MIDLANDS STATE UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL POLICY STUDIES AND LEADERSHIP

CHALLENGES FACED BY SCHOOL HEADS IN LEADING PRIMARY SCHOOLS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN MPOPOMA CLUSTER

BY

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APPROVAL FORM

The undersigned certify that they have read and recommended to Midlands State University for the acceptance of a dissertation entitled: **Challenges faced by School Heads in leading Primary Schools during the COVID-19 pandemic in Mpopoma Cluster.**

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the requirements of the Bachelor of Education in Educational Management and Leadership Degree at Midlands State University

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DECLARATION

I, Mahlangu Sikhangezile declare that this research report herein is my own work and has not been copied or lifted from any source without the acknowledgement of the source.

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ABSTRACT

This study examined challenges being faced by School Heads in leading schools during the Covid-19 pandemic in Mpopoma Primary Schools Cluster. A descriptive survey research design anchored in a pragmatic paradigm which accommodates mixed or uses a variety of approaches was used to provide the best answer to the research question for this study. The researcher used semi-structured interviews and questionnaires to generate data. Purposive sampling and random sampling techniques were used to select respondents. The sample for the study consisted of five School Heads, five Deputy Heads and five Teachers in Charge (TICs) to make a total sample of fifteen respondents.

Findings reveal that schools were facing numerous challenges such as being crippled financially due to decreased income and increased expenditure. Teachers found themselves being unable to utilise their usual teaching strategies under the Covid-19 regulations. They were no longer able to utilise core elements of their teaching approaches such as group work because of social distancing requirements, non-sharing of teaching and learning materials. Schools suffered the capacity to offer effective online learning as the pandemic deepened existing inequalities and vulnerabilities in learning and educational outcomes.

Recommendations drawn from these observations include the need for government to support schools with urgent resources, encourage them to embrace technology for enhancement of teaching and learning. The government to consider providing laptops, free internet services in schools, promotes and support accelerated learning approaches to help learners bridge learning gaps.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to:

- My Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, thank you for covering me with your hand of protection. Thank you for stirring up the gifts in me and using me for your glory! Thank you for continually moulding and shaping me into the person you desire for me to be.
- My husband, Mr J. Hadebe for his unwavering support.
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CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM AND ITS CONTEXT

1.1 Introduction

The study sought to present an examination of challenges being faced by School Heads in leading schools during the Covid-19 pandemic in Mpopoma Primary Schools Cluster. University World News Zimbabwe (2020) opines that schools and tertiary institutions in Zimbabwe shut down on Tuesday 24 March 2020 as a precaution to contain the spread of COVID-19 after parents and other education sector stakeholders contested their continued operation. Announcing the decision to close, University World News Zimbabwe (2020) claims that President Emmerson Mnangagwa said government thought it prudent to err on the side of caution by closing teaching institutions where human concentration and contact are high.

Ministry 0f Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE), (2020) highlights that schools across the country re-opened for examination classes on the 28th of September 2020 following a lengthy Covid-19 induced closure since the 24th of March when the Covid-19 pandemic hit the country culminating in the declaration of a countrywide lockdown initially for twenty one days. With new cases of the pandemic still being recorded in Zimbabwe, Ministry 0f Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) (2020) indicates that the Ministry had to carefully plan for the re-opening of schools in a bid to control the spread of the pandemic and make schools safe for teaching and learning. As a result the Ministry, in conjunction with the Ministry of Health and Child Care (MoHCC) developed Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and an accompanying Secretary's Circular No. 10 of 2020 which were dispatched to schools. The SOPs, which were developed in adherence to World Health Organisation (WHO) guidelines on controlling the spread of the pandemic, offered Heads of schools and all stakeholders a guideline on how to operate schools under the Covid-19 environment or the new normal.

Leading schools under the new normal was a big challenge for school Heads. The SOPs stipulate basic requirements for a school to be allowed to operate.

MoPSE (2020) asserts that these include adequate personal protective equipment (PPE) such as face masks, liquid soap and sanitizers for learners, teachers and ancillary staff, infra-red thermometers, hand washing stations at the entrance and other strategic places.

Fumigation or disinfection of the school premises, designation of a temporary holding bays, placement of information education and communication (IEC) material around the school, physical distancing marking in classrooms and other places where learners assemble and evidence of linkage with a local health centre. Furthermore, school leaders had to come up with a number of strategies to cover for lost teaching and learning time. In addition, OCHA (2020) claims that prolonged school closures exacerbated existing vulnerabilities and inequalities among children, especially girls, children with disabilities, those in rural areas, orphans and vulnerable children, as well as those from poor households and fragile families.

This chapter presents the background of the study that highlights key issues related to the research problem and the grey areas that needed attention. It also addresses the statement of the problem, research objectives, research questions, and significance of the study, assumptions, and delimitations of the study, limitations of the study and definitions of key terms.

1.2 Background to the Study

The Covid-19 pandemic impacted all areas of society, including education all over the world. Most governments across the world decided to temporarily close educational institutions in an attempt to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Learning and development were disrupted for millions of learners by the Covid-19 pandemic. School leaders were faced with the burden of re-strategizing for effective teaching and learning to take place. These strategies included the use of diagnostic tests and other tools to meet each learner where he or she was and to devise a plan for making up for the interruptions (Sharp et al., 2020). The Human Rights Watch (2020) argues that the Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated well-documented opportunity gaps that put learners from poor families at a disadvantage relative to their better-off peers. It views opportunity gaps as gaps in access to conducive environment and resources that enhance learning and development and include access to food and nutrition, housing, health and financial relief measures.

One of the most critical opportunity gaps was the uneven access to the devices and internet access critical to learning online (ECLAC-UNESCO, 2020). This digital divide made it virtually impossible for some learners to learn during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Covid-19 pandemic was overwhelming the functioning and outcomes of education systems some of which were already stressed in many respects (UN, 2020). This was affecting all children across the world at differing degrees depending on a variety of factors such as the country or region where they live, as well as their ages, family backgrounds and degree of access to some alternative educational opportunities during the Covid-19 pandemic (Ali and Kaur, 2020). The pandemic confined school children to staying in their homes all over the world. Learners across the world missed out on group activities, team sports and recreational options such as playgrounds as well as missing out on daily access to school and the basic support schools provide for many learners (García and Weiss, 2020).

The shutdown of schools, compounded by the associated public health and economic crises, posed major challenges to school leaders. The education systems were not developed with phenomena such as Covid-19 in mind. García and Weiss (2020), posit that education systems did not have suitable structures to sustain effective teaching and learning during the shut-down of schools and maintain the safety net provisions that many learners usually receive in school. This resulted in the deterioration of learners' academic performance during the pandemic together with their progress on other developmental skills (Ali and Kaur, 2020). Given the various ways in which the crisis widened existing socio-economic disparities and how these disparities affected learning and educational outcomes, educational inequities were growing (García and Weiss 2017). Consequentially, many special education needs learners who ideally benefit when at school under normal circumstances were finding it nearly impossible to receive effective instruction (Eyles, Gibbons and Montebruno, 2020). All these setbacks were evidenced in research studies carried out in Kenya, Burkina Faso, South Africa and Morocco. It was therefore, imperative to carry out a Covid-19 pandemic-relevant research in the context of Zimbabwe to offer key insights of the situation on the ground as the education system responds to the coronavirus crisis.

Research shows that a lack of contingency planning exacerbates the negative impacts of phenomena like recessions, natural disasters, and pandemics on learning (Reimers and Schleicher, 2020). Contingency planning thus, needs to be institutionalized and include emergency funding to replace the resources drained during emergencies (Eyles, Gibbons and Montebruno, 2020). For instance, ECLAC-UNESCO (2020), are assertive that research regarding online learning and teaching shows that they are effective only if learners have consistent access to the internet and computers and if teachers have received targeted training and support for online instruction.

This is echoed by E-Learning Africa (2020) which claims that lack of access to radios, television, computers, internet and data left many learners unable to engage in distance learning. Thus, many learners lacked access to the internet, which is increasingly indispensable for education in this day and age. The UN (2020) asserts that because these vital requirements for effectiveness were not available for many, remote education during the Covid-19 pandemic has impeded teaching and learning. The reduced children's learning time disrupted their learning and also affected their full development. These were situations that drove the researcher to carry out the current study in order to bring out major challenges affecting school leaders in Mpopoma Cluster as they responded to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Human Rights Watch (2020) hypothesizes that everybody should be concerned about all the factors that were affecting children's education during the Covid-19 pandemic as these were more pronounced for children with disabilities. The pandemic exacerbated the already dire living conditions for some of the learners (UN, 2020). For example, some learners lived in Child Headed families and extended family relatives in small houses and lacked basic items like food. Some of the parents to these children lost their sources of livelihoods due to the pandemic making their already strained living conditions much worse. It was one of the intentions of the current study to examine the challenges being faced by school leaders in their efforts to cater for the disadvantaged or vulnerable learners (the disabled included) in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Zimbabwe like many other countries in the world also decided to temporarily close educational institutions in an attempt to reduce the spread of Covid-19. UNICEF (2021) says that schools were forced to close their gates to all learners from March to September 2020. Simango and Mwareya (2020) indicate that they started opening their gates to selected learners in a phased approach. On 28 September Schools opened to Grade 7 learners as phase the first. Phase two was for Grade 6 learners on 9 November 2020 and the third phase for ECD A to Grade 5 learners on 23 November 2020 (UNICEF, 2021, Simango and Mwareya, 2020). Before the opening of schools, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in Zimbabwe in conjunction with the Ministry of Health and Child Care produced the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) as a guide on how to conduct business whilst ensuring the safety for all in schools, colleges, universities and other educational institutions (Secretary's Circular Number 10 of 2020). These Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) guide the day to day operations of schools in order to ensure a safe, secure and healthy environment. However, the situation was compounded by the failure of schools to open on the scheduled date of 4 January for the first term of the 2021 calendar due to the extended level 4 lockdown.

Educational institutions are being forced by the prevailing conditions created by the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic to adapt to what is being referred to as the new normal. This has been necessitated by the need to balance priorities for education and preventing the spread of Covid-19 as well as playing catch-up to lost teaching and learning time. School leaders were being held accountable for providing an effective response to the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on education. The education system in Zimbabwe was already stretched before the Covid-19 pandemic as a result of multiple crises, including the impact of Cyclone Idai in 2019, the economic crisis, climate-induced drought as well as food shortages (Education Cluster, 2020). Thus, the Covid-19 epidemic greatly interrupted the teaching and learning for learners. Therefore, the study sought to examine the challenges that were bedevilling school leaders in Mpopoma Primary Schools Cluster in their effort to recover from the adverse impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

The Covid-19 pandemic was impacting on all areas of society, including education all over the world. This included Zimbabwe. UNICEF (2021) says that schools in Zimbabwe were forced to close their gates to all learners from March to September 2020. Simango and Mwareya (2020) indicate they started opening their gates to selected learners in a phased approach. On 28 September Schools opened to Grade 7 learners as phase 1. Phase two followed for Grade 6 learners on 9 November 2020 and the third phase for ECD A to Grade 5 learners on 23 November 2020 (UNICEF, 2021, Simango and Mwareya, 2020). Before the opening of schools, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in Zimbabwe in conjunction with the Ministry of Health and Child Care produced the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) as a guide on how to conduct business whilst ensuring the safety for all in schools, colleges, universities and other educational institutions (Secretary's Circular Number 10 of 2020). These Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) guide the day to day operations of schools in order to ensure a safe, secure and healthy environment.

Leading schools during the Covid-19 pandemic was not a mean task but a big challenge for the school leaders. They were facing numerous challenges in making the education environment operate efficiently and effectively. The situation was compounded by the failure of schools to open on the scheduled date of 4 January for the first term of the 2021 calendar due to the extended level 4 lockdown. Schools could not be opened because of the level 4 lockdown regulations pronounced by government due to the escalating Covid-19 infections. The researcher was therefore motivated to conduct an investigation focused on gaining insight into the scale and nature of the challenges school leaders were facing in leading schools during the Covid-19 pandemic. It was a new normal that presented the challenge of achieving a balance between the priorities of fully opening schools and controlling the spread of the Covid-19 virus. Indeed, investigating challenges experienced by school leaders in balancing these priorities in Mpopoma Primary Schools cluster was the focus in this study.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

This research examined the challenges that were being faced by school leaders in leading Primary Schools in Mpopoma Cluster as they responded to the adverse impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the education system.

1.5 Research Aim

The aim of this study was: To examine the challenges school leaders were facing in leading Primary Schools during the Covid 19 pandemic in Mpopoma Primary Schools Cluster.

1.6 Research Objectives

The study was guided by the following objectives:

1.6.1 To establish major barriers inhibiting school leaders in Mpopoma Primary Schools Cluster in their effort to design and implement effective education responses during the exigency of the Covid-19 pandemic.

1.6.2 To examine how school leaders in Mpopoma Primary Schools Cluster are envisioning continued teaching and learning in the context of covid-19 restrictions.

1.6.3 To determine challenges being faced by school leaders in ensuring equal access to learning during covid 19 pandemic in Mpopoma Primary Schools Cluster.

1.7 Main Research Question

This study sought to answer the general question: What were the challenges faced by school leaders in leading Primary Schools during Covid 19 pandemic in the Mpopoma Cluster?

1.8 Sub-Questions

The study sought to answer the following research questions;

1.8.1 What major barriers are school leaders in Mpopoma Government Primary Schools facing in designing and implementing effective education responses during the exigency of the Covid-19 pandemic?

1.8.2 How are school leaders in Mpopoma Government Primary Schools cluster struggling to ensure continued teaching and learning in the context of covid-19 restrictions?

1.8.3 What are the major challenges being faced by school leaders in ensuring equal access to learning during covid 19 pandemic in Mpopoma Primary Schools cluster**?**

1.9 Significance of the Study

The researcher hopes that the proposed study will benefit various education stakeholders in the recovery process of the education system from the impact of Covid-19 in Mpopoma Cluster Primary Schools. These include the teachers, school leaders, learners, donors and policy makers.

1.9.1 School Leaders

The findings of the proposed study may assist school leaders in taking co-ordinated actions to address the challenges bedevilling their schools in their effort to address the impact of Covid-19 to the education system. It may guide them in creating targeted interventions to address various challenges that include technological and socio-economic divides. Thus, school leaders will have focus in their attempts to overcome a plethora of challenges they will be facing in order to develop strategies on how to rebuild the education systems. They become aware of the need for them to quickly adapt some of their programmes to ensure learning continues for every child.

1.9.2 Teachers

This study is expected to influence the much needed interventions by the teachers in the teaching and learning processes in order to rectify the Covid-19 induced challenges. The findings from the study may alert the teachers on the role they should also play in mitigating the challenges being faced by the education system in its recovery journey from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. They may realise how important their input is in the journey to recovery in the education system.

1.9.3 Policy Makers

It was critical for policy makers to be aware of the situation on the ground with regards to challenges being faced in the management of schools especially during the crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic. The study brings out these challenges to assist the policy makers to develop strategies that can be used to address the challenges. The findings may guide them in coming up with responses to ensure the quality of educational outcomes for all children, especially the vulnerable and disadvantaged. Thus, the policy makers may be in a position to build back better through planning systemic change that delivers more effective, more inclusive learning in the medium and long term.

1.9.4 Donors/NGOs

The research was also expected to alert some donor institutions or NGOs on the challenges being faced by school leaders in managing schools during the crisis caused by the Covi-19 pandemic. The findings may convince or encourage them to bring forth assistance in different ways such as providing resources related to the Covid-19 protocols in the form of personal protective equipment such as masks, sanitisers, hand-wash liquid and infra-red thermometers.

1.10 Hypothesis

The study sought to confirm the following hypothesis;

1.10.1 Satisfying requirements for social/physical distancing in schools in the wake of infrastructure constraints exacerbated the problem of lost teaching and learning time.

1.10.2 Inadequate funding to address the educational and protection needs induced by COVID-19 was a big obstacle in ensuring continuous learning.

1.10.3 Schools were finding it difficult to meet the learning needs of all children, especially marginalised learners such as disabled and disadvantaged learners.

1.11 Assumptions of the Study

This study was based on the following assumptions;

1.11.1 The schools under investigation were facing Covid-19 induced challenges in their efforts to revive the education system in response to the pandemic.

1.11.2 Schools were struggling to provide special support measures for learners from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds.

1.11.3 Schools could not provide equitable and inclusive access to digital learning resources.

1.11.4 Schools were failing to offer equitable and inclusive access to extra services for vulnerable learners.

1.11.5 Efforts by school leaders to support their schools aside from normal classroom teaching through digital resources were being hampered by lack of funds.

1.11.6 Adhering to all covid-19 protocols such as regular intensive cleaning of all surfaces and areas frequented by learners was difficult.

1.11.7 The learning days that had been lost during covid-19 lockdowns could not be compensated as schools continued losing hours because of the alternating system of attending school which gave learners less time for contact learning.

1.12 Delimitations of the study

The primary focus of the study was to examine the challenges school leaders were facing in managing primary schools during the Covid 19 pandemic in Mpopoma Cluster. The study was confined to Mpopoma Cluster which is made up of five Primary Schools which were all included in the study. Mpopoma Cluster is located in Mzilikazi District which has six clusters with a total of thirty one Primary Schools. The district itself is found in the Metropolitan city of Bulawayo.

1.13 Limitations of the Study

The study was affected by the current scourge of the corona virus which has afflicted the whole world. The policy on social distancing had the potential to prolong the research study as the researcher could not physically meet the respondents. The researcher therefore, opted to use the Whatsapp platform to collect data for the study from the respondents.

The researcher had a limited budget to carry out the research due to the prevailing, unstable economic climate. The high cost of data bundles for the internet had the potential to limit literature review which needs a wide source of information. The researcher decided to get a bank soft loan dedicated to the study to ensure thoroughness in all the phases of the study.

