



FACULTY OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF APPLIED EDUCATION

**PARENTAL PERCEPTIONS ON OPENING OF SCHOOLS DURING THE COVID-19
PANDEMIC PERIOD. A CASE STUDY OF NKETA CLUSTER SCHOOLS**

BY

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**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO MIDLANDS STATE UNIVERSITY IN PARTIAL
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DECLARATION

I, **Mthwazi Constance (R194756F)** do hereby sincerely swear and declare that this dissertation is my original work that has not previously been submitted to any university. In writing this work I duly complied with ethical issues and laws governing intellectual property.

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this research report to my beloved family. I love you all

ABSTRACT

This research explored the parental perceptions on opening of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic period with particular emphasis on Nketa cluster schools. The objectives were to identify the parental perceptions on opening of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic period, to find out the impact of parental perceptions on opening of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic and to suggest possible ways which parental perceptions can be improved at Nketa Cluster schools. A theoretical framework which was used for the study was the stakeholder theory which was developed by Freeman in 1984. Parents have been realised as one the key stakeholders in education during COVID-19 as most learning programs were now being conducted at home. Empirical literature revealed that health measures by schools as means to reduce the spread of COVID-19 has been questioned by parents in most countries. The importance of parental perceptions on reopening of schools was established. The study employed a descriptive design in order to gain an opportunity to use both the qualitative and quantitative approaches in order to have an in-depth understanding of the study. The study population consisted of the SDC members and schools administration at schools located in Nketa cluster. Semi-structured questionnaires and interviews were used to collect data from 20 SDC members and four school administrators in the cluster. The results obtained indicated that there were mixed feelings from parents about reopening of schools during COVID-19 pandemic period. It seems that the perceptions of parents were influenced by many factors which included their understanding of COVID-19, conspiracy theories, other related additional economic costs and the capacity of schools to follow COVID-19 protocols to protect their children. Furthermore, findings showed that the schools were implemented some COVID-19 prevention measures such as hand washing stations, hand sanitizing, protective wear, social distancing and cleaning and disinfecting of the school. It could also be noted that parental involvement was not prioritised at Nketa cluster schools because of lack of adequate time to consult them and their ignorance in attending school meetings. The study concluded that parental perceptions were not adequately used by Nketa cluster schools which created a gap between the schools and the parents because parental perceptions influence involvement. It was recommended that the national education leadership needs to develop new and creative ways of engaging the education stakeholders whenever new policies, and protocols are being crafted. Good communication will trust between the school and parents which is a crucial way to show that the school management understands and care about them and their children. In this Covid-19 pandemic, Nketa cluster schools should focus on engaging the community in meaningful and various ways of having parental involvement in schools. School need to strictly follow the COVID-19 policy and provide a safe learning environment to the learners. This makes the parents feel more confident to send their children to school and to support the schools' efforts as well. The study suggest further research to be conducted focusing on assessing the COVID-19 safety protocols as stipulated by the government and health experts.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to schools closing across the world, with substantial psychological and educational costs. Reopening schools when safe to do so is a priority. The current study looks into the parental perceptions on opening of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic period with particular emphasis on Nketa cluster schools. The current chapter focuses on the background of the study, the statement of the problem and the research questions. The significance of the study, delimitations of the study, assumptions of the study and the limitations of the study were highlighted. Definition of terms was presented. A summary of the chapter was part of the chapter.

1.2 Background To The Study

COVID-19 is an infectious disease, that has plagued the whole world, caused by a newly discovered coronavirus which can be quickly transmitted among humans. In educational institutions, protective measures are important both to reduce infection rates and to give parents confidence that it is safe for their children to return. Parental perceptions in the education of their children is a topical subject and is a factor which influences their involvement as well as the level of support they offer to the schools. Studies show that a child's education can be directly influenced by the parent's understanding of their past and current educational attainment. However, research on parental perceptions and subsequent involvement in their children's education during the pandemic, particularly in the Zimbabwe, is lacking.

Researchers from India have looked at some of the potential drivers of parental involvement in children's education in rural India, as well as how community-based accountability relationships can raise learning outcomes for the most disadvantaged primary-school learners (Kabir, Madan, Feng and Rudra (2020). Their research seemed relevant to the current situation in which millions of children in rural India were learning at home during the COVID-19 crisis. Also in the UK, Perry Wessly and Ballard (2020) looked at schools' accountability for strengthened learning during pandemics and they discovered that children's learning in the classroom can be improved by community-based interventions which are influenced by parental perceptions. The matter of parental perceptions seems to be a necessary and relevant topic today under the current COVID-19 crisis.

In Africa, schools have also closed and millions of children have been expected to be learning in their homes, potentially under the guidance of parents or other family members. One similar study that was conducted in South Africa by Mnkhwanzani (2020) underlined the importance of parental perceptions for sustainable and safe education in public schools. His findings showed that parents felt that the schools were not safe as there were not proper infection control measures. The same parents seemed to favour home schooling as they stated that they were able to engage with their children's learning at home.

In Zimbabwe, there has been many studies looking at parental perceptions and involvement in their children's education. However as of yet, there has been no study looking at parental perceptions during COVID-19 hence this is what prompted the current research. Mukombe (2019) used multiple regression models to estimate the underlying associations between parental

perceptions, attitudes and involvement in their child's learning, and they found that more affluent parents were more likely to become involved in their children's learning, as they themselves tend to be more educated and to recognise their child's learning gaps, whereas less affluent and less educated parents may have more challenges supporting their child's learning. Positive perceptions influence parental involvement in children's learning, generating a positive cycle of learning support for children. But poorer families may not have the knowledge to recognise whether their children are learning or if the resources to support them are available. In the current COVID-19 situation, it is critical to look at parental perceptions and how they trigger parental support hence the need for this study. The current study hopes to shed further light on how parental perceptions on the opening of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.3 Statement of the problem

The COVID-19 outbreak has ravaged all societal domains, including education. Home confinement, school closures, and distance learning impacted learners, teachers, and parents' lives worldwide. The impact of COVID-19-related restrictions on academic motivation as well as extracurricular activities have been adverse. The transition to distance learning placed a heavy strain on teachers, students, and their parents. Parents have been realised as key stakeholders in education during COVID-19 as most learning programs were now being conducted at home. It seems therefore that parental perceptions is a topical issue within the educational sector and that has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis. It is with this in mind that researcher has embarked on this study to explore parental perceptions on opening of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic period at Nketa Cluster schools in Bulawayo.

1.4 Research Objectives

1.4.1 Main research objective

To explore the parental perceptions on opening of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic period at Nketa cluster schools

1.4.2 Sub- objectives

- To identify the parental perceptions on opening of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic period at Nketa cluster schools
- To find out the impact of parental perceptions on opening of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic period at Nketa cluster schools impact academic goals.
- To suggest possible ways which parental perceptions can be improved at Nketa Cluster schools

1.5 Research questions

1.5.1 Main research question

How do parents perceive the opening of schools during the COVID 19 pandemic and the safety of their children in Nketa cluster schools?

1.5.2. Sub research questions

- What are the parent's perceptions on opening of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic period at Nketa cluster schools?
- How do parental perceptions on opening of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic period at Nketa cluster schools impact academic goals?
- In what ways can parents' perceptions can be improved at Nketa Cluster schools?

1.6 Significance of the study

The study findings should benefit schools in that they should be able to know the views of the parents which should lead to improved interactions with the parents. This study provides an important contribution to the study of parental views on how quality education can still be attained at Nketa cluster schools despite the prevailing pandemic. The researcher contends that schools need to adopt parental motivation-enhancing practices as means to prevent the decline in academic motivation during exceptional situations. Furthermore, future scholars may benefit as well because they can conduct their research studies on the basis of the findings of this current study. Findings on the level of support that schools receive towards school-parent cooperation should also assist in crafting policies that address raised concerns and thus adoption of the most effective strategies in the education system.

1.7 Assumptions of the study

The assumptions for this study were;

- Participants would be willing to provide information that would be complete and meaningful.
- Participants would give responses that would be accurate accounts of their views, whether positive or negative.
- The schools involve parents in their children's education during the COVID-19 period.

