



Basotho learners' challenges affect effective learning in a rural high school during the COVID-19 era

¹Mofokeng Mantwa 

¹Free State Department of Education, South Africa

¹Primary author: mmmofokeng95@gmail.com

Abstract – The learning process depends on decisions and constant assessments obtained from what is learned and how it is learned, the support given to access knowledge or concepts, and whether what is remembered by learners is correct. However, this process was disrupted in the COVID-19 era as there was rapid spread of COVID-19. This study investigates the challenges influencing effective learning among Basotho learners in a rural high school in the Mofutsanyane District. This study used a qualitative approach through a case study design. Participants were chosen purposefully, including the learners, parents or guardians, teachers, school governing body, school-based support team, and school management team members. Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews. The narrative results indicated that Basotho learners encountered various challenges, including failure of learners to attend online classes, absenteeism, poor internet connection, and declining performance. They experienced academic pressure, inadequate curriculum coverage, a knowledge gap in the next grade, and the learners transitioning to virtual learning. All these challenges affected learners' learning process due to transiting, which had to happen and did not favour all the learners' family backgrounds.

Keywords: Effective learning, Basotho learners, Rural high school, COVID-19 pandemic

To cite this article (APA): Mantwa, M. (2024). Basotho learners' challenges affect effective learning in a rural high school during the COVID-19 era. *International Journal of Studies in Inclusive Education*, 1(1), 18-24. <https://doi.org/10.38140/ijisie.v1i1.1260>

I. INTRODUCTION

ACCORDING to Soderstrom and Bjork (2015, p. 176), the main purpose of instruction should be to facilitate long-term learning, with the goal of creating permanent changes in comprehension, understanding, and skills that will support long-term retention and knowledge transfer. Moreover, Bjork, Dunlosky, and Kornell (2013) state that effective learning entails ensuring accurate assessments of how well one's learning goals have been met and responding appropriately to those assessments. The learning process depends on decisions and constant assessments obtained from what is learned and how it is learned, the support given to access knowledge or concepts, and whether what is remembered by the learner is correct (Bjork et al., 2013). However, despite teachers' efforts to make learning effective, other psychosocial factors prevented learning effectiveness during the COVID-19 pandemic. Onyema et al. (2020) noted that the COVID-19 era posed challenges to global education systems.

Furthermore, Jha (2020) asserted that many psychological problems and mental health issues, including stress, anxiety, depression, frustration, and uncertainty, were linked to the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, Serafimi et al.'s (2020) study revealed many psychological problems and important consequences in terms of mental health, including stress, anxiety, depression, frustration, and uncertainty during the outbreak of the COVID-19 era. Jha posits that if learning is paused during a learning programme, chances are high that learners may fail to see themselves as learners.

Learners' challenges affect effective learning in rural high schools during COVID-19.

The worldwide coronavirus-related disturbance has given teachers

(limited) time to rethink the sector and develop alternatives to face-to-face instruction (Pitikoe, Ferreira-Meyers, Bhebhe and Dlamini-Zwane, 2021, p. 66). In addition, Chandra (2020, p. 230) notes that the COVID-19 era is accompanied by strictly following isolation measures that have confined learners and teachers. The teachers and learners miss the mere reality of group learning and classroom activities. All this caused both teachers and learners to experience stress. Spending all the time at home and reduced physical activity negatively impacted effective learning. Onyema et al. (2020) state that the coronavirus era created multiple issues that reduced educational opportunities for rural and underprivileged learners in the education sector.

Furthermore, Onyema et al. (2020) argue that if children are not actively involved in their learning, it may result in inactivity, which may cause young engagement in crimes, lack of interest in learning, and subpar academic achievement. It may impact academic progress, particularly for learners with special needs or those who struggle with learning and regularly need extra hands-on support from teachers. Since schools no longer provide enough in-person instruction, Akat and Karataş (2020) write that learners' learning and social relationships are negatively affected when school closures take longer. Similarly, Drane, Vernon, and O'Shea (2020) highlighted that losing school connectivity due to school closures may enhance the risk of educational disengagement, especially for vulnerable young people. This is even worse for kids in foster care or who frequently go between homes or residences since education is the only thing that never changes for many of them. Furthermore, according to Drane et al. (2020), as learners lost school connectedness due to being physically removed from school or having to maintain a social distance from teachers and peers, there was a sense that adults and/or peers in their school were no longer concerned about them as an individual or concerned about their

learning.

Furthermore, Bozkurt et al. (2020) note that school is frequently the only place these learners feel secure, stable, and protected. Some of these poorer schools tried to stay in touch with them to show their learners that they cared.

Further consequences of learning off-site affect children's emotional safety, as schools might render a safe and nurturing haven for many learners. At the same time, physical and social isolation might refuse them this emotional refuge. Likewise, Arslan, Yıldırım, and Zangeneh (2021) state that school closure negatively affects learners' psychological health by physically distracting pupils from their peers and more extensive social networks. On the other hand, Suryaman et al. (2020, p. 525) state that during the pandemic, schools are closed, but the learning process must continue.

