

**STRATEGIES FOR MONITORING CURRICULUM DELIVERY: LESSONS FROM
PRIMARY SCHOOLS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC.**

by

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Submitted by the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in the subject of

EDUCATION MANAGEMENT

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

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I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at UNISA for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.



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Tshirangwana, 05/08/2025

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I give all honour and glory to the LORD for granting me the knowledge, strength, and perseverance to complete this research journey.

I express my sincere gratitude to the following individuals and institutions for their invaluable support throughout this academic endeavour.

My heartfelt thanks go to Professor J Nyoni for his consistent support, guidance, and encouragement during this academic process. Your expertise, patience, and dedication have been a constant source of inspiration, and the solid foundation you laid has significantly contributed to my academic development. A special word of thanks goes to Dr Munwana, not only for your professional support but also for being a brother to me. Your constant presence and guidance have made me a better person. I am truly blessed to have been on this journey with you.

I want to thank my late husband; I know that you would have been proud of this achievement. To my wonderful children, Excellent, Fortunate, McCoy, Taryn, and Muneri, your love, patience, and encouragement sustained me throughout this journey. Your unshakeable belief in me meant more than words can express, and I am forever grateful to each of you.

Special thanks to the D9 District and the Head Office for permitting me to conduct this research.

I am deeply grateful to all the principals, department heads, teachers, and District officials who generously participated and shared their insights for this study.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my late husband and my family, whose constant support, care, and encouragement have been instrumental in the completion of this project.

ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE



UNISA COLLEGE OF EDUCATION ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

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The manuscript has been reviewed and edited to ensure that it meets the highest standards of English usage.

Prof PK Rossler guarantees that the manuscript has been edited to the best of his ability and that it is free from errors in English language usage. The certificate is issued on 09/08/2025.

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Acronyms/Abbreviations Definitions

DBE	Department of Basic Education
DoE	Department of Education
GDE	Gauteng Department of Education
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
MoE	Ministry of Education
SMT	School Management Team
NRC	National Curriculum Statement
RNCS	Revised National Curriculum Statement
UNICEF	United Nations Children Fund
UNESCO	United Scientific and Cultural Organisation for Education

ABSTRACT

This study investigates lessons learned from curriculum delivery strategies in primary schools during the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on perceptions from principals, teachers, and Heads of Department (HODs). Its primary aim is to identify effective methods for monitoring curriculum implementation during crises and to generate insights for enhancing future primary education practices. Framed within an interpretive paradigm, the research employs a qualitative phenomenological approach, utilizing semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis to gather comprehensive contextual data. Thematic analysis of the transcribed data reveals key patterns and insights. Findings highlight significant challenges in maintaining learner engagement and motivation within virtual learning environments, emphasizing the pedagogical limitations of remote instruction. Participants underscore the essential role of face-to-face teaching in facilitating personalized learning and advocate for systemic reforms to bolster educational resilience against future disruptions. Critical barriers identified include inadequate digital infrastructure, insufficient teacher preparedness for remote instruction, and a lack of institutional support, especially in under-resourced schools. The study recommends that policymakers and school leaders prioritize equitable access to reliable internet, adaptive learning technologies, and conducive home-learning environments—particularly in low-income communities—to bridge the digital divide and support sustainable hybrid learning models. Additionally, the research underscores the importance of ongoing professional development that integrates teacher wellbeing, digital literacy, and flexible pedagogical strategies to ensure equitable curriculum delivery during crises. It advocates adaptable curriculum frameworks to support effective teaching across both digital and traditional platforms. Ultimately, this research contributes to the discourse on crisis-responsive education by proposing actionable strategies to foster resilient, inclusive, and adaptable primary education systems. The study's main objectives, methodologies, conclusions, and implications are succinctly summarised in this abstract.

CONCEPTUALISATION AND OPERATIONALISATION KEY TERMS

Adaptability, Agile leadership, COVID-19 pandemic, Crisis management, Digital leadership, Digital transformation, Education, Educational technology, e-leadership, Leadership theories, Online learning, School leadership, Learner achievement.

CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL ORIENTATION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION OF THE STUDY

The COVID-19 outbreak represents a global crisis that has profoundly affected both public health and education systems worldwide. Its impact on schools, learners, and instructors has been particularly significant (Almanthari, Maulina, & Bruce, 2020). Indeed, the pandemic precipitated one of the most severe disruptions to education systems in modern history, affecting billions of learners globally (Mhlanga & Moloji, 2020). Educational authorities around the world ordered unscheduled closure of schools to contain the COVID-19 pandemic. Thousands of educational institutions worldwide suspended classroom teaching and switched to online instruction as a response to the disruption of face-to-face education caused by the COVID-19 outbreak (Kiugu, 2020).

The transition to online, e-learning, or remote teaching formats accelerated rapidly, becoming a widespread reality for thousands of educational institutions worldwide. However, as Ornstein and Hunkins (2009) observe, the quality of education is shaped by a multitude of interrelated factors. These include teacher preparation, parental engagement, and learner characteristics—such as fluctuating emotional states—all of which significantly influence the effectiveness of remote instruction. Compounding these challenges, Pravat (2020) highlights that inadequate infrastructure, including network failures, electricity shortages, limited access to devices, and poor digital literacy, poses substantial barriers to the successful implementation of online education.

To achieve educational objectives during the COVID-19 pandemic, effective tools must not only facilitate operational delivery but also integrate robust curriculum-monitoring strategies in primary schools. Rahman (2020) defines curriculum delivery monitoring as a structured approach to shaping learning experiences, in which the intended outcomes of educational institutions are systematically planned and guided globally. Effective curriculum monitoring, according to this view, depends on reconstructing knowledge in ways that support learners' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor development.

In contrast, Pratt (1980) offers a broader conceptualisation of curriculum, framing it as the process through which an agreed plan, decision, proposal, or policy is translated into practice. This includes, among other elements, the provision of organised support to teachers. Within this framework, the enactment of newly developed curricula and instructional strategies occurs at the classroom level. Complementing this perspective, Pravat (2020) characterises curriculum monitoring as the evaluation of the learning experiences children undergo under a teacher's guidance, typically comprising three components: planned studies, structured activities, and sequential programmes.

Synthesising these views, Rahman (2020) envisions curriculum delivery monitoring as a conveyor belt that channels the various elements of educational programmes, serving as the mechanism through which knowledge and learning activities are disseminated. Operationalising this process requires implementing agents—in this context, teachers, and more specifically, principals, who are tasked with overseeing how teachers select, integrate, and apply the diverse knowledge domains contained in curriculum documents or syllabi (Mhlanga, 2020).

Against this backdrop, the present study seeks to evaluate the strategies for monitoring curriculum delivery employed in primary schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. By examining the lessons learned, it aims to recommend practical strategies for improving curriculum delivery and monitoring in schools across Johannesburg.

This was followed by the background, the problem statement, and research questions that would guide the study. The purpose of the study and the objectives that will guide it are then presented, followed by the research design and methodology. Other typical aspects of the chapter include the study's contribution, significance, safety issues, and intellectual property. The chapter closed with an outline of the research study's chapter divisions.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The global outbreak of COVID-19 severely disrupted teaching and learning, particularly compromising the monitoring of curriculum delivery. In response, government bodies, notably the Department of Basic Education (DBE), implemented COVID-19 guidelines meant to limit the virus's spread and manage education systems to mitigate its most devastating consequences. The complete closure of all educational institutions led to significant disruption in in-person teaching, which, in turn, hindered

effective curriculum implementation for an extended period (UNESCO, 2020). Changes in the education system significantly influenced the mode of delivery and the quality of teaching and learning in schools, as many South African teachers, according to Moloji, Mhlanga, and Nyoni (2020), faced difficulties accessing and using online learning support services. We observed that some schools were partially closed, while others were closed for the entire academic year. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, thousands of schools faced connectivity challenges and lacked familiarity with the technological tools required for effective online learning. The assumption is that the use of communication tools has become an added burden in educating the nation's children.

Various countries adopted alternative learning systems to mitigate the effects of the pandemic, which significantly altered how teachers allocated their time between student instruction and administrative responsibilities, according to a World Bank report (2020). During the COVID-19 pandemic, inequalities in access to learning resources, such as digital platforms, hampered curriculum implementation.

Consequently, learners, especially those in urban areas, had markedly different educational experiences compared to their rural counterparts, who faced limited access to technological resources (Spaull, 2020). Digital migration was found to be an ideal option; however, learners lack access to facilities (Janties, 2020). Due to teachers' lack of preparedness for remote teaching on short notice, there was an increased need for flexible scheduling to facilitate learner-teacher interactions in virtual education settings (Hodges, 2020). Teachers, school principals, and educational institutions worldwide experienced what the present generation may not have experienced before. To date, there appears to be limited literature on strategies for monitoring curriculum delivery in primary schools during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as on the pandemic's effects on these processes.

1.3 PRIME OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to investigate and understand the lessons learned about curriculum delivery strategies in primary schools during the COVID-19 pandemic, as experienced by principals, teachers, and heads of departments (HODs). This research investigated strategies for monitoring curriculum delivery under challenging circumstances during the COVID-19 pandemic and extracted lessons to inform future primary education practices. The primary objective was to explore and describe the

nanced experiences of primary school principals, deputy principals, and district officials in the Johannesburg East District as they navigated curriculum monitoring and delivery during this crisis period. Through in-depth analysis of the collected data, the study sought to develop a comprehensive understanding of the adaptive strategies used by the selected educational leaders employed in response to the disruption. Furthermore, the research aimed to contribute to the scholarly discourse by proposing a curriculum delivery model specifically designed for crisis contexts, such as a pandemic. Grounded in lessons learned and best practices identified during this period, the proposed model is intended to serve as a practical framework for planning and implementing resilient, crisis-oriented curriculum delivery in primary schools.

1.3.1 The Main Research Question

The following main research question was contextually framed in the study:

What are the key curriculum delivery monitoring strategies implemented in primary schools within the East District of Johannesburg during the COVID-19 pandemic, and what lessons can be derived from the experiences of school and district officials to adapt to and overcome the challenges posed by the pandemic in the context of primary education?

1.3.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- *To examine how the roles of school management teams evolved in response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.*
- *To identify and explore the specific challenges faced by school management teams in fulfilling their responsibilities during the pandemic?*
- *To investigate how school management teams innovatively adapted their roles and leadership strategies to address the unique demands of the COVID-19 pandemic?*
- *To analyse the forms of support and assistance provided by the Department of Basic Education to schools in managing curriculum delivery during the pandemic?*
- *To explore teachers' perspectives and experiences regarding curriculum delivery during the COVID-19 crisis?*

1.3.3 Sub-questions undergirding the main research question:

- *How have the roles of school management evolved in response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic?*
- *What specific challenges has the school management team faced in fulfilling its responsibilities during the pandemic?*
- *In what ways have school management teams innovatively adapted their roles to address the unique demands of the COVID-19 era?*
- *How did the Department of Basic Education support schools in managing and implementing the curriculum during the pandemic?*
- *What are teachers' perspectives on delivering the curriculum during the crisis?*

1.4 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has affected numerous sectors, including education (UNESCO, 2020). Global authorities advised the public to respond quickly to stop its spread, which has affected how educational programs are managed and tracked overall (Sintema, 2020). According to the World Health Organization (2020), responsive measures such as social distancing, sanitization, quarantining, mask wearing, proper ventilation of indoor areas, and handwashing were essential in mitigating the virus.

Curriculum delivery and monitoring are crucial processes for generating data to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching and learning, and they are part of the principal's responsibilities in every school (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2009). The purpose of establishing and aligning curricula includes these curriculum monitoring measures. However, COVID-19 disrupted teaching and learning processes, affecting how primary schools delivered their curricula (Sintema, 2020). Implementing a new teaching model was necessary due to the COVID-19 outbreak and the intervention strategies (Jantjies, 2020). This model involved using online platforms such as Zoom and TeamViewer and shifted to virtual lessons, which meant that curriculum delivery monitoring strategies would need to change.

Curriculum delivery was not successfully implemented at this time because, according to Dias, Lopes, & Teles (2020), not all learners were comfortable, available, or receptive to Zoom or virtual classes; instead, they preferred to wait for the epidemic to end. During the COVID-19 pandemic, curriculum delivery and monitoring were difficult and remain difficult in most developing countries (Jandra, Huda, & Maseleno, 2020).

In their capacity as leaders, school principals should establish an atmosphere that anticipates and models a student's future (Reynolds & Teddlie, 2000) to adapt to the rapid changes brought on by the epidemic. However, the principal should support the high calibre of curriculum delivery in the school, which can be achieved by cleverly monitoring the desired educational programmes. This is justified by the need to explore how school management, particularly principals, monitored and supported curriculum delivery during the pandemic. Understanding these approaches and challenges will contribute valuable insights into strengthening school leadership and preparedness for future educational disruptions.

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study holds substantial value for various stakeholders in the education sector. School principals and management teams (SMTs) benefit from evidence-based strategies to enhance crisis leadership, enabling them to navigate disruptions such as pandemics more effectively. Primary school teachers in Johannesburg's East District gain practical insights into adaptable teaching and leadership approaches, empowering them to mitigate challenges during crises.

Additionally, the findings inform policymakers about necessary reforms to strengthen educational resilience and ensure preparedness for future disruptions. UNESCO (2020) emphasises that policy responses should focus on building resilient education systems capable of adapting to sudden shifts in teaching modalities. By analysing this study's outcomes, stakeholders can develop targeted interventions that improve crisis response, leadership adaptability, and sustainable educational practices. This research contributes to a more robust, responsive education system capable of thriving amid change.

1.6 RESEARCH AUXILIARY OBJECTIVES

The study investigated and categorised the diverse experiences of primary school principals, deputy principals, and district officials in the East District of Johannesburg during the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting unique challenges and successful strategies.

Assess impact on Curriculum Delivery: Evaluate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on traditional curriculum delivery methods in primary schools in the East District of Johannesburg, examining how disruptions affected educational practices

and outcomes. **Identify Best Practices and Lessons Learned:** Systematically identify and document best practices and lessons learned by primary school teachers and administrators in Johannesburg's East District during the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on effective strategies for curriculum monitoring and delivery.

Analyse the Proposed Curriculum Delivery Method Model: Critically assessed the proposed curriculum delivery method model tailored for crises, evaluating its practical applicability, adaptability, and potential effectiveness in improving curriculum delivery during future crises beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recommendations for Future Crisis-Oriented Planning: Developed practical recommendations for teachers, administrators, and policymakers based on the findings, with a focus on informing future crisis-oriented curriculum planning and delivery strategies in primary schools, not only in the East District of Johannesburg, but also in similar educational contexts worldwide.

Mason (2002) defined data as the process of actively building knowledge about the world using certain principles. The researcher obtained data from people as well as from objects, textual materials, audiovisuals, and electronic records (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). The researcher interviewed the first participant, then the remaining participants until all interviews were completed. The interview process was followed by the transcription of the recordings (Horowitz & Gerson, 2020). The interview recordings were transcribed immediately after each day of interviews, and the transcripts were saved on a personal computer, where they will later be used for the day's analysis. The transcripts were verbatim. File names were assigned to the transcriptions to protect participants' identities. This meant that code names were used to safeguard the identities of the schools and participants, although the researcher knew their true identities.

1.7 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The following study was based on Mitroff's five-stage crisis management model and the 1994 portfolio model. Mitroff's model describes five crisis stages that follow a similar lifecycle progression: crisis signal detection, probing and prevention, containment, recovery, and learning.

Mitroff is regarded as one of the first researchers to recognise that, due to resource limitations, preparing for every conceivable kind of crisis is impossible. He noted that

crises tend to fall into certain categories, which Mitroff called clusters, such as equipment failures, breakdowns, and defects; equipment defects; external actions; and threats. Similarly, prevention actions also cluster together.

Based on a survey by Mitroff, it is suggested that rationalizing companies during the crisis by forming dual crisis portfolios. The first portfolio should consist of crises, one drawn from each crisis cluster, and the other portfolio comprises matching preventive actions from each cluster. Mitroff and his colleagues posited that establishing these two portfolios provides at least minimal coverage across crisis categories.

Crisis management is an integral part of an organisation's efforts to understand, prevent, and manage crises while considering stakeholder interests. It involves various individuals at different organisational levels and adapts to the specific nature and phases of a crisis.

According to Dirk (2003), crisis management can also be defined as an ongoing, integrated, and comprehensive effort that organizations put in place to first understand and prevent crises and then to effectively manage those that occur, taking the interests of their stakeholders into account at every stage of their planning and training activities.

Crisis management, as an institution, refers to groups of individuals responsible for crisis management efforts. They are the primary means of delivering effective crisis management. Employees at the middle and lower levels, as well as external pressures, serve as crisis actors alongside members of higher management. When a crisis develops, crisis management involves adjustments to jobs and procedures. There are several forms of crisis management and related activities, depending on the process, the nature of the problem, and the phases of the problem. Mitroff's theory is relevant to the context of the COVID-19 pandemic since its crisis signals detection phase emphasises the need to detect emergencies at an early stage. Once such signs are identified, authorities are supposed to implement crisis-containment strategies while ensuring the continuity of curriculum delivery. During the COVID-19 pandemic, preventive measures included vaccination, wearing face masks, sanitising and maintaining social distancing. Containment efforts involved quarantining infected individuals for a specified period and limiting in-person interactions. The recovery phase in education is centred on compensating for lost instructional time through extra classes and online activities. Consequently, learning programmes were extended, and

assessments were conducted virtually. Thus, Mitroff's (1988) theory provided a sufficient framework for mitigating educational disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.8 DEFINITION OF THE KEY CONCEPTS

1.8.1 Primary School

The primary school is an educational institution that serves learners from grade R to grade 7. It is organised into three distinct phases: the foundation phase, which covers grades R to three, the intermediate phase that spans grades 4 to 6, and finally, the senior phase comprising grade 7 (DBE, 2011).

1.8.2 School

A school is an educational institution that provides instruction under the guidance of teachers (UNESCO, 2021).

1.8.3 Curriculum

The curriculum is the set of subjects studied at school. It is also known and referred to as the syllabi. The focus of this study is the implementation of curriculum changes (DBE, 2021).

1.8.4 School Management

The school management team comprises highly qualified and experienced teachers who confidently supervise, guide, mentor, and provide unwavering support to their fellow teachers throughout the teaching and learning journey within the school (Bush & Glover, 2014).

1.8.5 COVID-19

The global coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic (COVID-19) was initially announced by the world on 31 December 2019 by the country office of the World Health Organisation, a cluster of pneumonia cases in Wuhan City, Hubei Province of China. The virus that causes COVID-19 has been identified as SARS-CoV-2 (Sharma et al., 2020; World Health Organisation (WHO), 2020).

1.8.6 Distance Learning

Distance learning is a form of education in which the teacher and learners are not in the same physical location. In other words, they live at a distance from each other and use technology to communicate (Moore, Dickson-Deane, & Galyen, 2011).

1.8.7 Distance Education

Distance education is defined as institution-based formal education in which the learning group is separated, and interactive telecommunication systems are used to connect students and lecturers (Simonson, Schlosser & Orellana, 2011).

1.8.8 Educational Technology Integration

Technology integration in education refers to the purposeful incorporation of technology into teaching and learning to improve student outcomes, improve instructional practices, and increase efficiency. This process involves the use of various digital platforms and technologies, such as educational software, learning management systems, multimedia content, and internet-based resources, to support and transform the learning experience (DBE, 2023).

1.8.9 Teacher Professional Development

The ongoing education and training of teachers, also known as Teacher Professional Development (TPD), aims to improve their skills, knowledge, and classroom practices. TPD helps teachers stay up to date with best practices, research, and emerging technologies while also improving their instructional strategies, assessment methods, and classroom management techniques.

1.8.10 Educational Technology

The use of technology to support and enhance teaching and learning during COVID-19 refers specifically to the digital tools and platforms employed by teachers and learners in South African primary schools. This includes the use of devices such as computers and tablets, Online communication applications, and digital learning resources designed to facilitate curriculum delivery under restricted in-person conditions (Motala & Menon, 2020).

1.9 CHAPTER LAYOUT

Chapter One: It presented an overview of the study and outlined the background and context, the problem statement, the aim and objectives, the research questions, the key definition, and the study's contribution to the existing body of knowledge.

Chapter Two: The chapter offered a comprehensive review of the relevant literature, beginning with the theories underpinning the research: Mitroff's Five-Stage Crisis Management Model and the Portfolio Model. These theories were subsequently examined for their relevance to the study.

Chapter Three: This chapter outlined the research design and methodology used in the study. It detailed procedures for collecting data through semi-structured focus groups, one-on-one interviews, open-ended and document analysis. The chapter also described the sampling procedures, addressed issues of trustworthiness, discussed ethical considerations, and identified the study limitations.

Chapter Four: Chapter four presented the research through findings, themes, and sub-themes accompanied by a thorough interpretation of the data.

Chapter Five: Chapter five summarised the key findings, provided conclusions, and offered recommendations based on the findings.

1.10 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The chapter presents an overview of the study, including the nature of the problem and the rationale for conducting the study. It has established clear parameters for the study, presenting the background, context, and objectives, the research questions, and operational terms used. The key concepts were then discussed.

1.11 PROJECTION FOR THE NEXT CHAPTER

This chapter provides a comprehensive foundation for the study by outlining its overall structure and key components. It starts by explaining the context and significance of the research, highlighting the profound impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on curriculum delivery and monitoring in primary schools. The statement of the problem highlights the disruptions caused by the pandemic, particularly the challenges faced in effectively implementing and monitoring the curriculum amid school closures and the shift to online learning. The chapter further defines the study's purpose and objectives, which focus on exploring the experiences and strategies of educational leaders in Johannesburg's East District during the pandemic. Key research questions are presented targeting the evolution of school management roles and the specific challenges encountered. The rationale emphasises the importance of the study for teachers, policymakers, and other stakeholders in developing effective crisis-response

strategies. Additionally, the chapter also explains the theoretical framework, particularly Mitroff's crisis management model, which was used to analyse school crisis management strategies adopted by schools. The definitions of key concepts, such as the primary school curriculum and distance learning, ensure a clear understanding of the terms used throughout the study. In conclusion, the chapter establishes the research objectives and parameters, providing a solid foundation for the subsequent chapters. Chapter Two on the foundational concepts introduced in Chapter One by reviewing relevant literature that deepens the understanding of curriculum delivery and empirical studies aligned with Mitroff's crisis management model to contextualise the research problem. This linkage provides a scholarly basis for the empirical investigation that follows in later chapters

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents an overview of the literature and the theoretical framework that informed the study's conception. The literature review in this chapter will focus on strategies for monitoring curriculum delivery in primary schools during the COVID-19 pandemic and the lessons learned. The focus was on the International, Sub-Saharan African, and South African perspectives on monitoring strategies for curriculum delivery in primary schools. According to Kothari (2004), a literature review is an integral part of the research process and makes a valuable contribution to every operational step. Furthermore, it creates links between the researcher's proposed work and the existing body of knowledge (Glazunov, 2012). De Vos, Strydom, Fouche, & Delpont (2011) concurred with the above argument that a literature review presented what was known and unknown about the topic, thereby providing a rationale for further research. Furthermore, the literature review should include all themes and subthemes related to the research objectives (Durrheim & Wassenaar, 2002). Therefore, the following subheadings anchored the literature review: content extension of curriculum delivery and monitoring international standards

and a summary of the chapter.

2.2 PHILOSOPHICAL OVERVIEWS

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly impacted education systems worldwide, challenging the traditional models of curriculum delivery and necessitating a re-evaluation of pedagogical strategies. In the context of primary schools, the crisis underscored the need for adaptive, resilient approaches to monitoring curriculum delivery to ensure that learning outcomes were not compromised amid unprecedented disruptions. Philosophically, this situation demands critical reflection on the nature of education, the role of technology in facilitating learning, and the ethical considerations in providing equitable access to quality education.

Drawing from constructivist and pragmatist educational philosophies, strategies to monitor curriculum delivery during the pandemic emphasise the importance of learner-

centred approaches that cater to diverse needs and contexts. The constructivist view, which posits that learners actively construct their knowledge through experiences, aligns with the innovative and flexible methods adopted by teachers during this period. Pragmatism, with its focus on practical solutions and outcomes, further supports the idea that educational strategies must be adaptable and responsive to the realities facing learners and teachers alike.

In addition, the pandemic highlighted the critical importance of inclusivity and equity in education, challenging stakeholders to consider how curriculum monitoring can be designed to bridge gaps rather than widen them. This philosophical lens calls for an ongoing commitment to understanding and addressing the diverse challenges faced by learners, particularly in under-resourced and marginalised communities. The lessons learned from primary schools during this period offer valuable insights into how education systems can evolve to be more resilient, inclusive, and effective in the face of future challenges.

2.2.1 Ontology

Ontology concerns the assumptions we make about what makes sense or is real, or the very nature of the social phenomenon we are researching (Scotland, 2012). According to Kivunja and Kuyini (2017), ontology assisted me to conceptualise the form and nature of reality, and what he/she believes can be known about that reality. It enabled me to examine his underlying belief system and philosophical assumptions about the nature of being, existence, and reality. Methodology is the strategy or plan of action that underlies the choice and use of methods (Crotty, 1998). Scotland (2012) advocates that methodology is concerned with why, what, from where, when, and how data are collected and analysed.

2.2.2 Epistemology

According to (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017), Epistemology is used to explain how we come to know something and how we know the truth or reality (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Schwandt (1997) described it as the study of the nature of knowledge and justification. Glesne (2016) defined a paradigm as a scientific framework that provides expectations about the nature of reality and truth, the kinds of questions to ask, and how to answer them. According to Mouton (2012:137), questions about human understanding of the world and how this understanding is communicated challenge worldviews about how humans learn. Understanding of everyday life and lay knowledge, the world of science,

and the world of meta-science is based on the view that reality is socially constructed by individuals through describing, making sense of, and negotiating the external world (Glesne, 2016).

2.2.3 Axiology

According to Kivunja & Kuyini (2017), Axiology refers to ethical issues that must be considered when planning a research project. It involves defining, evaluating, and understanding concepts of right and wrong behaviour related to research (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Axiology focuses on how the researcher's attitudes and preconceptions influence the scientific process, as well as how the researcher applies the knowledge produced by the study (Lincoln, 2013).

2.3 CURRICULUM IN THE WORLD.

According to Oliva (2012), curriculum is a comprehensive and structured program of educational experiences, activities, and learning opportunities provided by a school or educational institution. It encompasses the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that learners are expected to acquire and develop during their educational journey (Tyler, 1949). A well-designed curriculum serves as a framework for teaching and learning, ensuring consistency and coherence in educational experiences and preparing learners for future roles and responsibilities (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). It also fosters personal growth and development and reflects societal values and cultural heritage (Banks, 2004). A curriculum typically includes learning objectives and outcomes, subject and content, teaching methods and approaches, assessment and evaluation strategies, learning materials and resources, instructional strategies and activities, and time allocations and scheduling (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2013). Effective curriculum design and implementation involve clear learning objectives and outcomes, relevant and engaging subject matter, a variety of teaching methods and approaches, ongoing assessment and evaluation, and continuous improvement and revision (Fullan, 2007). A curriculum plays a crucial role in shaping learners' educational experiences and outcomes, and is essential to ensure that learners receive high-quality education that prepares them for success in life (Hattie, 2009)

The roots of curriculum date to ancient civilizations, with evidence of structured learning programs found in Ancient Greece, Rome, and China (Plato, 380 BCE; Aristotle, 350 BCE; Confucius, 551-479 BCE). The word "curriculum" itself comes from

the Latin word "*Carrère*," meaning "to run," and was first used in the 17th century to describe the course of study at the University of Glasgow (Hamilton, 1633). However, the concept of curriculum has its roots in Ancient Greece, where philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle developed curriculum frameworks that emphasized the study of philosophy, literature, and the arts (Plato, 380 BCE; Aristotle, 350 BCE). In ancient Rome, the concept of curriculum was further developed with a focus on practical skills training and physical education (Quintilian, 95 CE). In China, the Confucian tradition emphasised moral education and character development with a curriculum focused on classical texts and philosophical study (Confucius, 551-479 BCE).

These early curriculum frameworks were designed to prepare individuals for roles in society and laid the foundation for modern curriculum development (Kliebard, 1970). The concept of curriculum evolved and spread to other parts of the world, influenced by various philosophical, social, and economic factors (Franklin, 1986). In the Middle Ages, the Catholic Church played a significant role in shaping the curriculum with a focus on religious education and scripture (Bourke, 2002). During the Renaissance, there was a renewed emphasis on classical learning and humanism (Grafton, 2009). In the 18th and 19th centuries, the Industrial Revolution brought about significant changes in curriculum with a focus on preparing individuals for work in industrial societies (Kantor, 1988).

Curriculum across the world is indeed shaped by a multitude of factors, including cultural values, economic needs, historical contexts, and educational philosophies (Apple, 2013). In many countries, the national curriculum is designed by a central authority such as a ministry of education to ensure a standardised education that reflects national priorities and identity (Bernstein, 2017). For example, in Singapore, the national curriculum is designed to foster a solid foundation in STEM subjects with a focus on critical thinking skills and practical applications (Singapore Ministry of Education, 2020). In Finland, the curriculum emphasises inquiry-based learning and interdisciplinary approaches to promote innovation and adaptability (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2020).

Countries like the United States have more decentralised systems, where states or even individual districts have significant autonomy in curriculum design (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). This allows for greater flexibility and innovation in curriculum development but also raises concerns about consistency and equity (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Globally, there is a core emphasis on foundational subjects such as

mathematics, science, and languages that are considered essential for cognitive development and future career opportunities (OECD, 2019). However, the approach to teaching these subjects can vary significantly depending on the country and its educational philosophy. For example, in France, the humanities and social sciences are emphasised with a focus on developing critical thinking and ethical reasoning skills through the study of philosophical and historical texts (French Ministry of Education, 2020).

Literature, a core component of the humanities, plays a significant role in shaping a student's understanding of both their own culture and others'. In English-speaking countries, literature curricula often include a mix of canonical works such as Shakespeare, Dickens, and Morrison alongside contemporary writers from diverse backgrounds aiming to reflect a broad spectrum of experiences and voices. This approach helps learners develop empathy and a deeper understanding of different human conditions. For example, in the UK, literature classes might include works by British authors across different periods, as well as those by Commonwealth authors, to reflect a post-colonial perspective. In non-English-speaking countries, the literature curriculum is often deeply rooted in national literary traditions while also incorporating international classics and contemporary global literature to expose students to a wider range of genres and narratives.

In countries like Japan and South Korea, the curriculum is heavily influenced by Confucian values that emphasise respect for challenging work by authority and academic achievement. Literature classes in these countries often focus on national classics that convey moral lessons and cultural heritage, such as "The Tale of Genji" in Japan or the works of Yi Mun-yol in Korea. Additionally, there is a significant focus on memorisation and mastery of texts, which reflects the broader educational philosophy in these countries that values discipline and rigorous study. Recently, there has been a global trend towards incorporating digital literacy and critical media skills into the curriculum, recognising the importance of preparing learners for a digital world. This includes teaching learners how to critically evaluate information sources, understand digital ethics, and create digital content, ensuring they are not only consumers but also responsible producers of information.

In addition, hundreds of countries are experimenting with more flexible and interdisciplinary curricula. For example, Finland's education system has embraced phenomenon-based learning in which learners learn through multidisciplinary projects

that combine assorted topics around a single topic or real-world problem. This approach aims to foster collaboration, creativity, and the application of knowledge in practical contexts. While the specifics of curricula vary widely from one country to another, the global trend is towards creating education systems that not only impart knowledge but also develop critical skills such as problem-solving, adaptability, empathy, and global awareness, preparing learners for a rapidly changing world. From the researcher's perspective, changes in literature curriculum around the world show a strong effort to include many voices and cultures. The researcher believes that studying different types of literature helps learners better understand people and think more critically. It also prepares them to live and work in a globally changing world. The researcher views literature as a powerful means to build empathy, identity, and knowledge.

The significance of literature in shaping learners' understanding of their own culture and others' cultures is well documented (Bourdieu, 1990; Eagleton, 2013). Appleman (2015) asserts that literature curricula in English-speaking countries often blend canonical works with contemporary writers from diverse backgrounds, fostering empathy and understanding of different human experiences. In the UK, literature classes incorporate works by British authors alongside Commonwealth authors, reflecting a post-colonial perspective (Bhabha, 1994).

In non-English-speaking countries, literature curricula are deeply rooted in national literary traditions while also incorporating international classics and contemporary global literature (Even-Zohar, 1990). In Japan and South Korea, Confucian values emphasizing respect for authority, hard work, and academic achievement influence the curriculum (Tu, 1996). Literature classes focus on national classics that convey moral lessons and cultural heritage, such as "The Tale of Genji" in Japan (Waley, 1925) and Yi Mun-yol's works in Korea (Mun-yol, 1995).

The global trend towards incorporating digital literacy and critical media skills into the curriculum recognises the importance of preparing learners for a digital world (Kist, 2010). This includes teaching critical evaluation of information sources, digital ethics, and digital content creation (Hobbs, 2010). Some countries are experimenting with more flexible and interdisciplinary curricula, such as Finland's phenomenon-based learning, which combines various subjects around a single topic or real-world problem (Finland Ministry of Education, 2020).

2.3.1 America

The United States curriculum is influenced by a variety of factors, including state standards, local school board decisions, and increasingly federal initiatives (Ravitch, 2020). Each state sets its own academic standards that outline what learners should know and be able to do at each grade level, but the methods and materials used to achieve these goals can vary widely. For example, while the Common Core State Standards have been adopted by many states to standardise learning goals in mathematics and English Language Arts, some states have chosen to create their own standards or modify existing ones, leading to a patchwork of educational expectations across the country (National Governors Association, 2010). American curricula are often divided into grade levels with specific learning objectives and content tailored to various stages of a student's development. In elementary schools, the focus is on building foundational skills in reading, writing, mathematics, and the basic sciences, as well as social studies and the arts. As learners move into middle school and high school, the curriculum becomes more specialised and diverse, offering a range of courses that cater to different interests and future career paths. High school learners can typically choose from various elective courses, such as foreign language, computer science, and Advanced Placement (AP) classes, which can earn them college credit. (U.S. Department of Education, 2022).

A notable aspect of the American education system is its emphasis on inclusivity and providing equal opportunities for all learners. Federal laws such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) mandate that learners with disabilities and those of disadvantaged backgrounds receive appropriate accommodations and support to access the curriculum (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). This includes the provision of individualised education programs (IEPs) for learners with special needs to ensure that they receive tailored instruction that meets their unique learning requirements. There is a growing movement toward integrating technology into the curriculum to better prepare learners for the digital age. Many schools have adopted the 1:1 device program in which each learner is provided with a laptop or tablet to facilitate learning and access to digital resources. Digital literacy, coding, and media studies are becoming more common as schools aim to equip learners with the skills needed to navigate and succeed in an increasingly digital world.

In recent years, the American curriculum has also shifted towards fostering social-emotional learning (SEL) and promoting civic engagement. SEL programs are designed to help learners develop self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2023). In addition, there is a renewed emphasis on civic education aiming to cultivate informed and engaged citizens who understand their rights and responsibilities in a democratic society. The U.S. education system faces significant challenges, including disparities in funding, access to resources, and educational outcomes. Schools in affluent areas often have more access to advanced courses, extracurricular activities, and modern technology, while those in underfunded districts may struggle with outdated materials and overcrowded classrooms. Efforts to address these inequities include federal and state funding initiatives, community partnerships, and policies aimed at reducing the achievement gap between different demographic groups. The American curriculum reflects a blend of local control and national priorities that balance foundational knowledge with future-ready skills while adapting to the diverse needs of its student population.

2.3 2 England

In England, the national curriculum is a standardised framework designed to ensure that all learners receive a high-quality education and acquire essential knowledge and skills regardless of where they live or attend school (Department for Education, 2014). The curriculum is structured into key stages that correspond to specific age ranges and cover a range of subjects that learners are required to study. These key stages are Key Stage 1 (ages 5-7), Key Stage 2 (ages 7-11), Key Stage 3 (ages 11-14), Key Stage 4 (ages 14-16), and Key Stage 5 (ages 16-18). At each key stage, the curriculum specifies the subjects to be taught and the content within those subjects, and the standards that learners are expected to meet. In the early years of education (Key Stages 1 and 2), the focus is on foundational skills, particularly in English, Mathematics, and Science, alongside subjects like History, Geography, Art and Design, Music, and Physical Education. The goal is to develop basic literacy and numeracy skills while introducing learners to a broad and balanced curriculum.

English literature and language are emphasized to develop reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills. Science education encourages curiosity and exploration of the natural world, fostering an early interest in scientific inquiry. As the learner progresses to Key Stage 3, the curriculum becomes more specialized and covers additional

subjects such as Modern Foreign Languages, Design and Technology, and Computing, reflecting the increasing importance of digital literacy in the 21st century (Ofsted, 2023). This stage is designed to broaden learners' knowledge and understanding, preparing them for the more focused study that will come later in the stages. In computing, for instance, learners learn about digital literacy and computational thinking, reflecting the growing importance of technology in modern society.

Ofsted (2022) explains that in Key Stage 4, learners typically work towards General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) exams, choosing from a range of subjects while continuing core studies in English, Mathematics, and Science. The GCSEs allow for some flexibility and choice, enabling learners to specialise according to their interests and strengths while still ensuring a broad education. Subjects such as History, Geography, and the Sciences are often chosen based on students' career aspirations or areas of interest, providing a pathway to further education or vocational training. Key Stage 5, also known as Sixth Form, focuses on more advanced, specialised study, typically leading to A-levels or other qualifications such as BTECs. A-levels allow learners to concentrate on a few subjects in depth, preparing them for university or professional life. The subjects offered at this stage are diverse, ranging from traditional academic disciplines such as English, Mathematics, and Sciences to vocational subjects such as Business Studies, Media, and Performing Arts. (Cambridge Assessment International Education, 2021).

The curriculum in England is also supported by regular assessments to monitor progress and achievement. At the end of each key stage, learners are assessed to ensure that they meet the required standards, with significant assessments at the end of Key Stage 2 (SATs) and Key Stage 4 (GCSEs). These assessments help track student progress, guide instructional planning, and provide accountability for schools. In addition to academic subjects, the English curriculum places a strong emphasis on personal development, including social, moral, spiritual, and Cultural (SMSC) education (Ofsted, 2019). This includes promoting values such as democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance for those with different beliefs. Schools are encouraged to integrate these values throughout their teaching to foster a well-rounded education that prepares learners for life in modern Britain.

The curriculum in England is designed to be broad and balanced, developing learners' intellectual, physical, and emotional skills. However, it also faces challenges, including

addressing the diverse needs of learners, ensuring equity in educational opportunities, and adapting to the rapidly changing demands of the 21st century. The national curriculum in England continues to evolve, reflecting ongoing efforts to improve educational outcomes and prepare learners for future success.

