



The Effect of Covid-19 on Sustainable Development Goal Four in South Africa

C Mbatha¹; Shikha Vyas-Doorgapersad²

¹ Postgraduate Student, School of Public Management, Governance and Public Policy, College of Business and Economics, University of Johannesburg, South Africa

² Professor, School of Public Management, Governance and Public Policy, College of Business and Economics, University of Johannesburg, South Africa

E-mail: nkulle600@gmail.com; svyas-doorgapersad@uj.ac.za

<http://dx.doi.org/10.47814/ijssrr.v6i11.1620>

Abstract

The study reviewed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on South Africa's ability to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4). The qualitative research approach is utilised. The study is based on secondary data using literature review. The study aims to find answers to the research question, such as: 'what is the effect of COVID-19 on the education system in South Africa?' Data analysis is done through conceptual analysis. The findings indicate various challenges that hamper the effective implementation of SDG 4 in South African context. Furthermore, recommendations are offered for improvement. The findings of the study explored that many students were mentally disturbed due to the trauma that affected them and the country. The state and the departments failed to decide on a strategy quickly enough to save lives and failed to maintain the syllabus of primary, secondary, and higher education. Due to the high death rate, schools and high education institutions closed, delaying the syllabus, resulting in poor performance and a high dropout rate that negatively impacted pass rates. Therefore, the study suggests that the SDG4 needs more budgets to meet incoming challenges and even future planning for any pestilence that might take place.

Keywords: *COVID-19; Education; Qualitative Study; South Africa; Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); SDG 4*

Introduction

This study details the challenges of COVID-19 in South Africa by identifying the number of affected people, the decisions and the reasons for the decisions taken by the government and the health minister. COVID-19 and its effect on education are also discussed by focusing on the education disruption during the lockdown and closure of schools, identifying the status of students at that time, and the reasons for the decisions made by the minister of basic and higher education regarding the challenges of COVID-19 on the South African education system. The article compiles information regarding the effect of COVID-19 on the South African education system.

According to Harisovich (2017:16), the purpose of SDG4 is to have all countries globally committed to ensuring access to quality education for everyone: all ages, races, and genders. SDG4 focuses on pre-primary, primary, secondary, and higher education. Globally, SDG4 is synergistic and placed as a priority for a better and successful life. Hence, SDG4 provides equal opportunities for all. Therefore, COVID-19, as a global disease, has affected all countries. In this situation, SDG4 has also been a victim of COVID-19 (Harisovich, 2017:16). According to the United Nations (UN, 2021:34), “Covid-19 was first reported on 31 December 2019 by the World Health Organisation (WHO) country office following a cluster of pneumonia cases in Wuhan City, Hubei Province of China. In March 2020, WHO declared the Covid-19 outbreak a pandemic”. Hence, COVID-19 obstructs SDG4.

Various disruptions were caused to basic and higher education students. On March 23, 2020, President Ramaphosa proclaimed a national state of emergency that would run for 21 days, from March 26 to April 16, 2020. Due to the lockdown, all schools and institutes of higher education would have to close (Simon, 2020:2). On April 9, 2020, South Africa's president stated that the lockdown would be prolonged for another 14 days. The nationwide lockdown implied that the 2020 academic calendar would not be completed (Simon, 2020:2). Many educational institutions responded by moving certain classes to online platforms to lessen disruptions to the syllabus. Several nongovernmental organisations provided learning materials for elementary schooling (Simon, 2020:2).

The worldwide spread of COVID-19 and other disturbances to everyday life forced over 160 different nations to suspend their educational institutions. All schools and colleges in South Africa were shuttered due to the government's enforcement of a state-wide lockdown (Julia, Sandra & Sandrine, 2020:2). As a result, the learning process came to a complete halt. Some citizens were concerned that extensive closings of schools might result in not just the interruption of education but also a loss of human capital and less long-term economic possibilities (Julia et al., 2020:2). Even if schools quickly returned to their prior performance levels, the losses due to the widespread school closures in early 2020 can be challenging to make up. Unless these damages are adequately handled, they will have permanent economic consequences for the affected children and the nation (Julia et al., 2020:2).