However, in education, learning is done at home (Learning from Home). While the issues of inclusion and equity continue to be a challenge in the education sector, the decision to continue the education programme is supported (Pitikoe et al., 2021). Far Abid Hossain et al. (2020) revealed that the study participants reported that during the epidemic, online teaching was being used by most of their schools. This means learning outside a traditional classroom uses electronic technologies to access educational content (Alipio, 2020).

However, this learning method is still difficult because learners do not get enough help with their schoolwork; instead, assignments given to learners are not entirely done by learners as there is parental interference in the assignment process (Suryaman et al. 2020, p. 528). Bozkurt et al. (2020, p. 45) argued that many parents worked from home and had no time to assist with these online classes. Secondly, the parents were not always au fait with the content of the work, particularly in a subject like mathematics.

Moreover, Hebebcı, Bertiz, and Alan (2020, p. 278) reiterated that learners who were unsatisfied with distance education explained their dissatisfaction due to not understanding the subject, finding the teacher inadequate, inadequate time, and lack of infrastructure. Suryaman et al. (2020, p. 525) argue that although formal educational activities can still be done online because learners must study at home, character education during this era has become neglected. Formerly, when learning activities were carried out in schools, character education was carried out under the teacher's or lecturer's direct supervision. Activities that support character education can also be carried out directly intensively, and the level of success can be measured.

The main things of character education in indoor learning are teacher's body language, facial expressions, and voice.

In addition, Pitikoe et al. (2021, p. 68) indicated that the closure meant that learners were to stay and study at home, much to the dismay of the learners who had grown intimate with the traditional classroom approach. Okocha (2020), cited in Pitikoe et al. (2021, p. 67), further revealed that most developing countries lacked adequate planning, teacher training, and expertise for introducing Informatics and Communication Technology (ICT) in schools. Similarly, all analysed different developing countries and came to similar conclusions, namely that these nations lack infrastructure, expertise, and motivation to implement technology integration in the education system (Habibu, Abdullah-Al-Mamun, & Clement, 2012; Ghavifekr, Kunjappan, Ramasamy, & Anthony, 2016; Alkahtani, 2017; Azzi-Huck & Shmis, 2020).

Wu et al. (2020, p. 1) noted that COVID-19 is highly infectious, and there is still no effective treatment. The core of prevention is to reduce the crowd gathering. Moreover, Wu et al. (2020) state that parents and children were required to work and study at home during a protracted period of house quarantine under the direction of the central policy. Parents and children are restricted to small spaces. Pitikoe et al. (2021, p. 69) note that this new education dimension also landed on the parents, who had to become the immediate support structure for their children.

In addition, Yates, Starkey, Egerton, and Flueggen (2020, p. 12) state

that finding the motivation to complete studies amid the uncertainties of the global situation was the most challenging aspect of working from home. Many learners reported struggling to find the intrinsic motivation to study without the extrinsic motivators of school, routine, sanctions, resources, and easy access to teacher and peer support. Pitikoe et al. (2021) added that disrupting the relationship between learners and teachers was inevitable because of the pandemic in the process. The interaction between these two parties about academic matters is crucial to learners' academic success. Some learners come from low-income families with scant parental support, while others lack independent-thinking skills and lack resilience. Consequently, Buckler, Chamberlain, Stutchbury, and Hedge (2020) argued that more dropouts happen when schools are closed for longer periods.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Self-efficacy Theory

Background of the theory

Maddux (1995) states that people tend to engage in behaviours that they believe will get them what they want and that they can do. In addition, Maddux, Norton, and Stoltenberg (1986, p. 783) note that a person's expectation of mastery or coping can be broken down into two related expectations: self-efficacy and outcome expectations. A self-efficacy expectation is a belief that a person is or is not capable of performing the required behaviours. Self-efficacy theory is related to the more excellent family of psychological theories, often called expectancy-value theories. These theories preserve the tendency to perform behaviours as the result of the reinforcement value of the expected outcome and the expectation that specified behaviours would produce that outcome.

Moreover, according to Schwarzer and Luszczynska (2016), self-efficacy affects the effort one puts forth to change risky behaviours and the perseverance to continue striving despite obstacles and setbacks that may undermine motivation. This impacts how people set their goals and tackle challenges. Furthermore, Schwarzer and Luszczynska (2016) state that self-efficacy assesses a greater and more stable sense of personal ability to deal with stressful situations successfully.

Assumptions of the study

According to Schwarzer and Luszczynska (2016), self-efficacy influences the effort one puts forth to change risky behaviours and the persistence to continue striving despite barriers and setbacks that may undermine motivation. This influences how people set their goals and tackle challenges.

Relevancy to the study

The study used self-efficacy theory as a theoretical framework because it helped find an appropriate research approach, analytical tools, and procedures for his/her research inquiry.

Schwarzer and Luszczynska (2016) highlighted that self-efficacy affects the effort one puts forth to change risky behaviours and the persistence to continue striving despite obstacles and setbacks that may undermine research motivation. In this theory, a person's expectation of mastery or coping can be broken down into two related expectations: self-efficacy and outcome expectations. A self-efficacy expectation is a belief that a person is or is not capable of performing the required behaviours.