1.8 Delimitations of the study

This study was carried out in Nketa Cluster which is under Imbizo District in Bulawayo Metropolitan province. Three schools were the sampling frame. A random sample of 24 School Development Members was obtained as the sampling frame.

1.9 Limitations of the study

Despite the best efforts to adequately prepare for this research study, the researcher still faced some limitations. One such limitation was financial constraints as the research was not funded. The researcher resorted to using personal savings to carry out the research. Self-reporting may have also affected the interpretation of results and conclusions made by the researcher as the results were not examined by other individuals. The researcher referred on the input of the supervisor to review all the methodology, interpretation of findings and all other aspects of the research process. Time allocation for the study was short as the researcher was a full time teacher and new in the field of research. However the researcher maximized time after work for data collection so as to meet the demands of the research. Due to COVID-19, the sample for the research was too small to adequately represent the entire population which may have affected the statistical power of the study. However the researcher was careful in selecting the sample so that it would be representative enough for the results to be generalised.

1.10 Definition of terms

The following terms were considered to be key to this study:-

1.10.1. Parental perceptions

A perception is a view, opinion, belief, or idea, or a way of thinking about something (Perry et al., 2020).

1.10.2. Parental involvement

A parent's role in supporting their child's education, working together with teachers, administrators and other stakeholders in the education sector. Some aspects of parental involvement include open communication with schools and active parental involvement at school, including but not limited to partnerships with school organizations

1.10.3 COVID-19

This is defined by WHO (2020) as “an infectious respiratory illness in human beings caused by a novel coronavirus which can sometimes lead to death.”

1.10.4 Pandemic

Kabir et al. (2020) define a pandemic as a disease outbreak that quickly spreads over a very wide area or worldwide. It typically affects a large number of people.

1.11 Summary

In this chapter, the background to the study was contextualised and it was noted how COVID-19 pandemic had affected the education sector globally. The importance of parental perceptions was underlined and it was explained how they affect educational functions in a school setup. Parents have been realised as key stakeholders in education during COVID-19. Delimitations of the

study, limitations of the study were also outlined. Parental perceptions, parental involvement, COVID-19 and pandemic were the key terms which were defined towards the end of the chapter. The next chapter dealt with literature review from various authors that helped the researcher to conduct the research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

The researcher found it important to read widely around the topic so as to understand what other researchers and scholars discovered in relation to the parental perceptions towards schools' opening during the COVID-19 crisis. This chapter provided an overview on theoretical aspects of the research study and the knowledge and empirical literature noted by other researchers.

2.1 Overview of COVID-19 impact on education

The COVID-19 pandemic affected every societal domain, including educational systems worldwide. Among the restrictive measures imposed to contain the spread of the new coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2), home confinement was one of the most severe measures that national governments adopted worldwide (Shawna, LeeKaitlin, WardOlivia and Chang, 2020). This measure has led to an exceptional and temporary suspension of school attendance by both teachers and learners. The COVID-19 pandemic has changed everyday life, imposing unprecedented sanitary, political, economic, social, and educational challenges. Home confinement and temporary school closures have also affected educational systems worldwide. The rapid shift in the delivery mode of instruction and an uncertain future may have led students to experience considerable challenges in maintaining their academic motivation. However, to the best of our knowledge, although some evidence exists, for instance, on student's learning habits during COVID-19 (Shwana *et al.*, 2020)

Lee (2020) explains that in the most areas around the world, educational institutions suspended academic activities followed by a nationwide lockdown. During school closures, teachers adopted new strategies, such as distance learning programs and open educational applications and platforms, to reduce disruption and ensure that students could receive instruction remotely. In this regard, parental support became essential, especially for younger students, who are not fully autonomous in managing the assigned learning activities. Nevertheless, these strategies raised concerns as not all parents could work alongside their children (Lee, 2020).

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This stakeholder theory which was developed by Freeman in 1984 has been found best suitable for the current study. Freeman believed that stakeholders can be people, groups or institutions that have some interest with regards to the success of an organisation. Such stakeholders tend to have power to influence the demeanour and performance of an organisation and in turn they are also affected by the organisation's operation and outcomes (Shaun & Denzel, 2015). The theory suggests that organisations have to scrutinize both the external and internal environment in order to classify some opportunities and threats as well as to advance the exercise of the organisation's value judgment. According to Whittehead (2019), the stakeholders can be classified in two ways that is primary or secondary. Primary stakeholders are those who have formal and economical relations with the organisation. Secondary stakeholders are those agents who are not directly connected to the organisation despite their ability to influence and be influenced by its operation and outcomes.

The notion of a “stakeholder” interconnects with many school-based concepts and strategies—such as management and administration. There are numerous stakeholders that generally pursue to enlarge the number of people involved in making important decisions associated to a school organisation, operation, and academics. First and Jones (2018) provide an example that where shared leadership involves the formation of leadership roles and decision-making opportunities for teachers, staff members, learners, parents, and community members. Stakeholders may participate on a leadership team, take on management tasks in the school.

In the context of this research study stakeholders include parents, SDC, teachers, learners and government, as well as the community at large. The adoption of this theory in the current study is based on the recognition that schools, as public establishments supported by state and local tax revenues, are not only part of and accountable to the communities they serve, yet they are also obliged to involve the wider community in important decisions which are related to the control, operation, or development of the school. Gradually schools are being more deliberate and practical about involving a greater diversity of stakeholders. The concept of applying the stakeholder theory is that by including more members of a school community in the process, school heads can foster a sturdier sense of belonging among the parents and within the broader community.

2.3 Parental perceptions on opening of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic period

School during the COVID-19 pandemic has not been normal across the whole world. Everyone’s support has been critical in order to ensure that schools are safe, healthy and equitable for

learners, staff and families (Clemens, Deschamps, Fegert, & Visnapuu-Bernadt, 2020). Since the beginning of the pandemic, several research studies have been conducted to gather key information on the impact of COVID-19 to the education sector. In other countries, researchers have looked onto how parents felt about the measures put to mitigate the virus that includes closure and re-opening of schools. According findings from scholars such as Reene (2020), Talyor, Abe & Oswald (2020), Steinmayr, Lazarides, Weidinger & Christiansen (2020) as well as Lee (2020), parent opinions are further fractured along categories including socio-economic status, marital status, and religion. The scholars underline the importance of parental perceptions in school decision making as parents can actively influence student academic motivation. Academic motivation pertains to students' beliefs, goals, and values that determine which academic or school-related tasks they will pursue and persist. According to Taylor et al. (2020) the fulfilment of learner's psychological necessities for competence, autonomy, and relatedness rely on the way parents organize the environment and the extent to which parents are involved and establish positive, caring relationships with their children.

Reene (2020) conducted a survey similar to this study in England and she found that parents' perceptions were correlated with whether the schools were prepared to maintain safety and health during the pandemic. Her findings indicated that parents whose children were enrolled at schools which lacked some elements necessary for COVID-19 safety precautions did not agree that it was safe to go back to school. A roughly equal share of parents from schools that were confidently prepared stated that schools opening had been long overdue.

An American case study conducted by Steinmayr et al. (2020) showed that parent's opinions about school re-opening varied across racial, political and economic lines. Caucasian parents were found to be more likely than black parent to be having positive perceptions as they wanted to send their children back to school. From the political perspective, Republicans were more than twice likely as Democrats to support this on a 34% versus 16%. Also parents whose households earned more than \$75 000 per year said they felt that schools were safe yet those earning less than \$50 000 per year stated otherwise. These findings, according to Steinmayr et al. (2020) indicate that education policy makers need to work closely with public-health experts in order to earn parents' trust.

Whereas, according to Christiansen (2020) is of the sentiment that parents want concrete action to keep schools safe. When schools diligently follow the stipulated COVID-19 regulations such as enacting handwashing stations, protective equipment, social distancing by spacing out desks and enrolling fewer children in the classrooms, then parents can have positive perceptions and attitudes. The can assist to quell or eliminate the justified concerns that the parents have about sending their children back to school. The research conducted by Chritiansen (2020) indicated that parents were eager to reassess schooling. Schools provide more than just academics to children. Parental perceptions and attitudes catalyse health and education and other education stakeholders to question conventional assumptions and undertake new approaches to learning, instruction, and health care.