Students from low-income families can bear the majority of the financial losses. All signs point to children whose families cannot afford extracurricular activities suffering more considerable learning losses than their more privileged peers, leading to more significant lifetime earnings losses (Simon, 2020:2). The present value of economic losses to nations is substantial. Just returning institutions to their prior status will not be enough to regain such losses. They can only be improved by bettering them. Even though several approaches might be used, current research points to the possibility of loss mitigation by paying particular attention to the modified reopening of schools (Simon, 2020:2).

It is fair to emphasise the mechanics and logistics of safe reopening when schools start to resume their activities despite the continued pandemic (Simon, 2020:2). However, given that the losses already suffered require more than the best of the previously mentioned reopening techniques, the long-term economic effects merit careful study (Simon, 2020:2). Prior to the epidemic, the world faced tremendous challenges in fulfilling the promise of schooling as a fundamental human right. Although nearly universal early-grade enrolment exists in most nations, over 250 million children miss school, and around 800 million people are illiterate globally (Simon, 2020:2).

Furthermore, learning was not always assured, even for those in school. According to estimates, 387 million or 56% of primary school-aged children worldwide do not possess the fundamentals of reading (United Nations International Children Emergency Fund [UNICEF], 2017:7). Before COVID-19, the problem was already daunting financially. The startling \$148 billion yearly gap in funding needed to achieve the SDG of high-quality education in low- and lower-middle-income countries was estimated in

the early 2020s. According to estimates, the COVID-19 problem can result in an up to one-third increase in this financial shortfall (Simon, 2020:2).

The detrimental effects of COVID-19 on mental health in South Africa are indisputable, according to Naidu (2020:559). The South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG) polled the general population in March 2020 following the adoption of the initial lockdown regulations (Naidu, 2020:559). Of the respondents, 65% said they felt uneasy throughout the lockdown while supporting the limitations. A second countrywide online survey of 5,693 youth between the ages of 18 and 35 found that the pandemic had a particularly detrimental effect on youth with 72% of respondents indicating being at risk for depression (Naidu, 2020:559). The incidence was higher in urban informal areas (75%) and among the unemployed (73%), indicating that a lack of resources may have made mental health issues worse (Naidu, 2020:559). Teenagers and young adults in two South African areas participated in semi-structured interviews to analyse the problems they faced as the nation entered its first lockdown in March 2020 (Naidu, 2020:559). The results of the above study show that uncertainty regarding education and employment in the future is related to significant psychological stress and mental health disorders, including depression and suicidal thoughts.

Last but not least, research on university students revealed that in contrast to before the COVID-19 outbreak, feelings of loneliness had increased considerably among that population, which is connected to drug addiction (Naidu, 2020:559)—another hazard imposed by the pandemic to a South African nation already struggling from repeated societal trauma. The pandemic has had significant adverse economic and health effects on African nations. Everyday trauma, or shock, is frequent in South Africa and is anticipated to be catastrophic due to the ongoing threat of violent hijackings, home invasions, robberies, murder, gangsters, and other crimes (Naidu, 2020:559). With 73.8% of the general population reporting having gone through at least one potentially stressful event, trauma exposure is considerable. In summary, the trauma of COVID-19 exacerbates existing mental health conditions (Naidu, 2020:559).

Research Methodology

This study used a qualitative research methodology. Understanding a specific facet of social life is the aim of qualitative research, and its techniques often result in words rather than numerical data for analysis (Cochram & Quinn, 2002:2). It was also cited in Vyas-Doorgapersad (2017:145) that qualitative research (a phenomenological enquiry) seeks to understand phenomena in context-specific settings (also refer to Chiware & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2021:318). Qualitative researchers often analyse a relatively small number of persons or circumstances while keeping the individuality of each of these in their studies, as opposed to collecting data from huge samples and averaging the findings across individuals or situations. They can therefore understand how certain situations affect events, behaviours, and meanings (Maxwell, 2012:221). The data was gathered using a literature review. A literature review analyses academic books, journals, and other relevant resources related to a particular topic, field of study, or theory. It provides a description, summary, and evaluation of these works. A literature review aims to provide readers with an understanding of how the research aligns with the larger field of study. It offers an overview of the sources that have been researched while exploring a specific subject (Amin, Ramdhani & Ramdhani, 2014:48). The following sources are used to compile literature: books, journal articles, official documents, Internet sources, conference papers and reports. Books are sources of information, or non-periodic printed or digital publications intended mainly for reading (Kovac, 2019:10). Academic journals are publications that contain articles authored by academics, scientists, and other experts. These journals focus on a particular subject or field of study and are designed for an academic or technical audience rather than the public, unlike newspapers and magazines (Ajayi, 2017:4). The information gathered for the study was analysed using conceptual analysis. The opinions of Maxwell (2005), that were