2.3.3 Africa

The curriculum in Africa is shaped by a complex interplay of historical, cultural, socio-economic, and political factors, leading to significant variations across countries and regions (Tikly & Barret, 2011). Post-independence, many African nations sought to revise their educational curricula to reflect Indigenous knowledge systems and local cultural heritage while moving away from colonial influences that often prioritized foreign languages and perspectives. This has led to a resurgence in integrating local languages and culturally relevant content into the curriculum to make education more inclusive and relatable for learners. Countries such as Ethiopia and Tanzania have introduced mother-tongue instruction in early education to improve comprehension and learning outcomes. In recent years, there has been a growing emphasis on vocational and technical education in Africa to address unemployment and equip learners with practical skills that meet the needs of the labour market. According to the African Union (2022), countries such as Rwanda and Nigeria have incorporated technical and vocational education and training (TVET) into their national curricula to encourage entrepreneurship and innovation, fostering skills in areas such as agriculture, carpentry, tailoring, and information technology. This shift is part of a broader strategy to diversify economies and reduce reliance on traditional sectors like agriculture and mining.

In addition, there is a strong focus on addressing educational inequalities, particularly those affecting girls and children in rural areas. Organisations and governments in Africa are working to close the gender gap in education by providing scholarships, safe school environments, and community awareness programs that challenge cultural norms that may discourage girls' education. (UNESCO, 2023). Makgato & Khoza (2021) note that various African countries are adapting their curricula to include life skills education covering health hygiene, environmental awareness, and HIV/AIDS prevention, reflecting the pressing public health challenges on the continent.

Another significant trend in African education is the integration of digital technologies and e-learning platforms, driven by the need to improve learning quality and reach

more learners, particularly in remote areas. Countries such as Kenya and South Africa have pioneered initiatives to provide schools with digital devices and internet connectivity, integrating ICT (Information and Communication Technology) education into their curricula to prepare learners for a technology-driven world. However, these efforts often face challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, prohibitive technology costs, and a lack of trained teachers capable of delivering digital education effectively.

Spaull (2015) highlights that despite these progressive developments, many African countries still face substantial challenges in implementing effective curricula. Issues such as overcrowded classrooms that lack trained teachers, insufficient funding, and inadequate learning materials continue to hamper educational quality. The reliance on rote learning methods, shaped by colonial education systems, remains prevalent in some areas, limiting the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills among learners. To address these challenges, there is a growing call for comprehensive education reforms that focus on the relevance of teacher-training curricula, the equitable distribution of resources, and the incorporation of local knowledge and practices (Makgato & Khoza, 2021).

The curriculum in Africa is evolving to meet the diverse needs of its population, and significant efforts are still required to ensure quality and inclusive education for all. This involves not only adapting curricula to local contexts and global standards but also addressing systemic issues that affect the delivery of education, such as poverty, political instability, and cultural barriers. The future of education in Africa lies in its ability to create flexible, inclusive curricula and to prepare learners for the challenges and opportunities of a rapidly changing world.

2.3.4 Southern Africa

In Southern Africa, the management of curriculum has been shaped by both historical and contemporary factors, including colonial legacies, post-independence reforms, and regional cooperation (Makala, 2017). Countries in the region, such as South Africa, Zimbabwe, Botswana, and Zambia, each approach curriculum management with unique strategies reflecting their diverse educational needs and contexts.

South Africa has implemented several curriculum reforms since the end of apartheid to address educational inequalities and promote inclusion. The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) are designed to provide a clear and standardised approach to education that integrates South African literature and

cultural content with global perspectives (Jansen, 2009). The South African curriculum emphasises the importance of teaching both Indigenous and international literature to foster cultural awareness and critical thinking skills among learners. However, challenges such as uneven resource distribution and disparities between urban and rural schools can impact the implementation of this curriculum (Hoadley, 2018).

Zimbabwe has implemented various curriculum reforms to improve educational quality and relevance. The introduction of the new curriculum framework includes a focus on local languages and literature to preserve cultural heritage and enhance learner connection to their cultural contexts (Chikowero, 2015). Despite these advancements, the educational system faces challenges, including economic instability, which affects the availability of teaching materials and resources needed to support the effective delivery of the curriculum (Chikowero, 2015).

Botswana has also made strides in curriculum development, particularly with its emphasis on integrating African perspectives into education. The Botswana curriculum incorporates local literature and cultural studies to ensure that learners receive an education that reflects their heritage while preparing them for global challenges (Kagima, 2019). Government efforts to modernise the curriculum aim to improve relevance and participation, although challenges such as teacher training and resource limitations continue to affect implementation (Kagima, 2019).

Zambia has focused on curriculum reforms that incorporate local languages and literature to better align education with the country's cultural and linguistic diversity. The Zambian curriculum aims to promote national identity and cultural understanding, but like other Southern African nations, it faces challenges such as inadequate infrastructure and disparities in educational quality between urban and rural areas (Harrison, 2018). Efforts are underway to decentralise curriculum management and involve local communities in educational planning to address these issues and improve the effectiveness of the curriculum (Ngwenya, 2020).

In Southern Africa, curriculum management is characterised by ongoing efforts to reconcile local cultural needs with global educational standards. Although considerable progress has been made in incorporating Indigenous literature and perspectives into curricula, challenges such as resource constraints, regional disparities, and the need for effective teacher training remain prominent. Addressing these challenges requires continued investment in innovative approaches to

curriculum management in educational resources and a commitment to ensuring that education remains relevant and equitable for all learners in the region.

2.3.5 Management of Curriculum

The management of curriculum in Africa is characterized by a dynamic interplay of national policies, regional practices, and local adaptations. National education ministries typically set broad educational standards and frameworks, but the implementation and management of curricula can vary significantly due to regional and local differences. For example, in countries such as Kenya and South Africa, concerted efforts have been made to reform curricula to better reflect local cultures, including the integration of Indigenous literature and languages (Maringe & Ojo, 2017). These reforms aim to improve relevance and engagement by incorporating local knowledge and perspectives alongside international content.

Africa often faces the challenge of balancing diverse linguistic and cultural contexts. For example, while English is commonly used in many African countries, there is a strong push to include Indigenous languages and literature to promote cultural identity and heritage (UNESCO, 2017). This includes integrating works by African authors and oral traditions into the curriculum that can help learners connect with their cultural roots and develop a more inclusive worldview. However, this integration is not without difficulties, as many schools still lack adequately trained teachers and appropriate materials to effectively deliver this content (ADEA, 2019).

In some regions, curriculum management is hindered by logistical challenges such as inadequate infrastructure and political instability. For example, in rural areas of countries like Uganda, schools can struggle with outdated materials and limited access to books and digital resources, which affects the quality of literature education (Kagoda & Katamba, 2013). Efforts to address these issues include the development of localised curricula that allow schools to adapt content to their specific needs and contexts, a practice seen in countries such as Ghana and Nigeria (World Bank, 2018). In addition, there is a growing emphasis on incorporating digital technology into education in Africa. This includes the use of e-learning platforms and digital libraries to expand access to literature and educational resources (Ogunniyi, 1988). However, the digital divide remains a significant challenge, with many schools in under-resourced areas still lacking the necessary technology and connectivity.

According to the World Bank (2018), there have been significant strides in integrating local and global literature into African curricula; however, managing these curricula faces a range of challenges. Addressing issues such as resource limitations, disparities in educational quality, and the need for culturally relevant content requires ongoing efforts and innovative approaches to ensure that curricula are inclusive and effective.

2.4 SOUTH AFRICA CURRICULUM EDUCATIONAL REFORMS

2.4.1 Background

South Africa's democratic government has inherited a divided and unequal education system. Under apartheid, South Africa had nineteen different educational departments separated by race, geography, and ideology. This educational system prepared children in diverse ways for the positions they were expected to occupy in social, economic, and political life under apartheid.

The democratic government of South Africa inherited a deeply divided and unequal education system from the apartheid era, which consisted of nineteen different educational departments segregated by race, geography, and ideology. This system was designed to prepare children for specific social, economic, and political roles under apartheid, with the curriculum in each department reinforcing these inequalities by varying what was taught and how it was taught, based on children's expected societal roles. After the 1994 election, curriculum reform began with the National Education and Training Forum initiating syllabus revision and subject rationalisation to establish a single national core syllabus. This process involved consolidating existing syllabi and removing overtly racist content. Decisions were made in a participatory and representative manner, although the process was not comprehensive. The first significant curriculum statement for a democratic South Africa was the "Lifelong Learning through a National Curriculum Framework" document of 1996, which was based on principles from the White Paper on Education and Training (1995), the South African Qualifications Act (No. 58 of 1995), and the National Education Policy Act (No. 27 of 1996). These reforms aimed to bring about substantial changes in education and training to normalise and transform teaching and learning across the country. The document also emphasised the need to move away from the traditional aims-and-objectives approach to a more outcomes-based education system. It envisioned a prosperous, united, democratic, and globally competitive country with citizens who are

creative and critical thinkers, literate, leading productive and fulfilling lives in a society free from violence, discrimination, and prejudice. The National Education Policy Act (No. 27 of 1996) supported this outcome-based approach by providing the necessary curriculum design tools for its implementation. Critical Cross-Field Outcomes (later to be known as the critical and developmental outcomes and first formulated in the South African Qualifications Authority Act of 1995). Specific Outcomes Range Statements Assessment Criteria Performance Indicators Notional Time and Flexitime Continuous Assessment, Recording and Reporting. Additional curriculum design tools were developed over successive years and included Phase Organizers, Program Organizers, Expected Levels of Performance, and Learning Programs.

In October 1997, the Statement of the National Curriculum for Grades R-9 was published under Government Notice 1445. The Assessment Policy for the General Education and Training band for Grades R-9, as well as for Adult Basic Education and Training, was introduced in December 1998 through Regulation 19640. Curriculum 2005 was launched in schools in 1998, and a Ministerial Committee reviewed its implementation in 2000. The review focused on the curriculum structure and design, teacher orientation and development training, learning support materials, provincial support for teachers, and implementation timelines. The committee's report, presented on 31 May 2000, recommended that the curriculum be strengthened by streamlining its design and simplifying its language by creating an amended National Curriculum Statement. It suggested reducing the curriculum design features from eight to three: critical and developmental outcomes, learning outcomes, and assessment standards. The review also recommended a better alignment between curriculum and assessment, improved teacher orientation and training, improved learning support materials and provincial support, and a relaxation of implementation timelines.

In June 2000, the Council of Education Ministers accepted the Review Committee's curriculum recommendations. In July 2000, the Cabinet resolved that the development of a National Curriculum Statement, which must clearly and simply set out the curriculum requirements at various levels and phases, must begin immediately. Such a Statement must also address concerns about curriculum overload and provide a clear description of the kind of learner, in terms of knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes, expected at the end of the General Education and Training band. The revision of Curriculum 2005 resulted in a draft Revised National Curriculum Statement for Grades R-9 (Schools). This Draft Revised National Curriculum Statement for

Grades R-9 (Schools) was made available for public comment on 30 July 2001. It was subsequently revised in light of public comment during 2001/2002. The revised National Curriculum Statement is thus not a new curriculum but a streamlining and strengthening of Curriculum 2005. It keeps intact the principles, purposes, and thrust of Curriculum 2005 and affirms the commitment to outcome-based education. As this curriculum review process has progressed, the practice in schools in grades R-9 has continued under the previous policy. When the Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R-9 (Schools) in the Foundation Phase was planned for 2004. This document introduces and provides background to the eight Learning Area Statements that form the foundation of the Revised National Curriculum Statement for Grades R-9 (Schools) in the General Education and Training band.

2.4.2 Principles of the Revised National Curriculum Statement

The Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) for Grades R-9 (Schools) builds on the vision and values outlined in the Constitution and Curriculum of 2005. The key principles of the RNCS include promoting social justice, a healthy environment, human rights, and inclusivity. The curriculum aims to raise awareness of the connections between human rights, environmental sustainability, social justice, and inclusivity, like how some countries use civics education to achieve these goals. It reflects the principles of social justice, environmental respect, and human rights as defined by the Constitution and is particularly sensitive to issues such as poverty, inequality, race, gender, age, disability, and challenges such as HIV/AIDS. The RNCS takes an inclusive approach by setting minimum requirements for all learners while addressing their special educational, emotional, and physical needs through the design of appropriate learning programs.

Outcomes-based education (OBE) is a core element of the RNCS, emphasising both the process and content of learning by clearly defining the outcomes learners should achieve at the end of their education. The learning outcomes and assessment standards in the RNCS are derived from the critical and developmental outcomes outlined in the South African Qualifications Act (1995) and the Constitution. These outcomes define the qualities that the education and training system should cultivate in citizens. The critical outcomes envision learners who can identify and solve problems using critical and creative thinking, working effectively with others, managing their own activities responsibly, collecting and analysing information, critically

communicating effectively through various modes using science and technology responsibly, and understanding the world as an interconnected system where problems do not exist in isolation.

2.4.3 National Curriculum Statement (NCS)

The National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12 articulates the knowledge, skills, and values worth learning in South African schools. The curriculum aims to ensure that children acquire and apply knowledge and skills in ways that are meaningful to their own lives. In this regard, the curriculum promotes knowledge in local contexts while being sensitive to global imperatives (Coburn, 2005). The purpose of a National Curriculum is to ensure consistency and quality in education across the country (Department for Education, 2001). Establishes a mutual understanding of what learners need to know and be able to do at various stages of their education. Standardising the curriculum allows for effective teaching and a smooth transition between schools and regions (Chisholm, 2005).

The National Curriculum sets out the learning areas or subjects that must be covered in schools, such as mathematics, science, language, social sciences, and life skills. It also provides specific objectives and learning outcomes for each level of study. These objectives encompass both content knowledge and the development of skills and values (DoE, 2003). Assessment is an integral part of the National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement. It helps ensure that learners have achieved the expected results and provides feedback to teachers and schools for improvement. Assessment methods can include tests, projects, and observations of the learner's progress. Assesses both knowledge and skills such as critical thinking and problem-solving (DoE, 2006).

The National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12 serves the purposes of: equipping learners irrespective of their socio-economic background race, gender, physical ability or intellectual ability with the knowledge skills and values necessary for self-fulfilment and meaningful participation in society as citizens of a free country; providing access to higher education; facilitating the transition of learners from education institutions to the workplace; and providing employers with a sufficient profile of a learner's competencies (Davidoff & Lazurus, 2001).

According to the DoE (2003), the National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12 is based on the following principles:

- a. **Social transformation:** ensuring that the educational imbalances of the past are redressed and that equal educational opportunities are provided for all sections of the population.
- b. **Active and critical learning:** encouraging an active and critical approach to learning rather than rote and uncritical learning of given truths.
- c. **High knowledge and high skills:** the minimum standards of knowledge and skills to be achieved at each grade are specified and set high, achievable standards in all subjects.
- d. **Progression: the content and context of each grade show progression from simple to complex;** ENGLISH HOME LANGUAGE GRADES R-3 CAPS 5
- e. **Human rights, inclusivity, environmental and social justice:** infusing the principles and practices of social and environmental justice and human rights as defined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. The National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12 is sensitive to issues of diversity, including poverty, inequality, race, gender, language, age, disability, and other factors.
- f. **Valuing Indigenous knowledge systems:** acknowledging the rich history and heritage of this country as important contributors to nurturing the values contained in the Constitution; and **Credibility, quality, and efficiency:** providing an education that is comparable in quality, breadth, and depth to those of other countries.

The National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12 aims to produce learners who can: identify and solve problems and make decisions using critical and creative thinking; work effectively as individuals and with others as members of a team; organise and manage themselves and their activities responsibly and effectively (Government Gazette, 2009). NCS collect, analyse, organise and critically evaluate information; communicate effectively using visual, symbolic and/or language skills in various modes; use science and technology effectively and critically, showing responsibility towards the environment and the health of others. It demonstrates an understanding

of the world as a set of related systems by recognising that problem-solving contexts do not exist in isolation.

Inclusivity should become a central part of the organisation's planning and teaching at each school. This can only happen if all teachers have a sound understanding of how to recognise and address barriers to learning and how to plan for diversity. The key to managing inclusivity is to ensure that barriers are identified and addressed by all relevant support structures within the school community, including teachers, District-Based Support Teams, Institutional-Level Support Teams, parents, and Special Schools as Resource Centres. To address barriers in the classroom, teachers should use a range of curriculum differentiation strategies, including those outlined in the Department of Basic Education's Guidelines for Inclusive Teaching and Learning (2010).

The National Curriculum Statement specifies the minimum standards of knowledge and skills to be achieved in each grade and sets high, achievable standards in all subjects. The National Curriculum Statement (NCS) is a comprehensive framework for education in South Africa. Provides guidelines and standards for what learners should learn at various stages of their education (Stenhouse, 1975).

The NCS comprises three key documents: the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS), the National Policy on Curriculum and Assessment (NPCA), and the National Protocol for Assessment (NPA) (Tanner & Tanner, 1995). The first document that constitutes the NCS is the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) (DoE, 2006). CAPS provides detailed information about the content, skills, and values that learners should acquire at each grade and subject level. It outlines the specific performance indicators and assessment criteria for outcomes that teachers should use to guide their teaching and assess learners' progress. CAPS also lays out the recommended teaching methodologies, teaching time allocations, and assessment tasks for each subject, ensuring a consistent and standardized approach to education across the country (DoE, 2001).

The second document within the National Curriculum Statement is the National Curriculum and Assessment Policy (NPCA). The NPCA provides a broader framework for the NCS and sets the overarching goals, principles, and policies that shape South Africa's education system. It defines the objectives of education, including the

development of critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving, and a sense of social and environmental responsibility (DoE, 2005). The NPCA also addresses issues such as inclusivity, diversity, and the promotion of national identity and values. It guides the development and implementation of the curriculum, ensuring that it meets the needs of all learners and aligns with national priorities (Coburn, 2005).

The third document in the NCS is the National Protocol for Assessment (NPA). The NPA provides guidelines and procedures for formal assessment in the education system. It outlines the diverse types of evaluation, including formative and summative assessments, and provides criteria for the selection and administration of assessments (Chisholm, 2005). The NPA also addresses issues related to the learner's progression, remediation, and certification. It ensures that the assessments are fair, valid, and reliable, and enables the recording, reporting, and analysis of learners' achievements. The NPA plays a crucial role in ensuring accountability and quality in the educational system and provides a basis for monitoring and evaluating learner performance and progress (DoE, 2005).

In conclusion, the National Curriculum Statement comprises three important documents: the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS), the National Curriculum and Assessment Policy (NPCA), and the National Assessment Protocol (NPA). Together, these documents provide a comprehensive framework for education in South Africa, guiding the content, assessment, and evaluation of learning. They play a vital role in promoting a standardised and inclusive education system that prepares learners for the challenges of the modern world (Tanner & Tanner, 1995).

The National Curriculum Statement defines subjects with knowledge, skills, and values that are worth teaching and learning, i.e., subjects with a Level 4 weighting on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). Meaningful information is meant to be transmitted to learners and knowledge and skills that would further benefit the lives of those receiving it. The subject content taught in the national curriculum statement focuses on local contexts while remaining objective and mindful of the contrary viewpoints of the parents, learners, and teachers involved, as well as society (Government Gazette, 2007 NR 29626).

The objectives of the National Curriculum statement are to prepare learners for everyday life outside the school environment once they have matriculated. Many

factors must be considered, namely background, race, gender, and intellectual and physical abilities, to provide learners with appropriate career opportunities. It affords learners access to higher and further education studies, if they so wish, and equips them with the tools they may need as they transition from one learning society to the next (DoE, 2005).

Moving into the workplace and tertiary institutions provides learners with a central focus on their proficiency. All are very learner-based and focused on equipping learners with skills they will find useful not only in their own environment or situation but also wherever they may need to use them. It is believed that the primary purpose of schooling is to develop skills. The curriculum should be intended for effective learning, and the end should be determined before deciding on a means (Stenhouse, 1975).

As society changes, so should the curriculum and its educational purposes. Activities given to learners should be done and understood. This understanding should be built on experiences and set through future experiences. Through a variety of testing methods, the learner's knowledge must be assessed to determine whether the desired results and objectives have been achieved. The theory of the curriculum is based on the nature and structure of the knowledge that the teacher transfers to the learner (Tanner & Tanner, 1995).

According to Stenhouse (1975), one cannot predict tomorrow or next week's objectives. As our society and the world change, so should the way information is implemented. Learners' needs should be addressed by teachers in their teaching and lesson plans. Stenhouse believed in a guideline for teachers that was not enforced upon them but rather suggested. As teachers continue to educate their learners, they should conduct ongoing research into new and innovative ideas in the subject. Due to societal change, Stenhouse maintains his view of an ever-changing curriculum to suit the needs of all, especially learners, as his approach was centred on them. Teachers should serve as facilitators and guides rather than authoritarians, and children should be consistently allowed to contribute to classroom discussions and lessons. This will not only enhance learners' understanding and assess the level of your teaching, but also provide feedback on how enthusiastic learners are about your subject.

Tanner & Tanner (1995) believed that curricula were a political aspect as they had the power to either free or dominate those involved in the outcome. His five aspects of a liberating curriculum were evident in his work: dialogue, praxis, and the development of consciousness, experience, and Christian teaching. The curriculum should add value, and the dialogue that involves respect should not be about people working against each other, but rather about people working with each other. The dialogue should improve the community and build community investment. In conjunction with the Outcomes-Based Education curriculum, National curriculum statement, and CAPS, ideas from the three main theorists of Ralph Tyler are presented: Lawrence Stenhouse and Paolo Freire. Although these theorists may have different ideas about how a curriculum should be structured and how learners should be taught, these ideas can be agreed upon by all (Tanner & Tanner, 1995).

2.4.4. Revised Curriculum Statement (RNCS)

Early Childhood Development (ECD): The revised NCS emphasizes the importance of quality ECD programs for children younger than Grade R. It promotes holistic development by focusing on key areas, including physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development. The Revised National Curriculum Statement is not a new curriculum but a streamlining and strengthening of the Curriculum 2005 (DoE, 2005). Its purpose is to lay the foundation for a single national core syllabus that focuses on the structure and design of the curriculum, teacher orientation, training and development, learning support materials, provincial support for teachers in schools, and implementation timeframes.

Therefore, the RNCS document introduces and provides background to the eight 'Learning Area Statements': (Languages, Mathematics, Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, Arts and Culture, Life Orientation, Economics and Management Sciences, and Technology) that form the foundation of the Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R-9 (Schools) in the general education and training band.

According to (DoE, 2005), the revised national curriculum statement (NCS) has various impacts on the development of children younger than Grade R. Here are some ways it influences their development:

- 1) **Early Childhood Development (ECD):** The revised NCS emphasizes the importance of quality ECD programs for children younger than Grade R. It

promotes holistic development by focusing on key areas, including physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development.

- 2) **Play-Based Learning:** The NCS encourages play-based learning approaches for young children. It recognizes that play is a critical aspect of child development and provides opportunities for children to explore, experiment, and develop problem-solving skills.
- 3) **Learning outcomes:** The revised NCS sets learning outcomes for children in different areas of development, such as language, numeracy, life skills, and creative arts. This helps ensure that children are exposed to age-appropriate activities and experiences that promote their overall growth.
- 4) **Assessment:** The NCS emphasises continuous assessment of learner progress, rather than relying solely on formal evaluations. This allows teachers to gain a comprehensive understanding of a child's development and address any areas where additional support may be needed.
- 5) **Inclusive education:** The revised NCS promotes inclusive education, ensuring that all children, including those with disabilities or special needs, have access to quality education. This helps foster a sense of belonging, supports social integration, and encourages empathy and understanding.
- 6) **Parental involvement:** The NCS recognises the key role of parents and caregivers in a child's development. Encourage parental involvement in activities that support learning and development, fostering stronger partnerships between teachers and families.

In general, the revised national curriculum statement aims to provide a comprehensive framework for the development of children younger than Grade R, ensuring that they receive quality education that supports their holistic growth. According to (DoE, 2001), the revised national curriculum statement has a positive impact on the development of children younger than Grade R in several ways:

- a) **Holistic Development:** The curriculum emphasises the holistic development of children, considering their physical, cognitive, emotional, and social well-being. It recognises that young children learn best through exploration of play and active discovery.

- b) **Age-Appropriate Learning:** The curriculum is designed to be developmentally appropriate for young children. Set clear learning outcomes and expectations appropriate to their age and developmental stage.
- c) **Learning Areas:** The revised curriculum covers a wide range of learning areas, including language and literacy, mathematics, life skills, creative arts, and physical development. This approach ensures that children receive a well-rounded education and have opportunities to develop skills across various areas.
- d) **Learning Through Play:** The curriculum encourages play-based learning as research has shown that play is crucial for the development of young children. It provides guidelines and suggestions for incorporating play into the learning process to promote children's creativity, problem-solving abilities, and social skills.
- e) **Inclusive Education:** The revised curriculum promotes inclusive education, ensuring that children of different abilities and backgrounds have equal opportunities to gain experience and succeed. It emphasizes an inclusive approach that respects and celebrates diversity in the classroom.
- f) **Assessment:** The curriculum includes guidelines for ongoing assessment and evaluation of learner progress. This helps teachers identify areas where children may need additional support or enrichment and allows for individualised instruction.

In general, the revised national curriculum statement provides a framework for the development of young children that is child-centred, inclusive, and aims to promote their overall well-being and learning (Revised national curriculum statement grades R-9 (schools) policy 2002)

2.4.5. Curriculum and Assessment Policy (CAPS)

The CAPS curriculum, which stands for the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement, is the national curriculum framework used in South African schools. It was introduced in 2012 to standardise education across the country and replace the previous Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) system (DoE, 2006). The CAPS

curriculum covers all subjects taught in schools from the foundation phase (grades R-3) to the intermediate phase (grades 4-6) and the senior phase (grades 7-9).

Provides a structured, comprehensive framework for teaching and learning, ensuring all learners receive a high-quality education. A National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) is a framework that outlines the content and requirements to teach and assess various subjects in a country's education system. CAPS provides guidelines for teachers, learners, and parents to understand what knowledge and skills must be acquired at each grade level (DoE, 2005).

A National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement is developed through a consultative process that involves education experts, teachers, curriculum specialists, and other stakeholders. Consider global trends in education and the country's specific needs and priorities. The curriculum is regularly reviewed and revised to stay current and relevant (DoE, 2003).

One of the key benefits of a National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement is that it promotes equality and access to education. Setting clear standards and expectations ensures that all learners, regardless of their background or location, receive a quality education. It also provides a basis for accountability by enabling the government and education authorities to monitor and evaluate the performance of schools and teachers (Tanner & Tanner, 1995).

Furthermore, the National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement encourage a comprehensive approach to education. It recognises the importance of not only academic knowledge, but also skill development and the nurturing of values and attitudes. It supports the holistic development of learners, preparing them for a future that requires critical thinking, problem-solving, adaptability, and collaboration (Government Gazette, 2007 NR 29626).

One of the key features of the CAPS curriculum is its focus on outcomes. It emphasizes the development of skills, knowledge, and values that learners should acquire at each level of instruction. This approach promotes critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity, preparing learners for the challenges of the modern world (Coburn, 2005).

The CAPS curriculum is designed to be flexible, allowing schools and teachers to adapt it to the specific needs of their learners. Provides guidelines and support materials to help teachers deliver effective and engaging lessons. By following the CAPS curriculum, schools can ensure that their learners are receiving a well-rounded education that prepares them for future success (DoE, 2006).

It was an amendment to the National Curriculum Statement, with the amendments coming into effect in January 2012. It contains the policy for learning and teaching in South African schools from Grade R to Grade 12 for all the recognised subjects in the curriculum. Each subject has a separate CAPS document covering the following four topics: an introduction to the aims and principles of the CAPS curriculum; information on the subject's teaching and outcomes; content requirements for the subject; and an Assessment policy for the subject (DoE, 2006).

According to DoE (2006), CAPS serves several vital purposes in South Africa. These are as follows:

- It equips learners with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for self-fulfilment and meaningful participation in society.
- Provides access to higher education by standardising the curriculum to meet the admission requirements of higher education institutions.
- Facilitates the transition of learners to the workplace from educational institutions
- Provides employers with a detailed profile of the competencies of a learner.
- In general, CAPS ensures that the standard of education is consistent. This, in turn, achieves all the above-mentioned purposes.

According to (DoE,2003), there are certain guiding principles on which CAPS is based. These principles are as follows.

- **Critical and active learning:** To encourage a critical and dynamic approach to learning instead of the traditional uncritical learning and return of given facts.

- **Lofty standards for knowledge and skills:** Set specific minimum standards of knowledge and skills to be obtained at each grade. These standards are set high, but can be achieved in all subjects.
- **Social transformation:** Redressing the educational imbalances of the past and ensuring equal educational opportunities are provided to all members of the population.
- **Progression:** A progression from simple to complex in the content and context of each grade
- **Human rights, inclusivity, social and environmental justice:** Infuse in the policy the principles and practices of social and ecological justice and human rights as defined by the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. To ensure that the National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12 is aware of and sensitive to issues of diversity, such as poverty, race, gender, language, age, disability, and other factors.

Indigenous knowledge systems: Recognising and valuing the rich heritage and history of South Africa as significant contributors to nurturing the values contained in the Constitution,

Quality, credibility, and efficiency: To provide an education of quality, breadth, and depth comparable to those of other countries in the world.

The CAPS approach to teaching is to define certain aims for the learners while teaching the subjects in a contextualised manner (Chisholm,2005). Each CAPS document acts as a teaching guide for the subject to ensure that every teacher can produce learners who can:

- Identify and solve problems and make decisions using critical and creative thinking
- Work effectively as individuals and with others as members of a team
- Responsibly and effectively organise and manage themselves and their activities
- Collect, analyse, organise, and critically evaluate information

- Communicate effectively using visual, symbolic, and/or language skills in various modes
- Use science and technology effectively and critically, showing responsibility towards the environment and the health of others
- Demonstrate an understanding of the world as a set of related systems by recognising that problem-solving contexts do not exist in isolation (DoE,2003).

The CAPS system defines assessment as a continuous, planned process of identifying, gathering, and interpreting information about learners' performance, referred to as continuous assessment. This assessment model includes both informal assessments, such as quizzes, and formal assessments, such as exams. All forms of assessment under CAPS involve the following:

- Generating and collecting evidence of achievement
- Evaluating this evidence
- Recording of the findings

Using this information to understand and therefore assist the learner's development to improve the learning and teaching process

Providing regular feedback to learners to enhance the learning experience

Therefore, CAPS is a comprehensive system that aims to establish a high standard of education in South Africa. The importance of education cannot be overstated, which is why it is reassuring that the South African government has a comprehensive and specific policy, such as CAPS, to guide education.

Benefits of the CAPS curriculum offers a wide range of benefits for both learners and teachers. By aligning with international standards and focusing on outcomes, it prepares learners for further education and the workplace. Here are some key benefits of the CAPS curriculum:

Standardisation: The CAPS curriculum ensures that all learners throughout the country have access to the same quality of education. Promote equity and fairness, reducing disparities between schools and provinces.

Holistic Development: The CAPS curriculum goes beyond academic knowledge. It emphasizes the development of critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity, equipping learners with the skills they need to succeed in the 21st century.

Flexibility: While the CAPS curriculum provides a structured framework, it also allows flexibility. Teachers have the freedom to adapt lessons and teaching methods to meet the specific needs and interests of their learners.

Preparation for Further Education: By focusing on outcomes and developing key skills, the CAPS curriculum prepares learners for further education. Provides a solid foundation for learners to pursue tertiary studies or vocational training.

Relevance to the Workplace: The CAPS curriculum aims to bridge the gap between education and the workplace. It equips learners with the knowledge and skills required in various industries, increasing their employability.

International Recognition: The CAPS curriculum aligns with international standards, ensuring that South African learners are on par with their global counterparts. Improves the country's reputation in education.

By embracing the CAPS curriculum, learners can experience these benefits and unlock their full potential.

Key Components of the CAPS curriculum consists of several key components that shape the teaching and learning process. Understanding these components is crucial for parents and teachers to support learners effectively. Here are the main components of the CAPS curriculum:

Subjects: The CAPS curriculum covers a wide range of subjects, including languages, mathematics, natural sciences, social sciences, technology, and arts and culture. Each subject has its own set of specific results and assessment standards.

Outcomes: The CAPS curriculum focuses on outcomes, which are statements that describe what learners should be able to do at the end of each grade. These outcomes align with the knowledge, skills, and values that learners need to develop.

Assessment: Assessment is an integral part of the CAPS curriculum. It allows teachers to evaluate learners' progress and identify areas for improvement. Assessment methods include tests, projects, assignments, and exams.

Teaching and Learning Support Materials: The CAPS curriculum provides teachers with support materials, including textbooks, workbooks, and teaching guides. These materials help teachers deliver effective lessons and engage learners in meaningful activities.

Time tabling: an essential component of the CAPS curriculum. Ensure that all subjects are allocated sufficient time and that the curriculum is covered within the prescribed period. Time tabling also allows for the integration of co-curricular activities. By understanding these key components, parents and teachers can navigate the CAPS curriculum more effectively and support learners in their educational journey.

Parents play a crucial role in supporting their child's learning, and implementing the CAPS curriculum at home can enhance their educational experience. Here are some practical tips for implementing the CAPS curriculum at home:

Create a Learning Environment:

Set up a dedicated space in your home for learning. It should be quiet, well-lit, and free from distractions. Stock it with the necessary learning materials, such as books, stationery, and educational games.

Establish a Routine:

Establish a daily routine that includes dedicated study time. Set specific times for studying different subjects and encourage your child to stick to the schedule. Consistency is the key to effective learning.

Communicate with Teachers:

Stay in touch with your child's teachers to understand the curriculum requirements and expectations. Attend parent-teacher meetings and ask for guidance on how to support your child's learning at home.

Support Homework Completion:

Help your child with their homework by providing guidance and assistance. Encourage them to ask questions and seek clarification when needed. Ensure that homework is completed on time and to the best of their ability.

Encourage Reading:

Reading is a fundamental skill that supports learning in all subjects. Encourage your child to read regularly and provide them with a variety of age-appropriate books and reading materials.

Engage in Enrichment Activities:

Supplement classroom learning with enrichment activities. Visit museums, science centres and cultural events to expose your child to different experiences and broaden their horizons.

By implementing the CAPS curriculum at home, parents can create a supportive learning environment that complements what is taught in school. It allows for a holistic approach to education and reinforces concepts and skills learned in the classroom.

Tips for Supporting Your Child's Learning with the CAPS Curriculum

Supporting your child's learning with the CAPS curriculum goes beyond implementing it at home. Here are some additional tips to enhance your child's educational experience:

Set Realistic Expectations:

Understand your learner's abilities and set realistic expectations. Every child learns at their own pace, so avoid comparing them to others. Celebrate your accomplishments, no matter how small.

Encourage Independent Thinking:

Teach your child to think critically and solve problems independently. Encourage them to explore different solutions and express their opinions. This fosters creativity and develops valuable life skills.

Provide a Safe and Supportive Environment:

Create an environment where your child feels safe taking risks and making mistakes. Offer support and encouragement and be available to help them when they face challenges.

Promote a Growth Mindset:

Instil a growth mindset in your child by highlighting the power of effort and perseverance. Teach them that failure is a stepping stone to success and encourage them to embrace challenges.

Use Technology Wisely:

Technology can be a powerful tool for learning. Integrate educational apps, online resources, and interactive websites into your child's learning routine. However, set limits and ensure that screen time is balanced with other activities.

Celebrate Progress:

Recognise and celebrate your child's progress and achievements. Give praise and encouragement to boost your confidence and motivation. This will foster a love for learning and a cheerful outlook towards education.

By implementing these tips, parents can provide the necessary support and encouragement for their child's learning journey with the CAPS curriculum. It will help them develop a solid foundation and a lifelong love of learning.

Resources and Materials for the CAPS Curriculum

Implementing the CAPS curriculum effectively requires access to appropriate resources and materials. The textbooks approved by the Department of Basic Education are crucial resources for learners, offering a structured approach to covering the curriculum content in each subject. In addition to textbooks, workbooks serve as supplementary materials that reinforce classroom concepts through exercises, activities, and assessments, helping learners consolidate their understanding. Beyond traditional resources, educational websites and apps provide interactive learning experiences that engage learners with various subjects through interactive activities and lessons. Local libraries also offer valuable resources, including books and magazines aligned with the CAPS curriculum, allowing learners to explore different topics more deeply. Educational games and toys further enrich learning by promoting critical thinking and related skills in a fun and engaging way, often aligned with the CAPS curriculum.

Teacher support materials provided by the Department of Basic Education, such as lesson plans, teaching guides, and assessment tools, are beneficial not only for teachers but also for parents who want to support their child's learning. Using these resources, parents can enhance their child's educational experience and foster a deeper understanding of the CAPS curriculum, promoting a love for learning. However, implementing the CAPS curriculum presents challenges. One such challenge is curriculum overload, where the extensive range of subjects and learning outcomes can overwhelm learners. To address this, it is important to prioritise key concepts and balance depth and breadth in learning. Limited resources in schools and households, such as a lack of textbooks or access to technology, can also hinder the effective implementation of the curriculum. In such cases, exploring alternative resources such as online materials or community libraries can help mitigate these limitations.

Differentiated learning needs pose another challenge as learners have diverse learning styles and abilities. To accommodate these differences, teachers can differentiate instruction by offering additional support or enrichment activities customised to each learner's strengths and weaknesses. Time constraints due to the prescribed scope and sequence of the CAPS curriculum can also be challenging. To overcome these challenges, teachers can optimise learning time by focusing on essential concepts and integrating subjects where feasible. Lack of parental involvement can further complicate the effective implementation of the CAPS curriculum at home. Encouraging parental participation through regular communication, workshops, and resources can support their child's learning and improve outcomes.

Despite these challenges, success stories that demonstrate the positive impact of the CAPS curriculum are available. Schools have reported improved academic performance by focusing on outcomes and critical thinking, resulting in higher pass rates and overall achievement. The curriculum also improves learners' critical thinking skills by encouraging them to analyse information and develop creative solutions. In addition, the CAPS curriculum prepares learners for tertiary education by providing a solid foundation for knowledge and skills. Academic graduates have successfully gotten admission to universities and colleges both in South Africa and abroad. In addition, schools that have adopted the CAPS curriculum have seen increased student engagement, fostering a more positive learning environment. Graduates of the CAPS

curriculum also exhibit higher employability, equipped with the skills and knowledge needed for various industries in the modern workplace.

In conclusion, the CAPS curriculum is a powerful tool for improving education and preparing learners for success in the 21st century. By understanding its components, benefits, and implementation strategies, parents and teachers can provide the support needed to maximize learning outcomes. Through a collaborative effort, the CAPS curriculum fosters critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity, helping learners reach their full potential.

Teachers and researchers found the curriculum too structured and rigid, making it difficult to address learners' individual needs and interests. This rigidity limits my ability to engage in meaningful discussions or address real-world issues that learners might bring up. Educational policy planners pack the curriculum with so much that you can often feel overwhelmed. I believe it could benefit from greater flexibility to better focus on learners' needs, especially those with learning disabilities or barriers to learning. A more flexible approach would enable me to spend more time on essential concepts and provide individualised support as needed.

