

**TEACHING IN TIMES OF CRISIS: UNDERSTANDING THE UNEVEN EFFECTS OF  
THE COVID-19 LOCKDOWNS ON TEACHING PRACTICES IN ZIMBABWE –  
A CASE STUDY OF MARONDERA**

**by**

**Sarah Mazvita Nhliziyo  
(G14n2210)**

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**Supervisor: Professor Kirk Helliker  
([k.helliker@ru.ac.za](mailto:k.helliker@ru.ac.za))**

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**DEDICATION**

**To my mother**

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank my mother for her unwavering support and encouragement throughout this journey. She remains my pillar of strength and I am grateful for her. Thank you to my niece Edith for always availing herself in times of need, I cannot thank you enough for the immense support you have given throughout my academic career. A big thank you to Ruth for all her help and guidance. To my niece Thembinkosi; may this research show you proof that anything is possible even during adversity, if you apply yourself to it. And finally, to my supervisor, Professor Kirk Helliker for the time spent guiding me and ensuring that I complete this research. Thank you so much Prof for always extending yourself to help me, I am truly grateful.

## **ABSTRACT**

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the fragility of economies in times of a global crisis while simultaneously increasing inequalities between and within countries. The pandemic responses have varied between countries with some being extremely proactive and others being quite reluctant to respond. Though it is largely a health crisis, its impact has far reaching effects that have been felt in many sectors of society including education. Billions of scholars at varying levels were forced out of school abruptly globally and unfortunately some have not been able to return to schools. The differential impact of COVID-19 in education is evident not only at a global level, but national level as well. The primary focus of this research is the impact of COVID-19 on the teaching practices applied in Zimbabwean schools. Zimbabwe, a developing nation in the southern region of Africa, has a long history of a thriving education sector recognised internationally. However, in the wake of the pandemic, the research attempts to understand the experiences of teachers in private and government schools in the hope of showing the dilapidation and unevenness of the sector, across the private-public divide. COVID-19 comes at a time when the country's economy and healthcare system continue to exhibit signs of struggle and collapse. The research made use of qualitative research methods and in-depth interviews with teachers from public and schools around the town of Marondera. The research concluded that there are wide gaps in the quality of education delivered to students in private and government schools, and that the COVID-19 lockdowns in Zimbabwe not only demonstrate these gaps but also exacerbated them.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

Teaching practices the world over have been gravely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns. While the pandemic has crippled economies and challenged governments' health crisis preparedness, it has also demonstrated significant shortcomings in educational sectors in terms of their adaptability to sudden change. In the case of Zimbabwe's educational sector, the pandemic lockdowns have made more visible the crucial differences between the private and government (public) school systems regarding the capacity to adapt, and thereby adopt new teaching practices. Despite the lockdown, private schools continued with their lessons through social media platforms such as WhatsApp and zoom meetings, unlike the public schools which were still waiting for the lockdown to be lifted to resume lessons. The COVID-19 pandemic has had far reaching effects on the right to education and social wellbeing of children. According to a ZIMSTATS PICES Report (2021), most children were not able to engage in online or distance learning and the worst affected were those in public schools where only a few were engaged in distance learning. This had a risk of widening the emerging and growing inequalities in the education system in Zimbabwe. This dissertation seeks to understand the uneven impact of COVID 19 lockdown on teaching practice using a case study of Marondera.

### 1.2 Context of Research

Many scholars have written extensively about the implications of COVID-19 on the health and education sectors. Le Grange (2020) notes that COVID-19 has been a grim reality for the world for over a year, entailing a "multifaceted crisis" disrupting fragile health systems and sending the global economy into recession. Medical facilities ran short of personal protective equipment (PPE), beds and ventilators, and health-care professionals were stretched to the limit. Governments responded by imposing lockdowns, including travel restrictions, mandatory quarantines, banning of large gatherings, and the temporary closure of nonessential businesses and schools (Maphosa *et al.*, 2020). The lockdowns have class, racial and gendered implications in terms of their differential effects.

Regarding the education sector, Hassan and Daniel (2020) note that the abrupt closure of schools led to many challenges for educational systems globally and presented major barriers to

accessing the school curriculum. Teachers are now faced with a predicament in that they now have two competing responsibilities: that is, caring for their own children (including as students) as well as teaching other students (Kim & Asbury, 2020). Although distance learning is not new, facilitating and implementing it at short notice (and on a massive scale) where it did not exist previously, created serious problems because of inadequate knowledge, skills and resources amongst teachers, students, parents and school administrators (Thumvichit, 2020).

The new teaching practices have been complicated by uncertainty around the impermanence of remote learning and the reconfiguring of curriculums to cater for the 'new normal'. As well, teachers now have competing responsibilities in caring for their own children and teaching other students. Some nations have adopted the transition in teaching practices more ably than others (Lepp *et al.*, 2021). In this respect, a key challenge relates to large-scale technological challenges on which online teaching/learning depends. Access to technological resources for online teaching are a necessity, in relation to teachers (and their schools) and students (and their parents) at home.

Studying from home requires that the necessary infrastructure and resources are available, such as a computer, mobile device, internet connectivity and data bundles. While disruptions to education arising from technological shortfalls currently exist internationally, Africa lags far behind in pandemic-related crisis preparedness (Aristovnik *et al.*, 2020). Countries in sub-Saharan Africa, like Zimbabwe, have struggled to navigate to online teaching, considering the already prevailing economic challenges (Matimaire, 2020). Further, during the pandemic, there has been an exacerbation of educational inequalities, including within highly differentiated public-school systems but also across the public-private school divide in places where private schools are common (Sinha *et al.*, 2020; Le Grange, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic came at a time when Zimbabwe was entrenched in several crises (Helliker & Mazarire, 2021). Initially, the government showed a poor response and general lack of preparedness, owing to its denial that there was a pandemic (Scoones, 2020). The ensuing lockdowns, though, were to have devastating effects on workers in the formal economy and the vast informal sector which underpins the Zimbabwean economy. In Zimbabwe, COVID-19 affected many urban schools; however, rural schools were more affected (Mukute *et al.*, 2020). Regarding urban areas, specifically the low-income groups largely found in high density areas, social-distancing, hygiene, sanitation and access to food became a daunting task. In Zimbabwe's

high-density areas, houses are cramped, and most urbanites work in the informal sector without adequate lockdown financial relief from government (Scoones, 2020). In contrast, those in high-income groups and those in medium-density areas can maintain social distance, have access to private water sources and are often able to work from home despite the lockdowns (Scoones, 2020). According to Scoones (2020), the health sector in Zimbabwe was expected to deal with the surging infections, but it has been crippled by brain drain and medical professionals' strikes over poor salaries and lack of PPE. Those from high-density areas rely on the public health sector, while others turn to the better-equipped private health system.

In terms of the education sector, Maravanyika (n.d.) notes that a significant portion of Zimbabwe's post-independence education system still mimics that of the colonial era in that there is a visible divide between government/public and private schools. Similarly, Shizha and Kariwo (2011) highlight that, in 1980, Zimbabwe inherited an education system that favoured mainly white Zimbabwean students. Shizha and Kariwo (2011) further argue that those who had access found themselves in schools that were poorly funded, with very few educational resources and a separate curriculum from that offered in all-white schools. Education for black students was provided mainly by missionaries rather than by the government. Basically, two school systems existed prior to independence. What it then means is that public and private schools have been in existence in Zimbabwe well before independence. When Zimbabwe gained independence, Education for All was adopted, the government expanded the education system by building schools in marginalised areas and disadvantaged urban centres. (Dzvimbo, 1991). Though the number of students in government schools in high-density areas increased dramatically, government funding of these schools did not keep pace over time, and the teacher-pupil ratios were at one to 40 or more, two decades after independence (Kanyongo, 2005:67). Since then, the situation has deteriorated further (Mukute *et al.*, 2020).

At the end of March 2020, 9,500 schools were closed, and 4.6 million children were immediately sent home, indefinitely (Moshiri *et al.*, 2020). The pandemic lockdowns since then have entailed on-and-off in-class schooling. Schooling from home during the lockdowns raised many general concerns around child welfare, while school closures also heightened uncertainty and insecurity for teachers (Moshiri *et al.*, 2020). More specific to this study is that Zimbabwean teachers (in public schools) have received insufficient support to help students in their pursuit of online education (Matimairé, 2020). There have been several strikes by the teachers' unions in

response to the poor technical facilities, low wages and increased workload in the wake of the pandemic (Mavhunga, 2020). What is also critical is that Zimbabwe is a digitally deficient country where data is expensive, and smartphones are inaccessible for most people. A random survey carried out by Matimaire (2020) showed that the necessary monthly data costs for teachers was about USD\$50 per month, which was almost half the salary that government/public school teachers were estimated to be receiving at the time.

Analytically, in seeking to understand the differential effects of the pandemic lockdowns in Zimbabwe on teaching practices across the public and private school systems, the thesis will draw upon social class theory. While there are several versions of class theory, this research focuses on defining class as an objective position within a system of material inequality (Wright, 2003). Though education is often interpreted as a social mobility opportunity for low-income students (Ballantine & Spade, 2008), education tends to do little in minimising class inequalities; in fact, it facilitates the reproduction of pre-existing class stratification (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). Working-class (or lower-class) people are at a disadvantage in terms of access to material and psychological resources (including quality teachers) that enhance educational success (Ballantine *et al.*, 2017). Schools with more financial resources can afford higher-skilled teachers as well as improve teachers' skills. 'Quality teachers' do not necessarily mean that teachers in government schools are less qualified to teach, but that their capacity to activate their skills is inhibited by the school system, including under pandemic lockdown conditions. Hence, the public-private school divide in Zimbabwe is a manifestation of the prevailing class system, and this system conditions both the school and home environment – in terms of access to the resources required to engage in online teaching practices.

There is now a burgeoning scholarly literature on COVID-19 and related lockdowns globally, across all dimensions of social life (including education). In the case of Zimbabwe, there is no existing study about the differential effects on the public and private schools' systems based on empirical evidence, rather than anecdotal evidence. In undertaking a case study in Marondera, this thesis will make an important contribution to the prevailing literature.

### **1.3 Research Questions and Objectives**

- What is the impact of COVID-19 lockdown on teaching practices in Zimbabwe?

- What were the teaching conditions in both private and government schools before COVID-19 in Zimbabwe?
- How did the lockdown measures affect students and teachers in Zimbabwe?
- Which teaching methods were employed by teachers in private and public schools during the COVID-19 era as far as technology is concerned?
- How were the students coping with the new teaching arrangement brought about with the COVID-19?

