

**COVID-19 PANDEMIC: ONLINE TEACHING IN PRIMARY SCHOOL TO IMPROVE  
STUDENTS' MENTAL HEALTH FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**



**By**

Celina Thahanyane

(200803621)

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**Supervisors:**

Professor Maxwell Musingafi and Dr Bonaventure Mkandawire

National University of Lesotho,

Roma, Lesotho

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**DECLARATION ON PLAGIARISM**

I hereby swear that the study I have conducted is entirely unique to me and has not been submitted for publication or academic credit to any other organization, journal, college, or university.

I also declare that this research does not contain any unlawful statements or in any way infringe the rights of others. I understand that plagiarism is an act of intellectual dishonesty, and that consequences for committing any such acts can lead to discontinuation and withdrawal from the MA in Development Studies Programme.

I hereby declare that this paper is the outcome of my own free research work, and that in all cases, material from the work of others are used I acknowledged.

Signed-----date-----

## **DEDICATION**

I devote my thesis to my son, Thapelo Realeboha Zakia Ncheche who has been a constant source of support and encouragement during the challenges I faced while writing my dissertation. I'm grateful beyond words to have you in my life. The project is also devoted to my mother, Makabelo Thahanyane, who has always loved me unconditionally and who, by setting a good example, has inspired me to strive hard to achieve my goals. I also dedicate this dissertation to my family who have supported me throughout the process. I will always appreciate all they have done.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study offers guidance to teachers and school stakeholders on how to address the challenges of online learning during pandemics in line with sustainable development goals. Participants' experiences and perceptions reflect the educational implications of online education for learners' growth in terms of academic success and student well-being. The results of this study demonstrated how crucial it is to adapt instruction to meet the requirements of all students, regardless of their aptitude, race, or cultural background towards economic and sustainable development. These results demonstrated that students are more than just their academic selves, that teacher self-care issues exist, that parents' interactions with their children and their schools have an impact on the learning outcomes of those children, and that networking across the community can help teachers and students' families. Along with educating teachers, maintaining connections and healthy interpersonal relationships raises educational standards and helps students realize their intellectual, social, and emotional objectives.

The study used qualitative research paradigm and randomly interviewed 10 teachers and 4 parents. The target population was teachers of four primary schools around Leqele Community and the parents of the students enrolled there. Data gathered in this study was analysed through thematic analysis where common themes in the findings were established. The study provided information about student requirements before, during, and after the epidemic, addressed student and parent reassurance, and proposed useful ways and resources for efficient online learning. According to the findings of this study, the curriculum should be created to accommodate each student's unique learning requirements. The results also stressed the importance of teacher and student wellbeing because it influences student learning. The impact of online learning addresses the need for curriculum and policies that fulfil the various requirements of all students in order to promote social justice and equity and achieve sustainable development. This is based on interviews, conclusions, and a literature analysis. Based on the findings of this study, further research can enhance the online learning experience for all students.

## ACRONYMS

AACE	Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education
COVID-19	Corona Virus Disease of 2019
CRT	Critical Race Theory
CLS	Critical Legal Studies
ELLs	English Language Learners
NHC	National Health Commission
PACE	Policy Analysis for California Education
PE	Physical Education
SEL	Social and Emotional Learning
WHO	World Health Organization

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## CHAPTER ONE

### THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

#### 1.1 Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the importance of providing adjunct teachers with assistance as well as the necessary technical training and professional development in order to successfully adopt online courses. It is clear from the concerns expressed by educators and parents in this study that further research is required before appropriate design and methodology for online classrooms can be provided. According to studies by Albright et al., (2019), studying social and emotional skills can enhance academic performance and learning outcomes. This master's degree research thesis intends to advance the discussion on how to enhance the achievement of students and instructors, as well as their mental, societal and psychological health in an online learning setting.

The mental health of the teacher and a student provides a positive learning and growth experience through school-based mental health services. According to Cowan (2012), there is a growing urgency to improve school-based mental health and the expertise of school psychologists as essential to providing quality, evidence-based services to teachers. This can lead to the economic and sustainable development of the country. Similarly, teacher stress management magnifies the consequences of controlled stress. However, based on the study by Fondea Embuse et al. (2019), teachers reported high levels of stress and burnout due to increased pressure from test-based accountability practices. This calls for stress intervention to be an important first step in reducing negative outcomes. In this case, the findings of this study indicated that the most effective interventions in the fields of mindfulness, behaviour and cognitive behaviour are strategies that can built children 'social competence in online setting.

Based on Trazola (2018), public school teachers face a lot of paperwork and workload. Thus, this further indicates that teachers and development workers are bombarded by work-related tasks such as reports, materials, school assignments and other related tasks apart from their normal daily load. Not only do teachers suffer from overwork, but everyone in the private and public services is overworked and under enormous pressure (Trazola, 2018). Due to this workload, the actual teaching tasks are side-lined by the many other responsibilities and roles that teachers play (David

et al., 2019). In this case, the development of learning resources (LR) requires a lot of motivation and support to create credible materials for students in all schools in the division (Jimanez, 2020).

Sebastian (2019) indicates that, it is very important to find an appropriate approach that emphasizes providing strategic instruction to those who are comfortable with the curriculum, especially at this point. Currently, teachers are left unsure of how to proceed with the teaching and learning process amid the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. With much of the work left in the outgoing school year (e.g., last quarter exam, counting grades, reading forms, etc.), teachers waited for a directive process according to the new standard of the education agencies like country ministries and international organisations on education and sustainable development. This “new normal” prepares teachers to be equipped with adaptive leadership and increased technology competence, which are primary and valuable skills to master (Maha-rani, 2020).

Additionally, this global Covid-19 pandemic has brought anxiety, fear and uncertainty among students, teachers and educators, driving them away from people, work and gatherings. However, this situation also taught teachers bravery, camaraderie and unity to help, support and control this global threat (Suhami, 2021). This was articulated by Maha-rani (2020), who indicated that amidst the pandemic, teachers need to have a clear mind and psychological understanding to be ready and prepared for the new normal. According to Avcı et al. (2017), primary school teachers need a working relationship. The study also reported that needs or achievement, independence, and dominance are among the psychological needs that significantly predict perceived stress. The main purpose of this study was to analyse how teachers utilised online teaching during COVID-19 pandemic in primary schools to improve students’ mental health and how that would contribute sustainable development.

## **1.2 Background to the Study**

The WHO proclaimed COVID-19 a global pandemic in March 2020. It was first confirmed in December 2019 in Wuhan, China. It soon spread rapidly throughout China and in many nations around the world within a short period of time (Byron and Habib, 2021). From December 2019, there were about 2 million limited cases of coronavirus infection reported across 185 different nations. About 20% of instances resulted in significant and complex clinical problems (Anwar et al., 2020). The coronavirus was stated to have been reported in 26 nations globally as of February

2020 (Dong et al., 2020). As a result, nations implemented the necessary safeguards to reduce this infection. For instance, social isolation, quarantine, distance learning and suspension of office activities, travel restrictions, and blockade (Anwar et al., 2020). UNICEF (2021) estimated that 139 million persons worldwide were subject to national stay-at-home orders. Thus, billions of people around the world were staying at home to reduce viral infections (Anwar, Nasrallah and Hussain, 2020).

Not only did the epidemic have an impact on people's physical health, but it also impacted their mental health and general wellbeing of both children and adults. Thus, research on the coronavirus have revealed that the transmission of COVID-19 itself can raise people's levels of stress, anxiety, and depression, globally (Xiao, Zhang, Kong, Li and Yang, 2020). Additionally, there is proof that sadness, anxiety, and excessive levels of stress interfere with the quantity and quality of sleep (Shen, Shi, Ditchburn, Brooke and Bay, 2018). Another study especially notes that this increased emotion has an effect on people's mental health on a worldwide scale (Shafiq, Nipah, Sultana, Rahman and Rahman, 2021).

Children were particularly impacted by this epidemic. This was based on the fact that Covid-19 was a big challenge for the education system in many nations around the world (Daniel, 2020). Overnight, everything went online, and distance learning began all over the world. In Lesotho, as the crisis dragged on, the loss of learning and school closures affected social and economic problems such as school dropouts and malnutrition. As a result, the poverty caused by the economic crisis had a long-term effect on student life. In this inevitable situation, distance education began to reduce academic waste and the psychological stress of elementary education, but at least one third of elementary school students lacked support and did not have access to distance education due to school closures (Paudel, 2021).

In addition, teachers' perceptions and the public on online classes varied. Few people thought that online classes could not be adjusted properly with their toddlers and few thought that online classes were the best way to go (Kulal and Nayak, 2020). In Lesotho, the COVID-19 pandemic was confirmed to have reached Lesotho on 13 May 2020 (Witness News, 2022). Lesotho was the last country in Africa to report cases of COVID-19 during the pandemic (Sky News, May 2020). Many things were speculated to be the reason for the delay, among which was the fact that the country was unable to test for the virus (Worldmetre, 2022). On March 18, 2020, the government declared

a national emergency despite the lack of confirmed cases and closed schools until April 17, 2021, but allowed school meals to continue. At the time, Prime Minister Thomas Thabane announced a three-week quarantine from midnight on 29 March 2020.

The study conducted by Elahi (2021) on the impact of COVID 19 on emotional wellbeing of students indicates that, students had less anxiety, depression and psychological well-being than those of other countries. Online education was a brand new thing for Basotho. Therefore, by moving from traditional classes to online classes, children had less physical activity than expected. This meant that the teachers had to fully adopt the responsibility of fully managing the child's mental state and support accordingly. However, COVID-19 had many effects on daily human life, but its impact on education was very difficult to measure. Additionally, most of the primary school students were facing a big challenge in this epidemic. In light of the Covid-19 pandemic, the aim of this study is to analyse the effect of online education on elementary school kids' emotional, intellectual, and social well-being as well as instructors' perceptions of that effect.

### **1.3 Statement of the problem**

The COVID-19 global pandemic had unanticipated effects on behavior and mental health (Volk, Brazil, Franklin-Luther, Dane and Vaillancourt, 2021). People all over the world were facing difficulties as a result of the pandemic, and this was also the case in Lesotho. UNICEF Lesotho Annual Report (2020) reported that for Basotho learners, 2020 was described as the year of education loss. COVID-19 forced the government to close all schools in March 2020, affecting more than 500,000 students. During COVID-19 lockdown, only 20 percent of families with children who were already in school could access some form of education. Eighty percent of families with children in school stopped education entirely during the siege. As a result, only 45 percent of 7-14 year olds demonstrated basic reading comprehension in English or Sesotho, and only 15 percent demonstrated basic math skills.

This issue also caused the country's primary schools' first-semester exams to be suspended. This had ramifications for the kids and parents as well as the country, as the education sector is indicated to be poor in Lesotho (UNICEF Annual report, 2020). School closures and social unrest had an immediate effect on the mental health of youngsters, including increased stress levels, less focus on research and low self-esteem. This is because the classroom environment is considered more

important for academic performance due to the fact that learners can interact through face-to-face interactions, including those between students and professors, are essential (Somersallo, 2002). This is further emphasised by the ecosystem hypothesis of Bronfenbrenner, which focuses on the nature and circumstances of the child's surroundings. The ecosystems hypothesis claims that as kids become older, the interactions in these settings get more complicated (Makovec, 2018).

