Covid-19 pandemic were asked in many cases to adapt to one of two options, which included home schooling or online classes with rotational timetabling.

Many or if not all learners in underprivileged areas could not afford Wi-Fi or technological advancements to join online classes, and often times struggled in lessons that were held on a rotational basis. Many learners lacked parental support at home to assist with homework, etc. Poverty impacted learners psychologically, and often times many learners during the pandemic went to bed without a meal as their parents' income was cut short.

According to The Daily Maverick Newspaper (2020) many learners across South Africa relies on school meals, as it is the only constant meal they receive in a day. During the pandemic, schools were closed, leading to the closure of the school nutritional programme. This has left many learners without a meal, starving. This takes away their sense of belonging in society. In many cases this led to learners being affected psychologically as they felt they were to blame for their parent's financial circumstances and them being unable to provide for their learners. These feeling often lead learners towards a feeling of depression and distress (Ponnet, 2014).

Many learners felt embarrassed to open up and ask for help. They often went by with one meal a day. According to a nutritionist, Dr A D Leonardo of St. Mary's Hospital in Mariannhill, Durban, a child's mental capacity cannot function without regular meals on a daily basis. If a child does not consume food, their mental capacity deteriorates which increases the academic failure rate. In turn if a child does not progress to the next grade with their peers and has to stay behind in the same grade, it could affect them psychologically and often times may lead to depression and suicidal thoughts.

5.3.5. *Then versus now*

5.3.5.1. *Pre-Covid vs. Post-Covid*

The culture of teaching and learning before Covid-19 was efficient and effective as the educator could work through content while bearing in mind the vast needs of each learner within their classroom.

James Naicker mentioned that during pre-Covid teaching and learning was thus:

It was a normal environment where learners used to come to school and we could have done group work, extra-co-curricular activities could have resumed during the day, learners could have PE so normal teaching and learning experience for learners.

Kayla Sonny added:

The teaching and learning environment was satisfactory. Due to daily attendance learners had an understanding of subject content. Learners had basic necessary skills required for those grades at the time.

However, after Covid-19 the culture of teaching and learning had become questionable.

Reshmee Jaisunker believed:

Learners' academic performance has been very weak and very low. They are struggling to understand basic addition, subtraction sums, reading is very weak, many struggle to identify the alphabets. Behaviour wise, learners are not used to coming every day to school, they have become more distracted, less focused, very nonchalant, nothing seems to motivate them or threaten them.

Kayla Sonny agreed that there had been changes in learners' behaviour and performance in school, by mentioning:

Yes, there has been a difference, when it comes to behaviour due to the lockdown and the rotational timetable, you can see learners have become more reserved, they are isolated in their ways, they don't socialise much, most of the learners. Performance wise, performance of learners has declined drastically, learners do not have the basic necessary skills that are required at each grade level. Learners knowledge and skills are delayed by two years. For example: learners who are in grade 4 has the knowledge and skills of a grade 2 learner.

Participants shared their relative experiences in the classroom from both pre- and post Covid. It can be established that behavioural and academic challenges had been a concern since the pandemic started. Academically, during the Covid pandemic, rotational timetabling was utilized. This has been a major obstacle to teaching and learning after Covid-19.

Kaylene Narainsamy mentioned:

The rotational timetabling negatively impacted teaching and learning. Learners would come to school once a week, which only gives four school days per month. There was not enough teaching and learning time, this forced teachers to teach an aspect in one lesson and not go back to it even if learners did not grasp the content fully. Parents did not give learners the support that they needed. There was no online teaching and learning done as learners do not have access to such technology because they come from underprivileged homes. Therefore, learners were not able to grasp the skills and knowledge that they should have.

Kayla Sonny reiterates:

The rotational timetabling negatively impacted teaching and learning because learners attended school at least once or twice a week. There was not enough contact time in order to provide learners with the skills they needed in the grade that they were in. Because we are an underprivileged school, there was no online learning because of the lack of resources which resulted in learners losing valuable learning time.

Underperforming and failure in academics can lead a child to be affected psychologically. They tend to feel small, unworthy and often times such feelings can pursue to depression and suicidal thoughts.