Moreover, Maddux (1995) stated that people frequently act in ways they think would help them acquire what they want and can do. Therefore, self-efficacy helped the teachers, School Governing Bodies (SGB), School Management Teams (SMT), School Based Support Team (SBST), parents, and learners in the rural high school take necessary precautionary measures against COVID-19, understanding that their behaviours will protect them against contracting the virus. Both theories would also help the teachers, SGB, SMT, SBST, parents, and learners in rural high schools adhere to the coping strategies that the Department of Education or Department of Health has put forth to help them cope and overcome the psychosocial factors the pandemic has brought upon them and on teaching and learning. Thus, through this study, self-

efficacy theory showed where the researcher intended to fill gaps in knowledge and practice.

III. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

This study explores the challenges of the Basotho learners that affected effective learning in a rural high school in the Thabo Mofutsanyane district in the COVID-19 era.

IV. METHODS

Research approach

According to Cropley (2015), qualitative research is based on the fundamental idea that "reality" is subjective: Every human being constructs an individual, personal view of the world based on his/her specific interactions with the external world, including the people who are part of this world. As a result, much of what a person, including researchers, regards as reality consists of impressions, inferences, and opinions in the person's mind. The study used qualitative research to gather information about the participants' perceptions of the COVID-19 era and how it affects their psychosocial well-being and teaching and learning among Basotho learners in a rural high school.

Research paradigm

This study adopted an interpretive paradigm. However, interpretivists believe in socially constructed multiple realities (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016, p. 55). Truth and reality are created, not discovered. It is not possible to know reality as it is because our senses always mediate it. Interpretive epistemology is subjective. External reality cannot be directly accessible to observers without being contaminated by their worldviews, concepts, backgrounds, etc. This paradigm was beneficial to understanding Basotho learners' interpretations of the social phenomenon they interact with, the COVID-19 pandemic, and how it affects their teaching and learning in a rural high school.

Research design

A case study is an empirical inquiry investigating a current phenomenon in detail and within its practical context (Hollweck, 2016). This design was valuable and permissible in evaluations to capture the complexity of the COVID-19 pandemic, including determining the Basotho learners' challenges that affect effective learning in a rural high school during the COVID-19 era and strategies to overcome their challenges and enhance effective learning.

Data Collection Instruments

This study employed in-depth semi-structured interviews as an instrument for data collection. This instrument was advantageous as it helped build the interviewer-interviewee relationship, the interview itself, and the analytical component of the process (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). Thus, the close interviewer-interviewee relationship reduces response bias and increases data credibility. Another in-depth strength is the interview flexibility format, which allows follow-up questions that stimulate subconscious recall. The last key strength is the interviewer-interviewee relationship, which uses in-depth techniques that allow data to be analysed and produce rich details that assist with the root of narrative interpretation.

This data collection method made it easy for the researcher to get rich data from the interviewee. This is because the interviews were conducted one-on-one between the interviewer and interviewee. The researcher also asked probing questions based on the interviewees' responses as the interviewer-interviewee relationship was established during the in-depth interview. Thus, the minimum interview session lasted for twenty minutes. However, in cases where the researcher got interesting information, the interview was allowed to take more than twenty minutes. Therefore, the interview was conducted in the selected Basotho rural high school. During the interview, the interviewer adhered to COVID-19 protocols, which involved maintaining a 1.5-meter social distance, sanitising every twenty minutes for twenty seconds, and wearing masks throughout the interview.

Participants

The study comprised fifteen participants who included Basotho learners, teachers, SGB members, SBST members, parents or guardians of Basotho learners, and SMT members from a rural high school in the Thabo Mofutsanyane District, Free State. The participants helped the researcher gain more insight into how the COVID-19 era has affected teaching and learning, as they are the people in charge of promoting effective learning. The participants provided the researcher with empirical data that assisted in determining the psychosocial factors that influence effective learning among Basotho learners in a rural high school. Further, participants assisted the researcher in exploring the challenges that Basotho learners in rural high schools' face and the strategies that could help Basotho learners overcome those challenges to enhance effective learning during the COVID-19 era. The participants used their home language, Sesotho.

Procedure

Purposive and convenience sampling methods were used in this study to select participants. According to Etikan and Bala (2017), purposive sampling is based on the researcher's assessment of who will provide the most reliable information to achieve the study's objectives. To gather the necessary data and select participants to share it, the researcher must concentrate on those who share their viewpoints. On the other hand, Etikan, Musa, and Alkassim (2016) state that Convenience samples are also referred to as "accidental samples" since components may be chosen for the sample because they are physically or administratively close to the location where the researcher is gathering data.

Data analysis

The narrative technique was used to analyse qualitative data in this study. Sarah and Ann (2008) describe narrative analysis as a method used to analyse interview data that aims to comprehend how and why interview subjects describe their lives as a story or set of stories. Issues with identity and interactions between the narrator and the audience are inextricably linked to this. The narrative analysis helped the researcher understand how the COVID-19 era is perceived in the education sector and its impact on effective learning among Basotho learners in a rural high school. Also, through the participants' stories and COVID-19 experiences, the researcher was able to determine the psychosocial factors that influence effective learning among Basotho learners in a rural high school during the era of the COVID-19 era, as well as to explore the challenges that Basotho learners in a rural high school face and the strategies that can help Basotho learners overcome these challenges for effective learning.