According to Holzweiss et al. (2020), a study that examined the effects of apparent stress and emotional disabilities in online learning experiences found that students were less motivated, more pressured to learn independently and every day. Thus, although online and distance education has grown substantially over the past decade, and most notably since the COVID-19 lockdown, limited research has examined the role of online learning on the mental health of students in primary schools. Furthermore, very few studies have examined the significance of children's mental wellbeing on education and sustainable development during the pandemic of COVID-19. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to analyse how online teaching in primary school during COVID-19 was used to improve students' mental health for sustainable development.

#### **1.4 Statement of Purpose**

The rationale behind this study is to investigate the teacher's insights about the mental health of primary school children during an epidemic.

#### **1.5 Research Objectives**

##### **This study intended:**

- To analyse teachers' knowledge and attitudes on children's mental health during COVID-19 pandemic.
- To investigate the significance of children's mental wellbeing on education and sustainable development?
- To investigate how teachers helped parents and children with mental health problems during COVID-19 pandemic?
- To explore different online platforms and alternative teaching practices that were safe and ecologically inclusive that were utilised by teachers and school administrations in order to reduce negative impacts of pandemic on children.

## **1.6 Research Questions**

The survey questions gave the researcher an opportunity to analyse online learning from the standpoints of parents and instructors with different degrees of expertise. In order to elicit more information about the participants' perceptions and experiences, the researcher used an interview guide. Also, a reminder that follow-up questions might be asked during either the first or second interview was given to each participant.

The following questions are what the survey asked:

1. What were the teachers' knowledge and attitudes on children's mental health during COVID-19?
2. What is the significance of children's mental wellbeing on education and sustainable development?
3. How did teachers help parents and children with mental health problems during COVID-19 pandemic?
4. Which are the different online platforms and alternative teaching practices that were safe and ecologically inclusive that were utilised by teachers and school administrations in order to reduce negative impacts of pandemic on children?

## **1.7 Statement of Assumptions**

In line with the World Health Organization (WHO), restrictions placed by the government on social distance, schools in Lesotho predominantly embraced online learning as a technique to increase knowledge acquisition during the course when COVID-19 started to upsurge. The government put this in hopes that it will endure over time and draw in additional students to efficiently satisfy demand.

Here are some assumptions researchers had to make to study these challenges:

1. Sample participants are supportive and can support as much as possible.
2. Participants were also expected to have a broad knowledge of the challenges faced in implementing online learning for all stakeholders, not just rank-and-file.
3. Schools that failed to implement online learning programs and have low bandwidth access to online learning had less access to online learning, and even those that managed to implement online



learning, the problems occurred on student's end where there were different socio-economic challenges like connectivity.

### **1.8 Significance of the study- Scope**

This survey is beneficial to future researchers and scholars who may wish to conduct related research studies on the issues at stake as it will be a reference material for them. The survey will also help the researchers know the views of teachers regarding online learning and how it affected mental health of students. Through the study, the management of different elementary institutions will also know teachers views on the use of online learning, to ascertain whether it is a convenient route for primary students. The findings of this study will further benefit scholars as it is a contribution to the body of knowledge in this broad and yet not fully exploited area of education attainment, psychology as well as social sciences. This would help to enhance understanding and development of relevant theories as well as extensive areas of interest.

Furthermore, this survey will aid administrators of educational institutions in understanding the challenges facing the SADC region as a whole with regards to student's mental health and wellbeing. This understanding is crucial for them to mitigate the risks that may be associated with adopting online learning. In addition, this survey will help the parents anticipate the challenges associated with these rapid changes in their children's education process and stay alert to any changes in the educational field. Finally, this study adds to the body of knowledge on the use of ICT in education and the elements to take into account when putting online learning and projects into practice. Therefore, this study shows the need for a change in education for broader practices that identify the needs of students and enable educators to adapt to changes in society.

### **1.9 Delimitations**

The survey was carried out in Maseru District, Ha Leqele. The study's participants were parents of students who attended primary school in Ha Leqele and educators (such as teachers and principals) who were employed at the time the study was conducted. The rationale for the researcher to focus on choosing to focus on teachers and parents is based on the fact that parents and educators who develop a personal connection with children and students have a direct impact on their behaviour. Additionally, the study will focus on participants between the ages of 25 and 35.

### ***Participants***

For this study, diverse opinions were required for the study, thus, the intended sample size by the researcher was 14 participants. However, the research only covered 10 respondents as after the eighth respondents, the information attained through questionnaire and interview was repeated by other participants. A form of rapport between the researcher and the participants was needed.

### **1.10 Limitations of the Study**

The qualitative methodology's exploratory nature may be the study's flaw. This is because just after the COVID-19 restrictions are lifted, this study inclined parents and professional educators from a diverse Leqele community to participate in this study to better understand how online learning affected elementary school children's mental and emotional well-being. This was done because it was essential and timely to conduct more thorough study on the online application of social and emotional learning as opposed to classrooms learning. Although the researchers used precise criteria of purposive sampling to choose the individuals, sampling bias still remained. To start, the survey sample was not large enough to inferences.. Second, the survey's sample size was rather small and no students were interviewed by the researcher. Participants only resided in one area of the neighbourhood, and their ages ranged from 27 to 35. Third, because only a short period of time was used for this study, the variety of insights that participants could add after taking into account more experiences was constrained.

#### **1.10.1 Methodological limitations**

There were some methodological limitations that the researcher encountered during the course of the research study.

##### ***Sampling Limitations***

There was also a sampling limitation where the researcher could not precisely identify the schools that have successfully implemented online learning and those that have not. There was no open access to data from the relevant government bodies that accurately reports such information.

##### ***Limited Prior Studies***

There are limited prior studies relating to the current research within the Lesotho context. Literature review forms the groundwork of any study and a lack of or inadequacy of literature could make the research lack a clear foundation. However, this limitation acted as an opportunity because the researcher can successfully feel the knowledge gap that is already extant.

##### ***Limited Scope of the Study***

The scope of the research is limited to Ha-Leqele region only. Knowledge gap exists in many SADC region areas. However, due to the differences in socio-economic conditions of various regions and the fact that Lesotho is autonomous on most of its matters including education, the researcher focused on Ha Leqele community, a suburb of the city of Maseru, alone.

### ***Limited Sample Size***

The study consisted of a small sample size (14) which made data susceptible to bias. However, backing the information collected with relevant data from news sources, opinion articles, and data from other regions, credibility of the current data can be enhanced.

### **1.11 Definitions of Key Terms**

***Online learning and online teaching*** - the use of the Internet to access learning and teaching materials, to interact with the content, instructor, and other learners and to obtain support during the learning process. It can also be used to provide and acquire knowledge, to construct personal meaning and to grow from the learning experience” (Ally, 2004). For this study, online learning or teaching is any form of teaching through digital platforms that is given to students by their institutions.

***Sustainable development*** – According to Takahsi (2015), *it* is economic development that does not use up natural resources, and it has taken on a central role in a lot of environmental literature. For this study sustainable development refers to any form of development that comes as an end product of effective education.

***Mental well-being-*** refers to a state of psychological and emotional well-being that is favourable and indicates that a person is capable of engaging in productive and fulfilling cognitive and emotional functioning. Beyond simply feeling cheerful, mental well-being also includes having pleasant emotions and leading a purposeful life (Bhugra, Till and Sartorius, 2013). Thus, this study adopted the definition.

***Covid-19-*** Coronavirus, a condition linked to SARS-CoV-2, has a significant impact on many people's life. This virus attacks the bodily functions of humans and frequently results in death. It is a transmitted virus (Sverzellati, Milanese, Milone, Balbi, Ledda and Silva, 2020).

### **1.12 Chapter Outline**

There are five chapters in this dissertation. The topic is introduced in the first chapter, and the second chapter is literature review. The third chapter deals with the research methodology, the fourth one is about data analysis, the fifth and last chapter is the summary, conclusion and recommendations derived from the whole thesis.

### **1.13 Summary of the chapter**

This chapter has stated that Covid-19 pandemic is a major public health concern worldwide. Little is known about the impact of a pandemic on the mental health of the children especially those who were in school during the upsurge of the pandemic, and thus being forced to engage in online learning. The next chapter reviews literature utilized for this study.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **2.0 Introduction**

The effectiveness of early children's caregivers and the families in which they are raised directly affects their mental health (Huang, 2020). Early childhood mental health therefore refers to young children's healthy social, emotional, and behavioural well-being. As a result, a young child's mental health is crucial at his her every stage of development. Due to the closure of everything during the COVID-19 epidemic, millions of children are said to have lost early childhood education and care, according to the current state of the world (Egan, Pope, Moloney, Hoyne and Beatty, 2021). Based on Save the Children (2020), 56 percent of children were not in contact with their peers, which had an immediate negative impact on their social development and interfered with their mental health (Egan et al., 2021).

Thus, the purpose of this chapter is to present findings of a review of literature on how COVID-19 pandemic affected mental health of primary school pupils through online learning. Literature review is a review of the existing scholarship or available body of knowledge and helps the researcher to see how other scholars have investigated the research problem (Mouton, 2001). The chapter familiarized readers with the current stage regarding the research problem. This was achieved through the desk study of a wide range of academic books, journals articles, government documents and the internet. Owing to that, this chapter focused on reviewing on the impact of online learning in primary schools, on mental health of pupils, on teachers and parent as well as government and its sustainable development initiatives based on education sector.

#### **2.1 Empirical literature**

##### **2.1.1 Nature of online learning in primary schools during COVID-19**

###### *The concept of online learning or teaching*

The concept of online teaching is nothing but teaching that takes place using internet which is actually a virtual mode of teaching. The history of online teaching dates back to its first correspondence courses in 1800s and was said to be using parcel post to reach students who could not be on a university campus (Kentor, 2015). Gradually, the communication technologies emerged, modified and the use of radio waves, television, caught the track towards educating the masses. Though online learning emerged in 1982 yet, in 1998, the first fully online programs were

founded in New York University Online, Western Governor's University, the California Virtual University and Trident University (Miller et al., 2004).

Online education can be defined as electronically supported learning and teaching, which relies on the Internet, with the aim of interaction between teachers and students and for exchanging teaching materials. Online education can be an effective method of education for the students who are mature, self-disciplined, motivated, well organized and having high degree of time management skills. Such way of education has higher requirements on the ability of self-control and self-supervision of students (Kumar, 2010). On the other hand, online education can be an inappropriate learning environment for more dependent students who have difficulty with assuming responsibilities required by the online courses. For some students who lack ability of self-control, there is less teacher supervision and guidance in online teaching, which can lead to decline in academic success (Huang, 2020).

Regarding to online teaching, it can be divided into two types: asynchronous teaching and synchronous interactive teaching. A synchronous teaching can include for example, the development of (advanced) teaching materials, pre-recorded lectures, and usage of different tools, storage, streaming and other resources. Synchronous interactive teaching can include for example, all sorts of live (real time) webinars and live streaming (Huang, 2020). Teacher's positive attitude is one of the key elements in process of transforming classical onsite teaching into an online teaching. The application of modern educational technology in teaching can promote the renewal of teachers' teaching ideas, the improvement of teaching methods and the transformation of evaluation methods, thereby improving their professional teaching ability and information teaching level (Huang, 2020).

Unfortunately, the significant increase in the number of students studying online has not been associated with corresponding advances in the preparation of educators to teach online, in education for online learning, or in other efforts directed toward improved learning outcomes and the overall quality of the online educational experience (Garrison and Anderson, 2003). Research efforts in this area to date have concentrated on students and instructional strategies. As a result, there is now a better understanding of the way that online learning changes learners and learning, as well as teaching practices (Duffy and Kirkley, 2001).