adapted by Maile & Vyas-Doorgapersad (2022:83) and Vyas-Doorgapersad (2023:456) confirm that a conceptual analysis refers to the process of developing the empirical study's conceptual framework. It was explained by Newbery and Petoos (2010:126) that the process of scrutinising concepts, ideas, variables, definitions, claims, hypotheses, and theories is referred to as conceptual analysis. It requires evaluating things critically for coherence and clarity, following their logical connections, and discovering underlying presuppositions and implications.

Results and Discussion

Overview of Sustainable Development Goal 4

At the United Nations (UN) seminar in New York, the open operational group established by the UN General Assembly developed a list of 17 SDGs and 169 objectives. Some SDGs expand on previous millennium development goals (MDGs), while others integrate new concepts (Jonouskova & Moldan, 2015:565). The UN 2030 SDGs provide a framework for reducing global inequities and achieving a sustainable future for everyone (Baldassare, 2019:1). According to the United Nations Economic and Social Council (UNESCO) (2017:2–1), Vyas-Doorgapersad (2022:2) and Malesa (2023:1–2), there are 17 SDGs established: “End poverty in all its forms everywhere (Goal 1); end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture (Goal 2); ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages (Goal 3); ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all (Goal 4); achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls (Goal 5); ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all (Goal 6); ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all (Goal 7); promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all (Goal 8); build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and foster innovation (Goal 9); reduce inequality within and among countries (Goal 10); make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable (Goal 11); ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns (Goal 12); take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts (Goal 13); conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development (Goal 14); protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss (Goal 15); promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels (Goal 16); and strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development (Goal 17)” (UNESCO 2017:2–19; Vyas-Doorgapersad 2022:2; Malesa 2023:1–2). This study considered SDG4 (focus) from the South African perspective (locus).

SDG4 focuses on developing opportunities for lifelong learning and providing inclusive and equitable quality education (Burchi & Rappin, 2015:33). According to De Wall, Steyn, Steyn and Walhater (2002:2), the Bill of Rights, which outlines individual and collective rights, is emphasised in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996. The Bill of Rights emphasised the democratic ideals of human dignity, equality, and freedom while enshrining the rights of every South African. As a result, De Wall et al. (2002:2) aver that Section 29 of the Constitution establishes a significant value on education in the Bill of Rights and provides every person the right to the following: Basic Education, which includes Adult Basic Education; Further Education, which the State ought to make advancing readily available and accessible by means of reasonable measures; Create and sustain at their own cost autonomous educational facilities that are not discriminatory on the grounds of race, a disability, or any other characteristic; establish and maintain at their own costs self-sufficient educational structures wherever feasible, reserve education in the prescribed languages of their choice in public educational

institutions. Furthermore, the rights assist in allowing everyone to get access to education and promote equality to everyone (De Wall et al., 2002:2)

According to Behr and Macmillan (1971:3), Education was provided on a modest basis in South Africa until far into the second part of the nineteenth century. The only official education offered was religious, and it was overseen by academics and a bible school commission. As a result, that little education was able to affect societal transformation. This means that as education levels rise, so will everyone's standard of life. Therefore, according to Bieter (2021:125), the objectives and target of SDG4 (guarantee complete and equitable quality education and indorse enduring learning opportunities for all) are to:

- Ensure that by 2030, all girls and boys complete elementary and secondary schooling that is unrestricted, egalitarian, and generates relevant and valuable outcomes for learning.
- Ensure that by 2030, all children have an opportunity for early childhood education that sufficiently prepares them for primary school.
- Ensure that by 2030, men and women have equal opportunities for high-quality technical, professional, and tertiary education, encompassing higher education.
- Raise the number of youths and adults with vocational and technical abilities needed for labour, reputable jobs, and entrepreneurs by 2030.
- Ensure that by 2030, disparities between men and women in educational opportunities have been removed and that underprivileged individuals, including people with disabilities, people of indigenous descent, and children in vulnerable situations, have meaningful opportunities at all levels of education and professional training.
- Ensure that by 2030, a large proportion of people, including men and women, and all children are reading and math proficiently.
- Ensure that by 2030, every learner has the expertise and abilities required for advancing issues of sustainable development, such as those related to equality for all people, human rights, the advancement of the principles of peace and peaceful conflict resolution, global citizenship, and an understanding of cultural variation and its significance in equitable growth.
- Establish and improve educational institutions for children, persons with disabilities, and people of all genders, while providing a safe, calm, inclusive, and productive atmosphere for learning for every student.
- Raise the total amount of scholarships available to developing countries, particularly Least Developing Countries (LDCs), Small Island Developing State (SIDS) and African countries, for enrolment in colleges and universities, particularly technical, engineering, and scientific programs in information and communications technology, by 2030.
- Increase the supply of highly trained educators by 2030, notably through global partnerships for teacher education in developing countries, particularly in developing LDCs and small-island countries (Bieter, 2021:125).