V. RESULTS

Basotho learners' challenges affect effective learning in a rural high school during the COVID-19 era

Absenteeism

The results suggested that absenteeism of a few days a week could challenge effective learning among Basotho learners at a rural high school during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants intimated that they failed to attend adequate normal school lessons from Monday to Friday and instead only attended lessons twice a week due to COVID-19 regulations. The participants shared the following.

"We are coming to school twice a week, and we cannot do all the work for the whole week in just two days. This means that we are affected to the point that we almost fail because we are left behind. We must study via WhatsApp (online studying), and some of us did not have WhatsApp data bundles to do online studying" (Participant 1).

"We must come to school twice a week, but some of us come once a week, and this affects us because group work was cancelled, and we must attend online classes, which are not helpful because of the lack of electricity. We skip some of our online classes" (Participant 2).

Therefore, Basotho rural high school learners failed to attend classes regularly and instead only attended lessons twice a week. This challenge negatively impacted effective learning because the learners did not get enough teaching and learning time.

Online classes

The results revealed that online classes could challenge effective learning among Basotho learners in a rural high school during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants felt somehow responsible for frequent power cuts. The participants felt lost, sad, and ashamed for failing to attend. One participant shared the following.

"The challenges that I face in schoolwork are during the day. We do not come often to school, which makes us unable to complete our schoolwork. Sometimes, we do not have electricity while we study online. Also, sometimes we do not have WhatsApp data bundles" (Participant 3).

Therefore, Basotho learners had to attend WhatsApp classes, which in turn had a negative influence on effective learning during the era of the COVID-19 pandemic. This was a challenge because they missed many lessons due to frequent power cuts.

Declining performance

The results revealed that declining performance was another challenge influencing effective learning among Basotho learners in a rural high school during the COVID-19 pandemic. The participants felt like complete failures when they could not continue obtaining good grades like they normally do.

"Due to limited instruction time in the courses, I did not cover much in my schoolwork, which caused my performance to drop and fail in some subjects. On the other hand, teachers failed to understand why I barely wrote my schoolwork" (Participant 4).

Therefore, Basotho rural high school learners' performance dropped during the COVID-19 pandemic. This challenge resulted from insufficient teaching and learning time.

Academic pressure

The results showed that academic pressure could challenge effective learning among Basotho learners in a rural high school during the COVID-19 pandemic. The participants felt even more confused about their learning due to academic stress. The participants shared the following.

"Bana baka ba rata sekolo mme ba ile ba angwa haholo ke ho se ye sekolong. Ba ile ba pasa empa ba ile ba lahlehelwa ke tse ding tsa dithuto mme ba iphumana ba le ka tlasa kगतello ya mosebetsi wa sekolo nakong eo dikolo di neng di bulwa. Kelellong ha baka ba sitiseha ka ha ba ne ba thabela ho dula le nna ka ha ke ntho e neng e sa kgonahale" ("My children love learning, and they were affected by not going to school. They passed but lost some lessons and were under much pressure upon school reopening. They were not affected mentally because they enjoyed spending time with me as it was something that we hardly did during their normal school calendar") (Participant 5).

"Mosebetsi o ne ole mongata mme a ya sekolong matsatsi a leshome kgwedding. O ne a sa utlwisisi mosebetsi wa hae wa sekolo ka ha o ne a ya sekolong matsatsi a sa lekanang. O ne a ikutlwa a le tlasa kगतello e bakwang ke mosebetsi wa sekolo. O qetelletse a se a sa batle ho ya sekolong" ("There was too much schoolwork and he attended ten days a month. He did not understand his schoolwork because he did not attend school regularly. An immense backlog in his schoolwork under a lot of pressure caused him. He ended up reluctant to attend school") (Participant 8).

Therefore, Basotho learners were under much academic pressure during the COVID-19 era. The learners were given too many activities to complete independently because of limited contact time with the teachers.

Inadequate curriculum coverage

The results revealed that inadequate curriculum coverage resulting in a knowledge gap in the next grade could challenge effective learning among Basotho learners in a rural high school during COVID-19. The participants wondered if they could handle the next grade due to the trimmed curriculum, resulting in a knowledge gap. The participants shared the following.

"E ne e le motho ya nang le ditjhalentjhe tse ngata. O ne a bontsha a kgotsotsetse. Lemong se hlahlamang e eleng sa 2021 ha a ne a se a etsa sehlopha sa leshome le motso o mong o ne a lla ka ho se utlwisisi a bile a bontsha ho nyahama. Nakong eo a neng a kopa thuso ho matitjhere bakeng sa hore a fumane tlhakisetso o ne a sa e fumane. A ne a bontsha ho fella bana pelo". (She had multiple challenges regarding learning; she also showed satisfaction. The

following year, 2021, she started complaining about her lack of understanding and was discouraged. She did not receive the help she sought from her teachers when needed. The teachers showed a lack of tolerance towards such learners) (Participant 6).

"O ne a ya sekolong ha raro bekeng. O ne a fumana mosebetsi o mo ngata o imelang kelello ya hae ka baka la hore ba ne ba sa fumane nako e lekaneng ya thuto. O iphumane a se a na le kगतello ya maikutlo" (She attended school three days a week. She had too much work because they did not get enough contact time. She did not feel well) (Participant 7).