The pandemic has been especially hard for the African continent were the majority families living in poverty (Clemens, 2020). However there has been very little research if not none,

conducted to find out the parental attitudes or perceptions about COVID-19 and schools re-opening. This could probably be due to the fact that most schools in the continent were still yet to open and in very few countries, schools, including Zimbabwe where schools had actually opened. Due to low socio-economic levels in Africa, many children received no education after schools closed in March 2020.

Of late there has been many factors which have caused African parents to feel that schools should be reopened. According to Mwasa and Keluje (2021) Nigerian parents were not aware of the risks associated with sending their children to school during the pandemic hence they were demanding a return to school. Mwasa and Keluje (2021) are of the opinion that there has been escalations on the polarisation of debates over education and this has made parents to think that COVID-19 was just a scapegoat for incompetent governments.

According to a research study by Chwale (2020), many parents were burdened by costs associated with trying to continue educating their children during school closures and in some areas, schools were demanding full payment of school fees. Another factor is mentioned by Chihu and Phiri(2020) who state that limited access to technologies required for remote learning is also another reason why parents preferred that their children go to school in person. Already during the school closure the digital divide has exacerbated discrimination and gaps as children who lacked access to technology were not learning while their peers from higher economic classes progressed with their education. In line with this Chihu and Phiri (2020) underline that parents with low income have greater difficulty in supporting children with remote or home learning. The children are less likely to have resources to adapt and implement measures needed

to continue education during school closures, including access to the internet and flexibility to shift school calendars (Clemens, 2020; Langberg, Stephen & Becker, 2020).

According to Chwale (2020) parental perceptions influence parental involvement which is an important strategy in the advancement of the quality of education. Chen and Cox (2019) believe that parents play a pertinent role in the education of their children. In agreement, Desmione (2020) advises that the most promising ways to successfully achieve educational goals or desired educational outcomes is to involve their parents.

2.4 Impact of parental perceptions on opening of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic on academic goals

There is research evidence that suggests parental perceptions significantly influences student achievement and overall well-being. Because parental perceptions are associated with parental involvement, it is therefore a predictor of learner achievement than any other factor, according to Chakin and Handersen (2017). According to Mwasu and Keluje (2020) parents play important roles in the educational success of learners. Learners need a positive learning experience to succeed in school, one that is an experience providing support, motivation, and quality instruction. With the advent of COVID-19, there has been an increase on the demand of parental support in the education of learners as it now extends beyond the school building.

In the current pandemic period, most of the families are faced with overwhelming and unpredictable schedules and circumstances while juggling school, family situations and other responsibilities, allowing minimal time to provide support in any one given area. The impact of

parental perceptions and home-school partnerships have been researched and addressed at the national, state, and local levels. However, the research in connection with schools reopening during COVID-19 pandemic has been extensive. The little research that has been done shows that parents and community members have different opinions regarding opening of schools, safety and health in schools and effective educational process.

According to Orroco and Averet (2016) parental perceptions in the education of learners begins at home with the parents providing a safe and healthy environment, appropriate learning experiences, support, and a positive attitude about school. Several studies indicate increased academic achievement with students having involved parents. Parental perceptions are and indicate of parental involvement which is viewed as a partnership between schools and parents. In the time of pandemics such as the COVID-19, such partnerships are key in promoting student achievement (Dornbusch, 2020).

2.5 Improvement of parental perceptions

Globally, there has been a slowly increasing number of children return to the classroom. Given the difficulty of the situation and variation across the globe, countries are in different stages regarding how and when they plan to reopen schools. These decisions are usually be made by national governments, who are also the key stakeholders of education, under expert guidance of health experts and often in discussion with local authorities. They have to consider public health, the benefits and risks for education and other factors. The best interest of every child should be at the centre of these decisions, using the best available evidence and involvement of parents. Parents have an important role in making sure that children understand, learn and

follow the new rules in schools. In order achieve more parental involvement, the schools need to convince the parents that their children would be safe and healthy in the classrooms.

Schools reopening should be consistent with the country's overall COVID-19 health response to protect students, staff, teachers and their families. Water and hygiene facilities will be a crucial part of schools reopening safely. In agreement, Kaliope (2020) explains that reopening schools need to consider public health, the benefits and risks for education and other factors hence there is need for Governments to have a plan with different modalities that allow the education sector to ensure that all children are either in school learning or access a unified approach to learning, or a blended approach of distance and classroom-based learning. Taylor et al. (2020) explains that safety precautions should be taken by each and every school and there should be no compromise. According to WHO (2020) and UNICEF (2021), schools must follow advice from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for cleaning and disinfecting common areas. Schools may check kids for symptoms of coronavirus and protective clothing must be worn by everyone everyday. WASH facilities need to be available and adequate, social distance maintained by spacing desks and limiting class sizes. It is important for school administrators to look at opportunities to improve hygiene measures. Also administrative staff and teachers should also be trained on physical distancing, school hygiene practices and recognition of any symptoms. This can instil confidence amongst the parents, as stakeholders, and consequently improve their perceptions towards opening of schools.

According to Yalloh, Godin, Mucktarr and Rachid (2018) when parents feel that the school staff is adequately trained to handle all school matters with expertise and professionalism, they gain a

sense of trust and confidently enrol their children with that particular school. Therefore the education, in collaboration with Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) have to facilitate training and support for areas like Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) to school management, teachers as well as other school staff. This will help schools to be prepared and maintain proper hygiene practices in schools thus assuring parents of school safety.

Another strategy that can be used to set these standards could be collaborating with parents to ensure that children have a supportive, safe and healthy learning environment at school and at home. Schools need to invite parents as to act as full partners in making school decisions, this strategy would enable the schools to easily reach out to the community for resources to strengthen the schools. Also, health and education officials must listen to these parent views, exercising restraint and humility in their well-intentioned efforts to strike a grand agreement on when and how schools reopen. They must act in a way that communicates their commitment to safely, sensibly, and responsibly opening schools.

According to Christiansen (2020) and Yalloh et al. (2018), parents have an important role and responsibility in modelling behaviour so that children can follow. The scholars emphasise that encouraging parents to communicate with the school about important information about their child is critical during a pandemic. According to Hanke (2016) lists the ways in which communication between the schools and parents can occur. Emails, phone, letters, newsletters and personal contacts can be made by schools to reach out to parents. According to Krolak (2015) contact with parents should be positive, there should be clear communication and ensuring that parents have regular access to clear, concise and easily readable information about

their children's school and classroom. This will ensure that parents are more able to share their concerns and opinions.

Parents differ greatly regarding their preferences, capabilities and time available; therefore, schools must offer a variety of ways parents can become involved. Helping parents feel they are valuable stakeholders in their children's education takes time and effort, but the results will be better home-school cooperation and educational outcomes. Therefore educational authorities need to put policies in place to ensure that there is at least one successful way to reach parent if the need arises, providing multiple forms of communication will help to implement this policy. Families need to know that they are needed and wanted in their child's school, administrators need to be diligent in conveying this message at all times whether during a pandemic or at normal times.

2.6 Chapter Summary

Health measures by schools as means to reduce the spread of COVID-19 has been questioned by parents in most countries. The importance of parental perceptions on reopening of schools have been established. However, empirical literature reveals that there has not been not much research conducted on similar studies.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter focuses on research methodology of the current study. Its elements include the research design, approach, targeted population, sampling and data collection. It outlines the roadmap of the study in an endeavour to address the research question raised in the first chapter. The last section of the chapter confers the ethical considerations which the research adhered to in order to maintain the validity and reliability of the study as well as to respect the rights of the participants.

3.1. Research approach

Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2003) suggest two different methodological approaches when conducting a research study, that is the qualitative and the quantitative research approach. These two approaches are not limited and research incline to combine two types of approaches which is called the mixed models within their research, according to Kumar (2017). The choice is determined by a large range of factors such as but not limited to data availability, purpose of research and sample size.