5.3.5.2. Lack of support

According to Glickman et al. (2021), emotional neglect is defined as a caregiver's or parent's persistent disregard of their learners' emotional needs, which includes the failure to provide a source of comfort when their child is distressed or depressed. Further, if a child is exposed to emotional neglect, it can later on be associated with poor developmental outcomes, which include behavioural problems as well as a lowered self-esteem. Lack of support can impact a child by increasing their risk of depression.

In this research study, it is evident that parental involvement was minimal. A lack of parental involvement can push a child further into depression and psychological distress.

Reshmee Jaisunker mentioned that, "No support comes from the home front to show that they take their child's education seriously." Similarly, Kaylene Narainsamy added that, "Parents did not give learners the support that they needed."

According to The National Library of Medicine (2022), parental support is the structure of a firm foundation of a child's psychological being. Support coming from a household perspective is a primary source of assistance to a child. According to Crawford (2022), the Bronfenbrenner Ecological Systems Theory Model, the microsystem is the first level of the theory and has direct contact with the child in the immediate environment, mainly being parents and teachers. Influences from this environment can change the beliefs and ideologies of the child. If a child has a strong nurturing relationship with their parents, it is concluded that a positive effect would be evident on the child. However, a distant or unaffectionate parent may have harmful effects on the child. During the pandemic, parents also suffered emotional stress. Many parents lost their jobs during the lockdown and could not meet ends meet. Often cases, parents were substance abusers and many a times the president banned alcohol sales, which made parents very fragile and aggressive as they were very reliant on alcohol to function for their daily activities. Such households were exposed to gender-based violence of women and learners which affected the child very negatively. Parents did not have time to recoup and were busy fighting their own battles that they had sometimes neglected their learners' needs. This affected learners more badly in such cases (Ponnet, 2014).

According to the participants, it was felt that parents needed support to assist their learners as they felt that they had no exposure on how to handle such extreme situations.

Participants also elaborated that they did not know how to support learners who were psychologically affected during the Covid-19 pandemic. Further, participants are the secondary source of support other than the parents. Teachers form part of the microsystem in the ecological model of Bronfenbrenner's theory. Participants felt that they could be more hands-on in supporting learners that were affected psychologically by the pandemic if they had the adequate training from the Department of Education to assist such learners.

Support plays an integral role in allowing learners to voice their emotions. Often times, learners are afraid to speak as they are worried about others opinions around them. Parents and teachers should work conjointly in ensuring they are adequately trained to support such learners, which would assist in alleviating depression and other psychological trauma.

5.4. Questionnaire responses

Question 1: YES ✓ /NO ✗

Question	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Participant 5
1.1 Do you know what Covid-19 is?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
1.2 Has the learning environment deteriorated after Covid-19?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
1.3 Do you think Covid-19 has affected learners psychologically?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
1.4 Have you noticed behavioural changes in your learners after Covid-19?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
1.5 Do you know how to support learners who were affected psychologically during Covid-19?	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓
1.6 Teachers need support from the Department of Education to assist learners who were psychologically impacted by Covid-19?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
1.7 Do teachers get any support from the Department of Education to enable	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗

them to support learners psychologically?					
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All participants were well educated on what Covid-19 is. Participants mentioned that after the Covid-19 pandemic had taken place, the learning environment of learners has deteriorated drastically. All participants believed that Covid-19 has affected learners psychologically. According to all participants, Covid-19 has brought about behavioural changes in learners. Most participants felt that they could not support learners who were affected psychologically from the traumatic stress of Covid-19. All participants believed that they require support from the Department of Education to assist learners who are psychologically impacted by Covid-19. A few participants stated that they do not get any support from the Department of Education to enable them to support learners psychologically.

Most participants agree that going back to teaching and learning at full capacity after Covid-19 made a difference to learner’s psychological health. It is also agreed that teachers require support at first in order for them to give support to learners who are challenged during Covid-19. Participants strongly believe that specific strategies and specialist training are required to support affected learners.

Data collaborated from the questionnaire displays that parents, just like teachers need to be supported to deal with learners who were impacted by Covid-19.