Education is one of the 17 SDGs, and the government has committed, in conjunction with international partners, to ensuring equitable and readily available high-quality education and promoting opportunities for individuals to keep learning (Moriarty, 2018:4). Education is a public benefit generally appreciated by individuals worldwide, regardless of socioeconomic or cultural background, and governments of all political leanings. It is a primary driving force for progress without universalising education, and no country has achieved development without universalising education, nor has any country universalised education without meeting its commitments to offer compulsory, high-quality, inclusive education for everyone (Moriarty, 2018:4).

Challenges of COVID-19 on Education

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected pupils and educators worldwide, from early childhood at secondary schools to vocational and technical schools (TVET), colleges and universities, adult educational centres, and skills advancement, it caused the major disruption in the history of education (UN, 2020:12). By mid-April 2020, the disease had impacted 94% of students globally, totalling 1.58 billion children and youth in 200 nations participating in pre-primary through higher education (UN, 2020:12).

Training and education at all stages were affected. As a result of COVID-19's interruptions in everyday activities, up to 40 million students globally missed out on early childhood learning during this critical preschool period. They were thus denied access to a stimulating environment, educational opportunities, opportunities for social connection, and, in some cases, adequate sustenance (Julius, Lucas, McCrone, Nelson, Msharp & Sims, 2020:23). Particularly for kids from low-income or disadvantaged households, this is likely to jeopardise their long-term healthy development. Due to low levels of digitalisation and enduring structural issues, technical and vocational education and training systems were exposed as being vulnerable to the crisis (Julius et al., 2020:23). Establishing apprenticeship programs and work-based learning modalities, which are crucial elements of a functional and market-responsive technical and vocational system was unfeasible due to workplace interruptions (Julius et al., 2020:23).

The COVID-19 crisis saw a deterioration of educational opportunity disparities. An estimated 40% of the world's poorest nations neglected to assist vulnerable students, and prior experiences indicate that gender and educational disparities are routinely disregarded in the wake of disease outbreaks. Children, especially females, may not have enough learning time due to domestic duties and the labour required to run households or farms (UN, 2020:9). Distant learning methods typically do not include disabled children, who were already excluded before the outbreak. Children who are refugees or who have been forcibly removed from their homes are further stigmatised and excluded from school-based support services like school lunches and psychological support programs (UN, 2020:9).

Inequities in educational success are predicted to worsen due to the anticipated dropout rate, learning loss and the economic impact on households, an effect that extends beyond education. The disturbance in education will continue to have significant effects outside of the classroom (UN, 2020:9). Numerous topics, including food insecurity, economic instability, and violence against women and girls, have been covered in previous policy briefs. Closing schools and other educational institutions results in discontinuing school meals and other nutrition and health initiatives, making providing communities and children with crucial services more difficult (UN, 2020:9).

Issues connected to overcrowded classrooms and the necessity of physical separation in public schools in South Africa have challenges. (DoE, 2020:6). In all nine South African provinces, primary school class sizes average 35.2 students per class, often more than high school. Approximately half of South Africa's primary school children, 27.7%, are enrolled in classrooms with more than 40 pupils. Fifteen per cent of students are enrolled in classrooms with more than 50 pupils. For the majority of institutions, a significant challenge throughout the outbreak was finding adequate classroom space to accommodate extra pupils. Because of the requirement that students keep social distances of 1 m (when seated) and 2 m (when standing or walking), multiple educational institutions that could afford it refurbished and repositioned school desks (DoE, 2020:6). Desks were placed in a way that allowed for social isolation obligations to careful design and precise measurements. In addition, all ages of students were constantly reminded of the importance of social isolation. It was particularly challenging to ensure pupils kept their distance from one another when leaving class, during breaks, and before and after school (DoE, 2020:6).