The primary goal of the thesis is to highlight the uneven impact of the COVID-19 lockdowns on teaching practices in Zimbabwean schools, with a focus on differences between public and private schools in the town of Marondera. Under the main objective falls the following subsidiary objectives:

- a) examine the pre-COVID-19 teaching conditions and practices in private and government schools in Zimbabwe.
- b) understand the character of Zimbabwe's pre-COVID-19 technological/digital space broadly and as far as it relates to education in Zimbabwe.
- c) examine the COVID-19 pandemic-lockdown measures in Zimbabwe and how these affected the schooling systems.
- d) examine the COVID-19 pandemic-lockdown measures in Zimbabwe and how these affected the lives and practices of teachers (as teachers).

#### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

One of the most glaring observations about literature around this research topic is the extensive literature on Covid-19 in developed countries. While literature that directly speaks to education may not be extensive, there is a significant body of knowledge that covers the effects of the pandemic on education in the developed world than there is on the developing world. Research conducted in several parts of the world shows that there is need for more data on the true effects of Covid-19 in education. As such, the significance of this thesis lies in its quest to add to the growing body of knowledge surrounding Covid-19 and education in developing countries, namely Zimbabwe. Literature available on education and Covid-19 focuses at great length on the plight of students who have missed over a year of school and how this may further harm the economy. Teachers are perhaps one of the few looked at groups during the pandemic and much literature on

their experiences vaguely argues that they have had a tough time and have learnt to adjust to the new way(s) of teaching. The thesis thus pays attention to the teaching practices adopted in private and government schools to highlight differential impact, and to illustrate the potential devastation that will arise if substantial action is not taken. It is the hope of the researcher that through literature and reflections the research can recommend approaches for policymakers to formulate strategies that are inclusive and aimed at addressing the impact of the crisis.

### **1.5 Thesis Outline**

The focus on this thesis entails investigating the uneven impact of COVID 19 lockdown on the teaching practices in Zimbabwe about the inequalities that exist between the public and private schools in Marondera. Chapter 2 provides the theoretical framing for the thesis as well as reviews scholarly literature pertinent to this study. Chapter 3 focuses on the research methodology and chapter 4 involves a presentation of the evidence emerging from the study and offers an interpretation and analysis of the evidence. The final chapter (Chapter 5) revisits the thesis objectives in the light of the empirical analysis and seeks to show how the theoretical framework contributed to this analysis.

## **CHAPTER 2: CONTEXTUALISING TEACHING PRACTICES DURING COVID-19 LOCKDOWNS IN ZIMBABWE**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The Covid-19 pandemic has had far reaching devastating effects on global economies. A substantial amount of literature has covered the effects of the pandemic on education from the perspective of learners however, there is need to explore the effects of the pandemic with regards to teachers. This study focuses on the impact of Covid-19 on teaching practices in Zimbabwe. The study looks to understand the dilemma faced by educators in Zimbabwe considering the prevailing economic crisis that has become characteristic of the country for over a decade. In the wake of the pandemic, pre-existing socioeconomic inequalities have been highlighted and heightened particularly access to education and healthcare facilities, and yet there seems to be very little that has been done by the Zimbabwean government to aid its citizens.

### **2.2 Theoretical Framework**

The social class theory by Karl Marx will be used for this study. Grant (2001) defines social class as a set of concepts centered on models of social stratification that occur in a society, in which people are grouped into categories which are the “haves and have not”. Karl Marx (1972) based his theory on the idea that society has two classes of people which are the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The bourgeoisie are the owners of the means of production which are the factories, businesses, and equipment needed to produce wealth and the proletariat are the workers. According to Harvey (2010) Marxists identify the working class as comprising individuals who are forced to sell their labor-power in order to survive and who work under the control of capital. Dubois, Rucker and Adam (2015) argue that there is a relationship between the rich and unethical behavior. Indeed, the rich tend to use their money to propel their interests even when they are wrong. This is supported by Gwirayi (2010) who purports that there is unequal distribution of resources in society.

In the context of our study the bourgeois are those in private schools as they are classified as the “haves” who have resources to learn even in times of Covid whereas those from the public schools are the ones referred to as the “have not” as they struggle to get resources such as data to be able to learn, participate through google class or zoom meetings. Kozol (1991) asserts that a

person's social class has a significant effect on their educational opportunities. Supporting the above notion Hsieh and Shen (2010) reiterate that the inclusion of private schools in the education sector has received significant support from the parents as they perceive highest quality education and believe that learners will always perform better than their counterparts from public schools in all the aspects. In agreement, Mugisha (2008) postulates that, compared to public schools, private schools seem to address the needs of the learners more effectively and exceed in performance by almost every measure and parents are now shunning or abandoning public schools in favor of private schools. One may argue that a parent cannot just abandon public schools and send their children to private schools if resources are not available. Already one can also see the class divide that has been put between these two schools as the other has been deemed inferior over the other which makes this theory relevant to the study. Supporting this notion Sacks (2007) argues that this lack of good schools is one factor that perpetuates the class divide across generations.

Back in the days of pre colonialism social classes have always been in existence. As the British South Africa Company arrived in the 1890s to Rhodesia, the area now known as Zimbabwe, Malawi and Zambia they sought to establish rule by way of dehumanizing Africans (Shizha & Kariwo, 2011). The Company administration of Rhodesia created Christian missionary schools to serve local communities and missionary schools provided an education for the indigenous population that focused on deliberately teaching them agricultural production and industrial development including carpentry and building. It is further claimed that in order to control the local population, the company limited education and censored knowledge in schools. Furthermore, Eurocentric education system was a structural institution that reinforced the superiority of white settlers even though they were the minority of the population. Missionary schools perpetuated social and economic repression of the indigenous population by reducing their chances of earning well-paying jobs or positions of power (Shizha & Kariwo). This notion is in agreement with Marx theory of social class where one notes the class divide between the white settlers and the indigenous people. Similarly these differences also occur between the private and public schools in Zimbabwe where bourgeoisie parents fork out a fortune pegged in USD per term to send their children to school whereas the low income earners can only afford to send their children to government schools. To further show the class divide as Sacks (2007) mentioned earlier in terms of sporting activities, the private schools in Zimbabwe rarely compete with those from public schools. Similarly, Diemer & Ali, (2009) asserts that children from higher social class backgrounds tend to

be more successful in developing career aspirations and are generally better prepared for the world of work because of access to resources such as career offices, guidance counsellors, better schools, high level “social actors,” and familial experience with higher education.

Marx (1972) argues that the upper class in modern capitalist societies is often distinguished by the possession of largely inherited wealth. Marx (1972) further noted that the ownership of large amounts of property and the income derived from it confer many advantages upon the members of the upper class. The upper class are therefore able to develop a distinctive style of life based on extensive cultural pursuits and leisure activities that exert a considerable influence on economic policy and political decisions, and to procure for their children a superior education and economic opportunities that help to perpetuate family wealth. Social class theory has been criticized as creating low self-esteem, low expectations, discouragement, and lead to bitterness towards others who are working class which can further divide communities. Individuals can also tend to find scapegoats by blaming others, which continues the cycle of classism's negative impacts particularly in tough economic times.

It may be argued that the quality of education is a means to eradicate poverty and inequalities in any country and in the same light, Tooley (2009) reiterates that governments’ must ensure that all public schools are able to attract all classes in the society and provide the quality of education that is desirable to its citizens. Tooley, (2009) further states that those who go to private schools should do so because they are looking for exclusivity or other aspects such as religion, but not that the public schools are failing to provide quality education.

### **2.3 Pre Covid 19 teaching conditions and practices in government and private schools in Zimbabwe**

The Zimbabwean education system has an elaborate history of asymmetry. In the early stages, the education system derived asymmetries from colonial educational administration. The government of Zimbabwe inherited a 90-year legacy of inequality from the colonial Rhodesia that encompassed the social, economic, political, and educational aspects of life, which oppressed and discriminated against the black majority (Richards and Govere, 2003). According to Dorsey (1989), legislation, whenever necessary, was enacted to ensure that black development did not pose a serious threat to white development and interests thus, continued manipulation of the economic, political, and education structures was particularly important in maintaining white dominance during the

colonial era. According to Chitiyo and Wheeler (2004), the coming of independence enabled more black people to have increased access to education, however the education system was still unable to absorb all African people in the system. Therefore the emergency of private schools was justified. The second priority was to expand the educational system at all levels, but particularly at the secondary school level, to redress the extreme imbalance and inequality inherited from the colonial era (Dorsey, 1989).

Rosenholtz (1991) argues that private schools provide an alternative for parents who are dissatisfied with public schools or have other reasons for wanting their children to attend a private school. Within the private sector, parents can choose among a range of religiously affiliated and non-sectarian schools (as long as they can afford the tuition charged or receive financial aid). Some private schools are very selective in their admissions. It has been the role of the government to provide education to the appropriate age group. However, private schooling grew as a result of poor performance of public schools, with high student teacher ratio, poor working conditions and continuous salary grievances. Chifunyise (2001) points out that in Zimbabwe, 94% of primary schools and 87% of secondary schools are owned and run by missions, church organizations, and boards of trustees, commercial companies, and urban and rural district councils. She further states that most of the private schools are registered, therefore, eligible for certain benefits from the government and, at the same time required to maintain certain standards. One may also argue that not all private schools are registered as it is the situation currently in Zimbabwe, where backyard schools are the order of the day.

In 1979, the Zimbabwean government enacted an Education Act which brought about a three-tier system which destroyed the two-tier system of European and African nationals (Kanyongo, 2005). According to Kanyongo (2005), this Act which saw the inception of private schools in Zimbabwe, although these initially catered for the elite and mostly whites, because of the fees structure in these schools. To monitor the quality of education in these private schools, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) initiated the supervision of the operations of all private schools. According to the Ministry of Education in (UNESCO, 2016) all Zimbabwean schools follow a basic national curriculum, although they have open latitude to include aspects of the British curriculum which offers the Cambridge School certificate subjects in addition to the current changes in technology. It is further stated that most private schools offer a hybrid curriculum which allows students to fulfil both local and the Cambridge Examination systems with

permission from the Zimbabwe Ministry of Education. However, Dembo (2008) argues that private schools which operate on open enrolment platform zones perform better than public schools in many ways, because of availability of materials resources, reduced teacher pupil ratios and the inclusion of technology in their curriculum.

#### **2.4 Technological/digital space in relation to Zimbabwe's Education Sector**

The spread of COVID-19 has led to the closure of schools all over the world including Zimbabwe. This tested the preparedness of educational institutions to deal with a crisis that required the help of advanced technology including hardware and software to enable effective online learning. Such closure accelerated the development of the online learning environments so that learning would not be disrupted. Chinhenga (2017) notes that an online learning curriculum was introduced in Zimbabwe by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education long before the COVID - 19 pandemic, however it has been affected by a number of challenges and further reiterated that although computers have been part of the country's education curriculum for a long time, their use has been limited to a few well-funded government or public schools. UNDP (2020), also argues that most schools do not have the basic facilities required for the use of computer technology like electricity. In recent years, the use of online sites has grown tremendously perhaps more so among teenagers and high school students. However, very little was known about their ability and feasibility to make use of such learning platforms for academic learning purposes. According to a research carried out by Zinyemba *et al.* (2021) COVID-19 affected most learners who attend government schools in urban and rural areas as compared to their fellow counter parts who attended private schools. For learners and educators at most government schools ICT was beyond their reach and capacity. With most of the educators having basic mobile phones that could not access electronic media platforms like WhatsApp, Twitter, YouTube, Facebook and Instagram (Zinyemba *et al.*, 2021). On the other hand Zinyemba et al (2021) notes that it was learning as usual for private school learners as they quickly embraced technology and continued with their studies in the comfort of their homes and of interest to note was that such schools allow learners to come to school with their digital machines from as lower secondary students and primary students were mainly assisted by parents to attend to online lessons as most of the learners were not familiar with technology.