Therefore, Basotho learners in rural high schools fell behind on curriculum coverage, resulting in knowledge gaps during COVID-19. This challenge made learning difficult in the next grade as they lacked the basics for each lesson.

Transiting to online learning

The results indicated that transitioning to online classes could challenge effective learning among Basotho learners in a rural high school during the COVID-19 era. The participants were more scared of learning transition. Most of them were from low-income families and were not exposed to using smartphones. This automatically took their excitement of learning. One participant shared the following.

"The level of education had to change, pass percentages and weighting of average marks also changed. Teaching methods were transformed into virtual learning. Most of our learners come from disadvantaged backgrounds where cell phones were impossible. Teachers had to create WhatsApp groups to share information with learners at home, but that was impossible because most learners could not access cell phones or computers. Even those with cell phones had the challenge of not having enough data to download teacher information. These challenges hindered effective learning during the COVID-19 lockdown regulations. Learners failed to study online and even on their own. Most learners failed because they had to study at home without their teachers' intervention" (Participant 9).

Therefore, Basotho rural high school learners had to transition to virtual learning, which they could not afford to attend during the COVID-19 lockdown regulations. This challenge added to the stress level that the learners already have due to COVID-19 restrictions.

English as a language barrier

The results revealed that English as a language barrier challenges effective learning among Basotho learners in a rural high school during COVID-19. The participants could not respond to questions asked in English and had low self-esteem because of this. One participant shared the following.

"One of the biggest challenges that the learners face is language. There is a language barrier. They do not fully understand English as a medium of instruction. Almost everything must be over-explained. This could be due to COVID-19 because they were not attending school daily, and some aspects were trimmed in the curriculum. This barrier prohibits effective learning as learners have low self-esteem and cannot answer the question asked" (Participant 10).

Therefore, Basotho rural high school learners found it hard to respond to the questions asked in English during the COVID-19 era. This challenge created learning barriers since every aspect of the curriculum had to be over-explained with limited time.

School dropping out

The results showed that school dropping out could challenge effective learning among Basotho learners in a rural high school during the COVID-19 era. Participants feared for their future and lacked intrinsic motivation toward their future. One participant shared the following.

"Before COVID-19, we could hold assemblies and invite different people to come and motivate or encourage learners and provide career guidance, but due to COVID-19 restrictions, public gatherings had to stop. As a result, learners lost motivation to come to school and dropped out of school" (Participant 11).

Therefore, Basotho learners dropped out during the COVID-19 era. This challenge resulted from rotational attendance; they spent most of their time at home.

Preserving from COVID-19 cases and inadequate equipment

The results revealed that preserving from COVID-19 cases and inadequate equipment could challenge effective learning among

Basotho learners in a rural high school during the COVID-19 era. Participants were over cautious of flu-infected people and insufficient COVID-19-era prevention equipment. This hindered their full participation in their learning process. One participant shared the following.

"We had a problem of kids stealing sanitisers, which brought issues as regulations were not followed properly. Also, screeners did not screen all the kids at the gate in the morning because there were too many kids, and screeners could not handle them. Again, teachers had to sanitise each learner every twenty minutes for twenty seconds, wasting a lot of time, and lessons could not be completed. Moreover, learners were moved to other grades when they did not have content, which was very difficult because we had to do extra classes. Also, wearing masks led to other learners forgetting their masks at home and missing out on lessons as we had to send them home. Lastly, we had the learners that tested positive and hid their results, putting others at great risk" (Participant 12).

Therefore, Basotho learners and their parents hid positive COVID-19 cases. This was due to the anxiety of being marginalised. Also, equipment from the COVID-19 era was stolen, and it became sufficient in schools.

Suspension of effective teaching and learning techniques

The results demonstrated that suspending effective teaching and learning techniques could challenge learning among Basotho learners in a rural high school during the COVID-19 era. The participants were shocked at how teaching and learning had changed to accommodate the new norm, making them question their ability to learn effectively. The participants shared the following.

"Some learners learn best through lip reading, and it was difficult for them as we had to wear masks. Others learn best through peer learning or group work. COVID-19 did not give them a chance to continue doing group learning because both learners and parents feared for their lives. One-on-one lessons with teachers were no longer possible because of how they attended school. Our school had extra classes, which had to be cleaned, which left struggling learners behind" (Participant 13).

"Social distancing affected the learners' studies because they could not share. Those from low-income families could not do group work where they applied peer learning. Also, poverty; in the rural areas, people are suffering, and most of the learners depend on food that they were given at school now because of this pandemic, most learners are not completing the work they were supposed to complete at home" (Participant 14).

"The measures that were put in place because of the pandemic... They could not learn in pairs and groups because they had to maintain social distancing. They were not coping and struggled to complete the homework activities that teachers gave them to do at home. They were also worried about their parents losing work because their companies could no longer afford to pay them, and their parents could not afford to buy them data to attend WhatsApp classes" (Participant 15).

Therefore, Basotho learners experienced the suspension of effective teaching and learning techniques during the COVID-19 era. This challenge drastically affected their learning, as they could not cope with the new teaching and learning strategies that protected their health during COVID-19.