For the purpose of this research, both the qualitative and quantitative methods were employed. When the two are used together, they have a tendency to give a fair-minded picture of the outcomes and they usually balance out the findings of the research. The decision of using the mixed model approach was made as it was deemed to be more appropriate for the study after a

Careful analysis of different alternative research methods in literature, constantly bearing in mind the principal research question and the resources available for this study.

3.2 Research design

A research design is the organisation of environments for collection and analysis of data in a manner that wishes to combine relevance to the research purpose with economy and procedure. In this study the research design encompassed the target population, sample size and data gathering instruments as well as data presentation and analysis that the researcher employed in her research. The study is pragmatic because it explored parental perceptions on opening of schools during COVID-19 at Nketa cluster schools in Bulawayo Metropolitan province. It combined exploratory and descriptive designs. This design meets the criteria described by Borg and Gall (2012). Results of exploratory studies provide a better understanding of the sample being examined, according to Borg and Gall (2012), as such, the researcher deems this approach to be suitable for gaining better understanding of the study phenomenon. Brink and Wood (2018) explain that exploratory research examines the relevant factors in detail to arrive at an appropriate description of the reality of the existing situation.

Descriptive research provides an accurate account of characteristics of a particular phenomenon (Brink & Wood, 2018). A descriptive design was used to identify the problems with the current SDC implementation as well as making the judgment on whether the committees are effective or not as postulated by Borg and Gall (2012). The descriptive research design was important for this research study because it gave the researcher the opportunity to use both the qualitative and quantitative data in order to have an in-depth understanding of the study.

3.3. Study population and Sample

This section describes the population that participated in the current study. According to Wiersma (2015), population means the people or the subject which the study is meant to generalize. It can also be said that a study population is the entire group to whom researchers wish to generalize the findings of a study, including the people who did not participate in the study. The research population of the current study included the elements that were precisely identified for participation in the research study according the aim and objectives of this research. This study therefore targeted the following:

- The schools at Nketa cluster.
- The SDC members of Nketa cluster schools.
- The school administrators at Nketa cluster schools.

According to Kumar (2017), Cohen and Manion (2011), in most instances it is nearly impossible and at times not necessary to survey the entire population relevant to a research study. Therefore, a research has to select a sample that may be representative to the entire study population. However, Chandra and Sharma (2017) warn that in order to draw meaningful, reliable and valid conclusions, the sample should be representative of the entire study population. Therefore, the sampling procedures are a crucial element in conducting research. A sample as percentage that represents the study population features, hence it must be carefully chosen so that the data collection is smooth and reliable. In this, study, the researcher used purposive sampling to select the participants who were school heads and SDC members. Purposive sampling is when the researcher relies on her own judgement to choose those who will participate in the study from the targeted population (Kumar (2017)). The researcher therefore deliberately chose the participants who she saw as rich with information she needed and those that seemed to be available.

3.4. Instrumentation

3.4.1. Interviews

Interviews were used to collect data from the school administrators. According to Kelly (2016), interviews are of the two extreme types that is structured and unstructured; Midway between these is the semi-structured type of interview. The current study chose to use semi-structured interviews since this type follows a pre-determined set of questions and are asked in the same order to all the interviewees. However, the researcher allowed the interviewees to deliberate other factors deemed relevant to the questions, bearing in mind that the intention of employing interviews was to yield some qualitative data. This is because the interviews to allow the interviewer to follow up ideas, probe for more responses and observe body language (Kelly, 2016). Probing further was deemed important because it assisted the researcher to clarify issues where things were clear during the interviews. Moreover, use of semi-structured interviewing was found to be best suitable as it enabled the repetition of the interview process with different interviewees, which standardized the questioning.

3.4.2. Questionnaires

The questionnaires were distributed to the SDC members at Nketa cluster schools who are responsible for the usage of educational resources in the schools. Chandra and Sharma (2017) uphold that the questionnaire is usually self-administered and this allows the respondents to fill in the answers themselves. The researcher just had to distribute and collect them. In agreement, Koul (2017) indicates that questionnaires are instruments which are completed by the respondents themselves. Hence, they must be easy to use, economic and often the most plausible

option for measuring unobservable constructs such as attitudes, values and preferences, intentions and personalities. They have a highly structured setup, often used where the purpose is to make quantitative data from a large sample in order to test the research questions. The current study designed a questionnaire that mainly contained closed ended questions and a few open ended questions for further probing. This instrument was highly structured mainly because its main purpose was to yield quantitative data.

3.5. Data gathering procedures

After obtaining a letter of introduction from Midlands State University, the researcher went on to seek for permission from the district education office and it was granted as evidenced by the permission letter attached in the appendices. The schools in Nketa cluster were then notified of the pending research and informed consent was obtained from the study participants. During the first phase, the researcher distributed questionnaires to target respondents for completion which were then collected before the interview, in conformance with the chosen embedded design method. Secondly, pilot interviews were conducted two weeks before the actual interviews, enabling the researcher to test the readability of the terminology, the relevance of the proposed questions, the ability to complete the interview within the initially thirty minutes to one hour agreed upon. This assisted with efficaciously refining more than a few elements of the interview. The researcher then scheduled interviews and notified the respondents two weeks in advance. The scheduled interviews constituted of both closed and open ended questions to solicit for detailed answers.

Target respondents made choices for the interview setting, either in the participant's home, workplace or competition games venues. The interviews were performed via telephone in order to maintain physical distancing as stipulated by Government and health experts as a measure of reducing the spread of COVID-19. Interview durations per individual were between thirty minutes and one hour, with the researcher or research assistant as the facilitator and moderator. The facilitator digitally recorded all interviews to help with transcription, after seeking consent of the respondent to speed up the process.

3.5.1 Reliability

It is concerned with the accuracy and extent to which the data collection techniques or analysis of procedures will yield consistent results (Saunders et al 2007; Cooper and Schindler 2008). The researcher sought to improve reliability of the interviews by using an interview guide as suggested by Yin (2003).

3.5.2 Validity

Questionnaire piloting was conducted as a way of assessing its validity and the likely reliability of the data to be collected (Saunders et al., 2009). After the pilot test, some questions were rephrased to improve their relevance to the research questions. A pilot interview was conducted that enabled the investigator to examine the clarity of the words, the relevancy of the projected questions, the feasibility to exhaust them within thirty minutes to one hour as planned and also ensure the flow of the interview.

3.6. Data analysis procedures

Qualitative data was analysed using SPSS and the graphs, tables and frequency polygons were used to present findings. Findings were compared to and linked with the literature reviewed in the previous chapter and the differences discussed. The data generated were be closely analysed in order to determine its relevance to the study currently being undertaken.

3.7. Ethical considerations

The researcher had a moral obligation to strictly consider the rights of the participants who took part in the study. Ethics of research were an important aspect in this study, due the nature of this study. The ethical measures adhered to in this study include consent, confidentiality and anonymity , privacy, the right to withdraw from the study. The permission to conduct research was forwarded by the researcher to the school heads of all the primary schools that participated in the study as well as to the PED. Informed consent was then sought from the participants for the interviews and questionnaires.

Kelly (2016) states that confidentiality means that no information that the participant reveals is made public or available to others. The anonymity of a person is protected by making it impossible to link pieces of data to a specific person or institution. Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed by ensuring that data obtained were used in such a way that no one else other than the researcher knows the information source. In order to protect the participants from any form of harm, no names or any form of identify were attached to the information obtained.

According to Borg and Gall (2012), privacy refers to the agreements between persons that limit the access of others to private information. It is the freedom of an individual to regulate the time, extent and general situations under which private information will be shared with or withheld from others. In this study, privacy was also an important element in ethics. Hence it was maintained by not attaching the names of participants to the data and by allowing the survey participants to complete the questionnaires at the own space at a preferred time without the presence of the researcher. The researcher had to just drop the questionnaires and then collect them at a later date. At the commencement of the data collection phase, the participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time if they wished to.