Online learning is possible in Zimbabwe where there is enough infrastructure that is used for ICT, like electrification and internet connectivity, a feature which is still not obvious in most Zimbabwean schools. Machingura, (2016) further notes that most rural schools are marginalized and as a result of the marginalization of most rural schools most teachers are not interested in working in such remote areas. Hence, Chinhenga (2017) emphasizes that the literacy gap created by online learning in Zimbabwe, which was worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown may become a generational imbalance which will remain a serious inequality in opportunities in the wake of future generations and result in most of the gains of trying to address the historical imbalances in the education sector, which were experienced soon after independence to no avail. Further supported by Gwirayi (2010) who purports that Zimbabwean education is evidential of a capitalist weapon that has negative implications on social change since it is meant to preserve the status quo the impoverished lot will remain so and those who have control over the economy will remain occupants of the apex of the academic hierarchy.

Some of the tools that were used by teachers to conduct lessons during Covid 19 are WhatsApp, Google Classroom, Google Meet, Zoom and radio. An important point to note is that all the digital platforms requires internet where infrastructure, connectivity and data are of paramount importance.

#### **2.4.1 WhatsApp as an educational tool**

Global lockdown as a result of COVID19, has increased global WhatsApp users (including teachers and students) who have utilised the Application as the main form of educational interaction during the pandemic.

A recent survey revealed that the cost of one giga byte of data in Zimbabwe was the highest in the world (TechZim, 2019) and this limits student access to other e-learning platforms which demand more data, therefore WhatsApp became the de-facto online learning platform for most students. WhatsApp is a popular mobile application for providing instant messaging service in smartphones. One observation with WhatsApp is that it requires little or no training. This was corroborated by Bouhnik and Deshen (2014) who stated that WhatsApp was the only technology so far which had found itself in the classroom without any training offered to teachers, students and administrators. The traditional e-learning systems require a stable broadband connection and access to a computer and a laptop which was a major hindrance during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Most scholars do not have access to laptops and desktops as confirmed by a survey by Zimstats (2020) which revealed that about 11% of the population has access to one of the devices, and this limits access to Wi-Fi or bandwidth at their homes. Ahad and Lim (2014) confirmed that the popularity of WhatsApp was due to its low cost, ease of use, and unlimited instant messaging.

Some authors have identified that the use of WhatsApp has advantages including the faster exchange of information between lecturers and students, furthermore, utilizing the WhatsApp application students' study anywhere and anytime (Zan, 2019). Other advantages of WhatsApp are that it is user friendly and easily available though one can argue that it is not always available especially in developed countries like Zimbabwe where you need data to be online. In his study, Zan (2019) expressed that using WhatsApp social network in education has many benefits. However, in addition to the positive results, negative results such as remarkable number of students sending messages outside of class hours or use of inappropriate language in the WhatsApp messages were observed. Furthermore, it was seen that activating WhatsApp use during educational processes requires high level responsibility to follow all correspondence among students and checking possible errors and giving feedback for corrections in the whole messages send or received by each student (Yilmazoy *et al.*, 2020).

Other challenges associated with WhatsApp as Gusuringa (2018) explains it, is that only compatible smartphones can work with WhatsApp and Djamjuri and Kamilah (2020) also states that when signal is bad it will hinder the process of sending teaching materials. A study conducted by Nambiar (2020) showed that students perceived the online classes to lack motivation. Things like disturbance within the flow of classes, problems in clarifying doubts, lack of interest, technical issues were some prominent factors reducing the effectiveness of online classes. Williams, Birch, & Hancock (2012) argue that online lectures are more effective when combined with face-to-face lectures. This argument therefore means that although children were having lessons through WhatsApp during Covid-19, it was not effective because they lacked face to face as subjects like Mathematics and technical ones which at times need further illustrations that cannot be done via WhatsApp. In Zimbabwe most public school learners used WhatsApp as a learning tool, and the teacher will be the group administrator but it was one way, where the teacher sends instructions

### **2.4.2 Google Class and Google Meet as a learning tool**

Covid-19 has been recognized as a global epidemic by WHO, resulting in the learning process being carried out online. Sudarsana (2019) defines Google Classroom as a facility to measure student progress that allows teachers to assess consistently and transparently with a rubric that is integrated into student work and it is able to look for possible plagiarism by activating the authenticity report feature. This method of learning has been identified as a good solution to activate classrooms even though schools have been closed to reduce the spread of covid-19 (Okmawati, 2020). Google classroom is like a virtual extension of brick and mortar classrooms, It starts with creating classes and adding students then it explores the features found in this application such as sending information, starting discussions, distributing and collecting tasks. Using Google Classroom makes learning more effective and allows collaboration between teachers and students in virtual classes as well as communicating in forums and face-to-face connections if Google Meet is activated. Google Classroom and Google Meet are internet based and require smartphones or computers to function (Shaharane *et al.*, 2016). Unavailability of computers, smartphones and internet connectivity were some of the disadvantages mentioned by researchers concerning e- learning (Kumar 2018). Despite the advantages of online platforms suggested Zimbabwe had its own challenges as Mutanda (2022) argued that most urban schools in low income areas do not have the computers and internet connections to operate on such platforms.

### **2.4.3 Radio Broadcast as a learning tool**

According to Folarin (as cited in Okwu *et al.*, 2007), radio has always been a favoured medium of mass communication as it is easily understood by the laymen and the intellectual alike. It also acts as an effective tool of instruction as it can overcome the barrier of distance and reach the larger audience quick. According to OCHA (2020) The Zimbabwe government declared radio broadcasts as the primary tool to support teaching and learning during the pandemic. The country's contextual dynamics led to the examination and evaluation of the suitability of available technologies to deliver educational content during the COVID-19 lockdown. Nyarko and Mate-Kole (2016) purports that radio is a powerful mass medium that can broadcast educational content simply and more cheaply, reaching to the most remote and most deprived populations in developing countries. Similarly, radio broadcasts were used for English language lessons in Kenya to help the community, which had embraced street slang, which affected school children, and the

intervention proved successful (Odera, 2011). However, a study conducted in Namibia revealed that 67 percent of the population had radio access and that learners spent an average of six hours listening to radio programs such as news, entertainment and did not regard radio as a tool for learning (Beukes, 2006).

## **2.5 Lockdown measures on Zimbabwe schooling system**

The Zimbabwean education sector was heavily impacted by the Covid-19 induced lockdown. According to OCHA (2021), the education system in Zimbabwe was already stretched before the Covid-19 pandemic because of multiple crises that included the chronic economic crisis, humanitarian crisis (Cyclone Idai and food insecurity) as well as continuous job actions and demonstrations by teachers over poor salaries. The Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ) gave a directive on the physical closure of schools as part of a national Covid-19 induced lockdown on 24 March 2020. According to UNICEF (2021) schools suffered a 6-month closure and learners lost out on valuable learning time in 2020 and the conversation was on how students would continue with learning in their homes and several alternative ways of learning were introduced such as online learning and broadcast media. Similarly, Zimbabwe Education Cluster (2020), also noted that the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in conjunction with NGOs and other stakeholders set out several strategic priorities to get schooling back on track and the priorities stated were increasing teacher capacitation and awareness, improving resources to ensure the introduction of alternative learning strategies are in place.

Zimbabwe network providers also came on board to assist on education. According to Mudzingwa (2020) telecoms giant Econet Wireless Zimbabwe has taken the lead as it introduced online learning tailor-made for Zimbabwe's education system. Mudzingwa (2020) further states that Cassava Smartech, a subsidiary of Econet launched Akello Digital Classroom and Akello E-Library, which allow students to have online classes and access to hundreds of school curriculum books online approved by the Zimbabwe School Examinations Council and international examination boards. Similarly Runyanga (2020) noted that the government also signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with three contractors, namely ZARNet, e-Learning Solutions and the country's third-largest mobile operator TelOne Zimbabwe. Runyanga further states that ZARNet was tasked to install internet facilities and services to 1,300 schools at a cost of USD1.1 million, while TelOne was allocated 2,500 schools, and e-Learning Solutions was

expected to deal with the remainder. However, the Ministry heaped the slow pace of the e-learning exercise to the contracted players (Runyanga, 2020). Therefore, it should be noted that the ruling party, ZANU-PF, has strong reservations toward the promotion of online spaces, which they describe as advancing a regime change agenda through social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook as they have been used to expose misrule and corruption in government.

Commenting on government initiative to e-learning, Chipendo (2021) stated that only those privileged enough and well-resourced to be in private schools managed to quickly adapt through online learning platforms whereas public schools remained on a complete shutdown. Similarly Zhou (2020) a veteran educationist purports that e-learning currently has limited applicability due to limited power in rural Zimbabwe coupled with incessant power cuts in major cities. Zhou further postulates that currently more than 65% of secondary schools are not electrified, while more than 75% of primary schools are not electrified hence this will take a responsible government to ensure that these challenges are addressed. Misihairabwi-Mushonga argued that the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed government's reluctance to expedite online learning, which was recommended by Dr. (Caiphus) Nziramasanga back in 1999. Nziramasanga Commission, recommended the need to digitalise education, but it was not given priority back then by the Government of Zimbabwe.

An Amalgamated Rural Teachers Union report of 2020 indicated that lack of supporting infrastructure and insufficient teacher training compromised delivery of remote learning programs during lockdowns. According to Chingono (2021) home schools and unregistered private colleges sprouted up across Harare's townships, but the government warned teachers not to open their own classrooms, stating that it is illegal under lockdown rules. According to Mutsaka (2020), Zimbabwe implemented a phased schools reopening approach beginning with exam classes because of the need to decongest especially in public schools where infrastructure is limited and the teacher per student ratio is high (UNESCO 2020). According to a research conducted by Moyon Ndlovu (2020) indicated that students enrolled at one school in Matabeleland North province tested positive for COVID 19. Moreover, the COVID-19 outbreaks in schools have been linked to community transmission with most communities reported to be no longer adhering to standard COVID-19 preventative guidelines perhaps due to fatigue. WHO (2020) noted that these recent COVID-19 outbreaks in schools are an important public health problem given children can be asymptomatic carriers with the capacity to infect their older family members resulting in severe disease and possibly death.