VI. DISCUSSION

The findings revealed the challenges faced by Basotho learners in effective learning during the COVID-19 era. Several challenges were unearthed during in-depth interviews.

The research findings have revealed that learning from home was a challenge that influenced effective learning among Basotho learners in a rural high school during the COVID-19 pandemic. Chandra (2020, p. 230) notes that the COVID-19 era is accompanied by strictly following isolation measures that have confined learners and teachers to their homes; a disturbing social life and learning in isolation have made it stressful for learners and teachers. The research findings have revealed that group learning was another challenge that influenced effective learning among Basotho learners in a rural high school during the

COVID-19 era. Pitikoe et al. (2021, p. 68) postulate that the closure meant that learners were to stay and study at home, much to the dismay of the learners who had grown intimate with the traditional classroom approach. The findings revealed that youth involvement in crimes significantly influenced effective learning among Basotho learners in a rural high school during COVID-19. This notion supports Onyema et al.'s (2020, p. 118) view that if the learners are not engaged productively, it could lead to idleness, resulting in youth involvement in crimes, loss of interest in learning, and poor academic performance.

The research findings revealed that changing teaching techniques was a major challenge influencing effective learning among Basotho learners in a rural high school during COVID-19. This aligns with Suryaman et al.'s (2020, p. 525) observation.

Although formal educational activities can still be done online, character education during this pandemic has become neglected because learners must study at home. Formerly, when learning activities were carried out in schools, character education was carried out under the teacher's or lecturer's direct supervision. Activities that support character education can also be carried out directly intensively, and the level of success can be measured.

The findings revealed that inadequate face-to-face education was a challenge influencing effective learning among Basotho learners in a rural high school during the COVID-19 pandemic. This notion aligns with Onyema et al.'s (2020, p. 111) view that the coronavirus pandemic created multiple problems for the education sector, decreasing education opportunities for underprivileged learners and those in rural areas.

The findings revealed that loss of school connectedness due to school closures was another challenge influencing effective learning among Basotho learners in a rural high school during COVID-19. This notion supports Drane et al.'s (2020, pp. 8-9) observation that loss of school connectedness due to school closures may exacerbate the risk of educational disengagement, especially for vulnerable young people. This is compounded for those children in care or those moving between households or locations, as often school is the only constant in their lives.

The findings have revealed that poor teacher and peer support was a challenge that influenced effective learning among Basotho learners in a rural high school during the COVID-19 era. This inherently supports Pitikoe et al. (2021, p. 69), who argue that "... due to the pandemic in the process, interrupting the rapport between learners and teachers. The contact between these two stakeholders about schoolwork is central to learners' achievement. Some learners come from underprivileged backgrounds with limited parental support, while others lack strategies to work independently and are not resilient.

The findings revealed that the high school dropout rate was a challenge influencing effective learning among Basotho learners in a rural high school during COVID-19. The participants stopped attending school because they were used to waking up late and doing nothing with their time. This became an addiction, which resulted in them leaving school. This notion supports Buckler et al.'s (2020) observation that the longer schools are closed, the more dropout occurs.

The findings revealed that lack of intrinsic motivation was another challenge influencing effective learning among Basotho learners in a rural high school during the COVID-19 pandemic. This inherently supports Flueggen's (2020) view that the hardest part of working from home was finding the motivation to do schoolwork during the uncertainty of the state of the world. Many learners reported being unable to find the intrinsic motivation to study without the extrinsic drivers of school, routine, consequences, resources, and easy access to teacher and peer support.

The findings revealed that the knowledge gap was a challenge influencing effective learning among Basotho learners in a rural high school during the COVID-19 era. This notion supports Gustafsson and Deliwé's (2020, p. 3) view that the evidence suggests that learning losses, at least as measured soon after the disruption, will be greater than what

is suggested by actual days lost, in large part because disruptions result in learners forgetting some of what was previously learned.

The research findings revealed that transitioning to virtual learning was a major challenge influencing effective learning among Basotho learners in a rural high school during the COVID-19 pandemic. This motion supports Spaul, and van der Berg's (2020) view that apart from the fact that parents and caregivers are not trained or equipped to teach their children, the existing lockdown 'plans' for learning have not mitigated the losses in learning for children that do not have proper technology-enabled learning at home. All this was the result of regulation that was implemented in South African schools as a way of curbing the spread of COVID-19. Fundamentally, the Department of Education (DoE) wanted learning to continue as every South African child's basic right, even during COVID-19. This sentiment in the research is standard, with studies corresponding to the DoE objective to ensure that learning continues regardless of the COVID-19 era. SMT, SBST, SGB, teachers, and parents had to develop strategies and remedies to help ensure effective learning during the COVID-19 era among rural high school learners. They first had to identify challenges influencing effective learning and then devise possible remedies.

