



NAVIGATING UNCHARTED WATERS: INSIGHTS INTO CHALLENGES FACED
BY INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL LEADERS AMIDST THE COVID-19 CRISIS

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NAVIGATING UNCHARTED WATERS: INSIGHTS INTO CHALLENGES FACED BY INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL LEADERS AMIDST THE COVID-19 CRISIS

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Abstract

NAVIGATING UNCHARTED WATERS: INSIGHTS INTO CHALLENGES
FACED BY INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL LEADERS AMIDST THE COVID-19
CRISIS

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The COVID-19 pandemic is arguably the most disruptive occurrence that has threatened to destabilise almost all aspects of civilisation as we know it today. Its impact on education, particularly international education, has been profound. It is imperative that the world benefits from lessons learned in handling the pandemic, to inform the recovery of the international education sector, and to guide policies and measures to help the sector survive and thrive through similar crises in the future. This study employs the qualitative method to study how international education leaders managed the COVID-19 pandemic. The Qualitative method is favoured because the study's objective requires considering leaders' perspectives, views, and experiences regarding handling the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on international education. The study population is 30 participants, from 10 strategically selected countries, including Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, China, South Africa, and the United States, with three participants selected through purposive sampling from each of the ten countries. The study employs an exploratory research design and uses individual semi-structured interviews for data collection. The study's results suggest that international school students and parents experienced adverse effects due to the COVID-19 pandemic, including reduced academic performance, financial difficulties,

and negative impacts on mental health. Reduced efficiency amid COVID-19 interventions and the development of efficiency tools such as assignment submission portals exemplify the responses that bore favourable results, just as the establishment of guidance and counselling programs points toward how the pandemic helped highlight areas for improvement, both through programs and policy development. The study synthesises the perspectives and experiences of international school leaders as the prism through which to gain a perspective and understanding of how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted international schools, establishing key insights that will help international education recover successfully and prepare for its future growth in the face of future extreme occurrences. Future research should study how adverse and extreme events such as the COVID-19 pandemic affect teacher motivation and determine specific ways for international education institutions to diversify their income sources to cushion themselves against economic shocks orchestrated by occurrences such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree, except where it states otherwise by reference or acknowledgement; the work presented is entirely my own.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Johan and Saartjie Cronje, and my daughter, Adrienne Pretorius, with heartfelt gratitude and appreciation for their constant love, support, and encouragement throughout my academic journey. Their unwavering belief in me has been a source of inspiration and motivation, and I am forever grateful for their sacrifices and guidance that have paved the way for me to achieve this significant accomplishment. To my parents, thank you for instilling a love for learning and always encouraging me to pursue my passions. To my daughter Adrienne, your unwavering love, support, and patience have been my rock, and I dedicate this thesis to you with all my heart. This thesis is a testament to their unwavering support, encouragement, and love, and I hope to make them proud.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background

Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, many countries faced significant challenges in containing the spread of infections, resulting in the suspension of in-person and face-to-face teaching, and learning activities in most academic institutions worldwide (Mindzak, 2020). According to Chen et al. (2021), countries like Korea and China suspended in-person learning first, with most countries with high infection rates halting in-person learning as early as January 2020. Subsequently, countries like Germany resumed in-person learning in critical areas, such as medical schools and for students with doctor's certifications. However, regardless of the country, resuming formal education did not follow usual protocols, as students had to adhere to specified health standards before resuming their studies (Mindzak, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on international education, with international students and schools being among the most affected. The pandemic resulted in restricted air travel across countries, making it challenging for students to resume their studies physically. This situation also affected international school administrators and leaders who had to make adjustments to ensure the smooth running of the institutions (Wang et al., 2021). To cope with the pandemic's restrictions, students had to adapt to new teaching and learning methods, highlighting the impact of the pandemic on international education leadership and administration.

While the pandemic had a negative impact on international education, it also presented some positive milestones. For instance, the general adoption of online learning and the change of landscape were positive steps taken by international schools to

mitigate limited in-person learning (Wang et al., 2021). However, the pandemic had a long-term impact that required leaders to play a crucial role in aiding the total reopening of schools while ensuring the spread of the virus was contained.

In response to the pandemic, international schools had to make several adjustments to blend online learning with regular in-person learning effectively. International school leaders had to consider involving growth drivers to facilitate faster institutional growth after the pandemic (McKibbin & Roshen, 2020). Moreover, regional demographics were crucial to consider, with Asia having more than half of the world's international schools. The recruitment of teaching staff also had to be adjusted, with international schools being required to hire more local teachers instead of sourcing teachers from traditionally English-speaking countries. Lastly, tuition fees had to be reduced to facilitate an affordable resumption of learning amidst the economic crisis caused by the pandemic.