Table 0.1 Tally chart representing data collected from participants responses from the questionnaire

Question	Tally (Agree/ Strongly Agree)
1. Parents need support just as teachers to assist learners psychologically affected by Covid-19.	
2. Teachers are to be open-minded to assist learners with possible solutions to their psychological needs.	
3. Despite financial constraints, access to a school library could have assisted	

in teaching and learning during the pandemic lockdown.	
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It was concluded that four participants believe that if a parent receives support, they can assist in helping learners who are psychologically affected during the Covid-19 pandemic as they are equipped to give emotional support. Five participants suggest that an educator should be open-minded when it narrows down to assisting learners with possible solutions to their psychological needs. Only one participant believes that access to a school library during lockdown would have assisted learners in academic excellency despite their financial constraints. A decline in academic performance can hinder and default a learners' psychological perspective of themselves, hence directing such learner towards a negative self-esteem which further influences them psychologically.

It can be deduced through the means of a questionnaire that rotational timetabling; resource packs and social media were used as measures for teaching and learning during the lockdown. Such mediums of learning could play a role in many learners being psychologically affected during Covid-19, as teachers intervened by providing after hours counselling and financial assistance for learners in need, as per participant 2's response to question 9 in the interview. Teachers would educate learners more on Covid-19 to reduce their anxiety and practice exercises that supported their emotional well-being. Teachers tried their level best to provide affected learners with moral support and psychological help. Most participants had a sense of belief that they were not adequately qualified to assist such learners. Participant 3 mentioned, "We are not professionally qualified to assist learners in this regard", and participants 4 and 5 further reiterated that the Department of Education should appoint qualified psychologists to assist in this aspect.

In relation to the interview and questionnaire, it can be deduced that 5 out of 5 participants believed that learners were affected psychologically due to the pandemic. Participants further mentioned that the underperformance and failure in academics were one of the contributing factors to psychological distress.

In the interview, participants mentioned that there was a lack of support to aid assistance during the pandemic. Five participants further mentioned in the questionnaire that they required support from the department of education to assist learners who were psychologically impacted by Covid-19.

5.5. Summary

Covid-19 affected many individuals; however, major victims of the pandemic were little learners in their primary years of schooling, which would scar them as they progress towards their future. Physical harm is easier to repair, however psychological harm may not be able to be repaired in time. Through the window of the participants, it can be concluded that Covid-19 has made a big gap in the livelihood of learners, in the way they perform and interact in society. The next chapter is the final chapter, which will look at the recommendations and limitations of the study as well as the concluding aspects of this research task.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

6.1. Introduction

The previous chapter comprised the data analysis from the research as well as the themes that were developed from the literature and responses based on this research study. There were several important themes that emerged from this study which provide a basis for my argument that underprivileged primary school learners were impacted psychologically.

6.2. Insight of Covid-19 on this research task

The study clearly aimed at gaining an extensive knowledge on understanding how Covid-19 has impacted underprivileged primary school learners psychologically from different perspectives. The study drew insight on how such a phenomenon which affected many individuals across the world can impact a child psychologically. Covid-19 can also impact other aspects of a child's life adding to stagnation in their life as a whole. It has also been identified that a family's form of livelihood determined the child's position in the world. Society and being middle or working class have a strong impact on learners in the context of Covid-19.

This topic is current in South Africa and around the world, as in post-Covid times, there are distinct differences between those learners who were developing milestones during Covid and those who were already developed at that time. According to the Department of Education (Africa, n.d.), there is a big decline in academics generally as well as such specializations such as English and Maths. Reading and literacy has overall seen a big decline, as learners perform poorly due to online and rotational timetabling. Learners have witnessed loved ones dying and often times spent days, if not weeks stuck at home due to the national lockdown. Such events can lead a child into an emotional despair.

Many learners underwent mental, physical and emotional trauma during this pandemic. South Africa experienced a national level 5 lockdown, whereby citizens are asked to remain at home, alcohol was banned, which left men in a more vulnerable state of mind as their dependence on alcohol is high, tending to become abusive and violent to their partners and their learners. This added to the stats of Covid-19 psychological effects on learners.

This chapter is the final chapter of this research study which will consist of the limitations, summary of the findings from the research, recommendations and a conclusion to the research task.