3.8. Summary

The current chapter has described the specific research designs that were used are the exploratory and descriptive designs. The study followed a mixed methods, qualitative and quantitative approaches. The sampling procedures that were used were then explained. The study chose the purposive sampling technique. Since the study participants are people, it was crucial that the ethics were adhered to. This was done in order to ensure that the findings of the study were not harmful to the school administrators and the SDC members who took part in the study. The following chapter presents and analysis the data collected.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

The current chapter looks into presentation and analysis of the data collected in the previous chapter. A total of four school heads were interviewed and twenty questionnaires were distributed to the SDC members. Due to the mixed method nature of the research, the questionnaire contained both open and close ended questions. In order to maintain anonymity, SDC members were coded as SDC and school administrators were coded as SA.

4.2 Demographic Details

Table 4.1 showing gender of Respondents

Gender	SDC Members		School administrators	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Male	8	40	1	33.3
Female	12	60	3	66.7
Total	20	100	4	100

The researcher sought to highlight the gender distribution across the respondents. The results presented above show that the majority of SDC members were female (60%) while the remaining 40% identified as male. Similarly, in the school administrators' category 66.7% of the respondents were female and the remainder was male.

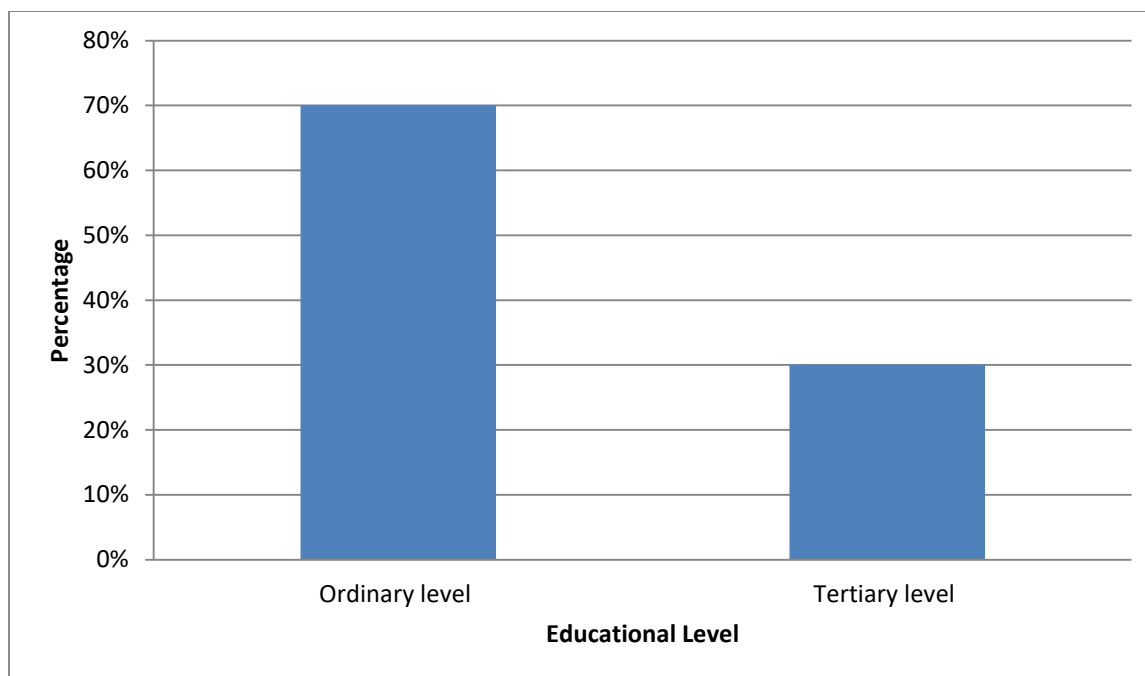


Figure 4.1 showing the highest educational qualifications of respondents

Figure 4.1 above shows that the majority of the respondents (70%) reached ordinary level as their highest educational qualifications and the remaining minority of 30% reached tertiary level.

Table 4.2 showing employment status for SDC Members

Employment status	SDC Members	
	Frequency	Percentage
Formally employed	2	10
Unemployed	6	30
Self-employed	12	60
Total	20	100

Table 4.2 shows that 60% of the SDC members were self employed, while 30% of them were unemployed and lastly 10% were formally employed.

4.3. Objective One: To identify the parental perceptions on opening of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic period at Nketa cluster schools

Table 4.3 showing parents' views on whether COVID-19 is a serious pandemic which needs to be taken seriously.

Response	SDC Members	
	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	2	10
Disagree	5	25
Neutral	13	65
Total	20	100

The researcher sought to understand the views of parents on whether they took COVID-19 seriously. Findings presented in the above Figure 4.2 show that 65% of the respondents were neutral when asked if COVID-19 was a serious pandemic. A significant number of respondents (25%) disagreed to the above notion.

The researcher then further asked the respondents to explain their answers and the respondents had the following to say;

“I feel that COVID is not as serious as they portray it because otherwise we could all be dead by now. Politicians have just used it as weapon of pursuing their own agendas.” – SDC4

“I don’t really know much about the disease and I haven’t seen anyone suffering from it so I do not really see how it can affect education.” – SDC8

“I am neutral because honestly I still am not sure whether in Zimbabwe it is as bad as they say. There has been so many conspiracy theories around this issue.” – SDC16

The above responses show that the majority of parents were not yet convinced that the COVID-19 virus is a threat that should be taken seriously. This shows that more communication is required to the parents. Shawna et al. (2020) explains that slowing the spread of COVID-19 requires mass scale shifts in behaviours.

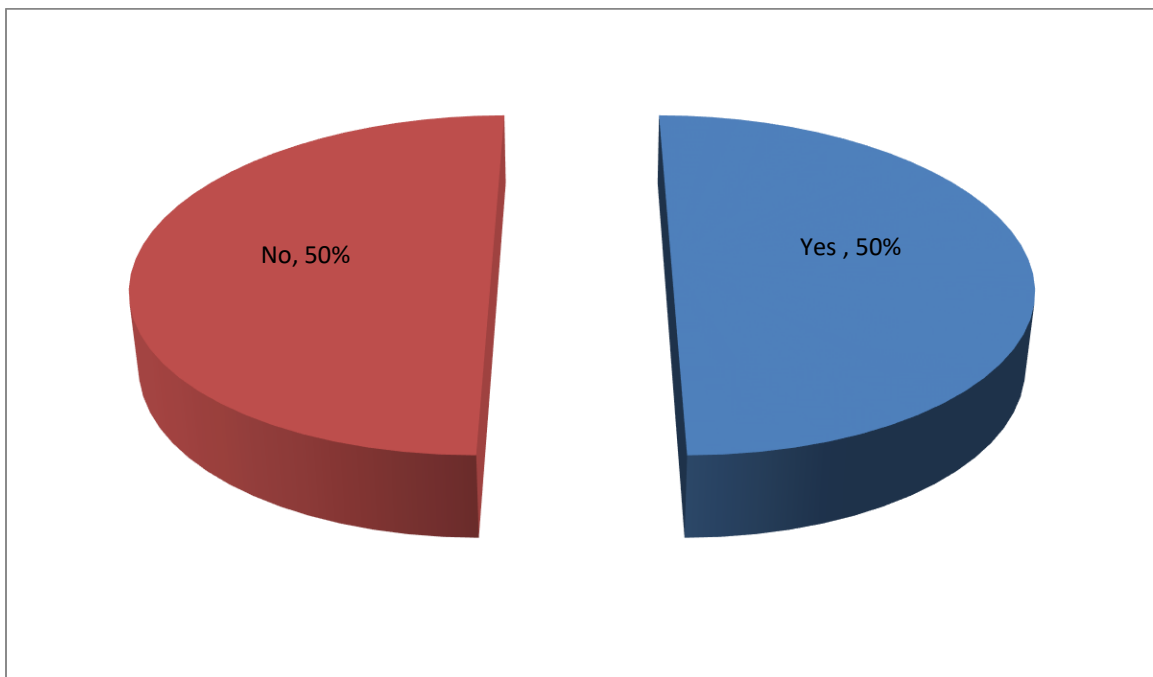


Figure 4.2: showing whether parents support the opening of schools currently

The researcher asked the respondents if they supported opening of schools. Results presented in Figure 4.3 indicate that they were mixed views as parents were half split between those who felt that they supported reopening of schools and those who did not. When asked to state reasons for their answer only three of them responded to that question. Others did not for reasons unknown to the researcher.