The perspective of international school leaders on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on international schools played a critical role in preparing for the resumption of learning as the world recovered from the pandemic. Their role was essential in making necessary adjustments to ensure that the education sector continued to thrive even during the pandemic's challenging times (Wang et al., 2021). Overall, the pandemic highlighted the importance of leadership and administration in ensuring that the education sector remains resilient in the face of adversity.

Purpose of the Study, Research Aims, and Objectives

Few studies have explored the impact of the pandemic on international schools and global education, indicating a lack of research in this area. Firstly, the pandemic has

affected the financing of international education. As Al-Samarrai et al. (2020) indicate, the pandemic affected the availability of education funds. The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted education systems worldwide, forcing schools to close and causing massive shifts in teaching and learning methodologies. With travel restrictions and social distancing measures in place, many schools had to switch to partial in-person learning or even entirely online education. This, in turn, created significant challenges for parents, particularly in terms of providing tuition funds for their children's education.

As a result, some institutions had to resort to offering online education as the only option, which was not always a feasible solution for many students and families. Additionally, the economy was hit hard by the pandemic, leading to job losses and financial difficulties for many households. This further complicated the situation, as parents were struggling to provide tuition funds while trying to make ends meet.

Murray et al. (2020) identified how the COVID-19 pandemic would impact international education. They suggested that parents will demand a reduction in school fees as they recover from the pandemic's economic effects. Some prestigious private schools opposed reducing school fees, even though it seemed the most suitable and logical way to go about it. Additionally, the pandemic affected students' admissions into international schools. The authors argue that middle-class parents have been a great source of funding for international students. Due to the upcoming recession following the pandemic, people experienced a decrease in the amount of disposable income they had. As a result, numerous parents enrolled their children in either local or international schools that provide equivalent educational services.

Azzi-Huck and Shmis (2020) analysed how schools worldwide have adjusted during the COVID-19 pandemic and offered some suggestions for policy changes. These suggestions included enhancing preparedness in opening international schools while keeping the schools open, as seen in countries such as Egypt, Russia, and Belarus. Other suggested ways included the selective closing of schools in hard-hit countries like Brazil, Italy, and Canada and adopting remote learning to help recover time lost and solve travel challenges.

This study will exclusively employ the qualitative research method and not mixed methods. While some experts argue that mixed methods can address the limitations of quantitative or qualitative designs and generate more robust data (Almalki, 2016; Almeida, 2018), this study deems the qualitative method alone adequate for its objectives. According to Bryman (2006) and Creswell and Plano Clark (2011), combining qualitative and quantitative data is recommended to enhance the value of mixed methods research significantly. Nonetheless, the present study relied on individual interviews to gather leaders' viewpoints on international learning to identify effective strategies and policies for promoting international learning during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

The study aimed to qualitatively explore the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on international schooling to determine concerns and undermining factors that deterred learning progress during the pandemic. The qualitative perspectives from leaders on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on international schools were used to recommend informed policies that would help mitigate the challenges which resulted from this period. The study, therefore, used the qualitative method.

The target population refers to the specific group of people that the researcher is interested in investigating and interviewing. For this study, educational leaders and institutional leaders with relevant international school information made up the target population. The views and perspectives of school administrators and leaders at different international schools across the globe were analysed.

Qualitative data was collected through individual interviews with educational leaders from countries where most international students come from, including Qatar, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Russia, South Africa, France, China, Mexico, Egypt, Europe, and the United States of America. The sample size was set to 30 leaders from these countries, and purposive sampling will be used to select the sample to ensure the data collected is relevant to the topic.

Continuous learning is vital for students to retain acquired information, participate in co-curricular activities, and enhance their social skills. In March 2020, over 150 countries closed their learning institutions resulting in massive learning disruptions that impacted over 80% of the global student population (Sahu, 2020). Through a study of Swedish males, Carlsson et al. (2015) established that even ten days of extra learning activities could raise test scores on crystallised intelligence by a 1% standard deviation. Not implementing strategies to promote learning would result in losing skill growth opportunities, a rise in mental health problems among learners, and further disruptions in the academic calendar (Sahu, 2020). The study emphasised leaders' perspectives, providing a practical approach for handling the resumption of international studies. This study was significant for the current pandemic and future contingencies such as other pandemics or extreme situations that may require partial or complete closure of schools

or limitation of in-person learning. The policies formulated from this study will also help improve international education, especially in remote learning for international schools.

Statement of the Problem

With the prevalence of international schools in Asia, the COVID-19 pandemic ushered in a series of unprecedented challenges for these educational institutions. Given the travel restrictions that marked this era, international students and educators, particularly those affiliated with the English-based curriculum relying heavily on professionals from the UK, New Zealand, Australia, South Africa, and the USA, grappled with prohibitive travel expenses and, at times, outright entry denials (Ferdig et al., 2020).