COVID-19 has had enormous economic and social ramifications, both domestically and globally. When schools were closed on March 26, 2020, it has affecting teachers, students, guardians, and communities (Brooks, 2020:2). The disruption of schooling and partial transfer to home and online learning has had both social and educational consequences, while also creating crucial political arguments regarding governmental control of education, particularly in times of national crises (Brooks, 2020:2). The intricacy of education policy amid a pandemic is highlighted by public discussion and recent court battles about the legality and propriety of the government's reaction. This is exacerbated by the ramifications of the interruption to crucial assessment in Grades 7 and 12 and the rights and obligations involved (Brooks, 2020:2).

The impact of school closures on student development, the right to an education, and the state's duty to protect people and governmental responses to increasing community transmission, are all addressed in this section. Panellists and attendees at the Mapungubwe Institute for Strategic Reflection (MISTRA) roundtable emphasised that any discussion of the difficulties confronting South Africa's basic education sector must be framed by the country's continuing heritage of unevenness and inequality (Brooks, 2020:2). This, according to Brooks (2020:2), is increasingly characterised by resource disparities between public and private schools, as well as the characteristics of a segregated education system. Both media and scholarly discussions on the pandemic's impact have highlighted issues in the basic education supply that are not so much caused by the pandemic as they are exacerbated by it. In addition, in South Africa the schools did not remain closed, but the country had plan to reopen on June 2020 under COVID-19 rules and regulations, as Africanews (2020:1) state that “on Monday, about 95 percent of schools had reopened in South Africa. The government had originally intended to reopen schools on June 1 but postponed this to June 8 after finding out that most schools require more time to better prepare facilities and train staff” (Africanews, 2020:1).

Decisions by the Minister of Basic and Higher Education in South Africa

According to the Department of Basic Education (DBE, 2022:7), the government stated decisions to minimise the spread and the death rate of COVID-19, due to the reason that the teachers nor the students have to go on with their studies to accomplish the curriculum for the year. The DBE (2022:7) stated that no one besides a student or an official is permitted to enter the educational institution's grounds, provided they first obtain authorisation from the school's principal or head of department and make appointments with them. Any governmental agency that upholds constitutional democracy is not hindered from doing its duties by sub-direction. Regardless of sub-direction, the principal of a school may permit entry of authorised individuals for an event or activity that is convened or hosted at the school as described in Direction 8, provided, however, that compliance with COVID-19 hygiene and safety measures are maintained (DBE, 2022:7).

It was emphasised that finding how many COVID-19 infections have been reported in a school, district, municipality, or province could be done using a risk-adjusted differentiated strategy. It entails returning all students to daily attendance and the standard time tabling paradigm (Govender, Madlala, Madikizela, McCarthy, Mngemane, Modisenyane, Nemungadi, Ramadan & Silal, 2022:7). Primary, secondary, and special education institutions, as well as hostels, used the daily attendance timetabling model, which has no social distancing, as of February 7, 2022. This supposes that the COVID-19 health and safety precautions, as proposed in these directions, and the risk-adjusted differentiation approach, as contemplated in Sub-Direction 1, are implemented (Govender et al., 2022:7). Elementary, high school, and special education institutions, as well as boarding schools, were required to strictly adhere to regulations regarding health, such as the use of facial masks or safeguards for learners with distinctive requirements, good air circulation, washing hands, using hand sanitisers, and the security measures on COVID-19 as envisioned in these directions and the regulations (DBE, 2022:7).

The Department of Transport played the vital role by offering more school transportation to accommodate all learners due to the fact that, the number of students in a single school bus was minimised, drivers had to follow COVID-19 precautions. (DBE, 2020:11). The aftercare facilities follow the COVID-19 health and safety requirements and guidelines outlined in the DBE standard operating procedures and guidelines; they were permitted to reopen. These facilities must be supervised or operated at a school where a person's COVID-19 test results are reliably negative (DBE, 2022:7).

If a student tests positive for COVID-19 and displays symptoms, the parent, caretaker, or other designated family member should inform the school as soon as possible about the student's condition, and the school should inform the head of the department of the incident via the district office (DBE 2022:7). The school must inform the student's parent, caregiver, or other designated family member as soon as possible about the child's health if they have COVID-19 symptoms while in class; and the beginning of the 2021 academic year had prepared by all higher education institutions, as well as the carefully planned relocation of employees and students to campuses and residences (DBE, 2022:7).