The choice of research instruments to collect data will be limited to non-contact techniques because of the Covid-19 pandemic protocols which discourage grouping. Preferred data collection instruments such as focus group interviews which can give researchers rich information were avoided as participants were uncomfortable to engage in group discussions. Therefore, the study utilised equally useful questionnaires and interviews which could be done online with minimal costs.

1.14 Definitions of Key Terms

Covid-19

Di Gennaro et al. (2020) defines Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a disease caused by a novel virus, severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), causing severe acute respiratory syndrome.

COVID-19 is an illness caused by a virus that can spread from person to person. CDC (2020) says that the virus that causes COVID-19 is a new coronavirus that has spread throughout the world to warrant its pandemic status.

School Strategic Plan

Refers to a formal document used to communicate with the organisation the institution's goals the actions needed to achieve those goals and all of the other critical elements developed during the planning exercise, over a defined period of time (Root, 2014).

Primary school

Etor, Mbon and Ekanem (2013) view Primary School as generally the first stage of formal education coming after pre-school and before secondary education. Emataron (2005) defines a primary school as a school for children from about four to eleven years old in which they receive primary education. It can refer to both the physical structure (buildings) and the organisation. In our own Zimbabwean context, a Primary School therefore entails a school for children aged 4 to 12 years receiving Primary School education. The Primary School level is the key to the success or failure of the whole education system since the rest of the education system is built upon it.

Curriculum

Hanganu (2015) defines a curriculum as a framework that sets expectations for student learning. It serves as a guide for teachers, a roadmap that establishes standards for student performance and teacher accountability.

Primary School Curriculum

The British School of Brussels (2012) views the Primary School Curriculum as a framework that sets the development of the whole child at the heart of the education programme of children from early years and foundation stage to year 6.

Therefore, in the context of Zimbabwe, a Primary School Curriculum may be defined as a framework of learning from ECD A to Grade 7 designed to develop personal, emotional and social skills as well as being an intellectual and academic process. Thus, the Primary School Curriculum is designed to nurture the young learner in all dimensions of his or her life.

1.15 Summary

This chapter provided the background of the study, statement of the problem and purpose of the study. The major gap that was filled by the current research had to do with the challenges being faced by school leaders in managing primary schools. The researcher presented the research objectives and research sub-questions that guided the study. Some hypothesis and assumptions were highlighted. Delimitations and limitations of the study were specified. Key terms were briefly defined as they were used in the study. The next chapter presents a review of related literature on the phenomenon under investigation.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

The chapter presents a review of related literature which helped the researcher to have a better understanding of the problem at hand as well as noting the gap to be filled. The issues generally addressed in this chapter encompass the theoretical framework that influenced the interpretation of the results and literature based on research objectives and research questions.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework was developed to demonstrate an understanding of theories and concepts which are relevant to the topic. Sekaran (2015) defines a theoretical framework as a conceptual model of how one theorizes or makes logical sense of the relationships among several factors that have been identified as important to the problem. On the same note, University of Southern California (2017) states that a theoretical framework is an essential part of the research work developed to demonstrate an understanding of theories and concepts which are relevant to the topic and other broader knowledge areas being considered.

The study adopted the scale up operational framework approach for this study which emphasizes selectivity and joint interventions to scale up solutions to tackle the unprecedented threats posed by the Covid-19 crisis on the education system (Dews, 2020). Disrupting billions of lives and livelihoods, the Covid-19 pandemic threatens decades of hard-won development gains and demands an urgent, exceptional response (World Bank Group, 2020). The crisis was influencing changes in ways of doing things likely to transform life after the Covid-19 pandemic. The Covid-19 pandemic was bringing about significant challenges that all educational institutions will need to tackle in the coming years to ensure children receive quality education (Dews, 2020).

Many countries across the world were experiencing a crisis in their education sectors because of the devastating effect of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Therefore, countries were coming up with innovations to recover from the effects of the pandemic. The challenge, however, was that too often they were small scale unable to be sustained and not reaching the most disadvantaged populations (World Bank Group, 2020). This is the point where the scaling up framework comes in.

It deals with how the education field can best leverage these innovations and effective practices to help bring about sustainable large-scale change in the way education is delivered.

Dews (2020) refers the term scaling to a range of approaches that expand and deepen the impact of efforts that lead to lasting improvements in people's lives. In agreement with Dews (2020), Barker (2004) asserts that the goal of scaling up of educational innovation is to produce robust, effective, replicable outcomes. It is adapting innovation for widespread and supported use. The expansion of schooling is a great example. It is really one of Zimbabwe's great scaling success stories immediately after independence which saw a great expansion in access to education although education quality did not keep pace with this expansion. Thus, the researcher investigated challenges being faced by school leaders in managing schools in terms of actual education related initiatives that are in the process of scaling in response of the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the education system (scaling related challenges). The World Bank Group (2020) argues that without aggressive policy action, the shocks to schooling and the economy will deepen the learning crisis. Scaling up allows for the ultimate turning of the crisis response into long-run improvements in education even after the Covid-19 pandemic.

2.3 Barriers to Curriculum Implementation during the Covid-19 Pandemic

The need to maintain educational continuity during and after the Covid-19 pandemic has presented challenges to which countries have responded with different learning options and solutions that included adjusting the school calendar and revising the curriculum. The pandemic forced changes in the way in which curricula were implemented in terms of the use of platforms, the need to consider circumstances other than from those for which the curriculum was originally designed and also because certain knowledge and competencies were more relevant in the current context (ECLAC-UNESCO, 2020).

These necessary changes were challenging for school systems, educational establishments and teachers as there was a need for a number of decisions to be taken and resources channelled for the implementation of the decisions. This was critical for curricular adjustments and prioritization and the contextualization needed to ensure that the contents were relevant to the Covid-19 emergency situation, based on consensus among all relevant stakeholders (ECLAC-UNESCO, 2020).

ECLAC-UNESCO (2020) believes that these adjustments must prioritize the competencies and values that have come to the fore in the current Covid-19 situation, namely solidarity, self-directed learning, care for oneself and others, social-emotional skills, health and resilience, among others.

The covid-19 requirement for social distancing in schools was creating problems for school leaders. UNICEF (2021) contends that the existing infrastructure in schools could not accommodate social distancing as they were built without that idea in mind. The available classrooms were too small for physical distancing sitting arrangements. This is echoed by Sharp (2020) who maintains that the layout of many school buildings, when full, made it difficult to exercise physical/social distancing in the existing classrooms. In support of the view by Sharp (2020), Soland et al. (2020) assert that the structure of many existing school buildings were not appropriate if one wanted to maintain physical distancing. The only option left for schools was to split the classes into smaller groups (ECLAC-UNESCO, 2020). The researcher also intended to find out how schools in Mpopoma Cluster were handling the same situation.

The idea of splitting classes into smaller groups in adherence to social distancing regulations backfired for most schools as it meant less in-school learning days for learners. Sharp (2020) noted that most learners were behind in their education where they would normally be expected to be in their curriculum learning in a normal situation. It became difficult to make up for lost time using the alternating system of attending school. More learning time was lost instead.

OCHA (2020) argues that satisfying requirements for social/physical distancing in schools in the wake of infrastructure constraints exacerbated the problem of lost teaching and learning time. Alternating learning time reduced learning time instead of increasing time to compensate for lost time during covid-19 induced school closures. In support of views by OCHA (2020), Sharp et al. (2020) argues that no matter how hard schools try to cover the full curriculum, their efforts were likely to be limited by social distancing. The researcher was interested in finding out how schools under study were balancing learning time as well as compensating lost learning time.

Educational institutions were facing a tough task of decision-making criteria and approaches regarding learning priorities and how to make adjustments (ECLAC-UNESCO, 2020). One alternative was to revise curricular content for it to be more relevant and prioritized over others.

Another option was to integrate the contents and learning objectives into interdisciplinary thematic clusters that allow various subjects to be addressed at the same time through topics that are particularly pertinent and relevant for learners in the current context, using project or research methodologies that allow for a joined-up approach to learning (ECLAC-UNESCO, 2020). Under this approach, value must be attached to teachers' independence and to developing complex competencies among teachers. Some countries have adopted strategies that include reducing sets of fundamental learning objectives in different disciplines, moving from curriculum prioritization to the current curriculum, adopting a modular approach to content by level, shifting from basic education to new learning associated with integrated or significant objectives that can create links between subjects.

The impact of Covid-19 pandemic on the education system was forcing schools to adjust their curricula because of the lost learning time during the different levels of lockdowns. The Human Rights Watch (2020) advises that it was also important to take note of special needs learners when adjusting curricula and developing pedagogical resources.

For example, adjustments must be made and the necessary support provided for learners with disabilities or who live in various conditions and situations that make it difficult for them to continue learning. Likewise, UNESCO (2020a) asserts that a gender perspective must be incorporated in order to make visible and eradicate situations of gender inequality or violence that could have worsened under lockdown. However, schools were finding it difficult to make appropriate adjustments. Ali and Kaur (2020) argue that a lack of these adjustments was exacerbating the differences in learning achievement in light of the prevailing educational inequalities and unequal access to curriculum coverage.

UNESCO (2020) reports that some countries were making adjustments to their curricula by reducing social and extra-curricular activities which help limit physical contact. Many countries restricted or cancelled extra-curricular and athletics as a measure of reducing physical contact. What this entails is that learning areas or subjects like Physical Education and Mass Display will lose out on practical activities which normally require team work. In Zimbabwe these learning areas are examinable in the new curriculum. It is a great disadvantage for the learners to concentrate on theory only yet these are practical subjects. These were measures instituted by individual schools, regionally or nationally by governments looking to enforce social distancing. UNESCO (2020a) notes that in countries across Europe and the Middle East, governments enforced a ban on gatherings with large numbers of participants, including sporting and non-essential academic events. Zhang et al. (2020) indicate that the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in the education systems being faced with the challenge of how to maintain continuity of teaching and learning while facing the threat of the scourge.

The covid-19 pandemic relegated classroom teaching as unviable without warning catching many unprepared (García and Weiss, 2020). This problem affected governments across the world but was more pronounced in most African countries where there is a wide disparity in provision for the elite and for less advantaged people, mostly in rural areas (E-Learning Africa (2020). While educational programmes on television and radio were quickly launched by many governments, they were only accessible to those with access to a television or a radio set (E-Learning Africa, 2020).

In addition to infrastructure and connectivity, teachers and school leaders' familiarity with the tools and processes of providing online learning or e-learning were also key factors that could inhibit the process.

UNESCO (2020a) claims that infrastructure and familiarity with the tools seemed to be a big challenge of delivering e-learning or online education. China for example, with robust connectivity, was offering online learning successfully whereas others with limited penetration of internet, cell phone or television such as most African countries, were finding it difficult to reach all learners equally. In addition, many countries have challenges in ensuring that education services are equally accessible for learners with disabilities (UNESCO, 2020a). Thus, access to connectivity and different types of devices such as ensuring accessibility for learners with disabilities vary widely across income levels. Therefore, the researcher intended to investigate challenges affecting school leaders in their efforts to mitigate further inequalities.

The Covid-19 pandemic forces educational institutions such as primary schools to restructure education in such a way as to meet the challenges of achieving balance between the priority of fully opening schools and controlling the spread of the Covid-19 virus (García and Weiss, 2020). Although there might be digital content available, a key challenge was preparing pedagogical material to be available in a structured way such that it could capture the attention of all learners (UNESCO, 2020a). Most African countries attempting e-learning were finding it difficult to prepare content that goes into e-learning (E-Learning Africa, 2020).

One of the major challenges that have been noted in research concerns aspects of schools' capacities to enhance teaching and learning using digital devices in terms of use of technology and preparedness of teachers (ECLAC-UNESCO, 2020). Some teachers did not have the requisite technical and pedagogical skills to effectively utilise digital resources. OECD (2020) highlights that some serious training was needed in the education systems for educational technology to be a success during and after the Covid-19 pandemic.

It is, however, prudent to note that the level of this challenge varies considerably between socio-economically advantaged and disadvantaged schools. Soland et al. contends that private schools in many countries were more likely to have effective e-learning and on-line learning programmes than public schools because they were well resourced compared to public schools and the teachers there were knowledgeable.

The new normal introduced as a result of the impact of Covid-19 saw emphasis being shifted to the requirement for additional cleaning and sanitation in schools to control the risk of infection. Sharp (2020) claims that school leaders were expected to ensure more regular cleaning of the school site, cleansing of shared equipment, both within and between learning groups, and regular surface cleaning. Sharp (2020) discovered that this was causing a lot of challenges in balancing cleaning times and learning because of the staggered starting, breaking and finishing times in schools. Similarly, Harris and Jones (2020) assert that it was difficult to schedule cleaning and disinfecting of areas. For instance, it would be difficult to have time for cleaning the toilets which would be in constant use because of the staggered breaking time which sees learners using the facilities at different intervals.

School leaders noted that it was difficult to balance the SOPs requirements that involve additional cleaning and sanitisation of frequently touched surfaces in the schools because of Covid-19. This was a new normal necessary to minimise the risks of infections in schools. Sharp (2020) discovered that this was causing a lot of challenges in balancing cleaning times and learning because of the staggered starting, breaking and finishing times in schools. Similarly, Harris and Jones (2020) assert that it was difficult to schedule cleaning and disinfecting of areas such as ablution facilities and classrooms at intervals since learners were also scheduled to use these same facilities at different intervals leaving no time for intensive cleaning Another major challenge schools were facing was the issue of funds to cater for all the needs of the schools. Inadequate funding to address the educational and protection needs induced by Covid-19 was a big challenge.

Simango and Mwareya (2020) contend that schools were mandated to ensure that both learners and the staff members were safe in the school by providing PPEs such as masks, sanitisers, hand washing soap and thermometers to everyone’s temperature.

This was a burden for the already financially strained schools. OCHA (2020) asserts that schools were facing an increased financial burden to implement all the recommended measures to mitigate against the spread of the disease. In concurrence with OCHA (2020), Sharp (2020) contends that disadvantaged schools faced challenges in procuring PPEs such as face masks, sanitisers, hand wash liquid and surface disinfectants. The study also sought to establish problems school leaders encountered as they tried balancing Covid-19 protocols and ensuring that learning continued.

The issue of high dropout rates caused by covid-19 was one area that school leaders had to deal with when in-school learning resumed after the covid-19 lockdowns. García and Weiss (2020) assert that the covid-19 pandemic caused a significant rise in school dropouts especially for the marginalised learners. Poor families were the worst affected. The unfortunate situation was consuming a significant amount of school leaders' time. School leaders were already battling with other covid-19 related issues to ensure that their schools were operational. Sharp et al. (2020) highlight that contacting and liaising with parents of school drop outs was a large and time-consuming task at a time when schools were managing many other complex issues during Covid-19 pandemic.

Many economies in the world were affected by the covid-19 pandemic making life for most people difficult. Schools were also drastically affected. ECLAC-UNESCO (2020) highlight that the downturn of most economies if not all saw prices of goods and services going up. This had a negative implication for the schools that had to deal with the extra provisions for covid-19 in order for them to be allowed to operate. In a study carried out in South Africa by Mukute, Francis, Burt and de Souza (2020), they established that the rapidly depreciating local currency in that country was forcing service providers to increase their prices, with negative implications for school preparedness efforts as goods and services were rising each week. The situation was worse for the traditionally disadvantaged schools.

2.4 Challenges Faced in Ensuring Continued Teaching and Learning during the Covid-19 Pandemic

A strong and equitable reopening of schools and recovery requires the careful use of resources, which relies on broad coordination, effective targeting, and continual use of among other things, data to adjust and improve approaches. Coordination and pulling resources together were critical components of emergency responses such as to Covid-19 pandemic, but evidence shows immense challenges regarding resources (Carvalho, 2020). If education systems are to build back better, then resources available for education will need to be maintained or, in some cases, increased. During and after the crisis, resources will be pulled in many directions, both within and outside the sector. Under such exceptional circumstances, available evidence shows that the management of competing priorities and targeted allocation of resources will require strategic coordination across sectors (Carvalho, 2020). The study was interested in finding out challenges faced by school leaders in coordinating resources in their path to recovery from the impact of Covid-19.

WHO Covid-19 protocols that require that schools should maintain a level of social distancing as far as possible in schools presents headaches for school administrators who have to grapple with the shortage of infrastructure (classrooms) challenges. Sharp (2020) acknowledges that the layout of many school buildings, when full, makes this difficult. Similar views were held by Soland et al. (2020) who assert that the structure of many existing school buildings may not be appropriate if one wants to maintain physical distancing. The recommended one-metre distancing between staff and learners means that the regular classes had to be split and divided into smaller groups. Where possible and appropriate, schools were advised to encourage learners to maintain a distance from each other and learners mixing between groups minimised (Sharp, 2020). Furthermore, schools were also encouraged to consider staggering start, finish and break times to avoid learners mixing. Such arrangements were difficult to implement efficiently considering time and space constraints. Given the space restrictions within these contexts, these guidelines are challenging to implement and supervise.

The Covid-19 pandemic also forced educational institutions to avail resources to provide personal protective equipment (PPEs) which are a prerequisite for any institution to be allowed to operate. Sharp (2020) highlights that schools had to put in place washing and sanitising stations around their schools. It was a requirement that learners should be guided to wash their hands regularly especially the younger children who needed regular hand washing supervision. Disadvantaged schools faced challenges in procuring these PPEs namely face masks, sanitisers, hand wash liquid and surface disinfectants (OECD, 2020). For instance, schools in Zimbabwe were facing financial problems as the Covid-19 induced school closures meant that parents were not paying fees and schools totally relied on fees paid for operations.