Adhering to health protocols such as social distancing further complicated the matter. Such mandates hindered face-to-face academic interactions, thereby pushing school administrators to investigate alternative teaching models that did not necessitate overseas travel for their staff. In parallel, the students confronted the daunting task of navigating their international education's difficulties in the face of such adversity. The efficacy of the strategies employed to alleviate this academic crisis was under scrutiny.

From an economic standpoint, tuition fee payment emerged as a contentious issue. Historically, parents footed the bill for in-person services. Yet, the pandemic-induced suspension of many of these services led to a dilemma – questioning whether institutions should refund or credit the fees for undelivered services. While some institutions opted for compensation, others refrained, triggering an outpouring of grievances from parents already burdened by the pandemic's financial onslaught (Gordon & Reber, 2020).

Despite the importance of teachers and students in the educational sphere, the pandemic underscored the pivotal role leaders play in steering the course of international schools during such crises (Burgess & Sievertsen, 2020). Disregarding the perceptions of these key decision-makers could inadvertently enable the inadequacies in the educational system during such transitional periods.

Consequently, to adequately address the logistical and ethical crises birthed by the pandemic, institutions needed to create holistic and pragmatic solutions that endorsed the seamless resumption of academics. This necessitated policy overhauls, an unwavering commitment to staff and student welfare, and a thorough understanding of the unique challenges and opportunities presented by the pandemic.

This research was thus conducted to illuminate the repercussions of COVID-19 on international schools, with an emphasis on the invaluable insights from the leaders - the cornerstones of international education. The study, rooted in a qualitative research, deciphered the leaders' views on the pandemic-induced academic challenges. Through online dialogues with these educational leaders, the research hoped to gather pragmatic strategies to navigate international education during the pandemic and equip institutions with the insight to pre-emptively address future crises.

Study Objectives

General objective

The general objective of this study is to investigate and understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on international schools from the perspective of school leaders. This study aims to provide insights into the challenges faced by school leaders during the

pandemic and to identify effective strategies and practices that can be used to overcome these challenges. The findings of this study may inform future policies and practices in the education sector, particularly in the context of global crises and emergencies.

Specific Objectives

- I. To critically examine and synthesise the multifaceted influences of the COVID-19 outbreak on pedagogical practices, curricular adaptations, and student engagement in international educational institutions, drawing on the perspectives and strategic responses of school leaders.
- II. To identify and analyse the positive innovations in international learning during the COVID-19 pandemic according to the leaders' perspectives.
- III. To investigate and understand how the pandemic has had an effect on the preparedness of global educational institutions to cope with future disruptions caused by public health crises from school leaders' perspectives.
- IV. To examine and evaluate the policy development process and outcomes of international schools in securing the well-being of staff and students during a crisis as impacted by COVID-19 from the school leader's perspective.

These objectives were used as a guide to generate in-depth knowledge about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on international schools from the leaders' perspectives, including the challenges and opportunities. The findings will contribute to understanding how international schools can enhance their preparedness and resilience to cope with similar crises in the future.

Research Questions

1. How have international school leaders perceived the multifaceted influences of the COVID-19 pandemic on pedagogical practices, curricular adaptations, and student engagement in their institutions?
2. From the perspective of school leaders, what are the notable positive innovations and adaptations in international learning that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, how do school leaders assess the readiness of international educational institutions for future disruptions caused by potential public health crises?
4. How do school leaders perceive and evaluate the policy development and its outcomes in international schools aimed at safeguarding the well-being of staff and students during the COVID-19 crisis?

Nature and Significance of the Study

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic indelibly transformed the landscape of global education. Worldwide, institutions were caught in the crosshairs of a sudden halt in traditional face-to-face education due to containment measures against the pandemic (Mindzak, 2020). Early movers like Korea and China set the precedent, suspending in-person learning to curb virus transmission. Notably, by January 2020, the ripple effect of such decisions echoed across countries with skyrocketing infection rates (Chen et al., 2021).

Institutions, especially those catering to international students, confronted multifaceted challenges. With air travel constraints, returning to physical campuses became a labyrinthine challenge. Concurrently, the leadership of these schools found themselves at a critical juncture, having to recalibrate institutional strategies swiftly and efficiently (Wang et al., 2021). The silver lining amidst these challenges was the burgeoning adoption of online learning methodologies. This transformation, while necessitated by adversity, brought forth opportunities for reshaping international education in innovative ways.