Matabvu (2020) purports that the government of Zimbabwe has made important strides in ensuring schools were safe for learners and teachers, however, these efforts have largely been limited in coverage and underfunded. Many schools in rural areas where the bulk of the population resides do not even have access to running water. The poor infrastructure has in some cases seen very large classrooms of up to 70 learners where it is impossible to social distance. The need for investment in schools to protect learners, teachers and their families cannot be over emphasized. Masaraure, president of the Amalgamated Rural Teachers Union of Zimbabwe (ARTUZ), said schools were ill-equipped to reopen and lack the necessary personal protective equipment for teachers (Human Rights Watch, 2020).

## **2.6 The Zimbabwe Government Response to Covid-19**

Zimbabwe recorded its first Covid-19 case on March 20, 2020 ([www.iharare.com](http://www.iharare.com)). The patient was a male resident of Victoria Falls who travelled back from the United Kingdom via South Africa on 15 March. The vast majority of infected patients for some time were returning residents or deportees from countries with high infection rates (including South Africa and the United Kingdom), or contacts of these residents. With just a few confirmed cases in the country, the Zimbabwean government proactively proceeded to declare the Covid-19 crisis a “national disaster” on Friday, March 27. This was followed by a national lockdown through the issuance of Statutory Instrument (SI) 83 of 2020 Public Health (Covid-19 Prevention, Containment, and Treatment) on March 28, 2020 (HRForum, 17/4/2020). The lockdown that began on March 30 was extended indefinitely on May 16, though it was eased slightly. Addressing the nation that day, President Emerson Mnangagwa indicated that the country had not yet met the conditions for lifting the lockdown that were set by the WHO: the capacity by the health system to test, isolate, treat, and trace every contact (HRForum, 19/4/2020). The announcement was immediately followed by the issuance of SI 93 of 2020–Public Health (Covid-19 Prevention, Containment, and Treatment) (National Lockdown) (Amendment) Order, 2020 (No. 3). The measure intended to slow the spread of Covid-19 and required public activities to stop and informal markets to close. Exceptions were made for certain food and fuel vendors as well as health-related facilities.

## **2.7 Covid 19 measures and their effects on teachers and education sector**

Prior to Covid-19 teachers had pretty set structures in terms of teaching practices. They planned their schedules, set their teaching materials and organized activities around the normal school calendar whilst observing holidays and any other country specific events (Khlaif *et al.*, 2021). Whilst planning has remained standard, there have been slight shifts that may contribute to stress. These shifts include finding ways to reach students who may have limited access to devices and internet services and to some degree teaching parents so that they teach their children (Khlaif, *et al.*, 2021) A survey by Education International (2021) revealed that, among 93 teacher unions from 67 countries, nearly two-thirds reported that education workers in private institutions were significantly affected as they were either not receiving their salaries on time or they have been cut. Similarly, Alam and Tiwari (2021) purport that multiple reports point to private school teachers losing their jobs, having their salaries cut, or not paid at all, which has significantly impacted their livelihood, their mental health, and potentially their motivation to teach. However, teachers from public or government schools in Zimbabwe had their salaries in full.

A recent study highlights that female teachers are bearing the greater share of additional responsibilities on childcare and household tasks. Similarly, Bowyer (2022) purports that gender disparity experienced by female teachers has a negative impact on female progression, professional identity, advancement, workload and wage. Marinoni *et al* (2021) also cited additional responsibilities, loneliness, reduced social interaction as a result of a busy schedule as other challenges faced by teachers. Mupinga (2020) argues that during school closures, most teachers were expected to provide lessons online and majority of them do not have laptops, Wi-Fi and the technical skill as a result hindered learning progress. Moyo (2021) also argues that for urbanite teachers, this entailed preparing and uploading lessons using the latest technology, while those in remote areas entail preparing work, print materials and distribute learning materials in more remote or rural areas. Maphosa (2021) argued that in most cases, some teachers ended up funding teaching materials out of personal resources. Hence, becomes critical to ensure continuity of education.

There are also teachers who have students at heart and continued helping them despite challenges. Hargreaves (2010) asserts that teaching is an emotional practice, and the rewards that teachers find in their work include a significantly emotional dimension. They are what Dan Lortie (1975), in his highly cited book, *Schoolteacher*, called “psychic”. Lortie (1975) found that teachers

he studied in the greater Boston area gained rewards and satisfaction when they got feedback showing that they were having a positive impact on their students.

Children also had their fair share during the pandemic. Covid 19 has impacted negatively on school going children and teachers as quite a number of challenges have been identified. Child labour is one of the effects of school closure. According to a research conducted by International Peace Information Service (2020) the Central African Republic shows an increase in children under 15 working in artisanal gold and diamond mines since the pandemic's outbreak due to schools' closure in rural and mining areas. Similarly Human Rights Watch (2020) noted that young children of school going age from low-income fishing community in Lagos, Nigeria, have begun to sell fish helping their parents. Domestic and other household chores emerged as another challenge, though in our African societies domestic work is not something that one can complain about however, UNESCO (2020) noted that domestic and other household work increased for the girl child as a result of the pandemic. In Zimbabwe, Chamunogwa & Chakanya, (2021) also agreed with UNESCO (2020) as they cited that lockdowns have also increased the rate of unpaid domestic work and young girls' responsibilities increased as they are expected to maintain homes and look after younger siblings, all at the expense of their educational development.

Education protects girls from child marriage and provides reproductive health services that prevent unplanned pregnancy. Evidence from past epidemics like the Ebola crisis in West Africa demonstrates the interrelated nature of poverty, school dropout, early marriage and early pregnancy (Chavez *et al.*, 2021). Supporting the above point Mukandavire (2020) noted that schools reduce early sexual activity, drugs and alcohol abuse and other behavior issues. School closures and economic hardships create incentives for families to marry their daughters early to offset financial burden, especially when families believe that education has limited immediate term value. Save the Children (2021) concurs with the above scholars and purports that asserts that as a result of COVID-19, an estimated ten million more girls are at risk of early marriage over the next decade. UNICEF (2021) also purports that increases in adolescent pregnancy during COVID-19 school closures have been evident, threatening to keep many adolescent girls barred from education even when they reopen. Tapfumaneyi (2020) supporting the notion states that reports showed that at least 415 school going girls dropped out of exam classes in Manicaland Province during the March to October 2020 COVID-19 lockdown period mainly due to marriage and pregnancy. Global Partnership for Education (2020) cited child marriage, early pregnancies, and

gender-based violence as a result of school closure. Similarly, United Nations (2020) purports that women and girls were more vulnerable to multiple types of abuse, such as domestic violence, transactional sex, and early and forced marriages.

Speaking on health issues WHO (2020) reiterated that closures of schools and other educational institutions have hampered the provision of essential services to children and communities and further argues that the loss of school meals and other health and nutrition services in the first months of the pandemic affected 370 million children in 195 countries, increasing hunger and nutritional deficiencies for the most disadvantaged. Similarly, according to a report by Zimbabwe Education Cluster (2020), the impact of Covid-19 show that there is grave concern over the nutrition of children in vulnerable communities who were reliant on schools for meals. According to UNICEF (2021), in most European countries, children from lower socio-economic backgrounds lacked and are still lacking reading opportunities, a quiet room, and parental support during school closure.

According to Firth (2020) in war zones like Kadugli, Southern Kordofan, Sudan, paramilitaries from Sudan's Rapid Support Forces took over a girls' primary school on June 14, 2020, and began using it as a training base since the school was already closed and when it was time to reopen for students to sit secondary-school entrance exams, the armed forces did not allow the school to reopen. Similarly, UNESCO estimates that 23.8 million additional children and youth (from pre-primary to tertiary) may drop out or not have access to school due to the pandemic's economic impact alone (UNESCO 2020). Lack of parental support in assisting school children with their work is another challenge that emerged. Horn (2020) purports that some children failed to get the necessary assistance from their parents regarding their school work, as the parents were also busy with their work schedules.

Many children lost their loved ones during COVID 19. Dyregrov (2013) asserts that one of the significant challenges which can arise because of childhood bereavement is reduced school performance. Students seem to struggle with concentration and memory issues, which can translate into learning difficulties (Dyregrov, 2013). Kuhfeld *et al.* (2020) purports that the negative effects of school closures due to summer vacation or natural disasters, and of absenteeism leads to lack of interest in school.

## **2.8 Conclusion**

This chapter reviewed literature on the effects of Covid 19 provided an overview of the effects of the lockdowns in Zimbabwe regarding multiple dimensions of social life, and focused more specifically on education and teaching practices during lockdowns but at a global level. In this way, two sets of literature frame the study of teaching practices during lockdowns in Zimbabwe: respectively, general effects of the lockdowns on Zimbabwean society, and specific effects on teaching practices of the lockdowns globally. The next chapter examines the research methodology underpinning this study.

## **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The primary goal of this dissertation is to understand the uneven impact of the COVID-19 lockdowns on teaching practices in Zimbabwean schools, with a focus on differences between public and private schools in the town of Marondera. In this context, it also seeks to understand the challenges faced by teachers in terms of teaching during a pandemic in Zimbabwe considering the prevailing economic crisis that has become characteristic of the country for over a decade. In order to understand the impact of COVID-19, the researcher examined the pre-COVID-19 teaching practices in the respective schools as well as the viability of online teaching in relation to education in Zimbabwe. The researcher also examined the lockdown measures in place in Zimbabwe and their impact on the schooling system and the teaching practices of teachers. This was done through interviews and gathering some secondary data from previous articles by various authors.

To address the research topic and pursue the primary goal, the researcher employed a qualitative research methodology and a (qualitative) case study research design. The choice of research method was based on the ability of qualitative research to draw on the experiences of individuals to support hypotheses. The sample comprised of 16 teachers from several public and private schools in Marondera because a small sample is manageable and avoids spending too many resources. The sample was selected using purposive convenience sampling techniques. In-depth interviews were used to collect data from the sampled population because they provided detailed information concerning people's thoughts, feelings and attitudes about complex social issues.

### **3.2 Qualitative Methodology**

Qualitative research relates to (among others) an interpretive and constructivist methodology because it is well suited for exploring hidden or multifaceted social issues. Honebein (1996) describes the constructivist philosophical paradigm as an approach which privileges ontologically subjective and intersubjective meanings, and which argues that human subjects construct their own knowledge, understanding and interpretation of the social through experience-based meaning-construction. Because of this, in terms of a constructivist epistemology, it is crucial for sociologists to understand the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it (Schwandt, 2000).

Overall, this approach entails collecting non-numerical data, and analysing it thematically, to understand social life by focusing on the perceptions, perspectives and practices of the studied populations (McCandless et al., 2007; Berg 2012; Johnson and Christensen, 2012). It allows for intensive, in-depth studies involving ‘thick descriptions’ of the lives of human subjects and is able to identify the dynamic diversity of subjective perspectives and actions amongst subjects.