The work of teaching online distance courses has required the adoption of different roles in these new learning environments. According to Moore and Kearsley (1996) the nature of teaching and the role of the instructor in distance education differs from the traditional classroom. In contrast to the assumed roles in the face-to-face format, these roles present certain challenges. One of the most important challenges for instructors dedicated to teaching online, is not only becoming good facilitators of acquisition of knowledge on the part of the students, but also in being vehicles to promote students to become more self-directed and to collaborate with other colleagues that they encounter in other geographical latitudes, whose messages can be asynchronous (Conrad and Donaldson, 2004).

### ***Online learning in primary schools during COVID-19***

The outbreak of COVID- 19 pandemic has disrupted the normal classroom teaching and made to think the alternate ways to continue teaching- learning process. Before the outbreak, though the online education practices were emphasized by the various educational stakeholders yet, it was never an entire shift of online teaching in the mainstream of elementary education which resulted into the beginning of new challenges as well as opportunities simultaneously (Kaup, 2020). The increased demand of online learning, the demand of online teaching was natural. It has been found that prior to COVID-19 pandemic, the findings of the study regarding online and distance learning in elementary schools found that only 47 percent of elementary respondents to the education survey indicated that they preferred to be taught online (Pomerantz and Brooks, 2017). This was also found to be the case with teachers as those who are familiar with teacher- centred methods may experience challenges transitioning to online instruction that emphasize implementation of student- centred pedagogies as because, some instructors find it challenging to adjust to a new pedagogical form (Barr and Miller, 2013).

The study by Mohalik and Sahoo (2021), indicated that one must realize that not all students were adept at using the latest technology tools in online education. Some of them feared using it, and not all courses were suitable for this online education adoption, especially in practical-based education such as the TVET course. TVET is an education and training that delivers broad-based technical knowledge and skills or practical assessment in the academic syllabus. Student struggled to accommodate in doing practical work at home with adequate access to appropriate facilities and resources.

In March 2020, Ha Leqele schools were forced to switch from in-person education to virtual learning in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Ha Leqele schools answered to the rare and difficult conditions for the 2020–2021 academic year by taking steps to guarantee that student learning could proceed securely and successfully. In Ha Leqele, both elementary and high schools began offering classes online in April 2020, with some changing to mixed learning by October 2020. To maintain safety and social distance, several schools established a two-cohort blended/hybrid approach, with one for in-person learning in the morning and the other in the afternoon. Parents' visits were also restricted by schools, and outsiders were not permitted on campus.

### **2.1.2 Impact of COVID-19 on mental health of students during online learning**

According to Dube (2020), emotions can also turn out to be a barrier to effective online learning. Emotions are an important factor for students to control their own learning state and influence on their learning outcomes. According to Huang (2020), research show that, generally, 21st century youth spend too much time in front of all sorts of screens. If the education process takes place online, the time of exposure to screens is even longer. The result is a bad impact on the health and psychological and social development of students, and of teachers also. In addition, it can happen that the time for consultations disappears, so professors receive messages, inquiries, assignments, and many at any time of the day or night. In this way, professors are disturbed, and their working day lasts 24 hours without personal space.

### ***International***

The COVID-19 pandemic began in December 2019 in Wuhan. The World Health Organization (WHO) noted that the virus was spreading globally at an alarming rate, with 3,472,068 fatalities and 167,011,807 verified cases as of May 25, 2021 (WHO, 2021). Although the pandemic's emergence in Africa had at the time been sluggish, the WHO claimed that cases were quickly spreading. Africa registered 3,457,590 cases after the first one was reported on February 14, 2020 and then 86,220 fatalities May 25, 2021 (ibid). According to a WHO poll conducted in 2020, COVID-19 affected 93 percent of the world's countries, with over 60 percent reporting disruptions to mental health services, particularly those for children and adolescents (72 percent). According to the National Health Commission of China where the virus was initially discovered, COVID-19 had a moderate to severe detrimental psychological impact on Chinese individuals, with depression



and anxiety disorders each accounting for 17 percent and 28.8 percent of cases, respectively (Fegert, Vitiello, Plener and Clemens, 2020).

Based on Fegert et al (2020), this is because people are social beings, so when educational institutions close, the problem was psychologically social because students closed themselves in their “bubbles” and they did not have needed social contact, which is considered extremely important for healthy development (Hargreaves, 2020). According to Dube (2020), if online classes were not held through video calls in real time, there was a high probability that the teacher cannot additionally explain a lesson to student who did not understand it, and the student can also not be able to ask the teacher if the lesson is not clear to him or her. Furthermore, there was no personalized attention and face-to-face interaction between a teacher and student. In this way students became depressed and anxious, which caused above-mentioned sociological and psychological problems. In other words, social isolation caused by closed educational institutions triggered negative effects on mental health of young people as well as on their social inclusion. Emotions were also involved there as it is well known that virtual world lacks emotions or ways for person to qualitatively express emotions. Emotions are an important factor for students to control their own learning state and influence on their learning outcomes (Huang, 2020).

Additionally, due to restriction on socialization as an effort to curb the spread of the virus, there was little contact and isolation among people which exacerbated loneliness. Evidence from Italy, Spain, and China suggests that during lockdowns, young children became clingier or exhibited regression in behavior (Imran, Aamer, Sharif, Bodla and Naveed, 2020). As a result of the high stress caused by the epidemic, Japan implemented an aerobic program and delivered information to promote their mental well-being (Okuyama, Seto, Fukuda, Funakoshi, Amae, Onobe, Izumi, Ito and Imamura, 2021). According to results of another study conducted in Argentina, 93% of participants noticed behavioural and emotional change on their kids throughout Covid-19. They noted that youngsters under 12 years old who were bored were more likely to become irate, upset, and nervous (Schneiderman, Bailac, Borak, Comar, Eisner, Ferrari, Giannini, Risso, Vetere and Garibotti, 2021).

### ***National***

Lesotho recorded its initial COVID-19 case on 13 May 2020, and infections rose sharply from then. As of 22 May 2021, Lesotho had recorded 10,822 confirmed cases and 326 deaths. In

response to increasing COVID-19 cases both globally and regionally, the Government of Lesotho established a set of restrictions to control the spread of the virus (World Bank, 2020). On the 18th of March 2020, the Government of Lesotho proclaimed a national emergency, which was followed a week later by a mandatory shutdown of all non-essential services. The lockdown required that all non-essential services under the lockdown. All non-essential activities were closed for 6 weeks, with restrictions relaxed on the 19<sup>th</sup> of May 2020. The closing of academic establishments restricted children and teachers to their houses. This development negatively impacted on the learners' brains and intellectual capacity as hundreds of primary school students stopped their academic activities owing to covid-19 (Ziebell, et al., 2020). But information is scant on the students' long-term psychological health in Lesotho. Nevertheless, the impact of lockdowns has had negative effect regarding students' mental health.

### **2.1.3 Perceptions or insights of teachers regarding**

There is increasing works on the welfare of students during the pandemic that highlighted increased anxiety over the disruption of schedules and routines as well as feelings of loneliness as a result of not being in direct contact with or interacting with friends (Brazeau, et al., 2020). Along with how happiness and health knowledge should take centre stage when school recommences, the communal and emotive needs of children had to also be taken into consideration (Colao, et al., 2020). The teachers indicate that online learning in elementary school was accompanied by many challenges that added on the mental stress of students. Students from rural areas and disadvantaged groups suffered during online learning. This is because they were not able to utilize high-speed internet access and the necessary extra technical equipment, bridging the gap between privileged and disadvantaged students. The student facing this difficulties were affected by anxiety and depression and negatively affected their daily life balance. It also provoked a startling response from students, affecting mental health and anxiety. Therefore, COVID-19 pandemic appears to have had a detrimental impact on student's mental health when students start to refuse or are unwilling to join online classes.

Additionally, studies on the psychological impact of pandemics show evidence of negative impacts on mental health, especially social mobility. Most teachers experienced problems in terms of: academic problems of students, children have not been independent in participating in non-academic activities, caring with less friends, the ability of children to interact with the environment is still low, the child's emotional ability in self-adjustment, skills in developmental aspects are not

stable. Social competence for children if they can have responsible behaviour, independent or not dependent on others, able to cooperate, behaviour has a certain purpose, and is not impulsive. While the child can be said to be incompetent if his behaviour is as good, unfriendly, as well as opposition. The social competence of the child of a sedentary positive mood, self-esteem, social responsibility that includes the ability to interact with adults, helpful behaviour towards peers and moral maturity, orientation to achievement, leadership attitude towards peers, and goal-oriented and persistent behaviour (Suharli,2020).

#### **2.1.4 Significance of children mental wellbeing for sustainable development**

Sustainable development cannot be achieved without the inclusion of mental health as a key global priority. Until recently, the international community had not mobilised the necessary attention, efforts, and resources for people with mental illness and disability, despite the knowledge that the economic cost of mental disorders is more than 4 percent of GDP worldwide. Depression is a leading cause of disability and more than 800 000 deaths by suicide occur every year, many of which are preventable. 2015 is historic because two UN global frameworks have included mental health and wellbeing and disability. The UN Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–306 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Richards, 2014).

Sustainable development in early childhood care and education is just as fundamentally concerned with wellbeing in early childhood and in later life in African countries as it is in any other part of the world. It is about being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and it is about achieving economic well-being as well. All of these are compromised by exposure to pollution, traffic, lack of green space and play areas, less active lifestyles, poor diets and poverty. The UNESCO Decade for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) has provided a context for the rationalisation of a number of separate initiatives that have developed in early childhood education. The recommendations were grounded on notions that children are competent, active agents in their own lives and recognised that children are affected by, and both capable (often required by circumstance), to engage with complex environmental and social issues. The recommendations steered away from romanticised notions of childhood as an arena of innocent play that positions all children as leading exclusively sheltered, safe and happy lives that remain untouched by the events around them (UNESCO, 2012).

Suhami (2020) indicates that the early age is the golden age. This golden age is the first five years of a child's life often referred to as a window opportunity, or critical period. 80% of a child's brain intelligence can be obtained at the golden age. Golden period is a golden age of child growth that occurs once in human life. At this time the child's brain develops very rapidly, where most brain cell tissue serves as a controller of every human activity and skin. Children respond and quickly learn new things by exploring the surrounding environment. Children are also state assets. On their shoulders bear the responsibility and survival of the country and the nation. If from an early age, the child is equipped with a good education and values then one day the child will be able to recognize the potentials that exist in him so that they can develop that potential and contribute the potential that exists to him for the progress of this nation and country in order to be able to compete in the era of globalization.

Education is a tool in achieving happiness and well-being for all mankind, a quality education will reflect a peaceful society that advances and leads to constructive traits. On the other hand, education is also the driving wheel so that the culture and habits of each age become changed following the changes gained from education itself. If a person wants to achieve a better life, surely education is the answer, because from education to doing creative things, innovative in tinging every development of the times (UNDP, 2020). In order for mental health programs implemented in schools to continue, it is important to develop the school system systematically (Adelman and Taylor, 1999). In the promotion of mental health in schools, its success is placed on the operating core, namely teachers. Thus, teachers in schools that promote health need to gain capacity for professionals to overcome learning barriers in students while promoting mental health, through the curriculum outlined in the daily actions/ activities in the school (Karyani, 2016).