“The school does not have enough resources to follow COVID-19 protocols and also classrooms are not enough even before there was hot-sitting so our children are exposed to the pandemic.” – SDC5

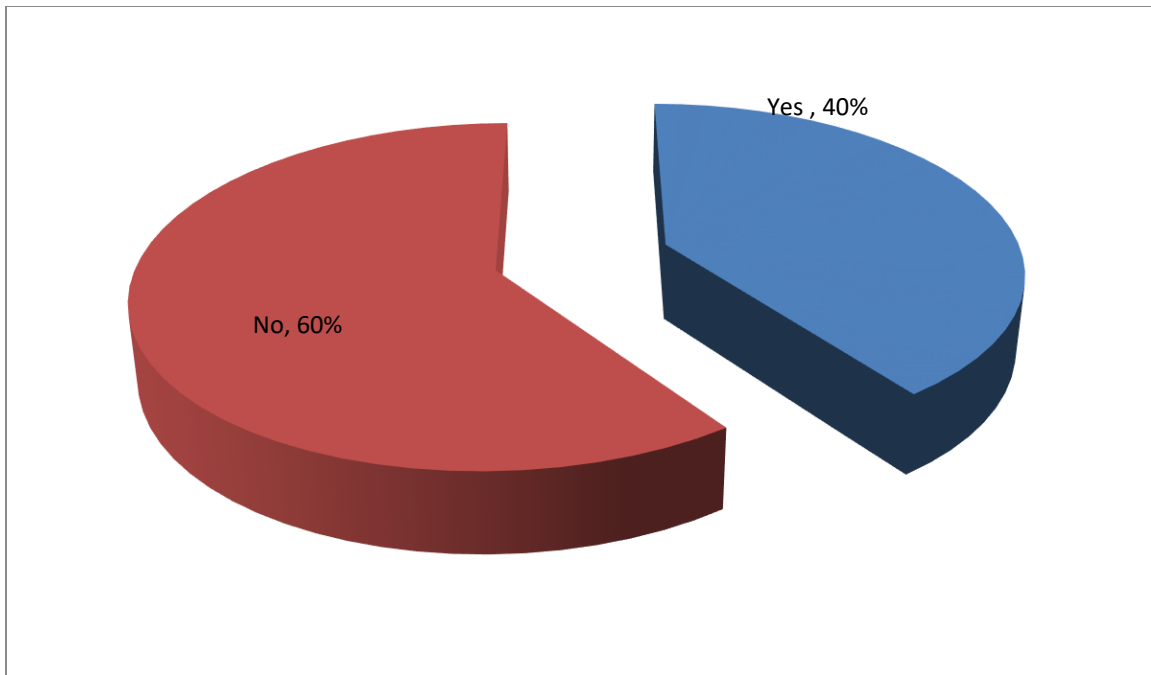


Figure 4.3 showing how parents feel about their schools’ capacity to protect children by maintaining COVID-19 protocols

Figure 4.4 shows that 60% of the parents felt that their school did not have the capacity to protect children by maintaining COVID-19 protocols. The researcher noted that the majority of respondents who said that they did not support the opening of schools were those who said they felt that their schools did not have the capacity to protect children by maintaining COVID-19 protocols. This finding is supported by Reene (2020) who noted that parents' perceptions were correlated with whether the schools were prepared to maintain safety and health during the pandemic.

The study sought to establish the regulations which the understudied schools followed and the results obtained were as follows;

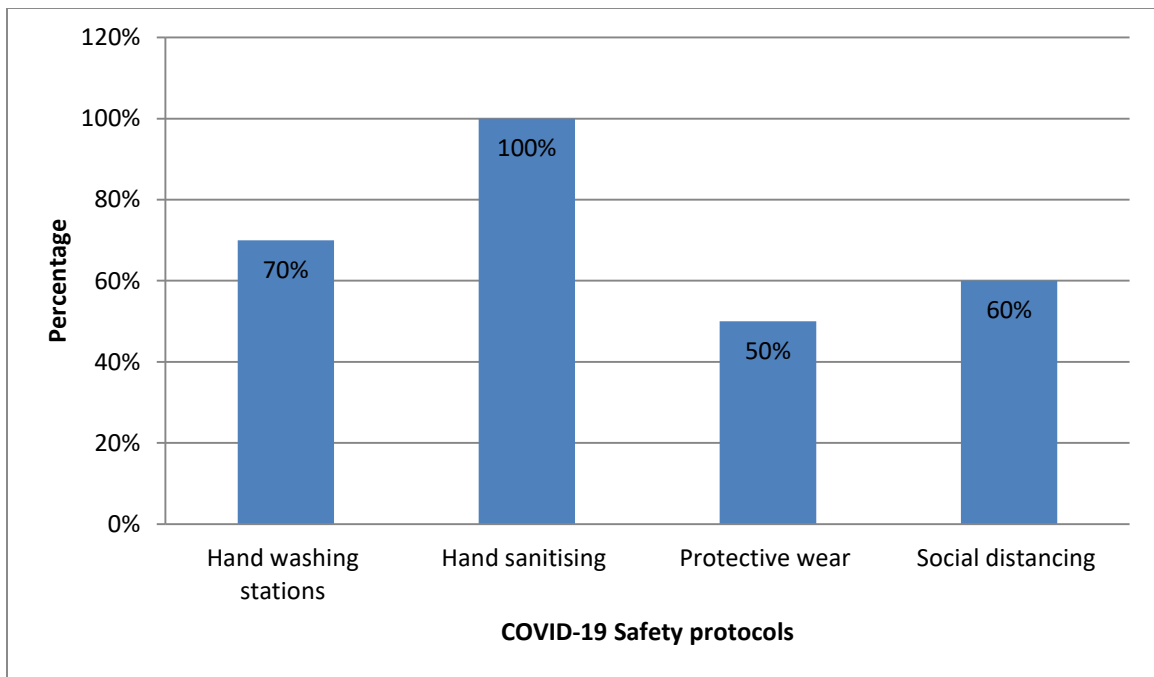


Figure 4.4 showing COVID-19 safety protocols at Nketa cluster schools

Figure 4.4 shows the COVID-19 regulations followed by Nketa cluster schools. Hand washing stations, hand sanitizing, protective wear and social distancing were mentioned by the SDC

members as shown above. However, these were also noted by the school administrators during interviews.

Hand washing stations

All the interviewees mentioned that they have put in place hand washing stations. SA3 had the following to say;

“We put hand washing stations at the gate and at the administration block. We also teach the reinforce hand washing with soap and water for at least twenty seconds to the learners.”

According to this finding, the whole school has only two hand washing stations which could not be enough for the whole school. Taylor et al. (2020) advises that school need to put in place an adequate number of hand washing stations, build time into daily routines for learners to wash their hands particularly after bathroom breaks, before lunch, or after playing outside.

Hand sanitizing

All the interviewees stated that their schools enforced hand sanitising. SA4 noted that;

“Soap and water are not always available for hand washing. Sometimes we run out of soap and we opt for hand sanitization instead to avoid spreading the COVID-19 virus.” – SA4

Protective wear

All the school administrators explained that all learners and staff are required to wear masks in order to protect themselves and others.

Social distancing

When it comes to physical distancing, the interviewees explained that their schools had established ground rules in accordance with the protocols established by the Ministry of Health and other local health bodies and authorities. SA2 explained the following;

“To ensure social distancing we have increased desk spacing, limited the mixing of classes and stopped all after school activities such as sports.” –

SA2

Cleaning and disinfecting the school

The school administrators when on to mention cleaning and disinfection of school premises. According to Reene (2020), cleaning and disinfecting are important actions that schools can take to slow down the spread of COVID-19.

The above findings show that attempts had been made the school administrators to protect their learners. However it is important to ensure that parents are aware that the schools are making attempts towards reducing the risk of exposure to their children.