In using a constructivist methodology, the thesis does not subscribe to idealism. In other words, the significance of social structures (both enabling and constraining) were brought to the fore in this research through in-depth interviews and secondary data. Considering this, the thesis examined the differentiated perspectives and practices of teachers in the educational landscape in Zimbabwe, recognising that structures (including economic and technological inequalities and the severe effects of COVID 19) condition this differentiation.

### **3.3 Research Design**

A research design is a plan that describes what, who, when and how particular parts of the research process are being undertaken (Leady & Omrod, 2014). According to Bryman and Bell (2013), the research design outlines how the investigation into the research topic will unfold and details the different stages that are to be followed. The research design is important for the research process because it creates a framework for the study to be carried out. A case-study research design was used. A case study is an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in an in-depth way and within its real-life context, and it is especially relevant when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clear (Yin, 2009).

A case study method enables a researcher to closely examine the data within a specific context. There are three distinct types of case study designs (Yin, 1984): exploratory, descriptive and explanatory. Exploratory case studies are often conducted in areas of social enquiry where little previous research has been undertaken. Given that COVID-19 has brought to the fore new challenges (including educational challenges) that never existed previously, this study has a very strong exploratory (and descriptive) dimension to it. In addition, broadly speaking, studies of inequalities in education have a rich sociological tradition and, hence, this study made use of pertinent sociological theory about educational inequalities (along social-class lines) to incorporate an explanatory element as well incorporating concepts such as modernization and globalization.

### 3.4 Sample

McCandless et al. (2007) describe a sample as a limited and set number of individuals from a wider population (or universe) in which the individuals embody specific characteristics found within the universe. This limited set (i.e. the sample) can be collected on a representative or non-representative basis, i.e. random or non-random sampling, respectively. The researcher employed non-random, stratified and purposive sampling to select the sampled population. Purposive sampling is typically less costly and more convenient as the research site and research subjects are more readily available (McLeod, 2004; Ilker, 2016).

For this study, there were three phases to the sampling process. Firstly, a research site for the case study, that is, Marondera town. Marondera was chosen on the basis that it was convenient for the researcher and is home to several education institutions (private and public) that will provide a foundation for studying teaching practices across the private-public school divide. Secondly, non-randomly eight schools were selected, four public and four private schools. Thirdly, purposive sampling was used for selecting 16 teachers from specific school grades. Lastly, stratified random sampling was used to capture the characteristics in the sample. Table 1 shows the sample information for Marondera.

**Table 1: Sample Information**

<b>INSTITUTION</b>	<b>TEACHER LEVEL</b>	<b>TEACHER LEVEL</b>
Nyameni Primary (Pub.)	Grade 3	Grade 7
Cherutombo Primary (Pub.)	Grade 3	Grade 7
Ruzawi Primary (Pvt.)	Grade 3	Grade 7
Lendy Park Primary (Pvt.)	Grade 3	Grade 7
Nyameni High (Pub.)	Form 4	Form 6
Cherutombo High (Pub.)	Form 4	Form 6
Watershed College (Pvt.)	Form 4	Form 6
Peterhouse High School (Pvt.)	Form 4	Form 6

Ten women and 6 men were selected to identify if there were any differences around teaching practices between school years which might, in turn, affect conclusions about overall

differences between public and private schools. In other words, the extent and form of differences between teaching practices across the private-public divide in the context of COVID-19 varied across grades this was mainly because of different financial situations and learning materials required per grade.

### **3.5 Research Instruments**

In this research, unstructured, in-depth interviews were used as the research instrument to obtain primary data. The data collection instrument was the most appropriate for qualitative research because fewer participants were needed to obtain useful information it helped to identify perceptions, perspectives and practices of teachers in Zimbabwe and elsewhere.

#### **3.5.1 In-depth interviews**

Boyce and Neal (2006) define in-depth interviewing as a qualitative type of research method that involves carrying out personal interviews with a specified number of informants on a one-to-one basis to find out their viewpoints on an idea, experience, or situation. For instance, as in this present study, a researcher may ask teachers in a study about their personal experiences, perspectives and prospects related to teaching during a pandemic. In-depth interviews, therefore, are useful when the researcher seeks detailed information concerning people's thoughts, feelings and attitudes about complex social issues.

According to Patton (2002), in-depth interviews are typically unstructured because they include open-ended questions and provide room for extensive probing to obtain clarity or to ensure that the research subjects are fully able to express their feelings and beliefs on the subject under study. The interviewee could articulate thoughts and feelings on issues beyond what the interviewer planned to cover but which, from the interviewer's perspective, enhance the value of the research (Saunders et al., 2009) (See Appendix 1 for the interview schedule).

Sixteen teachers from different schools in Marondera in Zimbabwe were interviewed. All interviews conducted were based on a combination of emails, messaging and face-to-face interaction. The researcher distributed the interview schedule a day before the face-to-face interview and explained what was required, so that the interviewee has time to think through the issues to be raised. Each interview session was estimated to take between 45 to 60 minutes. The

interviews took place at the most convenient places and time for the interviewees, but not on school grounds. The interviews were audiotaped.

### **3.6 Data Analysis**

Data analysis is a key step in the research process in so far as it serves as a tool to interpret data that has been collected and to establish coherence in what is being studied. There are several strategies by which data analysis can be carried out, including constant comparative analysis, phenomenological approaches, narrative analysis and ethnographic methods (Thorne, 2000). Constant comparative analysis is concerned with comparisons between cases; in this instance, this approach may be used to compare government schoolteachers' experiences with those of private school teachers (Thorne, 2000). Phenomenological approaches focus more on understanding the essence or importance of the research participants' experiences. Simply put, one may say phenomenology looks to interpret why experiences are important for those living through them. Narrative analysis concerns itself with "the extent to which the stories we tell provide insights about our lived experiences" (Thorne, 2000:69). Ethnographic methods are adopted from anthropology and look at beliefs and belief systems, ways of living and kinship as a form of data analysis (Thorne, 2000). Using comparative analysis, the researcher was able to analyse complex situations, and can help explain why change happens in some cases but not others.

### **3.7 Ethical Considerations**

The following are some crucial ethical issues to be considered by the researcher:

#### **3.7.1 Informed Consent**

The researcher used informed consent as one of the ethical considerations because it is a key cornerstone of ethical research. This entails an understanding between the researcher and the participant in which the latter must be provided with full details about the issues or topics being researched, including how the research will be carried out and how the data will be used. Overall, the researcher educated the participants about the purpose, data collection methods and scope of the research, including possible risks and benefits, before carrying out the study. Based on this, the researcher obtained informed consent of participants, both verbally and in writing (see

Appendix 2 for the consent form). Prior to conducting any in-depth interviews and discussions, the researcher also got interviewees' permission to record the interviews.

### **3.7.2 Confidentiality and Anonymity**

To maintain confidentiality, the researcher gave the participants pseudonyms when transcribing and translating the data. The researcher ensured that the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants was preserved through taking away any identifying characteristics before reporting research findings. The researcher made it clear that the participants' names were not used for any other purposes, and all research information provided was not to be shared in a way which revealed the identity of participants in any way.

### **3.7.3 Voluntary Participation**

In addition to the above-mentioned precautions, it was made clear to the participants that the research was only for academic purposes and that their participation was voluntary. Also, if any interviewee preferred not to be interviewed face-to-face because of the concerns around COVID-19, a virtual interview was arranged. Likewise, if an interviewee preferred that the interview not be audiotaped, the researcher took field notes only.

### **3.7.4 Withdrawal from the Study**

The researcher-built rapport and credibility with individuals by communicating with them at their workplaces personally during in-depth interviews. During the data collection, the researcher informed the participants about their freedom to withdraw from the study at any time they feel like doing so. This is what Tillman et al. (2011) term freedom to withdraw without consequences.

## **3.8 Issues of Validity: Researcher's Reflexivity**

Creswell (2009) describes researcher's reflexivity as the process whereby researchers report on personal beliefs, values, and biases which may shape their inquiry. A researcher's opinion and potential biases should be acknowledged but should not condition the character of the research process or the interpretation of the evidence collected. For this study, the researcher assumed that COVID-19 impacted negatively on the teaching practices in Zimbabwe. Despite this assumption,

deliberate attempts were made by the researcher to enter the field with an open mind to gain an unbiased account of what was ‘happening on the ground’.

### **3.9 Conclusion**

This chapter set out a qualitative research methodology and a case study research design as a basis for pursuing the research for this study. The choice of research method was based on the ability of qualitative research to identify and understand the experiences, practices and perspectives of those interviewed, which is necessary in turn for addressing the main thesis objective. Unstructured, in-depth interviews were used as the research instrument to obtain primary data. The researcher also observed all necessary ethical protocols prior to, and during, the fieldwork stage of the research process. The next chapter focuses on the empirical findings for this study.

## CHAPTER FOUR: TEACHERS AND TEACHING IN MARONDERA DURING THE COVID-19 LOCKDOWNS

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the experiences of teachers in the COVID-19 context. Examining these experiences is of importance in as far as it highlights differences in the nature and quality of response to the pandemic between government and private schools. Furthermore, it highlights that there are differences in and among the school sectors themselves, so whilst there may be some broad generalisations about the responses within private schools, there are also some differences among them and the same can be held true for government schools as well. This section explores the experiences of teachers in the wake of the new normal characterised by social distancing in classes, regular sanitizing and other regulations. It highlights the differences in the responses of the schools to the pandemic and the approach of the ministry of education and the government towards the schools.

### 4.2 The New Normal through the Lens of a Private School Teacher

Over the years, it has become increasingly apparent that government and private institutions in Zimbabwe experience the government differently, the rules are often twisted to force private institutions to pay fines or in the case of education and reopening schools during Covid-19 to make it appear as though the government is establishing standards. The new norm is characterised by masks, sanitizers, social distancing and less physically interactive activities and as per the stipulation of the government, inspections were to be carried out to determine school fitness/preparedness to reopen. One teacher had this say:

*We had several inspections to assess our readiness to open. The ministry of education sent a team of five people to come inspect the desk setups in the classes, sanitization stations and how bathrooms would be managed for the students. There was no room for error. – Tichawona.*

This is supported by Sango *et al.* (2017), who noted that the government supervise all private schools in order to maintain quality and check if teachers comply with the educational policies. A point to note is that although private schools are not managed by the state, they operate within the laws of the government. According to Karl Marx on his social class theory, the rich have wealth

and own the means of production, however Dubois *et al.* (2015) argue that there is a close relationship between the rich and unethical behaviour.

Whilst there was a general sense of job insecurity at the time schools were declared closed indefinitely, most teachers in the private sector were hopeful that they would be able to be sustained. The economic situation in Zimbabwe presents a challenge for those who are trying to save; however, private school teachers earn in US dollars, which meant that they had a small fall-back position.