The Covid-19 pandemic induced schools to seriously consider putting in place alternative methods of delivering teaching and learning. These include e-learning and online learning. Soland et al. (2020) argues that younger children may have problems in adapting to this online learning model. Schools in disadvantaged, rural or deprived areas lacked the appropriate digital capacity and infrastructure required to deliver teaching remotely (OECD, 2020). Significant differences in the provision of online teaching and learning resources existed especially between private and public schools (Soland et al., 2020). Research surveys in many countries reflect a digital divide among schools. Simango and Mwareya (2020) also claim that efforts by school leaders to support their schools aside from normal classroom teaching through on-line learning were hampered by the lack of funds. Furthermore, Subedi et al. (2020) highlights that obstacles such as the weakness of online teaching infrastructure, the limited exposure of teachers to online teaching and the information gap affected the effectiveness of online learning. Eyles, Gibbons and Montebruno (2020) contend that the majority of countries' private schools were more likely to have effective e-learning and on-line learning programmes than public schools because they are well resourced compared to public schools. It would be interesting to find out to what extent primary schools in Mpopoma Cluster are crippled in terms of digital learning resources as a response to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The above challenge was compounded by the unaffordability of online learning. The majority of the learners could not access online learning because they either did not have smart phones or could not afford access to the internet (Ali and Kaur, 2020).

Subedi et al. (2020) argue that non-conducive environment for learning at home affected learners to effectively take part in online learning. This view is cemented by Mukeredzi and Mashininga (2020) who assert that some learners were struggling to follow up internet lessons in homes where power cuts were frequent and internet data bundles were expensive. In agreement Murgatrotd (2020) claims that many countries have significant problems with reliable internet connection and access to digital devices. The same view is held by Doucet et al. (2020) who claim that the data package (costs) was comparatively high against average income earned by most people and continuous access to internet was a costly business for most learners.

The ecovid-19 pandemic impacted on all aspects of people's lives. This includes the economic system which has negatively impacted on parents' abilities to pay fees for their children (Ali and Kaur, 2020). The schools were in a bad situation since their income was depended on the fees paid by the learners. OCHA (2020) argues that the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted both the health and economic systems whereby schools which traditionally rely on payment of fees to fund their daily operations, faced a dire time with parents' inability to pay school fees because of the economic hardships they were facing. Most of the parents lost their jobs and were surviving on hand to mouth. Schools were stranded without the inflow of fees payments. Harris and Jones (2020) contend that for school leaders working in these demanding and chaotic circumstances, the pressure were insurmountable, the options limited and sleepless nights frequent. Furthermore, school leaders were caught in the unfavourable position of being the pinch point in the education system (Harris and Jones, 2020). Every expectation either from above or below asked more of school leaders professionally and personally.

The covid-19 protocols restricted the teachers' normal way of teaching as the covid-19 regulations did not allow them to utilise some of the useful teaching methods and activities. Sharp et al. (2020) claim that teachers did not feel able to teach to their usual standard under the Covid-19 regulations that were in place. The social distancing requirements negatively impacted teachers' teaching practices as they were no longer allowed to make use of some of the major core elements in their teaching such as pair work, group work or allowing learners to share scarce resources such as textbooks.

Sharp et al (2020) notes that teachers were no longer able to utilise core elements of their teaching practices such as group work and practical work, nor did they feel able to move around the classroom to teach, support and interact with their learners effectively.

2.5 Challenges faced in Ensuring Equal Access to Education during Covid-19 Pandemic

In a crisis, inequalities are likely to widen (Coboinaki and Ciarrusta, 2020). What the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has made evident is the gap between education systems that already have a robust platform of solutions to deliver online learning and those that do not. These gaps highlight the disparities in access to electricity, the internet, and devices.

COVID-19 and the closure of schools may not affect learners equally. Learners from disadvantaged backgrounds are expected to experience more significant learning loss during this crisis period than their more advantaged peers. This may be due to differences in non-financial parental support, parental financial resources, schools attended and learners' digital skills (Di Pietro, 2020). Although schools try to provide equal benefits to children of different background, during the Covid-19 lockdown when schools were shut, performance among children from higher socio-economic status continued to develop whilst no similar growth is observed in children from lower socio-economic status (Meyer et al., 2017).

This learning gap may have important long-term consequences, for instance, the 2020 Zimsec Grade 7 examination results in Zimbabwe show that the most affluent or high fees paying schools recorded one percent pass rate whilst poorly resourced schools especially in rural areas were recording zero percent pass rate. This problem faced governments worldwide but has been particularly severe in most African countries where there is a wide disparity in provision for the elite and for less advantaged people, mostly in rural areas (E-Learning Africa, 2020). There is increased risk of permanent drop out among children with pre-existing vulnerabilities, especially children with disabilities. The Education Cluster (2020) claims that the education sector in Zimbabwe was already beset with persistent disparities in educational opportunities between children of different gender, socio-economic status, disability status, orphan hood status, and demographic groups. Without a well-resourced response, these disparities are likely to widen.

Research shows that school closures caused by the Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated previously existing inequalities, and that children who were already most at risk of being excluded from quality education have been most affected (Human Rights Watch, 2020). UNICEF (2020) is assertive in that the pandemic will deepen existing inequalities and vulnerabilities. Children were not taught during the lockdown period across the African continent (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Many children received no instruction, feedback, or interaction with their teachers despite recommendations of the use of distance learning programmes and open educational applications and platforms that schools and teachers can use to reach learners remotely and limit the disruption of education (UNICEF, 2020). Similar views are held by Eyles, Gibbons and Montebruno (2020) who assert that children from disadvantaged backgrounds were likely to be affected more than others by school closures, with fewer family resources and less access to online learning resources to offset lost instruction time.

García and Weiss (2020) also argue that educational inequities were growing given the various ways in which the Covid 19 crisis has widened existing socioeconomic disparities and how these disparities affect learning and educational outcomes. The Human Rights Watch (2020) support García and Weiss's (2020) argument by claiming that school closures caused by the pandemic exacerbated previously existing inequalities, and that children who were already most at risk of being excluded from a quality education have been most affected.

There are considerable socio-economic inequalities in learners' access to digital technologies at home. Learners from higher socio-economic status are significantly more likely to have a laptop or a computer at home than those from lower socio-economic status (Di Pietro, 2020). UKCISA (2020) claims that a survey conducted in the United States of America shows that there are striking differences in access to broadband internet at home between low and high-income families thus, access to broadband internet connection varied significantly by household income. Rich families were more likely to have a broadband internet connection than poor families (Di Pietro, 2020).

Similar views were held by Eyles, Gibbons and Montebruno (2020) who assert that children from disadvantaged backgrounds were likely to be affected more than others by school closures, with fewer family resources and less access to online learning resources to offset lost instruction time. E-learning or on-line learning was almost non-existent to the majority of the poor learners in the African continent. Where it was available, most learners could not afford the required internet data to have access to those e-learning materials (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Thus, the majority of the learners did not have access to technology devices or data. Lack of access to radios, television, computers, internet, and data in most African countries left many learners unable to engage in remote learning. Only minority learners had access to smart mobile phones that could support calling and texting functionalities. García and Weiss (2020) contends that research regarding online learning and teaching shows that they are effective only if learners have consistent access to the internet and computers and if teachers have received targeted training and supports for online instruction. This entails that digital learning failed dismally as an option to learning during the Covid 19 pandemic induced lockdown across Africa.

In addition to having access to appropriate digital resources, students need to be in a home environment that is conducive to learning. However, this might not be the case for a large number of learners from poor families, who often have to do their work in small spaces shared with other family members (Hanushek and Woessmann, 2020). This is a major problem for children living in poverty worldwide, who often rely on the physical setting of their schools to provide educational materials, guidance and sometimes, the only decent meal of the day (Ali and Kaur (2020). Although little is known about the effectiveness of learning at home for the entire population of learners and what this means for the development of skills, evidence from many countries shows that many children had little effective instruction (Hanushek and Woessmann, 2020). Ali and Kaur (2020) further postulate that there was not much learning happening during covid-19 induced school closures at home. It therefore, shows that the learning progress of learners has suffered a strong decline during the covid-19 crisis, especially in schools in low-income areas (Hanushek and Woessmann, 2020).

Efforts to recover lost learning time caused by the Covid-19 pandemic were also affected by inequalities in socio economic statuses of the learners.

Affordability of extra-school activities means that some learners may afford extra lessons whilst other may not. Andrew et al. (2020) postulates that during the lockdown, children from more advantaged backgrounds tended to be more engaged in extra-school learning activities than those from less advantaged backgrounds. Such activities may considerably improve learner achievement as they may complement and supplement other learning activities provided by schools.

In a research study conducted by Andrew et al. (2020) in the United Kingdom, it was discovered that learners from richer families were significantly more likely to have access to a private tutors than their peers from poorer families. Thus, most of the children did not have any educational support during the time of the Covid 19 pandemic lockdown across the African continent (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Worse still, most schools did not offer any materials or guidance during the Covid 19 pandemic induced school closures (García and Weiss, 2020). This raised the potential of the drop in children's level of education consequent to all the time lost. Thus, economically advantaged families tend to have higher levels of education and more resources to fill learning gaps and provide enrichment activities to children who cannot attend school (Ali and Kaur, 2020).

Children from more advantaged backgrounds are more likely to study at schools that are well equipped in terms of digital technology resources. OECD (2020) indicates that in most countries, the distribution of resources in schools tends to be more equitable in advantaged schools than in poor disadvantaged schools (private versus public schools). Coboinaki and Ciarrusta (2020) believe that Covid-19 has exposed a large digital gap in how to use technology in a pedagogically meaningful way to enhance teaching and learning. Additionally, the school digital gap is exposed that distinguishes between education institutions that are simply content suppliers and those that can maximize learning by offering much more than access to educational materials (online and via radio or TV). For instance, the computer learner ratio is found to be greater in disadvantaged schools than in advantaged schools. The number of computers available per learner is greater in advantaged schools than in disadvantaged schools for online and e-learning activities. OECD (2020) reports that some advantaged schools report that their schools' internet bandwidth or speed and software are sufficient whilst disadvantaged schools report inadequacy of these tools.

This means that e-learning and online learning which are being encouraged especially during the Covid-19 pandemic were impossible in some disadvantaged schools. This highlights whether a school has the capacity to offer well planned and carefully selected sequences of digital learning, along with appropriate monitoring mechanisms.

The researcher was interested in finding out the situation on the ground in Mpopoma Cluster Primary Schools with regard to how well equipped in terms of digital technology resources these schools were as well as other resources. She intended to find out the resource constraints that were derailing efforts by school leaders in managing their schools in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic. The impact of the pandemic on the education system triggered responses from the schools and necessitated some changes in ways of doing things (new normal). Some of the changes required resources for them to be implementable. Thus, the current study sought to establish the resource challenges that were bedevilling school leaders in leading their schools. Furthermore, the study sought to determine challenges school leaders were facing in adjusting and implementing the curricula in response to the negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the education system. In addition the study also sought to examine challenges associated with previously existing inequalities exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

2.6 Summary

The chapter highlighted some of the major challenges facing schools in their responses to the adverse impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the education system. The literature review discussed barriers to effective design and implementation of school programmes, challenges faced in ensuring continued teaching and learning during the Covid-19 pandemic and challenges faced in ensuring equal access to education during Covid-19 pandemic. It was the intention of the study to examine these challenges in Mpopoma Cluster Primary Schools based on the scaling up research framework. The next chapter concentrated on giving the research methodology that was utilised in collecting and analysing data.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter focused on the research methodology that was utilised in data collection and analysis. Rahman (2017) asserts that a research methodology is a procedural framework within which a research is conducted and it explains how data will be obtained and analysed. For Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) a research methodology involves the systematic sequencing of all the procedures involved in carrying out the research. Thus, the researcher discussed the research paradigm, research approaches, research design, target population, sample, research instruments, data collection procedure, validity and reliability, data analysis procedures and some ethical considerations to be observed by the researcher.

3.2 Research Paradigm

Babbie (2014) views a paradigm as a model or framework for observation and understanding, which shapes both what we see and how we understand it. In agreement with Babbie (2014), Cresswell (2014) points out that a paradigm is a worldview that addresses the philosophical ideas in a study. Therefore, a research paradigm is the perspective, thinking, school of thought or set of shared beliefs that inform the meaning or interpretation of a research study. It is a basic set of beliefs or worldview that guides research action or an investigation. Positivism, realism, interpretivism and pragmatism are the four main research philosophical paradigms. The researcher utilised pragmatic paradigm for the current study. This is discussed in brief below.

3.2.1 Pragmatism

Pragmatic paradigm argues that a single paradigm orientation as advocated by the positivists and interpretivists was not ideal to determine social reality or search for knowledge. Okesina (2020) highlights that proponents of pragmatism advocate for a worldview which would provide perspective of research that is seen to be most appropriate for studying the phenomenon at hand.

They prefer approaches to research that are more practical and employ a combination of worldviews to carryout research in order to address research problems and contribute to knowledge, hence, pragmatic paradigm. For instance, a combination of positivism and interpretivism is seen as more effective than using any one approach on its own. Nguyen, (2019) asserts that pragmatic paradigm advocates a non-singular reality ontology a belief that there is no single reality and all individuals have their own and unique interpretations of reality. Furthermore, pragmatists believe in relational epistemology where relationships in research are best determined by what the researcher deems appropriate to that particular study. In addition, a value-driven axiology is advocated for meaning conducting research that benefits people (Nguyen, 2019).

Pragmatic paradigm accommodates mixed or uses a variety of approaches in providing the best answer to the research question for this study concerning challenges faced by school heads in leading primary schools during the Covid-19 pandemic in Mpopoma Cluster. This was achieved through complimenting the advantages and disadvantages present within positivism and interpretivism in a mixed method approach (Shannon-Baker, 2016). The school leaders' experiences in this study could only be explored and investigated through in-depth processes that enabled them to explore and share their own experiences and perceptions as well as being supported by evidence. Therefore, the role of pragmatic paradigm in this study was of great value. Interpretivism's principles and values align with many of education's approaches, principles and values, including learner-centred, holistic and personalised learning. The ways in which school leaders perceive the learning process or experiences are of great value in the educations system especially during a crisis such as the Covid-19 pandemic which has devastated the education system. Similarly, the principles of positivism can have wider application in understanding and examining the truth and credible data through measuring or observing the phenomena with as little intervention from the researcher and other factors as possible.

3.3 Research Approaches

The study adopted a mixed methods approach which allows the use of both qualitative and quantitative research methods.

Mixed methods research is a methodology for conducting research that involves collecting, analysing, and integrating quantitative and qualitative research in a single study or a longitudinal program of inquiry (Creswell 2007). The main advantage of this form of research is that both qualitative and quantitative research, in combination, provides a better understanding of a research problem or issue than either research approach alone. The goal of the method is to draw from the strengths of these approaches and to minimise possible weaknesses (Creswell 2007).

Mixing qualitative and quantitative methods of research can produce a final product which can highlight the significant contributions of both (Creswell 2009).

McMillan and Schumacher (2006) view qualitative research as an enquiry in which researchers collect data in face-to-face situations by interacting with selected persons in their setting. It describes and analyses people's individual and collective beliefs, social actions, and the meaning that they assign to them. Qualitative research is inductive in that the researcher attempts to understand a situation without imposing pre-existing expectations on the setting (McMillan and Schumacher, 2009). The qualitative approach allowed the researcher to get personally involved in the field with the informants thereby giving access to unknown information (Onwuegbuenzi and Leech, 2005). Using this qualitative method, knowledge was constructed from the meanings and responses obtained from in-depth interviews with the school heads (Creswell, 2007). It was expected that the resulting data would be richly descriptive and faithful to the school heads' perceptions. Thus, the qualitative approach allowed for deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study.

On the other hand, quantitative research is based more directly on its original plans and its results are more readily analysed and interpreted, it emphasizes relatively on large scale and representative sets of data (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Rahman (2017) defines quantitative research as an approach for testing objective theories by examining the relationship among variables. These variables can be measured, typically on instruments so that numbered data can be analyzed using statistical procedures. It quantifies data and generalizes results from a sample structure technique.

The quantitative design generates numbers which would be analyzed statistically making comparison and correlation possible (Denscombe, 2016). This approach was utilised through the use of a semi-structured questionnaire that was used to collect data from deputy heads and TICs. Thus, the mixed method approach enabled the researcher to gather both qualitative and quantitative data from school heads, deputy heads and TICs using face to face interviews and semi-structured questionnaires. A mixed research methodology was employed in this study because it balances the strengths and weaknesses of both quantitative and qualitative research approaches (Creswell, 2014). This mixed method approach provided the best opportunities for answering the important research questions of this study, the answers of which relied upon a variety of forms of data. It enabled the researcher to understand the experiences of the respondents in the study.

3.4 Research Design

Kothari (2014) defines research design as the main plan for the chosen methods, structure and strategy of a research to find out alternative tools to solve problems and to minimize the variances. Creswell (2014) on the other hand views research designs as the specific procedures involved in the research process, data collection, data analysis and report writing while Handy (2009) postulates that research designs are plans and structures of investigation the research is conducted and it constitutes the blueprint for the collection, measurement and analysis of data. The research design is the researcher's overall plan for obtaining answers to the research questions that guide the study. This means that a research design is a plan to be used to capture information. For the purpose of this research, the researcher used a descriptive survey research design.

3.4.1 Descriptive Survey Research Design

A descriptive survey is an investigation technique which focuses on describing and practices, (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2003).). This implies that a descriptive survey is a report of knowledge, attitudes or behaviour. A descriptive survey helps the researcher to assess attitudes, opinions, demographic information, condition and procedures, (Ary, Jocobs and Razavieh, 2002).

Avedian (2014) defines a survey as a systematic method for gathering information from (a sample of) entities for the purposes of constructing quantitative descriptors of the attributes of the larger population of which the entities are members. This is possible because the survey design gives in-depth responses about what people think and how they feel about the problem under study (Fowler, 2008). Surveys are conducted to gather information that reflects population's attitudes, behaviours, opinions and beliefs that cannot be observed directly. Their success largely depends on how closely the answers that people give to survey questions match how people think and act in reality (Avedian, 2014). The researcher therefore, used graphical and numerical methods for describing the data. Thus, she described challenges being faced by school leaders in leading schools during the Covid-19 pandemic (phenomena) and summarised the findings using descriptive statistics such as graphs, tables and numerical summaries.