6.3. Summary of the study

In relation to the research questions which were underpinned in the study, there were four findings that were established:

- A. Covid-19 impacted underprivileged learners the most as they were victims of psychological distress as our country was facing a huge pandemic. This pandemic altered their personal capacity as well as their academic growth to evolve from a poverty-stricken background and into a more established living environment.
- B. The pandemic altered the growing and developing learners's mental capacity, as many learners had been going through psychological distress from as young as they can remember. Many learners had to witness their loved ones pass on during the pandemic and often times they felt that there was no escape to the emotions that they feel. Many parents were bread winners in their homes and often times learners had to witness their parents dying and to then begin to take on that adult responsibility within child-headed homes. Many parents from poverty-stricken areas were helpers and domestic workers for people in urban areas. When the lockdown began, many if not all were out of jobs, which increased poverty to a greater demand.
- C. During the pandemic, learners had to live with the new norm "social distancing". Many learners in this area tried to find comfort with neighbours and friends. With this isolation, they had no one to express their feelings and had all their emotions bottled up. There was a lack of support as some parents and teachers were not trained and equipped with skills to counsel and support learners. Many learners felt alone and got accustomed to being an introvert.
- D. The stress that was identified from many aspects of a child's life becomes hard to eventually deal with, if not treated and counselled on time. Many factors that affect a child can contribute to their psychological mind-set. For example, an A+ child might underperform, due to not having access to online classes. This would not only impact the child academically but would also affect the child psychologically, as they may begin to fail their grades and in worst case scenario miss an entire academic year. This would further affect them psychologically, as they would have to see their friends

progress to the next grade whilst they remain back.

6.4. Discussion

The Covid-19 pandemic has been a very difficult pill to swallow for many individuals. The repercussions were many times very difficult to overcome as many succumbed to death. However, after consulting with various stakeholders it was evident that learners in underprivileged, poverty-stricken areas were affected the most. There is a wide range of components that can lead to a child being psychologically impacted through this pandemic. All learners bore the scars during this pandemic, however learners from lower income households suffered the most, most of who did not have a warm meal for the day and often went to bed on a hungry stomach. This study looked at how this virus impacted on an underprivileged child psychologically by analysing factors that contributed to such. It is important to understand that such an experience can impact a child to such an extent whereby they feel limited in society, as a vessel with little or no drive to grow in their future. In some cases, learners can take this psychological distress into their teen years and adulthood, scarring their future selves. Instead of learners continuing in psychological distress, teachers, principals, the Department of Education, parents and community members can stand at the forefront ensuring that learners who were affected during the pandemic can move past the psychological harm and work towards a more flourishing future, bettering themselves and moving away from poverty. Support is very pivotal in overcoming such experiences.

6.5. Limitations

It is of great importance to note that the research was conducted during Covid-19, where experiences were current. Remediation for teachers' and learner's experiences is recommended. The study is limited as only one school was sampled. It can be helpful to suggest responses from other participants from other areas beyond Durban, to respond to similar issues that has been affecting learners academically and psychologically.

Another limitation was the fact that the sample size was small, which may present a difficulty in drawing any generalisation to the whole education system regarding Covid-19 in the classroom and the implications that it has caused. Due to Covid-19, teachers were overworked to complete the syllabus and may not have time to participate in the data generation process. The participants had to participate during weekends and after school as teaching and learning time was not negotiated. Appointments was set up with the school principal in advance as due

to Covid-19 there was a limitation on the access of who enters and leaves the school premises.

Future samples of participants should be teachers teaching core subjects, as a child's full potential is displayed through the results of their core subjects. The focus could be on tracking the academic performance of high achiever learners so that it could be deduced whether changes in academic performance were due to Covid-19 and not due to the learning barriers that participants may have.

6.6. Recommendations

The community plays a very important role in assisting such learners. Learners will feel more confident to speak and open up if they know they have the backing of the community that would help them move forward. In order for the community to reassure learners that they have their support, the community may come up with a neighbourhood support group, speaking to elders and religious organisations bringing about a safe space for learners to speak and get counselled on without judgement and fear. By educating other stakeholders, the support system grows broader, giving victims a voice to speak out and to be heard no matter how difficult of a situation they are in.