*We experienced salary cuts from June, and some lost their jobs. However, some teachers who remained had some perks from the school such as transport and food hampers. Most of us understood that many parents were not keen on paying fees in full and the school explained its position, at the end of the day, something is better than nothing in Zimbabwe.*

– Mr Clement.

This is supported by Andaleeb and Tiwari (2021) who purport that multiple reports point to private school teachers losing their jobs, having their salaries cut, or not paid at all, which has significantly impacted their livelihood, their mental health, and potentially their motivation to teach. Similarly, a survey by Education International (2021) concurs with the previous scholars and revealed that, among 93 teacher unions from 67 countries, nearly two-thirds reported that education workers in private institutions were significantly affected as they were either not receiving their salaries on time or they have been cut. Education International (2021) further stated that despite salary cut for private schools, teacher's government received their salaries in full. This is also supported by Marx social class theory where he mentioned that this theory is centred on two distinct classes which are the bourgeoisie the owners of the means of production and the proletariat. Contextualising this to the job insecurity issue raised above, one can surely note that the bourgeoisie are the school owners and not the private school teachers. However, their salary cuts cannot be compared to the full salary given to a government school teacher.

#### **4.3 Through the Lens of a Government School Teacher**

Whilst there are some similarities in the challenges faced by teachers in private and government schools, their responses to the challenges are different primarily because of resources. The mere fact that government schools remained closed even after the said new term in May shows a great

level of inconsistency. Matilda, a government school teacher expressed a great deal of disgruntlement over the general lack of effort and support from the government to curb the potential spread of Covid-19 in her school.

*The classrooms were not big enough under regular operations and the social distancing regulation is impractical when you teach 50 students at a time. We do not have enough desks for students, neither do we have enough textbooks to allocate to a student individually. There are no sanitization stations and temperature checks are done at the main gate which proves to be a challenge if the few machines are not working. - Matilda*

Commenting from a Marxist perspective on social class theory, Gwirayi (2020) asserts that there is unequal distribution of resources in societies. Indeed this is the situation in most government schools which do not have enough resources to enable them to carry out their teaching jobs with ease. Unlike the private schools which are well resourced. This is further supported by literature where Maphosa (2021) argued that public schools are the worst hit by COVID 19 as they lack necessary resources to run a school.

To address the issue of space some schools have adopted a ‘day-in-day-out’ approach whereby students come to school on days based on numbers allocated to them. In theory, this is a good strategy as it also alleviates the challenge of teaching large classes, however, the execution was rather poor. Owing to dismal communication channels some students still attended school on days they were not meant to attend school because their older siblings were attending school.

*Parents prefer that their children attend school on the same day for planning and safety purposes, and this sometimes throws the class balance off, but we have tried.*

The public school class sizes are very large and at times make teaching tiresome. This is supported by Zhou (2019) who argued that population in urban areas is fast increasing yet there are no schools being built by the government to cater for the urban poor. This concurs with Karl Marx’s social class theory, where class divisions of the haves and the have not can be clearly seen. The haves never experienced ‘a day in day out approach, as their students are already few and manageable during the pandemic.

Teachers cited that the pandemic increased poverty levels and decreased access to education, therefore, emerging evidence indicate a rise in child marriages and teenage pregnancies in the COVID-19 contexts. A public school teacher had this to say:

*I have received reports that 5 girls from my class are pregnant, and it's disheartening that they are so young, and their future is down the drain.*

This is supported by literature as Tapfumaneyi (2020) supporting the response noted that reports showed that at least 415 school going girls dropped out of exam classes in Manicaland Province during the March to October 2020 COVID-19 lockdown period mainly due to marriage and pregnancy. According to Mukandavire (2020) in Zimbabwe, schools reduce early sexual activity, drugs and alcohol abuse and other behavior issues. Additionally, Global Partnership for Education (2020) cited child marriage, early pregnancies, and gender-based violence as a result of school closure. Similarly, United Nations (2020) purports that women and girls were more vulnerable to multiple types of abuse, such as domestic violence, transactional sex, and early and forced marriages. According to Karl Marx social class theory, income and occupation levels, impacts families and shapes lives and opportunities (Cummins 2020). What it meant is that poor families have fewer material resources and opportunities as a result end up engaging in transactional sex as mentioned above to supplement income, domestic violence or abuse because of fewer resources.

Teachers also cited child labour as a reason why some pupils failed to submit their work on time as children ended up helping their parents in doing their work especially to low income earners. One of the participants who is also a teacher at a public school commenting on the effects of lockdown on their livelihood had this to say:

*We pray to God that this pandemic comes to an end, children have joined their parents in vending as a survival strategy during this lockdown and children are not submitting their work at all.*

This is substantiated by a research conducted by International Peace Information Service (2020), which showed that the Central African Republic had an increase in children under 15 working in artisanal gold and diamond mines since the pandemic's outbreak due to schools' closure in rural and mining areas. Similarly, Human Rights Watch (2020) noted that young children of school going age from low-income fishing community in Lagos, Nigeria, have begun to sell fish helping their parents. In Zimbabwe, Chamunogwa & Chakanya (2021) concurred with the above as they cited that lockdowns have also increased the rate of unpaid domestic work and young girls' responsibilities increased as they are expected to maintain homes and look after younger siblings,

at the expense of their educational development. This is further substantiated by Cummins (2020) who argues that income and occupation level, impacts families and shapes lives and opportunities. Indeed, if a family's income is low, they come up with survival strategies as mentioned above in order to have food on the table. It can also be noted that children from upper class with high income are never found in the streets vending.

#### **4.4 Occupying the Online Space**

This section sought to understand the effectiveness of online teaching as a method of lesson delivery. Online teaching was pushed as a method of teaching as soon as the masses realized that there was no set date of normal school resumption. This section will highlight that although it was widely propelled as something that would benefit all the students, it was not for everyone. Online schooling highlighted the “haves and have nots” so to speak. The term ‘online space’ is used to refer to platforms used to conduct lessons during the period of lockdowns including WhatsApp, Google Class, Google Meet and Zoom.

The transition to online teaching did not happen overnight but was set in motion early in the wake of the pandemic. The primary reason for this is the availability of resources and the support of parents in many of these private schools. This supported by Marx (1972) who argues that the upper class in modern capitalist societies is often distinguished by the possession of largely inherited wealth. The private schools discussed in this paper had resources as they had support from the parents and made learning easier. Those schools that lacked resources had challenges in conducting classes online. This was supported by Mupinga (2020) who argued that majority of teachers (in public schools) did not have laptops or Wi-Fi which hindered learning progress.

Mark a private school teacher commenting on his experience on the digital space had this to say also:

*We received training on how to use the Google platforms which were informative, and the school provided data for us to be able to deliver lessons from our homes, it was about 10 gigabytes each week which helped me conduct at least three lessons from 0830am – 1230pm. Lessons took three main forms; pre-recorded with written instructions, live video lessons and practical's where the students took pictures or videos of their work to share in the class platform. – Kevin*

Online teaching was key in ensuring the continuation of formal education and admittedly had its pros and cons. The issue of provisions closely ties to the success or failure of teachers in delivering their lessons effectively to their students. Most teachers also had either a personal laptop or a school laptop in their possession which they used to conduct their lessons. Several teachers were happy about how they were eased into online teaching through training and the provision of resources like data and the option to use their school classrooms.

While teachers generally welcomed the move to online lessons for continuation, they were honest that it was not an easy task to follow through and they also grew frustrated with the network interruptions, inconsistency from parents and the uncertainty of when normalcy would return. However far desirable the thought of conducting online lessons was, there were differences in feelings about the true benefits of the lessons. Those who taught more independent classes were happy to continue for longer if the need ever arose, however those in primary schools were not looking forward to the possibility.

*Our students need increased supervision as they cannot do work independently. Whilst my students welcomed the lessons at first, they eventually got frustrated because they could not see their friends and the reality was boring. Being at home for a grade three student and being told it is time for school just doesn't quite make sense because there is no physical school. – Sthembeni.*

This is supported by a study conducted by Nambiar (2020) which showed that students perceived the online classes to be boring as they lack motivation to attend the classes thereby reducing the effectiveness of online classes.

Another challenge with online lessons was the general lack of formal structure, accountability and follow through. Mr Miti raised the issue of plagiarism among his students as they were using the internet as a primary source of information as opposed to the textbooks. Overall, online lessons increased the workload for many teachers.

*When students are physically present at school, they follow their deadlines because they are not distracted. My colleagues and I struggled a lot to ensure that deadlines were met because each student had a different reality at home. Others could only access the internet when their parents returned from work, others were available all the time. – Tichaona.*

*My workload almost doubled because there was no structure. I was working all the time because students submitted work late. I would have to plan days in advance so that I can upload the work and make room for potential errors that would happen because it was all new to me. – Mrs Stenford.*

This was supported by Marinoni et al (2021) supporting the experiences mentioned above cited additional responsibilities, loneliness, reduced social interaction as a result of a busy schedule as challenges faced by teachers during lockdown.

Whilst the online learning was availed to every student in the schools, it was not an option that was explored by every student because they did not always afford the data. In this respect there are some teachers who had good experiences with their students as attendance was 100% (especially in high schools) whilst others had only about 30% attendance. Whatever the case, private schools embraced the idea of online teaching and there was a consensus that although more could be done, what had been done up to this point was enough.

#### **4.5 Online or Offline – The Government School Reality**

WhatsApp is among the most used social media platforms in Zimbabwe, many people view it as a cheaper method of communication in comparison to direct calls and text messages. In the wake of Covid-19, there seemed to be a shift in the primary purpose for the platform particularly in relation to government schools in urban areas. The research found that the use of WhatsApp as a teaching tool was to a great extent an independent decision that individual teachers made to ensure the continuation of learning. When asked about online teaching, government teachers presented two cases; one where they did not teach at all, and one where they taught what they could, when they could.

*I find it difficult to answer the question on online teaching because nothing was formally put in place, not even after the proposal to use radios and television. No gadgets were made available to us and when I decided to use WhatsApp two thirds of my students could not afford to participate fully in the classes because they did not have the resources. – Christine.*

*The question is irrelevant to me and the other teachers here because we never attempted to explore that avenue. Under normal circumstances where parents are working, they struggle with fees, so there was no point in trying to introduce WhatsApp learning because they would*

*not have the means to participate. We just waited for schools to open and that was it. – Matilda.*

Commenting from a Marxist perspective on social class, Sacks (2007) argues that this lack of good schools is one factor that perpetuates the class divide across generations. This is supported by Mutanda (2022) who argued that most urban schools in low income areas do not have the computers and internet connections to operate on such platforms. Kumar (2018) concurs with Mutanda and argues that unavailability of computers, smartphones and internet connectivity were some of the problems faced with teachers and students and they could do is wait for schools to open. Those teachers who managed to coordinate with their students through WhatsApp used their resources.