Survey research involves the collection of information from a sample of individuals through their responses to questions. It is an efficient method for systematically collecting data from a broad range of individuals and educational settings (Check and Schutt, 2012). Survey research owes its continuing popularity to its versatility, efficiency and generalizability. Three distinguishing characteristics can be linked to survey research design. First, Glasow (2005) says that survey research is used to quantitatively describe specific aspects of a given population. These aspects often involve examining the relationships among variables. Second, the data required for survey research are collected from people and are, therefore, subjective. Finally, survey research uses a selected portion of the population from which the findings can later be generalized back to the population.

Check and Schutt (2012) highlight that surveys are efficient in that many variables can be measured without substantially increasing the time or cost. Glasow (2005) shares the same view when he contends that surveys are inclusive in the types and number of variables that can be studied. Furthermore, survey data can be collected from many people at relatively low cost and, depending on the survey design, relatively quickly. This is supported by Glasow (2005) who asserts that surveys are capable of obtaining information from large samples of the population and requires minimal investment to develop and administer. Survey methods lend themselves to probability sampling from large populations.

Check and Schutt (2012) contend that survey research is very appealing when sample generalizability is the main goal of a study. They go no to indicate that survey research is often the only means available for developing a representative picture of the attitudes and characteristics of a large population. Glasow (2005) argues that they are relatively easy for making generalizations. To gather a representative cluster picture of challenges being faced by school leaders in Mpopoma Cluster primary schools in leading schools during the Covid-19 pandemic, the survey sampled Mpopoma Cluster from six clusters in Mzilikazi District.

Without careful attention to sampling, measurement, and overall survey design, the efforts to use a survey design may fail (Check and Schutt, 2012). Such failures are possible when the responsible survey researchers do not take the time to design surveys properly. For a survey to succeed, it must minimize the risk of two types of errors namely poor measurement of cases that are surveyed (errors of observation) and omission of cases that should be surveyed (errors of non-observation) (Check and Schutt, 2012). Potential problems that may result in errors of observation emanate from the way questions are written, the characteristics of the respondents who answer the questions, the way questions are presented in questionnaires and the interviewers used to ask the questions.

Thus, drawbacks of using a survey design may emanate from coverage of the population being inadequate due to a poor sampling frame, the process of random sampling can result in sampling error (differences between the characteristics of the sample members and the population that arise due to chance) and non-response can distort the sample when individuals refuse to respond or cannot be contacted. Nonresponse to specific questions can distort the generalizability of the responses to those questions. Glasow (2005) shares the same views when he observed that biases may occur, either in the lack of response from intended participants or in the nature and accuracy of the responses that are received. Other sources of error include intentional misreporting of behaviours by respondents to confound the survey results or to hide inappropriate behaviour (Glasow, 2005). Surveys are important in education research because they can provide quantitative descriptions of the characteristics, behaviours, and attitudes of students, teachers, principals, parents, district leaders, and other specific populations (Walston, Redford and Bhatt, 2017). Accurate data from a well-designed survey can be instrumental in guiding effective policy and program decisions.

The survey was useful in understanding the experiences of school leaders in leading schools during and after the Covid-19 pandemic. The researcher adopted a pragmatic paradigm (mixed method approach) where both quantitative and qualitative approaches were utilised. In epistemological orientation, quantitative researchers are objectivists and positivists in their research approach while qualitative researchers are subjectivists and interpretivist in their research approach (Creswell, 2009).

3.5 Target Population

Avedian (2014) defines a population as an entire collection of people or things that a researcher is interested in, which she wishes to describe, explain or predict. Population distribution is usually unknown; we make inferences about its characteristics such as the parameter. According to Alvi (2016) a target population refers to all the members who meet the particular criterion specified for a research investigation. Taherdoost (2016) views population as the larger whole that is made up of people or objects that share the same norms. It is a term used in research to refer to all the units making up one big group, thus, the whole group. It means all members that meet a set of specifications or a specified criterion. The population for the current study was comprised of six clusters found in Mzilikazi District. Each cluster has five primary schools on average to make a total of thirty schools in the District.

3.6 Sample

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) define a sample as a part of population that holds the same characteristic as the entire population. Taherdoost (2016) views a sample as a fraction of people selected from the targeted total population for measurement. It is this fraction that represents the whole population in any decisions that could be taken. Alvi (2016) defined a sample as a group of relatively smaller number of people selected from a population for investigation purpose. The decisions taken using the sample should be applicable to the entire population. Since it would be difficult to use the whole population to collect data, the sample used in a study allows the researcher to generalise the results to the entire population, (Creswell, 2007). Thus, when only some elements are selected from a population, we refer to that as a sample.

The sample for the current study was Mpopoma Cluster which has five primary schools. The respondents were composed of school leaders, namely five school heads, five deputy heads and five teachers in charge (TICs) from the five primary schools under study to make a total of fifteen respondents. This sample was appropriate because it met the requirements of a sample emphasised by Alvi (2016) who argues that a sample is said to be representative when the characteristics of elements selected are similar to that of entire target population. All the characteristics of the people in the sample are part of the population found in the schools that participated in the study. Thus, a sample is representative of the population that the researcher actually observes and is used to infer about the population (Avedian, 2014).

3.6.1 Sampling Procedures

Alvi (2016) defines sampling as the process through which a sample is extracted from a population. In investigation it is impossible to assess every single element of a population so a group of people (smaller in number than the population) is selected for the assessment. On the basis of information obtained from the sample, the inferences are drawn for the population (Alvi, 2016). Purposive sampling and random sampling were used in this research as sampling strategies.

Elder (2009) believes that any survey aimed at generalizing results drawn from a sample to the whole population of interest must be based on probability sampling. Therefore the researcher used random sampling to select the cluster that participated in the study. Elder (2009) argues that when using a probability sample, each element in the population has a known and non-zero chance of being selected into the sample. Each member of the population has the same chance of being included in the random sample. With a random sample, the first step is usually to try to find a sampling frame. The sampling frame for the study was made up of six clusters. The clusters were allocated alphabet names, A, B, C, D, E and F which were shuffled in a small box. The researcher asked a colleague to pick a name at random to determine which cluster was to be surveyed.

In purposive sampling, a specific case is chosen because it illustrates a process that is of interest for a particular study (Onwuegbuenzi and Leech, 2005). Taherdoost, (2016) views purposive sampling as a strategy in which particular settings, persons or events are selected deliberately in order to provide important information that cannot be obtained from other choices. Thus, the researcher purposefully included all the school leaders from the five primary schools in Mpopoma Cluster in the sample because she believed that they warranted inclusion because they were highly going to provide the necessary information.

3.7 Research Instruments

Pham (2018) defines a research instrument as a measuring device that is used to gather data. It is a tool used by the researcher to gather data so as to assist in finding out solutions to the identified problem. To answer and validate the research questions, data was collected from school heads, deputy heads and TICs. These three different categories of respondents allowed for triangulation. Information about the challenges being faced by school leaders was collected using semi-structured interviews which were elaborated and directed to the school heads whilst questionnaires were directed to deputy heads and TICs. These two instruments are briefly discussed below.

3.7.1 Interview

Onwuegbuenzi and Leech (2005) view an interview as one method of collecting qualitative data. It is the most preferred data gathering instrument as it permits interface between the researcher and the participant. Patton (2002) views an interview as a method of data collection in which the researcher interacts directly with the respondent in a face to face manner. The researcher is enabled to seek clarity to certain ideas put across by the participant and can gain in-depth understanding of the opinions of his or her participants.

Thus, the researcher can further probe the respondents where responses are not clear so that he or she has a better understanding of the respondents' perceptions. Cassel and Symon (2005) indicate that respondents usually prefer interviews to questionnaires because it does not involve the burden of writing responses.

The researcher elects to use the semi-structured interview amongst other interview types such as structured and unstructured interviews because of its flexibility. Bryman (2018) views a semi-structured interview guide as an instrument in which the interviewer can deviate from the formalized list of questions. Flick (2014) indicates that semi-structured interviews are interviews that use an interview protocol to help guide the researcher through the interview process. Although it maintains some structure, it also gives the researcher an opportunity to probe the participant for additional details through side conversations. Further probing allows the researcher to have a deeper understanding of the participants in terms of their behaviours, thoughts and relations (Hyett, Kenny and Dickson-Swift, 2014). Semi-structured interviews gave school heads the freedom to express their views hence the researcher was able to get reliable, comparable qualitative data.

The choice of semi-structured rather than structured interview was employed because it offers sufficient flexibility to approach different respondents differently while still covering the same areas of data collection (Crowe et al., 2011). The interviews were recorded using a mobile phone to secure an accurate account of the conversations and avoid losing data since not everything can be written down during interviews.

3.7.2 Questionnaire

Avedian (2014) defines a questionnaire as a document containing questions and other types of items designed to solicit information appropriate for analysis. Abawi (2014) defines a questionnaire as a data collection instrument consistent of a series of questions and other prompts for the purpose of gathering information from respondents. A questionnaire allows a researcher to collect complete and accurate data in a logical flow. This is done in order to reach reliable conclusions from what a researcher is planning to observe. Abawi (2014) highlights that each question in a questionnaire should contribute to testing one or more hypothesis or research question established in the research design. Questionnaires can be open-ended or closed-ended, structured or unstructured. Open-ended questionnaires have questions for which the respondent is asked to provide his or her own answers whilst closed-ended questionnaires have questions in which the respondent is asked to select an answer from among a list provided by the researcher (Avedian, 2014).

The researcher utilised a semi structured questionnaire which uses both open-ended and closed-ended questions (Involve, 2020). Respondents having adequate time to give well thought out answers is one of the major advantages of the questionnaire. Since the respondents, the deputy heads and TICs in this case are going to answer the questionnaires at their own spare time they will be in a position to find convenient time to answer the questionnaires objectively (Trigueros, 2017). Questionnaires will afford them enough time to give well thought out responses unlike face to face interviews. The fact that questionnaires can be used on large samples increases the reliability of the results to generalise them to the larger population. Trigueros (2017) argues that large samples can be made use of and thus the results can be made more dependable and reliable.

3.8 Data Collection Procedures

The researcher first obtained permission from the Provincial Education Director of Bulawayo Metropolitan Province to gain access to schools selected for the research study and also notify the District Schools Inspector. She then approached the school heads of the schools under study to seek authority to carry out interviews as well as distributing the questionnaires and also invited them to participate in the study.

The researcher made appointments for interviews with the school heads at their own convenient time and left a sample of the interview questions with them. The interviews were conducted face to face with the school heads. The researcher used verbatim transcriptions to record the participants' responses and this facilitated accuracy of the collected data. She also audio recorded the interviews with the consent of the respondents for later transcription and analysis. Questionnaires were distributed to deputy heads and TICs on the days they were on duty at their school as the study was carried out during the Covid-19 lockdown. Collection of the questionnaires was also done when the respondents were on duty at their respective stations.

3.9 Validity and Reliability

3.9.1 Validity

Validity is the degree to which a study accurately reflects or assesses the specific concept that the researcher is attempting to measure (Noble and Smith, 2015). In support, Sekaram (2015) points out that validity is concerned with the ability of an instrument to test or measure what it is intended to measure. Validity will therefore determine if the research instrument measures what it is supposed to measure. Validity can be viewed as the extent to which an empirical measure adequately reflects the real meaning of the concept under consideration (Babbie, 2014). In agreement, Sekaram (2015) adds that it is the degree to which the researcher has measured what he has set out to measure. In other words, the degree to which research results can be generalized to the population concerns validity of a research. Validity of data collection instruments refers to the extent to which the question items in the instruments adequately reflect the real meaning of the concepts under consideration (Babbie, 2014).

It therefore implies that in this study, the researcher was concerned about the extent to which the measurement instruments and the items they contained were representative of the content domain the researcher intended to measure. To ensure validity the researcher therefore used triangulation. Triangulation may be defined as the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour (Cohen et al, 2007:141). Furthermore, Merriam and Tisdell (2015) posit that triangulation refers to the combination of two or more theories, data source, methods or investigators in one study of a phenomenon to converge on a single construct and can be employed in both quantitative (validation) and qualitative (inquiry) studies. The process of triangulation hence is often used to point out that two or more methods will be used in a study with a view to double or triple check outcomes, also referred to as cross checking. Thus, data collected from school heads, deputy heads and TICs was triangulated to increase validity of the results.

3.9.2 Reliability

Reliability is about whether a technique, applied repeatedly to the same object, yields the same results each time (Babbie, 2014: 143). On the same foot, Noble and Smith (2015) refer to reliability as the extent to which an experiment, test or any measuring procedure produces the same result on repeated trials.

They further state that reliability is the consistency, constancy, dependability, accuracy and precision with which an instrument measures the target‘s attributes. Reliability means that administering the same instrument by various researchers will provide the same results under comparable conditions (Babbie, 2014). In other words, reliability of data collection instruments therefore relates to the application of a valid measuring tool to different groups of people under different situations to produce the same results.

To ensure reliability in this study, the researcher developed the questionnaire in consultation with the research supervisor. The questions regarded as unclear or verge by the supervisor were corrected accordingly. The researcher made an effort to increase reliability of the data collection instruments discussed above by carrying out a pilot study at the researcher’s school. This afforded her the opportunity to identify ambiguities in the instruction, clarify the wording of questions and enabled her to indicate omissions and previously unanticipated answers. Following the pilot testing, the whole questionnaire and interview schedule were redirected and the suggested changes incorporated to assemble the final instruments.

3.10 Data Analysis Procedures

Based on the information that was obtained from the respondents all the reported challenges were classified into different categories according to the dictates of research questions. Based on the information that was obtained from the interviews and questionnaires all the reported challenges were transcribed and then themes used according to the research questions. This helped to reduce data into manageable summaries. The predominantly quantitative descriptive statistics from questionnaires were summarized to find patterns to it.

Specifically, the descriptive statistics that were used to describe the data were the percentages and frequencies. The analysed data was then presented in the form of tables and graphs where applicable. Narrative analysis was used to analyse the predominantly qualitative data from interviews. It involved identifying broad concepts or phrases from the respondents and then assigning codes to them. Once this was done, the researcher then identified themes, looking for the most common responses to questions, identified data or patterns that answered research questions. Thus, the researcher explained findings verbatim, outlining trends and providing contextual information.

3.11 Ethics Considerations

It is always imperative to have ethical considerations in mind when conducting a research study. The following ethical considerations were observed.

3.11.1 Confidentiality

Confidentiality means that any identifying information is not made available to, or accessed by anyone but the researcher (Akaranga and Makau, 2016). It also ensures that identifying information is excluded from any reports or published documents. It refers to refraining from referring to informants by their names or divulging any other sensitive information about them (Mugenda, 2003). Thus, the confidentiality of the information supplied by the informants and the anonymity of the informants will be respected. In order to create confidentiality, necessary ethical clearance was done by briefing to the respondents.

3.11.2 Informed Consent

Informed consent means that the person participating in the study is fully informed about the study being conducted. According to Akaranga and Makau (2016) informed consent implies the fact that a person knowingly, voluntarily, intelligently, and in a clear and manifest way, gives his or her consent. Participants need to be made aware of the purpose of the study, how the findings would be used and who will have access to the findings.

The main purpose of informed consent is that the participant is able to make an informed decision as to whether they will participate in the study or not (Mugenda, 2003). An individual should at no point feel any coercion to participate in the study. This includes any type of persuasion or deception in attempting to gain an individual's trust. The researcher utilised verbal consent from the participants for this research study.

3.11.3 Protection from Harm

The research design needs to consider the potential of harm to the participants, the researcher, the wider community, and the institution. The harm can range from physical, resource loss (including time), emotional, and reputational. When considering the potential for harm, the approach should be, in descending order, to eliminate, isolate and minimize the risk, with the participants being fully informed on what the risks are (Akaranga and Makau, 2016).

3.12 Summary

This chapter has identified the methodology that was used in the study. Pragmatism was adopted as the research paradigm for this study. The reasons for adopting the survey research design were discussed. The chapter outlined the target population and the procedures that were adopted for sample selection. Attempts were made to justify the data collection research instruments that were used in the study namely the interview guide and semi-structured questionnaire. Data collection and analysis procedures were also explained and ethical considerations noted. The next chapter looks at the presentation, interpretation and discussion of findings.

CHAPTER 4
DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.0 Introduction

The focus of this chapter is to present, analyse and interpret data based on an examination of the challenges that were being faced by school administrators in managing primary schools in Mpopoma Cluster as they responded to the adverse impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the education system. Data were generated from interviews with school administrators, teachers' questionnaires and learners' focus group discussion.

4.1 Presentation of Demographic Data

4.1.1 Distribution of Respondents by Gender

The table below presents the distribution of respondents by gender.

Table 4.1: Distribution of Respondents by Gender

Gender	**Frequency**	**%**
Female	26	74
Male	9	26
Total	**35**	**100**

Table 4.1 above shows the dominance of females (74%) in the study with males making up 26% of the study sample. The gender imbalance was great (48%). The category of teachers and school administrators contributed more females whilst the learners contributed the most males. These gender imbalances are associated with urban schools were females dominate staff compliments in urban schools. It is usually caused by the priority given to females for them to move closer to their spouses.

4.1.2 Distribution of Respondents by Experience

Respondents with vast experience are expected to give to be proactive in handling challenges that come their way. The majority of the respondents had work experience exceeding twenty years. Figure 4.1 shows the summary of the respondents' work experience.