The medical psychology team of many government hospitals should give free access for counselling which should include whole family counselling. Often times, learners are afraid to speak to their families about what is bothering them as they feel they will be judged and won't be heard.

In many occasions, elders are not aware of the repercussions their actions have on their learners. They believe in societal ancient teachings that learners cannot have psychological battles and sometimes as it is not understood by parents or elders, they believe that learners are rebels due to the way in which they act out, without understanding the reasoning behind it. Elders should be more accepting to learners and give them advice and a safe space to speak up, as often times learners feel alone and alienated or some cases blame themselves for their financial situation.

Lastly, in a school set up, the Department of Education should draw up a workshop for empowering teachers and other staff members on how to counsel affected learners and what steps to take to assist learners in overcoming psychological distress.

The Department of Health should offer free and available counselling sessions for learners together with their families, who had witnessed traumatic situations during the pandemic and hold seminars on the importance of a positive psychological mind to reach out awareness to elders and family members.

6.7. Conclusion

There were very important findings that were established from this research task, which included society, the community and financial dependence being important aspects that affects a child psychologically during the pandemic. The Department of Education, social services, parents and families as well as the community can come together to provide support and direct awareness to mental health, highlighting how such circumstances as well as poverty have had detrimental effects on primary school learners.

Help is needed to create a safe haven for learners to become themselves in the classroom as well as outside the classroom space, allowing them to discover their full potential in society and the classroom, ensuring great professional growth and increase in their capabilities, despite their past situations, to aim far beyond society's expectations.

Literature was greatly analysed in relation to the pandemic in South Africa and around the world. Women and young learners face hunger and poverty every minute of every day in every part of the world. Learners are not weak or vulnerable, they are shaped by what societies sculpt them to be. However, learners are afraid to speak about what is bothering them as they feel like they will not be heard. Support is a very important aspect in assisting underprivileged primary school learners who were negatively impacted during the pandemic. After research with participants, I realised that teachers feel that they are not equipped to counsel and support learners. They believe parents are also not equipped to assist their learners. It is an important call for the Department of Education and the Department of Health to come together and work in unison in assisting learners in speaking up and not turning to suicide or drugs consumption.

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Appendix 1: Permission from KwaZulu Natal Department of Education



KWAZULU-NATAL PROVINCE

EDUCATION
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

OFFICE OF THE HEAD OF DEPARTMENT

Private Bag X9137, PIETERMARITZBURG, 3200
Anton Lembede Building, 247 Burger Street, Pietermaritzburg, 3201
Tel: 033 392 1063

Email: Phindile.duma@kzndoe.gov.za

Enquiries: Phindile Duma

Ref.:2/4/8/4072

Miss N Naicker
7 Winter Manor
Trenance Manor
PHOENIX
4068

Dear Miss Naicker

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: **"THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON UNDERPRIVILEGED PRIMARY SCHOOL LEARNERS"**, in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education Institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the Intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from 23 May 2022 to 02 May 2025.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Miss Phindile Duma at the contact numbers above.
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report/dissertation/thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Office of the HOD, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education.

PINETOWN DISTRICT

Mr GN Ngcobo
Head of Department: Education
Date: 26 May 2022

GROWING KWAZULU-NATAL TOGETHER

Appendix 2: Request for permission to access schools

2 Peace Park Place

Sastri Park

Phoenix

4068

GATEKEEPER PERMISSION

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Natlee Naicker. I am a Master of Education (Med) student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal who will be participating in fieldwork for my research project entitled, **“Teachers’ views on the psychological influence of Covid-19 on underprivileged Primary School learners”**. In a Primary School in the Durban Region through a socio-economic lens. My supervisor for this research project is Mrs. Sibusiswe Ndinisa, a lecturer at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Edgewood Campus.

Covid -19 has not only challenged adults in their lifestyle changes but has also taken an extreme toll on learners as well. Many learners had to process not only the change of lifestyle but the loss of loved ones during this pandemic. Such changes in the economy and daily routines have shifted the psychological coping mechanism for learners. Covid-19 has had enormous replications to learners especially those at underprivileged areas. Not only did these learners lack facilities to continue with their education in the midst of school closures, they were starving due to lack of food nutrition and often cases were victims of physical and emotional abuse which impacted them psychologically.