The researcher learns more about the CAPS curriculum and is impressed by its enormous potential to transform South Africa's educational landscape. At its core, the CAPS curriculum is a comprehensive, clear document that outlines the learning objectives and assessment strategies for all subjects in Grades R-12, providing a structured approach to learning and teaching. This curriculum has the power to promote critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity, preparing learners for success in the 21st century. CAPS offers a range of resources, including textbooks, workbooks, educational websites and apps, library resources, educational games and toys, and teacher support materials, all designed to make learning engaging and accessible. However, as a teacher, I find the curriculum overly structured and rigid, making it difficult to address learners' individual learning needs and interests. This rigidity limits my ability to engage in meaningful discussions or address real-world issues that learners might bring up. Curriculum planners pack so much into the curriculum that you can often feel overwhelmed. The researcher believes it could benefit from greater flexibility to better focus on learners' needs, especially those with learning disabilities or barriers to learning. A more flexible approach would enable me to spend more time on essential concepts and provide individualised support as

needed. The researcher also recognizes that challenges such as curriculum overload, limited resources, differentiated learning needs, time constraints, and lack of parental involvement can hinder its implementation. As someone enthusiastic about education, I find it essential to acknowledge these challenges and adopt strategies to overcome them, such as prioritizing key concepts, exploring alternative resources, and encouraging parental participation. The researcher believes that parents and teachers can work together to ensure a smoother implementation of the curriculum, empowering learners to reach their full potential and succeed in an ever-changing world.

The policy document, National policy on the program and promotion requirements of the National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12, describes the number of subjects to be offered by learners in each grade and the promotion requirements to be met, and standardizes the recording and reporting processes for Grades R-12 within the framework.

There is a Foundation Phase CAPS Document, an Intermediate Phase CAPS Document, a Senior Phase CAPS Document, and a FET CAPS Document. The National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12 articulates the knowledge, skills, and values worth learning in South African schools. This curriculum aims to ensure that children acquire and apply knowledge and skills in meaningful ways to their own lives. In this regard, the curriculum promotes learning in local contexts while being sensitive to global imperatives.

The National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12 serves the purpose of equipping learners irrespective of their socio-economic background, race, gender, physical ability or intellectual ability with the knowledge skills and values necessary for self-fulfilment and meaningful participation in society as citizens of a free country; providing access to higher education; facilitating the transition of learners from educational institutions to the workplace; and providing employers with a good profile of a learner's competencies.

2.5. LITERATURE REVIEW

Caldwell (1992) further adds that the principals of private schools were able to develop and implement a cyclical process in which seven managerial functions, such as goal

setting, needs-identification, priority setting, planning, budgeting, implementation, and evaluation.

COVID-19 has led to changes in teaching and learning styles, resulting in the suspension of face-to-face classroom teaching and learning in countries such as South Africa as a precaution to flatten the curve and reduce the spread of the pandemic (Rahman, 2020). Therefore, e-learning platforms mushroomed and became a widely practised medium of teaching-learning around the world despite the ambivalent feelings of teachers, especially in developing countries (Kamenetz, 2020). The roles of principals revolved around monitoring teachers, learners, and parents as they transitioned to a different school system. In virtual schooling, as in face-to-face schooling, school principals often consider matters such as managing distance among school members, effective communication strategies, staff motivation, and trust-building (Das Gupta, 2021). Since implementing and monitoring curriculum delivery were challenges during the pandemic, the study seeks to assess the coping strategies adopted to avoid problems and to implement crisis management effectively in similar situations in the future. This will ensure that teaching and learning continue smoothly.

Implementing the South African Schools Act [SASA] (RSA, 1996) and similar international policies that advocate self-management has led to an emphasis on sound educational management practices (Huber, 2004). In this regard, principals received advice from politicians, education officials, academics, and consultants on how to lead and manage schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. Prescriptions were theories underpinned by explicit values, theoretical foundations, or concepts (Bush, 2003). Therefore, theories have been categorized into six main models of educational leadership and management: formal, collegial, political, subjective, ambiguous, and cultural. These leadership models are not exhaustive and do not provide a comprehensive distinction; however, they are unidimensional perspectives on school leadership and management that are most relevant in South Africa.

2.5.1. Curriculum-Delivery during COVID-19 in Countries

According to Pretorius (1998), leadership is one of the most important components of education, both in and out of the classroom, that determines the interpersonal and disciplinary climate. Education managers, particularly school principals, could not simply go about their business as usual during the pandemic. The hype surrounding

school closures and the reopening of schools worldwide underscored the importance of innovative leadership and management for teaching and learning in all its forms.

As COVID-19 spread worldwide, forcing humanity to maintain social distancing, disruptions adversely affected teaching and learning processes; hence, curriculum delivery and monitoring were severely hampered. Although the pandemic posed challenges, it ironically created a window of opportunity for educational institutions to strengthen their technological knowledge and infrastructure (Pravat, 2020).

In developed countries, their formation courses and exams were conducted online using applications such as Zoom and Teams, or timed on social networks. (Sun, 2020). Teachers often assign work to learners by uploading material to a specified website and delivering lectures via videoconference. (Pravat, 2020). Developed countries monitored curriculum delivery through virtual systems to assess the effectiveness of teaching and learning. This was possible in countries where resources were available to both learners and teachers.

The challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic clearly illustrated the need for and importance of using effective technology and data for learning purposes, so learning disruption was minimised, although the role of management and its duties were unfamiliar to them (Djalante et al., 2020). During the COVID-19 pandemic, school principals gradually locked down schools in accordance with health regulations and other COVID-19-related protocols. Given the absence of clear government guidelines, the pandemic crisis posed a significant challenge for school principals and managers; however, it also provided new opportunities to accelerate change at an unprecedented scale to align with technological advancements.

In the USA, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the electronic disparity between devices and data for the Internet (Hammond, 2020). Furthermore, when schools were closed, 15% of US households with school-age children lacked a high-speed internet connection at home, which critically affected curriculum delivery. In addition, in early April 2020, it was reported that in high-poverty districts, the lack of basic technology was a major problem; hence, the role of principals in avoiding resource problems was crucial.

In the USA, several people were infected with the COVID-19 virus and subsequently died from the virus. Significant measures were taken to reduce the nationwide spread of the COVID-19 pandemic (Ahmed, Zviedrite, & Uzicanim, 2018). Therefore, those in

management positions in the USA responded to the crisis by closing campuses and residence halls, cancelling events, and moving their educational and associated activities to online platforms, especially those with digital resources. The public stays at home, self-imposed quarantine, and practices social distancing to curb the nationwide transmission of the virus. Measures such as social distancing have been shown to reduce virus transmission in densely populated community settings, such as schools and colleges. In Texas, amid school closures, educational managers and principals opted for remote instruction with little or no training, thrusting teachers into a new world of teaching learners online (Kaden, 2020; Ferdig et al., 2020).

As the COVID-19 pandemic spread worldwide, schools struggled to respond and implement appropriate measures to bend the curve. Schools were the most affected by the pandemic's devastating impact. Unfortunately, school leaders had no training in crisis leadership or had not dealt with a crisis of this magnitude or scale for such a long time. The impact has adversely affected the delivery of the school curriculum (Fernando, 2020).

According to Hammond (2020), in the United Kingdom, the advent of COVID-19 exposed a stark digital disparity, like in the United States, where 1.9 million households had no access to the Internet, and a few million relied on pay-as-you-go online services to make phone calls or access health care and education. This remained a challenge for educational authorities, as school principals and government authorities had to ensure that curriculum delivery continued in tough times. The task was enormous, given that schools had to close in April 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic (UNESCO, 2021b).

COVID-19 in Germany became a reality in late January 2020. The first official case of COVID-19 was reported in January 2020. Germany experienced a steep rise in COVID-19 infections, affecting schools and curriculum managers. School closure was first introduced by one district on 28 February 2021. The increasing number of infections affected curriculum delivery and the change in the role of principals (Anger et al., 2020).

During the school holidays in Germany, no consensus was reached on online concepts and procedures for distance teaching and remote learning; therefore, it was left to individuals and school principals to implement online teaching and learning (World Bank, 2020). Although virtual learning was facilitated through online platforms

and technology-rich activities, access to essential digital devices was uneven across the population, thereby negatively affecting curriculum delivery. In other words, in Germany from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds who lacked the means to access ICT devices were severely disadvantaged by the COVID-19 crisis, which resulted in cumulative learning inequalities. This also affected managers, as some were challenged by the use of online teaching and learning tools (Kultusministerkonferenz, 2020).

Zhao (2020) reports that UNESCO estimated about 1.6 billion young people left school during the pandemic. Globally, getting children to go back to school in a stop-start manner was a challenge. Reopening schools to full functioning capacity was still an uphill battle, and managers were scrambling to address new challenges.

According to The World Bank (2020), Russia's Ministry of Education issued guidelines on implementing distance learning technologies across all levels of education. The Russian government also launched a help desk dedicated to supporting regional ministries, schools, and universities in organizing distance learning. Guidance was also provided at the psychological level, with a special focus on the school principal and staff on how to deal and cope with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Additionally, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russian Ministry of Education held regular online guidance sessions through the Ministry's YouTube channel and organised webinars for universities. They also launched a university hotline and website that encourages learners to continue learning and teachers to continue teaching. The strategy provided methodological support and published a list of free online courses on its website (World Bank, 2020).

Included in the plan was the development of television programs for primary and secondary education, which will enhance the e-learning platform for both levels and support the use of Zoom and Microsoft Teams for videoconferencing lessons at the upper secondary and tertiary education levels. The first phase was at the primary level, where television programs were broadcast for grades 1-9 on designated educational television channels. In addition, the Russian Ministry of Education also explores the use of radio programs for specific subjects, such as languages, and for children with visual impairments.

2.5.2 Leadership and Management in African Countries on Curriculum Delivery

The pandemic created untold chaos in education, affecting management practices, particularly among principals, who had to adjust to monitoring online platforms to ensure that curriculum delivery was not severely affected (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2020). Since the pandemic necessitated alternative teaching-learning methods implemented remotely via screen-based devices, this limited learners in developing countries who could not afford devices for online learning. However, due to the pandemic, it became necessary for primary school teachers to adapt to online platforms for teaching and learning, delivering the curriculum from home (Sukmawati & Nesia, 2019).

Organisational issues for curriculum coverage and recovery initiation programs were the main topics of concern in school management. When such concerns become curriculum issues, the fundamental question of which type of knowledge is most worthwhile arises. The focus will then shift to the development of knowledge through the school curriculum in the context of COVID-19. This encourages the emergence of innovative solutions (Spencer, 2020). However, in this regard, Jasen (2020) criticises the overloaded CAPS curriculum (DoE, 2020), which is exacerbated by the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and national issues such as glaring social injustices and inequalities, which are still evident in South Africa (Billignat, 2020).

According to Tabulawa (2009), the Botswana education system comprises seven years of primary education, three years of secondary education, and two years of senior secondary education. The main objectives of primary education are for children to be literate first in Setswana and then in English. Botswana offers free education, but it is not compulsory. Therefore, Botswana's education system was developed to produce critical thinkers, problem-solvers, and creative learners who could boost the economy and skills of the country. The direct effects of the pandemic in Botswana were minimal, and there were few reported deaths (Angrist, Bergman, Brewster, & Matsheng, 2020).

At the end of July 2020, the Botswana government adopted and implemented social distancing, severely affecting educational and social services. In March 2020, the Director General of WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic after assessing the rapid spread and severity of the deadly virus worldwide; an additional announcement made social distancing compulsory as a means of curbing the spread of the pandemic (Kultusministerkonferenz, 2020). Schools in Botswana closed in March 2020. After

reopening, a new wave of COVID-19 cases forced the government to close the school for the second time. Since July 2020, schools in Botswana have been running a double-shift system, with half the learners attending in the morning and the other half in the afternoon. This arrangement drastically reduced the total time available for lessons, thereby affecting curriculum coverage.

Regarding online teaching-learning, when children could not attend school, existing educational inequalities became more visible, as the internet and smartphones were unaffordable for low-income families, who could not access online learning materials. This situation also affected the delivery of the educational curriculum. During the pandemic, the Kenyan Ministry of Education distributed guidelines to improve teaching and learning for its more than fifteen million learners. From March 2020, four main platforms were accessed to provide educational programs and learning materials to learners. The Kenyan Broadcasting Corporation and its radio channels broadcast educational programmes, while the Edu Channel TV programmes supported the teaching and learning curricula.

The Ministry of Education developed a COVID-19 Education Sector Emergency Response Plan that identified key areas to support learners. This includes providing educational services through radio broadcasts for primary education and digital technology for secondary and tertiary institutions. Radio lessons were broadcast in different languages by region for primary school learners, while television programs for secondary school learners were launched before the onset of COVID-19 lockdowns.

2.5.3 Curriculum-Delivery during COVID-19: South African Perspective

According to Hargreaves and Fullan (2020), COVID-19 closed all doors to daily activity, including economic growth and education. Post-lockdown, schools across all grades operated on a staggered system, which affected curriculum delivery because subject content was difficult to complete within the restricted time. As schools resumed 'normal' classes after COVID-19, the effects of curriculum changes were still widely felt; these also affected evaluation procedures. Since it is the role of school principals to ensure that the curriculum is fully covered, they have been seriously challenged as they have had to adjust to changes brought about by the COVID-19 restrictions.

Since 15 March 2020, when the South African President announced the 2020 National State of Disaster Management Act, which included National Lockdown guidelines,

school leaders have been required to implement educational interventions during emergencies. Among the measures introduced was social distancing, which led to temporary school closures. The South African government also introduced technology-based pedagogy to ensure that learners had access to learning materials at home. Hence, the advent of blended learning, a technology-based teaching system that integrates face-to-face instruction with online learning, became a reality (WHO, 2020).

2.5.4 Leadership and Management in South African Schools during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

The educational system in South Africa is structurally incoherent, weak, and based on gross discrimination and brutalization of the apartheid system, which disadvantaged non-white schools and learners in the provision of human and physical resources. This was exacerbated by COVID-19 restrictions that further plunged low-income and marginalised communities into untold difficulties that further exposed past inequalities.

In South Africa, the reopening of schools and the delivery of curriculum were implemented using different approaches (DBE, 2020). The School Recovery Plan (SRP) was implemented in response to the debilitating effects of COVID-19 to address issues related to curriculum content that was not covered due to lockdown and the implications of time lost to teaching and learning, e.g.

According to Parker et al. (2021), disadvantaged schools lacked the means to facilitate online learning (Parker et al., 2020; Spaul, 2020). Learners lacked a good, comfortable learning environment, including access to computers and Internet connectivity, and parents found it difficult to assume the role of facilitating homeschooling, which affected curriculum delivery. School principals and leadership who should have fostered nurturing environments where children flourish and develop holistically were hampered by the pandemic, which expanded their usual responsibilities. Mostly, managers not only execute the responsibility to govern schools but also manage the spread of the pandemic within school premises. In other words, South Africa is still reeling from the devastating effects of COVID-19 that marginalised non-white society and education.

According to Voster (2020), in South African children who often live in poverty, inequalities manifest clearly when it comes to areas of health and nutrition, safety, and access to education. In contrast, the previous model C schools progressed because

they had the facilities to circumvent the effects of lockdowns. The technological provision and data-related issues in South Africa were found to be debilitating. The General Household Survey shows that only 10.4% of South African households have access to the Internet (Stuart & Chotia, 2016). Principals and teachers at underprivileged schools adapted, with the cooperation and generosity of teachers, to ensure continuity of education for learners (DoE, 2020).

However, little attention has been paid to the role of management. There is insufficient investment to effectively select and develop leaders professionally so they can support a variety of educational goals for all learners. In addition, Gupta (2011) stated that school principals must consider issues such as managing physical distancing between school members and establishing an effective communication strategy that motivates staff and establishes trust.

Globally, including in South Africa, online teaching was incredibly challenging, especially to ensure continued academic learning, providing support for parents and learners, defining curricular priorities, and caring for teachers and learners (Reimers & Schleicher, 2020). Educational leaders during COVID-19 and current times could not simply go about business as usual.

Leading in disruptive times means being able to navigate new paths. According to Reynders (1977), leading and guiding are universal activities that require a person in control of people's activities to carry them out. These include decision-making to direct such activities toward achieving goals. Given the importance of leadership and the pandemic's disruptive impact, it is imperative to be resilient in transforming the educational system to meet the challenges of any crisis.

Significantly, the role of leaders was highlighted during COVID-19, as they were expected to use their ingenuity and innovation to ensure resources were available to mitigate its effects (Zhao, 2020). The effects of the pandemic on the mental health of both staff and learners were also considered by managers and leaders who should have sought professional help where needed. This approach caught managers off guard, and if this problem had not been dealt with expeditiously, it might have escalated into a major issue affecting overall teaching and learning.

Furthermore, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the success of a school principal depended on readiness and skills to be an initiative-taking leader in times of change, serving as an innovator and dynamic, inspirational curriculum leader. Crawford et al.

(2020) further stated that it was crucial to monitor curriculum delivery during the pandemic to ensure effective teaching and learning in times of crisis.

As the pandemic continued, teachers knew that a return to normal teaching and learning would not be sufficient to improve the life chances of the lost generation. These are the generations whose education was disrupted by the pandemic. Therefore, it is important to foster new thinking, driven by strong management, to create more inclusive and equitable educational systems that promote quality education for all learners worldwide.

In most cases, management involves eliciting changes envisioning a new future for the organisation and motivating people to dedicate themselves to a new direction to meet any challenge in life (People's Dynamic, August 1997). According to Vela (2005), the role of the principals became more complex, overwhelming and unclear.

Challenges faced by school principals today include the sudden increase in the scale and complexity of agendas expected to be followed (PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP, 2007). Principals and management are distinct; however, they are often interchangeable. Principals as educational leaders in a school are frequently seen as leading figures in the management sphere, characterised as charismatic leaders with visionary flair and the ability to motivate and inspire others (Law & Clover, 2000).

The COVID-19 crisis overburdens principals with those responsibilities that include, among others, a staggering array of professional tasks and competencies. Principals are expected to be visionaries, instructional leaders, curriculum leaders, assessment experts, disciplinarians, community builders, public relations officers, communication experts, budget analysts, facility managers, program administrators, as well as guardians of various legal, contractual, and policy mandates and initiatives. They serve the school and department; on the other hand, they manage conflicting needs and interests of stakeholders, including learners, parents, teachers, district officials, unions, and state and federal agencies (Davies, Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerton, 2005).

According to Luck (2009), school principals were responsible for the leadership and work organisation of all who work in it, guiding them in the development of an educational environment capable of promoting learning and developing learners holistically at the highest possible level. Ntuli (2020) also stated that the primary duty of school principals during the pandemic was to ensure the preparation, coordination,

direction and management process of school members' work. This ensures that all activities are aligned with the curricular goals by using available operational tools.

The World Bank Global Education Practice (WB EGP) was the first organisation to present the first set of online educational resources to support the continuity of teaching and learning during 2019-2020 (OECD 2020). As such, the SA government needs to identify and implement policies that can maximise the effectiveness of online learning currently and in the future to supplement classroom teaching. In addition, learners' attitudes towards learning online rather than face-to-face instruction must be explored in depth.

Furthermore, creative online instructional practices and upskilling of teachers' pedagogical methods, coupled with providing learners with guidance and motivation towards online learning, are necessary to move toward digital teaching-learning environments (Peterson et al., 2018). Additionally, the Department of Education introduced television channels that broadcast high-quality educational material tailored to different age groups and enabled parents to easily connect online with schools (Van der Vlies, 2020). The management team had to undergo online training on using digital resources for virtual teaching and learning (Vincet-Lancrin, 2020).

However, to circumvent COVID-19 restrictions, countries divide the curriculum into three modes. These were asynchronous, synchronous, and blended. A synchronous mode, which allows learners to engage in discussions with the instructor and classmates via the LMS, was an option (Ellaway & Masters, 2008). The Synchronous option facilitates interaction and feedback, whilst a synchronous mode allows control of pace and timing. These are some of the tools that include the LMS option that could be used for both options during online learning.

2.6 CONTEXTUALISING CURRICULUM DELIVERY MONITORING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic, which has spread to all countries and territories, was first identified in Wuhan, China, in December 2019 (Global Analysis, 2020). According to Di Martino (2020), responses to the COVID-19 pandemic or threat by educational institutions around the world have varied, ranging from the total discontinuation of studies to a switch to online or distance learning. Carius (2020) warns that COVID-19 created the largest disruption to education systems in human history, affecting 1.6 billion learners in more than 200 countries (UNESCO, 2020).

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, educational institutions and learning spaces were closed, resulting in significant changes in various aspects of education, including curriculum delivery and monitoring in primary schools (UNICEF, 2022). This abrupt shift from in-person instruction to remote or online learning methods presented considerable difficulties for both school administrators and learners, as it required rapid planning with minimal time and unclear implementation frameworks.

In mid-February 2020, countries, including China, where the initial outbreak occurred, closed schools that were heavily impacted by COVID-19 (Global Analysis, 2020). By early April 2020, every nation worldwide had implemented full school closures. However, the reactions of educational institutions to these abrupt lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic remain insufficiently documented in the existing literature, with limited research addressing responses to such large-scale epidemics. Given this gap, it is crucial to conduct a study that provides scientifically grounded insights into managing similar crises in the event of future disruptions.

2.6.1 International Standard for Curriculum Delivery During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Curriculum delivery is an ongoing process that begins with the issuance of national policies by the ministry responsible for education policy and documentation. It involves how teachers deliver instruction and assessment with the specified resources provided in a curriculum. The international standard proposes how the teacher interprets the planned or officially designed course of study into syllabuses, work plans, and lessons to be delivered to learners. Implementation, as an essential part of curriculum development, brings about the anticipated changes, often implemented in stages (UNICEF, 2022). The stages include, among others, the assessment, the planning session, the delivery and revision of the content development pilot, and finally the completed curriculum package.

During the COVID-19 pandemic around 2020, there was no international standard for curriculum delivery, resulting in sporadic, uncoordinated delivery across various educational institutions. All schools were closed, which affected millions of learners; therefore, it was important for educational institutions to develop a means to continue delivering the curriculum (Barberia, Bastos & Moraes de Sousa, 2021).

Unfortunately, the lack of equal access to computers and digital devices has created barriers for teachers in engaging and instructing low-income learners, a group already

at higher risk of dropping out. In addition, schools have not been able to adapt online learning into an attractive and effective educational model, leading to instances in which learners advance academically without meeting the necessary standards.

In addition to such methods, teachers could implement new evaluation mechanisms based on exercise summaries, text productions, and experiments rather than tests. This trade would benefit learners by allowing them to practice what they have learned (Marinho, Cordeiro, Coelho, & Cabral, 2021).

Global education policy responses to the COVID-19 pandemic reveal a sense of surprise and shock that, while understandable, fail to recognize that crisis and uncertainty have always beset the education system and have made the experiences of marginalized, disadvantaged, impoverished, displaced, and exploited a reality for all.

However, to continue curriculum delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic, primary schools implemented alternative methods of teaching, including online learning (Barberia et al., 2021). As a global response, countries such as Brazil, Kenya, and South Africa used television, radio, and mobile devices to provide virtual classes and to combine these strategies (Marinho, Cordeiro, Coelho, & Cabral, 2021).

As noted by Hodges (2020), the abrupt shift to remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic left teachers unprepared to use digital tools effectively in teaching, resulting in a situation in which they were learning to navigate technology while simultaneously delivering instruction. Learning from home also required significant involvement from families, which presented challenges in certain contexts. Additionally, the implementation of remote learning programmes was often delayed and lacked a strong emphasis on ensuring equitable access for all learners

In cases, the inverted classroom fosters effective study habits, encourages routine building, and creates a more personalized and engaging learning experience, as highlighted by Bergmann and Sams (2012). The teacher assumes a tutoring role rather than an authoritative one and helps each learner with their own needs (UNICERF, 2022). Another solution for public school teachers was to designate learners as tutors to help younger learners who were struggling with their learning. The tutor receives a monthly salary in exchange for correcting other learners' homework, providing additional material, and giving a weekly online review.

Due to the quality of these protocols and the reduced investments and delayed planning directed at preparing primary schools for in-person learning in the context of the pandemic, including low priority given to vaccinations for teachers and learners.

However, other countries around the world partially allow learners to resume in-person learning in an unprotected school environment (Marinho *et al.*,2021). The unprecedented COVID-19 outbreak worldwide also affects areas that traditionally lack a culture of digital remote work or distance education. This was also new and complex for those who work with basic education in public and private schools.

Carius (2020) posits that, amid confinement due to the COVID-19 pandemic, classroom educational activities with undergraduate and postgraduate learners were nearly interrupted worldwide. Teachers were scrambling to adapt to social distancing, self-quarantine, and online learning. This has led to the adoption of a workable standard in other countries.

2.6.2 International Standards on Monitoring Strategies during the COVID-19 Pandemic

During the COVID-19 pandemic, a sporadic monitoring strategy was haphazardly implemented, using quantitative methods such as attitude scales and national licensing exams and qualitative methods such as interviews with learners in Brazil, Kenya, and South Africa (Carius, 2020). There was no clearly defined standard for monitoring curriculum delivery, and a hybrid monitoring mechanism was designed for affected countries to use to mitigate the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Among the mechanisms implemented were online schooling and teaching methods the use of open public media such as television and radio the use of private and individual media devices such as mobile devices WhatsApp and YouTube channels the promotional use of remote learning and distance learning programs designated tutor with some stipend to tutors and the hybrid learning system which includes partially face-to-face learning and e learning system (Abad & Abad, 2020).

Despite these new adaptations focused on educational issues, there is little evidence of the actual impact of these media platforms on learners' knowledge formation and solidification, and this impact cannot be quantified. According to Reimers (2020), teachers had to adapt their practices and prepare for new responsibilities in delivering the curriculum. Teachers were presented with a quintessential adaptive and

transformative challenge, one for which no preconfigured playbook can guide appropriate responses.

Teachers needed to modify their instruction to incorporate social distancing and other COVID-19 regulations while still providing quality teaching and learning. According to a joint survey conducted by UNESCO, UNICEF, and the World Bank (2020), teachers must adapt to alternative modes of teaching and learning communication regardless of context. Teachers were forced to make decisions and other adjustments due to a lack of skills to navigate these various modes effectively in order to deliver the curriculum (Carius, 2020).

2.6.3 Sub-Saharan Africa and South African Standard on Curriculum Delivery Monitoring during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The education system in sub-Saharan Africa faced major challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A key example of this disruption was the complete shutdown of schools, followed by a sudden shift to online and digital homeschooling, a move that faced significant difficulties and limited success. Most educational institutions, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, have found this to be a new phenomenon (ADEA, 2020). Although the shift from face-to-face to virtual learning aimed to preserve the academic term, a substantial number of learners, particularly those from low-income households and underserved communities, dropped out of the education system altogether (World Bank, 2021).

At the time, the main question in educational discourse was whether all regional schools could gain access to the Internet and the digital devices required for virtual learning and curriculum implementation (Nzuki & Wanyama, 2020). Other studies have strongly linked school closures to academic learning losses and other unintended consequences, including curriculum delivery (Engzell, 2020). As a result, most regions were divided on this issue, believing it was possible to provide access to all learners and recommending measures such as zero-rated broadband, donations, and the establishment of hotlines for teacher-learner consultation to deliver the curriculum.

Others, however, felt strongly that the country's digital divide, including a lack of electricity in rural areas, had resulted in growing inequality that would jeopardise the commitment of teachers in curriculum delivery (Parsitau & Jepkemei, 2020; Ngwacho). However, most measures focus on how to use existing facilities, such as the education

cloud, live-streaming, and the digital literacy programme, to continue with curriculum delivery (Nzuki & Wanniyama, 2020).

According to Mpungose (2020), the paradigm shift to virtual learning was met with several challenges, including a lack of electronic equipment and internet connectivity, which affected curriculum delivery in primary schools, as well as the difficulty of orienting learners who were accustomed to the face-to-face model but now had to deal with a situation in which the teacher was not physically present to support learning. Undoubtedly, learners perceived online learning as a lesser version of face-to-face education rather than a new way to organise education.

The shift to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic posed significant challenges to primary education, particularly in contexts with limited digital infrastructure. According to Mpungose (2020), schools, particularly in under-resourced areas, struggled to implement effective virtual learning due to inadequate access to digital devices and unstable internet connectivity. These constraints disrupted curriculum delivery and affected learners' participation. Zhao (2020) further notes that learners accustomed to traditional classroom environments found it difficult to adjust to a model in which the teacher was no longer physically present. As a result, learners viewed online learning not as an innovative alternative but as an inferior substitute for face-to-face education.

In matters of education, the sub-Saharan government has developed a three-pronged approach to support the continuation of remote learning, adhering to international and national guidelines for social distancing, quarantine, and self-isolation. The Education Ministry developed online content that some schoolchildren access through various channels to ensure uninterrupted learning for learners in the country while they are at home (Wangari, Gichuki, Abuor, Wambui, Okeyo, Oyatsi, Odikara, & Kulohoma, 2021).

However, the approach was riddled with challenges. Lockdown and prolonged institutional closures have long-term implications, particularly for marginalised and most vulnerable children who already experience barriers to accessing education or who are at increased risk of being excluded for reasons (Ngwacho, 2020). These include learners with disabilities, those in urban slums, informal settlements, remote locations, asylum seekers, and refugees, and those whose families have lost their

livelihoods due to job cuts, business closures, and casual jobs, among other tricky situations.

Regardless of these prevailing circumstances, the sub-Saharan regional framework provides for the right of every person to achieve the highest attainable standard of education, training, and research (Wangari *et al.*,2021). These include children living in remote and difficult places in Kenya, the girl child, orphans, and vulnerable children (OVC), learners with extraordinary educational necessities and disabilities, learners from poor urban informal settlements, and children in refugee camps, among others (Barasa,2021).

During COVID-19, learners' educational challenges in regional countries widened the physical distance between teachers and students. One of the main impacts of COVID-19 on learners was the lack of in-person contact with teachers for content delivery. This has been triggered by the Ministry of Health (MoH) regulations on social distancing to prevent the rapid spread of the virus (Gichuhi et al., 2021). This has been temporarily replaced by digital learning.

In response to institutional closures initiated by COVID-19, the regional governments of Kenya and South Africa recommended the use of distance learning platforms, open education applications, and other platforms that institutions and instructors can use to connect with learners remotely and minimize learning interruptions (Barasa, 2021). Additionally, schools in the region have scrambled to find creative solutions for instructing learners online, in person but socially distant, or in a hybrid format (Agbe et al., 2020). However, online learning requires various qualities of learners, such as knowledge of technology, time management and organization, and interaction using online technologies. Those who enrol in online courses may have mixed levels of readiness.

The South African government instituted a nationwide lockdown starting on March 18, 2020, as in most countries around the world. This lockdown included a stay-at-home order for the entire population, with restrictions on movement except for essential goods and services (ADEA, 2020). The economy came to an almost complete halt, leading to the demise of small- to medium-sized businesses and adding about 3 million more people to the already high unemployment rate.

Although COVID-19 is a health crisis, it has thrown all aspects of the country's social and economic sectors into chaos. The pandemic has also had a revolutionary effect

on teaching and learning, exposing the cracks in an already burdened, struggling, and unequal education system (Broughton, 2020). The latest School Realities Report released by the South African Department of Basic Education suggests that by the end of 2019, there were 13,041,198 learners in ordinary schools, including public and independent schools.

South Africa has been reported to have one of the most drastic responses to the pandemic, which has impacted the provision of education and the delivery of the curriculum in the country. The first and most notable policy response of the South African government in relation to education was the nationwide closure of schools (Asim, Carvalho & Gera, 2020). After the closures in March, schools reopened in a staggered approach in June 2020, with learners at the ends of their education returning first.

This means that in primary schools, grade 7 was the first to return, and in high schools, grade 12 was the first to return. Furthermore, learners could only return to school if they had the resources and capacity to ensure that the effects of the virus were mitigated: clean running water, sufficient PPE for learners and teachers, adequate stock of hand sanitiser and sufficient class space for social distancing of learners (Department of Education, 2020).

Another government response was the adjustment of the school calendar due to 'lost learning days.' The amendment was published on 11 August 2020, at which point learners would have lost up to 57% of their normal school days. The adjustment maintained the four terms, but the number of days per term was adjusted (ADEA, 2020). Term one (13 January to 18 March 2020) consisted of ten weeks; term two (1 June to 24 July 2020) consisted of eight weeks; term three (24 August to 23 October 2020) consisted of nine weeks; and term four (2 November to 15 December 2020) would consist of seven weeks.

The delivery of the curriculum in education, as in other countries on the continent and globally, during the lockdown and the staggered start to schooling, involved alternative methods of teaching and learning. These methods included the use of online platforms, television broadcasts, and radio programs (Department of Education, 2019). In some cases, hard copy resources were made available to learners. However, despite the available platforms, Broughton (2020) states that not all learners were able

to access information, and in some cases, no learning took place. Blended learning, which combines online and face-to-face instruction, was also a widespread practice.

The learners attended school classes two to three days a week and alternated face-to-face learning with online learning on the other days. This blended approach ensured that social distancing measures were instituted in classes. Schools whose teachers had the necessary infrastructure switched to online platforms such as Skype, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and even WhatsApp to relay information to learners (Department of Education, 2019).

However, due to existing socioeconomic inequalities, not all teachers and learners can benefit from teaching and learning through these modalities. Most of the country's learners come from disadvantaged backgrounds; language is also an issue, as most learners do not speak English as their first language, and English dominates classrooms (Department of Education, 2020). The lack of access to digital technology for teaching and learning has illuminated the extent of the South African digital divide. Due to financial constraints and poor planning, the programs were broadcast outside school hours. Instead, educational programs were broadcast after midnight and at 5:00 in the morning to the disadvantage of learners (Broughton, 2020).

According to the statements of South African officials quoted above, teachers have not received the support they find useful or meaningful in the delivery of curriculum during the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, it implies that the government is unaware of the Professional Development that teachers require. According to Sayed and Bulgrin (2020), successful curriculum delivery requires teachers who are committed, motivated, and supported, and teacher professional development should be part of a continuous development programme that continues after the initial teacher education phase, ensuring that teachers receive relevant professional development as the foundation for the provision of quality education.

In addition, understanding the contextual realities in which teachers operate is critical to determining the types of professional development they most need. The emergency policy required teachers to switch to online modalities to continue teaching and learning, despite contextual factors such as the lack of access for most of the poorest learners and teachers in the country (Department of Education, 2020). Curriculum trimming has reduced the breadth of learning opportunities and will have adverse consequences for learners' career trajectories.

2.7 CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES, AND LESSONS LEARNED FROM PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Although COVID-19 poses huge challenges, the crisis offers an opportunity to transform and reimagine education, providing a window into how schools will be shaped in the future (Valleva & Kalimullin, 2021). Notable challenges, opportunities, and lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic varied depending on the severity of COVID-19 infections, a country's health status, and its socio-economic status.

The challenges were for the learners to maintain achievement and develop new skills. Distance learning programmes consider that learners already possess a certain level of autonomy and self-motivation necessary for independent learning. Although learner autonomy is valuable in both remote and traditional classroom settings, younger children often have not yet developed the skills required for effective self-directed learning. In addition, remote learning environments often lack the interactive frameworks that enable teachers to monitor progress and provide timely feedback and formative support. According to Reimers and Schleicher (2020), the sudden shift to online education during the COVID-19 pandemic revealed significant gaps in instructional design, particularly in providing learners with consistent pedagogical support and feedback mechanisms.

The areas that are on a television or radio-based distance learning programme are unidirectional interfaces that do not offer opportunities for teachers to assess and correct student learning pathways. Therefore, learners who lack regular feedback from teachers may fail to maintain their current learning levels and struggle to develop new knowledge and skills through self-learning, as required (Gyeltshen, 2021). However, learners in primary schools must have a certain level of proficiency with technology to explore the vast landscape of the Internet (Nkula & Krauss, 2014).

The challenge for the learners was to obtain end-of-cycle certifications. Modifications to the school calendar often interfere with national summative assessment processes, including end-of-cycle examinations and certification processes. This can lead to increased stress among children and adolescents at the end of school cycles, reduce motivation to complete their school cycles, and/or have a long-term impact on children's academic progression if appropriate policies are not implemented (Hondonga, Chinengundu & Maphosa, 2021). These challenges can

disproportionately affect children in the most disadvantaged communities, who are already at risk of not completing basic education.

The challenge for teachers was the need for new protocols for distance learning, online or otherwise, that require them to rapidly change their practices, including daily tasks, responsibilities, and accountability (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2020). This could have enabled teachers to develop new alternative and varied approaches to monitor children's learning during the COVID crisis, which would also include both formative and summative methods.

The effectiveness of distance learning had to be evaluated. However, perceptions of effectiveness may not replace measuring actual effectiveness in the medium to long term (Mendiratta, Nsababera, & Sam, 2022). Therefore, the following considerations should be considered. These are the effectiveness of distance learning programs, how wealthier learners are doing compared to less wealthy learners, and whether learners are maintaining or developing their learning through a distance medium.

For aspects of reaching a sizeable population, the question should be how all populations can be reached. Reducing expectations about what children can learn and how much during the COVID crisis period should also be part of the monitoring strategies. Schools, teachers, and learners should be able to evaluate crisis conditions. Thus, the nature of the content and the stakes of the assessments should reflect the conditions of the crisis.

Consequently, governments, parents, and learners should not assume that adjusted examinations can serve the same purpose or carry the same significance as assessments conducted under normal circumstances. Where feasible, high-stakes assessments should be deferred. It is essential to provide clear and consistent guidelines that outline the evaluation procedures to all stakeholders, including schoolteachers, parents, and learners.

Education and parental counselling were identified as key during the COVID-19 crisis for the well-being, the preservation of learning motivation, and the safety of their children, beyond their necessary participation in schools' learning and evaluation culture. Countries without an integrated cross-sector parenting education and counselling system should develop one; this is also an opportunity for schools to build stronger links with parents (UNICEF,2020). Therefore, the considerations should be what training and support teachers need to successfully implement distance learning

and assessment practices, how that training can be provided, and what information, support, or training parents require.

Furthermore, the introduction of technology into education has disrupted traditional teaching. Pavlik (2015) opines that technology has had three main influences on the delivery of curriculum. First, it has transformed teaching and learning methods. Second, it has reshaped the content of what is taught and learned. Third, technology has redefined the relationships between and among learners, teachers, and educational institutions.

The global response of education to the COVID-19 pandemic, in terms of monitoring curriculum delivery, illuminates the orthodox educational framework adopted by many states in both developed and developing contexts. The responses suggest that understanding of learning and schooling is underpinned by a focus on content learning, with little emphasis on the affective dimensions of schooling, such as social skills, a sense of community and belonging, and learning the dominant social norms and values of society.

According to Trucano (2020), digital, radio, and television platforms became the primary means of sustaining teaching and learning during school closures, particularly in primary education. Among these digital technologies, the most widely adopted approach emerged. However, Di Pietro et al. (2020) caution that despite the global shift to these modalities, learners in low-income countries were left behind due to limited access. Tools such as radio and television can only support learning effectively when learners have access to the necessary devices and when educational programs are broadcast at appropriate times.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, educational institutions around the world have transitioned to distance education, of which online delivery was not planned. Educational professional courses use various blended learning methods for this process, including, among others, synchronous online tutorials, E-learning in simulation sessions, asynchronous activities in moderated discussion forums, formative quizzes, and other teacher-directed or self-directed learning activities.

Around the world, the decision to resume in-person schooling has been a subject of ongoing controversy. By the end of August 2020, countries had begun reopening their schools. However, countries were on academic break. This means that approximately two-thirds of the global student population face school closures or uncertainty, while

the most vulnerable populations, particularly girls, are at especially high risk of dropping out of school (Mendiratta et al., 2022).

The school's reopening, as stipulated in the framework, aims to guide decision-making processes and support national preparation and implementation procedures, while mitigating the spread of the virus and ensuring the delivery of quality education. However, schools in sub-Saharan Africa remain closed due to a lack of resources and infrastructure, such as running water and classroom space, needed to mitigate the spread of the virus.