VII. CONCLUSION

The concept of effective learning is essential in teaching and learning. However, the challenges brought by the COVID-19 era on teaching and learning made it impossible for rural Basotho high school learners in Thabo Mofutsanyane to learn effectively. Rural high school Basotho learners experienced various psychosocial factors that challenged effective learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results of this research suggested that four themes have played a vital part in rural high school learners' effective learning and assisted them in dealing effectively with the challenges brought by the COVID-19 era on their education. Those themes are (i) psychological factors influencing effective learning among Basotho learners in a rural high school during the COVID-19 pandemic. Such factors range from panic behaviours or collective hysteria to pervasive feelings of hopelessness and desperation, which are associated with negative outcomes, including suicidal behaviours. It has also triggered a wide variety of psychological problems, such as panic disorder, anxiety, and depression. (ii) The second theme entails challenges that Basotho learners in a rural high school face in effective learning during the COVID-19 era. Such challenges include learning from home, group learning, youth involvement in crimes, loss of interest in learning, poor academic performance, inadequate face-to-face education, loss of school connectedness due to school closures, poor teacher and peer support, and lack of intrinsic motivation. (iii) The final theme entails strategies to help Basotho learners in a rural high school overcome their challenges in effective learning during COVID-19. Such strategies include attending extra classes, identifying areas that need improvement, policy adjustment, and online learning. These themes align with learners, parents or guardians, teachers, SGB, SBST, and SMT attitudes toward all the challenges they faced during the COVID-19 era for effective learning. Participants in this research presented themselves as people determined to overcome any challenge posed by the COVID-19 era that threatened effective learning. Participants went the extra mile to make sure that effective learning took place by holding and attending extra classes, identifying areas that needed improvement, adjusting policy, and having online lessons so that learners could ask teachers questions where they did not understand. They even had a chance to have peer learning in group WhatsApp because learning was affected by precautionary measures that were put in place to curb the spread of COVID-19 in schools. Learners, parents or guardians, teachers, SGB, SBST, and SMT members in this study had self-efficacy, which was useful in resolving challenges brought on by the COVID-19 era on effective learning. Participants' strategies to help the learners showed they value effective learning and their future. The results of this research suggest that learners, parents or guardians, teachers, SGB, SBST, and

SMT members in Thabo Mofutsanyane District view the challenges they encountered during the COVID-19 era in the rural high school as motivation to put more effort into their schoolwork and teaching careers and support the learners in any way they could.

VIII. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

There are no conflicts of interest.

REFERENCES

- Akat, M., & Karataş, K. (2020). Psychological effects of COVID-19 Era on society and its reflections on education. *Turkish Studies*, 15(4), 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.7827/TurkishStudies.44336>
- Alipio, M. M. (2020). *Education during COVID-19 era: Are learners in a less-economically developed country ready for e-learning?* ZBW - Leibniz Information Centre for Economics, Kiel, Hamburg.
- Alkahtani, A. (2017). The challenges facing the integration of ICT in teaching in Saudi secondary schools. *International Journal of Education and Development using Information and Communication Technology*, 13(1), 32-51. Retrieved from <https://www.learntechlib.org/p/180215/>
- Arslan, G., Yıldırım, M., & Zangeneh, M. (2021). Coronavirus Anxiety and Psychological Adjustment in College Students: Exploring the Role of College Belongingness and Social Media Addiction. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, 20, 1546-1559. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11469-020-00460-4>
- Azzi-Huck, K., & Shmis, T. (2020). Managing the impact of COVID-19 on education systems around the world: How countries are preparing, coping, and planning for recovery. *World Bank Blogs*. Retrieved from <https://blogs.worldbank.org/education/managing-impact-covid-19-education-systems-around-world-how-countries-are-preparing>
- Bjork, R. A., Dunlosky, J., & Kornell, N. (2013). Self-regulated learning: Beliefs, techniques, and illusions. *Annual review of psychology*, 64(1), 417-444. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-113011-143823>
- Bozkurt, A., Jung, I., Vladimirci, V., Schuwer, R., Ektorov, G., Lambert, SR., Alfreih, M., Pete, J., Olcott Jr, & Paskevicius, M. (2020). A global outlook to the interruption of education due to COVID-19 Pandemic: Navigating in a time of uncertainty and crisis. *Asian Journal of Distance Education*, 15(1), 1-126.
- Buckler, A., Chamberlain, L., Stutchbury, K., & Hedge, C. (2020). Minimising distance in distance learning program during a global crisis: framing an international education response to COVID-19. UKFIET. Retrieved from <https://www.ukfiет.org/2020>.
- Chandra, Y. (2020). Online education during COVID-19: perception of academic stress and emotional intelligence coping strategies among college students. Emerald Publishing Limited. *Asian Education and Development Studies*, 10(2), 229-238. <https://doi.org/10.1108/AEDS-05-2020-0097>
- Cropley, D. H. (2015). Promoting creativity and innovation in engineering education. *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*, 9(2), 161-171. <https://doi.org/10.1037/aca0000008>
- Drane, C. F., Vernon, L., & O'Shea, S. (2020). Vulnerable learners in the age of COVID-19: A scoping review. *The Australian Educational Researcher*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-020-00409-5>
- Etikan, I., & Bala, K. (2017). Sampling and sampling methods. *Biometrics & Biostatistics International Journal*, 5(6), 215-217. <https://doi.org/10.15406/bbij.2017.05.00149>
- Etikan, I., Musa, S. A., & Alkassim, R. S. (2016). Comparison of Convenience Sampling and Purposive Sampling. *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics*, 5(1), 1-4. <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ajtas.20160501.11>
- Far Abid Hossain, S., Nurunnabi, M., Sundarasan, S., Chinna, K., Kamaludin, K., Baloch, G. M., ... & Sukayt, A. (2020). Socio-psychological impact on Bangladeshi students during COVID-19. *Journal of public health research*, 9(s1), 38-44. <https://doi.org/10.4081/jphr.2020.1911>
- Flueggen, F. (2020). *Investigation of the Association between Video Game Usage, Personality, Psychological Needs, and Wellbeing* (Unpublished