The study I have undertaken seeks to understand the psychological impact of Covid-19 on underprivileged primary school learners. This study also aims to explore the role that socio-economic factors played in contributing to the psychological impact of these underprivileged learners in a Primary School in the Durban area. Further, intervention strategies will be sifted upon in assisting learners in overcoming psychological distress due to Covid-19 and their financial backgrounds.

I am seeking your permission to conduct this research study with five teachers at your school. Participation in this study is voluntary. These teachers will partake in a questionnaire as well as in a focus group interview, which would occur once which will take place after school hours and will not impact or interfere with the normal running of the school. All interviews will be audio-taped. Participants will have access to all transcripts from the interviews and a copy of the questionnaire. The participant has the right to review, change, or withdraw information or data that has been given. I will make every effort to ensure that the school and participants identities are not divulged. To ensure the protection of the school and participants, I will ask all participants to use pseudonyms for the interviews. No details of the participant are required in the questionnaire. Participants are at liberty to withdraw from the research at any point without any penalties or negative consequences. All audio recordings and transcripts from interviews will be stored and locked away for safe keeping by the researcher.

Should you require further clarification, please contact my research supervisor, Mrs. Sibusisiwe Ndinisa who is located at the School of Educational Psychology, Edgewood Campus, University of KwaZulu-Natal. Contact details: email: NdinisaS@ukzn.ac.za. Phone number: [REDACTED]

For queries concerning ethics, please contact: **Research office, Westville Campus , Govan Mbeki Building, Private Bag X 54001. Durban 4000, KwaZulu Natal, South Africa.**
Contact number : 031 260 4557 Fax : 031 260 4609 Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Yours Faithfully,

_____	_____	_____
Fieldworker's full name	Fieldworker's Signature	Date

Fieldworker's details:

Name of Student: Ms Natlee Naicker

Institution: University of KwaZulu-Natal (Edgewood Campus)

Course: Master of Education (Med)

Cell: [REDACTED]

Email: Natleenaicker01@gmail.com

Kindly complete the following in order to grant permission to the researcher to conduct this research task at you school organisation.

I, _____ hereby give permission for the above mentioned research project to be conducted in my school. It is my understanding of which I acknowledge that consent needs to be further granted from each educator whom wishes to participate in this research task. I am aware that the Heads of Departments in each phase of my school will allocate participants accordingly in the event of their willingness. Thereafter, consent and communication will take place via the participant and the researcher.

SIGNATURE OF GATEKEEPER (PRINCIPAL)

DATE

Appendix 3 Ethical clearance



18 November 2022

Natlee Naicker (213537567)
School Of Education
Edgewood Campus

Dear N Naicker,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00004371/2022

Project title: The psychological impact of corona virus pandemic on underprivileged primary school learners
Degree: Masters

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 17 June 2022 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

This approval is valid until 18 November 2023.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,



Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa

Telephone: +27 1031 290 8350/1557/3587 Email: hssrec@ukzn.ac.za Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics>

Founding Campuses: ■ Edgewood ■ Howard College ■ Medical School ■ Pietermaritzburg ■ Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

Appendix 4: Letter of informed consent

School of Educational Psychology,
University of KwaZulu-Natal (Edgewood Campus)

Dear Educator,

My name is Natlee Naicker. I am Masters student studying at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Edgewood Campus. The title of my research is: The psychological impact of Covid-19 on underprivileged primary school learners. The aim of the study is to understand the psychological impact of Covid-19 on underprivileged learners and why did the pandemic affect them in the way that it did . I am interested in your participation so as to share your experiences and observations on the subject matter.

Please note that:

- The information that you provide will be used for scholarly research only.
- Your participation is entirely voluntary. You have a choice to participate, not to participate or stop participating in the research. You will not be penalized for taking such an action.
- Your views in this interview and questionnaire will be presented anonymously. Neither your name nor identity will be disclosed in any form in the study.
- Your participation will take about 1 month of the school term.
- The records as well as other items associated with this study will be held in a password-protected file accessible only to myself and my supervisors. After a period of 5 years, in line with the rules of the university, it will be disposed by shredding and burning.
- If you are willing to be interviewed and to answer the questionnaire , please indicate (by ticking as applicable) whether or not you are willing to allow the interview to be recorded by the following equipment:
- Audio equipment

Willing		Not Willing	
---------	--	-------------	--

- If you agree to participate please sign the declaration attached to this statement.