It remains to be seen whether the aid directed to schools and other educational institutions will remain in a post-pandemic era. In general, it remains to be seen whether teaching and learning, as we traditionally understand them, will be transformed and return to normal once the pandemic is over.

2.8 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

Carius (2020) defined the theoretical framework as the “blueprint” for the entire dissertation investigation, serving as a guide for building and supporting the study; it also provides the structure for how the researcher will approach the dissertation philosophically, epistemologically, methodologically, and analytically. However, Chislett (2021) states that a theoretical framework provides a “map” for investigating the study's nature and scope in relation to the research questions, objectives, and purpose.

As a cornerstone of all research one undertakes, this study sheds light on the theoretical frameworks underpinning it. The study seeks to use a two-dimensional theoretical framework comprising Mitroff's five-stage crisis management model and portfolio model, as well as the World Bank's immediate response to a pandemic and its commitment to education. The rationale for using the two theories is their interconnection in crisis management and immediate response to pandemics.

2.8.1 Mitroff's Five-Stage Crisis Management Model and Portfolio Model

In 1994, Mitroff described five crisis stages that follow a similar lifecycle progression: Crisis signal detection, probing and prevention (probing refers to looking for risk factors), Containment, Recovery, and Learning.

Mitroff was one of the first researchers to recognise that, due to resource limitations, preparing for any kind of crisis is impossible. He noted that crises tend to fall into

certain categories, which Mitroff called clusters, such as equipment failures or defects, external actions, and product recalls. Similarly, prevention actions also cluster together. Based on a survey of 1,000 Fortune-1000 companies, in 1988, Mitroff, along with Terry Pauchant and Paul Shrivastava, recommended that companies rationalise their crisis management programmes by forming dual crisis 'portfolios'.

The first portfolio consists of crises, one drawn from each crisis cluster, and the second portfolio comprises matching preventive actions from each cluster. Mitroff (1988) and his colleagues posited that establishing these two portfolios provides at least minimal coverage across crisis categories.

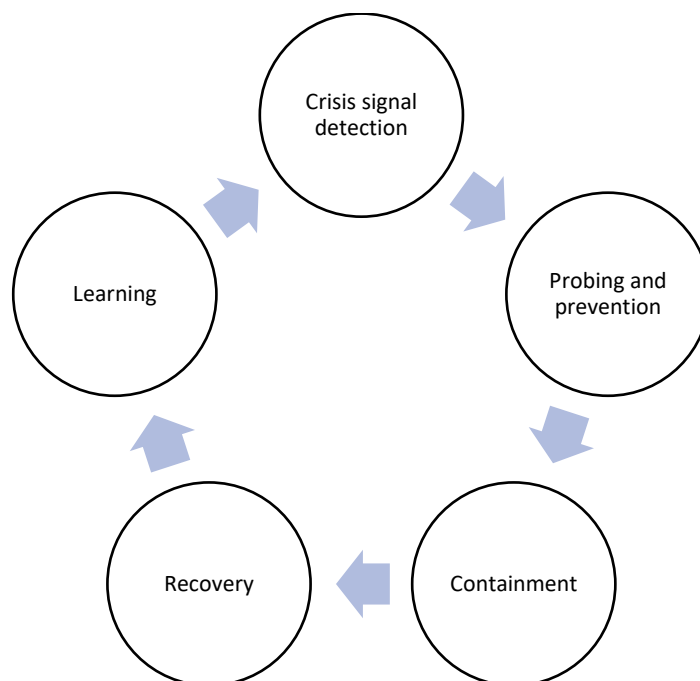


Figure 2.1: Mitroff's (1994) five-stage crisis management model and portfolio model

Mitroff's theory aligns better with the COVID-19 pandemic in that the detection of crisis signals the early detection of the pandemic, and once detected, the country developed measures to contain the spread of COVID-19, ultimately came up with a recovery plan, and continues learning. Prevention was achieved through vaccination, facial mask use, and social distancing.

Regarding containment, governments kept infected people in quarantine for a period and limited face-to-face contact. Recovery was to cover lost time, and in terms of learning, educational institutions introduced online learning. The learning programmes

were extended, and the assessments were also conducted online. Therefore, this theory is the best model aligned with the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.8.2 The Immediate Response of the World to the Pandemic and Commitment to Education

The World Bank responded immediately to the pandemic by increasing its support for countries through various channels and priority interventions, covering the entire cycle from early childhood to higher education, in the delivery of the curriculum during the pandemic (The World Bank, 2020).

According to UNICEF (2021), the Bank's overall new commitments in education during the last fiscal year reached \$5.3 billion, the highest figure ever, and it expects to add another US\$6.2 billion per year, with the active portfolio exceeding \$20.6 billion. The World Bank's education teams work with countries in three phases of the COVID-19 response: coping, managing continuity, and improving and accelerating.

The World Bank supports countries in this by providing tools and guidance on remote learning and school reopening, including a decision-making toolkit on remote learning options and remote learning assessment solutions for curriculum delivery. The World Bank also brings reading materials home, measures the quality of teaching practices in the classroom, and uses observations to provide continuous practical support to teachers (UNICEF,2020).

The identification and development of teacher professional development solutions using EdTech, and the compilation of structured lesson plans that use multimodal technology, were implemented worldwide (The World Bank, 2020). So far, the effort has reached more than four hundred million learners and sixteen million teachers. An urgent priority is to return to learning. Learning losses increased during COVID-19, and children and youth must reengage in learning through effective remote learning, hybrid options, or returning to safe in-person programs.

Countries are already implementing flexible schemes in which schools are partially or fully closed based on sanitary conditions that affect curriculum delivery (Moussa, 2021). It is a complex balance of managing health risks with massive learning losses, particularly among the poor. Based on the 10-action recovery plan, the country can decide to accelerate learning and recovery (Ussif, 2021).

Although there is no single path to the future of learning, countries can draw lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic and chart their own course with bold, visionary action to implement targeted investments and reforms (UNICEF, 2020). Based on these five pillars, educational technology can be a powerful tool to support and connect teachers, learners, parents, and broader communities, and to build education systems that are equitable, effective, and resilient (The World Bank, 2020).

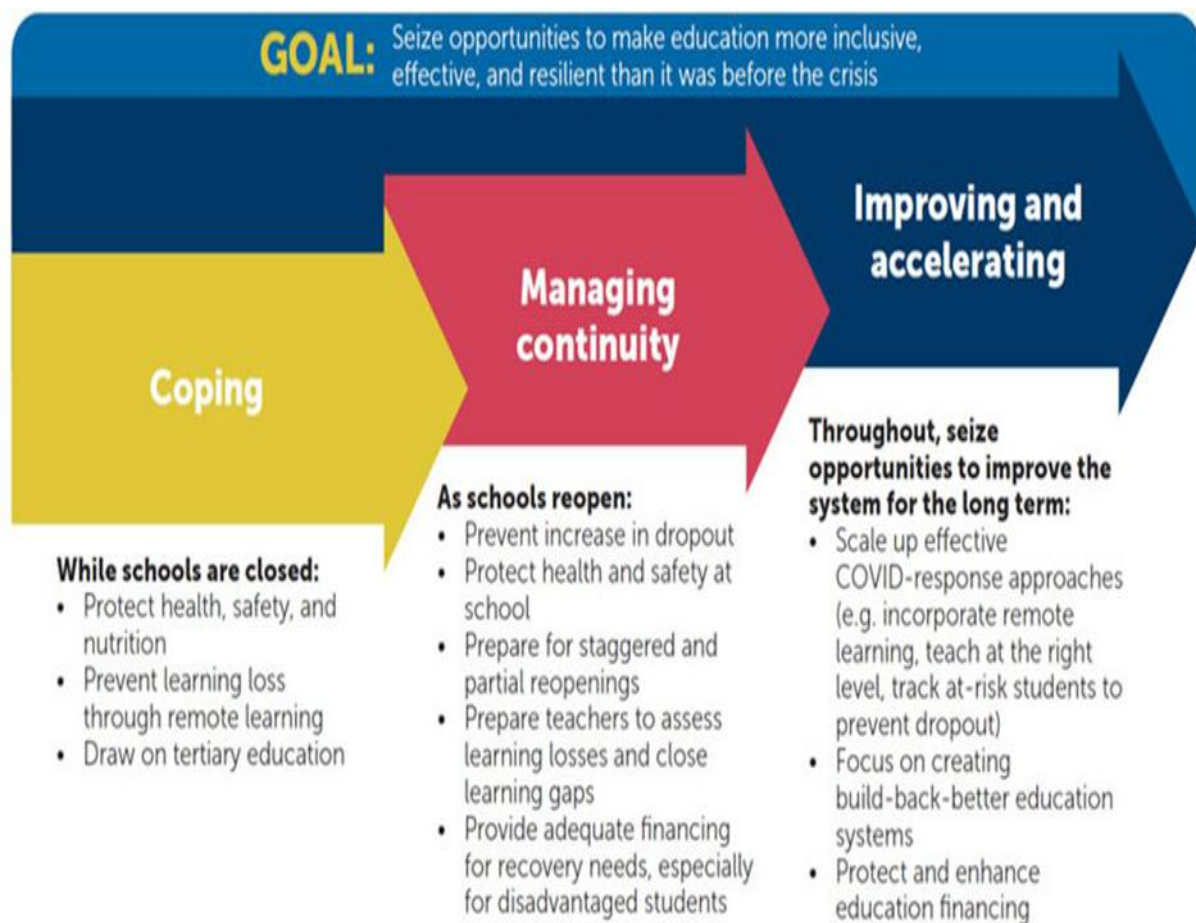


FIGURE 2.2: The immediate response of the World Bank to the pandemic and its participation in education. (SOURCE, WORLD BANK,2020).

Both reviewed countries, at the global, regional, continental, and local levels, used a similar approach once COVID-19 was detected. The common approach and universal strategy were to [1] wash hands, [2] wear face masks, [3] prohibit large gatherings, [4] implement a national lockdown and stay away, [5] and, lastly, practice physical distancing. These were global measures approved by the WHO, and all countries were expected to adhere to the COVID-19 Protocols. Both countries in the study implemented the protocols, along with measures tailored to each country's needs.

All countries have implemented school protocols to flatten the curve and limit the spread of COVID-19. Amongst the measures implemented were the immediate closure of schools, the amendment of the school calendar, the combining of the first and second terms into a single term, and the streaming of the curriculum. The mode of teaching and learning was also face-to-face or online, depending on the country's needs. The use of public platforms, such as television and radio, was popular in each country reviewed for catch-up lessons. The immediate response of the World Bank and the other international organizations aligns closely with this study's focus on maintaining curriculum delivery amid crises. The World Bank's emphasis on advancing continuity of learning through remote, hybrid, and safe in-person teaching follows strategies used by South Africa's Department of Basic Education during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The countries in the study also partnered with private companies to provide data and Internet connectivity. The use of private individual media devices, such as WhatsApp, YouTube, and other platforms, was explored by both countries in the study. However, the quality of education could not be measured or monitored as there were no monitoring tools. Globally, remote and hybrid learning systems were the most widely used methods during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.9 MONITORING STRATEGIES DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic presented unprecedented challenges for education systems worldwide, disrupting traditional modes of teaching and learning. As schools transitioned to remote and hybrid models, the need for effective monitoring strategies became more critical than ever. Monitoring during this period was not only about ensuring the continuation of curriculum delivery but also about adapting to new realities, addressing inequities, and maintaining educational standards in a rapidly changing environment.

These strategies involved leveraging technology, rethinking assessment methods, and prioritizing communication between teachers, learners, and parents. The lessons learned during the pandemic have underscored the importance of flexibility, innovation, and resilience in educational practices, offering valuable insights for future crises and beyond.

2.9.1 Online Learning and Digital Learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Online learning and digital learning are varieties of the learning process. Although the term is used interchangeably with others to denote a mode of 'technology-enhanced' learning, online learning refers to learning that takes place online, in which online technology enables all or part of the learning process and environment. This includes e-learning, receiving instruction through a platform such as Google Classroom, accessing content via mobile devices, or video conferencing. Online education has emerged as a solution to the worldwide epidemic despite hurdles for both teachers and learners.

Transitioning from traditional face-to-face learning to online learning was challenging for both learners and teachers, as there may be limited choices available. The school system and teachers have accepted "Education in Emergency" through online platforms, forcing them to adapt a system for which they are unprepared.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, e-learning technologies helped to promote student learning amid school closures. During the adjustment to the new adjustments, the preparedness of employees and learners should be accurately assessed and supported. Learners with a fixed perspective struggle to adapt, whereas those with a growth mindset readily adapt to new learning environments (Subedi, 2020). There are several subjects with unique demands. Various disciplines and age groups demand many ways to learn online (Doucet et al., 2020). Online learning enables physically challenged learners to learn with limited mobility.

The COVID-19 epidemic has caused unforeseen ripple effects on learners' parents and teachers worldwide. (Basilaia and Kvavadze, 2020). Effective pedagogy for online education requires competence and exposure to ICT for both teachers and learners. Several online platforms, such as Microsoft Teams, Google Classroom, Canvas, and Blackboard, enable teachers to design educational courses, training, and skill development programs (Petrie, 2020). Teachers, analysts, and researchers have criticized the DBE's reliance on online learning, citing the digital divide in South Africa and the challenges faced by learners who lack reliable connectivity or cannot afford the prohibitive cost of data. Despite having access to data and digital technology, learners may lack the necessary digital literacy, time, space, self-regulation, and parental support to effectively use online learning resources.

According to Black (2020), online learning can leave many schoolchildren without access to learning resources or help during lockdowns. Many learners have been left behind (Brodie *et al.*, 2020; Equal Education, 2020). In a national briefing on 30 April, the Minister recognised that during the lockdown, few learners were contacted, and for those who were, the impact was less than 20% of what would have happened in the classroom (Govender, 2020). Principals had to provide support and guidance to primary school teachers to help monitor curriculum delivery during the transition to online instruction.

This included helping teachers develop engaging, interactive online lessons to deliver the curriculum, as well as providing training in using digital tools and platforms effectively. Primary school principals played a critical role in navigating the challenges of curriculum monitoring during the COVID-19 pandemic, working tirelessly to support teachers, learners, and families as they transitioned to online learning and to ensure educational continuity for all learners. Bishop (2012) found that some principals lacked basic computer skills to monitor curriculum during the COVID-19 pandemic, which hampered their ability to serve as instructional and technology leaders.

Principals organised professional development opportunities for teachers to improve their skills in the delivery of curriculum through online learning platforms. In addition, Machado and Chung (2020) assert that principals need to create a vision for effective technology integration and provide teachers with ongoing, supportive professional development aligned with integration goals. Furthermore, Principals need to be equipped with the skills and abilities to handle administrative tasks that can enable schools to meet the demands set by the education department and stakeholders such as parents (Nomnian & Arphattananon, 2018). Principals requested feedback from parents and learners on their experiences with online learning and the curriculum. They used the feedback to make the necessary curriculum improvements and improvements in the monitoring curriculum.

2.9.2 Distance Learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Murphy (2014) described distance learning as a collection of teaching and learning tactics (or educational approaches) that facilitators may use to overcome the physical and temporal distance between learners and their teachers. White (2014) demonstrates that distance learning is defined by its use of media to facilitate teaching and learning: learners and teachers do not often meet in person. One or more methods

are used for interaction and subject communication, such as printed and written materials, audio and video recordings, telephone conversations, and computer communication.

Nambiar (2020) agreed that the familiarity and simplicity of offline techniques, as well as the absence of the need for online teaching channels, were the key impediments to the adoption of online education channels.

However, considering the current COVID-19 epidemic, educational boards have made online programs mandatory at the college and university levels. COVID-19 has caused a significant shift in the education system, not just in India but worldwide. Universities in India and around the world have switched to virtual classes, eliminating the need for physical classrooms. Principals faced challenges while monitoring curriculum implementation during distant learning, necessitating ingenuity, adaptation, and teamwork to overcome these impediments and ensure continuity of instruction for all learners. Online communication has also facilitated and refined the use of social media applications for monitoring the curriculum in primary schools.

Therefore, one of the most popular social media apps teachers used to monitor the curriculum was WhatsApp. This app was the easiest to use for communicating with teachers, parents, and learners to monitor the curriculum. (Mazana, 2018). Therefore, these changes required principals who had a vision for monitoring the curriculum and were strategic about how that vision for leading learning during the pandemic would be executed (De Reuck, 2021). It is this core duty that the principals had to find alternatives to reach out to teachers, parents, and learners during the pandemic so that teaching and learning could continue. In the digital age, it is a prerequisite for a school principal to be a visionary instructional leader who embraces the relevance of technology by leading and managing the school through technology (Ugur & Koc, 2019)

2.9.3 Radio Broadcast during COVID-19

Radio is widely regarded as a low-cost, high-impact educational device, beyond COVID-19 responses. During the 2014-2016 Ebola epidemic, Sierra Leone successfully used the radio to educate its citizens. Sierra Leone uses radio to teach lessons due to the coronavirus outbreak, with NGOs providing radios and batteries (Develop Africa, 2020). Radio is the most popular and accessible medium in Rwanda, reaching about 99% of the population. During the epidemic, radio lessons were

recognised as the best urgent option. Principals or their representatives regularly monitored radio broadcasts to assess the quality and accuracy of the content delivered.

They paid attention to factors such as clarity of information, level of engagement, and adherence to curriculum guidelines. UNICEF supports Rwanda's use of radio by leveraging 144 scripts from other countries on primary-level reading and numeracy instruction. These scripts were contextualised and tailored for Rwanda (Houser, 2020). UNICEF collaborated with the national NGO Inspire, Educate and Empower (IEE) and the Rwanda Broadcasting Agency to develop and broadcast scripts nationwide. Learners may access 20-minute interactive lessons daily at 8:30 and 14:00. The 20-minute course emphasises participatory learning. Lessons are designed for independent participation, although parents and caregivers are invited to monitor and assist learning at home.

The World Bank (2005) provided a toolbox to assist policymakers and planners in implementing an interactive radio teaching approach. Principals collaborated closely with teachers to integrate radio broadcasts into lesson planning and curriculum implementation. They provided support and guidance to teachers in adapting instructional strategies for radio-based learning. Principals ensured that curriculum delivery through radio broadcasts remained effective and aligned with educational goals during the challenging circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.9.4 Using EdTech to prevent learning loss during COVID-19

In Argentina, the Seguimos Educando program began broadcasting educational content on April 1, 2020. It airs 14 hours of television content and 7 hours of radio content each day, specially produced for learners due to school closures. Each broadcast lesson includes a teacher and a conductor (a journalist, artist, or scientist), along with the dissemination of teaching materials. For learners without access to technology or connectivity, this television and radio programming is supplemented with “notebooks” packed with learning resources that have been delivered to student homes.

The program also makes available a collection of digital educational materials and resources on demand on the Ministry of Education’s Educ.ar website. A section on the website, called “the class of the day,” provides a comprehensive daily plan for learners aligned with the television program and printed notebooks. It also has a section on

virtual reality that features a collection of 360-degree videos to provide the user with an immersive educational experience. (World Bank, 2020).

India's multimodal approach includes multiple platforms. The DIKSHA portal contains e-Learning content for learners, teachers, and parents aligned with the curriculum, including video lessons, worksheets, textbooks, and assessments in multiple languages. Principals used EdTech tools and platforms to actively monitor curriculum delivery, assess learners' achievement, and implement targeted interventions to prevent knowledge loss during the COVID-19 pandemic. Principals used EdTech tools such as online quizzes, examinations, and interactive projects to assess learners' grasp of the curriculum remotely.

Principals identified learning gaps and adjusted teaching strategies based on analysis of assessment data. QR codes in textbooks encourage learners to go beyond the book. The application is also available for offline use. Then there is e-Pathshala, a learning application for classes 1 to 12 in multiple languages that provides books, videos, audio, and more, aimed at learners, teachers, and parents. The Swayam Learning Platform hosts 1,900 complete courses, including teaching videos, weekly assignments, exams, and credit transfers, aimed both at school (classes 9-12) and higher education (undergraduate and postgraduate) levels. Swayam Prabha is a group of 32 direct-to-home channels devoted to telecasting educational programs throughout the country.

The channels air courses for school education (classes 9–12) and higher education (undergraduate, postgraduate), as well as for out-of-school learners, vocational education, and teacher training. Kenya was rapidly innovating. In addition to radio and TV, educational programming is available as both live-stream and on-demand content through the Edu TV Kenya YouTube channel. In partnership with the Kenya Publishers Association, the government has made electronic copies of textbooks available free of charge on the Kenya Education Cloud for all learners.

To provide wider Internet coverage for all learners and families, the Kenya Civil Aviation Authority, in partnership with Alphabet Inc. and Telkom Kenya, has deployed Google's Loon Balloons carrying 4G base stations across Kenyan airspace. A single balloon can provide internet connectivity across an 80 km-diameter area. Infrastructure constraints, such as poor internet access and power outages, posed substantial challenges to deploying EdTech solutions in parts of South Africa,

particularly in rural areas. Without stable infrastructure, schools struggled to successfully provide online instruction and monitor curriculum using technology.

Principals struggled to adequately monitor and evaluate learners' progress and participation in remote learning settings. Without the opportunity to directly monitor learners in the classroom, principals had to rely on data from EdTech platforms, which may not always give a complete picture of learners' learning experiences.

2.9.5 How ICT Tools Supported Teaching and Learning During the COVID-19.

During the COVID-19 shutdown, schools and institutions were closed. Global educational communities collaborated to develop novel platforms and strategies to help learners and teachers alike and prevent academic time loss. Educational institutions introduced various ICT technologies to keep learners engaged (Patil, 2020). Technology has provided hope and support during the pandemic, amid uncertainty and anxiety. Teachers used WhatsApp to send audio samples, papers, worksheets, and pictures to learners, set tasks, and post results.

Principals have implemented virtual classrooms and video conferencing tools for live instruction. These platforms enable principals to observe teaching sessions remotely, ensuring that teachers deliver the curriculum effectively and engage learners in learning activities. However, for most learners, this is not possible due to ICT shortages (Mdlongwa, 2012). To help teachers and learners throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the principals managed the curriculum using ICTs such as online platforms, virtual tools, assessment technologies, communication platforms, data analysis tools, and opportunities for professional development.

Technology helped prevent severe damage to primary schools. During the pandemic, teachers have used tools such as Google Classrooms, Microsoft Teams, and Zoom to maintain student learning. This has demonstrated the potential of ICT technologies to support the education sector in times of crisis (Sharma, 2021).

According to Moreno (2020), the implementation of these ICT technologies saved an academic year due to the severe COVID-19 constraints. Incorporating technology into primary school education has a considerable influence on teaching methods. The epidemic has prompted adjustments in educational institutions, including opportunities for innovation and skill development. The COVID-19 pandemic has posed significant obstacles for the education sector, prompting global discussions on potential remedies.

Technological developments have helped the education industry navigate challenging times. The industry has used technology to develop solutions, including ICT. These efforts provided learners with access to a range of educational materials and virtual learning opportunities. Stakeholders in the educational community see the importance of employing ICTs for e-learning. One benefit is the ability to communicate effectively between teachers and learners. One benefit is the ability for teachers to communicate with learners in a manner like in-person classes. Serhan (2020) argues that the interactive capacities of new media are especially significant.

2.9.6 Learning from Home during COVID-19

To adapt to changes in learning systems, educational institutions introduced remote education, also known as e-learning, distance education, correspondence education, external studies, flexible learning, and massive open online courses (MOOCs). The terms and conditions remain the same in the United States. According to the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (2020), electronic learning initiatives, including digital and remote learning options, have been implemented whenever possible and appropriate to ensure learner academic continuity throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. According to a World Bank study (2020), when physical schools were closed due to COVID-19, several nations devised alternative learning methods.

The Indonesian government's enforcement of large-scale social restrictions has influenced community and school routines. Distance learning, or the use of online platforms, has provided options for schools beginning to implement the School from Home (SFH) model. SFH is a programme that transfers learning from school to home. According to the Ministry of Education and Culture's guidelines, schools must organise online learning to provide a meaningful learning experience for learners without being overwhelmed by the responsibilities of meeting all curricular standards.

SFH considers the health and safety of learners, teachers, school personnel, and the community. The Indonesian government's implementation of broad-based social restrictions has affected community and school routines. Distance learning and the usage of online platforms have provided opportunities for schools to implement the School from Home (SFH) concept. Principals maintained open lines of contact with teachers, learners, and parents to keep them informed about curriculum delivery.

They maintained frequent contact using a variety of communication technologies, such as email, messaging apps, and virtual meetings, to monitor curriculum. SFH is a

programme that transfers learning from school to home. According to the Ministry of Education and Culture's instructions, schools must structure online learning so that learners may have a meaningful learning experience without being overburdened by the demands of completing all curricular criteria. SFH considers the health and safety of learner instructors, school workers, and the community.

During the school from home implementation phase (March to early June 2020), stakeholders encountered challenges, particularly in schools that were suddenly required to use school from home. The implementation of homeschooling has posed challenges for the development of online learning systems, particularly in terms of facility use. In Bulgaria, in early April 2020, the Ministry of Education and Science launched an e-learning system.

In Finland, due to school closures, instruction and guidance for learners have been implemented by distance learning, digital learning environments, and, where necessary, independent learning. Ways to support e-learning have been found, including creating an e-Content Repository that publishes materials of pedagogical specialists for working in e-learning environments

Online learning emphasises courses offered via the Internet asynchronously and synchronously. Synchronous learning is a form of learning that involves direct interaction between learners and teachers, while also using online tools such as conferences and chat. Principals collaborated closely with teachers to monitor curriculum and design the primary school curriculum for remote learning. They analysed curriculum materials, lesson plans, and learning goals to ensure that learning was consistent and aligned with grade-level requirements.

Meanwhile, asynchronous learning is a form of learning that occurs indirectly (not at the same time) through an independent learning approach. Subject is designed and displayed on LMS platforms such as Moodle, email systems, blogs, online discussions, Wikipedia, videos, articles, and other platforms (Ko & Rossen, 2017; Ogbonna et al., 2019; Papachristos et al., 2010; Sturm & Quaynor, 2020; Tarman, 2020). Learners have access to the teacher synchronously, asynchronously, or both (Hunter & St. Pierre, 2016; Inoue, 2007; Ohlin, 2019; Richardson et al., 2020).

Various issues have arisen, including the supply of school infrastructure (Bakalar, 2018), such as an Internet network that not all schools previously had, particularly in rural areas, and the cost of high-priced data packages. Principals ensured that

teachers, learners, and parents had access to the appropriate technology and technical assistance for remote learning in curriculum monitoring. To enable curriculum delivery from home, they addressed difficulties such as device compatibility, internet connectivity, and software availability.

Despite the Indonesian government's new law allowing school operating funds to be used to purchase data packages, schools are still unable to fully benefit from school-from-home learning. In addition to data packages, faulty signals impede learning. Learners often arrive late in gathering and finishing tasks, and grasping the information has become a major issue for them. Another shift is that parental interaction with children at school has increased compared to pre-school, with more learning at home. Parents may help young people grasp the subject. A teacher's failure to comprehend or effectively impart a subject. Collaboration between principals and parents in primary schools is required to introduce online learning, as parents typically own the supporting hardware, such as mobile phones or laptops.

2.10 CHAPTER SUMMARY

During the COVID-19 pandemic and the delivery of the curriculum (March to early June 2020), school principals faced numerous challenges, particularly in primary schools that were forced to teach online. The use of curriculum delivery has posed challenges in implementing online learning systems, particularly regarding the availability of facilities and infrastructure, which have been limited to date. Furthermore, the shift from traditional face-to-face instruction to more indirect methods has forced primary schools to navigate a learning landscape marked by complexities and limitations. Various issues have arisen, including the provision of school infrastructure, such as an Internet network to which all schools did not previously have access, particularly in villages, as well as the cost of purchasing expensive data packages. Bad signals, in addition to data packages, are obstacles to implementing learning. learners often arrive late in collecting and completing assignments, and understanding the material has become a significant issue for learners. WhatsApp, Google Forms, Worksheets, YouTube, and Zoom were also used as media to deliver the curriculum during COVID-19.

CHAPTER THREE:

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the research process. It provided information on the methods used to conduct the research and justified their use. The focus was on describing the research approach, design, and data collection techniques used to develop an understanding of perceptions of curriculum management in primary schools during the pandemic. It also provided information on data collection procedures and how data were presented, and specifically examined data collection methods and instrumentation with respect to the qualitative questionnaires used in the study.

Furthermore, the chapter described the purposive sampling method, explained how the data were analysed, outlined the ethical considerations, and underscored the measures taken to strengthen the study's trustworthiness. The chapter also described the various stages of the investigation, including participant selection, data collection, and data analysis. The chapter concluded with a discussion of ethical considerations and how each requirement would be addressed in the current study.

According to Dawson (2019), the research methodology is the fundamental principle that will confidently guide your research. Establishes the general approach to investigate your chosen topic and decisively determines the specific research method to be used.

A research methodology comprises the methods and procedures used to collect and analyse data on a particular research topic. It is a systematic approach through which researchers plan their investigation to accomplish their goals using the chosen research tools. It encompasses all vital elements of research, including research design, data collection techniques, data analysis methods, and the comprehensive framework within which research is conducted. In my study, the researcher used the established paradigm from the literature and applied it to the methodology.

3.2 Research Philosophy

A research philosophy is an opinion on how data on a phenomenon should be collected, processed, and applied. The term epistemology (what is known to be true), as opposed to doxology (what is believed to be true), encompasses the various

philosophies of the research approach. The process of transforming things believed into things known from the doxa to the episteme. Gallier (1991) explained that two major research philosophies have been identified in the Western tradition of science, namely positivist (sometimes called scientific) and interpretivist (also known as anti-positivist).

A paradigm is an integrated cluster of substantive concepts, variables, and problems, accompanied by corresponding methodological approaches and tools (Thomas Kuhn, 1962; Flick, 2009). According to Olsen, Lodwick, and Dunlop (1992), a paradigm is a pattern, structure, framework, or system of scientific and academic ideas, values, and assumptions that shapes how the world is understood.

3.2.1 Ontology of Interpretive Research Philosophy

Hiller (2016) explains that an ontological mindset makes the basic assumption that reality is subjective. Ontological assumptions lay the groundwork for the types of questions a researcher might pursue about how the world works, particularly how people act and interact with one another. The assumption of a relativist ontology holds that the situation studied has multiple realities that can be explored and interpreted through human interactions, both between the researcher and participants and among the research participants themselves.

Ontology is concerned with the assumptions about what makes sense or is considered real, and with the very nature of the social phenomenon being researched. (Scotland, 2012). According to Kivunja & Kuyini (2017), ontology assists in conceptualising the form and nature of reality and what can be known about that reality. It enables an examination of underlying belief systems and philosophical assumptions about the nature of being, existence, and reality. Methodology refers to the strategy or plan of action that underpins the choice and use of methods (Crotty, 1998). Scotland (2012) argues that methodology addresses why, what, from where, when, and how data are collected and analysed.

3.2.2 Interpretivist Research Philosophy Epistemology

Interpretivists contend that only through the subjective interpretation of and intervention can that reality be fully understood. The study of phenomena in their natural environment is central to interpretivist philosophy, together with the acknowledgment that scientists cannot avoid affecting the phenomena they study. They admit that there may be many interpretations of reality, but maintain that these

interpretivisms are in themselves a part of the scientific knowledge they are pursuing. Interpretivism has a tradition that is no less glorious than positivism nor shorter.

According to Giacomini (2014), epistemology is the theory of knowledge concerning how phenomena can be known. Pascale (2011) and Gianomini (2014) further assert that epistemology addresses the nature, sources, and limits of knowledge and provides a justificatory account of the scientific production of knowledge. Epistemology examines how knowledge is acquired and understood. By implication, as with ontology, a researcher can approach the quest for knowledge through a range of various epistemological perspectives. (Pascale, 2015). The assumption of subjectivist epistemology suggests that knowledge is constructed through a researcher's own thinking and cognitive processing of data, shaped by interactions with participants. (Punch, 2015). According to Punch (2015), Knowledge is developed socially, arising from subjective experiences in real-life and natural environments. It is assumed that the researcher and participants engage in interactive procedures, including discussion, listening, reading, writing, and recording research findings.

According to Kivunja & Kuyini, (2017), Epistemology is used to explain how we come to know something and how we know the truth or reality. Schwandt (1997) described it as the study of the nature of knowledge and justification. Glesne (2016) defined a paradigm as a scientific framework that provides expectations about the nature of reality and truth, the kinds of questions to ask, and how to answer them. According to Mouton (2012:137), questions about human understanding of the world and how this understanding is communicated challenge worldviews about how humans learn. Understanding of everyday life and lay knowledge of science and meta-science are based on the view that reality is socially constructed by individuals through describing, making sense of, and negotiating the external world (Glesne, 2016).

3.2.3 Axiology

According to Kivunja & Kuyini (2017), Axiology refers to ethical issues that must be considered when planning a research project. It involves defining, evaluating, and understanding concepts of right and wrong behaviour in relation to research. Axiology is also concerned with how a researcher's attitudes and preconceptions influence the scientific process, as well as how the researcher applies and acts upon the knowledge generated (Lincoln, 2013).

3.3 QUALITATIVE DESCRIPTIVE RESEARCH APPROACH.

Types of Qualitative Research Question

Type of Research Question		Examples
Qualitative Research Question (Exploratory)	Ontological research question (Capturing participants' realities)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ "What is the nature of...?" ✓ "What are the lived experiences of...?" ✓ "What is it like being...?" <p style="text-align: right;">(Saldana, 2013, p.61)</p>
	Epistemological research Question (Understanding phenomenon)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ "How does...?" ➤ "What does it mean to be...?" ➤ "What factors influence...?" <p style="text-align: right;">(Saldana, 2013, p.61)</p>

Figure 3.1: Qualitative Descriptive Research Approach

The qualitative descriptive research approach is defined as a study that describes the characteristics of a population or phenomenon being studied. It is used primarily to understand a group or phenomenon. This includes collecting data through surveys, interviews, or observation. Based on Sugiyono (2010), who states that qualitative research is descriptive, the collected data were in the form of words rather than numbers. In addition, Gay (2006) stated that qualitative research is the collection, analysis, and interpretation of comprehensive narrative and visual data to gain insight into a particular phenomenon.

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), a research design is determined by the nature of the research question and the subject being investigated. Maree (2007) defined research design as the organization or plan that moves from the fundamental conversations to the formulation of the data collection procedures to be used and the data analysis to be conducted. In the understanding of (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014), the research design designates the measures for steering the study, comprising when, from whom, and under what conditions the data were obtained. This implies that the research design signals the overall strategy, how the research is set up, what happens to participants, and which data collection methods are used. Therefore, a qualitative phenomenological research design was chosen for the study, as it

consolidates understanding and interpretation of meaning, as well as the intentions underlying curriculum delivery strategies in primary schools during COVID-19. Further, the use of a qualitative design allowed for flexibility and depth in data collection, capturing a range of adaptive strategies employed across different school settings. This mirrors the principles of the Portfolio Model, which emphasises the diversification of approaches and resource application in managing education during crises. The design facilitated the exploration of multiple strategies, decisions, and reflections, essentially building a portfolio of insights on curriculum delivery monitoring under emergency conditions.

Thus, the research design was intentionally selected to enable an in-depth exploration of crisis experiences and to support the development of a strategic, adaptable model aligned with the study's theoretical frameworks.

3.5 RESEARCH PARADIGM

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) defined the research paradigm as a basic set of beliefs that guide actions. This can be done by first dealing with the principles, or I's worldview. According to Ling and Ling (2020), a research paradigm is a philosophical way of thinking. Maree (2009) agrees that in the contextual domain of empirical research, researchers describe a paradigm as the philosophical lens of viewing the world and scrutinising the research phenomenon under study. This research is based on the interpretative paradigm. Thanh & Thanh (2015) characterise this paradigm as a tool for understanding why individuals act and interact the way they do. The interpretive paradigm seeks to understand how participants construct meaning in their daily lives. Thanh & Thanh (2005) concur that in this paradigm, no single reality exists as social and personal contexts allow for the creation of multiple realities.

The purpose of this study is to investigate curriculum delivery and monitoring strategies in primary schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, the essence of the research paradigm lies in understanding how individuals construct meaning in their daily lives.

Thanh & Thanh (2015) emphasise that no one reality exists in this paradigm, since societal and personal conditions allow us to produce numerous realities. The participants revealed a variety of truths during the interpretative paradigm process. This allowed participants to communicate their entire experience of the event under

investigation. Reality is constructed as people's experiences occur within social, cultural, historical, or personal contexts. This means that the school management in this study recounted their experiences, guiding teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in primary school settings. The interpretive paradigm is useful for analysing how the characteristics of the primary school environment influenced the capacity of the school management team to carry out managerial activities in primary schools during the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.6 POPULATION OF THE STUDY

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2006), a population is defined as a group of elements or cases, such as individuals, objects, or events, that conform to specific criteria. Mohajan (2018) further emphasises that a population is an entire group of individuals who have one or more characteristics in common that are interesting to them. They are intended to provide a suitable base for the research that will form a population. The population is the object of the study, consisting of individuals, groups, organizations, human products, and events or the conditions to which they are exposed. It is a complete set of cases from which a sample is drawn, and every element with the same characteristics has an equal chance of being selected for the sample (Welman, Kruger, and Mitchell, 2005). Sampling is about the richness of the information generated and its appropriateness and adequacy (Fossil, Harvey, McDermott, and Davidson, 2020).

Creswell (2012) emphasises deliberately selecting appropriate participants to achieve set objectives. This study was conducted in the Johannesburg East District, located in the northern part of the Gauteng Province of South Africa. The researcher selected five schools to conduct this research. The selected sample included teachers of Grades 6 and 7, Intermediate Phase teachers of Grades 4 and 5, and Foundation Phase teachers of Grades 1, 2, and 3. Five teachers from each school were selected for semi-structured focus group interviews, while five Departmental Heads (DHs) from each school participated in one-on-one semi-structured interviews. Additionally, one principal and one deputy principal from each school, and three District Officials participated by answering questions in the open-ended questionnaire. Therefore, 25 teachers, five deputy principals, five departmental heads, five principals, and three District Officials from five schools formed the total sample of 43 participants for this study.

3.7 SAMPLING PROCEDURE

A sample is a quota of the total number of population or events from which a representative sample was made (De Vos, Strydom, Fouchè, and Delport, 2014). Neuman (2011) defines sampling as the process of selecting a smaller set of cases or individuals from the entire population. In this study, sampling involved selecting a suitable number of schools, teachers, and district heads as participants. A handful of sampling methods were possible when conducting research. In qualitative research, the focus is more on small groups (Lyell, 2022). Research participants were selected because they could provide rich descriptions of their experiences and were willing to articulate them, thereby enriching the study's understanding.

Purposive sampling was used to select schools and teachers as participants in this study. Purposive sampling is a form of non-probability sampling, in which participants are selected based on specific characteristics rather than through random procedures. Purposive sampling is when cases are nominated with a specific purpose in mind. Neuman (2011) stated that purposive sampling is used to select specific types of cases for in-depth examination, thereby enabling the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the study. De Vos *et al.* (2014) and Babbie (2013) further state that purposive sampling involves selecting elements that possess key characteristics, representativeness, or typical qualities of the population that best serve the study's aim. The researcher used purposive sampling to target principals, deputy principals, departmental heads, district officials, and teachers who had experienced the challenges brought about by COVID-19. Capturing the lived experiences of each participant was essential as this offered rich and meaningful insights. The researcher also believed that the information provided by these participants was relevant and appropriate for addressing the research questions.