Table 4.4: showing views on whether educational costs increased due to COVID-19?

Response	SDC Members	
	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	18	90
No	2	10
Total	20	100

Nearly all the respondents agreed that educational costs have increased due to COVID-19.

The same sentiment was echoed by the school administrators that were interviewed. One school administrator stated the following;

“The school now has to purchase extra cleaning resources such as Domestos because cleaning is now being done more frequently. Other

related bills include hand sanitisers, buckets for hand washing also we have procured hand gloves and masks for our staff. These are not all there are some other costs that we have incurred and yet parents delay paying school fees some do not even pay at all. When we ask them to bring soaps and disinfectants they object as well” – SA4

The above response could be an indicator that COVID-19 has added another burden on parents of providing the school with soap and disinfectants as well as purchasing masks for the children.

4.4. Objective Two: To find out the impact of parental perceptions on opening of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic period at Nketa cluster schools

Table 4.5: showing views on whether parental perceptions are associated with parental involvement

Response	SDC Members	
	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	17	75
Disagree	1	5
Neutral	2	10
Total	20	100

The majority of 75% agreed that parental perceptions were associated with parental involvement. Clemens (2020) agrees with this by stating that parents’ perceptions are correlated with parental involvement. This means that when parents had positive perceptions about the

school, then they are most likely to participate and cooperate with the school leadership. If the perceptions are negative then they are less likely to do the same.

The respondents were then further asked to state how the perceptions of parents challenged the reopening of schools. The findings indicated that parental perceptions brought challenges on involvement which included that some parents looked down upon themselves as they felt that the school did not welcome their views since they did not have first hand information about COVID-19. This was noted as one of the main reasons why parents chose not to support reopening of schools.

4.5. Objective Three: To suggest possible ways which parental perceptions can be improved at Nketa cluster schools

This section sought to find out what had been done to promote parents perceptions at Nketa cluster schools and the following comments were raised by school heads;

“Because of the pandemic, we haven’t really done much because movements are limited and we have had a lot of extra work and government makes last minute decisions hence we don’t have much time to consult the parents” – SA1

“In the current situation, it has been impossible to fully liase with the parents. We have tried to do whatsapp meetings but they have not worked because not every parent is able to be online. Also whatsapp groups can

only have a maximum of 250 participants when the school has almost 1000 parents.” - SA2

“When it comes to COVID-19, we only listen to the government and not the parents. The government is the one controlling how the schools function and all the activities done. Parents are not very knowledgeable about the situation and involving them may cause problems, conflicts and delays in decision making.” – SA3

The findings above show that parental perceptions haven’t really been prioritised by both the government and the schools administration. Whereas, according to Mwasa and Keluje (2021), parents are the best stakeholder partners in mitigating both short and long-term impacts of COVID-19 on educational institutions.

The parents were asked if there was any interaction platform created so that the parents were well informed and could share their views and the following results were obtained;

Table 4.6 showing views on whether Nketa cluster school have created interaction platforms so that parents are well informed and their share their views?

Response	SDC Members	
	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	0	0
No	20	100

Total	20	100
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All the parents felt that they were not involved in the decision making processes when it came to school re-opening. However one school administrator argued with the above when he stated the following;

“We have tried our best to consult the parents but when we called for a meeting they did not attend it. We had even invited the education officers and people from the health sector so that they would share important information with them.” – SA4

In line with the above, Chwale (2020) underlines involving parents in decision making can build a more trusting relationships between the families and schools which are an essential foundation for building productive partnerships. Furthermore, Dornbusch (2020) is of the view that that parents and caregivers can be an important ingredient in children’s achievement in school particularly during this time of a pandemic where parents are involved and supportive of their children’s learning at home. With involved parents, learners are more likely to attend, complete, and do well on academic achievement.

“When the government adjusts the re-opening plans and functioning activities, the schools are not given enough time to discuss it with the parents. So parental involvement in decision making has been a challenge.” – SDC19

The above responses are a confirmation that parental involvement was affected by a number of factors such as poor attendance to meetings and lack of adequate time. The school administrators

were asked to state the parental involvement strategies that they had in their school. Findings revealed that sampled schools currently relied on four main strategies to involve parents in the education of their children namely parent meetings, consultation days and newsletters. However the researcher noted that these strategies were merely used for transmitting information to parents and less collective decision making. One interviewee also mentioned prize giving day as another strategy which they used to promote parental involvement but he then further explained that they were disrupted not only by COVID-19 but also by the harsh economic conditions prevailing in the country and therefore cannot be used to their full potential, consultation days were indicated as the most common strategy as they are cheap. Therefore, schools need to have a look at these strategies with a view of either improving them or crafting new strategies that would be more fruitful as the strategies most relied on are few and not very successful.

When asked what they thought was the best way to involve parents during this COVID-19 pandemic, school heads echoed that there was need to also identify some challenges that parents themselves were facing. One administrator had the following to say;

“The corona virus has presented a lot of difficulties for everyone. Families also face problems which affect the level of support that they offer to the child’s education. It is important for schools to also understand these problems. But how can we do that when there is no communication?” –

SA1

This response is in line with Chritiansen (2020) who postulates that there is need for policy makers to under some lessons from global emergencies and work closely with parents as well as support them in engaging with their children’s learning.

4.6 Discussion of findings

The findings indicated that a significant number of parents did not take COVID-19 as a serious pandemic due to several conspiracy theories and lack of adequate information. Responses drawn from the respondents indicated that the majority of parents were not yet convinced that the COVID-19 virus is a threat that should be taken seriously. The parents seem to be biased to ignore the seriousness of the pandemic. This shows that more communication is required to the parents in order to raise more awareness and debunk the misinformation. With regards to opening of schools, there were mixed views from the participants as they were half split between those who felt that they supported reopening of schools and those who did not. It can be noted that there are several factors which influenced the perceptions of parents and these included whether they felt that the school were safe or not, their knowledge and attitude towards COVID-19 and whether they were involved in the school functioning.

The study sought to establish the regulations which the understudied schools followed. Findings showed that the school had put in place hand washing stations, they practised hand sanitizing, protective wear such as face masks, social distancing as well as disinfecting the school. According to Kaliope (2020) the science and solutions can make schools safe but they are not inherently safe. The elements which make the schools safe also influence the attitudes and perceptions of parents. WHO (2020) has stipulated that the mitigation measures such as those mentioned in the findings can be put in place to prevent school transmission among the people in the school building. These measures help to get children back in the classroom safely which is a major concern for parents.

It was noted that COVID-19 had increased costs to the understudied schools since the school had to purchase additional cleaning materials and chemicals and to cover other related bills which included hand sanitisers, buckets, hand gloves and masks for our staff. However, school revenue was not sufficient as parents were not paying school fees on time. According to UNICEF (2021) school systems run on money and it is impossible to provide access to schooling without adequate financial resources. The increased financial burden could be another factor leading to negative perceptions about school reopening.

Views from the respondents indicated that parental perceptions were associated with their involvement in the school. According to Chwale (2020) parental perceptions influence parental involvement which is an important strategy in the advancement of the quality of education. This means that if their perceptions were negative then there would be low parental involvement. Steinmayr et al. (2020) underline the importance of parental perceptions in school decision making as parents can actively influence student academic motivation. The respondents were then further asked to state how the perceptions of parents challenged the reopening of schools. The findings indicated that parental perceptions brought challenges on involvement which included that some parents looked down upon themselves as they felt that the school did not welcome their views since they did not have first hand information about COVID-19. It could be noted that the parents felt that their views were not prioritised by both the government and the schools administration as they not been involved in decision making processes. Parental perceptions are and indicate of parental involvement which is viewed as a partnership between schools and parents. In the time of pandemics such as the COVID-19, such partnerships are key in promoting student achievement (Dornbusch, 2020). However, this was caused by lack of

adequate time as most circulars distributed by the government were done in a short space of time and instructions were that they had to be implemented with immediate effect.