Additional measures were also implemented to deal with the COVID-19 challenges. The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET, 2021:5) introduced the following decisions for keeping lives safe while continuing with the syllabus for the year 2021 to avoid lost teaching time. The DHET considered that for optimal responsiveness to COVID-19 pandemic-related difficulties, every educational institution must establish a COVID-19 response task team or additional appropriate management committee comprised of every important stakeholder and per safety and health requirements (DHET, 2021:5). Therefore, the goal of academic sessions should be the creation of engaging and interactive academic virtual environments that lead to meaningful learning (Abiolu, Abiolu & Patrick, 2020:6). Hence, virtual environment refers to Information Communication Technology (ICT) system that makes more interactive academic or learning environment. ICT is an effective tool to rich educational environment and improve skill development (Starichenko & Yavich, 2017:176).

The response teams need to remain in place throughout the national disaster. Staff and student access to the school's premises, interaction tuition, and housing have to be handled within the parameters of the relevant national risk alert level and the applicable regulations, as published from time to time by the minister of cooperative governance and traditional affairs (DHET, 2021:5), with the exceptions noted in the guidelines. This indicates that institutional plans will occasionally be modified to reflect any adjustments made at the federal level. A teaching and learning plan must be developed and put into place by each institution to guarantee that safety measures like physical separation are consistently implemented. This entails using blended learning strategies, flipped classrooms, carousel, and block contact teaching, among other techniques (DHET, 2021:5).

It was considered imperative that all institutions abide by the relevant health and safety laws. There should be at least 1.5 meters between each examination table and all windows and doors must remain open the whole time if ample facilities with sufficient ventilation are not available (DHET, 2021:5). It was also emphasised that "at all times, all students and employees in the venue wear masks" according to Kallon (2020:1). All visitors to the venue were screened and given hand sanitisers upon entry. Allowing the examination process, the venue capacity was not more than 50%, the invigilator should transport boxes of scripts to a specified secure storage place for overnight quarantine. The scripts could be quarantined and be given to examiners for marking after at least 12 hours (DHET, 2021:5).

All these measures were applied successfully. Even the citizens accepted COVID-19 regulations well. Face masks became a part of life for everyone. It also introduced the importance of hygiene since some people were unaware of it. During the pandemic, everyone was forced to practice good hygiene, and

even today, post-pandemic, it is an advantage. Online learning is still a challenge since the country faces load shedding; this is a long process goal.

Policy Recommendations

The outburst of the COVID-19 disease has, in many ways, caused disruptions in our livelihoods, leaving behind an ailing economy and a perennial conundrum in many departments, including the DoE, for both basic and higher education. Considering this, the DoE introduced new learning and teaching strategies, including e-learning, online examination, WhatsApp, and so forth, to uproot the devastating effects of the pandemic. Digital communication channels have replaced face-to-face communication in learning and teaching. New communication channels, like Microsoft Teams, Zoom and WhatsApp, are now used to mitigate the spread of the virus.

Although these channels are effective in many ways, another main factor is the energy crisis in South Africa, better known as load shedding. All these channels need digital devices like smartphones, computers, and tablets. In addition, electricity and good network coverage are essential for them to function. However, there is still a long way to go due to poor network coverage and load shedding. It is, therefore, vital that the administration and private institutes take full accountability to furnish, especially people experiencing poverty, with all essential needs and other means of power like solar energy, batteries and so on for effective results since it is apparent that the world, including South Africa, has taken a new direction due to COVID-19 pandemic.

According to Naidu (2023:2), based on the 2023 budget report by Enoch Godongwana, the Minister of Finance, granted R457,1 billion to the DBE. With this amount, a lot can be done by prioritising the abovementioned necessities. Based on the targets of the DoE, the department will innovate and improve the school infrastructure. It will deliver enough studying material for teachers and learners and provide enough nutritious meals for pupils. The overall amount expenditure targets to grow at an annual rate of 7.2%, from R23.4 billion in 2020/2021 to R28.8 billion in 2023/2024.