3.8 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

There are hundreds of methods to collect data in qualitative research. Some of these are interviews, participant observation, and secondary resource surveys (Kumar, 2013). Each method is suitable for collecting certain types of data. For this study, the researcher used semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and documents. An interview was used as a favourite tool for qualitative research for this study (Denzin, 1998). According to DeMarris (2004), an interview is a procedure in which the investigator and participants engage in a discussion based on questions related to a research study. The researcher used multiple qualitative data collection methods,

including semi-structured interviews. Data collection was guided by interview schedules that were designed to elicit open-ended responses. Open-ended questionnaires were utilized for five principals, five deputy principals, and district officials. In addition, five departmental heads participated in one-on-one interviews, while twenty-five teachers took part in semi-structured focus group interviews and document analysis. An audio recorder or phone recording was used to record the interview. The information was transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy in the data collection process. The audio recording helped to maintain the authenticity of the interviews.

3.8.1 Semi-Structured Interviews One-on-one Interviews

The researcher used semi-structured interviews to elicit participants' beliefs and perceptions of the phenomenon under study (De Vos *et al.*, 2012). Semi-structured interviews were used to gain a deeper understanding of how curriculum delivery was monitored during the COVID-19 pandemic. De Vos *et al.* (2012) posit that both the researcher and participants should be flexible during the interview process. In this regard, the researcher conducted follow-up research, particularly on interesting and relevant issues that emerged during the interview process, while participants were expected to provide detailed accounts of topical issues guided by the interview schedule (De Vos *et al.*, 2014). The participants were perceived as experts and had ample time to elaborate on the issues they considered important. The participants selected were those who had participated in implementing and monitoring the curriculum in schools.

3.8.2 Semi-Structured Focus Group Discussions

A focus group discussion was a carefully planned conversation intended to elicit discussants' perceptions of a defined area of interest in a non-judgmental, non-threatening environment (De Vos *et al.*, 2012). The focus group was used to promote self-disclosure among participants and explore what people thought and felt about a particular phenomenon. The researcher conducted focus group discussions to enable participants to express their opinions on the topics under study.

Babbie (2016) explains that a researcher systematically and concurrently interviewed many participants in the same venue. The researcher created an environment that made participants feel at ease and open as they shared their perceptions, points of view, experiences, and wishes (Kumar, 2013). Participants took part in guided

discussions based on the topic under study. In this study, five principals, five deputy principals, five departmental heads, twenty-five teachers, and three district heads were selected from the sampled primary schools in Johannesburg and were expected to provide first-hand information on the issues under investigation. In a focus group discussion, the richness of the information obtained depends on how participants interact and stimulate each other. Rich data can be gained when participants engage intensely in exploring a particular topic. The researcher guided the discussion using a semi-structured interview schedule, creating a supportive and interactive environment. Acting as a neutral facilitator, the researcher encouraged participants to express their views and experiences openly and freely.

3.8.3 Document survey

Document analysis anchored the findings in institutional reality by examining official policies, school records, communication protocols, and government circulars. This method corresponds with the signal detection and containment stages in Mitroff's framework by revealing how schools documented, responded to, and tracked crisis management efforts. In the Portfolio Model, it represents the 'archival layer providing historical context and evidence of strategic resource management. Document analysis is the study of current documents to understand their content or illuminate deeper meanings that can be discovered by their lifestyle and coverage (De Vos *et al.*, 2014). Creswell (2013) emphasizes that organizations, governments, and institutions maintain documents written for their ongoing functioning, such as meeting minutes, agendas, newsletters, internal memos, and reports. In this case, there are two types of documents: public documents (government documents), such as publications, and private documents, such as personal letters and diaries. In this study, data were generated from public documents, such as policy books and records used to monitor curriculum delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic. School schedules, policy documents, and circulars (from principals and higher offices), meeting minutes, and all relevant school documents were reviewed.

3.9 DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

Three data collection techniques were used: questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions. The instruments used in this study were questionnaires for principals, deputy principals, and district officials; semi-structured interviews with departmental heads; face-to-face interviews with teachers (focus

group); and document analysis. Open-ended questionnaires and interviews were used simultaneously. Although questionnaires and interviews were data generation instruments, there was a difference between the two. Where questionnaires are more rigid, and interviews are open and flexible, allowing participants to explore more follow-up questions and probing. Questionnaires can be sent to large numbers of participants; they allow participants to respond remotely and are the most affordable and efficient data-collection instruments (Ozil, 2021). The interview questions could be altered, whilst the questionnaire questions could not. According to Cohen (2018), Open-ended questions allowed participants to respond in ways they felt were suitable; a suitable sequence of questions for one participant was less suitable for another. Cohen (2018) further asserts that open questions can be regarded as an attractive strategy for smaller-scale research or for those sections of a questionnaire that invite honest, personalised comments from participants in addition to ticking numbers and boxes. The questionnaires were sent to five principals and five deputy principals of the five selected schools, and three questionnaires were sent to three district officials in the East District of Johannesburg. Five departmental heads and five teachers from each selected school were interviewed face-to-face.

Document analysis was followed for cross-reference purposes. The document published by local and national government bodies can be used for qualitative research (Warren & Kanner, 2015). The researcher used official documents, such as policy documents, to gain a deeper understanding of curriculum delivery monitoring strategies in primary schools. Data are frequently gathered and analysed before moving to the next participants.

3.10 UNIT OF ANALYSIS

Milner & Adler (1999) define a unit of analysis as one of the first steps in the qualitative data analysis process; it refers to the portion of content that was the basis for decisions made during the development. In this study, the researcher used individuals, groups (including principals, deputy principals, teachers, and district officials), and documents. Using these different units, the researcher gained a comprehensive understanding of the research topic from multiple perspectives. This approach allows for a more nuanced analysis by considering individual experiences, collective dynamics, and documented evidence. The data source comprised principals, departmental heads, and teachers from selected schools in the Johannesburg East

District, which has 10 schools, of which 5 were purposively selected. In each school, the researcher confidently conducted Semi-structured interviews with teachers and departmental heads. The selection was based on their extensive knowledge and experience in effectively managing the curriculum during the challenging circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.11 DATA ANALYSIS PLAN

The data analysis plan serves as a guiding framework outlining how the researcher handled, processed, and interpreted the data to answer the research questions or test the hypotheses. Thematic analysis is a method to identify, organise, describe, and report topics within a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell, 2017). Creswell & Poth (2016) define thematic analysis as the process of detecting and reporting themes within collected data. This study used thematic analysis to classify and organize data according to key themes, concepts, and emergent categories (Lewis & Ritchie, 2003). A thematic analysis seeks to identify patterns of themes in interview data (Mortensen, 2020).

According to Braun & Clarke (2006), thematic analysis enables me to describe data in depth, report participants' experiences, meanings, and realities, and interpret various aspects of the research questions. Kiger & Varpio (2020). It is a powerful and adaptable method of analysing qualitative data that can be employed within multiple paradigmatic or epistemological perspectives. A thematic approach allows emerging themes to be contextualised with data transcripts and findings from existing literature. Cresswell (2014), the data were organised into segments, each segment being described and categorised before patterns began to emerge and themes developed. The data analysis plan for this study employed thematic analysis to systematically identify, organise and interpret patterns and themes within the interview data (Brawn & Clark, 2006; Nowell, 2017). Data were transcribed verbatim, reviewed multiple times for familiarity, and coded according to recurring concepts and ideas (Lewis & Ritchie, 2003; Mortensen, 2020). These codes were then grouped into broader categories and emergent themes, which were contextualized with existing literature to capture participants' experiences, meanings, and perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Kiger & Varpio, 2020). This approach enabled an in-depth interpretation of how primary school principals, teachers, and district officials monitored and delivered the

curriculum during the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring that the findings were systematically organized and connected to the study's objectives (Creswell, 2014).

3.12 DATA ANALYSIS AND DATA PRESENTATION

Data analysis is described as an approach to making sense of social observations without changing the data to a numerical format (Barbie, 2017). According to Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2011) describe data analysis as a process by which the researcher organizes, accounts for, and explains the data. Yin (2014) holds a similar view by describing data analysis as a process of clarifying and tabulating data. In this study, data were analysed applying the content analysis approach, which involves counting, sequencing particular words and themes.

The researcher and assistants wrote notes and information from audio recordings on the curriculum delivery strategies obtained from the participants during semi-structured interviews. Furthermore, observations were made in both written and video form. Using the content analysis approach (which is inductive), themes were expected to emerge from the data. The words and phrases that are mentioned most often during data collection will indicate themes and patterns (Sharan, 2009).

The data collected was analysed and coded deductively to describe the overall data, with less focus on providing a detailed analysis of a particular aspect of the data that was interpreted through a theoretical lens (Braun & Clarke, 2020). The emphasis was on curriculum and monitoring delivery strategies. Distinct dimensions are anticipated to emerge from the analytical process, reflecting latent meanings evident in the collective content of each category (Berg, 2001).

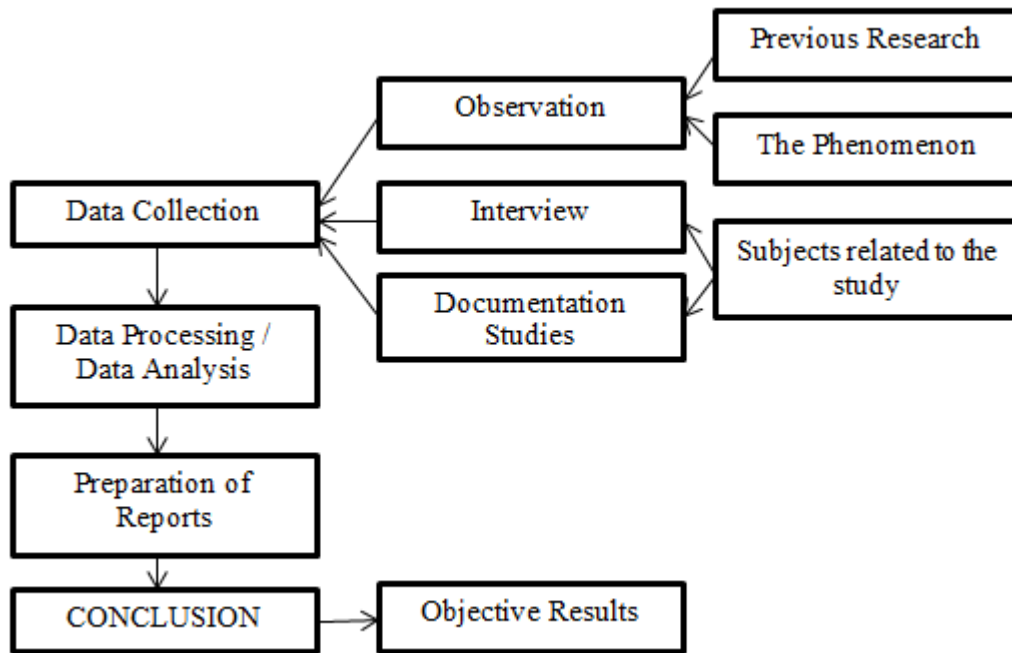


Figure 3.2: Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) Strategy

The QDA process followed a systematic, four-phase approach:

1. Data Preparation:

- Interview/focus group recordings were transcribed verbatim
- Documents were organised and digitised for analysis
- All materials were anonymised and assigned case codes

2. Thematic Coding:

- Conducted line-by-line inductive coding using NVivo software
- Developed a hybrid coding framework (both data-driven and theory-informed)
- Established inter-coder reliability through team-based code verification

3. Pattern Identification:

- Codes were clustered into preliminary themes
- Conducted constant comparative analysis across cases

- Developed thematic maps to visualise relationships

4. Interpretation & Verification:

- Triangulated findings across data sources
- Conducted member checking with select participants
- Refined themes through iterative peer debriefing

This rigorous approach ensured findings remained grounded in the data while allowing for theoretical sensitivity. The strategy balanced flexibility for emergent insights with systematic rigour through audit trails and reflexivity journals maintained throughout the process.

3.12.1 Rigour

Research rigour refers to the strictness, precision, and thoroughness applied in the design, conduct, and reporting of research. Ensuring rigour enhances the credibility, reliability, and validity of the findings. Key aspects of research rigour include

1. **Methodological Rigour:** This involves the use of appropriate and robust research methods and techniques to collect and analyse data. This includes careful planning, systematic data collection, and thorough data analysis.
2. **Reliability:** Consistency of the research findings over time and among different observers. Reliable research produces stable and consistent results under similar conditions.
3. **Validity:** The degree to which the research accurately measures what it intends to measure. This includes:
 - **Internal Validity:** Ensure that the study design, procedures, and measurements accurately reflect the research question and that the observed effects are due to the independent variable and no other factors.
 - **External Validity:** The extent to which the research findings can be generalised to other contexts, populations, or times.

4. **Transparency:** Clear and detailed documentation of the research process, including methodology, data collection, and analysis. This allows other researchers to replicate the study and verify the results.
5. **Ethical Considerations:** Adherence to ethical standards throughout the research process, including informed consent, confidentiality, and minimisation of harm to participants.
6. **Critical reflexivity:** Awareness and acknowledgement of the biases, assumptions, and influence of researchers on the research process and results. This includes reflecting on how their perspectives might affect the research.
7. **Triangulation:** Using multiple methods, data sources, theories, or investigators to cross-check and validate research findings. This helps to ensure a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of the research problem.
8. **Peer Review and Feedback:** Subject the research to review by other experts in the field to identify potential flaws and ensure the quality and precision of the research.

In summary, rigor in research ensures that the study is conducted with careful attention to methodological soundness, ethical principles, and integrity of the research process, thereby producing reliable and meaningful results.

3.13 TRUSTWORTHY OF THE STUDY FINDINGS

The reliability of the study is essential to ensure that its findings and interpretations are accurate (Creswell & Cresswell, 2018). Measures of trustworthiness were established according to the following criteria: credibility, dependability, transferability, and conformability (Ntsaba & Havenga, 2007). These helped to gain the respect and trust of my colleagues in the group. The intended study highlighted the importance of dignity and collaboration, as well as the need to acknowledge everyone's input.

The study's reliability was ensured by applying the following criteria. De Vos *et al.* (2014) recommend four different constructs that reflect the assumptions of the qualitative paradigm more precisely:

3.13.1 Credibility

Credibility refers to the confidence implied by the truth gained from the research findings (Anney, 2014). Kumar (2014) notes that credibility is achieved when the

results of qualitative research are acceptable to the participants. The researcher obtained permission to collect data from the participants. A tape recorder and a digital camera were used to record interview sessions and capture images during data collection, ensuring data accuracy. The researcher examined the connection between participants' views and their construction and representation, ensuring that the study investigated what was intended to be explored. Lengthy discussions and continuous observations were conducted during fieldwork (De Vos *et al.*, 2014). This approach helped to advance trust and consider the culture and settings of the participants who ultimately judge the credibility of the research. The study linked its findings to reality to demonstrate the investigation's veracity. Credibility was further enhanced through triangulation, which involves using multiple data collection methods, such as engaging two distinct populations, interviewing participants at different points in time, and comparing perspectives across diverse individuals (Metzger, Flanagan & Zwarun, 2014).

3.13.2 Transferability

According to Durrheim and Wassenaar (2002), transferability also addresses concerns about over-simplifications that may arise when generalising the collected research information to the wider population and surroundings. Furthermore, the researcher provided a detailed description of the investigation and the participants selected to facilitate its transferability. To enhance transferability in this study, thick descriptions were used, which refer to detailed accounts of field experiences in which the researcher made explicit the patterns of cultural and social relationships and put them into context (Tracy, 2020).

According to De Vos *et al.* (2014) and Kumar (2013), the researcher considered whether the research findings could be transferred from one specific case to another. In this study, the findings were deemed transferable to other settings. As indicated above, the researcher used multiple sources of data.

3.13.3 Dependability

Dependability involves evaluating the study's findings, interpretations, and recommendations to ensure they are supported by data elicited from participants (Cohen *et al.*, 2001; Begley, 2004). The consistency of a study's findings was achieved by verifying research steps through the examination and authentication of items such

as raw data, data reduction, and note-taking (Campbell, 1996). This was achieved by listening to participants' needs and interpreting the results responsibly.

Anney (2014) indicates that the purpose of this test is to demonstrate stability and consistency in the investigative process. In this study, the findings, interpretations, and recommendations were evaluated to determine whether they reflect the participants' data. If a similar study were conducted in the same settings with the same participants, its findings should be consistent with those of the first study.

3.13.4 Confirmability

Confirmability is defined by Baxter & Eyles (1997) as the degree to which the results of an inquiry could be confirmed or corroborated by other researchers. Confirmability is the qualitative investigator's duty to establish objectivity and the extent to which he or she admits any kind of predisposition (Patton, 1990). In other words, the processes must be free from bias and manipulation. As such, it measures how well the inquiry's findings are supported by the data gathered (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to Bowen (2009), confirmability through an audit trail offers visible evidence of processes that the researcher was not aware of when initially embarking on the research journey. This was achieved by engaging an independent person(s) to audit the research processes. In this study, triangulation was achieved through document analysis, semi-structured focus group discussions, and one-on-one interviews with 30 participants. Fusch and Ness (2018) argue that using multiple data collection methods strengthens the confirmability and credibility of qualitative research. Selecting participants from five primary schools meant that the data reflected diverse perspectives, yielding a balanced view of reality (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All these steps contributed to ensuring the confirmability and the trustworthiness of the study findings.

3.14 RESEARCH ETHICS

The study adhered to all stipulated research ethics requirements. The Ethics Committee of the University of South Africa and the Department of Basic Education provided ethical guidance throughout the research process. The researcher obtained formal permission to conduct the study from both the Ethics Committee of the University of South Africa and the National Department of Education before commencing data collection.

The researcher obtained informed consent from all participating school authorities, including principals and department heads. The research purpose and detailed procedures were presented both in writing (through the consent form) and verbally during scheduled meetings at mutually convenient locations. School authorities who voluntarily agreed to participate signed the consent forms after reviewing all materials.

All participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without prejudice. The researcher maintained strict confidentiality by anonymising all participants and school identities. All collected data was securely stored in encrypted electronic files secured by a password-protected laptop.

To ensure data authenticity, the study employed rigorous verification processes, including auditing and methodological triangulation, with member checking conducted to validate findings. Throughout the research process, participants were treated with respect, dignity, and professionalism. The researcher regarded participants as co-researchers who contributed valuable insights to the development of strategies for educational managers to address crisis-related challenges in content delivery.

3.14.1 PERMISSION TO CONDUCT THE STUDY.

The researcher first obtained approval from the University Research Ethics Committee before commencing the study. The study complied with the ethics code stipulated by the University of South Africa. According to Cohen *et al.* (2006), the researcher must obtain permission and acceptance to access the institution where the research is conducted. In this regard, the researcher obtained written permission to conduct interviews in the selected districts. Permission was also obtained from the Gauteng Province Department of Education to formalise the field work.

3.14.2 INFORMED CONSENT

The researcher informed the participants about the purpose of this study and that their participation was voluntary. Participants were asked for permission before the start of interviews and signed consent forms indicating that they voluntarily agreed to participate in the study (Babbie, 2013).

3.14.3 Voluntary Participation

Participants were informed that only volunteers would participate in the research project. They were also informed that they were free to withdraw at any stage of the interview(s) if they wished.

3.14.4 Confidentiality and Anonymity

Babbie (2016) posits that data were reported anonymously so that readers of the report cannot identify responses to specific participants. Participants were assured of the confidentiality of the data generated related to the study. Resnik (2015) asserts that research participants and the confidentiality of their shared information must be protected from disclosure unless they consent to the release of such personal information. All information provided by the participants was considered confidential. The participant's name did not appear in any publication resulting from this study, and any identification information was omitted from the report. In this investigation, the use of pseudonyms or aliases instead of participants' real names was strictly adhered to, and participants were referred to by their school names (e.g., School A, School B).

3.15 INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

The intended study remained the intellectual property of the University of South Africa and the researcher. When conducting the intended study, it was imperative to acknowledge that the research and its findings were considered the intellectual property of both the University of South Africa and the principal investigator, myself. This joint ownership underscored the collaborative and shared nature of the research effort. As the institution that provided the resources, support, and academic environment for the study, the University of South Africa played a significant role in shaping the research's direction and outcomes. Gleichzeitig, as the driving force behind the research, the researcher contributed expertise, time, and effort to ensure its success. This dual ownership not only respected the contributions of both parties but also emphasised the commitment to responsible and ethical research practices. Protecting and acknowledging this intellectual property served as a testament to the value placed on original research and academic integrity.

3.16 DATA MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Creswell (2014) describes data as the information that researchers systematically collect to gain a deeper understanding of a phenomenon. In this study, data were obtained from people as well as from objects, textual materials, audiovisual materials, and electronic records (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). The researcher interviewed the participant, then continued interviewing the other participants until all interviews were completed. The interview process was followed by the transcription of the recordings (Horowitz & Gerson, 2002). The interview recordings were immediately transcribed after each day's interview, and the transcripts were saved on a personal computer for use during data analysis. All transcripts were produced verbatim. File names were assigned in a manner that did not reveal participants' identities. This meant that code names were used to protect the identities of the schools and participants, although the participants' true identities remained known to the researchers.

3.17 ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

POPIA Act 4 of 2013 is a comprehensive data protection law in South Africa. It aims to promote the protection of personal information processed by public and private bodies, balancing the right to privacy against other rights, such as the free flow of information and access to information. South Africa (SA) has successfully implemented its own privacy legislation, the Protection of Personal Information (POPI) Act, which was enacted on November 26, 2013 (POPI, 2013). This act serves to safeguard the privacy rights outlined in Section 14 of the South African Constitution, which explicitly states that "everyone has the right to privacy. As defined by the POPI Act, a responsible party refers to "a public or private body or any other person who, either alone or in collaboration with others, determines the purpose and methods of processing personal information". The act provides for specific exemptions, such as the handling of personal information, the use of anonymisation techniques to remove identification from data (ICO, 2012), or the collection of information on behalf of a public body focused on national security and public safety (POPI, 2013).

Ethical considerations refer to the conformity with the standards of conduct of a given profession or group. In this study, the researcher adhered to the following ethical issues that guide social research (Babbie, 2013).

3.18 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter describes the methodology used in the study. A qualitative approach and an interpretive paradigm were adopted, following a qualitative and phenomenological study design. Each of these aspects is explained in some detail. The sample and sampling procedure were explained, along with a rationale for the procedure followed. The research instruments and the techniques for collecting the data were thoroughly explained, as well as the steps taken to analyse the data. The issues of credibility and trustworthiness, as well as ethical considerations, were also addressed so that the findings can be considered valuable contributions to resolving the study issue and for use by other researchers.

CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION OF RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapter outlined the research design and methodology adopted for this study. This chapter presents and discusses data collected in the field through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with five departmental heads and teachers. Participants were encouraged to respond openly to the guiding interview questions, allowing rich and in-depth discussions. The survey questions were used to clarify certain points and, when necessary, to steer the conversation back to the study's focus. The data and subsequent discussion are organised into themes and sub-themes that emerged during the analysis aimed at addressing the five critical sub-questions outlined in Chapter One.

- How have the roles of school management evolved in response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic?
- What specific challenges has the school management team faced in fulfilling its responsibilities during the pandemic?
- In what ways have school management teams innovatively adapted their roles to address the unique demands of the COVID-19 era?
- How did the basic education assist the schools in managing the curriculum during the pandemic?
- What are teachers' perspectives on delivering the curriculum during the crisis?

To preserve the authenticity of participants' perspectives, verbatim quotes are used in presenting the data, allowing their voices to be clearly heard and accurately represented in the study. This approach ensures that the' experiences and viewpoints of the participants are conveyed in their original context, adding richness and depth to the analysis. To uphold ethical standards and protect the privacy of those involved, pseudonyms are assigned to both the participants and their respective schools. This measure protects their identities and maintains confidentiality while still enabling meaningful insights to be drawn from their contributions. Such practices align with ethical research principles and improve the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings.

4.2 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis is a structured process through which data is interpreted, and insights are derived from it. It is closely connected to other components of a qualitative study, including data generation and presentation of findings, rather than occurring in isolation (Creswell, 2014). The process begins with data generation and continues until the data have been thoroughly examined. Consequently, data generation and analysis are interconnected and mutually influential. Creswell (2014) emphasizes that, unlike the linear approach in quantitative research, qualitative research follows a cyclical process in which data collection and analysis occur simultaneously to produce a coherent interpretation of the findings.

A voice recorder was used to document participants' responses. Following the generation of empirical data, the recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. This meticulous transcription process captured the participants' exact tone and word choices, which is essential for maintaining the integrity of qualitative data.

The transcripts were then carefully read multiple times to develop a deep understanding of the perspectives shared by the participants and departmental heads. This detailed engagement with the data marked the starting point for coding and thematic analysis. During coding, significant segments of text that convey meaningful insights were identified, and units of analysis for further interpretation and theme development.

Colour coding was applied to distinguish between various categories within the data. This approach facilitated the identification of emerging themes that were then tagged in accordance with the study's research objectives. To streamline data organisation, similar interview questions were grouped. Subsequently, the participants' responses were synthesised and interpreted to gain insight into their perceptions of curriculum delivery in the context of teaching and learning within their respective schools.

TABLE 4.3: Themes Aligned with Research Questions

THEMES	SUB-THEMES
1. Adaptation and structure of school leadership roles.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Supporting remote teaching and learning- Enhance communication and engagement

2. Challenges faced by the school management team.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Remote curriculum delivery strategies. - Health and hygiene protocols. - Revised annual teaching plan.
3. Teachers' proficiency in using Technology.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Capacity development in technology for teachers, learners, and parents. - Incorporating ICT to improve teaching and learning. - Disparities in access to resources between learners.
4 Support from the (DBE) during the COVID-19 Pandemic.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improvement of Infrastructures - Professional Development
5 Inadequate teacher support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Limited interaction between learners and teachers - Emotionally affected - Curriculum Coverage

In this study, pseudonyms were assigned to maintain the anonymity and confidentiality of all participants. Teachers who contributed their experiences and insights were identified as T1 to T25, while principals, departmental heads, and district officials were referred to as P1 to P5, DH1 to DH5, and DO1 to DO3, respectively. This approach ensured that individuals could not be personally identified, creating a safe environment that encouraged participants to share their views and experiences openly. The use of pseudonyms was also aligned with ethical research standards by protecting participant privacy while allowing me to capture meaningful perspectives on issues such as the challenges experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.3.1 THEME: 1 Adaptation and Strengthening of School Leadership Roles

The theme of adapting and strengthening school leadership roles focuses on how School Management Teams (SMTs) had to expand their responsibilities to respond to the unprecedented challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings reveal that the SMTs were advancing crisis management and ensuring the smooth operation of schools under difficult circumstances. SMTs also played a critical role in supporting teachers with remote curriculum delivery by organising digital training sessions, distributing learning materials, and monitoring the engagement and progress of learners. Furthermore, SMTs improved communication with parents and the wider school community through regular updates using platforms such as WhatsApp, phone calls, and newsletters. Their leadership extended beyond administrative duties to provide emotional and professional support to both teachers and learners, ensuring that learning continued despite the many disruptions caused by the pandemic (DBE, 2020; Modisaotsile, 2021).

DH 5 “Our Principals and Deputy Principals took on crisis management responsibilities that went far beyond their usual administrative and instructional roles. They were deeply involved in developing and enforcing safety protocols, managing learner rotation schedules, and coordinating remote learning strategies to ensure that teaching and learning continued under difficult circumstances.

This was confirmed by one teacher who explained, “Our principal... had weekly sessions with the planning committee. We created schedules with safety precautions that took hours. This highlights the degree of planning and leadership required from school management to navigate the crisis effectively.

Furthermore, P2 indicated that school leaders had to redesign school schedules to minimise instructional loss while complying with COVID-19 safety protocols. This involved adjusting start times to allow for daily health screenings of both staff and learners before lessons began.

As one teacher explained, “Teachers had to arrive at 6:50 AM for screening... By 7:30 AM, we were in class. We did not lose time. These adjustments ensured that teaching time was protected despite the additional demands of implementing health and safety measures.”

One participant mentioned that school management teams (SMTs) faced numerous challenges in adapting and strengthening their leadership roles during the COVID-19

pandemic. One of the main difficulties was the rapid shift from traditional school operations to crisis management, requiring urgent planning and decision-making under pressure. SMTs had to interpret and implement changing government regulations while ensuring that both staff and learners remained safe. This involved developing new operational plans that adjust school routines and respond quickly to emerging health and safety concerns. According to the Department of Basic Education (DBE, 2020), SMTs were expected to lead school COVID-19 compliance committees that oversee the implementation of safety protocols and provide ongoing support to teachers and learners during this challenging period.

DH 2: *“As SMTs, we were forced to think critically and act quickly. The sudden shift to crisis management demanded urgent planning and decision-making under intense pressure. One of our biggest challenges was interpreting and implementing constantly changing government regulations. We had to stay informed, adapt to new guidelines, and ensure full compliance to keep both staff and learners safe.”*

DH5: *“Developing new operational plans and adjusting school routines became essential during the pandemic. As SMTs, we had to prioritise the safety and well-being of everyone in the school premises. The leadership of school-based COVID-19 compliance committees was a significant responsibility that required us to oversee the implementation of safety protocols such as screening, sanitising and social distancing measures. In addition to these tasks, we were responsible for providing ongoing support to both teachers and learners, ensuring that teaching and learning could continue under the new and challenging conditions.”*

DH2: *“I was a coordinator of the COVID-19 Committee; leading school-based COVID-19 compliance committees was a big responsibility. We had to supervise safety protocols and support teachers and learners.”*

DH3: has this to say, *“I was trying to be strong for teachers during the pandemic; providing ongoing support to teachers and learners was essential. We had to be proactive in addressing their needs and concerns.”*

This was supported by P3: *“It was not easy managing the pandemic, which required strong leadership and communication skills. SMTs had to work together to make it happen. Responding quickly to emerging health and safety concerns was critical. We had to be vigilant and take prompt action.”*

DO3: "There was daily communication with any school at any time. *Officials would often attend schools depending on the need, especially during COVID-19*".

Other participants shared the same idea that they all struggled with limited resources, including shortages of personal protective equipment (PPE), cleaning materials, and digital tools needed for remote learning. Communication was another major challenge, as SMTs had to maintain constant contact with teachers, parents, and learners, often using unfamiliar digital platforms. This lack of resources and communication barriers made it difficult to implement safety protocols and maintain effective teaching and learning. According to Modisaotsile (2021), many schools, especially in under-resourced areas, faced significant obstacles in accessing the necessary equipment and technology to manage the crisis effectively.

P5: "Communication with parents became one of our biggest responsibilities. *We called the parents, sent them SMS messages, and used the school website to share homework packs. For learners who were at risk, we made individual calls to explain how parents could help their children at home. Not all parents were cooperative; some were very reluctant, but for those who were willing, the support was particularly good.*

T6: "*Communication barriers affected our ability to support learners. We had to work hard to stay connected with parents and teachers, but many parents made excuses.*

DP1: "*Communication was a major issue. SMTs had to use digital platforms to stay in touch with teachers, parents, and learners, which was often unfamiliar territory.*"

DH4: "*One of the biggest obstacles was the lack of resources. The lack of PPE, cleaning supplies, and electronic equipment made it difficult for us to respond appropriately. It was difficult to communicate. Reaching all parents and learners was challenging, and we had to use digital platforms with which we were unfamiliar.*"

P4: "Digital tools were essential for remote learning, but many learners did not have access. *We had to find ways to bridge the gap. "Digital tools were essential for remote learning in our school. However, our school lacked the necessary resources, making it difficult to sustain effective teaching and learning during COVID-19."*

According to DBE (2020) and Modisaotsile (2021), School Management Teams (SMTs) were tasked with providing emotional and professional support to teachers while ensuring that curriculum delivery continued with minimal disruption. In addition, they had to revise school schedules to align with health protocols, including daily

screenings and rotational attendance. These additional obligations placed significant strain on SMTs, who had to balance academic supervision, health management, and administrative tasks. They were unable to lead due to increased workload, leaving many SMT members feeling overworked and exhausted.

DH4: *"It was difficult; we also had to ensure the safety of teachers and parents when collecting and returning the student packs. We placed a steel box at the school gate for parents to drop off their work. Teachers used gloves and masks when handling the packs, and we sanitised all materials before marking. After marking, feedback was given to parents again, following strict safety protocols."*

DP4: *"Supporting teachers emotionally and professionally was crucial. We had to prioritise their well-being and provide resources for them to cope. Redesigning school schedules was a challenge. Accommodating health protocols like daily screenings and rotational attendance added to our workload."*

DH4: *"Honestly, it was extremely difficult to balance academic obligations, health management, and administrative duties. It pushed the limits of our leadership ability."*

DH1 *"It was tough. SMT members were exhausted during COVID-19. The pandemic took a toll on our physical and mental health, and we had to find ways to manage our own stress."*

DH4: *"We learned the importance of setting priorities and delegating tasks effectively. It was crucial to manage our workload and keep the school operations running smoothly."*

4.3.1.1 Sub-Theme: Supporting Remote Teaching and Learning

The sub-theme supporting remote teaching and learning during COVID-19 highlights how primary schools adapted to continue education during nationwide closures. Schools quickly shifted from face-to-face teaching to remote methods, using strategies such as homework packs and low-data platforms like WhatsApp to reach learners (Mpungose, 2020). Effective communication with parents was essential, with schools using phone calls, SMS, and websites to offer guidance. Despite efforts, significant challenges emerged, including limited access to digital devices and the internet, unequal parental support, and inadequate infrastructure (Spaull, 2020). Teachers worked extra hours using personal resources, and the Department of Basic Education provided a trimmed curriculum (ATP) to support teaching. However, learning losses

increased particularly among foundation phase learners due to reduced teacher interaction and difficulties with independent learning (DBE, 2020).

DP3: *"The School Management Team (SMT) faced numerous challenges in supporting remote teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the main challenges was the lack of digital infrastructure in many communities. Most learners lacked access to devices such as smartphones, tablets, or computers, and internet connectivity was limited or non-existent in rural and disadvantaged areas. This made it difficult for schools to implement online learning platforms effectively."*

Another challenge was poor parental participation. Although some parents were supportive and helped their children with schoolwork at home, many were either unable or unwilling to assist due to work pressures, stress, or lack of educational background. This lack of home support affected the learners' participation in homework packs and online activities.

T7: *"The level of parental participation varied. Although some parents were incredibly helpful, others found it difficult to support their children due to work obligations or lack of formal schooling."*

T9 and T10 had this to say: *"Learner participation suffered when parents weren't involved. We had to find ways to engage struggling learners and parents. T10 pointed out that the lack of home support affected learner engagement. We had to adapt our teaching strategies to reach learners who weren't getting support at home."*

The SMT had to prepare the teacher for remote teaching. Most teachers had never been trained in digital teaching methods or in managing remote learning, resulting in low teacher confidence and increased anxiety. SMTs had to step in to provide continuous support and guidance to teachers, often arranging internal workshops and curriculum planning sessions under strict COVID-19 regulations. Monitoring curriculum delivery remotely was also a major difficulty. Without direct classroom interaction, SMTs relied on learner work submitted through drop boxes at the school gate or through WhatsApp, which made it hard to track learner progress effectively

DH5: *"Monitoring curriculum delivery remotely was tough during the pandemic. We had to produce a plan on how to receive the learners and books. We relied on the work of the learners submitted through drop boxes or WhatsApp, which had its limitations."*

DH2: "I think supporting teachers was a priority for me as a manager. *I recognised that their confidence and competence were crucial to effective remote teaching during COVID-19.*"

DH1: "*Remote teaching required a different approach, especially during the pandemic. We had to rethink our teaching strategies and find ways to engage learners in a virtual environment, but it was a challenge.*"

DP2: "*It was not easy at all; We learned to be flexible and adaptable. SMTs had to respond quickly to changing circumstances and find solutions to unexpected challenges.*"

Supporting remote teaching and learning during COVID-19 exposed significant gaps in parental involvement in digital infrastructure and teacher preparedness, particularly in under-resourced communities. These shortcomings affected effective learning, as many learners lacked access to devices and internet connectivity, while teachers faced challenges adapting to digital platforms with minimal training or support. The lack of devices and internet access hindered effective online learning, while varying levels of parental support affected learner engagement and participation. Teachers faced challenges adapting to digital teaching without prior training, requiring SMTs to provide ongoing support and innovative strategies under difficult conditions. Monitoring learner progress remotely was also limited by the reliance on physical submissions and low-tech communication (Spaull & Van der Berg, 2020). These challenges highlight the urgent need for improved digital access, targeted parental support programs, and comprehensive teacher training in digital pedagogy to build resilience in education systems for future crises.

4.3.1.2 Sub-theme: Enhance Communication and Engagement

Enhancing communication and engagement during COVID-19 focuses on how schools sought to maintain strong connections with learners and parents during remote learning. With the sudden closure of schools, effective communication became essential to ensure continuity of learning and provide emotional support for learners. School Management Teams (SMTs) and teachers used various platforms such as WhatsApp, phone calls, SMS, and school websites to share updates, learning materials, and provide guidance to parents. According to Mpungose (2020), the use of low-data platforms was especially important in under-resourced communities, helping to bridge the communication gap. Some schools also held regular check-ins

with parents to monitor learner progress and address challenges. However, findings show that the level of engagement varied. While some parents were proactive and maintained regular communication with teachers, others were unreachable or unable to support their children due to work pressures or limited digital literacy. Teachers often had to go beyond their normal duties to keep learners motivated and engaged remotely, sometimes using their own resources. Efforts to enhance communication played a critical role in supporting learners emotionally and academically, but their effectiveness was influenced by socioeconomic conditions, digital access, and parental involvement (Mhlanga & Moloi, 2020; Spaul & Van der Berg, 2020).

T5: "In my school during the pandemic, we communicated with parents primarily through WhatsApp and school emails. These platforms were used to share important updates, distribute learning materials, and offer ongoing support to keep parents informed and involved in their children's education. However, not all parents were actively engaged. Some faced challenges such as limited digital literacy, lack of time due to work commitments, or insufficient access to devices and internet connectivity, which affected their ability to support their children's learning at home."

T12: "We held a Teams meeting where we agreed to continue delivering the curriculum online during lockdown. We also sent a message to our parents on D6 informing them that we will continue with the curriculum online"

T11 said: "We sent a message to our parents on D6 informing them that we will continue with the curriculum online. If they wanted it to be marked by us, we gave them a week... they brought it back on a Friday, and then we took it, and we marked it right."

Schools faced several challenges in enhancing communication and engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic. One major issue was the unequal access to digital tools and internet connectivity, particularly in under-resourced communities, which made it difficult for many families to stay connected with schools. While platforms like WhatsApp and SMS were used to reach parents, not all households had smartphones, data, or consistent network coverage (Mpungose, 2020).

T15: "I think unequal access to digital tools and reliable internet posed a significant challenge with many under-resourced families struggling to stay connected."

This was supported by T13: *"We reached out to parents through SMS and WhatsApp, but these approaches weren't perfect because some families didn't have smartphones or reliable network connectivity"*.