### **2.1.5 How teachers helped parents and students with mental health**

A "focused tactic of physical re-engagement" (Brown, et al., 2020) and continued elevation of healthy habits through the dissemination of health matters and healthy lifestyles through reliable knowledge actions should be implemented in order to improve student wellbeing when school begins. The inclusion of health literacy in academic curriculum, "either within scientific courses or as extracurricular matter," can attest to this (Colao, et al., 2020). According to Suhali et al (2020), teachers in Malawi noted that students had different needs and varied in their experience of mental health difficulties, including how they choose to think about their situation, and whether they wish to disclose their difficulties. Forms of mental health that were said to have been having

multiple appearances in several studies according to (Colao, et al., 2020) were emotional wellbeing where there was high levels of stress, anxiety and mood disorders.

In five studies conducted on anxiety by teachers association of Australia on parents, teachers as well as elementary students using cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) interventions which were rated as 1++ on quality showed beneficial effects of the intervention programmes. Two studies showed that brief targeted interventions (9 to 10 weeks) successfully reduced anxiety problems developing in children who were identified as showing precursor symptoms. Two studies of indicated interventions suggested that anxious online school refusers showed sustained benefit compared with controls, and one study showed increased benefits when parent training was combined with child CBT (Shucksmith, 2020). Additionally, there were two studies on attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Both studies used multicomponent interventions based on CBT. One addressed ADHD symptoms, while the other focused on helping teachers to identify ADHD and respond appropriately. No significant differences were found between the intervention and control groups on the outcome measures reported (Shucksmith (2020).

### **2.1.6 Teaching methods that promoted mental wellbeing of students**

The physical environment is a powerful force for child social support. This physical and verbal environment affects how we feel and what we do, determines how our processes interact with others, and will be able to measure how much we can achieve our goals (Weinstein, Romano and Mignano, 2007). This is the case for everyone, but especially for children. Environmental elements such as colour, light, materials, room settings, sounds, and routines also affect the child's prosocial behaviour. In order for children to interact comfortably, children behave in a socially acceptable way, and the opportunity to practice skills related to self-regulation can be done by making well-planned early learning arrangements. This is the case for everyone, but especially for children. Environmental elements such as colour, light, materials, room settings, sounds, and routines also affect the child's prosocial behaviour. In order for children to interact comfortably, children behave in a socially acceptable way, and the opportunity to practice skills related to self-regulation can be done by making well-planned early learning arrangements.

Teaching that includes Social competence, which is defined in early childhood literature as the extent to which children are effective in their social interactions with others, including creating and maintaining social relationships, showing cooperative skills and flexibility, and adjusting

behaviour to meet the demands of different social contexts (Fabes et al., 2006). This realm reflects pro-social children's skills and abilities, including the ability to recognize social cues; get along positively with peers and adults through cooperation, listening, picking, and starting and maintaining conversations; engage in social problem solving; understand the rights of others; treat others fairly; distinguish between incidental and intentional actions and balance your own needs with the needs of others (Kostelnik et al., 2014).

In order for mental health programs implemented in schools to continue, it is important to develop the school system systematically (Adelman and Taylor, 1999). In the promotion of mental health in schools, its success is placed on the operating core, namely teachers. Thus, teachers in schools that promote health need to gain capacity for professionals to overcome learning barriers in students while promoting mental health, through the curriculum outlined in the daily actions/activities in the school (Karyani, 2016). Mental health in education is expected to help with life and education issues (Hanurawan, 2012).

Furthermore, what greatly affects children's social behaviour is how adults are able to align nonverbal and verbal communication to the child. It can be seen from how adults talk to the child, how well they listen to what the child is saying and the extent to which they use language to expand the child's social understanding. In teaching and learning, attitude and tone are just as important, if not more important, than the exact word you choose. Similarly, the word can harm, heal, support, or reduce a child's sense of well-being and confidence. This pyramid promotes self-awareness as well as the development and communication of language is a nonverbal and verbal strategy connected to the social support phase (Hemmeter and Ostrosky, 2003;; Sugai et al., 2000).

## **2.2 Theoretical framework**

### **2.2.1 Critical race theory (CRT)**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a "theoretical and analytical framework that challenges diversities and impacts educational structures, practices, and discourses" (Yosso, 2005). CRT is one framework that allows scholars to look at how social characteristics affect academic performance. Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman and Richard Delgado founded critical race theory in the 1970s. They contributed to the theory by emphasizing and placing a strong activity and transformation of ideas about race, racism and power (Yosso, 2005). They also sponsored for separate black institutions, criticising the white sponsored change introduced after American civil rights movement of the

1960. They struggled with the idea that motivated Desegregation and enhancement of education for black and white students, as in the case of *Brown v. Education* (Yosso, 2005). They indicated that building environments that are best for learning requires taking into account, appreciating, and utilizing students' cultural backgrounds and identities (Gay, 2010). CRT challenged the law, society, race, and education in the early to mid-1980s (Hartlep, 2009).

Yosso (2005) claims that CRT developed from criticisms of the critical legal studies movement in its post-1987. According to critical theorists, critical legal studies thought negatively about and paid little attention to the history of institutionalised racism (Yosso, 2005). However Derrick, et al (2017) organized the first group workshop in the development of fresh perspectives and methods for combating racism in Madison, Wisconsin in 1989 (Delgado and Stefancic, 2017). Garca and Guerra (2004) explored presumptions and ideas about students from varied cultural backgrounds and acknowledged the pervasiveness of deficit thinking in American culture. Cultural understandings, aptitudes, and talents that oppress certain groups socially frequently get ignored are utilized in the critical race theory. According to them, schools and those who work in them reflect these ideals (Garca and Guerra, 2004). Furthermore, the cultural race theory underlines how poorly equipped instructors deal with the realities of their students' diversity as learners. Daniel Solórzano identified five CRT tenets, according to Yosso (2005):

- (1) The inter-centricity of race and racism;
- (2) The encounter to leading system;
- (3) The assurance to societal reasonableness;
- (4) The importance of empirical information; and
- (5) The exploitation of interdisciplinary methods.

### **CRT in an online classroom environment**

Contact is crucial for minimizing inequalities in the digital world, and access to affordable broadband and internet tools, technology lessens disparities in educational consequences (Khan, 2012). Ethnic documentation lessens the negative impact of bias (Accles, et. al, 2006; Wong, et al 2003) on educational achievement and fulfilment are apparent judgment on mental and biological reactions to stress, which in turn affect perceptive functioning (Levy et al 2016). For educational

programs to be successful, pupils' most fundamental human needs must be satisfied first (Zubrick, et al., 2005). If assistance is also given to address their basic requirements, such as care and protection, the likelihood that educational programs will have any good effect on vulnerable pupils will be significantly boosted. According to recent literature, students from poor backgrounds to students with special learning needs and to those living in villages, are at particular risk of having worse learning outcomes (Cowden, et al, 2020).

### **Absenteeism and equity in an online classroom (through the lens of CRT)**

Absences have a negative effect on pupils' academic performance and behaviour, especially those who are deemed defenceless (Cottingham, et al., 2020). This study discovered that prolonged absences have the most detrimental effects on elementary and middle school children's social and emotional development (Cottingham, et al., 2020). The researcher will illuminate absenteeism, vulnerability, internet accessibility, and the effect of critical race theory based on the social and emotional learning of students when this theory is utilized. Similarly, the nature of its inclusive units and its absence in all classrooms and experiences are two criticisms of CRT (Ladson-Billings, 1999).

#### **2.2.2 Social and emotional learning**

The term “social and emotional learning” refers explicitly to student development in this vast area (Duckworth and Yeager, 2015). The process of learning the abilities necessary to control one's emotions and make wise judgments is known as social and emotional learning, or SEL (CASEL, 2005). The development of students' social and emotional skills are advantageous to both individuals and society (CASEL, 2005). Communal and emotive development are essential for academic performance and must be taught in every classroom, particularly in an online learning setting (California Department of Education, 2019). Additionally, social and emotional shows how community and emotive learning affect students. In accordance with Greenberg et al. (2003), SEL competencies have a favourable impact on students' academic performance and social behaviour and reduce conduct issues and emotional distress.

Social competence for children if they can have responsible behaviour, independent or not dependent on others, able to cooperate, behaviour has a certain purpose, and is not impulsive. While the child can be said to be incompetent if his behaviour is as good, unfriendly, as well as opposition. The social competence of the child of a sedentary positive mood, self-esteem, social



responsibility that includes the ability to interact with adults, helpful behaviour towards peers and moral maturity, orientation to achievement, leadership attitude towards peers, and goal-oriented and persistent behaviour. Thus, children's social competence is very important to be built and improved early on. The component of CSC are self-regulation, interpersonal expertise and abilities (Suharni et al., 2020).

Numerous studies have shown how crucial SEL is to students' success in and out of the classroom. Han and Johnson (2012) discovered a link between students' social connections with peers in online classroom settings and their emotional intelligence, such as their capacity to read facial emotions. Raising students' EQ levels may increase their interest in online learning. Additionally, this study demonstrated that linked peers are more productive in an online learning setting (Han and Johnson, 2012). As a result, the submission of SEL has the possibility to lessen isolation and produce improved student results, thereby increasing platform longevity. The goal of Durlak et al (2011)'s 213 SEL programs was to examine the effects of social and emotional learning in learners from kindergarten through grade 12. The findings demonstrated that SEL programs enhance social behaviour in students, enhanced academic performance, and have a beneficial impact on students' views toward themselves, others, and school.

SEL programs work at all academic levels and in both traditional and online learning environments (Durlak, et al., 2011). Over 10 years, academics and educators argued that it is important to pay more attention to the mental models, dispositions, emotions, and behaviours of pupils as well as their academic material knowledge. For examples, teachers, administrators, academics, and lawmakers all throughout the United States are becoming increasingly interested in promoting these components of student development, which are generally referred to as social and emotional learning (SEL). Development about and controlling one's emotions, setting and achieving objectives, appreciating others' viewpoints, forming and maintaining strong relationships, making responsible decisions, and handling interpersonal situations constructively are all part of social and emotional learning (Elias, et al., 1997). SEL programs, according to CASEL (2005), improve academic achievement and youth development and assist children in acquiring the knowledge and attitudes necessary to control their emotions, demonstrate empathy for others, and uphold supportive connections.

### **SEL as a Lever for Equity**

The CASEL (2005) asserts that societal and poignant learning is a valuable tool aimed at building compassionate, equitable, comprehensive, and healthy groups that encourage every person to realize their potential. A learning environment where all children and adults feel respected, valued, and affirmed in their interests, abilities, social identities, cultural values, and backgrounds is necessary for the systemic implementation of the SEL curriculum. In spite of inequalities in colour, socioeconomic class, gender, sexual orientation, and other factors, SEL aids districts in promoting high-quality educational opportunities and outcomes for all children (CASEL, 2005).

There is also more and more support for particular Social and Emotional Learning programs. In the current research literature, applications of the Committee for Children's curricula have demonstrated robust outcomes. Many beneficial effects, including improved executive-function abilities for young learners, have been linked to Second Step SEL for Early Learning (Wenz-Gross et al., 2018). Others have criticized SEL, even though many scholars and educators have stated that it is advantageous. According to Hoffman (2009), communal and emotive learning is based on prevailing values. Hoffman (2009) and Kohn (2014) concur that SEL places more value on compliance than on critical thought. Hoffman (2009), Kohn (2014), and Stokas (2015) assert that SEL puts an emphasis on particular pupils rather than larger social systems.