I can be contacted via email: natleenaicker01@gmail.com or [REDACTED]

My supervisor is Mrs. S. Ndinisa who is located at the School of Educational Psychology, Edgewood Campus, University of KwaZulu-Natal. Contact details: email NdinisaS@ukzn.ac.za. Phone number: [REDACTED]

The Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee contact details are as follows: Research office, Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building, Private Bag X 54001. Durban 4000, KwaZulu Natal, South Africa.

Contact number: 031 260 4557 Fax: 031 260 4609 Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Thank you for your contribution to this research.

DECLARATION

I..... (full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire. I understand the intention of the research. I hereby agree to participate.

I consent / do not consent to have this interview recorded (if applicable). I also consent to partake in the questionnaire.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

DATE

.....

.....

Appendix 5: Focus group interview schedule

Focus Group Interview:

1. What is your understanding of Covid-19?
2. How was the teaching and learning environment before Covid-19?
3. How has Covid-19 affected learners in this school psychologically?
4. Have there been any changes in learners' behaviour or performance at school after Covid-19? If so, in what way?
5. In what way did the lockdown affect learners' psychologically?
6. How has rotational timetabling impacted teaching and learning?
7. How has the teaching and learning been after school opened at full capacity?
8. As your school being a full service, mainstream Primary School, how are learners' performance been after schools reopened at full capacity?
9. Is there any learner who has lost loved ones due to the pandemic? How did this impact on them psychologically?
10. Are learners isolated during lunch break or are they able to socialise and grow friendships?
11. If your answer was isolated to question 10, do you think the lockdown could have added to this behaviour? Elaborate.
12. What impact do you think Covid-19 had on underprivileged learners as compared to privileged learners?

Appendix 6: Questionnaire

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this study. The purpose of the study is to understand the psychological impact of Covid-19 on underprivileged primary school learners. Please note that there are no right or wrong answers.

Do not write your name on this questionnaire.

1. Please respond to these questions by ticking YES/NO

- Do you know what Covid-19 is?
Yes/No
- Has the learning environment deteriorated after Covid-19? Yes
/No
- Do you think Covid-19 has affected learners psychologically?
Yes/No
- Have you noticed behavioural changes in your learners after Covid-19?

Yes/No

- Do you know how to support learners who were affected psychologically during Covid-19?
Yes/No
- Teachers need support from the Department of Education to assist learners who were psychologically impacted by Covid-19 Yes/No
- Do teachers get any support from the Department of Education to enable them to support learners psychologically?
Yes/No

2. Please decide how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements by ticking numbers 1-5.

1–Strongly Agree 2–Agree 3–Neutral 4–Disagree 5–Strongly Disagree

- The return of learners at full capacity made a difference to learners psychological healthy. 1 2
3 4 5
- Teachers require support themselves for them to support learners and to face challenges posed by Covid-19. 1 2 3 4
5
- Supporting learners requires specific strategies. 1 2 3 4 5
- Teachers need specialist training to support learners who has lost loved ones during the Covid-19 pandemic. 1 2 3
4 5
- Parents, just like teachers, need to be supported to be able to deal with learners who were impacted by Covid-19. 1 2 3
4 5
- In supporting learners, teachers need to have a frame of mind that is open to many possible solutions for ensuring learners are well supported according to their psychological needs. 1 2 3 4
5
- Access to a school library during the lockdown could have assisted learners in academic excellency despite financial constraints. 1 2 3 4 5

3. Please fill in your answers to these questions:

- a. Making reference to your school being in an underprivileged area and learners coming from disadvantaged homes, can you briefly explain how teaching and learning took place under the lockdown restriction as learners lack facilities in their homes?

- b. As an educator explain how you went about in assisting learners psychologically in overcoming the influences of Covid-19?