DH1: *"During lockdowns, communication was key, but it was hard to reach all families. We had to be creative in finding ways to stay connected."*

T16: *"Parent engagement was affected by unequal access to technology. We had to find ways to support parents who were struggling to stay connected."*

T17: *"WhatsApp was useful, but it had its limitations, so we had to rely on multiple communication channels to reach both parents and learners effectively"*.

According to Spaul (2020), one of the major challenges during remote learning was low parental involvement. While some parents were highly supportive, many were either unreachable or unable to assist their children due to demanding work schedules, low levels of education, or limited digital literacy. This lack of parental engagement created a significant communication gap, particularly for learners who required additional support at home. As a result, teachers and School Management Teams (SMTs) had to go beyond their normal duties, often using their personal resources to maintain contact with families and keep learners engaged.

DP5: *"We tried our best in our school, SMTs played a vital role in maintaining communication and engagement with parents during COVID-19. We worked tirelessly to ensure learners stayed connected and motivated."*

DH1: *"Low parental involvement harmed learner outcomes. We had to find alternative ways to support learners who lacked adequate support at home, ensuring they stayed engaged and continued learning despite the challenges."*

T5: *"Teachers had to be creative in engaging learners and parents. They used different approaches to reach learners and keep them motivated."*

DH5: *"SMTs had to be proactive in reaching out to parents and learners. We used various strategies to build relationships and maintain communication with parents in our school. The communication gap was significant. Learners who needed more support at home were often the ones who struggled the most."*

One participant stated that the emotional and academic support required during remote learning added pressure on teachers already managing increased workloads

and unfamiliar teaching methods. These challenges collectively hindered consistent communication and limited the effectiveness of remote engagement strategies (Mhlanga & Moloi, 2020; Spaul & Van der Berg, 2020).

T81: *"Communication was essential to the success of remote learning. We had to put in a great deal of effort to maintain consistent and meaningful connections with both learners and parents throughout the period, but we did not reach all parents due to connectivity problems."*

T13 had this to say: *"It was not easy, but supporting learners' emotional well-being was crucial during remote learning. Sometimes I just say it was fine, just to calm the learners down. Teachers had to show empathy and understanding, recognising the stress and uncertainty learners were experiencing and providing reassurance alongside academic support. Sometimes we just call the parents and talk to the learners just to calm them down. It was hurting."*

T15 said: *"Remote engagement strategies had their limitations, which required us to be creative and flexible in how we reached learners and kept them actively involved in the learning process, even though it was not easy to teach them"*.

T17: *"Honestly, consistent communication was a challenge, and we had to explore various strategies to stay connected with certain learners and parents who were difficult to reach"*.

DH5: *"SMTs had to strengthen communication channels between the school, parents, learners, and the Department of Basic Education. This involved regular updates via WhatsApp groups, phone calls, and community outreach to address learner engagement, attendance, and well-being issues."*

The findings imply that effective communication between schools, parents, learners, and the Department of Basic Education was essential during the pandemic to support learner engagement, attendance, and well-being. SMTs played a key role in coordinating regular updates via platforms such as WhatsApp, phone calls, and community outreach. However, limited access to technology and digital literacy challenges highlighted the need for more equitable and reliable communication systems (Mpungose, 2020). Moving forward, there is a clear need for improved digital infrastructure training for parents and teachers, as well as formal communication protocols during crises.

4.3.2 THEME 2: Challenges Faced by School Management Teams

School Management Teams (SMTs) encountered a range of challenges in maintaining effective leadership, ensuring the continuous delivery of teaching, and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. They had to navigate shifting policies, implement health and safety protocols, support teachers and learners emotionally and professionally, and manage limited resources, all while striving to maintain educational standards under unprecedented conditions. SMTs were responsible for interpreting and implementing Department of Basic Education (DBE) guidelines, managing both staff and learner safety, and addressing the emotional, academic, and operational needs of the school community (Nkosi, 2021). The findings reveal that SMTs faced significant difficulties, including a lack of resources, overcrowded classrooms that made social distancing impossible, and inadequate infrastructure, such as poor sanitation and limited access to water (Mpungose, 2020). Additionally, SMTs were overwhelmed by the sudden shift to online and rotational learning systems, with insufficient training or access to digital tools (Mahlangu, 2021). They also reported elevated stress levels due to increased workloads, fear of COVID-19 infection, and pressure to cover the curriculum under time constraints. Poor communication from the DBE further complicated decision-making, with schools often receiving late or unclear instructions (Modisaotsile, 2021). The implications of these findings highlight the urgent need for leadership development programs focused on crisis management, digital skills, and psychosocial support for SMT members. Furthermore, there is a critical need for the government to improve school infrastructure and provide more consistent and timely communication and support. Strengthening collaboration between schools, parents, and community stakeholders may be essential in building resilience against future educational disruptions. One participant had this to say:

T1: "It was exceedingly difficult. Schools faced a shortage of tablets and Wi-Fi, making it difficult to facilitate online learning. In some cases, the few devices provided by the Department of Education were stolen, further worsening the situation. As the school management team, we found it extremely challenging and frustrating to carry out our responsibilities effectively under these circumstances."

According to Mahlangu (2021). During the pandemic, School Management Teams (SMTs) faced numerous and complex challenges that affected the overall functioning of schools. One of the key issues was the lack of resources such as tablets, internet

connectivity, and personal protective equipment (PPE), which made it difficult to implement remote learning and ensure the safety of staff and learners.

DH7 *"One major issue was the digital gap. It was challenging to find ways to connect with learners who lacked equipment or internet access, and they struggled to keep up. I had to prepare printed materials for some learners, which was time-consuming. It was tough to ensure everyone had access to the same resources."*

P5: *"Disadvantaged learners were most significantly impacted by the digital gap. Watching them struggle was heartbreaking. Learners' emotional and cognitive readiness varied greatly. Some struggled to stay engaged, and it was hard to motivate them in a blended learning environment."*

P8: *Personally, "I worried about learners who fell behind, especially the learners who went home during lockdown. The blended learning model was not suitable for everyone, and it was a struggle to keep them on track. Learners from disadvantaged backgrounds needed more support, and it was hard to provide it."*

P5: *"In my school, I had to be creative with my teaching strategies. Finding ways to engage learners and promote academic success was a daily challenge."*

DH4: *"As a school, we need to address the digital gap and provide more support for learners who struggle. It's essential to ensure equitable access to education for all."*

Some schools reported incidents where devices provided by the Department of Education were stolen, further limiting access to online learning tools (Mpungose, 2020). SMTs were also under constant pressure to interpret and implement frequently changing guidelines from the Department of Basic Education (DBE), often with noticeably short notice and limited support.

DP3: *"Our neighbourhood has a high crime rate, and there are numerous social issues in the immediate vicinity. Unfortunately, there was a significant event where all the devices were stolen during a break-in at the school."*

P9: *"Honestly, SMTs were under immense pressure to keep up with changing guidelines from the DBE. It was challenging to implement new protocols on short notice."*

P1: *"The lack of support from the DBE was frustrating. SMTs had to figure things out on their own, often with little guidance. Constant changes to the guidelines made planning challenging. SMTs must be quick to adapt to ensure adherence.*

DP3: *"It was evident that SMTs were under pressure during COVID-19 in my school. They had to strike a balance between administrative duties and ensuring that instruction and learning continued without interruption. The DBE's communication was crucial. For SMTs to effectively support teachers and learners, they require clear, consistent guidelines.*

P10: *"Honestly, as SMTs, we showed resilience. We worked tirelessly to ensure schools adapted to the new reality and learners received the support they needed. We supported our teachers emotionally "*

Managing rotational timetables, monitoring curriculum coverage, and addressing the emotional well-being of teachers and learners added to their already overwhelming workload (Nkosi, 2021). Many school leaders felt unprepared for crisis management, as they lacked formal training in dealing with emergencies of this scale.

P1: *"Managing rotational timetables proved to be a logistical challenge, making it difficult to coordinate classes effectively. Ensuring full curriculum coverage became a constant struggle while prioritising the well-being of learners added further pressure on the school management team.*

P11: *"To be honest with you, the workload was overwhelming. School leaders had to juggle multiple responsibilities while supporting teachers and learners, a difficult task. I felt unprepared for the crisis management role. School leaders need formal training to handle emergencies effectively."*

P13: *"The emotional well-being of both teachers and learners became a major concern. School leaders were tasked with offering emotional support while also managing the day-to-day operational demands of the school."*

P14: *"Rotational timetables required careful planning. School leaders had to ensure curriculum coverage while prioritising learner and teacher safety. "School leaders were expected to be experts in everything. The lack of formal training in crisis management was a significant challenge to us as managers."*

P16: *"Managing the emotional toll on teachers and learners was essential. School leaders had to be supportive and understanding during a difficult time."*

The frustration and stress experienced by SMTs were worsened by poor communication from education authorities and minimal parental involvement in supporting learners at home (Modisaotsile, 2021). These challenges not only disrupted teaching and learning but also exposed gaps in leadership support infrastructure and crisis preparedness within the education system.

P15: *“School Management Teams (SMTs) were provided with guidelines such as sanitizing protocols, but received no practical training or resources to support remote teaching. There was insufficient professional development to help them adapt to blended learning approaches. The Department of Education was reactive rather than proactive, issuing directives without offering practical solutions or support for implementation.”*

P10: *“Poor communication from authorities was frustrating. SMTs needed clear guidance to effectively support learners and teachers. The lack of leadership support infrastructure was lacking. SMTs were left to handle challenges on their own, which was frustrating to us.”*

P17: *“I think parental participation is essential. Learners suffer when parents are not involved, and SMTs suffer the most. There is a need for a stronger support system for School Management Teams (SMTs), which should include improved communication from education authorities and greater involvement from parents in supporting school activities and learner progress.”*

P3: *“For me, the experience taught us valuable lessons. We must prioritise leadership support infrastructure and crisis preparedness to mitigate future challenges.”*

4.3.2.1 Sub-theme: Remote Curriculum Delivery Strategies.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, schools implemented various alternative teaching methods to ensure the continuity of learning despite school closures and rotational attendance. These remote curriculum delivery strategies were designed to address the challenges posed by limited face-to-face instruction and maintain educational progress. The key strategies included digital platforms such as WhatsApp, Google Classroom, Zoom, and D6 Communicator, as well as non-digital options such as printed worksheets, radio lessons, and home learning packs. The findings reveal that while these strategies provided some level of learning support, they also exposed deep inequalities in access to technology and connectivity, especially in rural and

under-resourced communities. Many learners did not have access to smartphones, computers, or reliable internet, making participation in online learning difficult. Teachers also faced challenges with digital skills workload and maintaining learner engagement remotely. Despite these obstacles, schools that adopted a combination of online and offline methods were more successful in reaching a wider number of learners. The experience emphasized the urgent need for investment in digital infrastructure, teacher training on technology integration, and more inclusive remote learning strategies for the future (Moloi, Mhlanga & Mokoena, 2021; DBE, 2021).

DH4: *“In my school, we started online worksheets. Our school distributed digital worksheets through platforms like Class Dojo and communication tools like WhatsApp, allowing parents to download and use the materials with their children, but it was challenging for some parents.*

This was supported by DH6: *“Parents were expected to oversee learning at home while teachers remained available to provide support through email, ClassDojo or phone calls. Schools distributed DBE workbooks, textbooks, and graded readers to help maintain continuity in core subjects such as mathematics and languages, but it did not work as expected.”*

Teachers faced numerous challenges in implementing remote curriculum delivery strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic. A major issue was inequitable access to technology and internet connectivity. Many learners did not have devices, reliable internet, or even data, making it difficult for teachers to engage all learners effectively. Teachers had to rely on platforms like WhatsApp, ClassDojo, and Google Classroom, but these tools were not accessible to all families. In some cases, schools had to provide hard copy worksheets for parents to collect, but even this posed difficulties for families with limited transport or printing facilities.

DH5: *“Parents were expected to monitor and support learning at home while teachers aided through email, ClassDojo, or phone calls. To support learning continuity in core subjects such as mathematics and languages, schools distributed DBE workbooks, textbooks, and graded readers. However, participation was uneven; some parents were actively involved, while others viewed the pandemic period as a “holiday,” resulting in inconsistent learner engagement.”*

DH3: *“We tried hard copies for families without access to technology; printed worksheets were made available. Parents collected these from the school and later returned them for marking, but not all parents brought them back.”*

DH1: *“Inequitable access to technology was a huge challenge. Many learners did not have devices or internet, making remote learning difficult. WhatsApp and other platforms helped, but not all families had access. We had to find alternative solutions for those learners.”*

DH5: *“Teachers in my school had to be creative. We used various platforms and methods to reach learners, but it was an ongoing challenge. Data costs were a major barrier. Many learners couldn’t afford to access online resources or participate in virtual lessons.”*

DH4: *“Some learners lacked parental support at home, making it difficult for them to engage with remote learning activities. Teachers had to find creative ways to support these learners from a distance, often providing additional resources and simplified instructions to ensure they could continue learning. This included making follow-up phone calls, sending voice notes, and preparing extra printed materials for collection.”*

Teachers also struggled with low learner participation as some parents were unable or unwilling to supervise their children's learning at home during COVID-19. According to Modisaotsile (2021) and the DBE (2020), the sudden shift to digital teaching platforms forced teachers to rapidly acquire new ICT skills often without sufficient training or institutional support. Furthermore, the absence of real-time interaction and feedback made it difficult to track learners’ progress and offer timely academic assistance. These challenges not only widened learning gaps but also significantly increased teachers’ workloads and stress levels.

T16: *“There was a lack of parental support at home, which affected learners’ participation in remote learning. Some learners did not complete any schoolwork during the lockdown periods because their parents did not have smartphones or data access. Others reported ongoing challenges with network connectivity, making it difficult for them to engage with digital learning platforms or receive communication from teachers.”*

T19: *“To be honest with you, low learner participation was frustrating. Some parents could not supervise their kids’ learning, and it affected their progress. Monitoring*

progress was tough without face-to-face interaction. We had to find new ways to track learner progress and provide feedback. The sudden shift to digital platforms was overwhelming. We had to learn new ICT skills quickly, often without support, which was very challenging for us as teachers in our school."

T12: "Teacher workload increased exponentially. We had to adapt our teaching methods, develop new materials, and support learners remotely. Learning gaps were a major concern. We had to find ways to bridge those gaps and ensure learners did not fall behind. Teacher workload increased exponentially. We had to adapt our teaching methods, develop new materials, and support learners remotely."

T18: "Learning gaps were a major concern. We had to find ways to bridge those gaps and ensure learners didn't fall behind, but it was not easy for us."

4.3.2.2 Sub-theme: Health and Hygiene Protocols.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, schools were tasked with implementing and managing strict health and hygiene protocols to ensure the safety of learners, teachers, and staff. School Management Teams (SMTs) were tasked with ensuring that safety measures such as regular sanitisation, mask-wearing, handwashing, and social distancing were strictly followed to protect both learners and staff from infection (Mahlangu, 2021). The findings reveal that while guidelines were provided by the Department of Basic Education (DBE), many schools faced serious challenges in implementing them due to limited resources and poor infrastructure. Some schools lacked running water, making regular handwashing difficult, while others struggled to maintain social distancing in overcrowded classrooms (Mpungose, 2020). The delivery of personal protective equipment (PPE) was inconsistent and often delayed, leaving schools vulnerable. In some instances, cleaning materials were insufficient, and there was no dedicated budget for continuous sanitisation (Nkosi, 2021). The implications of these findings highlight the urgent need for government investment in school infrastructure, especially in disadvantaged communities. Adequate funding and timely provision of PPE and hygiene materials are critical for maintaining safe learning environments. Furthermore, the situation exposed the need for better emergency preparedness planning in schools, including staff training on managing health crises. According to Modisaotsile, (2021), strengthening partnerships between schools, communities, and local health departments will also be essential in ensuring a quicker and more coordinated response to future public health emergencies.

The document analysis, including Department of Basic Education circulars and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), confirmed that while protocols were clearly outlined, their feasibility was often undermined by infrastructural and resource constraints. For example, some schools received only limited quantities of sanitisers and masks, which were quickly depleted, forcing staff to improvise or purchase their own supplies.

P4: “The absence of essential resources such as running water and soap made it extremely difficult to uphold proper hygiene standards in schools. This lack of necessities hindered the implementation of recommended health protocols, increasing the risk of infection among both learners and staff. Teachers and school management teams were often left with no choice but to improvise or rely on limited, inconsistent supplies, further compromising the safety of the school environment. This situation created anxiety and fear among teachers, learners, and parents, as schools struggled to meet the minimum hygiene requirements recommended by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) during the COVID-19 pandemic.

School Management Teams (SMTs) faced several challenges in implementing health and hygiene protocols during the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the major difficulties was the lack of essential resources such as running water, soap, sanitisers, and personal protective equipment (PPE), which made it difficult to maintain the required hygiene standards (Nkosi, 2021). Many schools, especially those in rural and disadvantaged areas, struggled to ensure regular cleaning and sanitisation of classrooms and shared spaces due to limited cleaning staff and inadequate funding (Mpungose, 2020).

T20: “I struggled to maintain the required one-meter distance between learners, especially in overcrowded classrooms. Younger learners often forget protocols, such as touching each other’s materials or sitting too close. We had to make them sit one person at a table, but they became rowdy... They wanted to sit close to each other on the field. We were scared because we didn’t know how to explain to our parents if they got sick. Even with screens and gloves, kids borrowed scissors or touched each other’s stuff. It was stressful.”

T22: “In our school, some parents refused to send children to school due to fear of infection, undermining attendance and consistency in protocol adherence. Parents put their foot down and said their child would not return until COVID was ‘clear.’ We had

to keep repeating lessons for learners who were absent. Parents were paranoid. They wouldn't let kids come even during rotational days, so gaps widened."

P3: *"In our school, we had limited cleaning staff, and inadequate funding made it difficult to keep classrooms clean".*

P9: *"Ensuring regular cleaning and sanitisation was a daily struggle. Limited resources made it hard to maintain a safe environment. PPE was a luxury for some schools. We had to rely on donations and community support to get what we needed."*

P5: *"In my school, SMTs had to get creative with limited resources. We had to find ways to maintain hygiene standards despite the challenges. Cleaning staff were overworked and under-resourced. We relied on their dedication to keep schools clean. Adequate funding is crucial, honestly. Without it, schools cannot maintain proper hygiene standards, putting learners and staff at risk."*

Managing the Implementation of Hygiene Protocols: Voices from Focus Group D shed light on the firsthand experiences of school staff as they implemented hygiene protocols during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants consistently acknowledged that although the introduction of these measures was crucial to ensuring the safety of both learners and teachers, their practical implementation posed significant logistical and emotional difficulties.

This theme corresponds with the *damage containment* and *recovery* phases of Mitroff's Five-Stage Crisis Management Model, wherein institutions are required to manage the immediate consequences of a crisis while initiating steps toward operational recovery. Participants described the intense pressure to swiftly comply with the Department of Basic Education (DBE) directives, often without adequate resources and with minimal training. These experiences underscore the importance of adaptable and multifaceted crisis strategies, as advocated by the Portfolio Model, which calls for a diverse range of resources and layered responses to strengthen institutional resilience.

Overcrowded classrooms made it impossible to enforce social distancing, putting both learners and teachers at risk. Additionally, SMTs had to monitor compliance with mask-wearing and daily screening, which added to their already heavy workload. The inconsistent and delayed delivery of PPE and cleaning materials by the Department

of Basic Education (DBE) further compounded the problem (Mahlangu, 2021). SMTs were also not given proper training on how to implement and manage these protocols effectively, leaving them to rely on trial and error

P4: *"Overcrowded classrooms made social distancing impossible. It was a high-risk environment for everyone. Monitoring mask-wearing and daily screening was a challenge. SMTs were already overwhelmed, and it added to their stress."*

P16: *"The DBE's inconsistent delivery of PPE and cleaning materials was frustrating. We needed reliable support. The DBE's inconsistent delivery of PPE and cleaning materials was frustrating. We needed reliable support."*

P17: *"Without proper training, SMTs were left to figure things out on their own. Trial and error were not the best approach during a pandemic. Making sure that health procedures were followed was a daily struggle. More resources and assistance were required for SMTs to perform it successfully."*

P11: *"I think overcrowding and limited resources placed immense pressure on schools, leaving SMTs struggling to manage the situation during COVID-19. The delayed delivery of PPE by the DBE worsened the challenges, forcing SMTs to seek alternative solutions with limited support and resources."*

The lack of support from parents and the wider community made it even harder to reinforce these measures outside school premises, undermining the effectiveness of the protocols (Modisaotsile, 2021). Many learners returned to school without following basic hygiene practices at home, such as regular handwashing or wearing masks, which increased the risk of infection within the school environment. This lack of cooperation placed additional pressure on teachers and SMTs who had to constantly remind and monitor learners' adherence to the protocols. Furthermore, poor community awareness and misinformation about COVID-19 further contributed to non-compliance, making it difficult for schools to maintain a safe and healthy learning environment (Nkosi, 2021).

P5: *"Parental support was crucial, but it was lacking. Learners were not following hygiene practices at home, making it hard to maintain protocols at school. Teachers and SMTs were overstretched. We had to constantly remind learners about protocols, taking time away from teaching."*

P19: *“Both teachers and SMTs were overwhelmed as we had to continuously remind learners about the health protocols, which took valuable time away from actual teaching and learning”.*

P10: *“In my school, SMTs were doing their best, but it was not enough without community support. We needed a united effort to keep schools safe during the crisis.”*

P11: *“Involving the parents is crucial. Learners do not take procedures seriously when parents are not involved, which puts everyone at risk.”*

4.3.2.3 Sub-theme: Revised Annual Teaching Plan.

The revised annual planning Plan (ATP) focuses on how schools adapted their curriculum delivery in response to the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Department of Basic Education (DBE) introduced the Revised ATP to help schools prioritise essential content and manage reduced teaching time effectively. The key findings indicate that while the revised plan helped streamline curriculum coverage, it also presented challenges for both teachers and learners. Teachers struggled with curriculum trimming, pacing and ensuring learners grasped key concepts within the shortened timeframe. Additionally, the frequent changes in teaching schedules, such as rotational timetables, made it difficult to complete the required content. Many learners, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, experienced learning gaps due to limited contact time and lack of support at home (Modisaotsile, 2021; DBE, 2020). Despite these challenges, the Revised ATP served as a crucial strategy to keep teaching and learning on track under difficult circumstances. This is what the participants said:

T22: *“The alternating attendance system (platooning) significantly disrupted curriculum coverage. Teachers were forced to repeat the same lessons for diverse groups of learners on consecutive days, which reduced teaching time and overall efficiency. One teacher explained, it was exceedingly difficult... we had half the number of learners one day and the following day the other half. You had to teach the same thing twice today and tomorrow. This repetition limited the pace of curriculum delivery and made it challenging to complete the Annual Teaching Plan (ATP) within the set timeframes.”*

DH4: *“We used WhatsApp and D6, but not all parents had access... Some could not even photocopy worksheets. This digital divide made it difficult to reach all learners,*

especially those from disadvantaged households, leading to gaps in learning and further widening educational inequalities”

During the COVID-19 pandemic, both teachers and School Management Teams (SMTs) faced significant challenges in implementing the Revised Annual Teaching Plan (ATP). The sudden changes in the curriculum required schools to adjust teaching schedules, prioritise key content, and adopt new instructional strategies within a limited time frame (DBE, 2020).

DH 4: *“The Revised ATP was a challenge to implement. We had to adjust our teaching schedules and prioritise key content on short notice. The DBE’s guidelines were clear, but implementation was tough. We had to adapt quickly to ensure learners didn’t fall behind.”*

DH1: *“Prioritising key content was essential, but it meant sacrificing other important topics. It was a difficult balancing act. The new instructional strategies required by the Revised ATP were a challenge to implement, especially with limited training and support.”*

DH5: *“As SMTs played a crucial role in supporting teachers. They helped us adjust to the new curriculum requirements and provided guidance. The Revised ATP required flexibility and creativity. We had to find new ways to engage learners and deliver content effectively. Learners were already struggling with the pandemic’s impact. The Revised ATP added to their challenges, and we had to find ways to support them.*

T5: *“I think we need ongoing support and training to effectively implement curriculum changes during the pandemic. The pandemic highlighted the importance of flexibility and teamwork, which was difficult.”*

T11: *“One teacher commented, “The ATP was frustrating, it focused only on Maths and English, and it was impossible to complete it. The pressure to meet curriculum targets within limited timeframes increased teacher workload and stress, while learners struggled to grasp key concepts with insufficient instructional time.”*

DO2: *“A specially adapted Annual Teaching Plan (ATP) was developed to guide schools in implementing teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic”.*

DO1: *“The ATP had to be trimmed, some topics were completely removed, and some topics were also adjusted. Other topics were also adjusted. Other topics became non-examinable as before COVID-19, those topics were examinable.”*

One of the major challenges was time constraints caused by rotational timetables and school closures, which reduced contact time with learners. Teachers had to condense lessons, often focusing only on essential topics, leaving some learners with gaps in foundational knowledge (Spaull & Van der Berg, 2020). SMTs struggled to plan and monitor curriculum coverage, as the pandemic's unpredictability made long-term planning difficult. The lack of resources such as textbooks, digital devices, and internet connectivity made it hard for learners to engage in remote learning activities.

P10: *"It was exceedingly difficult to teach; time constraints were a major issue. Rotational timetables and school closures reduced contact time, making it hard to cover the curriculum."*

P15: *"SMTs struggled with planning and monitoring curriculum coverage. The pandemic's unpredictability made long-term planning impossible. Lack of resources was a huge challenge. Without textbooks, digital devices, and the internet, remote learning was difficult for many learners."*

P16: *"Essential topics took priority, but it meant sacrificing other important content. Learners' understanding suffered as a result. Reduced contact time affected learner engagement. We had to find creative ways to keep them motivated and on track."*

T10: *"Planning was a constant challenge during COVID-19 in my school. SMTs had to adapt quickly to changing circumstances and adjust plans accordingly. Learners without digital access were left behind. We had to find alternative solutions to ensure they didn't fall further behind."*

Many teachers also experienced increased workload and stress as they had to prepare catch-up plans and support learners with varying levels of understanding. SMTs had to constantly provide emotional support to teachers while ensuring that teaching and learning continued despite the disruptions. Overall, the implementation of the Revised ATP highlighted deep-seated inequalities in the education system and placed immense pressure on both teachers and school leaders (Modisaotsile, 2021).

T4: *"To be honest with you, the workload was overwhelming to us as teachers. Preparing catch-up plans and supporting learners with unique needs was stressful. SMTs played a vital role in supporting us emotionally. They helped us cope with the pressure and stress."*

T7: *"The Revised ATP implementation was a challenge. It highlighted existing inequalities and put immense pressure on teachers and school leaders. Learners' varying levels of understanding made it hard to teach. We had to adapt our approaches to meet individual needs."*

T1: *"Teachers needed emotional support during that time. SMTs provided a listening ear and helped us stay focused. The pandemic exposed weaknesses in the education system. We need to address these inequalities to ensure better outcomes for learners."*

T3: *"One participant said, despite the challenges, we found ways to make it work. Collaboration and teamwork helped us support learners and each other. Teachers were stretched thin. We had to juggle teaching, planning, and supporting learners while managing our own stress."*

T1: *"As one teacher noted, 'I think in our school, SMTs were the backbone of the school. They kept everything running smoothly, even in difficult circumstances. Their dedication played a vital role in keeping teaching and learning on track during an incredibly difficult period.'"*

School Management Teams (SMTs) faced numerous challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, including poor infrastructure, a lack of digital tools, and inadequate support from the Department of Basic Education (DBE). Many schools lacked water, PPE, and space for social distancing, making it difficult to implement health protocols. SMTs also faced pressure to manage new curriculum plans and remote teaching without proper training or resources. The digital divide further disadvantaged learners, especially in under-resourced communities. These challenges increased workloads and stress for both teachers and SMTs. The findings highlight the urgent need for improved infrastructure, leadership training, better communication from DBE, and stronger parent and community involvement to support schools during future crises (Modisaotsile, 2021; Mahlangu, 2021).

4.3.3 THEME 3: Teacher Proficiency in Using Technology.

During crises, teachers' proficiency in using technology reflects the extent to which they possess the skills, knowledge, and confidence required to effectively integrate digital tools into their teaching practices. It highlights both the capabilities and limitations that teachers face in leveraging technology to enhance learning outcomes. Key findings reveal that while some teachers demonstrate a reasonable level of

technological competence, many struggle with basic digital tools due to limited exposure, lack of formal training, and minimal ongoing support. According to Makunja (2023), insufficient training and professional development significantly contribute to teachers' limited ICT skills, particularly in developing countries where access to resources is unequal. The study indicates that this proficiency gap affected the effective use of educational technologies in classrooms, especially in under-resourced schools during COVID-19. Furthermore, professional development opportunities in information and communications technology (ICT) were found to be either infrequent or misaligned with teachers' practical classroom needs. Consequently, many educators during the COVID-19 pandemic relied on peer support or self-directed learning, resulting in inconsistent levels of technological proficiency and confidence for remote instruction. The departmental Heads stated that:

DH1: *“Our school was unprepared for the digital transition during the COVID-19 pandemic. We had to build Google Classroom from the ground up, and our IT staff handled all the setup. Unfortunately, there was no digital infrastructure in place, leading to a rushed, last-minute implementation. As the management team, we faced challenges due to inconsistent participation, which resulted in disadvantaged learners being left behind in learning and teaching.”*

4.3.3.1 SUB-THEME: Capacity Development in Technology for Teachers, Learners, and Parents.

Training and capacity development in technology for teachers, learners, and parents highlights the critical role of ongoing support in enhancing digital literacy and effective technology use across the school community. Findings from the study revealed that while some training efforts during COVID-19 have been initiated, they remain inconsistent, insufficiently resourced, and often focused more on teachers than on learners or parents. School management teams also indicated difficulties in sustaining capacity-building efforts due to financial constraints, time limitations, and varying levels of ICT readiness among stakeholders. According to Van Zyl (2022), effective digital integration in schools requires inclusive training that empowers all members of the learning ecosystem. Similarly, Mhlanga and Moloji (2023) emphasise that equitable access to ICT skills development is essential to bridge the digital divide and ensure meaningful participation in digital learning environments.

DH3: One of the Departmental heads expressed concern about inadequate training resources, stating that: *"We try to organise workshops, but the budget doesn't allow us to do it regularly. Most of the time, we rely on free sessions, which are not always practical for our teachers."*

DH4: Similarly, another DH noted the gap in parent involvement: *"We teach learners how to use certain platforms, but when they go home, the parents can't support them because they also don't understand how the technology works."*

DH2: This was echoed by another participant who emphasised the lack of learner-focused ICT training: *"The training is mostly for teachers, but our learners also need structured digital skills lessons, especially now that so much learning is online."*

DH3: About learners and parents, one departmental head noted: *"Most learners don't have devices at home, and their parents are not digitally literate. That makes it hard to reinforce what we teach at school."*

DH2: Another commented, *"We once invited parents for a digital skills workshop, but only a few showed up. Many feel intimidated by technology or think it's not their responsibility."*

4.3.3.2 Sub-theme: Incorporating ICT to Improve Teaching and Learning.

This sub-theme explores how the integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is being used to enhance teaching and learning processes in schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. Findings from the study revealed that while many schools recognise the potential of ICT to transform education, its implementation remains uneven and often limited by infrastructural and training constraints. Teachers expressed that ICT tools such as digital content, interactive platforms, and online assessments have the potential to support differentiated learning and improve learner engagement. However, participants reported that access to devices and reliable internet connectivity remain major barriers, particularly in under-resourced schools. Moreover, teachers lacked confidence or adequate training to effectively integrate ICT into their daily lessons. School management teams acknowledged the importance of ongoing support and professional development to build teachers' digital competencies during the COVID-19 pandemic. As Ngcobo and Dube (2021) emphasise, successful ICT integration depends on aligning technology with pedagogical goals and sustained teacher support. Similarly, Mahlalela and Pitsoe (2022) emphasise that leadership

commitment and infrastructure are crucial during COVID-19 in shaping the effectiveness of ICT use in classrooms. Furthermore, research by Mhlanga and Mloi (2023) reinforces the essential need for equitable access to digital tools and skills across all schools to narrow educational gaps and foster inclusive digital learning environments.

DH1: *“Incorporating ICT to improve teaching and learning during COVID-19 presented significant challenges for school leaders and me. One of the key difficulties was the unequal access to technology among learners and their families.”*

DH4: *“We also used the D6, where children had to get some work from D6, where the parents had to help to reinforce what we were teaching, but we also used the WhatsApp groups... but also we had challenges with it because not all the parents had access to that.”*

Two Departmental Heads expressed the view that the digital divide hindered the effectiveness of remote teaching strategies, as not all learners had equal access to, or could benefit from, the online resources provided. The absence of consistent parental feedback and concerns about the authenticity of learners’ work further complicated the situation. According to Mpungose (2023), such inequalities in access and support during remote learning have deepened existing educational disparities, particularly in under-resourced communities.

DH5: *“Assessing the learners’ work for me personally, I felt like it wasn’t a true reflection of the learner’s work because most of the time when the children do the work at home, the parents assist them.”*

DH3: *“I also tried with the communication with WhatsApp, but... not all the parents could have access to that... because you send the worksheets, but you're not receiving the worksheets back for you to do the marking and the assessment.”*

4.3.3.3 Sub-theme: Disparities in Access to Resources among Learners

Disparities in access to resources among learners highlight how unequal access to devices, the internet, and parental support during COVID-19 widened learning inequality. Many learners could not fully engage with remote learning due to a lack of resources, leading teachers to lower standards to accommodate those left behind. Communication difficulties further complicated curriculum delivery and monitoring

during the COVID-19 pandemic. These challenges reflect broader educational inequalities worsened by the pandemic, as noted by Spaul and Van der Berg (2020), Mpungose (2020), and UNESCO (2021), emphasising the need for fair resource distribution to support all learners effectively.

DH3: *We did send work through WhatsApp, but not all parents had access to WhatsApp. Digital technology left learners behind because they could not access WhatsApp or print the work. Some had to go to internet cafés just to print.*"

DH5: *"When learners came back on a rotational basis, it was clear that those who were assisted at home were ahead, while those who weren't assisted were left behind. It was challenging to figure out how to close that gap."*

DO: *"District officials encouraged primary schools to use all resources provided to support learners to learn remotely. The challenge was a lack of resources that prevented parents from providing their learners with the computer data to log in online."*

DH2: *"We had to lower the standards and adapt to suit the learners who had fallen behind because we couldn't just leave them behind. It was tough but necessary."*

DO1: *Primary schools that are financially self-sustaining managed to ensure the continuity of teaching and learning through online platforms. In contrast, no fee-paying schools were able to benefit from remote learning. No additional funding was made available.*

DH4: *"Communication with parents was difficult because some had no electricity or their phones did not work. Contact numbers changed without notification, making follow-ups hard."*

DH5: *"Parents who were working left children with older siblings, who often didn't have time to help. So, the learners missed out on support at home."*

DH1: *"The lack of resources and support made it very challenging to monitor curriculum delivery effectively. We tried our best, but the gaps were significant."*

Limited teacher proficiency with technology, unequal access to digital tools, and inadequate training for all stakeholders significantly hindered the effectiveness of remote teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. These challenges affected lesson delivery, learner engagement, and overall teaching quality, highlighting the need for comprehensive digital capacity-building in schools. The lack of structured and

inclusive ICT training for teachers, learners, and parents resulted in inconsistent digital literacy levels affecting the continuity and quality of learning. Under-resourced schools faced the greatest challenges, with teachers forced to adapt rapidly without adequate infrastructure or support. This worsened existing educational inequalities and left many learners behind, particularly those without access to devices or parental assistance. As Spaul and Van der Berg (2020) highlight, these disparities deepen learning gaps and call for targeted interventions. Furthermore, Mhlanga and Molo (2023) stress that equitable access to ICT resources and ongoing professional development are crucial to building a resilient education system. Addressing these gaps is essential for improving digital integration in schools and ensuring that no learner is excluded from quality education in future crises.

4.3.4 THEME 4: Support from the Department of Basic Education (DBE) during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Support from the Department of Basic Education (DBE) during the COVID-19 Pandemic focuses on how the DBE assisted schools in managing teaching and learning during an unprecedented national crisis. When schools were forced to close, the DBE played a vital role in ensuring that education could continue despite the disruptions. One of the key interventions was the development of Revised Annual Teaching Plans (ATPs), which helped teachers prioritise essential content and adapt to reduced instructional time (DBE, 2020). The department also provided remote learning support through printed materials, radio, and television lessons, and online platforms to cater to learners with varying access to technology, but not all schools benefited. In addition, teacher development programs were introduced to help teachers adjust to blended and online teaching methods, but not all teachers attended due to the pandemic. (Spaul, 2021). The DBE also guided schools in implementing curriculum recovery plans to address learning losses and ensure consistency across provinces. The findings indicate that the DBE's structured support was insufficient in helping schools adapt swiftly and sustain curriculum continuity during the pandemic.

T5 said: "The DBE provided guidelines (e.g., trimmed Annual Teaching Plans (ATPs)) but was perceived as reactive rather than proactive in assisting schools. The trimmed ATPs helped reduce content, but nobody explained how to assess properly. We were still expected to produce 'normal' results with half the teaching time. The department was not providing enough resources for teachers to help parents and learners. They were not proactive... they would just come and say follow the guidelines"

Another participant, T6, had this to say: *"We got the COVID safety circulars late, sometimes after we'd already figured things out ourselves. By the time their guidelines came, we'd moved on."*

DO2: *"I know, as District Officials, there was a circular released by the GDE to reduce the percentages of examination content in the senior phase curriculum. (Gr R-12)"*

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many teachers encountered significant challenges due to limited support from the Department of Basic Education (DBE). In the absence of consistent guidance, teachers had to navigate remote teaching on their own, often using personal resources to develop learning materials and communicate with learners.

T9: *"The lack of consistent guidance from the DBE was frustrating during COVID-19. We had to rely on our own initiative and creativity. Teachers were left to figure things out on their own. Limited support from the DBE made remote teaching even more challenging."*

T2: *"We had to use personal resources to develop learning materials and communicate with learners. It was a huge burden."*

T16: *"Remote teaching was a steep learning curve. Without adequate support, it was tough to keep up with the demands. The DBE's limited support affected the quality of education. We had to do our best with the resources we had."*

T10: *"DBE prioritised safety (e.g., social distancing) but neglected pedagogical support. The department was very focused on health and safety, but there was very little support for schools like us."*

Many teachers reported inadequate training in using online platforms, leaving them unprepared for the demands of remote instruction (Motala & Menon, 2020). The lack of clear communication from the DBE added to the confusion, leading to inconsistent curriculum delivery across schools. This situation placed considerable emotional and professional strain on teachers expected to maintain continuity of learning under exceedingly difficult conditions.