### **2.3 Chapter Summary**

With data that demonstrates institute philosophy has a critical scholars' participation, the chapter has demonstrated that great school culture is rooted in students' sense of belonging. School engagement is both a requirement for and a contributor to SEL efforts (CASEL, 2005). This project assists professors in assessing the unswerving relationship amongst online techniques and results. Researchers may want to look at SEL techniques in the setting of primary schools as a result of this study. Last but not least, this essay emphasizes the necessity of educational reform in the direction of more adaptable models and practices that address the complexity and unpredictability of the modern, fast-paced, networked, yet still fragile society.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3.0 Introduction

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2001) research methodology is the general approach the researcher takes in carrying out the research project. This chapter explains how the researcher will conduct the study. It includes the description of research design, the population, the sampling procedure, methods of data collection, and how the data will be analysed and a description of the study. The information from the various views on how e-learning touches students' mental and social-emotional health are the main topics of this project, which also addresses a wider spectrum of potential future issues.

#### 3.1 Research Methodology

This study is a qualitative research and hence will follow systematic procedures. According to Babbie and Mouton (2012), qualitative research is a generic research approach that takes its departure from the insider perspective. The advantage of using this method is that it promotes understanding of social phenomena and studies phenomena in their natural setting (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Thus, the researcher chose qualitative approach in order to fully learn about the effects of online learning on mental health of elementary school students amid the Covid-19 pandemic as it will allow the study to identify contributing aspects of children mental health during pressing times.

#### 3.2 Research Design

Social survey research design was used for this study; this is because social survey is mainly used for this kind of research where opinions of individuals are sought. The purpose of the study is to utilise the information gathered to help stakeholders, and educational institutions better understand the psychological, communal, and emotive necessities of the children. In order to support the educational needs of minor students in online learning environments, it is important for lecturers who teach online courses to be aware of the best educational techniques for fostering multicultural presence. The results of this study may affect future teacher practices for integrating social and emotional learning into their courses and school site decisions about the adoption and implementation of particular social and emotional curricula.

### **3.3 Research Population and sample**

The populations of this study were all the teachers of the primary schools around Leqele community and the parents of the children enrolled at those schools. There are a total of 4 primary schools located at Leqele community and 10 teachers were drawn from all of them as sample with addition of 4 parents. This means that the questionnaires were distributed to 14 participants. Simple random sampling technique was used in drawing the sample for this study. According to Babbie (2018), in simple random sampling, each member of the population has an equal chance of being selected.

### **3.4 Research Instruments**

Questionnaire and interview guide are the research instruments that were used for this study. The questionnaire was used because it is mostly used in library and information science research. The questionnaires were prepared in line with the research questions raised in the study. The questionnaire comprises of closed-ended questions where by respondents were required to tick from the available options. According to Busha and Harter (2018), questionnaires are used in survey research as instrument for primary data collection. Ten copies of questionnaires were distributed to primary school teachers around Leqele community and parents of pupils enrolled at the four primary schools involved in the study.

The study also utilized an interview guide. The interview guide is a series of interlinking written questions. A set of sequential questions were drafted and these questions were used to extract the relevant information from the respondents (Ary, Jacobs and Razavieh, 2010). Babbie and Mouton (2012) postulate that depth interviews are most appropriate in complex situations and for studying sensitive areas because they give the interviewer the opportunity to prepare the respondent before asking sensitive questions and explain complex ones in person. This study also employed individual interviews. The interviews were used on four parents involved in the study as they are best used to capture data on socially sensitive and highly personal topics of one's life experiences. The interview method allowed the researcher to create an environment in which respondents will be recorded on voice recorders after permission from respondents has been granted, so as to ensure that all parts of these conversations will be available for transcription and data analysis at a later stage.

### **3.5 Research Procedure**

Prior to each interview, the researcher sent an email to each participant requesting their signature on a consent form permitting them to take part in the study. Some participants asked for a sample of the questionnaire so they would know exactly what would be asked of them. The consent form described the objectives of the study, its methodology, associated risks, and the procedures for gathering and safeguarding data. The researcher created the interview questions to elicit information from the participants and their experiences with online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as the difficulties that impacted the students' achievement, behavior, and mental health.

### **3.6 Data Collection and Analysis**

Copies of the questionnaires were personally administered to the respondents. To this end, the researcher obtained letter of introduction from his Head of Department, and displayed to the respondents so have their cooperation in seeking information on the issue under study. Furthermore, interview guide was used where a convenient time to participants was arranged. The guide consisted of sequential topics and questions that the researcher wanted to ask along with the follow-up questions and probes. The guide was designed in both Sesotho and English, and enabled the respondents to answer in any language they chose where they were able to express themselves fully. All parts in Sesotho were translated and duly transcribed into English. Notes were also taken on all aspects of the responses, which included verbal cues, the emotional state of the respondents and gestures that they might display. Notes were taken on the environment in which the interview was taken, for example the participant' houses. These helped shed light on subjects' socio-economic statuses among other things.

Framework analysis was used to analyze the data. According to Ritchie et al (2013), framework analysis is an approach to qualitative data analysis that aims to order data to facilitate interpretation by allowing the researcher to analysis and interpret data sequentially. The consideration for this method of analysis was that; it organizes data but reduces it, the framework also retains link to the original data. The researcher can look down the grid to conduct thematic analysis or look across to perform case analysis or combine both for example and explanation.

### **3.7 Ethical Considerations**

Researchers have an obligation to consider ethical issues when conducting a research. These issues have to with upholding the credibility and legal boundaries of research. Research ethics

specifically entails what the researcher may and may not do. If these issues are not considered carefully they may affect the credibility of research. Hence research ethics have to with the researcher considering and respecting human rights by protecting and promoting the freedoms of the respondents.

### ***Confidentiality***

The first ethical consideration that was adopted for the study is confidentiality. Participants were informed that the information they supply is going to be treated with outmost confidentiality and was used for the purpose of the study only. Participants were also assured that their names will be withheld and published with their consent. The researcher also explained that the information that respondents provided was strictly confidential.

### ***Anonymity***

The second ethical principle for the study was anonymity. The participants were assured that the study is anonymous if they choose to. Publicity was done only with their consent.

### ***Informed Consent***

The third ethical principle in the study was informed consent. Here, the participants were assured on the purpose of the study, procedures involved in the research and the benefits of the research to single-student parents, their children and the society at large. The study was strictly voluntary and participants allowed to withdraw at any time without providing reasons to justify their withdrawal.

## CHAPTER 4

### DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

#### 4.0 Introduction

This chapter essentially presents the findings from the research study conducted regarding the impact of online learning on primary students' mental wellbeing amidst COVID-19 pandemic. The data was collected using questionnaires and individual interviews from the participants of the study. The thematic analysis was used to analyse the collected data. The researcher repeatedly went through the theories, transcriptions of the data collected and the literature to develop the significant themes for the study that were related to the objectives of the study. The themes created were characterized based on the repeated and similar perceptions and opinions of the participants during the interview process, which was formed into patterns that better clarify the themes. Not only did it showcase as to whether there are similar opinions and perceptions among the participants only, but also included the links and similarities between the data collected and the literature review. The researcher utilized fictitious names in relation to each participant's responses.

#### 4.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

To discover the effects of e-learning on mental health of elementary school pupils in Leqele, the researcher conducted on the parents and stakeholders who were both male and female and between the ages of 25 and 50. When analysing the interviews in-depth, several key results came to light.

#### 4.2 Teachers views concerning elementary students mental wellbeing during online learning amidst COVID-19

All the participants in the study indicated that the children were less motivated to attend online classes as they were confusing to them. This is because the students had previously associated school with waking up in the morning, being in uniform and travelling from their homes to school facilities to meet their friends. However, this situation provided something which was entirely different from what they came to know. Thus, differing environment from what they know school environment provided them with obstacles to fully engage in online classroom, hence the frustrations and anxiety during learning time. This is in conjunction with Sahurla (2020) who indicated that the the physical environment is a powerful force for child social support. This is the case for everyone, but especially for children. Environmental elements such as colour, light, materials, room settings, sounds, and routines also affect the child's prosocial behaviour. In order

for children to interact comfortably, children behave in a socially acceptable way, and the opportunity to practice skills related to self-regulation can be done by making well-planned early learning arrangements.

On the other hand, parents were honest and upfront about their children's reactions to the abrupt switch to online learning. Some parents gave explanations for why their kids were depressed and cranky. For instance, Cynthia, a mother of two, said about her children as follows:

*Spencer is in first grade, and Albert is in fifth grade. They love school and they're very sociable, but I've seen a shift in mood and changes in their overall emotional state, from being sad a lot to be a little bit more buoyant and happier when they went back to school on hybrid mode. While learning online, Cynthia noticed that her two kids seemed depressed, although they looked forward to starting school again in the fall of 2020. She mentioned how happy it makes her kids to see their teachers, friends, and engage with other people when they get home from school. After they go back to school in September, they are more willing to discuss school with her.*

Additionally, parents and instructors indicated instances when pupils felt challenged, particularly around the start of the pandemic and when they switch to online education. One respondent indicated that:

*My son Brian is in first grade. He is still a child and cannot study on his own. He initially found it difficult to operate the computer and learn online. Peter is the headmaster of a public elementary school in a suburban area. Since 70% of the pupils at his school are economically poor, he claimed that "everything happened so rapidly, and the sudden adjustments made the online learning tough for many students and their families.*

Stress and annoyance were brought on by the duties of teaching in the pandemic's novel environment. Participants in this study described their feelings of burnout, discouragement, and under appreciation.

Katlego complained:

*"It was very stressful and challenging. I was literally up till 2 am every day for the first two months of online learning, which affected my wellness and home situation. My mental health reflects on*



*my students.” To preserve passion and motivation for efficient teaching, it is important to take care of the physical, mental, and emotional requirements of teachers.*

As a second-grade teacher named Sello described it,

*"I felt discouraged because I thought that the time and effort I put into online learning probably wasn't even noticed by anyone."* In the interview, Sello talked about how the epidemic has given instructors new duties and how difficult it was to prepare for an online classroom while also meeting all the students' expectations. During interviews, instructors cited a variety of difficulties including problems with technology, time management, workload, and juggling home and teaching responsibilities. We had a lot of work to do, numerous staff meetings, and significant domestic duties, as described by Jessica. I had trouble sleeping. I sometimes felt as though I was losing my footing.

Sello, a second-grade teacher, claimed that she struggled with organization and occasionally experienced technical difficulties.

*"One day, I've started the Google meeting, and it took a few minutes to find out what to do,"* she whined.

The study findings indicate that there is a clear evidence that online learning during COVID-19 was not accepted well by the students, not because they were incompetent, but because the nature of it was accompanied by many challenges. Teachers had to solve many problems quickly while also neglecting their own mental health requirements. According to some interview data, when schools had to switch to online learning because of the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers experienced new difficulties. The balance between their career and family life was essential. The kids are affected by and learn from a teacher's mental health.