(THE END- THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR SUPPORT)

Appendix 7: Editor's letter

Crispin Hemson
15 Morris Place
Glenwood
Durban
South Africa 4001

hemsonc@gmail.com


TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to confirm that I have undertaken language editing of a Masters dissertation by Natlee Naicker, entitled **The psychological impact of COVID-19 on underprivileged primary school learners**.



25th November 2023

Appendix 8: Turn it in report



Digital Receipt

This receipt acknowledges that Turnitin received your paper. Below you will find the receipt information regarding your submission.

The first page of your submissions is displayed below.

Submission author: Natlee Naicker
Assignment title: The psychological impact of COVID-19 on underprivileged p...
Submission title: thesis
File name: thesis.docx
File size: 1.09M
Page count: 67
Word count: 20,964
Character count: 114,048
Submission date: 27-Nov-2023 06:32PM (UTC+0200)
Submission ID: 2237540506

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

Covid-19 is a pandemic which has affected the entire world, particularly children, who attempt to make sense of the world were threatened through the isolation imposed on them due to lockdowns. Their future academic growth and their psychological health were compromised. This research aims to identify the psychological effects of Covid-19 on underprivileged learners in a primary school and the challenges that these learners are faced with daily. This chapter focuses on the reality of these experiences from a personal, professional and contextual point of view and will display an introductory of what the future chapters hold.

This chapter will set out the introduction to this research study, firstly through the analysis of the background of the study as well as the rationale from a personal, professional and contextual view. This chapter also expands on the location in which the study is to be carried out.

1.2 Background

The World Health Organization (2020) mentions, the Coronavirus-19 (Covid-19) disease is known as an infectious disease which was caused by a scientifically newly discovered coronavirus. Most badly affected individuals have been those of which had underlying comorbidities such as heart disease, cancer, diabetes and so on, of which were most likely to develop serious illnesses. Further, the World Health Organization (2020) highlights the fact that the Covid-19 virus spreads primarily through a discharge from the nose or droplets of the saliva when an infected person coughs or sneezes. The National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD, 2021) adds, on the 2nd of March 2020, South Africa encountered its first Covid-19 positive case. In response to this discovery and the increase in positive cases, according to the South African Government News Agency, Mr Cyril Ramaphosa (The President of the Republic of South Africa) announced the initiation of a nationwide lockdown which began on the 26th of March 2020. The president's announcement followed a nationwide lockdown which came forward due to the number of confirmed positive cases increased in six-folds in just eight days from just 61 cases to an increased 402 cases. As a result of the lockdown measures, the Government of South Africa



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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

Covid-19 is a pandemic which has affected the entire world, particularly children, who attempts to make sense of the world were thwarted through the isolation imposed on them due to lockdowns. Their future academic growth and their psychological health were compromised. This research aims to identify the psychological effects of Covid-19 on underprivileged learners in a primary school and the challenges that these learners are faced with daily. This chapter focuses on the reality of these experiences from a personal, professional and contextual point of view and will display an introductory of what the future chapters hold.

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implemented strategies on containing the outbreak which includes the closure of schools, implementation of remote working policies, travel restrictions as well as the ban on the sale of alcohol.

According to Van Der Berg (2020), prior to the lockdown, 2.5 million children had experienced a feeling of hunger and more than one third of children who had died were severely malnourished. A Survey undertaken immediately by STATS SA and the Human Sciences Research Council (STATSA, 2021) have displayed an increase in child hunger since the lockdown, ever since many workers lost their income and led to children no longer being able to receive subsidized meals at school. Further, Statistics SA (2021) makes reference to latest surveys in various countries that have demonstrated a consensus view (Figure 3.2) showing that many children are at an increased risk for lasting psychological distress which also includes depression.

A significant number of days at school were lost by South African children, of which the extent being dependent on their grade. According to the Department of Health (2021) and the government regulations in reviewing the size of the classrooms in South Africa (South African Schools Act, Norms and Standards, 2009), it is evident that almost half of South African learners were unable to practise social distancing in their classroom. Schools had to ensure that learners came to school on a rotational timetabling basis. They were required to sanitize and to use their masks at all times. In some cases, according to the rotational timetabling, learners were only present at school once a week, which impacts the teacher being unable to complete the school curricular which would leave a gap in a child's education and such learning losses would have much lasting implications. Piragiatin (2020) mentions that children were