T24: *"The DBE's communication was unclear during COVID-19, leading to confusion and inconsistent curriculum delivery. It was challenging to navigate. Teachers were expected to adapt quickly, but without proper support, it was overwhelming. Emotional and professional strain was very high."*

T4: *" Sometimes maintaining learning continuity was a huge challenge. We had to be creative and resourceful to keep learners engaged most of the time."*

4.3.4.1 Sub-theme: Improvement of Infrastructures

Efforts to improve school infrastructure aimed to enhance teaching and learning conditions in response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. This included upgrades such as the provision of water and sanitation facilities, improved classroom spaces to allow for social distancing, and in some cases better access to digital infrastructure. The aim was to create a safe and conducive learning environment that adhered to health protocols and supported remote or blended learning models. Key findings reveal that while some progress was made in improving basic infrastructure, the interventions were uneven and often delayed. According to the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT, 2020), many rural and under-resourced schools continued to face challenges, including inadequate classrooms, a lack of running water, and poor internet connectivity, which hindered the implementation of safety measures and digital learning. Furthermore, Spaul. (2020) found that infrastructure upgrades were not consistently aligned with the immediate needs of schools, limiting their effectiveness in supporting curriculum delivery during the pandemic.

T14: *'We faced challenges related to classroom space at our school, which negatively impacted teaching and learning, as maintaining social distancing was difficult during COVID-19.'*

T12: *"Space in the classroom was a big problem. We were unable to guarantee physical separation, which raised concerns about learner safety."*

T19: *"Classroom space was a major issue. We could not ensure physical distancing, which raised concerns about learner safety. Ensuring learner safety was a top priority. However, infrastructural challenges made it difficult to maintain a safe learning environment."*

T24: *"The impact on teaching and learning was profound. Infrastructure issues made remote instruction even more difficult. Schools with inadequate funding were severely impacted. It was difficult to provide effective teaching and learning since basic facilities were insufficient."*

According to the DBE (2020), the inability to meet health and safety requirements delayed the reopening of several schools, further disrupting curriculum delivery. Most schools did not have the necessary digital infrastructure, such as internet connectivity, computers, or smart devices to support remote or blended learning.

T5: *“Observing health and safety regulations was difficult. Learners were impacted as the delivery of the curriculum was affected by school reopening delays.”*

T13: *“Digital infrastructure was a significant problem. To facilitate remote learning, many schools lacked computers, smart devices, and internet access.”*

T18: *“Safely reopening schools was a top priority. However, it was challenging to comply with health and safety regulations due to infrastructure constraints. Curriculum delivery was heavily disrupted, particularly in schools lacking digital infrastructure, which made it difficult to offer quality remote education.”*

T9: *“One major issue was the digital gap. Compared with schools with greater resources, those with less digital infrastructure were at a disadvantage. Learners were especially impacted. Their capacity to learn remotely was hampered by a lack of internet and digital tool availability.”*

This digital gap worsened existing inequalities, leaving many learners without access to online education platforms. These infrastructural shortcomings exposed systemic weaknesses in the education system and highlighted the urgent need for long-term investment in school infrastructure to ensure resilience during crises.

DH5: *“At my school, we were unable to implement any learning activities during the lockdown because most learners did not have access to online learning. We tried to use WhatsApp as a learning platform, but it was not effective for all learners.”*

T8: *“The digital gap made already-existing disparities worse. Learners who were unable to access online resources were left behind.”*

T13: *“Infrastructural shortcomings were exposed. We need long-term investment in school infrastructure to bridge the digital gap. Systemic weaknesses were revealed. The pandemic highlighted the need for strong digital infrastructure in schools.”*

T12: *“I think schools require infrastructure that supports online and blended learning. Learners who lacked digital resources faced disadvantages. Investments in school*

infrastructure must be given top priority to avoid the problems if we had COVID-19 in the future."

T25: "Existing inequalities were worsened during COVID-19. Digital infrastructure is crucial for ensuring equal access to quality education and learning. We learned that infrastructure is crucial. Schools need investment in digital infrastructure to be resilient in times of crisis."

4.3.4.2 Sub-theme: Professional Development

Professional Development during COVID-19 highlights the training and capacity-building initiatives provided to teachers to help them navigate the shift to remote and blended learning. With the sudden closure of schools and the move to online or alternative teaching methods, teachers needed new skills in digital pedagogy, technology use, and curriculum adaptation. Professional development became essential in equipping teachers with the tools and knowledge to maintain teaching quality under challenging conditions. Key findings show that although the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and other stakeholders introduced training programmes, these efforts were often limited in reach and effectiveness. According to Mpungose (2020), many teachers, especially in rural areas, lacked access to reliable internet and digital devices, which made participation in online training difficult. Moreover, Spaul (2020) notes that some training was generic and did not fully address the specific challenges teachers faced in their contexts. As a result, while professional development was a key response strategy, its impact was uneven, leaving many teachers feeling underprepared to implement remote teaching effectively.

DH4: "I think, during the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers faced several challenges related to professional development. One of the key issues was the lack of access to relevant and timely training on how to deliver remote or online lessons effectively."

T6: "No, nothing. There was no training provided during the pandemic. Everything had to stand still. I feel like everything was stopped. We could not go to the workshops. We did not have the departments coming to workshop us on anything. It was more like, you know, now there's social distancing. We have to keep away from all this."

T19: "The only way we did it was to use WhatsApp. But even with that, it wasn't like wasting time... I would not really say we could get proper feedback from every

individual learner. Yes, they (departmental heads) tried persuading that you should carry on trying your best... but like, it wasn't easy."

T6: "There were some policies given to us... posters to put on the walls... but to be honest, everyone was scared. Even our principal... she would avoid close contact. The support wasn't much; it was more verbal and at a distance."

Many teachers were not adequately prepared to use digital tools and platforms, as professional development opportunities were either limited or non-existent, especially in under-resourced schools. According to Mpungose (2020), the sudden shift to online teaching left teachers overwhelmed with little support or guidance from the education departments.

DH1: "No professional development from the Department of Education during COVID-19. There was no help from them except when they sent the trimmed ATP. That is the only thing. The department was caught off guard, just like us. They kept changing directives weekly: first, no teaching; then, platoon in; then, trimmed curriculum. There was no clear plan. They promised tablets and data for learners, but only a few schools received them. We saw it on TV but never in our classrooms."

DO1: Teachers did receive constant professional development, have been, and are going, even during the hard lockdown, to mediate developments cascaded down from DBE to provinces to districts. Teachers are now undergoing training to address learning gaps that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic.

T16: "We had to teach ourselves how to use WhatsApp and Google Classroom. No workshops, just trial and error. I learned to record lessons on my phone because the department did not show us how. Some parents could not even open the videos. The DBE said to use online platforms but did not provide training or check if parents even had smartphones. Many families share one basic phone."

Some teachers struggled with unreliable internet connectivity, a lack of devices, and insufficient digital literacy, which further hindered their ability to participate in online training sessions. As a result, many teachers had to rely on self-learning and peer support, which was not always consistent or sufficient to meet their needs.

DH3: "Unreliable internet and lack of devices were major hurdles. Teachers had to rely on self-learning and peer support. Digital literacy was a challenge. Many teachers

struggled to participate in online training sessions due to technical issues. The absence of devices and unreliable connectivity were significant obstacles. Teachers were forced to rely on peer help and self-learning. Being digitally literate was difficult. Technical difficulties made it difficult for many teachers to take part in online training courses."

T7: "Teachers were left to solve problems on their own. We were unable to adjust to online learning due to a lack of resources and assistance. Although peer assistance was beneficial, it had drawbacks. More organised assistance and training were required for teachers to use digital tools efficiently."

T8: "It was difficult to have inconsistent internet connectivity. It made it difficult for us to work with colleagues and take part in online training. The lack of devices and internet access hindered our ability to participate in online professional development opportunities."

The findings highlight key lessons for strengthening education systems during crises. The Department of Basic Education (DBE) was reactive, offering delayed guidance and limited support, leaving schools unprepared. Poor infrastructure, especially in rural areas, worsened inequalities, stressing the need for targeted investment in water, sanitation, and digital access. Teachers lacked proper training for remote teaching and instead relied on peer support, revealing gaps in professional development. The digital divide excluded many learners from education, while the DBE's focus on safety over learning support showed misaligned priorities. Overall, the study calls for better crisis planning, clear communication, teacher training, and equitable resource distribution to build a more resilient education system.

4.3.5 THEME 5: Inadequate Teacher Support

Inadequate teacher support refers to the limited availability of guidance resources, emotional support, and professional development for teachers, especially during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Many teachers were left to navigate remote teaching, modern technologies, and increased workloads with minimal institutional support, which negatively impacted their effectiveness and well-being. Teachers were often expected to adapt rapidly to new teaching methods, such as online platforms, without adequate training or support from education departments. This lack of preparation led to increased stress, confusion, and burnout among teachers,

compromising teaching quality and learner outcomes. Many teachers felt isolated and overwhelmed, having to rely on their own initiative to manage unfamiliar technologies and shifting policies. Moreover, inconsistent communication from education authorities further deepened the sense of uncertainty (Phahlamohlaka, 2022). As a result, the absence of structured institutional support negatively affected curriculum delivery, teacher morale, and learner engagement (Maphalala & Jampies, 2021). This theme highlights the need for proactive, consistent support systems for teachers, especially during disruptions, to maintain educational stability and well-being.

T1: *“One participant noted that during the COVID-19 pandemic, in our school, we faced several difficulties that had a significant effect on teaching and learning. One of the major difficulties was adapting to online and hybrid teaching techniques without enough training or adequate technological resources.”*

T14: *“I found it very difficult to transition to online learning with little preparation. I had to learn things on my own, and it was very difficult”.*

T10: *“As a teacher, I struggled to transition to online teaching due to limited training and support, making it challenging to effectively deliver instruction and engage learners remotely.”*

T20: *“I faced significant difficulties as a teacher in adapting to online teaching largely because of inadequate training and preparation, which limited my ability to employ digital tools and strategies. Two participants shared the same views: T6 and T11. “As a teacher, I had a hard time adjusting to online instruction, mostly due to a lack of training and preparation that made it hard for me to employ digital tools and techniques.”*

Many teachers lacked access to reliable internet, digital devices, and technical support, which made it extremely difficult to deliver lessons effectively, particularly in rural and under-resourced communities. Teachers were forced to use their own data and personal devices to continue teaching, which imposed a financial burden on them and was unsustainable in the long term. Others had to rely on printed materials or informal platforms like WhatsApp to maintain contact with learners, which limited the effectiveness and depth of instruction. This lack of proper ICT infrastructure and technical training exposed the digital divide and widened existing educational inequalities. According to Mhlanga and Moloji (2020), the pandemic highlighted how unprepared many schools were for digital transformation, especially in disadvantaged

areas. Similarly, Mpungose (2020) emphasises that the rapid shift to online learning, without adequate preparation or support, left both teachers and learners overwhelmed and disadvantaged, further straining the education system.

T1: *“As a teacher, I witnessed the challenges of online learning during the pandemic. Many of us lacked access to reliable internet, digital devices, and technical support, making it tough to deliver lessons effectively.”*

T3: *“I was a teacher during the epidemic, so I experienced the difficulties of online education. It was difficult for many of us to successfully teach because we lacked access to digital equipment, dependable internet, and technical help.”*

T21: *“Sometimes I had to use my own data and personal devices to send some worksheets via WhatsApp to the parents to do work with their learners. It was not easy because the feedback was not pleasing.”*

T24: *“Some colleagues relied on printed materials or WhatsApp to reach learners, but it wasn't ideal”.*

Phahlamohlaka (2022) and Maphalala and Jampies (2021) note that during the COVID-19 pandemic, some teachers faced significant challenges in reaching all learners due to connectivity problems and a lack of resources, which contributed to widening learning gaps. In addition, unclear communication from education authorities led to confusion regarding policies, assessments, and curriculum adjustments. Without adequate guidance or support, teachers were often forced to make independent decisions, which increased their stress levels and affected the consistency and quality of their teaching.

DH4: *“During the lockdown, many learners travelled to rural areas, which made it extremely difficult for teachers to provide academic support. These areas often lacked reliable internet connectivity, and in some cases, there was no network access at all. As a result, learners were unable to join online classes, download materials, or communicate regularly with their teachers.”*

DH1: *“I think many of the homes in these rural areas did not have digital devices such as smartphones, tablets, or computers, which makes it harder for learners to finish their education. This digital divide widened learning gaps and left both teachers and learners feeling frustrated and disconnected from the education system.”*

T7: *"It was very tough; I struggled to reach all my learners during the pandemic. Connectivity issues and a lack of resources were major challenges. I had to get creative with WhatsApp and phone calls, but it wasn't ideal."*

T15: *"The pandemic showed me how unprepared our education system was for online learning. We need to always be prepared for the unknown. Sometimes I joined groups of teachers online on how to teach using online platforms, but it did not work out for me."*

T11: *"The lack of training and support was a major issue. I had to figure out how to use online tools and platforms on my own, which took time and effort."*

There were also significant issues with the lack of professional development opportunities during this period, leaving many teachers to navigate unfamiliar technologies and adopt new teaching methods through trial and error. Most teachers had never received formal training on digital tools, online platforms, or remote teaching strategies before the pandemic. As a result, they were forced to learn on the job, often under pressure and without proper support. This lack of preparation not only increased their stress and workload but also affected the quality of teaching and learner engagement. In many schools, there was no structured support or continuous training provided to help teachers adapt, especially in disadvantaged communities where digital literacy was already low. According to Mpungose (2020), teachers were left to experiment with digital tools independently, leading to inconsistent and sometimes ineffective teaching practices. Similarly, Mhlanga and Moloji (2020) emphasise that the absence of targeted professional development revealed systemic gaps in teacher training, which limited the education system's ability to respond effectively to the crisis.

T2: *"I did not receive support from either the school management team or the Department of Education. Although the department provided us with guidelines and masks, there was no emotional, academic, or curriculum-related support to help us manage the challenges we faced."*

T6: *"It was difficult; I had to learn digital tools on the fly without any formal training. It was trial and error, and some days I felt like I was barely keeping up. The lack of support was overwhelming."*

T25: "In my school, it was very bad. I am worried about the quality of teaching and learner engagement, especially during the crisis, because we did not engage with anyone during lockdown".

DO2: "indicated that communication took place via group chats and the School Management Team (SMT) remained available at the school on most days to attend to any issue or problems that arose".

Additional challenges included poor infrastructure in many schools, limited classroom space that made social distancing impossible, a shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE), and inadequate sanitation facilities. These conditions not only put the health and safety of teachers and learners at risk but also hinder efforts to resume safe face-to-face teaching. Many schools, particularly in rural and low-income areas, lacked basic resources such as running water, proper ventilation, and enough furniture to ensure safe physical distancing. According to Spaul et al. (2020), these infrastructural deficits made it difficult to implement COVID-19 safety protocols effectively. Similarly, Khula and Lekhetho (2022) emphasise that the lack of basic hygiene and protective resources in under-resourced schools undermined teaching continuity and contributed to heightened anxiety among teachers and learners.

T5: "To be honest with you, the Department of Education provided guidelines to follow during this period; however, implementing them proved extremely difficult due to inadequate infrastructure in many schools. Challenges included overcrowded classrooms, poor ventilation, limited access to water and sanitation facilities, and a lack of teaching and learning resources. These conditions made it hard for schools to comply with safety protocols such as social distancing, regular handwashing, and proper classroom management as outlined in the guidelines."

T10: "Maintaining social distancing was a major challenge because there was insufficient space to accommodate all the learners safely. Limited classroom space made social distancing impossible, and we did not have enough PPE or sanitation facilities. Lack of infrastructure made it difficult to implement safety protocols; it was exceedingly difficult."

T11: "I felt like we spent more time sanitizing instead of teaching, it really takes up my teaching time, and recording the temperature was time-consuming. We struggled to maintain safety standards, and it affected our teaching."

T17: *"We need urgent attention to our school infrastructure. It is not just about COVID-19; it is about providing a safe learning environment for all. We can't compromise on this."*

4.3.5.1 Sub-theme: Limited Interaction

Rotational groups were introduced in schools as a strategy to reduce classroom density while preserving some level of in-person learning amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Learners were divided into alternating cohorts attending school in morning and afternoon shifts or on a week-on-week-off basis. This system aimed to balance the need for infection control with the goal of maintaining educational continuity. However, research reveals mixed outcomes, with some learners benefiting from smaller class sizes while others struggle with inconsistent schedules, reduced instructional time, and difficulty adapting to the alternating structure. Studies found that while rotational grouping reduced the risk of virus transmission (Lessler, 2021), it exacerbated educational inequalities, as learners from disadvantaged backgrounds struggled with inconsistent instruction and limited access to resources (Maldon & De Witte, 2022). Additionally, the lack of daily peer interaction and fragmented teacher-student engagement negatively impacted social development and academic progress, particularly for younger children (Engzell, 2021). The implications suggest that while rotational grouping was a necessary emergency measure, future pandemic response should integrate stronger remote-learning support, targeted interventions for vulnerable learners, and hybrid models that minimize disruptions to learning and socialization.

One participant explained that teachers were forced to repeat lessons several times because only half of the learners attended on alternating days. This process was not only time-consuming but also disrupted the flow of teaching. As a result, teachers felt that the rotational system significantly hampered both effective curriculum delivery and the development of meaningful relationships with learners. The irregular attendance patterns led to slower academic progress and limited the depth of instruction, causing frustration and a sense of professional dissatisfaction among teachers. According to Spaul and Van der Berg (2020), such rotational models contributed to substantial learning losses and disrupted continuity of teaching, particularly in disadvantaged schools.

T12 explained, *“Half the learners come today, the other half tomorrow... We must repeat the same lesson we taught on Monday... It just was not effective. It took longer to deliver the content because we had to go over the same material again.”*

T18 shared the following: *“The rotational system was a nightmare. Having to repeat lessons several times consumed valuable teaching time and disrupted the natural flow of instruction. It was difficult to build any real momentum.”*

T5 expressed, *“I felt like I was teaching the same lesson over and over. It was exhausting, and I worried about the impact on learner progress. We just couldn’t move forward.”*

T14, T18, T10, and T17 shared similar sentiments regarding the challenges of the rotational system. One teacher stated, *“The irregular attendance patterns made it hard to plan and deliver lessons effectively. It slowed down academic progress, and I felt frustrated.”* Another noted, *“I missed the connection with all my learners. The rotational system made it hard to build meaningful relationships, and it affected my teaching.”*

Others highlighted the emotional toll, with one teacher saying, *“It was demotivating to repeat lessons multiple times. I felt like I was not making progress, and it affected my sense of professional satisfaction.”*

However, a contrasting view was also expressed: *“The rotational system was quite effective because the smaller class sizes allowed me to provide individual support to each learner. I really enjoyed the experience.”*

Limited face-to-face contact made it challenging for teachers to understand learners’ individual needs and learning styles. This disruption in continuity not only affected learner performance but also demotivated teachers, who often felt that their efforts were ineffective and undervalued. According to Spaul and Van der Berg (2020), rotational attendance significantly disrupted teaching routines and caused learning losses, especially in under-resourced schools. Similarly, Mthethwa and Ngcobo (2022) found that teachers experienced emotional strain and professional burnout due to the constant adjustments required under rotational timetables.

T16 *“expressed the difficulty of building relationships and delivering the curriculum effectively due to irregular attendance, stating: “You did not see learners often... We could not deliver the curriculum properly because we rarely saw them. I had to think*

on my feet every day. With learners rotating and not coming daily, it even took time just to learn their names.”

T10 “Participants shared their frustration, stating: “It was very frustrating as a teacher... You come to work for eight hours and do the very bare minimum. They further explained the challenges of learner access, adding. The learners would tell us, ‘I don’t have internet.’ So, we could print out the work... but then you would never really get to talk to them.”

T5: “I felt frustrated because I prefer face-to-face teaching where I can see my learners and actively engage with them. Being physically present allows me to observe their reactions, provide immediate feedback, and create a more interactive learning environment.”

DH3: “Limited face-to-face contact made it hard to understand my learners’ needs and styles. I felt like I was teaching in the dark, and it affected their performance. Sometimes I struggled to connect with learners individually. The rotational system disrupted continuity, and I felt demotivated knowing my efforts were not yielding desired results. Limited contact with learners made it hard to gauge their understanding, and it affected my teaching.”

DH1: “I personally preferred face-to-face; I missed the delicate touch. Limited face-to-face contact made it hard to build relationships with learners, and it affected my job satisfaction.”

4.3.5.2 Sub-theme: Emotional Affected

Both teachers and learners were emotionally affected by the pandemic-related changes. Teachers experienced elevated levels of burnout, stress, and demotivation due to the pressures of adapting to new teaching methods, managing rotational attendance, and coping with limited learner interaction. At the same time, learners struggled with feelings of isolation, disengagement, and a lack of emotional and academic support, caused by disrupted routines and reduced classroom presence. According to Mthethwa and Ngcobo (2022), the emotional toll of the pandemic on both teachers and learners was significant, as many schools were unprepared to provide the necessary psychological and social support during this period.

T1 and T7 shared the same views: *"Both teachers and learners were affected mentally... We were confused, not knowing where we ended where to start. You gave them work, you do work with them, but they are not interested. I was disengaged due to a lack of interaction with the learners. The constant adjustments wore me down, and I felt emotionally drained. It was unsustainable. T7 said, "I felt like I was just going through the motions. Limited contact with learners made it hard to gauge their understanding, and it affected my teaching."*

DH4: *'The rotational timetable system further complicated curriculum coverage, as teachers had to repeat lessons multiple times due to split classes, reducing instructional time and increasing their workload.'*

T12: *"Emotional exhaustion and burnout became widespread as we juggled personal stress and health concerns and the professional demands of supporting learners remotely".*

T8: *"We were afraid of one another as teachers, making it difficult to offer help or support to each other out of fear of being infected with COVID-19. Unfortunately, our Departmental Heads and the Department of Education did not provide us with any emotional support during this challenging time."*

T1: *"I contracted COVID-19, and the most difficult part was the isolation that followed. Other teachers were afraid to come near me, and no emotional support was offered. I felt completely alone during that time, having to cope with both the illness and the emotional strain by myself."*

Another major challenge was the absence of emotional and psychological support for teachers. Many teachers faced heightened stress and anxiety caused by the constant risk of infection, heavier workloads, and fear of not meeting their learners' academic needs. In addition to managing their own emotional well-being, teachers were expected to support learners who were also struggling with feelings of isolation, grief, and limited parental guidance. In many instances, teachers had to take on multiple roles, acting not only as teachers but also as counsellors, social workers, and caregivers to address learners' emotional and social challenges (Kim & Asbury, 2020; Mhlanga & Moloji, 2020).

T3 expressed the emotional challenges faced during the pandemic, saying: *"There was no emotional support for teachers, we struggled to cope with our own stress and*

anxiety, let alone support our learners. It was overwhelming trying to manage my own emotional well-being while supporting learners who were struggling. I felt like I was drowning in responsibilities. It was exhausting, and we needed more support to deal with the emotional toll.”

T5 shared the emotional difficulty of supporting learners during the pandemic, stating, *“I had learners dealing with trauma, grief, and isolation; some lost their parents. Without proper training or support, it was hard to know how to help them. I felt helpless.*

T14: *“The lack of emotional support for teachers was too much. We were expected to be strong, but we needed someone to talk to and support us. I struggled to balance my own anxiety with supporting learners. It was a heavy burden, and I felt like I was burning out.”*

T17: *“Teachers need emotional support not just for ourselves but to effectively support our learners. It is time we prioritise our mental health.”*

4.3.5.3 Sub-theme: Curriculum Coverage

The findings indicate that despite the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the school in question maintained effective curriculum coverage through a combination of digital platforms and structured rotation schedules. Teachers utilised Google Classroom to continue with daily lessons and created comprehensive timetables from Grade 1 to Grade 7. Approximately 80% of learners were able to participate in online learning, which helped sustain academic progress. For learners with connectivity issues or those whose parents were hesitant to send them back to school, lessons were repeated to ensure they did not fall behind. Alternate classroom attendance (rotational timetables) allowed for safe in-person learning and enabled the school to conduct assessments systematically. Teachers also developed pre-recorded video lessons and uploaded them for learners to access at their convenience, reinforcing learning and ensuring consistent content delivery. As a result, the school was able to keep pace with the curriculum, and most learners did not experience substantial academic loss, highlighting the adaptability and resilience of the teaching team during the crisis.

DH1 had this to say: *“The transition to digital platforms was quite overwhelming. I had to quickly familiarise myself with Google Classroom without any formal training or support. It felt like I was learning on my own, often staying up late trying to figure things out. Balancing the demands of teaching, preparing online lessons, and addressing*

learners' technical difficulties made the experience even more stressful and exhausting."

Despite the school's overall success in maintaining curriculum coverage during the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers faced several significant challenges. One of the main difficulties was the need to adapt quickly to digital teaching platforms like Google Classroom, often without sufficient training or prior experience in online education. Many teachers were unfamiliar with the required technology and struggled to design engaging and interactive online lessons while simultaneously managing learners attending in-person classes on rotational schedules (Mpungose, 2020). The lack of professional development and technical support further compounded the problem, leaving teachers to rely on peer support or self-learning to navigate digital tools effectively (Moloi, Mkwanazi & Bojabotseha, 2021). This sudden transition placed enormous pressure on teachers, increasing their workload and emotional stress as they tried to ensure that no learner was left behind.

T21 Described the impact of the pandemic on teaching, stating: *"The pandemic severely disrupted curriculum delivery with irregular attendance (platooning), forcing teachers to repeat lessons. We had to teach the same thing twice today and tomorrow because of platooning. No proper teaching and learning was evident... parents did the work for the children."*

T5 said: *"The lack of training and technical support was frustrating. I had to rely on colleagues and self-learning to self-educate to use digital technology, which added to my workload. The sudden transition was unsettling. I felt like I was learning alongside my learners, and it was emotionally draining."*

T9: *"I had to get creative with my lessons, but it was hard to gauge learner engagement. The lack of feedback was concerning, and I worried about learner progress. The experience taught me a lot, but it was tough. I had to adapt quickly, and it felt like I was constantly playing catch-up. I used to tell my learners to ask their friends for assistance, saying that peer support was crucial. We relied on each other to navigate the challenges of online teaching."*

This sudden shift required teachers to invest extra time in learning modern technologies and developing digital content. Many had to familiarise themselves with digital tools and online teaching methodologies without formal training, often working late hours to prepare suitable learning materials (Mhlanga & Moloi, 2020).

Furthermore, the rotational timetable system meant that teachers had to repeat lessons multiple times to accommodate learners who were attending on different days, leading to increased workload and time pressure. This repetitive teaching process, combined with the need to balance and face-to-face instruction, contributed to teacher fatigue and burnout (Ngcobo & Mhlongo, 2021). These challenges highlight the immense strain placed on teachers during the pandemic and the urgent need for institutional support and training.

T2 and T18 shared their frustrations, *"The rotational timetable was a nightmare. Repeating lessons multiple times was exhausting, and balancing online and face-to-face instruction was a huge challenge."*

One teacher elaborated further: The rotational timetable was extremely challenging and felt like a nightmare at times. Having to repeat the same lessons multiple times for diverse groups of learners was mentally and physically exhausting. Trying to balance online teaching with face-to-face instruction added even more pressure. On some days, I would teach only a handful of learners because many were absent due to illness. Trying to cover the Annual Teaching Plan (ATP) under these conditions was incredibly frustrating and left me feeling overwhelmed.

T1: *"We had to work extra hard to prepare digital materials without proper training. It was a steep learning curve."*

T16: *"The workload was unsustainable. I was constantly preparing new materials, marking, and adapting to new tech. It was a heavy burden. The lack of training and support made it hard to deliver quality education."*

T8: *"We need more support and training. The pandemic showed us that we're not equipped to handle sudden shifts without proper resources and guidance."*

T5: *"I'm not sure how I would've coped without my colleagues. We supported each other through the tough times, but institutional support would've made a huge difference."*

Learners without reliable internet access or technological devices posed another challenge, forcing teachers to find alternative ways to deliver lessons, such as preparing printed materials or offering catch-up sessions. This digital divide disproportionately affected learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, making equitable curriculum coverage difficult to achieve (Dhawan, 2020). Additionally,

learners' emotional and cognitive readiness varied, with some struggling to stay engaged or to cope with the blended learning model. Many learners experienced anxiety, isolation, and a lack of motivation, further complicating teaching and learning processes (Maphosa & Mavhiza, 2021). As a result, differentiated instruction became essential but difficult to implement, placing additional strain on teachers already grappling with increased workloads.

T1: *"Both teachers and learners were affected mentally. We were just like we used to confuse things, not knowing where we ended, where to start."*

T3: *"It was total confusion for me. I must think on my feet every day. Rotating, not coming every day. I get to learn their names first."*

DH2: *"Based on my experience, online tools such as WhatsApp, D6, and Google Classroom were helpful but unfortunately not accessible to many learners and parents. I faced significant challenges using WhatsApp. Whenever I sent worksheets through the platform, I struggled to get the completed work back from parents. The process was exceedingly difficult and frustrating. Many parents complained, with the key issues being a lack of Wi-Fi and insufficient mobile data. Some did not have any data at all, making it almost impossible for them to participate fully in the learning activities."*

DH 5: *"At my school, I would say, only about 20% of learners were able to log on to online platforms. The majority had no access to data or suitable devices. While ClassDojo proved useful for some, distributing hard copies of learning materials was more reliable for parents without Wi-Fi access. Another major challenge was that not all parents were able or willing to assist their children with schoolwork, which made the situation even more frustrating for teachers."*

T6: *"The digital divide was a huge challenge. Learners without devices or internet access struggled to keep up, and it was hard to find ways to reach them."*

T7: *"I had to prepare printed materials for some learners, which was time-consuming. It was tough to ensure everyone had access to the same resources."*

T9: *"Learners' emotional and cognitive readiness varied greatly. Some struggled to stay engaged, and it was hard to motivate them in a blended learning environment. learners experienced anxiety, isolation, and lack of motivation. It was a challenge to support them emotionally while teaching."*

T9: *“I worried about learners who fell behind. The blended learning model wasn’t suitable for everyone, and it was a struggle to keep them on track.”*

During the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers faced major challenges due to inadequate support, limited training, and poor communication from education authorities. Many had to learn digital tools on their own, which affected the quality of teaching and increased stress and burnout. The digital divide, especially in under-resourced schools, prevents equal access to education for all learners. Rotational timetables and limited face-to-face contact disrupted curriculum delivery and made it harder to support learners effectively. Emotional strain was high among both teachers and learners. As noted by Mpungose (2020) and Mhlanga & Moloji (2020), these challenges exposed the education system’s unpreparedness and highlighted the need for stronger teacher support, infrastructure, and emotional care during crises.

4.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Based on the findings, this chapter details the profound challenges and adaptations within school leadership, teaching, and institutional support during the COVID-19 pandemic. School Management Teams (SMTs) were forced into expanded crisis-management roles, strengthening communication with parents and supporting remote teaching despite severe infrastructural and resource constraints. Key challenges included a lack of digital tools, unreliable internet, and overcrowded classrooms that made health protocols difficult to enforce. Teachers, in turn, faced immense pressure as they struggled with inadequate technology training and the emotional strain of adapting to remote and rotational teaching models with minimal support. The implementation of the Revised Annual Teaching Plan (ATP) and remote delivery strategies, while necessary, was hampered by these systemic weaknesses, resulting in inconsistent curriculum coverage and widening learning gaps, particularly for learners from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The study further revealed that support from the Department of Basic Education (DBE) was often perceived as reactive and insufficient, with delayed guidelines and a lack of practical on-the-ground assistance. The overarching theme of inadequate teacher support manifested in limited interaction with learners due to rotational timetables, significant emotional distress, and the immense challenge of ensuring comprehensive curriculum coverage. The collective findings underscore a system strained by pre-existing inequalities in infrastructure and digital access, which were starkly exposed

and exacerbated by the pandemic. This highlights an urgent need for proactive crisis management planning, sustained investment in school infrastructure and digital resources, and strong, structured support systems for both teachers and school principals to build a more resilient education system for the future.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapter (Chapter 4) presented, analysed and interpreted the research data. This chapter summarizes the key findings, draws conclusions, and outlines recommendations for improving curriculum delivery and monitoring strategies in primary schools. The main objective of the study is to describe the nuanced meanings embedded in the experiences of primary school principals, deputy principals, and district officials within the Johannesburg East District as they monitored and delivered the curriculum during the challenging period of the COVID-19 pandemic. The study's findings are presented according to each research objective outlined below.

- How have the roles of school management evolved in response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic?
- What specific challenges has the school management team faced in fulfilling its responsibilities during the pandemic?
- In what ways have school management teams innovatively adapted their roles to address the unique demands of the COVID-19 era?
- How did the basic education assist the schools in managing the curriculum during the pandemic?
- What are teachers' perspectives on delivering the curriculum during the crisis?

5.2 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

The key findings of the study are presented in relation to the five research objectives. Each objective guided the data collection and analysis, allowing me to explore various aspects of monitoring curriculum delivery in primary schools.

5.2.1 How have the roles of school management evolved in response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic?

COVID-19 pandemic drastically reshaped the duties of School Management Teams (SMTs), requiring them to adapt to unprecedented challenges and expand their leadership roles. SMTs were expected to transition from traditional school management functions to leading emergency response efforts within their schools. As noted by DBE (2020) and Modisaotsile (2021), this includes developing and

implementing health and safety regulations, monitoring learner rotation schedules, and maintaining compliance with Department of Basic Education (DBE) norms. Their responsibilities stretched beyond administration to include emotional support for teachers, learner crisis communication, and continuous curriculum delivery in difficult settings.

The participants expressed their concerns that one of the most important shifts in leadership was the SMTs' role in supporting remote teaching and learning. With the sudden closure of schools, SMTs had to ensure that education continued through alternative means such as homework packs, trimmed annual teaching plans (ATPs), and digital channels like WhatsApp. However, this transition exposed crucial gaps in infrastructure and training. Many schools, particularly in under-resourced communities, lacked devices, internet access, and digital literacy, which made it difficult to sustain effective remote learning (Mpungose, 2020; Spaul & Van der Berg, 2020). Teachers are often unfamiliar with digital instruction and require support and guidance from SMTs who facilitated internal training sessions and remote curriculum planning. Despite these attempts, remote monitoring of learner progress proved challenging, and learning losses were particularly considerable among foundation-phase learners (DBE, 2020).

According to the participants, maintaining effective communication and involvement with parents and the larger school community has emerged as another critical obligation for SMTs. To ensure continuity of learning and emotional support, schools used several communication channels, including SMS, phone calls, WhatsApp, and school websites (Mpungose, 2020). These initiatives were critical in assisting parents in assisting learners at home, particularly when learners required additional attention or assistance. Participants reported that parental involvement varied substantially. While some parents were actively involved, others were unreachable or unable to support their children owing to factors such as work pressure, lack of education or insufficient digital abilities (Spaul, 2020; Mhlanga & Moloji, 2020). The unequal access to communication technologies and varying levels of parent engagement contributed to uneven learning experiences among learners.

Most participants report that the tremendous workload and emotional toll placed on SMTs during the pandemic were substantial. In addition to their new roles, SMTs were responsible for leading school-based COVID-19 compliance committees, supervising

health screenings, coordinating learner support systems, and managing staff morale. The shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE), cleaning materials, and digital tools further intensified the challenges to the principals. Many SMT members reported experiencing stress, exhaustion, and burnout as they tried to balance academic leadership with health management and administrative obligations (Modisaotsile, 2021; DBE, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed both the resilience and the vulnerabilities within school leadership organisations. While SMTs demonstrated adaptability and dedication in sustaining teaching and learning during crises, their experiences also highlighted the urgent need for systemic reforms. As noted by Spaul and Van der Berg (2020), DBE (2020), and Modisaotsile (2021). These include investment in digital infrastructure, professional training for teachers and school leaders in remote education, structured support systems for parental involvement, and explicit communication frameworks for future emergencies. The enforcement of social distancing between teachers and learners imposed additional personal and professional burdens on school leaders, further complicating their roles during the pandemic.

5.2.2 What specific challenges has the school management team faced in fulfilling its responsibilities during the pandemic?

School management teams (SMTs) faced a wide range of challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, significantly altering their roles and responsibilities. SMTs were forced to expand beyond traditional management roles to lead emergency responses in their schools. According to Mpungose (2020), their responsibilities included executing health and safety procedures, coordinating rotational timetables, managing staff and learner safety and supporting both academic success and emotional well-being. These duties were made more difficult by limited resources, inadequate infrastructure and shifting policies, which placed substantial pressure on SMTs to maintain continuity in teaching and learning under crisis conditions.

Most participating principals identified inadequate digital infrastructure and limited technological resources as a significant challenge. Many learners, particularly in under-resourced and rural areas, had little or no access to smartphones, internet connectivity or learning equipment. SMTs and teachers had to adopt blended or remote teaching strategies, using platforms such as WhatsApp, ClassDojo, and

Google Classroom, as well as printed worksheets. However, this exposed deep educational inequalities, as not all learners could engage meaningfully with these strategies due to the digital divide (Moloi, Mhlanga & Mokoena, 2021; DBE, 2021). Teachers also faced increased workloads, the need to learn new digital tools quickly, and the challenge of maintaining learner engagement in a remote setting (Modisaotsile, 2021).

In addition to remote learning, schools were entrusted with implementing strict health and hygiene protocols to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Many schools lacked basic supplies such as running water, soap, sanitiser, and sufficient personal protective equipment (PPE). According to Mahlangu (2021), Mpungose (2020), and Nkosi (2021), overcrowded classrooms made social distancing impossible, particularly in poorly resourced schools. SMTs were frequently forced to improvise with minimal resources, relying on donations or their own problem-solving initiatives to enforce safety measures. This increased their administrative load while also exposing their vulnerability in emergency preparedness.

Many teachers expressed concerns that implementing the Revised Annual Teaching Plan (ATP) posed further challenges. While it attempted to assist teachers in prioritizing key content and managing reduced instructional time, many teachers struggled with the fast-paced curriculum, limited contact time, and learners' varying levels of understanding. The pressure to deliver the revised curriculum often left learners with foundational gaps, particularly those from disadvantaged households. Teachers and SMTs had to navigate frequent changes to guidelines and provide catch-up support, all while managing emotional stress and burnout (Spaull & Van der Berg, 2020; DBE, 2020; Modisaotsile, 2021).

Modisaotsile (2021) and Mahlangu (2021), communication from the Department of Basic Education (DBE) was described as inconsistent and unclear, further complicating the decision-making process for SMTs. Schools frequently received new directives with little notice and limited practical support. As a result, SMTs had to make critical decisions independently, contributing to confusion, frustration, and increased anxiety among staff. Furthermore, minimal parental involvement in many schools worsened learner disengagement at home, placing additional burdens on teachers and school leaders.

Despite these enormous challenges, the findings also reveal the resilience, adaptability, and dedication of SMTs. They played a vital role in sustaining the education system by supporting teachers engaging with communities and creatively responding to changing conditions. According to Modisaotsile (2021) and Mahlangu (2021), their experiences showed the urgent need for systemic reforms, including improved school infrastructure investment in digital learning tools, targeted leadership training and structured emotional and psychosocial support services. Strengthening collaboration among schools, parents, and communities is also critical to improving educational resilience during future crises.

5.2.3 In what ways have School Management Teams Innovatively Adapted their Roles to Address the Unique Demands of the COVID-19 Era?

The study identifies significant challenges in teachers' technological proficiency during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in under-resourced schools. Many teachers lacked the necessary skills to effectively integrate digital tools into their teaching due to insufficient training, limited prior exposure, and minimal ongoing support (Makunja, 2023). While some teachers demonstrated acceptable competence, others relied on peer support or self-directed learning, resulting in inconsistent confidence and proficiency levels. School management teams reported that the abrupt transition to digital learning was poorly planned, with many schools lacking existing infrastructure. As one departmental head noted, the rushed implementation of platforms like Google Classroom left disadvantaged learners struggling to keep up, exacerbating existing educational inequalities.