#### **4.3 The significance of children's mental wellbeing on sustainable development**

##### ***Mental wellbeing on children and sustainable development***

The intent behind education is to train young people for the future. Majority of the respondents indicated that online learning was used as an alternative rather than education being stopped entirely because of thoughts of sustainable development. One teacher indicated that:

*In our ongoing efforts to achieve an Education for Sustainable Development it is clear that we must address the most pressing unsustainable challenges of our local contexts and simultaneously contribute towards global efforts to promote an education for sustainable citizenship. Recent years have seen an increasing emphasis upon the identification of children at risk of poor wellbeing and health and the development of interventions that may reduce their long-term harm. In global terms, young children are recognised as the first, and the worse affected victims of climate change, natural and environmental destruction.*

This was emphasised by Saharni (2020), who indicated that the corona virus pandemic has a huge impact on the mental health of children. Social competency for children is the extent to which children are effective in their social interactions with others, including creating and maintaining social relationships, showing cooperative skills and flexibility, and adjusting behaviours to meet the demands of different social contexts. This study aims to shed light on how strategies can be used to build a child's social competence in a pandemic- and post-pandemic world. The solutions used for strategies to build children's social competence are with a wide range of solutions, including: 1) a systemic approach, 2) building positive relationships, 3) creating a supportive environment.

### ***Mental wellbeing on teachers and sustainable development***

An essential part of a teacher's mental health is self-care. According to Sokal and others (2020), teachers' poor mental health has a negative impact on pupils' academic attainment and performance. Fourth-grade teacher Katlego underlined during the interview that:

*"My self-care is a priority. I can now give each of those pupils more of myself as a result. Whether teaching in a physical or online classroom, according to Katlego, a teacher must come prepared with a grin and a good attitude. She cited research showing that when teachers are passionate about what they are doing, pupils experience a sense of love and are inspired to learn.*

Additionally, Mohlomi said:

*We try to be supportive of each other. I emphasize a lot of self-care. Every week, I share self-care ideas on the staff bulletins, and in our staff meetings, I always include questions like 'What are we doing to care for our kids? What are we doing to care for each other? And what are we doing to*

*care for ourselves?’ Because it's easy to just completely dive into the work and forget to take care of yourself or take stock of what you need. So, I remind them of that.*

Katlego claimed that she had emotional exhaustion from her job when she was learning online. *"Teaching in a pandemic is incredibly exhausting," she said. I must take care of myself. She bemoaned the amount of work she had to do and the lack of time she had for relaxation and self-care.*

If I could go back to the beginning of my online learning experience, Linda (an instructor) said:

*“I would just remind myself it is okay if things don't appear extremely professional. Just finish it..”* Teachers should take care of themselves

He stated, “I would say just don't stress out, like take it day by day. Deep breaths and taking breaks help you get rid of stress.”

In this study, the educator respondents emphasized the significance of stress management and self-care as it affects students' academic performance and school climate. Students can learn to their fullest capacity if a teacher is enthusiastic about what they are doing.

Finding Resilience in an Emergent and Creative Community via Socially Distant Coffee the Ha Leqele community is a family-oriented one that emphasizes partnerships and education, according to educators Mohlomi and Lerato. In this research study, participants reported coming together in novel ways, such as through virtual or geographically remote gatherings. Many of the educators who took part in this study were inspired and appreciative of their receptive schools and communities.

For instance, Jessica, a seasoned teacher with eight years of experience working at a diverse school's family centre, proudly said:

*"I love seeing the community come together, and everybody just really supports the families, the students, the teachers, and everyone." Having a fully functional, healthy community is wonderful. We help one another. This study demonstrated how important it was for teachers and staff to work together and sustain healthy relationships in order to empower kids and meet their needs in this historic period.*

Mohlomi, said, *"[We] attempt to keep the morale high. Every week, we gather outside for coffee while wearing masks and avoiding eye contact. Additionally, teachers said that parents were very involved in their kids' education. Through email, phone calls, or class groupings, they made contact.* The majority of parents, according to Sibongile, were accommodating and showed up to a number of online community and school meetings. He continued by saying that by giving parents the tools and encouragement they require to empower their children, his school empowers parents.

The same school's Sara, who agreed, said:

*"We've had access to some fantastic community resources. We're trying to do as many training sessions as possible for families to be able to support their kids at home."*

Lerato and Sibongile rejoiced that certain community members are investing their resources and time in donations that are fairly dispersed among families that need more assistance. They described how their school district gives free computer and English classes and is highly accommodating to families. Schools must maintain a healthy atmosphere for kids to succeed to their maximum potentials and for teachers and staff to cooperate and trade resources and expertise. Effective student learning is a by-product of a strong school climate as well as the home-school link. Schools should also think about involving parents more because they are so important to their children's education.

#### **4.4 How teachers assisted students and parents during online learning to improve students mental wellbeing**

Schools in Ha Leqele anticipated that the switch from in-person instruction to online instruction would take place over the course of a few weeks at the start of the pandemic, but because the number of Covid-19 cases was rapidly rising, online instruction persisted until the end of that academic year (2019-2020). The new routine required the students to adjust, which was difficult for many of them. Other participants claimed that because pupils were in the dark about what was happening, fear, a change in one's attitude toward learning, shame, irritation, and melancholy were all brought on. All participants indicated that they did not offer any form of support to parent as the online learning platform coupled with the pandemic also made them confused. one respondent articulated that:

*My daughter Angela is in third grade. At the beginning of the pandemic, she had a fear of what might happen. One day, she asked me if we would die from the Coronavirus, and if she would ever see her friends again.*

Spencer, Cynthia's youngest son, thought he was doing improperly. Because he had no idea what was happening or what to do, he always felt as though he was in jeopardy. She clarified,

*I am concerned about my kids' attitude toward school. I want my kids to love school and to love learning. And so, I know, whatever happens, I want that love of learning to remain and going through makes it especially challenging, to hold on to that. First, he was terrified and frustrated because he couldn't trail the teacher's schedule or turn in his papers on time, according to Mohlomi, a parent whose son T'sepiso is in third grade.*

Participants discussed how some kids began to detest school and were dissatisfied by in an online learning environment. They also mentioned how some pupils were eager to return to class and their regular schedule. As an illustration, Palesa, a mother of three, said:

*Seleke always asks me when school is going to open again. He also mentioned a couple of times before that learning at school is more fun than online learning. Unlike his older brother and sister who felt more engaged online than in a face-to-face setting, it was clear that Brian preferred in-person learning and missed his school and friends a lot.*

Based on these interviewees' comments, it appears that school and online learning were negatively affected by the changes brought on by the epidemic. It was difficult for some students to adjust to the changes. Other teachers thought that some of their students found online learning to be interesting and felt more at ease there than in a traditional classroom. This is in accordance with Dube (2020), who indicated that what greatly affects children's social behaviour is how adults are able to align nonverbal and verbal communication to the child. It can be seen from how adults talk to the child, how well they listen to what the child is saying and the extent to which they use language to expand the child's social understanding. In teaching and learning, attitude and tone are just as important, if not more important, than the exact word you choose. Similarly, the word can harm, heal, support, or reduce a child's sense of well-being and confidence.

### **New Roles and Responsibilities for Parents as Co-Teachers**

Crucial in encouraging their kids to learn online and maintaining their amusement and interest, some parents reported that while their children had previously been self-motivated in face-to-face learning settings, it was challenging for them to put aside domestic distractions and remain focused in a virtual learning environment. Cynthia claimed to have converted her kids' room into a small school. Two desks, two headphones, and all the equipment they would require were purchased by her. They felt bored and uninterested while learning online despite her turning off the TV and avoiding all outside distractions.

Parents concurred that elementary school pupils require technical assistance, and having family close by enables students to stay on top of their class schedules. In response to the interview questions, "What challenges and hurdles did you experience during online learning?" form the basis for this conclusion, parents' answers to the interview question.

Katlego stated:

*"They were not used to studying in front of a screen, and that was so hard for them. Learning how to navigate the internet was difficult. It was so challenging for her to sign in on the Google Meeting and follow up with the teacher."*

Ramabolu said:

*"I help my son join the meeting, and I sit beside him all day long in case he encounters any Internet issues or signs himself off from Google Meet." Additionally, some parents discussed their worries about learning loss brought on by the abrupt switch to online learning as well as the strategies they utilized to keep their kids motivated and enthusiastic about studying. Lekhooa said, "I thought that the best way to keep my son focused and prevent learning loss is to reward him. We would watch a movie together or get him a new book or toy."*

Cynthia stated:

*I came up with a positive reinforcement strategy. Well, I gave my kids points for doing good things, such as joining their classroom meetings on time or doing all their homework. They had to work hard to earn these points, and they received a prize for every 10 points.*

### **Unexpected Levels of Expected Responsiveness to Parents and Learning**

Teachers had to be more adaptable because of the epidemic, and the time that was traditionally reserved for professional development and parent-teacher conferences was included into their regular workweek. In the interviews, every participant acknowledged the importance of parent-school communication in creating a shared understanding of the steps necessary for the student to advance academically. Teachers said they were getting in touch with students and their families more frequently than in the past to check on them, learn more about them, and provide them feedback on how their children were doing in school. The goal of educators and neighbourhood stakeholders was to ensure that all families have access to technology and support.

#### **4.5 Mechanisms implemented to improve mental wellbeing of students during online learning**

All the respondents indicated that the fundamental strategy that helped students was having a healthy communication between parents and students. Responses from participant interviews indicate that education needs to be holistic in nature. The phrase "students are more than academic selves" was used by one educator. This indicates that in order for schools to fulfil their primary goal of assisting students in realizing their full potential and achieving success, they must concentrate on their cognitive, social, and emotional learning. Participants concurred that having daily one-on-one talks with pupils is essential for keeping tabs on them. This factor aligned with Karyani (2016) through the indication that in the promotion of mental health in schools, its success is placed on the operating core, namely teachers. Thus, teachers in schools that promote health need to gain capacity for professionals to overcome learning barriers in students while promoting mental health, through the curriculum outlined in the daily actions/ activities in the school (Karyani, 2016).

An instructor articulated:

*Check by asking a pupil how they are feeling, according to one respondent. For example, Pont'so, a teacher, shared that her institution holds weekly "Monday Morning Minute" with students "with a social-emotional focus, and we're still trying to do the best we can without being able to do some of the larger school-wide things we would normally do around Social and Emotional Learning."*

According to interviewees' replies, a key component of differentiated education is checking in with pupils. Teachers can better reach all students and assist each one in achieving their learning

objectives by better understanding each student's needs. Teachers also mentioned how difficult it was to differentiate lessons in an online classroom in order to meet the needs of each student.

Another respondent indicated:

*It's tougher to satisfy individual needs when you have all the students in front of a screen. Even evaluation is more difficult to accomplish online. When I switched to online instruction, I thought her students were new people.*

### **Increased Parent-School Communication**

There were some limitations on parent-school communication because to the COVID-19 pandemic, and parents were not permitted on school grounds. Staff members communicated by phone call, text message, or email during every meeting, which was conducted electronically using Zoom, Google Meet, or another platform. Teachers and other educators exhibited creativity and adaptability, and they developed strong bonds with the parents. Through frequent check-ins and relationships with parents, teachers can learn about the requirements of their children and their families (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018). Parents turned to teachers more frequently during online learning for intellectual, emotional, and technical support. For instance, Katlego, a fourth-grade teacher, used current events, images, feedback, or worries about the learning of the students. Principal Mohlomi added the following:

*All of the teachers had built stronger relationships and a stronger kind of home-school connection with families, out of necessity, but they're also loving it. They're loving that it doesn't matter if they don't speak the same language. They're going through the translators, the apps, and they're doing the best they can. And they're creating that trust between parents and teachers. And that consistency and communication between the school and the home are great.*

Teachers concurred that parents were crucial to maintaining children' connections and engagement. Teachers described how they frequently contacted parents to learn about the needs of their pupils. They provided instances of parents asking for technical assistance or checking in on their children. According to Jessica, a teacher, "families are acting as administrators, educators, facilitators, and coaches for student learning throughout online learning." Parents must establish a balance between their work and family responsibilities in order to support their children as they adjust to the changes brought about by online learning. They must also maintain a positive home-



school relationship. Although some parents speak Sepedi and Xhosa, Jessica emphasized that this did not prevent them from communicating with teachers despite the language barrier. Sara, a teacher, observed:

*We've seen the important role of technology in parent meetings. We've [actually] noticed a lot higher turnout at some of our virtual meetings. In the last teacher-parent meeting, we've had fifty people. In a normal face-to-face meeting, we never had more than fifteen people.*

Virtual gatherings allowed parents to maintain effective home-school communication while saving them time on their commutes and allowing them greater flexibility with their work schedules.