Furthermore, Minister of Finance, Enoch Godongwana, allocated money for basic education. First, the department allocated R48.7 billion to improve infrastructure at schools to create a safe and comfortable learning environment for all (Naidu, 2023:2). Second, the department intends to improve the matric pass rate, decrease the dropout rate, and provide second opportunities for students to repeat or upgrade their matric results. The amount of R182.1 million is allocated to support such programmes (Naidu, 2023:2). Third, the department allocated R3.8 billion for providing high-quality studying materials or tools such as workbooks and technological learning devices (National Treasury, 2023:3). Fourth, the department distributed R4.2 million for facilitating more educators, there are programmes and funding such as Funza Lushaka bursary to produce more qualified teachers especial in mathematics, science and even in ICT or technological inclusive education (National Treasury, 2023:3). In addition, the department intends to improve early childhood development (ECD). The amount of R29.3 billion and an additional amount of 1.5 billion were distributed to improve ECD infrastructure, learning material and nutrition. Another R228 million above the medium term is allocated for ECD resource packages in 2023 and 2024, expanding the department's ability to support and deliver oversight of ECD (National Treasury, 2023:3). Moreover, the department intended to be accountable must ensure that learners get enough nutritious meals and help to alleviate poverty. An overall amount of R29.3 billion, also counting a surplus of R1.5 billion, is distributed over the medium-term period to the educational enrichment services course for handovers to the nationwide school nutrition programme funding (National Treasury, 2023:3).

Therefore, the South African government, DBE and the DHET should consider creating a comfortable and safe school environment, mostly in rural areas, that encourages children to go to school and study. They must maintain the classrooms' condition and have a variety of qualified teachers in each subject. For example, some classrooms have broken windows, causing some learners to be uncomfortable in winter, which may affect their pass rate. These two departments must also design some programmes aimed at parents to help raise today's learners. As technology changes, so too do communal social contracts. The DoE should take advantage of the fourth industrial revolution and design new academics that are digital and interesting to learners with practical digital examples. It is also important to promote proper research. There must be alternative studying methods based on predictions of the future of education, in line with natural disasters that might happen. Since nothing is new in the world, the government and the DoE must research and state possible strategies to help during pestilences such as COVID-19. Learners are very diverse, so the school curriculum should be a multidimensional curriculum. The most critical attributes a learner can learn are thinking individually and not being constrained by theory. Some learners need special schools; therefore, the DoE must build special schools in rural areas, providing more technical and art subjects and even classes for learning social skills. There is a need to allocate more money to education, which will help catalyse the objectives of SDG4.

Conclusion

The article discussed the consequences of COVID-19 on the South African school system. COVID-19, also known as severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus-2, was first detected in China at the end of 2019 in Wuhan City. Scientists have connected it to the COVID-19 sickness. The global learning problem existed before the COVID-19 outbreak, as evidenced by the high prevalence of illiteracy. Consequently, this chapter showed how COVID-19 has impacted the South African education system and one of the critical SDGs with the capacity to better the education system. In South Africa, education is a big concern. A quality education can help individuals escape the vicious cycle of poverty. As a consequence, education aids in reducing gaps and attaining equality between men and women. It additionally allows individuals across the globe to live healthier, more sustainable lives. Education is also crucial for developing more peaceful communities and promoting interpersonal tolerance. Education is exceptionally beneficial to people. It discloses, for example, a person's ideas and thinking. It helps students plan for jobs or advance their education by graduating from university. Additionally, schooling promotes the growth of a person's character, cognition, and social skills. It also educates them about real-world scenarios. It raises people's status in their culture and wherever they live. Therefore, the following theories were discussed in detail in the chapter: COVID-19 in South Africa by identifying the number of affected people, the reasons for the government and the health minister's decisions, and the challenges of COVID-19 in South Africa. Therefore, it can be confirmed that South Africa has been a victim of COVID-19. Moreover, COVID-19 and its effect on education have been discussed by focusing on the education disruption during the lockdown and closure of schools and identifying the status of pupils or students at that time. The study could be extended to embrace a detailed investigation in which the factors influencing the effective implementation of SDG4 in South African tertiary institutions can be explored.

Note

This article is based on an unpublished MA Minor Dissertation titled Mbatha, C.N., 2023- The effect of COVID-19 on Sustainable Development Goal Four in South Africa at UJ under the supervision of Prof S Vyas-Doorgapersad. Unpublished Minor Dissertation. Johannesburg: University of Johannesburg.

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