Capacity development for teachers, learners, and parents was inconsistent and underfunded, further widening the digital divide. Training initiatives were often poorly resourced and primarily targeted at teachers rather than learners or parents (Van Zyl, 2022). School leaders expressed concern with funding constraints that hindered their capacity to organise regular workshops, requiring them to rely on free but frequently ineffective training sessions. Parental involvement was particularly weak, as many lacked digital literacy and were unable to support their children's learning at home. Some schools attempted digital skills workshops for parents, but attendance was low due to intimidation or a perceived lack of responsibility. These gaps underline the need for inclusive ongoing training that empowers all stakeholders in the education ecosystem (Mhlanga & Moloi, 2023).

Two Departmental Heads observed that the integration of ICT into teaching and learning was inconsistent across schools, with many facing challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, unreliable internet connectivity, and teachers' lack of confidence in using digital tools. While some teachers recognized the potential of online platforms to enhance engagement, differentiated learning implementation was often hindered by logistical barriers (Ngcobo & Dube, 2021). School leaders acknowledged the importance of sustained professional development to improve teachers' digital competencies, but financial and time constraints made such efforts difficult to maintain (Mahlalela & Pitsoe, 2022). Furthermore, disparities in access to devices and connectivity made remote learning inaccessible to many learners, particularly in low-income communities.

The pandemic further showed profound inequalities in resource distribution, preventing many learners unable to participating in digital learning. Schools in wealthier areas fared better while no-fee schools struggled with limited funding and support. Teachers reported having to lower academic standards to accommodate learners who lacked access to technology or parental assistance. Communication breakdowns, such as outdated contact details and parents' inability to engage with digital platforms, further disrupted continuity of learning. These challenges align with broader research showing that the pandemic worsened educational disparities, particularly in under-resourced communities (Spaull & Van der Berg, 2020; UNESCO, 2021).

The findings emphasize the critical need for equitable access to technology, comprehensive digital literacy programs, and sustained professional development for teachers. Without systemic interventions, future crises will continue to deepen educational inequalities, leaving marginalised learners further behind. As Mhlanga and Moloji (2023) argue, building a resilient education system requires inclusive policies that ensure all stakeholders, teachers, learners, and parents are well-equipped to navigate digital learning environments effectively. Addressing these gaps is essential for creating a more equitable and adaptable education system in the post-pandemic period.

5.2.4 How did the basic education assist the schools in managing the curriculum during the pandemic?

The findings reveal that the support provided by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) during the COVID-19 pandemic was perceived as inadequate, inconsistent, and reactive. While the DBE implemented essential interventions, including the Revised Annual Teaching Plans (ATPs), curriculum recovery guidelines, and remote learning resources (DBE, 2020), many teachers believed these efforts were insufficient to address the complex challenges they faced. Teachers indicated that although ATPs helped reduce content, there was a lack of clarity on how to assess learning outcomes under the revised curriculum. In many cases, support came after schools had already implemented their own coping strategies. As Spaul (2021) notes, despite the DBE's purpose, interventions were implemented too late and lacked practical guidance, particularly for under-resourced schools.

Participants also expressed frustration over unclear communication and a lack of consistent pedagogical support. Teachers frequently had to rely on their own creativity and personal resources to deliver remote lessons while departmental support focused on safety protocols rather than instructional needs (Motala & Menon, 2020). For example, teachers received safety circulars late, while others struggled with expectations to produce "normal" results despite having reduced teaching time. This disconnects between policy and classroom realities placed emotional and professional strain on teachers, who felt abandoned during a critical time.

Another significant finding concerns the infrastructure challenges that hindered effective curriculum delivery and the safe reopening of schools. Although the DBE attempted to improve water, sanitation, and classroom space to comply with safety protocols. Schools, especially those in rural or no-fee areas, reported delayed or inadequate upgrades (NECT, 2020). According to Spaul (2020), infrastructure interventions often failed to match the immediate needs of schools. Participants reported difficulties enforcing social distancing due to overcrowded classrooms and limited access to water. Furthermore, poor, limited digital infrastructure, such as inconsistent internet and a lack of devices, further complicates remote teaching, widening the digital gap and disadvantaging learners from low-income backgrounds.

The findings further demonstrate that the digital gap significantly worsened educational inequalities. Schools in wealthier areas were better able to transition to

online learning, while learners in poorly resourced communities lacked devices or connectivity, or parental support to access remote education. As Mpungose (2020) and Spaul & Van der Berg (2020) point out, the pandemic exposed and intensified structural inequalities, leaving learners behind and prompting teachers to lower academic standards to accommodate those with limited access. Communication barriers, such as outdated contact details or digitally illiterate parents, further disrupted teaching and learning, particularly when platforms like WhatsApp or D6 were used inconsistently.

Regarding professional development, the study discovered that training programmes were either insufficient, generic or inaccessible for teachers. Although professional development initiatives were launched, they were not equitably distributed and failed to address the specific challenges faced in diverse contexts. According to Mpungose (2020), teachers, particularly in rural schools, struggled to access online training due to poor connectivity and a lack of devices. Teachers often resorted to self-teaching or peer learning, resulting in varying levels of digital proficiency and confidence. Participants noted that the DBE failed to provide practical support for using online platforms, and those schools never received the promised resources, such as tablets or data.

The findings demonstrated a systemic lack of preparedness within the DBE to support schools during a national crisis. The department's assistance focused heavily on health and compliance, with limited attention to pedagogy, teacher empowerment, and digital equity. The challenges experienced during COVID-19 underscore the need for more initiative-taking crisis planning, targeted infrastructure investment, inclusive professional development, and equitable resource distribution. As Spaul (2020) and UNESCO (2021) argue, building a resilient education system requires not only policy intervention but also structural reform to ensure that no learner or teacher is left behind in times of crisis.

5.2.5 What are teachers' perspectives on delivering the curriculum during the crisis?

The study's findings offer a comprehensive account of the significant challenges faced by teachers and schools during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly within under-resourced educational environments. These findings illustrate both systemic shortcomings and teachers' resilience while also highlighting areas in urgent need of

reform and investment. One of the most concerning findings was the widespread lack of institutional support for teachers. Teachers were expected to switch to online or hybrid teaching techniques with little guidance, inadequate professional development, and insufficient access to digital tools (Phahlamohlaka, 2022; Maphalala & Jampies, 2021). Teachers indicated that they frequently had to learn digital tools such as Google Classroom or WhatsApp through trial and error without formal training or consistent support from education departments. This resulted in greater stress burnout and a deterioration in the quality of instruction, particularly in schools located in rural or disadvantaged communities (Mpungose, 2020). The findings show the importance of organized, context-specific, and ongoing professional development programs that prepare Teachers in these under-resourced settings, who frequently have to use their own data and devices or rely on less effective methods such as printed materials and WhatsApp communication. Learners' inability to participate in remote learning widened learning gaps and placed additional burdens on already stretched teachers.

The implementation of rotational attendance schedules was a necessary public health measure but had adverse consequences for curriculum delivery. The Department of Education compelled teachers to repeat lessons, thereby consuming valuable instructional time and disrupting the flow of lessons. Learners' inconsistent attendance also made it difficult to maintain teaching momentum and build relationships (Spaull & Van der Berg, 2020; Mthethwa & Ngcobo, 2022). Teachers expressed frustration and emotional exhaustion due to the inefficiencies introduced by the rotational system. Although smaller class sizes sometimes allowed for more personalised support, this benefit was overshadowed by the logistical and pedagogical challenges faced by most teachers.

The pandemic imposed a severe emotional burden on both teachers and learners. Teachers were not only expected to deliver instruction under new and difficult conditions but also to provide emotional support to learners dealing with anxiety, grief, and isolation (Kim & Asbury, 2020; Mhlanga & Moloji, 2020). Teachers reported feeling unsupported and isolating themselves, often dealing with their own mental health struggles in addition to those of their learners. The lack of formal emotional and psychosocial support systems worsened these challenges, pointing to the critical need for integrating emotional wellness into school support structures.

The study also discovered that poor infrastructure, particularly in rural and low-income schools, was another major barrier to effective teaching and learning during the

pandemic. Schools lacked the physical space to implement social distancing measures, such as reliable water and sanitation facilities or adequate ventilation (Spaull et al., 2020; Khula & Lekhetho, 2022). These infrastructural deficiencies not only delayed the reopening of schools but also undermined safety protocols and curriculum continuity. The findings demonstrate the critical need for long-term investment in school infrastructure to ensure that future emergencies do not cripple the education system.

Schools demonstrated adaptability and resilience. Where resources were available, schools employed platforms such as Google Classroom and pre-recorded lessons to maintain continuity of instruction. Teachers with access to training or peer support managed to cover the curriculum effectively through blended models and staggered attendance (Mpungose, 2020; Moloi, Mkwanazi & Bojabotseha, 2021). However, these successes were not uniform across all schools, with learners in less connected or poorly supported environments falling behind. The need for differentiated instruction, while necessary, further strains teachers already dealing with increased workloads and emotional fatigue.

The findings indicate that the South African education system was unprepared for a crisis of this magnitude. The pandemic exposed profound systemic inequalities and underscored the vulnerability of teaching and learning structures to disruption. Teachers were deployed on the frontline without the necessary tools, support or infrastructure and learners from disadvantaged backgrounds endured the most of these shortcomings. As supported by literature (Mpungose, 2020; Maphosa & Mavhiza, 2021), there is an urgent need for reforms that prioritize teacher development, equitable resource allocation, and emotional and infrastructural support systems. These reforms are essential for building a more resilient and inclusive education system that can withstand future crises.

5.3 KNOWLEDGE AND CURRICULUM MONITORING STRATEGIES

Remote teaching and learning may be a viable alternative for continuing education during pandemics, but it requires significant improvements informed by lessons learned during COVID-19. The pandemic forced schools to shift from traditional face-to-face instruction to remote methods, which involved tools such as WhatsApp, SMS, and homework packs, particularly in under-resourced communities (Mpungose, 2020). While this contributed to maintaining levels of learning continuity, it also exposed

significant obstacles, including limited access to digital devices, poor internet connectivity, low parental involvement, and a lack of teacher preparedness. Learners, particularly those in rural areas, struggled to participate in remote learning due to a lack of resources at home.

The absence of structured training particularly affected older teachers who were less familiar with technology. Crawford (2020) highlighted that professional development programmes significantly enhance teachers' ability to engage learners in remote settings, aligning with broader findings in the field. School Management Teams (SMTs) played a crucial role in supporting teachers and engaging with parents, but they too faced constraints in infrastructure and communication systems. Moving forward, remote learning can be used effectively in future crises if key areas are addressed. According to Mhlanga and Moloji (2020), effective strategies include improving digital infrastructure, providing professional development for teachers in online pedagogy, developing clear communication channels with parents, and ensuring that all learners have access to devices and data. The experience of COVID-19 has shown that remote teaching has potential, but for it to succeed, it must be supported by strategic planning, investment, and inclusive policies that prioritize equity and resilience in education systems.

Information and Communication Technology-based learning during a pandemic is both essential and achievable, but its effectiveness depends on overcoming the challenges that emerged during the COVID-19 crisis. The integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) proved crucial for ensuring learning continuity when face-to-face teaching was suspended. Ngcobo and Dube (2021) highlight that ICT tools such as digital platforms, online assessments, and multimedia content enhanced learner engagement and facilitated differentiated instruction. However, the study's findings indicate that the benefits of remote learning were not experienced equally across all schools during the pandemic. Mpungose (2023) and Mhlanga and Moloji (2023) identify unequal access to devices and reliable internet connectivity, especially in under-resourced communities, as a major barrier to effective ICT integration in education. Many teachers also lacked confidence and training in digital pedagogy, which limited the effective use of technology in teaching during the pandemic (Purwanto, 2020). School Management Teams (SMTs) acknowledged that sustained professional development and infrastructure investment are crucial to prepare schools for future emergencies. In addition, limited parental support and

concerns about the authenticity of learners' work, as noted by several departmental heads, further undermined the effectiveness of remote strategies. As such, while remote learning holds potential for future pandemics, its success depends on strengthening ICT infrastructure and providing targeted teacher training, ensuring equitable access to digital tools and fostering strong partnerships between schools and families. To build a resilient education system, future planning must prioritise inclusive digital access and capacity-building at all levels.

Online learning in curriculum delivery can play a critical role in sustaining education during a pandemic or crisis, provided that systemic improvements are made to address the challenges revealed during COVID-19. Molo, Mhlanga, and Mokoena (2021) highlight that the pandemic demonstrated the potential of online platforms such as Google Classroom, WhatsApp, Zoom, and ClassDojo to support continuous learning beyond the physical classroom, enabling flexibility in instruction and communication. However, for these tools to be genuinely effective and equitable, several conditions must be met. First, governments need to significantly improve investment in digital infrastructure to ensure that all learners, especially those in primary schools, have access to reliable internet devices and affordable data (DBE, 2021; Van der Berg & Spaul, 2020). Second, teachers require continuous professional development in digital pedagogy to confidently use technology for content delivery, assessment, and learner engagement (Modisaotsile, 2021).

Third, governments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), parents and caregivers must be supported with digital literacy training and clear guidelines to enable them to assist with home-based learning, particularly for younger learners (UNESCO, 2021). According to the Department of Basic Education (DBE, 2020), a blended approach that integrates online tools with offline resources, such as printed workbooks and radio or TV lessons, can help reach learners with limited connectivity. When effectively integrated, online curriculum delivery can enhance access, personalize learning and ensure continuity during disruptions. Thus, developing inclusive, well-supported, and resilient digital education systems is essential to protecting learning during future crises.

Beyond digital literacy, school management faced technical and infrastructural challenges, including unstable internet connections, limited access to teaching resources, and difficulties engaging learners remotely. School infrastructure must be strategically enhanced to ensure the continuity of teaching and learning during crises.

First, there is a critical need to invest in basic facilities, such as adequate classroom space, improved sanitation, and access to clean water, to comply with health and safety standards and to enable physical distancing (Department of Basic Education 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic exposed fundamental shortcomings, especially in primary schools, which often lacked the physical space and hygienic conditions necessary for safe schooling (NECT, 2020). Additionally, long-term investment in digital infrastructure is essential. Spaul (2020) emphasises the need to expand solid internet connectivity, providing learners and teachers with access to digital devices and offering training to support the successful use of technology in teaching. Van der Berg & Spaul (2020) stress that targeted support for underprivileged communities is crucial, especially vital to bridge the digital gap, as many learners were excluded from remote learning during the pandemic due to the lack of devices and connectivity. Flexible learning environments that can accommodate both face-to-face and blended models should be designed with future adaptability in mind. Furthermore, infrastructure planning should include emergency preparedness strategies, such as deploying mobile classrooms, solar-powered equipment for off-grid schools, and zero-rated online education platforms to maintain continuity during disruptions (UNESCO, 2021). By resolving both physical and digital infrastructure gaps, the education system can become more equitable, more powerful, and better able to maintain quality education during future pandemics.

5.3.1 Five-Step Crisis Management Strategy Proffered

Drawing on Mitroff's (1994) and Dirk's (2003) seminal work on crisis management frameworks, this study examined the perspectives and experiences of school leaders and district education officials to inform the development of actionable strategies for sustaining curriculum delivery during crises. I modified the five-step strategy process in line with Giacomini's (2014) epistemological lens, which underscores the importance of methodological rigour in interpreting how knowledge of complex phenomena—such as crisis-responsive education—is constructed.

The urgency of this inquiry aligns with Pascale's (2011) and Giacomini's (2014) assertion that digital affordances (Digital affordances refer to the perceived and actual possibilities for action that digital tools or environments offer users. They describe what users can *do* with a technology based on its design, features, and context (Nyoni, 2014), presenting a critical opportunity to mitigate disruptions in teaching and learning.

Building on these theoretical foundations, the study's findings yielded a **five-step crisis management strategy** tailored to curriculum delivery in schools, as outlined below:

Here is a **five-step crisis strategy** for monitoring curriculum delivery during challenging times (e.g., disruptions like pandemics, natural disasters, or resource shortages):

1. Rapid Assessment & Prioritisation

- **Evaluate Immediate Needs:** Identify gaps in curriculum delivery (e.g., lack of access to technology, teacher shortages, or learner engagement issues).
- **Prioritise Core Competencies:** Focus on essential learning outcomes to streamline content.
- **Gather Stakeholder Feedback:** Survey teachers, learners, and parents to understand challenges.

2. Flexible Adaptation & Resource Allocation

- **Adjust Delivery Modes:** Shift to hybrid (online + offline), asynchronous, or community-based learning as needed.
- **Leverage Available Resources:** Redistribute materials, devices, and support staff to high-need areas.
- **Simplify Lesson Plans:** Provide teachers with adaptable templates for easier implementation.

3. Real-Time Monitoring & Data Collection

- **Track Participation & Progress:** Use digital tools (e.g., LMS analytics, attendance logs) or manual check-ins for offline learners.
- **Identify At-Risk Students:** Flag those falling behind and intervene early.
- **Weekly Progress Reports:** Require brief updates from teachers on coverage and challenges.

4. Educator & Learner Support Systems

- **Professional Development:** Offer quick training on crisis teaching methods (e.g., digital affordances, trauma-informed instruction).

- **Mental Health & Motivation:** Provide counselling resources and stress-management strategies for teachers and learners.
- **Peer Collaboration:** Encourage teacher teams to share best practices and problem-solve together.

5. Continuous Review & Agile Adjustments

- **Weekly Debriefs:** Hold short meetings to assess what is working and what is not.
- **Iterative Improvements:** Modify strategies based on feedback and data.
- **Contingency Planning:** Prepare for further disruptions with backup options (e.g., printed packets, radio lessons).

Key Principles:

- ✓ **Communication** – Keep all stakeholders informed.
- ✓ **Equity** – Ensure that access issues do not leave a learner behind
- ✓ **Resilience** – Build systems that can adapt to ongoing changes.

5.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically reshaped the roles and responsibilities of School Management Teams (SMTs) and teachers, revealing both the resilience of school leadership and the fragility of the education system in times of crisis. SMTs were thrown into new duties that required rapid adaptation, including enforcing health protocols, supporting remote learning, managing emotional well-being, and maintaining communication with all stakeholders. Teachers, in turn, were required to deliver curriculum under constrained and often inequitable conditions with limited training and support. These pressures were especially pronounced in under-resourced schools where inadequate infrastructure and digital tools magnified existing educational disparities.

Although institutions were not fully prepared for the transition, teachers and SMTs showed commendable adaptability and innovation. From developing rotational timetables and blended learning strategies to using platforms like WhatsApp for instruction and parental engagement, school leaders and teachers found creative

ways to sustain teaching and learning. However, the implementation of these strategies was uneven, hindered by inconsistent training, infrastructural deficits, and a deep digital gap. The pandemic exposed the unequal distribution of resources between urban and rural, or no-fee, schools, with the most vulnerable learners disproportionately affected by learning losses and disengagement.

The findings emphasise the urgent need for long-term systemic reform. Building a resilient education system requires more than emergency responses; it demands equitable investment in digital infrastructure, consistent and practical professional development, emotional and psychosocial support for teachers and learners, and strengthened partnerships among schools, families, and communities. Without addressing these foundational gaps, future crises will continue to disrupt learning and deepen inequalities. The lessons learned from this disaster must guide policy and planning to ensure that all learners, regardless of context, have access to quality education even during emergencies.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, several useful recommendations can be suggested. The following recommendations are informed by the literature review, the theoretical framework and the results of this study

- Based on the challenges experienced by School Management Teams (SMTs) during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is recommended that schools and the education system strengthen their capacity for crisis-responsive leadership. This includes investing in digital infrastructure, ensuring access to devices and connectivity, and providing ongoing professional development for both teachers and SMT members to effectively manage remote and blended learning environments. Schools should also establish clear protocols and internal support systems for curriculum monitoring during emergencies, including the development of standardised tools for tracking learner progress and guiding remote teaching.
- Furthermore, stronger systems for parental involvement and community engagement should be developed to ensure continuity of learning during disruptions. Schools should adopt diverse and reliable communication channels and provide parents with basic training or guidance to support learners at home. Additionally, SMTs require structured emotional,

administrative, and professional support to manage increased workloads and stress levels during crises. This includes access to psychosocial services, stronger coordination between district officials and schools, and clear leadership frameworks that prepare SMTs for future disruptions while ensuring that teaching and learning continue effectively.

- To strengthen the effectiveness of School Management Teams during future crises, it is recommended that schools receive targeted support to improve infrastructure, particularly in the areas of digital access and health and safety. Schools need reliable internet connectivity, sufficient digital devices for teachers and learners, and adequate training to enable seamless shifts between face-to-face and remote learning. In addition, clearly developed crisis-management protocols, consistent communication channels, and adequate provision of sanitation supplies and protective equipment are essential. SMTs should also be supported through specialized leadership development programs that equip them to manage emergencies, supervise remote learning, and maintain curriculum continuity during disruptions.
- Furthermore, stronger collaboration among SMTs, teachers, parents, and district officials is necessary to ensure effective teaching and learning during emergencies. Schools should establish structured systems for regular communication with parents and a guide to help families support learning at home. Emotional and psychosocial support for SMTs and teachers is also essential as many experienced significant stress and burnout. Providing counselling services, workload management strategies, and professional support networks would promote well-being and resilience within schools. Strengthening these areas will enhance SMTs' capacity to navigate future crises while safeguarding teaching, learning, and overall school stability.
- School management teams should prioritise strengthening digital competence across all stakeholders. This includes implementing sustained and well-resourced professional development programmes that equip teachers with the skills to confidently use digital tools and integrate ICT into their classroom practice. Schools should also design inclusive training that extends to learners and parents, ensuring that families can support home-based learning when necessary. Improving digital infrastructure, such as internet connectivity, access to devices, and reliable learning platforms, should be a key priority, enabling

schools to transition smoothly between face-to-face and remote learning during future disruptions.

- School management teams should develop structured strategies to minimise inequalities by offering targeted support for learners who lack access to technology or require additional guidance. Strengthening communication systems is essential to ensuring that schools maintain accurate contact details and use multiple channels to reach parents effectively. SMTs should also advocate for equitable resource allocation and collaborate with community partners to secure additional support where needed. By promoting inclusive digital literacy, fostering strong school-community partnerships and implementing proactive crisis-response frameworks, school management teams can build a more resilient and adaptive education environment capable of withstanding future challenges.
- The Department of Basic Education should prioritise timely, consistent and context-responsive support to schools. Clear and practical curriculum guidelines should be issued early, with accompanying assessment guidance that aligns with revised content expectations. The DBE should streamline its communication systems to ensure that schools receive accurate information without delay and improve coordination between national, provincial and district levels. Strengthening professional development is essential. Training must be accessible, relevant to diverse school contexts and focused on developing teachers' digital competence and pedagogical strategies for remote and blended learning. Providing schools with promised resources, including devices and data support, would also enable teachers to deliver quality learning without relying solely on personal resources.
- A proactive and equitable approach to infrastructure development is essential to ensure that schools are fully prepared for crises. Investments should focus on improving water and sanitation facilities, expanding classroom space to reduce overcrowding and upgrading digital infrastructure so that all learners can participate in remote learning. Special attention should be given to rural and under-resourced schools to prevent the widening of inequalities during emergencies. The DBE should also develop a comprehensive crisis response framework that integrates health compliance with curriculum continuity, teacher support and learner wellbeing. By prioritising equity, strengthening communication and adopting long-term systemic reforms, the education system

will be better positioned to withstand future disruptions while ensuring that teaching and learning continue effectively.

- Teachers must be equipped with the skills and resources required to transition smoothly between in-person, online, and hybrid teaching environments. This support should include consistent guidance on user-friendly digital tools and reliable access to devices and data. Strengthening communication between schools and education authorities is also essential so that teachers receive timely and clear instructions. Furthermore, emotional and psychosocial support for teachers should be embedded within school systems to address the stress, anxiety, and emotional strain teachers experience during disruptions. Providing structured support networks, counselling services, and wellness programs would help ensure teacher well-being and sustain instructional quality during emergencies.
- Investments are needed to upgrade school infrastructure, including water and sanitation facilities, safe classroom spaces, and digital connectivity, particularly in rural and no-fee schools. Ensuring equitable access to devices, internet connectivity, and learning materials will help prevent the widening of learning gaps during future disruptions. Additionally, curriculum recovery plans should be more flexible and responsive to the realities of different school contexts, allowing teachers to manage reduced teaching time without excessive workload pressure. By prioritizing equity, strengthening digital readiness, and building crisis-resilient systems, the education sector can ensure that all learners continue to access quality learning even in times of instability.

5.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study were successfully achieved; however, the study had some limitations. It was confined to a sample of 25 teachers, five departmental heads, five deputy principals, and five principals from five urban primary schools selected through purposive sampling. Although this sample size was adequate for a qualitative study, its small scope limits the generalisability of the findings to all primary schools in South Africa. Despite these limitations, the study gathered sufficient and valid data through semi-structured focus group discussions with teachers, one-on-one semi-structured interviews with departmental heads, and open-ended questionnaires administered to deputy principals and principals.

5.7 CONCLUSION TO THE STUDY.

This study aimed to investigate how curriculum delivery was monitored in primary schools within the Johannesburg East District during the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, it explored the strategies employed by school principals, identified the key challenges encountered, captured lessons learned from these experiences, and proposed a model for curriculum delivery monitoring that could be implemented during national emergencies.

The findings revealed a range of challenges affecting curriculum delivery, including infrastructural shortcomings, limited digital literacy, teacher stress, and unequal access to educational technologies. These obstacles disrupted traditional teaching and learning methods, disproportionately impacting under-resourced schools. Despite these difficulties, principals and teachers demonstrated notable adaptability and resilience employing strategies such as streamlined teaching plans, remote learning methods, printed homework packs and community-supported resource mobilisation to maintain curriculum continuity.

More broadly, the study contributes to the literature by demonstrating how systemic inequalities can worsen during crises if not addressed through inclusive equity-focused interventions. It underscores the need for education policymakers and school leaders to institutionalise adaptive strategies that ensure learning continuity, particularly for the most vulnerable learners. Additionally, the findings highlight the importance of sustained investment in teacher training, digital infrastructure, and psychosocial support not only during crises but as enduring elements of a resilient and equitable education system.

Ultimately, the COVID-19 pandemic acted as both a disruptor and a catalyst, exposing longstanding gaps while creating opportunities to rethink curriculum delivery and monitoring. This study offers a grounded framework to guide such transformation, ensuring that schools are better equipped to not only survive future crises but to adapt, innovate, and thrive.

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LIST OF APPENDICES

A. DEPARTMENTAL HEAD INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

The following research instrument will address **Objective Two: To explore how curriculum delivery was monitored in Johannesburg schools during the COVID-19 pandemic.**

Objective Three: To establish lessons learnt regarding curriculum delivery monitoring in the primary schools of the Johannesburg East District during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Face-to-face semi-structured interviews with Departmental Heads

1. How did you monitor curriculum delivery and encourage teaching and learning in the primary schools of the Johannesburg East District during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. Briefly describe the methods you employed to maintain uniform monitoring curriculum delivery standards across the district.
3. How did you support principals and teachers to successfully monitor curriculum delivery during the transition to remote learning platforms?
4. Did schools receive guidelines for ensuring the successful attainment of curriculum objectives during the COVID-19 pandemic? If so, elaborate.
5. To ensure fair and equitable curriculum delivery, what interventions did you implement to close the gap relating to differences in resources or access to technology amongst the primary schools in the district?
6. What method did you engage to gather feedback from schools, teachers, and other stakeholders to assess the effectiveness of curriculum delivery tracking strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic?
7. Were there any barriers hindering the establishment of monitoring measures across the district? If yes, describe how they were addressed.
8. Have you used any technology solutions or data analytics tools to boost monitoring efforts and to identify areas for improvement in curriculum delivery? If yes, explain.
9. While working with schools, teachers, and other educational organisations, what best practice principle(s) emerged during the Covid-19 pandemic that could be implemented as effective curriculum delivery monitoring strategies?
10. In retrospect, during the Covid-19 outbreak, what did you consider to be the most effective strategy for monitoring curriculum delivery, and what lessons have you learnt for future crisis management in education?

B. PRINCIPAL QUESTIONNAIRE ON CURRICULUM DELIVERY

CURRICULUM DELIVERY MONITORING STRATEGIES AND LESSONS LEARNT IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

A. PRINCIPALS

PRINCIPALS	

Informed consent

Fieldworker/Researcher read out:

My name is Nobel Tshirangwana. I am a researcher, and I will ask permission to the **principal** to fill in the questionnaire. This questionnaire will be part of a research project of a post-graduate student at the University of Zululand. The project, which is a principal factor in people's lives, especially South African learners, is about "**Curriculum Delivery Monitoring Strategies and Lessons Learnt in Primary schools during the Covid-19 Pandemic**".

Your name will not be disclosed anywhere on the form, and signing is optional. Your answers will be held in strict confidence. It will be processed by a computer in such a way that no personal identification is possible.

	Yes	No
Do you have any questions?		
Will you do the interview?		

Fieldworker, if "no," thank the interviewee and terminate the interview; if "yes", continue as follows:

Thank you very much for agreeing to answer the following questions. The information you provide is extremely important, so try to answer as accurately as possible. You are not being tested, and there are no right or wrong answers. You can at any time ask me to stop, repeat or explain a question.

Participants' Signature (Optional) _____

SECTION 1 DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1	District	
2	School	
3	Age	
4	Gender	
5	Experience	
6	Educational Qualification	
7	Marital Status	
8	Employment Status	
9	OTHER	

SECTION 2: Curriculum Delivery Monitoring Strategies and Lesson Learnt in Primary schools during Covid-19 Pandemic.

Quast view questions Open-Ended Interviews

2.1. How do managers manage the implementation of curriculum delivery in primary schools during the COVID-19 Pandemic?

2.2. How did you manage curriculum delivery during the height of COVID-19 in 2020, and how do you manage curriculum delivery now?

2.3. How did you support teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic?

2.4. What type of leadership approach was best suited to mitigate the effect of the pandemic?

2.5. As a school leader, what was your reaction to school closure during the COVID-19 pandemic?

2.6. When delivering curriculum during the COVID-19 pandemic, which methods of ~~curriculum~~ did you use?

2.7. What measures were implemented to aid primary school learners amidst the COVID-19 pandemic?

2.8. Regarding curriculum delivery, did you establish clear communication channels with learners and parents to provide feedback and support?

2.9. Looking back, what lessons have you learned about curriculum delivery during times of crisis, and how might these insights inform future practices?

2.10. How are you dealing with the latest changes brought by the pandemic?

2.11. What is the current state of the role of management in curriculum delivery?

2.12. What obstacles were encountered in the delivery of curriculum within primary schools during the Covid-19 pandemic?

2.13 How has professional development been utilized to enhance teachers' skills in curriculum monitoring and adapting to the challenges posed by the pandemic?

Thank you

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C. PERMISSION LETTER TO SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

THE PRINCIPAL

Dear Sir/Madam

LETTER SEEKING PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A STUDY

My name is Nobel Tshirangwana. I am a student at the University of Zululand, KwaZulu-Natal and currently registered for a PhD Degree in Educational Leadership Management. Conducting a study is one of the criteria for completing the degree. I am writing to request permission to perform research at your school. The school was purposively selected because it is situated in an urban setting and is in proximity to where I work. I request permission to interview five teachers and one Departmental Head. I will ask the principal to fill in the questionnaire. The interview will take approximately one hour, 30 minutes with the teachers and 30 minutes with the departmental head. It will be recorded. The information generated will be used solely for research, and the audio recording will be securely stored at the University.

Participants will not receive any financial compensation for their involvement in this research project. Participants' identities will not be disclosed under any circumstances, during or after the reporting process. All responses, observations, and reviewed documents will be kept strictly confidential. Pseudonyms will be used to represent the school and participants' names.

Participation will always be voluntary, meaning participants can withdraw from the research for any reason at any time without penalty.

Participants will be purposively selected for this study and contacted well in advance for interviews. Interviews will be recorded to help focus on the actual interviews.

Your positive response in this regard will be highly appreciated. Should you need further information regarding the matter, you may contact me, Nobel Tshirangwana, at 083 954 7125, my supervisor, A.P. Kutame and e-mail kutameA@unizulu.ac.za. My e-mail is [nobeltshirangwana@hotmail.com](mailto:nobel_tshirangwana@hotmail.com)

Yours in Education

Mrs Tshirangwana

0839547125



D. TEACHER F2F FOCUS GROUP GUARD

The following research instrument will address Objective Three.: To explore how curriculum delivery was monitored in Johannesburg schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. And

Objectives Two. To find out the strategies used for monitoring curriculum delivery for promoting learning and teaching in primary schools during the Covid-19 pandemic in the Johannesburg East District.

1. What were the most significant challenges you faced when monitoring curriculum delivery in primary schools during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. Do you have any effective strategies or approaches you used for efficiently monitoring curriculum delivery when teaching remotely?
3. How did you adapt your monitoring methods to ensure that learners were actively engaged and progressed in their learning during remote instruction?
4. What were the most important lessons you learnt about the importance of flexibility and adaptation in monitoring curriculum delivery during times of crisis?
5. Were there any tools or technologies that you found particularly useful for remotely monitoring curriculum delivery?
6. How did you keep in touch with learners and their families to give assistance and feedback on curriculum delivery throughout the pandemic?
7. Did you see any differences in student involvement or access to resources during remote learning, and how did you address these in your monitoring efforts?
8. What support or resources did you find most helpful in improving your capacity to successfully manage curriculum delivery throughout the pandemic?
9. Looking back, what did you think were the most successful aspects of the plan you used to monitor curriculum delivery during the Covid-19 pandemic?
10. How do you plan to apply what you've learned from monitoring curriculum delivery during the epidemic to your future teaching methods, both remotely and in-person?

E. DBE DISTRICT OFFICIAL F2F FOCUS GROUP GUARD

Request for permission to conduct research in Johannesburg East District

Title of the title of your research: **CURRICULUM DELIVERY MONITORING STRATEGIES AND LESSON LEARNT IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC.**

Date: JUNE

Dear Mrs Busi, Radebe

I, Munyadziwa Nobeli Tshirangwana I am doing research under the supervision of Professor Jabulani Nyoni, a Professor in the Department of Education, towards a PhD at the University of South Africa. We have funding from N/B for N/B We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled **CURRICULUM DELIVERY MONITORING STRATEGIES AND LESSON LEARNT IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

This research aims to explore the experiences of Johannesburg East District primary school principals, deputy principals, and district officials in monitoring and delivering the curriculum during the COVID-19 pandemic. It seeks to analyse the strategies used, propose a crisis-specific curriculum delivery model, and encapsulate lessons learned and best practices to enhance future crisis-oriented curriculum planning and delivery in primary schools.

Your school is identified because it is located within the same cluster.

The study will include interviews.

The benefits of this study are the information that communities can access.

Potential risks are N/A

There will be no reimbursement or any incentives for participation in the research.

The feedback procedure will entail verbal communication.

Yours sincerely



Nobel Tshirangwana

F. GAUTENG DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION APPROVAL LETTER



GAUTENG PROVINCE
Department: Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

8/4/1/2

GDE RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER

Date:	06 May 2025
Validity of Research Approval:	08 February 2025– 30 September 2025 2025/75
Name of Researcher:	Tshirangwana MN
Address of Researcher:	3 Beryl Avenue Bramley North / Sandton
Telephone Number:	083 954 7125
Email address:	nobelstshirangwana@gmail.com
Research Topic:	CURRICULUM DELIVERY MONITORING STRATEGIES AND LESSONS LEARNT IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC
Name of University:	UNISA
Type of qualification	PhD
Number and type of schools:	5 Primary Schools
District/s/HO	Johannesburg East

Re: Approval in Respect of Request to Conduct Research

This letter serves to indicate that approval is hereby granted to the above-mentioned researcher to proceed with research in respect of the study indicated above. The onus rests with the researcher to negotiate appropriate and relevant time schedules with the school/s and/or offices involved to conduct the research. A separate copy of this letter must be presented to both the School (both Principal and SGB) and the District/Head Office Senior Manager confirming that permission has been granted for the research to be conducted.

The following conditions apply to GDE research. The researcher may proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below being met. Approval may be withdrawn should any of the conditions listed below be flouted:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'F. Tshabalala'.

1

Making education a societal priority

Office of the Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management

7th Floor, 17 Simmonds Street, Johannesburg, 2001

Tel: (011) 355 0488

Email: Faith.Tshabalala@gauteng.gov.za

Website: www.education.gpg.gov.za

1. Letter that would indicate that the said researcher/s has/have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.
 2. The District/Head Office Senior Manager/s must be approached separately, and in writing, for permission to involve District/Head Office Officials in the project.
 3. **Because of the relaxation of COVID 19 regulations researchers can collect data online, telephonically, physically access schools or may make arrangements for Zoom with the school Principal. Requests for such arrangements should be submitted to the GDE Education Research and Knowledge Management directorate.**
 4. **The Researchers are advised to wear a mask at all times, Social distance at all times, Provide a vaccination certificate or negative COVID-19 test, not older than 72 hours, and Sanitise frequently.**
 5. A copy of this letter must be forwarded to the school principal and the chairperson of the School Governing Body (SGB) that would indicate that the researcher/s have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.
 6. A letter / document that outline the purpose of the research and the anticipated outcomes of such research must be made available to the principals, SGBs and District/Head Office Senior Managers of the schools and districts/offices concerned, respectively.
 7. The Researcher will make every effort obtain the goodwill and co-operation of all the GDE officials, principals, and chairpersons of the SGBs, teachers and learners involved. Persons who offer their co-operation will not receive additional remuneration from the Department while those that opt not to participate will not be penalised in any way.
 8. Research may only be conducted after school hours so that the normal school programme is not interrupted. The Principal (if at a school) and/or Director (if at a district/head office) must be consulted about an appropriate time when the researcher/s may carry out their research at the sites that they manage.
 9. Research may only commence from the second week of February and must be concluded before the beginning of the last quarter of the academic year. If incomplete, an amended Research Approval letter may be requested to conduct research in the following year.
 10. Items 6 and 7 will not apply to any research effort being undertaken on behalf of the GDE. Such research will have been commissioned and be paid for by the Gauteng Department of Education.
 11. It is the researcher's responsibility to obtain written parental consent of all learners that are expected to participate in the study.
 12. The researcher is responsible for supplying and utilising his/her own research resources, such as stationery, photocopies, transport, faxes and telephones and should not depend on the goodwill of the institutions and/or the offices visited for supplying such resources.
 13. The names of the GDE officials, schools, principals, parents, teachers and learners that participate in the study may not appear in the research report without the written consent of each of these individuals and/or organisations.
 14. On completion of the study the researcher/s must supply the Director: Knowledge Management & Research with one Hard Cover bound and an electronic copy of the research.
 15. The researcher may be expected to provide short presentations on the purpose, findings and recommendations of his/her research to both GDE officials and the schools concerned.
16. Should the researcher have been involved with research at a school and/or a district/head office level, the Director concerned must also be supplied with a brief summary of the purpose, findings and recommendations of the research study.

The Gauteng Department of Education wishes you well in this important undertaking and looks forward to examining the findings of your research study.

Kind regards



Dr. Gumani Mukatuni
Acting CES: Education Research and Knowledge Management

DATE: 09/05/2025

2

Making education a societal priority

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