### **Community Getting Together**

Schools, community members, and kind contributors committed their time and resources to giving out books to pupils and providing low-income families with tools like Internet access and hotspots. "The district wants to expand on and use technology to complement the in-person instruction and increase students' academic achievement," said Sello, a second-grade teacher. Whether they were school-family relationships, school-community partnerships, or family-community interactions, all participants focused on the critical significance of creating strong relationships. "You won't trust me unless we establish a strong rapport".

*Mohlomi stated that "we've been able to have some good resources out in the community. Our district is trying to do as many training sessions as possible for families to be able to support their kids at home." Ramabolu, the parent of a third-grader, stated, "We have an excellent relationship with my son's school. I have the teacher's email, and this school is really good. You can call or email them anytime, and they usually get back to you right away.*

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.0 Introduction

The results of this study indicate that schools had to come up with creative strategies to reach students, teachers and parents because of the abrupt shift to online learning brought on by the Covid-19 epidemic. The information gathered showed that for children to achieve their educational right, it is essential to satisfy their academic, mental, and social-emotional requirements. The responses from the participants revealed four key findings:

- (1) Students do not view themselves as academics
- (2) That there were higher than predicted levels of parental and academic response
- (3) The significance of teachers' care in maintaining mental wellbeing

#### 5.1 Summary

This study demonstrated that learning is more successful when students' well-being is promoted (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018). Students' academic, social, and emotional needs should be met in schools, according to the respondents to this study. The participants also emphasized the value of parent-school communication, which enables teachers to better understand their pupils, customize instruction to match their needs, and improve academic performance which will then lead to sustainable development. The study's interview data provided insight into magnitude of mental distress that was experienced by elementary school pupils. Additionally, this study showed that the participants of Ha Leqele Community's emergent and creative community developed resilience there. Effective student learning, according to those who responded to the interview questions, is a by-product of both a supportive school environment and the relationship between the family and the school. Schools must empower students, instructors, and parents while fostering healthy home-school ties if they are to increase children' academic achievement in the online learning environment. The interview's emerging ideas and discoveries appeared to be consistent with the information gathered from the literature research.

These results support the three main frameworks online learning, Critical Race Theory (CRT) and social and emotional learning that were discussed in chapter two. In order to accommodate individual variances and learning styles, Cassidy (2004) first showed that a diversity of learning strategies should be incorporated in online training. In order to improve students' learning and

accomplishment online, participants emphasized the significance of check-ins and comprehending students' needs. Participants who were educators had the special belief that teachers should educate the complete child while a youngster is learning online.

Second, access is crucial in limiting inequities in an online context, according to the respondents to this survey. According to Khan (2012), kids have more equal access to the internet, which increases their opportunities for learning. According to the study's participants some children experienced connection problems, thus, it is critical to give children and their family's equal access to technology and other resources that will help them achieve. Third, prior studies have shown that kids who participated in universal SEL programs showed improved socio-emotional abilities and good social behaviour, as well as lower levels of emotional distress and behavioural issues (Durlak, 2011).

The results of this analysis were also important to the study's conclusions. According to interviewees, interpersonal ties at home and at school, as well as emotional intelligence, increase kids' motivation and involvement, paving the way for their academic and personal success. All facets of students' well-being must be supported for them to succeed in an online learning environment. Additionally, research demonstrates that play and peer connection are fundamental to the growth of primary pupils. According to Katzaman and Stanton (2020), integrating SEL modules into online learning enhances students' emotional intelligence and fosters their success. The qualitative findings of this study demonstrated that integrating Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) into online learning improves elementary students' academic performance and learning outcomes. However, there is a gap in the research on the benefits of integrating SEL skills into online learning, particularly in situations like pandemics.

Implications for Literature this study adds to the literature by highlighting how the Covid-19 epidemic has impacted students' wellbeing. Even though the extent of student well-being is debatable, it could serve as a support or starting point for other academics looking to do research in this area. It can also help educators understand how crucial practice is in promoting students' mental health. It demonstrates to parents the value of their kids' wellbeing and prioritizing it over any short-term academic success. The results of this research, at least while conducted online during a pandemic, imply that SEL programs and training are vital for teachers as well. Elias et al. (1997) discovered that SEL helps pupils manage emotions and sustain positive relationships. The

results of this study go beyond Fung et al (2020)'s conclusions concerning the value of student-teacher connection by demonstrating the impact of peer interaction and student-parent engagement in the learning process. This study adds to the findings of Darling-Hammond and Cook-Harvey (2018) that learning is successful when students' well-being is supported by highlighting the significant influence of teachers' self-care on the learning process, particularly in times of crisis like the Covid-19 pandemic. The results of this study address a vacuum in the literature about SEL during a significant and quick shift to online learning, followed by a gradual return to traditional classroom settings. Human connections are a necessary component for promoting healthy growth and teaching. According to the research's findings, teachers must establish a welcoming classroom atmosphere so that students can actively participate in their online learning and have a sense of belonging.

## **5.2 Implications of the study**

### ***Practice and Policy***

The study's conclusions have effects on both practice and policy. Academic developers and administrators must create guidelines that enable cutting-edge teaching methods and address the new demands of the continually evolving learning environment. They must also create policies for professional advancement in online education. For kids, parents, and students to feel comfortable sharing their insecurities, schools must create a thorough communication plan. The stability of students' well-being would be appropriately triggered and maintained by supporting teachers through courses with wellbeing practices. Academic performance of students suffers when a teacher is unwell. Maintaining diverse communication channels that emphasize social relationships for students and activate structural well-being aspects is one viable approaches.

The community's stakeholders must embrace a public health stance that strengthens the links between the various aspects of students' well-being. Such approaches necessitate getting to the core of developing educational possibilities that support students' wellbeing. To increase students' competency, teachers should successfully support all types of social dialogues with students and between the peers themselves. Additionally, it appears that a key factor in students' ability to express themselves is the use of direct questions throughout the discussion that are relevant to one's worries and stress.

### ***Implications for Teachers***

The results of this study encourage teachers to think about fostering a supportive learning environment for each and every student. This study demonstrates the need for teachers to differentiate instruction and modify a curriculum to meet the requirements of various student groups, paying particular attention to SEL. The results show that teachers' wellbeing is crucial to the learning community and that there should be policies in place to support teachers in taking care of themselves and forming deep relationships with one another. These findings also illuminate the need of planning daily warm-up exercises to support students' mental health for educators.

### ***Implications for Schools***

A major factor in a child's growth is their school environment. Students can fulfil their potential in a supportive and diverse learning environment. To engage students and address their unique requirements in an online learning environment, schools must use a variety of teaching styles, tools, and technologies. Effective online learning implementation requires adopting school-wide procedures that steadily improve students' social, emotional, and academic abilities. Additionally, in order to help instructors create and adapt fresh approaches that match the requirements of their pupils, schools must support teachers and offer chances for professional development. Additionally, it is advised that schools create a thorough communication strategy to allay the fears of instructors, parents, and students, particularly in the event of an emergency or significant, unforeseen changes to the educational ecology. The stability of students' well-being would be appropriately triggered and maintained by supporting teachers through courses with wellbeing practices.

Academic performance of students suffers when a teacher is unwell. Maintaining diverse communication channels that emphasize social relationships for students and activate structural well-being aspects is one viable approach. The community's stakeholders ought to follow a public health strategy that fosters relationships between the various facets of students' wellbeing. Such approaches necessitate getting to the core of developing educational possibilities that support students' wellbeing. To raise students' feeling impression proficiency, educators must successfully enable all types of social dialogues with students and among peers. Additionally, it appears that a key factor in students' ability to express themselves is the use of direct questions throughout the discussion that are relevant to one's worries and stress.

### ***Implications for Policy***

The following stage is, ideally, a speedy reform of the curricula to go beyond accomplishment standards during the pandemic and to take vital markers of students' mental health and wellbeing into account. The inclusion of daily wellness activities in the curriculum would establish a new standard and prioritize the holistic wellbeing of all students. Reprioritizing or better integrating whole-person learning could be a positive outcome of this trying time. By incorporating the necessary courses to support the students' developing solid emotional, physical, social, and mental health, the community and the entire academic system must respond to the students' ever-changing needs, especially during times of crisis.

### **5.2 Contributions for Equity and Social Change**

Even major disasters like the Covid-19 outbreak have not had an equal impact on pupils, with clear and documented gaps in lower-income areas' access to technology. In order to provide the environment for all kids to succeed, particularly in times like a pandemic, there is a clear need to establish measures to maintain and better foster lines of contact with students and families with various needs. Working as a community to address accessibility challenges and equity standards ensures that every young person benefits from what is understood about how to support their healthy path to a successful future. Everyone should have access to education since it is essential to children's growth and academic performance.

### **5.3 Future Research**

It might be possible for future research to focus on teaching techniques that can keep students in elementary and secondary schools in particular, as well as all students in general, motivated and involved in crisis situations. Future studies should broaden this investigation to look at how online learning affects particularly vulnerable pupils, like primary school pupils and kids with learning difficulties. In addition, the researcher advises incorporating students in the interviews based on the study's findings in order to learn more about their viewpoints on online learning and to comprehend the impact that SEL program implementation has on students' mental health and social-emotional wellbeing. Insight into effective online tactics that raise students' motivation and engagement in an online environment can be gained by examining the various viewpoints of educators, parents, and students. This research also exposes if online learning hinders or aids students' learning. As this study demonstrates, social and emotional learning (SEL) can provide kids new skills to regulate their emotions and make them more responsible. As a result, the researcher recommends that schools focus more on SEL. For at-risk pupils, students with special

needs, primary school students, and other vulnerable groups, this is particularly crucial. The results of this study concentrated on how online learning affected elementary children, but they did not provide a more comprehensive knowledge of middle school students' opinions. Future studies could examine whether incorporating social and emotional learning curricula into schools would produce different outcomes from those seen in this study. Future studies might compare the effects of online learning on students in elementary, middle, and high schools using a longitudinal, mixed-methods research design.

#### **5.4 Conclusion**

This study provides advice to educators on how to deal with the difficulties of online learning amid the Covid-19 pandemic. The participant's experiences and perspectives are reflective of the educational effects of online learning on the students' academic success and general well-being. The results demonstrated the significance of modifying instruction to fit the requirements of all students, regardless of their aptitudes, ethnic, cultural, or socioeconomic backgrounds. These results demonstrated that students are more than their academic selves, that teachers' self-care matters, that parents' relationships with their children and their schools have an impact on these students' learning outcomes, and that the development of community-wide networks empowers teachers and the families of the students. Along with teacher preparation, maintaining connections and constructive interactions boosts educational quality and enables students to meet their intellectual, social, and emotional objectives. This study addressed reassurance to students and parents, offered information regarding students' needs during and after the epidemic, and proposed helpful tactics and tools for efficient online learning. In order for pupils to reintegrate, the researcher came to the conclusion that the curriculum needed to be adjusted. The results also showed that educators' and students' wellbeing is a top priority because it affects student learning.