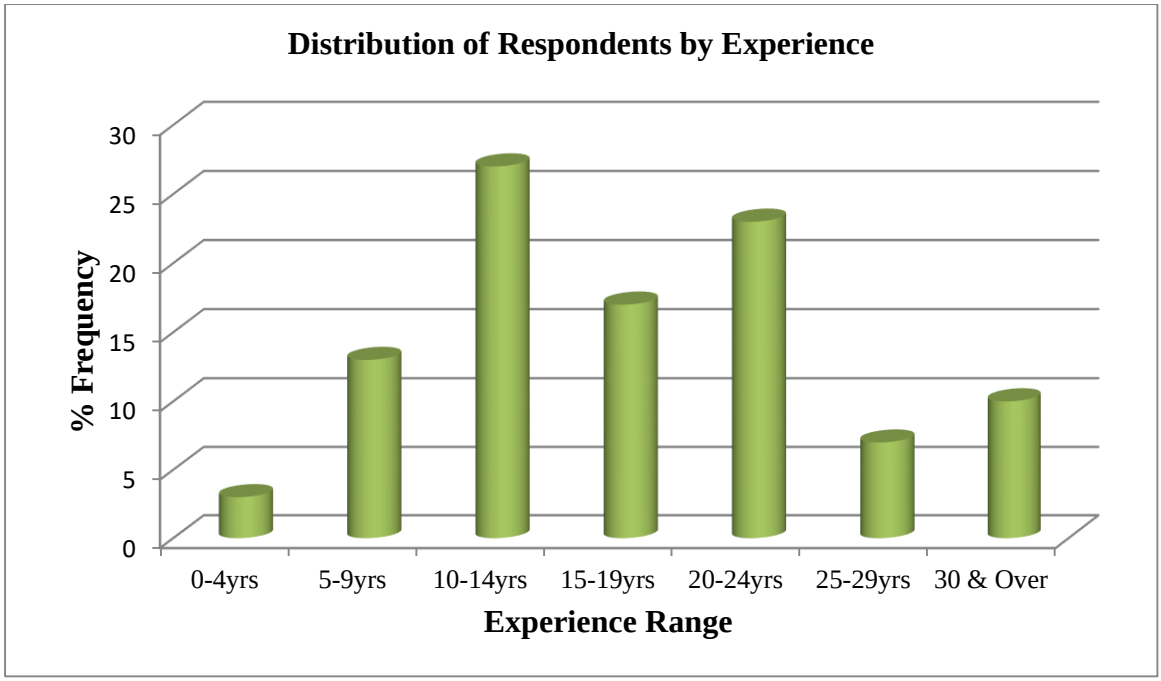

Figure 4.1: Distribution of Respondents by Experience

Figure 4.1 above shows that most of the respondents (27%) were in the experience range 10-14 years, 23% in the 20-24years range, 17% in the 15-19years range, 13% in the 5-9 years range, 10% in the 30 and over years range, 7% in the 25-29 year range and the least experienced (3%) in the 0-4years experience range. It can be concluded from the data that the experiences of the respondents was good enough for all of them to handle challenges coming their way in the management of schools. Both teachers and school administrators were mature enough to find lasting solutions to a myriad of challenges they would be facing in the teaching and learning process.

4.2 Research Findings

4.2.1 Barriers to Effective Design and Implementation of School Programmes

Figure 4.2 below shows responses by deputy heads and TICs concerning their evaluations of the Covid-19 crisis management at their schools.

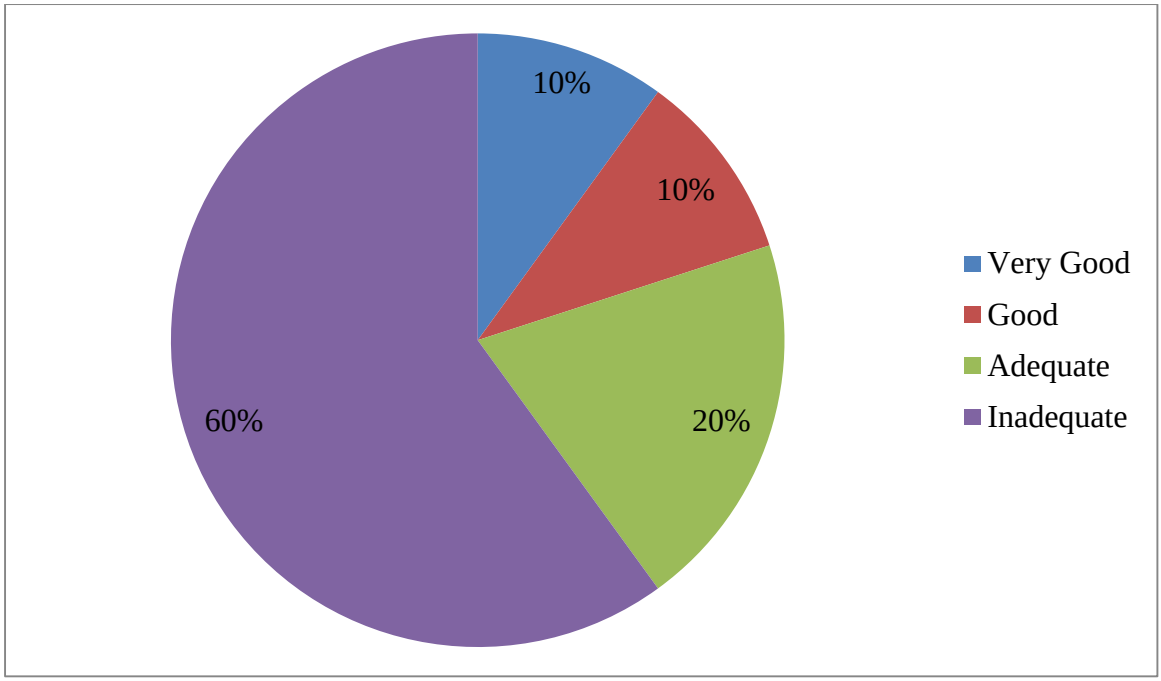

Figure 4.2: Evaluation of Covid-19 Crisis Management by Deputy Heads and TICs

Figure 4.2 shows that the majority of the deputy heads and TICs combined (60%) indicated that the management of covid-19 at their schools was inadequate, 20% adequate and those who reported good and very good accounted for 10% each of the respondents respectively. Their responses were supported by almost all the school heads (80%) who reported that their schools could not meet the requirements of the SOPs which were mandatory for schools to be allowed to operate. They highlighted that there was a need for extra resources to manage the demands of Covid-19. These included additional cleaning and sanitising regimes as well as face masks and infra-red thermometers. Some of the school heads' comments are as follows;

School Head A

It is extremely difficult to meet all the requirements of the SOPs considering that we are not getting much from fees. For instance, if I am to provide three masks per learner for the one thousand and sixty four learners in my school, I will be left with nothing to pay bills and rates as well as providing instructional material. It is really tough for us.

School Head B

These are stressful times for us because we are not getting enough financial support to be able to provide things like PPEs, masks, thermometers, sanitizers and soaps. These are materials which were not there in the past. It is a big challenge providing PPEs to both staff and learners considering our enrolment one thousand one hundred and three and a staff compliment of thirty eight.

School Head C

It is nearly impossible to be able to provide all the SOPs requirements without government support. We are supposed to provide both learners and teachers with masks, sanitizers, hand wash soap and have thermometers for checking temperatures for everyone who enters the school premises. These are extra resources which we are not prepared to fund since we have always been struggling financially even before the pandemic hit us.

School Head D

The covid-19 pandemic came with extra costs as we have to provide PPEs such as face masks, sanitizers and thermometers. The truth is we cannot afford to provide all these as a school.

School Head E

We our trying our best to ensure that all the necessary PPEs are in place. So far we are managing well enough to ensure the safety of both learners and the staff.

It emerged in the study that schools were struggling to provide basic COVID-19 requirements for a school to be allowed to re-open as recommended by SOPs. These include adequate personal protective equipment (PPE) such as liquid soap, face masks, and sanitisers for learners and teachers as well as infra-red thermometer.

These were extra costs which schools were not prepared for in their operations. In agreement with the above, OCHA (2020) asserts that schools were facing an increased financial burden to implement all the recommended measures to mitigate against the spread of the disease. In concurrence with OCHA (2020), Sharp (2020) contends that disadvantaged schools faced challenges in procuring PPEs such as face masks, sanitizers, hand wash liquid and surface disinfectants.

The extra cost to address the educational and protection needs induced by COVID-19 was a big challenge for the schools under study. Since they were always struggling financially before the on-set of the covid-19 pandemic, the culmination of the pandemic has made the situation worse as it came with an extra cost as schools are forced to avail resources to provide personal protective equipment (PPEs) which are a prerequisite for any school to be allowed to operate.

All the school heads reported that the requirement for regular intensive cleaning of all surfaces and areas frequented by learners was hard to schedule. They indicated that scheduling the cleaning times was difficult since the learners were using the different facilities at different intervals. There was hardly any free time when most of the facilities were not in use for intensive cleaning to take place. Two school heads out of five noted that sometimes learners would lose learning time whilst waiting for cleaning to be done in shared facilities such as computer laboratories.

Adhering to all the covid-19 protocols was proving to be cumbersome in schools. Schools were forced to adjust all their school programs to suit the new normal. Besides the issues of social distancing and general movement around schools, school leaders faced the considerable challenges of scheduling and following the regular intensive cleaning of all surfaces and areas frequented by learners. School leaders noted that it was difficult to balance the SOPs requirements that involve additional cleaning and sanitisation of frequently touched surfaces in the schools because of Covid-19. This was a new normal necessary to minimise the risks of infections in schools.

Sharp (2020) discovered that this was causing a lot of challenges in balancing cleaning times and learning because of the staggered starting, breaking and finishing times in schools. Similarly, Harris and Jones (2020) assert that it was difficult to schedule cleaning and disinfecting of areas such as ablution facilities and classrooms at intervals since learners were also scheduled to use these same facilities at different intervals leaving no time for intensive cleaning. It was therefore stressful for school leaders to adhere to the schedules they would have created considering that it was a necessary programme for the safety of both learners and staff members. The requirement for social distancing in the schools was reported by all the school leaders as problematic. They indicated that they were forced to split and divide classes into small groups since the existing infrastructure could not accommodate the required one metre distancing with all learners present.

One of the school heads went on to add that even the muted idea by government of providing tents which never materialised was not feasible without additional staff. Four school heads summarily reported that additional infrastructure and staff were required to ensure social distancing is managed appropriately without disturbing the teaching and learning process.

The covid-19 protocols that required schools to strictly exercise social distancing was nightmare for most of the school leaders. The existing infrastructure in the schools could not accommodate the recommended one metre distancing. The available classrooms were too small for physical distancing sitting arrangements. Sharp (2020) also maintains that the layout of many school buildings, when full, makes this difficult to exercise physical distancing in the existing classroom. In support of the view by Sharp (2020), a similar view were held by Soland et al. (2020) who assert that the structure of many existing school buildings were not appropriate if one wanted to maintain physical distancing. As result, schools were forced to split and divide classes into smaller groups to accommodate the recommended one-metre distancing between staff and between staff and learners. These arrangements were difficult to implement efficiently considering time and space constraints in the schools under study. Thus, the Covid-19 protocols that emphasise on physical or social distancing were not easy to implement and supervise considering the space restrictions within the schools.

All the school leaders reported that their learners were behind where they would normally expect them to be in their curriculum learning. They expressed converging sentiments that the compressed syllabi introduced by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education to cater for the lost teaching and learning time during covid-19 induced school closures was not helping at all in the catch up exercise. It was the opposite. The school heads reported that learners were further falling behind because of less time spent at school because of the alternating system of attending school for only three days on average. The alternating system of school attendance was necessitated by the classes that were split into small groups in adherence to covid-19 social distancing requirements.

All the school leaders acknowledged that the reorganization of the curriculum by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education to accommodate the revised school calendar was far from helping with the catch-up program to make up for teaching and learning time lost during school lockdown closures. They complained that even though the compressed syllabi were meant to catch up on missed learning days, social distancing meant that the school timetables had learners alternating days in school which gave them less time for contact learning. Sharp (2020) noted that most learners were behind in their education where they would normally be expected to be in their curriculum learning in a normal situation. The implication of this situation was that the learning days that had been lost will not be compensated as schools continued losing hours because of the alternating system of attending school. This was also discovered by OCHA (2020) which argues that satisfying requirements for social/physical distancing in schools in the wake of infrastructure constraints exacerbated the problem of lost teaching and learning time because of the system of alternating days in school which reduced learning time instead of increasing time to compensate for lost time during school closures. In support of views by OCHA (2020), Sharp et al. (2020) argues that no matter how hard schools try to cover the full curriculum, their efforts were likely to be limited by social distancing. Learners were losing more learning time because of the reduced number of contact learning per week, to modify expectations of schools providing a broad and balanced curriculum while social distancing is in force. Thus,

Figure 4.3 shows responses from deputy heads and TICs concerning the impact of covid-19 on learner dropout rate compared to the academic years before the Covid-19 pandemic.

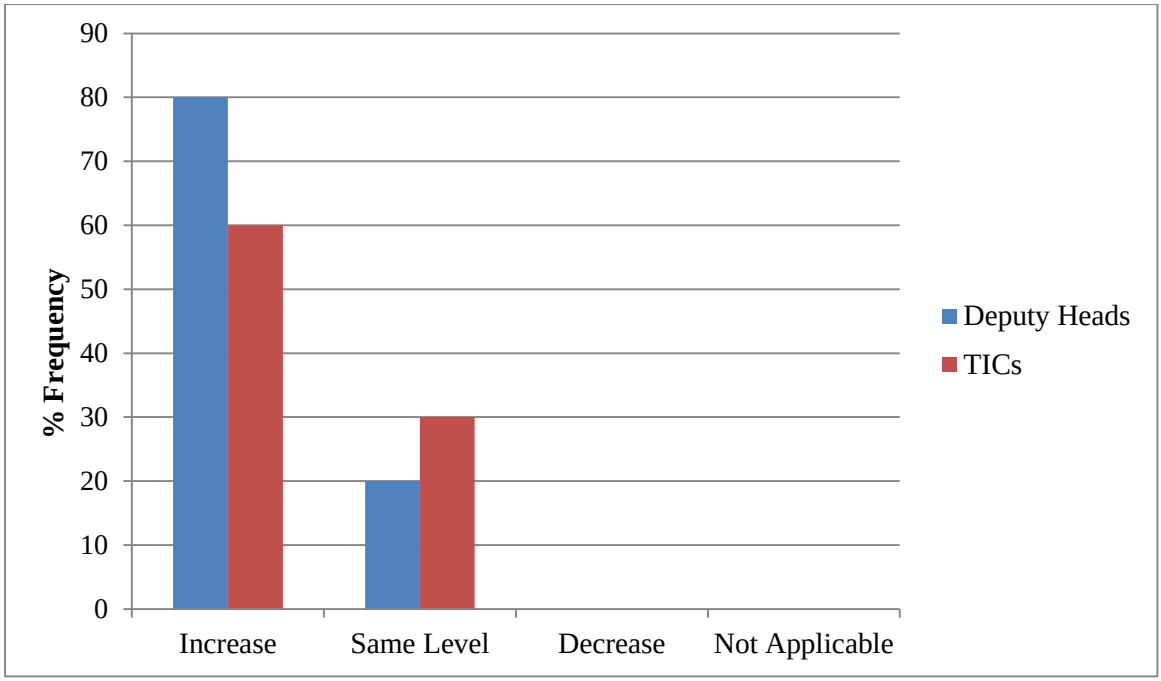

Figure 4.3: Responses from Deputy Heads and TICs concerning the impact of covid-19 on learner dropout rate compared to the academic years before the Covid-19 pandemic

Figure 4.3 shows that most of the deputy heads (80%) and TICs (60%) indicated that the pandemic caused an increase in learner dropout compared to the academic years before the Covid-19 pandemic whilst only 20% of the deputy heads and 30% of the TICs intimated that the dropout rate was at the same level as the previous years. This reported increase in dropout rate entailed that school leaders had to make follow ups on such learners to bring them back to school. Nearly all the school heads (80%) also gave the same report and added that they were in a difficult position with regard to school dropouts since they are required to make follow ups to ensure that such learners are brought back to school. Three school heads (60%) went on to indicate that the issue of dropouts was an extra burden to their already busy schedule complicated by the impact of the covid-19 pandemic. They explained that contacting and communicating with the parents of the school dropouts was an extra burden consuming some of their time they could be using to attend to other complex covid-19 induced needs.

The findings show that school leaders were concerned about the time they had to spend on contacting and communicating with the parents of school dropouts with the intention of bringing them back to school yet they had a myriad of other issues to attend to.

The school leaders reported an increase in school dropouts compared to other years before the onset of the covid-19 pandemic forcing them to put measures in place to follow up with such learners and their parents to try and get the learners back to school as per Ministry requirement. They felt that this was significantly consuming some of their time considering that they had a lot of issues to attend to in response to covid-19 effects. The same phenomenon was reported by Sharp et al. (2020) who highlight that contacting and liaising with parents of school drop outs was a large and time-consuming task at a time when schools were managing many other complex issues during Covid-19 pandemic.

All the school heads expressed shock at the way service providers were hiking the prices of their goods and services. Considering that schools had to supply PPEs for both learners and staff members such as masks and sanitisers, it was hard for schools to afford them. The school heads reported that the situation was made worse by the fact that parents were not forthcoming in paying fees hence schools were not receiving much of income. They indicated that the hike in prices of goods and services was stressful for them as they tried their best to make ends meet. They were having a hard time balancing the payments of bills and rates with purchasing PPEs and educational materials.

Research findings show that schools were struggling to meet their needs when it comes to resources. These include purchasing PPEs and education material because of the ever rising costs of goods and services. School leaders were worried about the way service providers were increasing their prices. They found it tough to balance payments of rates and purchasing teaching and learning materials. It was even more difficult purchasing goods following the laid down procurement procedures as most suppliers were refusing to give quotations and if they did, they lasted for twenty four hours only. In a similar study carried out in South Africa by Mukute, Francis, Burt and de Souza (2020), they found out that the rapidly depreciating local currency in that country was forcing service providers to increase their prices, with negative implications for school preparedness efforts as goods and services were rising each week.

4.2.2 Challenges Faced in Ensuring Continued Teaching and Learning during the Covid-19 Pandemic

Figure 4.4 presents results of deputy heads and TICs concerning the extent to which the covid-19 pandemic impacted their school financially in terms of income and expenditure.