- PhD thesis). Wellington: Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand.
- Ghavifekr, S., Kunjappan, T., Ramasamy, L., & Anthony, A. (2016). Teaching and learning with ICT tools: Issues and challenges from teachers' perceptions. *Malaysian Online Journal of Educational Technology*, 4(2), 38-57.
- Gustafsson, M., & Deliwe., C. N. (2020). How is the COVID-19 pandemic affecting educational quality in South Africa? *Evidence to date and future risks. Bureau For Economic Research. Department of Economics, University of Stellenbosch.* Retrieved from <https://cramsurvey.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/>
- Habibu, T., Abdullah-Al-Mamun, M. D., & Clement, C. K. (2012). Difficulties faced by teachers in using ICT in teaching-learning at technical and higher educational institutions of Uganda. *International Journal of Engineering Research & Technology*, 1(7), 1-9.
- Hebebcı, M. T., Bertiz, Y., & Alan, S. (2020). Investigation of views of learners and teachers on distance education practices during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic. *International Journal of Technology in Education and Science*, 4(4), 267-282.
- Hollweck, T. (2016). *Case Study Research Design and Methods* (5th eds.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage
- Jha, R. K. (2020). Socio-economic and psychological impact of COVID-19 on English learners. *Journal of NELTA Gandaki*, 3(1&2), 82-92. <https://doi.org/10.3126/jong.v3i1-2.33147>
- Maddux, J. E. (1995). Self-Efficacy Theory. In J. E. Maddux (ed.) *Self-Efficacy, Adaptation, and Adjustment. The Plenum Series in Social/Clinical Psychology* (pp. 3-33). Boston, MA: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4419-6868-5_1
- Maddux, J. E., Norton, L. W., & Stoltenberg, C. D. (1986). Self-efficacy expectancy, outcome expectancy, and outcome value: Relative effects on behavioural intentions. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 51(4), 783-789. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.51.4.783>
- Onyema, E. M., Eucheria, N. C., Obafemi, F. A., Sen, S., Atonye, F. G., Sharma, A., & Alsayed, A. O. (2020). Impact of Coronavirus Era on Education. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 11(13), 108-121. <https://doi.org/10.7176/JEP/11-13-12>.
- Pitikoe, S., Ferreira-Meyers, K., Bhebhe, S., & Dlamini-Zwane., N. (2021). Who Moved my Old Cheese? Implications of COVID-19 to Teaching and Learning in Southern Africa. *Journal of Teaching and Learning with Technology*, 10(1), 64-79. <https://doi.org/10.14434/jotlt.v10i1.31402>
- Rehman, A. A., & Alharthi, K. (2016). An introduction to research paradigms. *International journal of educational investigations*, 3(8), 51-59.
- Roller, M. R., & Lavrakas, P. J. (2015). *Applied qualitative research design: A total quality framework approach*. London: The Guilford Press.
- Schwarzer, R., Luszczynska, A. (2016). Self-efficacy and outcome expectancies. In Y. Benyamini, M., Johnston, & E. C., Kaarademas (eds.) *Assessment in health psychology*. (pp. 31-44). Boston, MA: Hogrefe Publishing.
- Serafimi, G., Parmigiani, B., Amerio, A., Aguglia, A., Sher, L., & Amore, M. (2020). The psychological impact of COVID-19 on the mental health in the general publication. *QJM: An International Journal of Medicine*, 113(8), 531-537. <https://doi.org//10.1039/qjmed/hcaa20>.
- Soderstrom, C. N., & Bjork, A. R. (2015). Learning Versus Performance: An integrative Review. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 10(2), 176-199. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691615569>
- Spaull, N., & Van der Berg, S. (2020). Counting the cost: COVID-19 school closures in South Africa and its impact on children. *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, 10(1), a924. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v10i1.924>
- Suryaman, M., Cahyono, Y., Muliandyah, D., Bustani, O., Suryani, P., Fahlevi, M., Pramono, R., Purwanto, A., ... & Harimurti, S. M. (2020). COVID-19 era and home online learning system: does it affect the quality of pharmacy school learning? *Systematic Reviews in Pharmacy*, 11(8), 524-530.
- Wu, M., Xu, W., & Yao, Y. (2020). Mental health status of students' parents during COVID-19 era and its influence factors. *General Psychiatry*. 33, e100250. <https://doi.org//10.1136/gpsych-2020-100250>
- Yates, A., Starkey, L., Egerton, B., & Flueggen, F. (2020). High school students' experience of online learning during Covid-19: The influence of technology and pedagogy. *Technology, Pedagogy and Education*, 30(1), 59-73. <https://doi.org//10.1080/1475939X.2020.1854337>