The analysis of the literature revealed that SEL emphasizes educational disparities and gives kids the tools they need to succeed (CASEL, 2005). Based on the data from the interviews, observations, and literature study, the effects of online learning take into account the need for curriculum and policies that cater to the various requirements of every student in order to advance social justice and equity. It would be fascinating to see more research that broadens the scope of this study to look at the relationship between SEL and the standard of online learning as well as the effects of online learning on a larger group of students and in a larger community. On the basis of this study's findings, further research can enhance the online learning environment for all

students. The results of this study address a vacuum in the literature about SEL during a significant and quick shift to online learning, followed by a gradual return to traditional classroom settings. Healthy learning and growth are fuelled by human interactions, which are a crucial component.

### **5.5 Recommendations**

Teachers and educators proposed the continuous development of the facility. They recommended reducing cognitive load and increasing interactivity during online learning. Some teachers suggested ways to start online Case Based Learning. However, some were also of the opinion that there should be revision courses along with psychomotor hands on teaching after the COVID-19 pandemic.

The recommendations reflect that good behaviour can be maintained through close supervision of students, establishing ground rules for online interaction, counselling and disciplinary measures. According to teachers, the attention span during online learning was even shorter than in face-to-face sessions, as evidenced by the literature. This can be managed through flipped learning modalities, shorter lectures and increased teacher-student interaction. Investing in purchasing premium software packages will also help overcome many limitations and is therefore recommended.

Finally, while it may seem fun to work from home, it can be challenging to stick to a regular schedule. Therefore, it would be useful to include the following:

- Make a regular sleep schedule.
- Reduce distractions if possible (turn off social media notifications, for example).
- Set daily and weekly goals.
- Take regular breaks.
- Make time to exercise.
- Maintain time to socialize, even if it's virtual.

### **5.7 Chapter Conclusion**

This chapter focused on presenting results of this study which demonstrated that students were not identical to their academic self and that education should give kids the opportunity to achieve academic, social, and emotional success. Positive interactions and ongoing check-ins are essential



for students to learn and grow, according to the parents' and instructors' answers to interview questions. Teachers and parents gave examples of how building resilient and creative communities may promote learning and assist pupils in overcoming obstacles. During the Covid-19 epidemic, participants provided examples of how schools handled the extraordinary shift to online learning. Schools were crucial in moulding good student behaviour, assisting with self-control, and maintaining teacher and student motivation.

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## Appendices

### APPNDIX A: Supervisor's letter

# The National University of Lesotho

Telephone: +266 22340601

Fax: +266 22340000

<http://www.nul.ls>



P.O. Roma 180

Lesotho

Africa

## Department of Development Studies

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June 2, 2022

Dear Sir:

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This letter serves to introduce Ms Celina Thahanyane, our postgraduate student, and my supervisee, in the Department of Development Studies, Faculty of Humanities at the National University of Lesotho, Roma. Ms Thahanyane is undertaking research leading to the production of a thesis on *COVID-19 Pandemic: Online teaching in primary school on the improvement of students' mental health for sustainable development goals*.

Therefore, we would like you to assist her with this study by having her access to the information required to cover certain aspects of this topic. Be assured that any accessed information provided by you will be treated in the strictest confidential manner possible, for academic purposes only.

Any enquiries you may have on Ms Thahanyane's study, please direct them to me at the address and telephone numbers given in this letter.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation and assistance.

Yours sincerely,

Bonaventure Mkandawire, PhD; MPACS; MPolit.Sc; MAR; BSc, EdPsych; PGD Law  
Lecturer, Faculty of Humanities  
Development Studies Department  
National University of Lesotho  
P.O. Roma 180, LESOTHO  
Email: [b.mkandawire@nul.ls](mailto:b.mkandawire@nul.ls)  
Tel. (Ofc): +266 2234 0601 Ext 3648  
Mobile Phones: +266 6264 9922

## **APPENDIX B:**

### **Interview Guide**

#### **TEACHER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:**

1. Which grade/grades do you teach?
2. How many years of experience do you have?
3. What do you like most about teaching?
4. Are you currently teaching online or on-site? If you are teaching remotely, when did you start distance learning?
5. What is your school's approach to online learning?
6. What is preparation for an online classroom like? Explain the daily process of online learning.  
What are some tips for teaching virtually?
7. Which is better for the quality of learning, face-to-face or online learning, and why? What learning platform(s) are you using?
8. Did you participate in any teacher training programs about online teaching or dealing with COVID-19 challenges?
9. What strategies do you use to keep kids engaged and collaborating remotely?
10. What are the biggest obstacles you are encountering as a teacher during online learning? How do you evaluate this experience?
11. What are the biggest challenges for students? What advice would you give to students during online learning?
12. What are the parents' biggest concerns about online learning?
13. What advice would you give to fellow teachers during this time of distance learning?
14. How would you help students develop self-awareness and self-worth?
15. What strategies would you use to support students affected by trauma?

16. Were you able to foster any new emotional, cognitive or social skills in your students during the sudden transition to online learning?

17. What experience have you had with students' discomfort or distress and how did you handle it? Provide a time when you dealt calmly and effectively with a high-stress situation.

18. What aspects of the changes in learning approaches do you think will continue after the pandemic is over?

19. Is there anything else you would like to say?

## **APPENDIX C:**

### **Sample parent interview questions**

1. How many children do you have?
2. Do any of your children have special needs?
3. Which is an accurate description of your family (single parent, 2 parents, or a combination of parents and caregivers i.e., parents and grandparents in the home)?
4. How has COVID-19 impacted your family's life and your physical or emotional health?
5. Is your child studying online? In which grade is he/she?
6. How old is your child?
7. Did your child receive any learning support during Covid?
8. Which explains your child's current learning (face-to-face, online or blended)?
9. Do you have WIFI access?
10. To what degree does your child appear to enjoy their online learning? Does he/she feel motivated and excited to learn online?
11. Does your child feel confident about accessing the internet and joining his class meeting?
12. Do you help your child navigate through the tabs or provide support with the assignments?
13. How much time is your child currently spending on distance learning (if at all)?
14. Is your child given the chance to collaborate with his/her classmates?
15. Is your child receiving enrichment activities such as Music, P.E, Yoga, or any other activity?
16. What was the impact of lack of predictability and daily routines on your child's mental and social-emotional health?
17. Does your child feel tired or have headaches due to excessive screen time?
18. Does your child feel isolated?
19. Is your child showing behavioural issues and shifts of mood?
20. Do you sense in your child a fear of what might happen? How?
21. How is your child reacting to changes in the home-school environment?
22. How does your child respond to the demands of change triggered by the current situation?
23. Does your child have any physical or mental reaction with daily functionality?
24. Do you talk to your child about the importance of expressing his/her emotions or check in with him/her?

25. In what ways do you support your child to maintain self-control and focus despite the discomfort he/she faces?
26. To what extent have the family around helped your child self-regulate and manage stress?  
For example, are you open to hold a calm discussion with your child about each person's feelings and needs? Does it help as a regulating strategy?
27. What are you concerned about mostly?
28. What else would you like to share about distance/online learning for your child?

APPENDIX D:

**Questionnaire**

**Section A: BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 1 Sex:**
- a. Male [ ]
  - b. Female [ ]
- 2. Age:**
- a. 15-19 [ ]
  - b. 20-24 [ ]
  - c. 25-29 [ ]
  - d. 29 and above [ ]

**3. School:**.....

- 4. Subject category you teach:**
- a. Languages [ ]
  - b. Mathematics [ ]
  - c. sciences [ ]
  - d. Arts [ ]
  - e. Physical Arts [ ]

**Please tick as appropriate.**

**Section B: Online learning during COVID-19 pandemic**

1. What types of online teaching do you use?
- i. Facebook [ ]
  - ii. Whatsapp [ ]
  - iii. Telegram [ ]
  - iv. emails [ ]
  - v. school websites [ ]
  - vi. school apps [ ]
  - vii. video conferencing [ ]



viii. Others  
(specify).....

2. What device do you use in accessing these social media?

- a. Desktop computer
- b. Laptop
- c. Tablet
- d. Cell phone
- e. ipad
- f. Android

**Section C: insights of teachers regarding the mental health of their students during online learning amidst the pandemic**

1 Online learning was the source of distress for children

- a. Strongly Agreed [ ]
- b. Agreed [ ]
- c. undecided [ ]
- d. Disagreed [ ]
- e. Strongly disagreed [ ]

2. Children experienced difficulties in online classroom setting more than in physical setting

- a. Strongly Agreed [ ]
- b. Agreed [ ]
- c. undecided [ ]
- d. Disagreed [ ]
- e. Strongly disagreed [ ]

3. How Frequent was the online classes

- a. Hourly [ ]
- b. Daily [ ]
- c. Weekly [ ]
- d. Monthly [ ]

**Section D: The significance of children’s mental wellbeing on sustainable development**

1. Sustainable development efforts through education were challenged by online learning

- a. Strongly Agreed [ ]
- b. Agreed [ ]
- c. undecided [ ]
- d. Disagreed [ ]
- e. Strongly Disagreed [ ]

2. Online education lacks sustainable development qualities

- a. Strongly Agreed [ ]
- b. Agreed [ ]
- c. undecided [ ]
- d. Disagreed [ ]
- e. Strongly Disagreed [ ]

3. Education attainment was in progress, but with frustrations

- a. Strongly Agreed [ ]
- b. Agreed [ ]
- c. Undecided [ ]
- d. Disagreed [ ]
- e. Strongly Disagreed [ ]

**Section E: How teachers helped students and parents deal with children mental health issues during online learning**

1. What are the effects children online learning that also affected parents?

- a. Online learning discourages face-to-face communication [ ]
- b. Disruptive to the learning process [ ]
- c. Lack of trust in peer feedback [ ]
- d. Difficulty in adapting to new technologies [ ]

2. Online learning also involved parents

- a. Strongly Agreed [ ]

- b. Agreed [ ]
- c. Undecided [ ]
- d. Disagreed [ ]
- e. Strongly Disagreed [ ]

**Section F: Healthy methods of online learning or mechanisms that were used to improve mental wellbeing of students during online learning**

1. Methods employed by teachers to help students

- a. Direct communications [ ]
- b. Relationship building [ ]
- c. Personal communication [ ]
- d. Academic activities [ ]
- e. Professional purposes [ ]
- f. information sharing [ ]

APPENDIX E:

**Consent Form**

**Topic:** COVID-19 pandemic: online teaching in primary school to improve students’ mental health for sustainable development

My name is Celina Thahanyane, a postgraduate student studying Master of Arts in Development Studies at National University of Lesotho. I am doing a research entitled “COVID-19 pandemic: online teaching in primary school to improve students’ mental health for sustainable development”. I have an interest in this particular area of study so that my work will add more literature on limited studies on mental wellbeing of children. The findings of the research will also serve a purpose of assisting in realising the service gaps to service providers so that they will know the factors that may lead to mental distress of kids especially during pandemics and help accordingly. More importantly, the research will help improve the mental wellbeing of children who suffered mental distress during COVID 19 pandemic while undertaking online classes, so that assistance will be channelled to them as another vulnerable group of children. The results obtained will be strictly meant for academic purposes and confidentiality is assured.

Date:.....

Signature of Participant:.....

Signature of interviewer:.....