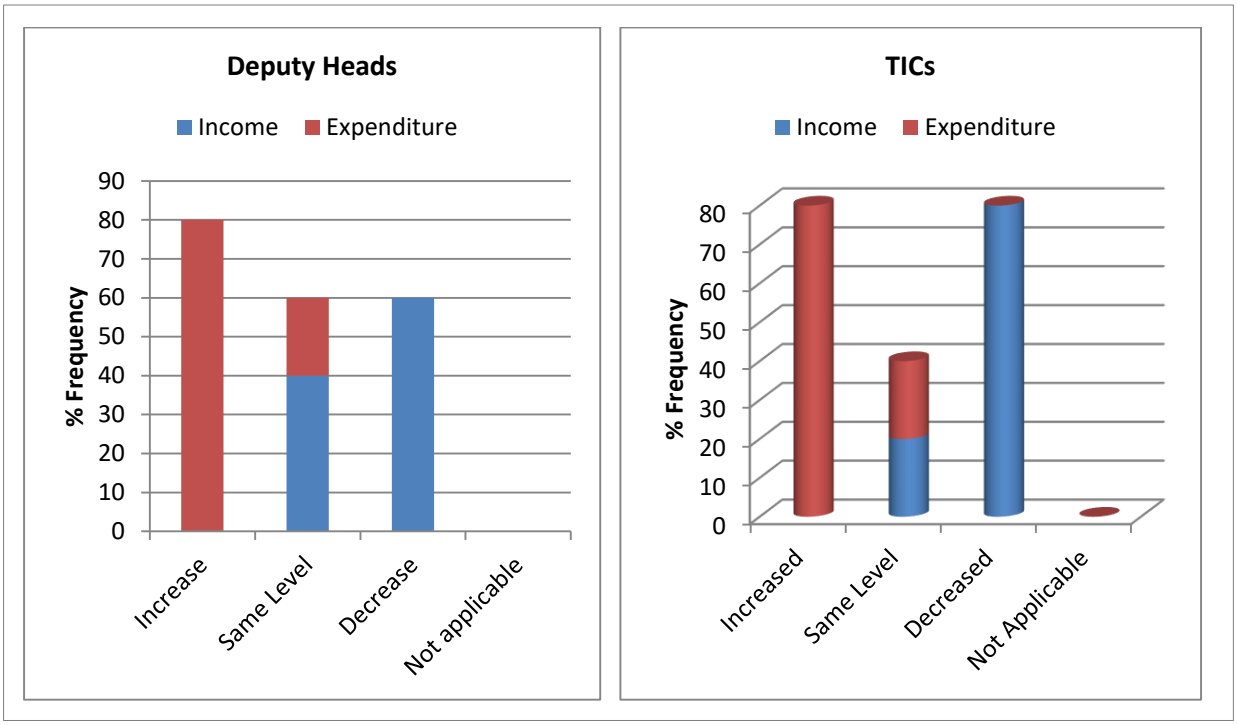

Figure 4.4: Responses of Deputy Heads and TICs concerning Impact of Covid-19 on School Income and Expenditure

Figure 4.4 shows that most deputy-heads (60%) and TICs (80%) indicated that their school income decreased because of the impact of covid-19 and 40% deputy heads and 20% TICs indicated that their school income had remained at the same level as before. While the results show that school income decreased, expenditure on the other hand increased as reported by 80% of the deputy heads and 80% TICs. Only 20% deputy heads and 20% TICs reported expenditure remaining at the same level. The decrease in income and the increase in expenditure was also reported by all the school heads who indicated that payment of fees was slow while at the same time schools had to meet the extra cost of providing PPEs such as masks, sanitizers, hand washing soap and thermometers.

The covid-19 pandemic resulted in the requirement for additional resources that included funding for additional cleaning and protective equipment and online learning resources such as data bundles or Wi-Fi. Thus, the cost of additional resource needs represented an increase in total expenditure for the school heads. They noted that government intervention was insignificant.

Schools were finding it difficult to satisfy the requirements set in the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) which guide schools on how to conduct business whilst ensuring the safety for all in schools as well as failing to provide teaching and learning materials. The major reason being that income decreased and expenditure increased because of the impact of covid-19. For learning to continue, schools had to ensure that they provided PPEs such as masks to teachers and learners as well as sanitisers and hand washing facilities. The school leaders complained that this was putting a strain to the already tight budgets in their schools considering that they were not receiving much of fees inflows because of the lockdowns and other economic related reasons. The same problems were revealed by Carvalho (2020) who claims that coordination and resources were critical components of emergency response such as the Covid-19 pandemic, but evidence shows immense challenges regarding resources. Carvalho (2020) believes that if education systems are to build back better, then resources available for education will need to be maintained or, in some cases, increased. It was not the case for school under study where school leaders indicated that they could not afford to provide all the required PPEs hence they were always in a dilemma of how to ensure everybody was safe for learning to continue. The PPEs were a prerequisite for any school to be allowed to operate.

Figure 4.5 shows responses from school heads, deputy heads and TICs combined concerning whether teachers were able to teach to their usual standards or not since they returned to teaching in school after the covid-19 induced lockdowns.

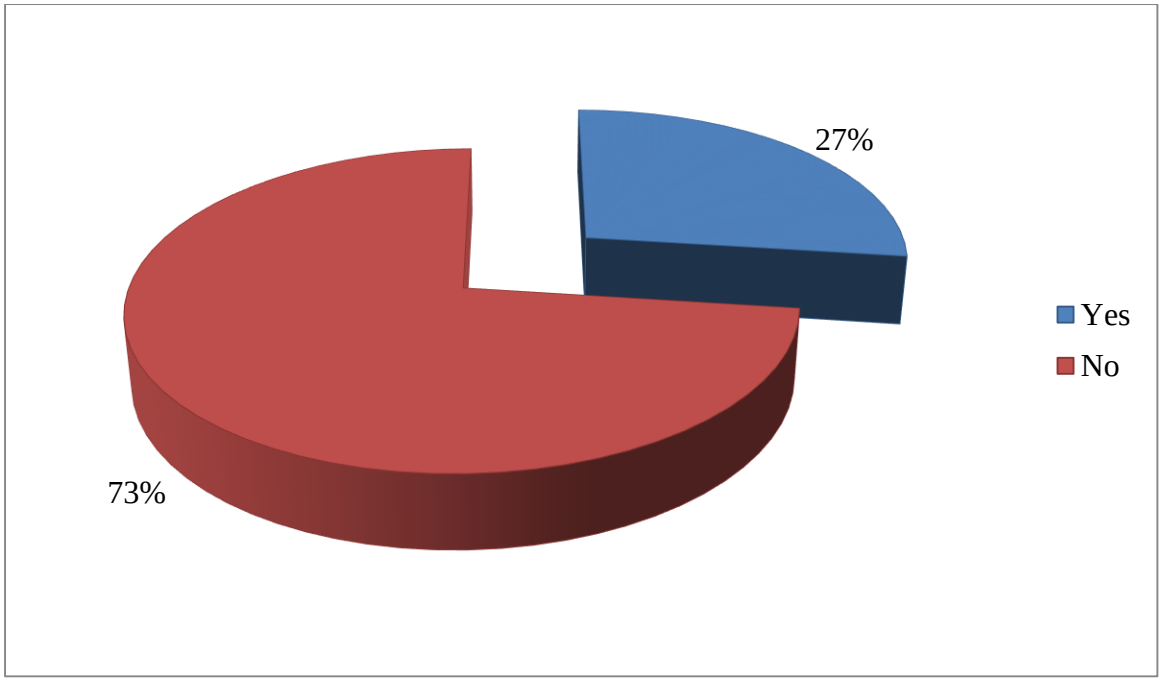

Figure 4.5: responses from school heads, deputy heads and TICs combined concerning whether teachers were able to teach to their usual standards

The results in figure 4.5 show that the majority of the respondents (73%) felt that teachers were not able to teach to their usual standards since they returned to teaching in school after the covid-19 induced lockdowns. A minority (27%) indicated 'Ýes' meaning that they were managing to teach to their usual standards. The school heads further highlighted that teachers were not managing to teach to their fullest under the covid-19 regulations that were in force. They noted that teachers were no longer able to utilise effective teaching methods such as group work and pair work or even move around the classroom to teach, support and interact with their learners as usual. Worse still, learners were not allowed to share the few textbooks that were available. Thus, the covid-19 pandemic in a way was compromising the quality of in-school teaching.

Responses from the school leaders show that Covid-19 negatively affected the quality of in-school teaching as teachers could hardly teach to their normal standards because of the Covid-19 restrictions. School leaders indicated that teachers were no longer making use of some of the major core elements in their teaching such as pair work, group work or allowing learners to share scarce resources such as textbooks.

Sharp et al. (2020) share the same findings as they found out that teachers did not feel able to teach to their usual standard under the Covid-19 regulations that were in force. The social distancing requirements negatively impacted their teaching practices. Sharp et al (2020) notes that teachers were no longer able to utilise core elements of their teaching practices such as group work and practical work, nor did they feel able to move around the classroom to teach, support and interact with their learners effectively. The situation was made worse by the shortage of resources such as textbooks as learners were not allowed to share resources as they would usually do.

Deputy heads and TICs were asked to share their views with regard to resources at teachers' disposal to support teaching and learning. The results are shown in figure 4.6 below.

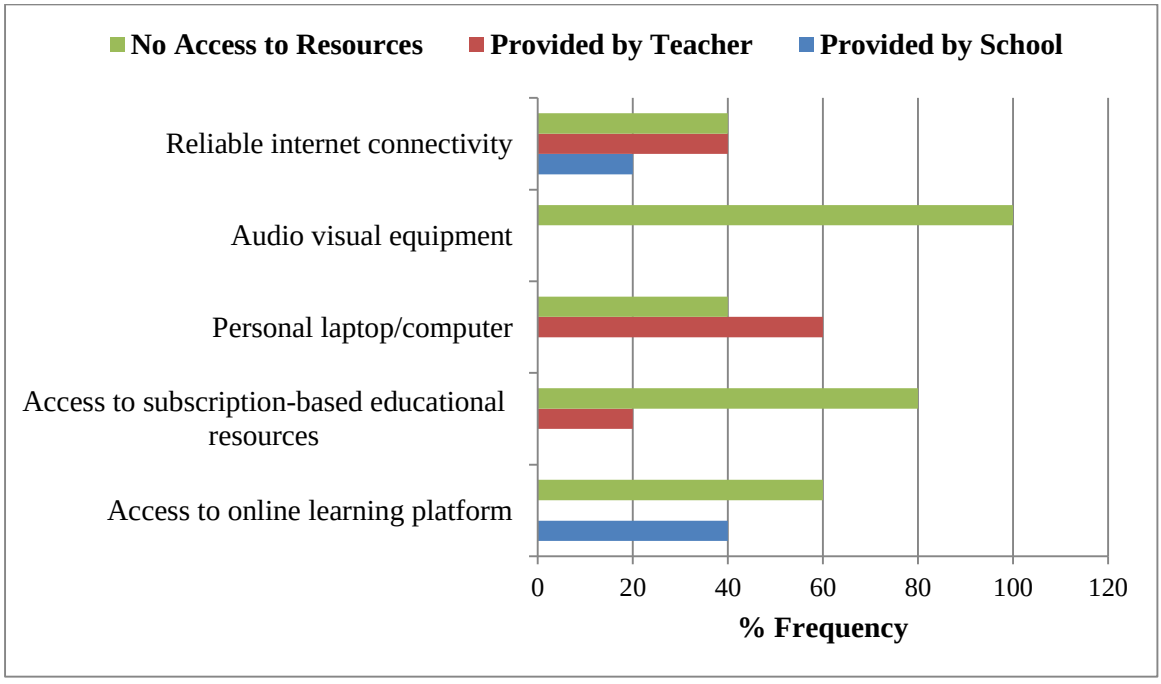

Figure 4.6: Responses of Deputy Heads and TICs on Rresources at Teachers' Disposal

A significant number of the respondents (40%) indicated that teachers had no access to reliable internet connectivity and another 40% indicated that it was provided by the teachers whilst only 20% indicated that reliable internet connectivity was provided by the school. All the respondents (100%) indicated that they had no access to audio visual equipment. Most of the respondents (60%) also indicated that they provided their own personal computers/laptop for online learning and the rest (40%) indicated that had no access to such gadgets.

Almost all the respondents (80%) reported that teachers had no access to subscription-based educational resources whilst a mere (20%) indicated that the resource was provided by the teacher. Most of the respondents (60%) indicated that teachers had no access to online learning platforms whilst 40% indicated that teachers were provided with access to online learning platform by the schools. The results show that there was a shortage of online learning resources for teachers to effectively implement online learning. The findings reveal that schools were in a dilemma regarding putting together plans on how to deal with measures to support learners including the extent of interventions other than classroom teaching. The two schools that were conducting online learning were encountering a lot of problems that included lack of funds to connect to the internet and shortage of gadgets such as smart phones and computers resulting in learners not responding to work given to them and teachers not being able to send work. This was also discovered by Simango and Mwareya (2020) who claim that efforts by school leaders to support their schools aside from normal classroom teaching through on-line learning were being hampered by the lack of funds. This is echoed by E-Learning Africa (2020) when it says that the schools could not afford the high cost of internet access.

Although these schools tried their best to offer online learning, they did not have the capacity to offer effective online learning. OECD (2020) also confirms that schools in disadvantaged or deprived areas lacked the appropriate digital capacity and infrastructure required to deliver teaching remotely. In addition, Subedi et al. (2020) highlights that obstacles such as the weakness of online teaching infrastructure, the limited exposure of teachers to online teaching and the information gap affected the effectiveness of online learning. School leaders felt that there was a need for government support with digital equipment to ensure that all schools could communicate effectively with learners, staff and parents. There was little time to cover the whole curriculum with in-class learning only considering that a lot of learning time was lost during covid-19 lockdowns. The study reveals that there was a lack of dedicated time from schools to provide for learning hours after school through online learning. Responses to online learning by learners and parents from the two schools that were conducting online learning were not fruitful. Table 4.2 shows responses from deputy Heads and TICs with regard to measures taken to facilitate access of learners to online distance learning infrastructure.

Table 4.2: Deputy Heads and TICs Responses on Measures taken to Facilitate Access of Learners to Online Distance Learning Infrastructure

Category	Frequency	%
Offer/negotiate access to internet at subsidized or zero cost	0	0
Make access to distance learning platforms available through landline	0	0
Make access to distance learning platforms available through mobile phones	4	40
Subsidized/free devices for access	0	0
No measures taken	6	60

The majority of the respondents (60%) who were generally from the schools who were not offering online learning indicated that no measures were taken to facilitate access of learners to online learning. Only 40% of the respondents indicated that their schools were making access to online learning platforms available through mobile phones. None of the respondents intimated that their schools were offering access to internet at subsidized or zero cost, making access to distance learning platforms available through landline or offering subsidized/free devices for access. Relative to the above results, school heads reported that since schools could do nothing to assist learners in terms of online resources such as smart phones and access to the internet, the engagement of learners in online learning was very low. This was evidenced by the low rate of learners who submitted their online work to their teachers during in-school learning. The school heads noted that the major reason behind learners not responding to online learning was it was not affordable. The evidence from the study reveals that online learning was not being a success because parents and learners did not have adequate digital resources such as smart phones and internet connection. School leaders reported that most parents were complaining that the new learning method was not affordable. Subedi et al. (2020) argue that non-conducive environment for learning at home affected learners to effectively take part in online learning. In concurrence, Mukeredzi and Mashininga (2020) assert that some learners were struggling to follow up internet lessons in homes where power cuts were frequent and internet data bundles were expensive.

In agreement Murgatrotd (2020) claims that many countries have substantial issues with a reliable internet connection and access to digital devices. The same view is held by Doucet et al. (2020) who opine that the cost of data was comparatively high against average income earned by most people and continuous access to internet was a costly business for most learners. The situation was exacerbated considering that there was less income for a huge population due to covid-19 induced closures of businesses and offices. The reality on the ground with regard to online learning was that despite the move being a noble undertaking, this home-based online learning system was a nightmare for many learners. Sharp et al. (2020) claim that the majority of learners were expected to learn at home throughout the school closures, but learner engagement in remote learning was low as a few learners returned their last piece of set work when schools reopened. For many of the parents, it was a choice between using the money to buy food for their families and forking out money each month to purchase data bundles or home Wi-Fi.

One of the major challenges reported by all the school heads was that their schools were financially handicapped because the parents were also finding it difficult to raise school fees since most of them were unemployed because of the impact of covid-19. They indicated that this was making it difficult for them to operate in the schools as they could not balance all their needs such as paying bills and providing other educational needs. The heads also revealed that they were not getting any special covid-19 funding from government to alleviate their plight. The study revealed that most parents were struggling to pay fees in schools because of the effects of Covid-19 on the economic system of the country. School leaders made an outcry that fees inflows were slow at their schools making it difficult for schools to operate. The situation was made worse by inadequate funding to address the educational and protection needs induced by COVID-19 which made it extremely difficult for the school leaders to ensure continuous learning. In line with the above findings, OCHA (2020) argues that the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted both the health and economic systems whereby schools which traditionally rely on payment of fees to fund their daily operations, faced a dire time with parents' inability to pay school fees because of the economic hardships they were facing. This weakened the efforts of the schools to provide Covid-19 materials needed in the schools as well as the education materials needed especially at a time when learning materials were critically needed for effective learning.

Inadequate collection of fees to address the educational and protection needs induced by COVID-19 was a big obstacle in ensuring continuous learning, paying bills and rates.

4.2.3 Challenges faced in Ensuring Equal Access to Education during Covid-19 Pandemic

The deputy heads and the TICs were asked to say their views in connection with learning gaps between disadvantaged learners and their peers. Their responses are illustrated in Figure 4.7 below.