4.7 Chapter Summary

The current chapter presented and analysed the data collected from the SDC members and school administrators at Nketa cluster schools. Findings indicate mixed perceptions by parents towards reopening of schools. It could also be noted that parental perceptions were influenced by other factors such as lack of correct information about COVID-19, other additional education costs related to the pandemic. The following chapter summarises, concludes and makes recommendations.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The current chapter closes the study on parental perceptions on opening of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic period at Nketa cluster schools. This will be done by making a summary of the whole study, drawing conclusions based on the findings made in the previous chapter and suggesting recommendations.

5.2 Summary

The current study looked into the parental perceptions on opening of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic period with particular emphasis on Nketa cluster schools. The impact of COVID-19-related restrictions on academic motivation as well as extracurricular activities have been adverse. Parents have been realised as one the key stakeholders in education during COVID-19 as most learning programs were now being conducted at home. The study was guided by the following objectives;

Objectives revisited:

- To identify the parental perceptions on opening of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic period at Nketa cluster schools
- To find out the impact of parental perceptions on opening of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic period at Nketa cluster schools impact academic goals.
- To suggest possible ways which parental perceptions can be improved ar Nketa Cluster schools

A theoretical framework which was used for the study was the stakeholder theory which was developed by Freeman in 1984. In the context of this research study stakeholders included parents, SDC, teachers, learners and government, as well as the community at large. Zimbabwean schools are being more deliberate and practical about involving a greater diversity of stakeholders. Empirical literature revealed that Health measures by schools as means to reduce the spread of COVID-19 has been questioned by parents in most countries. The importance of parental perceptions on reopening of schools have been established. It was noted however, that there has not been not much research conducted on similar studies since COVID-19 was a relatively new pandemic in the world.

The third chapter looked into research methodology used to conduct the research. The study employed exploratory and descriptive designs in order to gain an opportunity to use both the qualitative and quantitative approaches in order to have an in-depth understanding of the study. The study population consisted of the SDC members and schools administration at schools located in Nketa cluster. Semi-structured questionnaires and interviews were used to collect data from 20 SDC members and four school administrators in the cluster.

The findings of the study were then presented and analysed in the fourth chapter. Results indicated that there were mixed feelings from parents about reopening of schools during COVID-19 pandemic period. It seems that the perceptions of parents were influenced by many factors which included their understanding of COVID-19, conspiracy theories, other related additional economic costs and the capacity of schools to follow COVID-19 protocols to protect their children. Furthermore, findings showed that the schools were implemented some COVID-

19 prevention measures such as hand washing stations, hand sanitizing, protective wear, social distancing and cleaning and disinfecting of the school. It could also be noted that parental involvement was not prioritised at Nketa cluster schools because of lack of adequate time to consult them and their ignorance in attending school meetings.

5.3 Conclusions

The impacts of positive parental perceptions on the functioning of schools has been a fragment of the discourse on quality education. The study however concludes that parental perceptions were not adequately used by Nketa cluster schools and this creates a gap between the schools and the parents because parental perceptions influence involvement.

During the pandemic's time, it is critical that the barriers to active parental involvement are addressed because of its positive effect on learner performance. Since parents have an influence on the academic prospects a child pursues in school, their involvement during school would aid informed advice- based on some level of awareness of their inclination, aptitude, and performance.

Findings show that the perceptions of parents were influenced by many factors which included their understanding of COVID-19, conspiracy theories, other related additional economic costs and the capacity of schools to follow COVID-19 protocols to protect their children. The extent to which parents understand the seriousness of COVID-19 influences their decisions with regards to how and when their children attend school. It seems from the findings that there were some parents who believed that COVID-19 was just an excuse used by politicians to drive their

personal agendas. Such a mindset may mean that the parents did not take the pandemic seriously hence they may not participate in some intervention measures proposed by the school.

There not enough hand washing stations atNketa cluster schools as the school administrators confirmed that only two stations were put in the entire school. When parents see such, they may feel that the school is not doing enough to protect their children hence the negative perceptions. This study however concludes that this only applies to the parents who understand the seriousness of the pandemic.

It could also be noted that parental involvement was not prioritised at Nketa cluster schools because of lack of adequate time to consult them and their ignorance in attending school meetings. The study concludes that lack of spaces for schools to communicate with parents could be another contributing factor to the ignorance of the parents at Nketa cluster schools.

5.4. Recommendations

The study suggests the following recommendations:

- The national education leadership needs to develop new and creative ways of engaging the education stakeholders whenever new policies, and protocols are being crafted.
- The study suggests that Nketa cluster schools be more aggressive in building good communication. Good communication will trust between the school and parents which is a crucial way to show that the school management understands and care about them and their children. Nketa cluster schools need to continuously keep in touch with parents about the new national COVID-19 protocols and provide suggestion of the ways that they can give assistance to their children's education on an ongoing basis. Findings showed

that parents were not attending school meetings. The study recommends that schools should come up with parent teacher meeting strategy in which the vast majority of parents can participate.

- In this Covid-19 scenario, Nketa cluster schools should focus on engaging the community in meaningful and various ways of having parental involvement in schools. This can be done by creating a parental involvement policy. Such a policy needs to be formed in order to smooth the involvement of parents and make sure the parents are encouraged to talk and discuss about their views. This may take a lot of time and effort; hence the school administrators need to be committed principles.
- Schools can partner up with the health sector and conduct community outreach programs where families are approached directly for discussions regarding schools opening, their roles as parents and assurance on the safety of the children at school. School need to strictly follow the COVID-19 policy and provide a safe learning environment to the learners. This makes the parents feel more confident to send their children to school and to support the schools' efforts as well.

5.5 Suggestions for further research

This study only focussed on parental perceptions on opening of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic period with particular emphasis on Nketa cluster schools. The study suggests further research to be conducted focusing on assessing the COVID-19 safety protocols in schools at a broader scope as stipulated by the government and health experts.

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APPENDICES

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR SDC MEMBERS

DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS

- 1. Gender: Male [] Female []
- 2. Educational Qualification
 Ordinary level [] Tertiary level []
- 3. Employment status
 Formally employed [] Unemployed [] Self-Employed []

**TO IDENTIFY THE PARENTAL PERCEPTIONS ON OPENING OF SCHOOLS
DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC PERIOD AT NKETA CLUSTER SCHOOLS**

- 4. COVID-19 is a serious pandemic which needs to be taken seriously. Do you agree?
 Agree [] Disagree [] Neutral []

Explain your answer

.....
.....

- 5. Do you support the opening of schools currently?
 Yes [] No []

State reasons for your answer

.....
.....

- 6. Do you feel that your school has the capacity to protect children by maintaining COVID-19 protocols
 Yes [] No []

7. Which of the following regulations does your school follow?

Hand washing stations []

Hand sanitizing []

Protective wear []

Social distancing []

8. Has educational costs increased due to COVID-19?

Yes [] No []

TO FIND OUT THE IMPACT OF PARENTAL PERCEPTIONS ON OPENING OF SCHOOLS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC PERIOD AT NKETA CLUSTER SCHOOLS

9. Parental perceptions are associated with parental involvement

Agree [] Disagree [] Neutral []

10. How has parental perceptions affected the manner in which SDC promotes education in your school?

.....
.....
.....

TO SUGGEST POSSIBLE WAYS WHICH PARENTAL PERCEPTIONS CAN BE IMPROVED AR NKETA CLUSTER SCHOOLS

11. What has been done to promote parents perceptions at your school?

.....
.....
.....

12. Have interaction platform been created so that parents are well informed and their share their views?

Yes []

No []

13. Were parents involved in the decision making processes when it came to school re-opening?

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

1. Does your school have adequate resources to follow COVID-19 safety protocols?
2. What are the COVID-19 regulations being followed?
3. In your opinion, have parents been supportive to the re-opening of schools?
4. How do parent's views affect the school?
5. How has the parental perceptions affected school operations?
6. What parental involvement strategies have your school put in place?
7. What do you think is the best way to involve parents during this COVID-19 pandemic?



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FACULTY OF EDUCATION DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATIONS AND PRIMARY EDUCATION

15 APRIL 2021

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

The bearer, Mthwazi Constance, is a B.Ed. student at this University. She 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 E Muguwe

(Chairperson – Educational Foundations and Primary Education)