Out of desperation, to earn a living and to be able to prepare their classes, government teachers opted to engage students at an individual capacity. Mr Kangayi who teaches Advanced level Mathematics was one such teacher who chose to defy the rules in order to sustain his livelihood and help his students. According to him

*It was incredibly difficult to teach using WhatsApp and there were many disruptions from a connectivity standpoint. I took it upon myself to take students in groups of 6 for face-to-face lessons sometimes two groups a day. It is Maths you know, so I feel like I had no choice because you cannot really show working over the phone and things like that. – Mr Kangayi.*

This was supported by Chingono (2021) who noted that home schools and unregistered private colleges sprouted up across Harare's townships, but the government warned teachers not to open their own classrooms, stating that it is illegal under lockdown rules.

The discussion on government schools and online learning is quite a difficult one to have because it shows the gradual deterioration of the public education system of Zimbabwe, an education system that was branded as being progressive for all. It also highlights the inconsistencies of the government in that they claim to be invested in education and anything that helps progress young minds, and yet many have gone for months without access to education. There is poor technological infrastructure in the schools to even support the idea of online classes.

*Personally, I am not sure if I would have managed with the online teaching because I was never really given the opportunity to try except for WhatsApp. I cannot speak for others, but*

*I do not have the computer literacy that perhaps may be required by online teaching, so I would not be comfortable.* – Mrs Chikutu.

This is supported by Mupinga (2020) who argues that teachers lacked the technical skills to be able to carry out lessons online.

The lack of exposure to technology in the daily teaching practices for government schoolteachers has bred a form of resistance to the idea. Teachers such as Mr Kangayi are one of few examples of teachers who tried briefly to use WhatsApp but quickly resorted to smaller group interactions. On a quiet Monday morning I would often see students of varying grades donning their uniforms or civilian clothes, carrying backpacks and making their way to the homes of their teachers. Having separate conversations with parents you would find that they opted for those small group interactions because it kept their children from falling pregnant, using drugs or engaging in other destructive activities.

Government schools were more offline than online. They simply found a way around the lockdowns to continue teaching their students. For those who used WhatsApp, it was a mammoth task to control what students post on WhatsApp platform and their students showed a poor level of commitment because the lessons were informal, not conducted regularly and the accountability checks were few.

*Controlling students is hard when using WhatsApp because students just post information not relevant to the topic under study and some sent derogatory messages on the platform whilst learning.* – Christine.

This is supported by Zan (2019) in his study expressed that using WhatsApp social network in education has many benefits. However, in addition to the positive results, negative results such as remarkable number of students sending messages outside of class hours or use of inappropriate language in the WhatsApp messages were observed.

It is common knowledge that teaching has been changed by the pandemic, there is also a wide sense of acknowledgement that schools and interactions will never be the same. The teaching practice is quite important because it contributes significantly to society in as far as children go through the education system and make meaningful contributions to society. Ultimately, the researcher felt that it was important to try to understand the feelings of teachers about the pandemic, their students, parents' support and ministry support. As such, the key focus of this

section is the individual perceptions of teachers about COVID-19 and their profession. It also provides insight on some of the commonalities in the experiences of teachers whether private or government school.

Perhaps now more than ever teachers have found themselves needing a great deal of support from parents and guardians in order to not only facilitate and monitor online lessons, but to also challenge the crisis preparedness of the government.

*It feels like we have gone ten steps backwards with the students as some of their attitudes towards school are negative and they lack discipline. – Mr Mukungatu.*

This is supported by Kuhfeld *et al.* (2020) who purports that the negative effects of school closures due to summer vacation or natural disasters and of absenteeism leads to lack of interest in school.

Much of the above discussion has focused on the differences in how teachers experienced the pandemic depending on whether their institution is private or government. However, there are some differences in the approaches taken among the schools themselves. In as much as most private schools were able to engage over 90% of their students through online teaching, some private schools struggled to get high engagement rates. This is primarily because some parents lost their jobs, and usually can make payment plans during the physical school scenario. The harsh reality of online learning is that you either have the adequate resources or you do not.

*The school was able to provide me with all the necessary equipment and supplies to conduct my lessons either from the comfort of my home or my classroom, but sometimes I had ten students only out of the twenty participating. I had to put in extra effort to reach the others in my own time and at times the support from the parents was very low – Sthembeni.*

This is in direct contrast to teachers like Kevin who had a good online teaching experience because he had the support from his students' parents.

*I was fortunate enough to be teaching at a top private school where we established the online platforms quickly and the parents are well off and supportive. I cannot say I struggled to reach my students, they at times were distracted, but they were present. I always had 100% attendance – Kevin.*

The above responses is in agreement with Marx (1972) who noted that the ownership of large amounts of property and the income derived from it confer many advantages upon the members

of the upper class. In this instance private school teachers had advantages during the pandemic as they had support from parents regarding the teaching online and made their work easier.

Government schools' teachers had similar experiences to a great extent, only that the differences in approaches existed between those who were teaching exam and non-exam classes. The teachers who were taking grade 7, Ordinary level and Advanced level students seemed to have a distinct level of proactiveness to them when it came to online teaching via WhatsApp. Teachers like Munashe, a grade 3 teacher did not try to reach their students because they had no means and they were following the government's order that teaching was being conducted via radio and television. Teachers like Mr Joni an Ordinary and Advanced level Chemistry teacher tried to reach his students through WhatsApp, creating class groups to help prepare his students for the examinations.

*I teach because I have a passion for the students and the subject. I was not receiving the support from the school or parents at times, but I wanted the students to pass and be doing something meaningful even when they are not physically in school. When the WhatsApp approach was failing, I opened my doors and those who could come, came, I think it helped.*

– Mr Joni.

This is supported by Hargreaves (2010) asserts that teaching is an emotional practice, and the rewards that teachers find in their work include a significantly emotional dimension. They are what Dan Lortie (1975), in his highly cited book, *Schoolteacher*, called “psychic”. Lortie (1975) found that teachers he studied in the greater Boston area gained rewards and satisfaction when they got feedback showing that they were having a positive impact on their students.

Although there were a multitude of differences between government and private school teachers' experiences within the COVID-19 pandemic context, there were some similarities in the challenges faced. To begin with, the abruptness of the school closures was a major setback for all the teachers. Whilst several teachers said they were not too worried in the initial first two weeks of the lockdowns, they were beginning to worry as the weeks gradually turned into months. Perhaps of key importance is how the pandemic impacted teachers on a personal level which in turn affected their teaching practices. COVID-19 claimed millions of lives across the globe, and in some way impacted everyone. Students lost parents to the pandemic and teachers lost loved ones as well, this presented a mental challenge and a strain on their practices. One teacher said

*When we returned to face-to-face lessons, I could not just pick up from where we left off. Some of my students are evidently different. You also must be very sensitive in the way you discuss anything around COVID-19 because students have lost parents and guardians and have not had adequate time to grief in some instances. – Emily.*

This is supported with Dyregrov (2013) who asserts that one of the significant challenges which can arise because of childhood bereavement is reduced school performance. Not only were the teachers dealing with grieving students, but they themselves have had their fair share of losses as well. Going back into the classroom was difficult for all the teachers because of the risk it came with.

*We have not been given adequate PPE, we fend for ourselves and the sanitizing process is not thorough. It gets scarier when you think of how full my class is daily and where the students may be coming from. – Matilda*

You can sense that even though most private schools have seemingly established adequate measures and procedures to sanitize, disinfect and social distance, there was still an air of resistance when teachers had to return to school physically. Other similar challenges shared was navigating where to start or continue with the curriculum once face to face classes began. The continuation was tough on both the private and government schoolteachers because although online learning had been incorporated, attendance was not always 100% and information retention was quite low. Teachers struggled with gauging their students' progress and how best to carry on given that in some cases they had stopped school completely.

#### **4.6 Looking Ahead**

The idea of looking ahead whilst still being in the peak of the pandemic seems too optimistic, however it must be done at some point. I asked my participants to describe their levels of motivation. The responses did not surprise me at all particularly because there was not much to be motivated by for the government school teachers.

*The government has failed me as an individual and even more so my students. Imagine sitting at home with a low salary and just being expected to survive somehow? You can tell that the ministry is just waiting for the pandemic to blow over, and that is unfair on those of us who*

*are breadwinners and need to put food on the table for the families. We need more technology in our schools, and for the ministry to take us seriously. – Matilda.*

Substantiating the above with theory, Harvey (2010) argues that Marxists identify the working class as comprising individuals who are forced to sell their labour-power in order to survive and who work under the control of capital.

Responses about motivation from private school teachers were quite in between. Others were highly motivated and keen to see what lies ahead, and others were tired and just wanted to take a break from the pandemic so they could interact with their students more.

However different the experiences of the teaching groups were, there is room for improvement in both sectors, particularly in relation to the ministry. The sharing of resources is a way in which it can be ensured that students have at least equal chances at succeeding through the education system. As it stands, there are a few who will walk out of the pandemic having felt minimal disruption and others who have either dropped out or are back but have no clarity on what will happen next.

*Our profession is not under threat but there is room for more ICT oriented programs that will help us improve our knowledge and deliver education in a globally competitive way. I have had good results and my classes have been productive, however there is always more that can be done – Mr Miti*

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

COVID-19 and its impact on the livelihoods of Zimbabweans is not something unique; countries and governments worldwide were caught off guard and as such education and other sectors suffered. Perhaps what strikes me as unique in the case of Zimbabwe is how progressive the education policies and systems were in at independence and how regressive the system has become since then. Generally, without classifying schools as government or private, they are united in having poor online structures. Nevertheless, this chapter has clearly shown the wide unevenness between public and private schools in teaching methods in the face of the COVID-19 lockdowns, and the different experiences of private and public teachers because of this.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

### 5.1 Introduction

Over the past two years, the world has faced a public health crisis because of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns. Though strictly speaking a health crisis, the pandemic has affected every aspect of social life, including education. This is certainly the case with reference to Zimbabwe, as this thesis seeks to demonstrate. In this regard, the effects of the pandemic were uneven within the educational sector, as the pandemic emerged in the context of pre-existing social and economic inequalities within the sector; and it may have deepened these inequalities.

The primary goal of this thesis is to highlight the uneven impact of the COVID-19 lockdowns on teaching practices in Zimbabwean schools, with a focus on differences between public and private schools in the town of Marondera. This entailed the use of a qualitative research methodology where data was gathered mainly through unstructured in-depth interviews in eight schools (four private, four public) and with sixteen teachers (also across the public-private divide). The private and public-school divide in Zimbabwe, and in Marondera specifically, tends to represent a social class divide as well, with private schools more well-endowed with resources (as are the homes from which private school students emanate). The public schools, public school teachers and public-school students were at a marked disadvantage in the face of the pandemic lockdowns in Zimbabwe. For this reason, analytically, a class-based theoretical framing about education was adopted for this study.