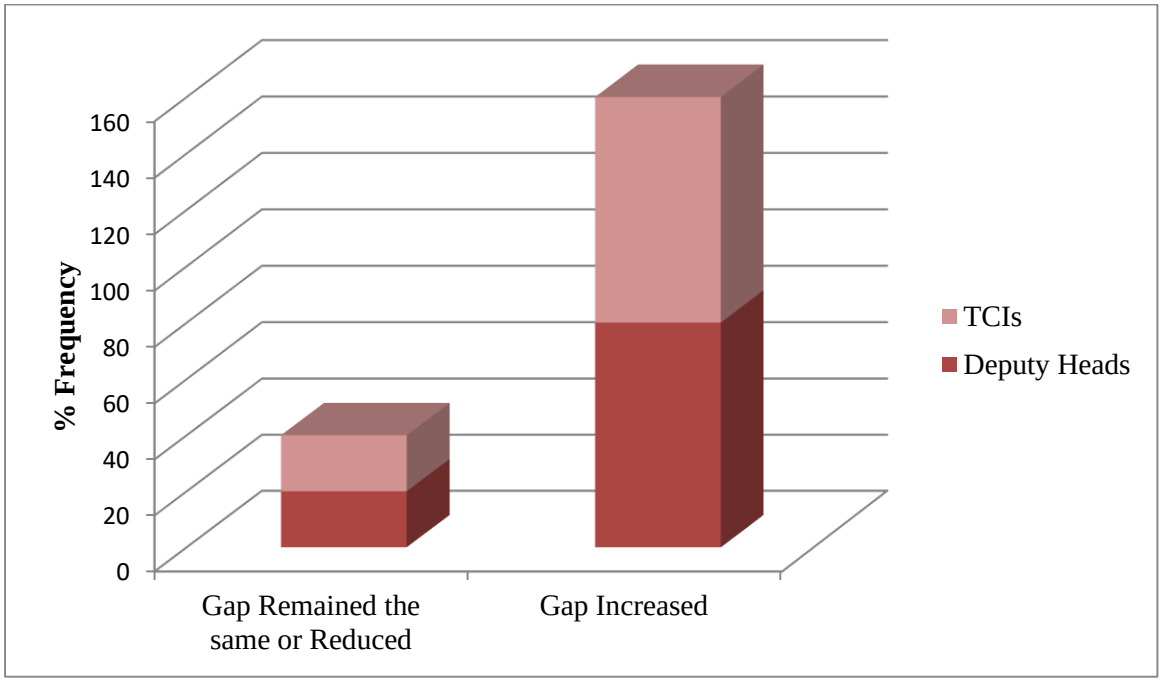

Figure 4.7: Views by Deputy Heads and TICs of the learning gap between disadvantaged learners and their peers

The gap between disadvantaged learners and their peers was widening according to the respondents. Most of the deputy heads (80%) indicated that the gap between disadvantaged/vulnerable learners and their peers had increases compared to just 20% who indicated that the gap remained the same or reduced. The same results were recorded with the TICs in which 80% reported an increase in the gap whilst 20% reported the gap to have remained the same or reduced. Both responses from the deputy heads and TICs were seconded by all the school heads who reported that the learning gap between the disadvantaged/vulnerable learners had tremendously increased during the covid-19 pandemic.

They noted that the majority of the learners never touched a book during covid-19 induced lockdowns compared to their well up peers who could afford both online lessons and extra or private lessons. Well up learners never stopped learning compared to the disadvantaged learners. Research findings indicate that the learning gaps that exist for marginalized populations or vulnerable learners were widening as nothing much was being done in the schools to cater for this particular category of learners. The school leaders reported that they did not have the capacity to provide solutions to learners without necessary access to learning resources such as access to online teaching and learning. There was lack of specific interventions to assist vulnerable learners in terms of learning resources such as access to online devices and connectivity in order to make the move to online learning possible for all learners. School leaders indicated that many learners did not have access to internet connectivity, digital devices and learning resources. As a consequence, there was a high probability of those learners who needed the most attention (vulnerable) getting left behind in the current environment in schools. The vulnerable learners who already experienced achievement gaps even before the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic were in danger of seeing the gaps widening.

This is also highlighted by OECD (2020) which maintains that there was a real possibility of those who needed the most attention getting left behind in the current environment and the danger being that marginalized populations that already experienced achievement gaps might see them widen. In agreement, García and Weiss (2020) assert that the covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated well-documented opportunity gaps that put low-income students at a disadvantage relative to their better-off peers. UNICEF (2020) is assertive in that the pandemic will deepen existing inequalities and vulnerabilities. García and Weiss (2020) further argue that educational inequities were growing given the various ways in which the Covid 19 crisis has widened existing socioeconomic disparities and how these disparities affect learning and educational outcomes. Evidence from the study shows that there were no signs of targeted interventions aimed at supporting vulnerable learners. A total of three school heads (60%) reported that the inability by their schools to continue with feeding programs was affecting the disadvantaged learners who relied on school feeding programs for a decent meal. Only two school heads (40%) reported that they were managing to feed learners three times a week after receiving food stuff from a donor.

The school heads believe that the inability of their schools to provide meals at school was exacerbating absenteeism and dropouts as most poor families were struggling to put food on the table because of the impact of covid-19. They believe that a lot of bread winners lost sources of livelihood because of covid-19. Many were unemployed as most businesses closed down. It also emerged in the study that failure by schools to continue with feeding programs in order to promote continuous access to education was increasing possibilities of drop outs by vulnerable learners. School leaders believe that some learners from poor families relied on school feeding programs to get a decent meal. However, the schools were failing to run the feeding programs because of lack of funds. As a result, some learners were no longer coming to school and the absenteeism rate was too high. OCHA (2020) also discovered that the worsening food insecurity in most poor households compounded by the covid-19 pandemic represents a significant challenge which had the potential to contribute to school drop-outs. School leaders had to work extra hard to ensure that they followed up on school drop-outs with the intention of bringing them back to school. It was not an easy task for the school leaders considering a myriad of other initiatives they had to take in response to the effects of covid-19 in the operations of the schools.

Responses from deputy heads and TICs suggest that special education needs learners were being neglected in the whole puzzle of responding to the covid-19 pandemic. Schools were responding to the general needs of the main stream learners with no interventions targeted to learners with special needs. Most of the deputy heads (80%) and 60% of the TICs indicated that there were no special interventions directed to learners with special education needs such as the mentally challenged, visually impaired and hearing impairment. Only 20% of the deputy heads and 40% of the TICs indicated that they were doing something to cater for inclusivity. In agreement with deputy heads and TICs, a total of three school heads (60%) also reported that learners with special education needs were not receiving any additional support that they required as their schools could not afford to help them in any special way because of lack of funds. Only two school heads indicated that they were doing something although they failed to explain how they were doing this. School leaders were also faced with the dilemma of meeting the needs of learners with special educational needs such as the hearing impaired or mentally challenged.

Schools could do nothing to assist these learners during school closures in order to ensure equity and inclusion in education during school closures. Murgatrotd (2020) postulates that learners with special needs having learning difficulties, such as hearing impairment, visual impairment and mobility disabilities required additional training with support and guidance. The situation on the ground in the schools under study was in direct contradiction to recommendations by Human Rights Watch (2020) which advises that it was also important to take note of special needs learners when adjusting curricula and developing pedagogical resources. Many caregivers and parents at home were not able to cater to such needs, hindering the learning of this group of learners. In agreement with Murgatrotd (2020), Dhawan (2020) connotes that the affordability and accessibility for all the learners of varied special needs was identified as a challenge which needed urgent attention. Ali and Kaur (2020) argue that a lack of these adjustments was exacerbating the differences in learning achievement in light of the prevailing educational inequalities and unequal access to curriculum coverage. Thus, even though they were attempts to implement online learning in some schools, special needs learners such as the hearing impaired and blind were not catered for. They lacked the guidance they needed for online learning.

4.3 Summary

This chapter has dealt with findings obtained from the study based on the inputs from deputy heads and TICs through questionnaires and from school heads through interviews. Judging from the data obtained in the study, it was revealed that the Covid-19 period was a particularly difficult time to be a school leader because there were many challenges they had to overcome for their schools to operate. They were caught in the unfavourable position of being the pinch point in the education system. School leaders were walking a tightrope without a safety net as they had to lead their schools in a time of crisis where they had to act swiftly and with foresight. The summary, conclusions and recommendations of the study were considered in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter gives a summary of research findings, conclusions drawn from the findings as well as the recommendations. The main thrust of the chapter is to establish whether the data collected as well as the responses given answered or failed to answer the sub-questions and the main research question raised. Each sub-question is dealt with within the scope of the research findings. The chapter then proceeds to draw conclusions based on the main research questions and finally give an outline of recommendations in light of the researcher's findings.

5.2 Summary

The study sought to examine the challenges that were bedeviling school leaders in Mpopoma Cluster Primary Schools in their effort to lead their schools in the road to recovery from the adverse impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The researcher was motivated to carry out the study after she observed how the Covid-19 pandemic was adversely interrupting teaching and learning in schools. Schools were being forced by the prevailing conditions created by the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic to adapt to what is being referred to as the new normal. This was necessitated by the need to balance priorities for education and preventing the spread of Covid-19. School leaders were being held accountable for providing an effective response to the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on education in a crisis situation.

A review of related literature showed that school leaders experienced numerous barriers to curriculum implementation during the Covid-19 pandemic. Sharp (2020) maintains that the Covid-19 requirement for social distancing in schools was creating problems for school leaders because the layout of many school buildings, when full, made it difficult to exercise physical/social distancing in the existing classroom. In agreement, Soland et al. (2020) assert that the structure of many existing school buildings were not appropriate if one wanted to maintain physical distancing. Simango and Mwareya (2020) claim that efforts by school leaders to support their schools aside from normal classroom teaching through on-line learning were being hampered by the lack of funds.

UNICEF (2020) was assertive in that the pandemic was deepening existing inequalities and vulnerabilities regarding access to education. OCHA (2020) maintains that schools were financially crippled to be able to meet the entire requirement for quality learning to continue. The researcher utilized a descriptive survey research design to extract information from the respondents. A mixed method approach was utilized which allowed the use of both the qualitative method and quantitative method. The population for the study was comprised of six clusters found in Mzilikazi District. Each cluster has five primary schools on average to make a total of thirty schools in the District. Random sampling was utilized to select one cluster out of six clusters in Mzilikazi District. Purposive sampling was then used to select fifteen school leaders from the five primary schools in the selected Mpopoma Cluster. Two data gathering instruments were utilized to obtain data, namely the semi-structured questionnaire and interview. After the data collection procedures which were personally administered by the researcher, quantitative data was presented using tables and graphs and then analyzed. Narrative analysis was used to analyze the predominantly qualitative data from interviews.

The findings from the study reveal that schools were facing an increased financial burden to implement all the recommended Covid-19 measures to mitigate against the spread of the disease. School leaders faced considerable challenges in scheduling additional cleaning and sanitisation of frequently touched surfaces in the schools as per Covid-19 requirements. No matter how hard schools tried to cover the revised curriculum, their efforts were limited by social distancing. They were crippled financially as income decreased and expenditure increased because of the impact of Covid-19. Teachers could not teach to their usual standard under the Covid-19 regulations as they were no longer able to utilise core elements of their teaching practices such as group work due to social distancing requirements. Online learning was an alternative, but schools did not have the capacity to offer effective programs due to financial constraints. School fees inflow was disrupted by Covid-19 as many schools traditionally rely on fees payment to sustain their daily operation. Parents' inability to pay school fees was as a result of the economic crunch due to the pandemic which also deepened existing inequalities and vulnerabilities in learning and educational outcomes.

5.3 Conclusions

5.3.1 Barriers to Effective Design and Implementation of School Programs

The Covid-19 pandemic brought with it a new normal which schools had to adapt to. It emerged in the study that schools were struggling to provide basic Covid-19 requirements for a school to be allowed to re-open as recommended by SOPs. These include adequate personal protective equipment (PPE) such as liquid soap, face masks, sanitizers as well as infra-red thermometers for learners, teachers and all ancillary staff. These were extra costs which schools had not budgeted for. The situation was compounded by the ever rising inflation, the cost of goods and services. The rise in prices of goods and services had a negative impact on school preparedness efforts as they fell short of meeting Covid-19 requirements. They could not afford to provide adequate PPEs for both learners and staff members.

School leaders found it stressful coping up with Covid-19 protocols that required schools to strictly exercise social distancing because the structures of many of their existing school building structures were not appropriate if one wanted to maintain physical distancing. School leaders were forced to apply the splitting and dividing classes into smaller groups' strategy to accommodate the recommended one-metre distancing between learners. Splitting the classes on its own was a nightmare for school leaders as it forced them to adopt a system where learners attended school on alternating days. This reduced learning time to three days a week for learners instead of increasing time to compensate for lost time during school closures. Meeting requirements for social/physical distancing in schools in the wake of infrastructure constraints exacerbated the problem of lost teaching and learning time. Thus, schools were finding it hard to make up for reduced learning time caused by covid-19 induced school closures. Adherence to Covid-19 protocols of social distancing made compensation of lost time difficult as schools could not increase the amount and quality of learning time. There was a conflict between maintaining social distancing and achieving full curriculum coverage. The Covid-19 pandemic caused an increase in learner dropout rate compared to the academic years before the Covid-19 pandemic. Since the school leaders were mandated to make follow-ups on school drop outs, the process of contacting and liaising with parents of school drop outs was a large and time-consuming task for the school leaders at a time when schools were managing many other complex issues during Covid-19 pandemic.

School dropouts became an extra burden to the school leaders who were already swamped with busy schedules complicated by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

5.3.2 Challenges Faced in Ensuring Continued Teaching and Learning during the Covid-19 Pandemic

Schools were experiencing a decline in income inflows whilst expenditure was increasing. Covid-19 increased the inability of the affected and infected parents to pay fees as many of them lost their jobs and their livelihoods. Expenditure increased because schools had to meet the extra cost of providing PPEs such as masks, sanitizers, hand washing soap and thermometers to meet Covid-19 protocols. Thus, the Covid-19 pandemic pushed schools to have additional unplanned resources that included financing additional cleaning and protective equipment and online learning resources such as data bundles or Wi-Fi. This was putting a strain to the already tight budgets in the schools.

Covid-19 negatively affected the quality of in-school teaching as teachers could not teach to their normal standards because of the Covid-19 restrictions. The social distancing Covid-19 protocol did not allow teachers to utilise some of the major core elements in their teaching such as pair work, group work or allowing learners to share scarce resources such as textbooks. The requirement for social distancing restricted teachers using these effective teaching methods including moving around the classroom to teach, support and interact with their learners as usual. There was a conflict between maintaining social distancing and ensuring high-quality teaching and learning. Efforts by school leaders to support their schools aside from normal classroom teaching through on-line learning were being hampered by the lack of funds. The quality of remote provision and engagement with it was ineffective because of lack of resources.

They did not have the capacity to offer effective online learning as they lacked the appropriate digital capacity and infrastructure required to deliver teaching remotely. Schools could not afford the high cost of internet access and they had a shortage of gadgets such as smart phones and computers.

Furthermore, online learning was not a success because parents and learners did not have adequate digital resources such as smart phones and internet connection. Learners could not effectively take part in online learning because it was unaffordable to them.

5.3.3 Challenges faced in Ensuring Equal Access to Education during Covid-19 Pandemic

The learning and performance gap between disadvantaged/vulnerable learners and their peers widened. These educational inequities increased as a result of the various ways in which the Covid 19 crisis widened existing socioeconomic disparities which in turn affected learning and educational outcomes. The learning gaps for vulnerable learners widened as nothing much was being done in the schools to cater for this particular category of learners. The schools were financially crippled to have the capacity to provide solutions to learners without necessary access to learning resources such as access to internet connectivity, digital devices and other learning resources. There was a lack of provision for appropriate support to vulnerable learners from poor families and learners with special needs who were at risk of becoming disengaged and eventually dropping out of school. The covid-19 pandemic was exacerbating inequalities in education.

Food insecurity in poor households compounded by the Covid-19 pandemic was causing an increase in absenteeism and school dropout. This was made worse by the failure by schools to continue with feeding programs in order to promote continuous access to education as some learners from poor families relied on school feeding programs to get a decent meal. The schools were failing to run the feeding programs because due to financial constraints. As a result, some learners no longer attend school and the absenteeism rate was too high. Lack of resources did not allow the schools to put in place special interventions that cater for learners with Special Educational Needs such as the mentally challenged, visually impaired and hearing impaired. This category of learners was not receiving any additional support that they required as the schools could not afford to help them in any special way because of lack of funds.

The affordability and accessibility for all the learners of varied special needs was a big challenge which needed urgent attention because a lack of interventions directed to such learners was exacerbating the differences in learning achievement in light of the prevailing educational inequalities and unequal access to curriculum coverage.

5.4 Recommendations:

Based on the research findings, the following recommendations were made:

- Government should support schools with urgent resources so that they can provide high-quality in-school teaching and effective online learning programs. Properly-resourced online learning needs to be synchronized with high-quality in-school teaching with considerations for vulnerable or disadvantaged learners.
- Schools are encouraged to embrace technology by implementing e-learning strategies that will assist them in enhancing teaching and learning, making provision for online lessons, and for interactions between pupils and teachers and between pupils and other pupils.
- To make high quality online learning feasible, government should consider providing laptops and free internet connections for schools as well as for disadvantaged or vulnerable learners.
- Government should assist schools to revive school feeding programs by providing basic food stocks such as mealie-meal and relish such as chunks and beans. These will go a long way in reducing absenteeism and school drop outs as some learners rely on school feeding programs for a decent meal.
- The government should prioritize safe and quality education during the covid-19 pandemic with a focus on the needs of the most vulnerable for more effective and inclusive learning. Thus, there is need for targeted interventions to address both technological and socioeconomic divides.
- Schools should speedily redirect their efforts to respond to the covid-19 crisis by adapting some programs that ensure that quality learning continues for every learner. For instance, schools can adapt existing literacy and numeracy lessons for radio broadcast supported by SMS or Whatsapp communication.