In what follows, I first indicate how the empirical presentation addresses the four subsidiary goals of the thesis. I then outline how, indirectly, this led to addressing the main goal. In doing so, I show how the theoretical framing of the thesis contributed to addressing the main goal. The chapter ends by outlining certain limitations of this study and possibilities of further research.

### 5.2 Addressing Subsidiary Objectives

The four subsidiary goals for the thesis are as follows:

- a) Examine the pre-COVID-19 teaching conditions and practices in private and government schools in Zimbabwe.

- b) Understand the nature of Zimbabwe's pre-COVID-19 technological/digital space broadly and as far as it relates to education in Zimbabwe.
- c) Examine the COVID-19 pandemic-lockdown measures in Zimbabwe and how these affected the schooling systems.
- d) Examine the COVID-19 pandemic-lockdown measures in Zimbabwe and how these affected the lives and practices of teachers (as teachers).

I turn to these sequentially.

The first subsidiary objective was: to examine the pre-COVID-19 teaching conditions and practices in private and government schools in Zimbabwe. This objective was substantiated by literature which shows that the pre-Covid-19 classrooms did not require social distancing, there were open group interactions between students, sharing textbooks and other materials was not uncommon. Interschool's sports and clubs were a common practice and a way to engage. Teaching was a face-to-face highly interactive task including field trips and class plays. The average number of students per class in private schools was 25 and 55 in government schools. Because of proximity, teachers felt that they were able to instil discipline in students better, they also were able to cater for individuals. Prior to independence, schools in Zimbabwe were divided into two main categories, Group A schools and Group B schools. Group A schools were for white students and most of these schools were well equipped with state-of-the-art teaching and learning facilities. Group B schools were for black students and most were poorly funded.

The government disbanded this classification system to achieve racial equity in all schools. However, the group A and Group B Schooling continued in the new Zimbabwe now classified as private and public schools. From a Marxist perspective, society is made up of social classes that differ in significant ways. Those varied social groups are further differentiated by the quality of education that they attain since education is a major distinguishing feature that marks the dichotomy between the rich and the poor. Gwirayi (2010) asserts that, there is unequal distribution of resources in society. This is quite evident if one looks at the different schools in our society. In Zimbabwe, elite or former Group A schools are the most equipped, with some surpassing even teachers' colleges and universities. This is in sharp contrast with the situation in public schools, which experience acute and continuous shortage of resources. Hence, Zimbabwean education is evidential of a capitalist weapon that has negative implications on social change since it is meant to preserve the status quo the impoverished lot will remain so and those who have control over the

economy will remain occupants of the apex of the academic hierarchy (Gwirayi 2010). Given the above scenario the situation in public schools worsened when COVID 19 came.

The second subsidiary objective was: to understand the nature of Zimbabwe's pre-COVID-19 technological/digital space broadly and as far as it relates to education in Zimbabwe. The Zimbabwean government made tremendous moves to provide ICT material for Zimbabwean schools this has included the urban and rural schools. In Zimbabwe, many schools are rurally located and are not electrified, thus, the introduction of computers and their prioritization is a sarcasm since schools will keep computers under lock and key for years to the disadvantage of rural students. Public schools in urban areas also benefited from the government on digitalization of schools but are constantly interrupted with power outages and also the number of students who may have to share one computer may derail the progress in learning. This will mean that students from private schools will perform better compared to their counterparts. Already this shows a divide between the two school systems where private schools have always been equipped as compared to the public schools. This has been the situation in Zimbabwean schools before Covid 19 as far as digitalisation in schools is concerned.

The third subsidiary objective was: to examine the COVID-19 pandemic-lockdown measures in Zimbabwe and how these affected the schooling systems. The pandemic has critically affected the global education sector, potentially compromising the right to education. Across the globe children had their right to education infringed following enforced school closures as part of the measures to combat the spread of COVID-19. Most developed countries, Zimbabwe included have turned to alternative means to deliver education using online or electronic learning aided with digital technologies, thereby preserving learners' human rights to education and health. The closure of schools brought to light the disparities in children's access to tools and technology during lockdowns, which threaten to deepen the learning crisis. Many children, especially the poorest children faced challenges in accessing technology and materials needed to continue learning during school closures. Literature revealed that Zimbabwe cannot fully embrace e-learning, as it would prejudice and be discriminatory to persons without internet access or those who cannot afford access to the internet. Most students in public schools do not have the capacity in terms of hardware (mobile phones or other devices that facilitate access to the internet), infrastructure and finances to access the e-learning portals thereby affecting the schooling system in a very big way.

The fourth subsidiary objective was: to examine the COVID-19 pandemic-lockdown measures in Zimbabwe and how these affected the lives and practices of teachers. Although there were a multitude of differences between government and private school teachers' experiences within the COVID-19 pandemic context, there were some similarities in the challenges faced. To begin with, the abruptness of the school closures was a major setback for all the teachers. Whilst several teachers said they were not too worried in the initial first two weeks of the lockdowns, they were beginning to worry as the weeks gradually turned into months. Teachers who were providing online classes needed to invest money to access technology, which includes possessing the devices, Internet connectivity, and a reliable power source. This led to an added financial cost. The digital skills gap was another challenge faced by teachers. The lack of exposure to technology in the daily teaching practices for public schoolteachers has bred a form of resistance to the idea as many were not trained and was difficult to become proficient at using technology in such a short period. This was shown by a response given by a school teacher who failed to use such platforms and ended up teaching his students in groups of six which was against the COVID 19 measures put in place by the government. Capitalist society has unequal distribution of resources as evidenced by lack of exposure to technology by teachers in their daily teachings at public schools whereas in private schools, they are equipped with all the ICT materials needed for conducting lesson and marks the dichotomy between the rich and the poor. Private school teachers also faced challenges as their salaries were cut by their employers due to non-payment of fees from students

### **5.3 Addressing the Main Objective**

The main objective of the thesis is to highlight the uneven impact of the COVID-19 lockdowns on teaching practices in Zimbabwean schools, with a focus on differences between public and private schools in the town of Marondera. The first objective clearly showed that there are differences in the teaching practices as evidenced by research where private schools are equipped with all the material required by both pupils and teachers such that when COVID 19 came teachers in private schools were not faced with many challenges as they were already used to the teaching practices such as use of digitalised systems to deliver lessons whereas most public schools were not equipped and resorted to radio and other forms of learning which were also prohibited by the state. The uneven impact therefore supports the Marxist theory where an egalitarian society cannot be achieved. The second objective also highlighted the uneven impact of the COVID 19 lockdowns

on the teaching practices in Zimbabwean schools, literature showed that many schools in Zimbabwe are rurally located and are not electrified. Hence what it then means is that such schools do not have internet connections. For the purposes of this research the public schools have no alternative source of power as compared to the private schools which are powered with heavy duty generators and solar energy. This is further supported by Marx who purports that society has unequal distribution of resources which marks the haves and the have not in society. The third objective shows the uneven impact as indicated by literature that Zimbabwe cannot fully embrace e-learning, as it prejudices and discriminates to persons without internet access (mostly public schools), the poorest were the most affected as they lacked from the hardware itself which includes the phones and computers thereby disrupting the schooling system. The fourth objective also highlighted the uneven impact as the digital skills gap was also discovered among the public school teachers as some ended up resorting to having small groups of students which was against the COVID 19 regulations.

#### **5.4 Recommendations from Study**

There is need to increase access to infrastructure for online learning, develop digital literacy skills for all stakeholders, and enhance teacher remote delivery competence. Teachers and students, faced many challenges that they were not ready to overcome, hence, it is essential that teacher and school leader preparation programs support educators in carrying out their instructional technology skills and meeting the social emotional and academic needs of all learners to minimize potential achievement and opportunity gaps. To respond to the challenges that many teachers reported in delivering instruction online departments of education, and local districts should develop equitable policies for technology access and accountability. Local school districts require school leaders who are prepared to foster successful, equitable, socially responsible learning and accountability practices for all students. The results of this study are expected to help guide further research for scholars.

### **5.5 Limitations of Research and Possible Further Research**

All research is with its limitations, and certainly this is true as the researcher failed to conduct Focus Group Discussions as a data gathering method because of the virus. Participants dismissed the idea of having Focus Group Discussion even when maintaining social distancing as this was totally banned at the time of the research and this was believed to be one of the ways of spreading the virus. Another limitation of the study was the range of literature review, since this is a recent and ongoing event, researchers are still getting information about this new phenomenon. Studies in relation to Zimbabwe in terms of COVID-19 have widely focused on the health sector and its poor management often neglecting the education sector and the challenges faced. Those who have explored the effects of COVID-19 on education have brushed on the surfaces and as such did little justice to the researcher. I recommend that further studies be carried in rural areas for comparison purposes.

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## Appendix 1: Interview Schedule

1. How long you have been a teacher and what is your level of qualification?
2. What level/grade do you teach? On average, how many students do you teach in your class?
3. Can you describe your teaching practices prior to COVID-19 lockdowns?
4. How has the pandemic changed your teaching practices (if at all)?
5. How do you think your students have adjusted?
6. How comfortable are you with using online platforms to teach, and do you feel that the move to online classes has in any way increased/decreased your workload?
7. How have your students' parents responded in relation to online teaching and support?
8. What are the challenges to your teaching practices that you believe have come as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?
9. How would you describe your motivation levels?
10. Has the school made any provisions to assist you in carrying out online teaching?
11. What improvements do you think are necessary (if any) to assist you with teaching going forward?
12. Is there anything else you would like to add about your experience as a teacher during the pandemic?

## Appendix 2: Consent Form



### PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT INFORMED CONSENT DECLARATION (Participant)

**Project Title: Teaching in times of crisis: understanding the uneven effects of the covid-19 lockdowns on teaching practices in Zimbabwe – A case study of Marondera.**

Sarah Nhliziyo from the Department of Sociology, Rhodes University has requested my permission to participate in the above-mentioned research project.

The nature and the purpose of the research project and of this informed consent declaration have been explained to me in a language that I understand.

I am aware that:

1. The purpose of the research project is to understand the differential impact of Covid-19 on teaching practices in Zimbabwean Schools.
2. The Rhodes University has given ethical clearance to this research project. and I have seen/may request to see the clearance certificate **by contacting Mr Siyanda Manqele (s.manqele@ru.ac.za).**
3. By participating in this research project I will be contributing towards highlighting the challenges facing teaching staff in the Covid-19 context. I will also be contributing to a growing body of knowledge on Covid-19 and education in Zimbabwe.
4. I will participate in the project by answering and providing relevant information on my experiences as a teacher.



Rhodes University, Research Office, Ethics

Ethics Coordinator: [ethics-committee@ru.ac.za](mailto:ethics-committee@ru.ac.za)

t: +27 (0) 46 603 7727 f: +27 (0) 86 616 7707

Room 220, Main Admin Building, Drostdy Road, Grahamstown, 6139