- There is need for government to promote and support accelerated learning approaches in schools to help learners to bridge learning gaps that have been created by the Covi-19 pandemic.

5.5 Recommendations for Further Study

Through the discussion and conclusions, a couple of areas for further study have been noted.

- This research was restricted to Primary Schools in one cluster. It is therefore recommended that similar studies be carried out at a macro level (Provincial level).
- Further research should focus on exploring the best practices in responding to the impact of Covid-19 on education.

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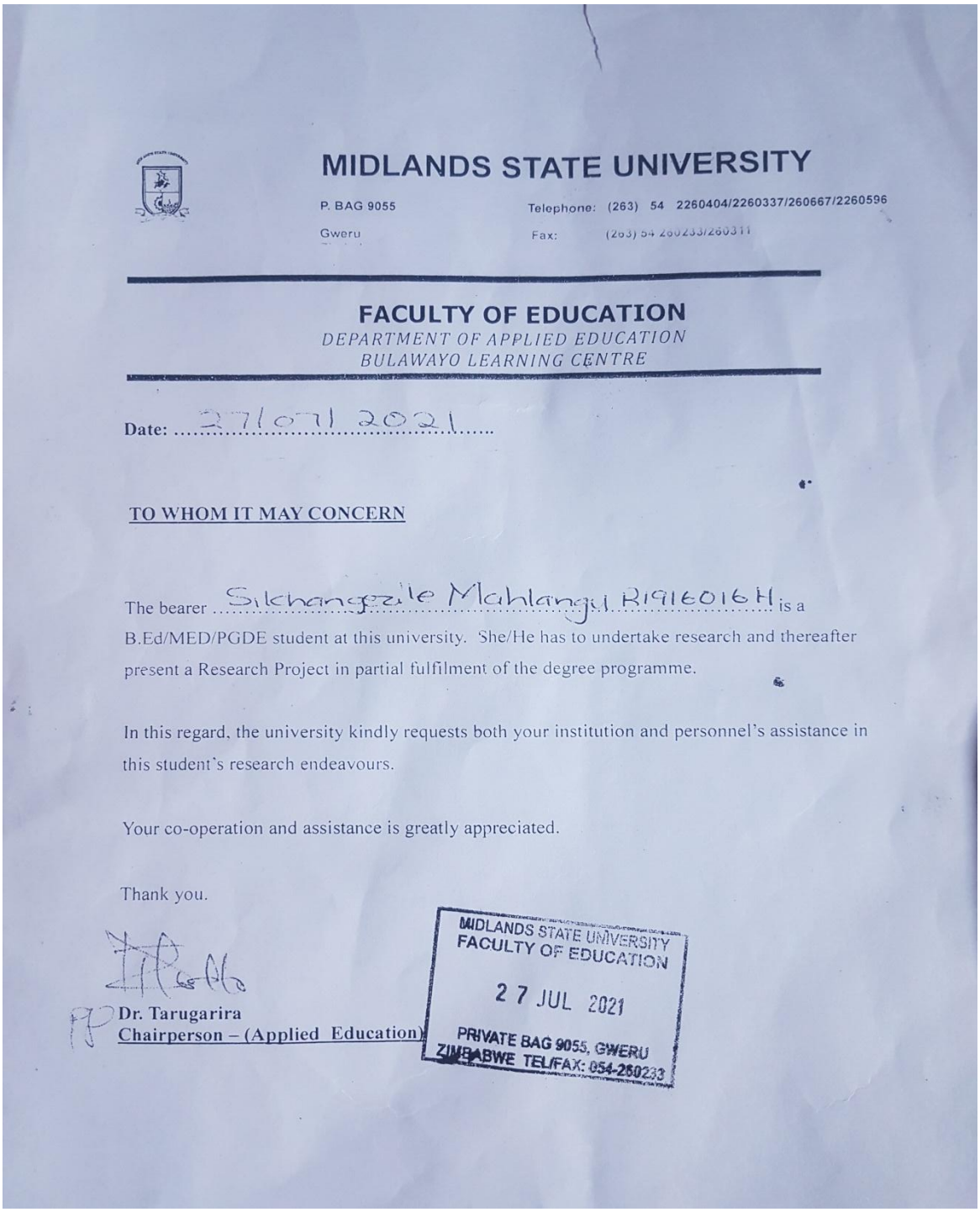
APPENDIX I



MIDLANDS STATE UNIVERSITY

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FACULTY OF EDUCATION
DEPARTMENT OF APPLIED EDUCATION
BULAWAYO LEARNING CENTRE

Date: 27/07/2021

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

The bearer Sikhangezile Mahlangu R191601 6H is a B.Ed/MED/PGDE student at this university. She/He has to undertake research and thereafter present a Research Project in partial fulfilment of the degree programme.

In this regard, the university kindly requests both your institution and personnel's assistance in this student's research endeavours.

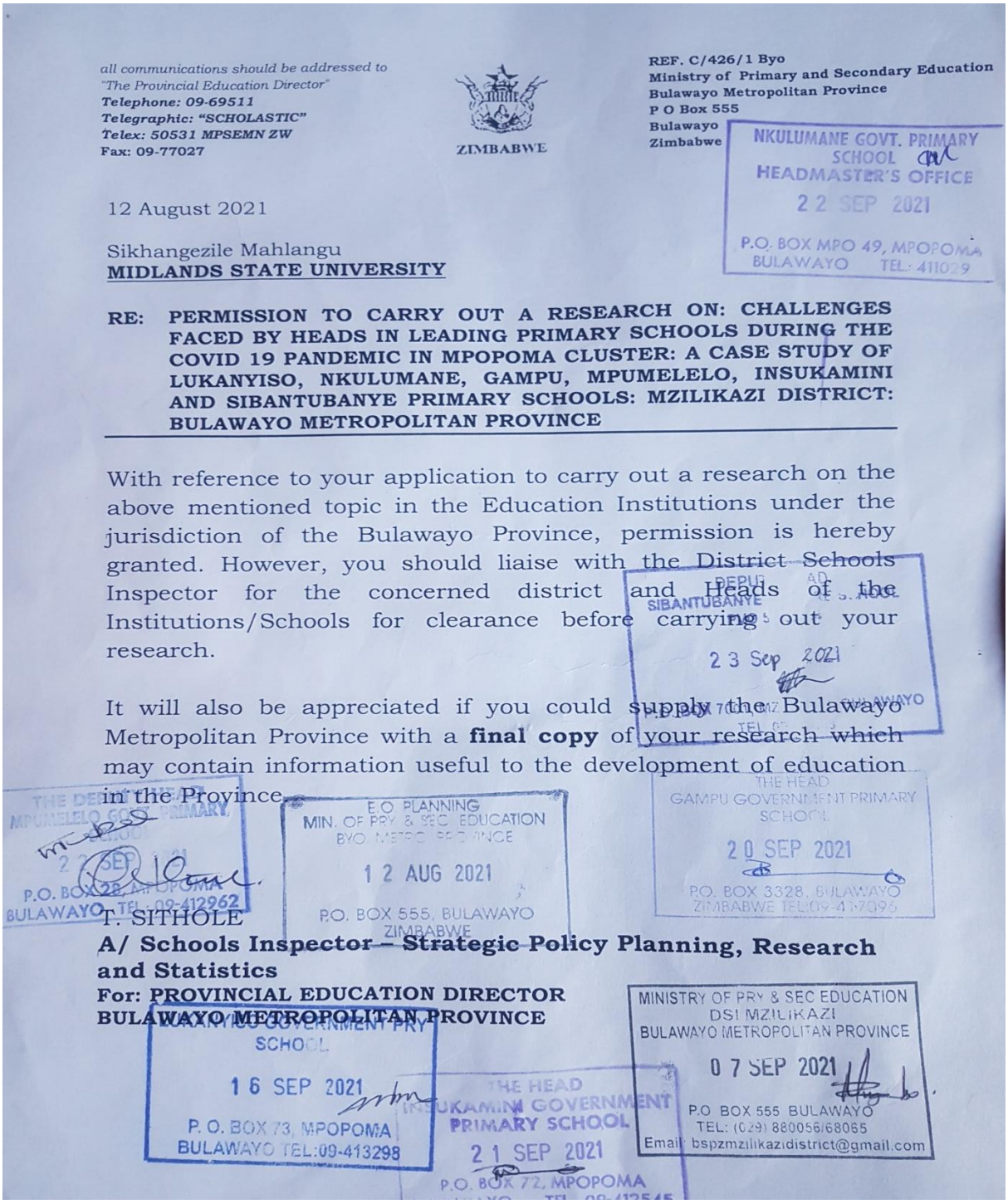
Your co-operation and assistance is greatly appreciated.

Thank you.

Dr. Tarugarira
Chairperson – (Applied Education)

MIDLANDS STATE UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF EDUCATION
27 JUL 2021
PRIVATE BAG 9055, GWERU
ZIMBABWE TEL/FAX: 054-260233

APPENDIX II



all communications should be addressed to
"The Provincial Education Director"
Telephone: 09-69511
Telegraphic: "SCHOLASTIC"
Telex: 50531 MPSEMN ZW
Fax: 09-77027

ZIMBABWE

REF. C/426/1 Byo
Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education
Bulawayo Metropolitan Province
P O Box 555
Bulawayo
Zimbabwe

NKULUMANE GOVT. PRIMARY SCHOOL
HEADMASTER'S OFFICE
22 SEP 2021
P.O. BOX MPO 49, MPOPOMA
BULAWAYO TEL.: 411029

12 August 2021

Sikhangezile Mahlangu
MIDLANDS STATE UNIVERSITY

RE: PERMISSION TO CARRY OUT A RESEARCH ON: CHALLENGES FACED BY HEADS IN LEADING PRIMARY SCHOOLS DURING THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC IN MPOPOMA CLUSTER: A CASE STUDY OF LUKANYISO, NKULUMANE, GAMPU, MPUMELELO, INSUKAMINI AND SIBANTUBANYE PRIMARY SCHOOLS: MZILIKAZI DISTRICT: BULAWAYO METROPOLITAN PROVINCE

With reference to your application to carry out a research on the above mentioned topic in the Education Institutions under the jurisdiction of the Bulawayo Province, permission is hereby granted. However, you should liaise with the District Schools Inspector for the concerned district and Heads of the Institutions/Schools for clearance before carrying out your research.

SIBANTUBANYE
23 Sep 2021

It will also be appreciated if you could supply the Bulawayo Metropolitan Province with a **final copy** of your research which may contain information useful to the development of education in the Province.

E.O. PLANNING
MIN. OF PRY. & SEC. EDUCATION
BYO. METRO. PROVINCE
12 AUG 2021
P.O. BOX 555, BULAWAYO
ZIMBABWE

THE HEAD
GAMPU GOVERNMENT PRIMARY SCHOOL
20 SEP 2021
P.O. BOX 3328, BULAWAYO
ZIMBABWE TEL:09-417095

T. SITHOLE
A/ Schools Inspector – Strategic Policy Planning, Research and Statistics
For: PROVINCIAL EDUCATION DIRECTOR
BULAWAYO METROPOLITAN PROVINCE

MINISTRY OF PRY & SEC EDUCATION
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16 SEP 2021
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THE HEAD
INSUKAMINI GOVERNMENT
PRIMARY SCHOOL
21 SEP 2021
P.O. BOX 72, MPOPOMA

APPENDIX III

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR DEPUTY HEADS AND TICS

My name is Sikhangezile Mahangu, a student at the Midlands State University doing a Bachelor of Education in Educational Management Degree. I am currently carrying out **a study on challenges school administrators are facing in managing primary schools during the Covid-19 pandemic in Mpopoma Cluster primary schools.** In this regard, I would be grateful if you can spare your time in informing this study by answering the following questions. You are kindly requested to provide honest answers. Please do not write your name since the information you provide will be given utmost confidentiality and will be used only for academic and professional purposes.

Section A: Personal Details

1. What is the highest qualification you obtained?

a) PTL/PTH [ ] b) CE/DE [ ] c) Degree [ ]

d) If other specify……..…

2. Which experience group do you belong to?

a) 1-3years [ ] b) 4-6years [ ] c) 6-8years [ ] d) 8 years + [ ]

Section B: Barriers to Curriculum Implementation during the Covid-19 Pandemic

3. How would you evaluate the Covid-19 crisis management at your institution? ***(Please select only one)***

a) Very good [ ] b) Good [ ] c) Adequate [ ] d) Inadequate [ ]

Comment:

……

……

……

4. Has the pandemic caused an impact on learner enrolment compared to the academic year before the Covid-19 pandemic? ***(Please select only one)***

a) Increase [ ] b) Same level [ ] c) Decrease [ ] d) Not applicable [ ]

5. Has the pandemic caused an impact on learner dropout compared to the academic year before the Covid-19 pandemic? (Please select only one)

a) Increase [ ] b) Same level [ ] c) Decrease [ ] d) Not applicable [ ]

6. Is there a governmental scheme providing emergency/special funding to your school in the context of the Covi-19 pandemic? a) Yes [ ] b) No [ ]

7. Has your school benefitted from any external non-governmental funding to address Covid-19 pandemic related issues? a) Yes [ ] b) No [ ]

8. What type of online learning platforms were used by teachers, learners and parents/caregivers while schools were closed?

9. Have teachers been provided with any additional support in the specific context of Covid-19 to help them with the transition to remote learning? a) Yes [ ] b) No [ ]

[If yes, select all that apply below]

a) Online training seminars [ ]

b) Provision of ICT tools and free connectivity (PC, mobile device, voucher for mobile broadband, etc.) [ ]

c) Professional, psychosocial and emotional support (e.g. chat groups, online forums to share ideas and educational content) [ ]

d) Teaching content (e.g. use of open educational resources (OERs), sample lesson plans etc.)

e) Don't know [ ]

f) If other, please explain:

……

……

……

10. What is the estimated percentage of all the learners who are in need of intensive catch-up support over and above normal expectations?

……

Section C: Challenges Faced in Ensuring Continued Teaching and Learning during the Covid-19 Pandemic

11. To what extent has the pandemic impacted your school financially? (Income) (Please select only one)

a) Increase [ ] b) Same level [ ] c) Decrease [ ] d) Not applicable [ ]

Comment:

……

……

……

12. To what extent has the pandemic impacted your school financially? (Expenditures) (Please select only one)

a) Increase [ ] b) Same level [ ] c) Decrease [ ] d) Not applicable [ ]

Comment:

……

……

……

13. Are teachers able to teach to their usual standards since they returned to teaching in school after the covid-19 induced lockdown?

a) Yes [ ] b) No [ ]

Can you explain why?

……

……

……

……

14. What percentage of learners is able to follow remote teaching and learning? ……

15. Resources at teachers' disposal to support teaching and learning. ***Tick where relevant.***

Resource	**Provided by School**	**Provided by Teacher**	**No Access to Resource**
Access to online learning platform			
Access to subscription-based educational resources			
Personal laptop/computer capable of delivering all types of online learning support			
Audio visual equipment (webcam, camera)			
Reliable internet connectivity			

16. Which measures have been taken to facilitate access of learners to online distance learning infrastructure? **[*Select all that apply*]**

a) Offer/negotiate access to internet at subsidized or zero cost [ ]

b) Make access to distance learning platforms available through landline [ ]

c) Make access to distance learning platforms available through mobile phones [ ]

d) Subsidized/free devices for access [ ]

e) No measures taken [ ]

c) Other (please specify) ……..

17. Have any measures been taken to assess learners' learning on distance education delivery systems? a) Yes [ ] b) No [ ]

If yes, please specify:

……

……

……

Section C Challenges faced in Ensuring Equal Access to Education during Covid-19 Pandemic

18. What is your view of the learning gap between disadvantaged learners and their peers?

a) Gap remained the same or reduced [ ] b) Gap increased [ ]

19. How are you managing the learning gap between disadvantaged learners and their peers?

……

……

……

……

20. How does your school support disadvantaged learners without the necessary access to remote teaching and learning? (***Please select only one***)

a) The institution does not have the capacity to provide solution to students without access [ ]
b) The institution provides devices (computers/tablets/phones) to learners in need (funded by the institution) [ ]
c) The institution provides devices (computers/tablets/phones) to learners in need (funded through partnerships and sponsorship) [ ]
d) The institution has developed partnerships with telecommunication companies regarding internet connection, data packages etc. for learners in need [ ]
e) Learners without necessary access to remote teaching and learning have access to school facilities as a priority group [ ]

f) If other, please explain:

……

……

Comments:

……

……

……

……

21. Is there any other aspect about challenges you are facing in teaching and learning of learners during the Covid-19 pandemic that you wish to comment on?

……

……

……

……

Thank you for your participation.

APPENDIX IV

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SCHOOL HEADS

My name is Sikhangezile Mahangu, a student at the Midlands State University doing a Bachelor of Education in Educational Management Degree. I am currently carrying out **a study on challenges school administrators are facing in managing primary schools during the Covid-19 pandemic in Mpopoma Cluster primary schools.** In this regard, I would be grateful if you can spare your time in informing this study by answering questions. You are kindly requested to provide honest answers. Please do not write your name since the information you provide will be given utmost confidentiality and will be used only for academic and professional purposes.

SECTION A: PERSONAL DETAILS

1. What is your highest professional qualification?
2. How many years have you been a school head?

SECTION B

3. How are you managing the opening of schools to all learners while maintaining social distancing as recommended by Ministry?
4. How are you managing financially to address the educational and protection needs induced by COVID-19 in order to ensure continuous learning?
5. How have curricula changed due to the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic?
6. Which learning areas are particularly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and how are they affected?
7. How is your school managing on-line teaching and learning?
8. Please provide additional information on how participation of learners in distance education programmes is monitored?
9. How does your school support learners without the necessary access to remote teaching and learning?
10. What percentage of teachers at your school had experience with online/distance teaching and learning prior to Covid-19?
11. How are you promoting continuous access to education especially for the marginalised learners such as disabled and disadvantaged learners?
12. Is there any other important thing that you wish to add?

Thank you for your participation.