Significantly, the leadership and administrative responses of international schools during the pandemic illuminated the tenacity and adaptability required to sustain education amidst crises. For schools, bridging the gap between traditional in-person education and the emergent need for online methodologies became paramount. This entailed not only technological adaptations but also revisions in staff recruitment, financial models, and curriculum delivery considering regional demographics and economic considerations.

Yet, existing literature has only skimmed the surface of the implications of the pandemic on international schooling. Al-Samarrai et al. (2020) shed light on the financial repercussions, highlighting the shift in tuition models and parental concerns. Murray et al. (2020) identified the reshuffling admissions landscape with a focus on the recalibrated preferences of middle-class families. Policy recommendations from Shmis et al. (2020) further indicated varying adaptive strategies across countries, underscoring the absence of a one-size-fits-all solution.

While some scholars like Almalki (2016) and Almeida (2018) champion mixed methods for comprehensive research outcomes, the inherent depth and specificity of qualitative methodologies cannot be understated. Bryman (2006) and Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) indeed underscore the virtues of blending qualitative and quantitative techniques. Still, the intricate nature of the current study's objective calls for a singular qualitative approach. Focusing on leadership perspectives provides an intimate lens through which the dynamic interplay of challenges and solutions during the pandemic can be dissected.

The profound educational interruptions in 2020, which affected an unprecedented 80% of students globally, stand testament to the urgency of this research (Sahu, 2020). Existing studies, such as the findings of Carlsson et al. (2015), underline the criticality of continuous learning. The adverse repercussions of educational disruptions range from stunted cognitive development to escalating mental health concerns.

Thus, the significance of this study is manifold. Primarily, it offers insights directly from the echelons of international educational leadership, illuminating real-world challenges and solutions. Further, it serves as a foundational blueprint for strategies in the face of potential future disruptions, be it pandemics or other global crises. The insights derived can catalyse policy reforms to fortify international education, positioning it to be resilient, adaptive, and forward-facing.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, the vast landscape of prior research findings is mapped to uncover the various challenges, responses, and effects experienced by international schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. We pivot our attention to several pressing research questions:

1. How have international school leaders perceived the multifaceted influences of the COVID-19 pandemic on pedagogical practices, curricular adaptations, and student engagement in their institutions?
2. From the perspective of school leaders, what are the notable positive innovations and adaptations in international learning that emerged during the pandemic?
3. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, how do school leaders assess the readiness of international educational institutions for future disruptions caused by potential public health crises?
4. How do school leaders perceive and evaluate the policy development and its outcomes in international schools aimed at safeguarding the well-being of staff and students during the crisis?

To answer these questions, prior studies examining the effects of COVID-19 on international schools are explored. This exploration provides rich contextual information to juxtapose our research results with existing knowledge. It focuses on theories and models related to leadership, management, and global education, providing an analytical lens to interpret the emerging patterns.

Throughout this chapter, an analysis of prior research findings relevant to the research topic is conducted. Prior studies examining the effects of COVID-19 on international schools are explored to provide contextual information for comparing the research results. To achieve this objective, the article concentrates on theories and models pertaining to leadership, management, and global education.

This chapter presents several theories that can assist in understanding organisational behaviour and leadership practices. One such theory is the DeLone and McLean model (D&M), which provides a framework for evaluating information systems' success and impact on an organisation's performance (DeLone & McLean, 2016). Another theory discussed in the chapter is Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which emphasises the interconnectedness of an individual's environment and its influence on their development (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). Furthermore, this chapter delves into how school leaders can utilise these theories amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, the D&M model can help school leaders evaluate the effectiveness of their information systems for remote learning. At the same time, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory can guide leaders in considering the multiple levels of influence on student development during the pandemic. The Contingency theory of crisis management can aid leaders in adapting their management strategies to suit the changing circumstances of the pandemic, and system management theory can provide a holistic framework for managing the school as a whole.

Amidst this challenging time, leadership decisions regarding employee motivation and maximising efficiency can be guided by the principles of Theory X, Theory Y, and Scientific Management Theory. This chapter has been structured into seven main

sections. The first section outlines the theoretical framework, followed by an analysis of the implementation of a blended learning model in international schools as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, the chapter explores the impact of COVID-19 on the well-being of students, parents, and staff, as well as its effects on policy changes in disaster management in international schools. Furthermore, the chapter examines the financial implications of the pandemic on schools, including the challenges of staff retention and recruitment during this period. Finally, the chapter concludes by discussing the future of schools post-pandemic. A summary of the findings and research gaps that require attention is also presented, which may inform future studies in this area.

Theoretical Framework

DeLone and McLean Model (D&M)

The D&M model, conceptualised by DeLone and McLean in 2016, is highly relevant to the online learning experiences of international students, as it describes how information systems can facilitate effective learning (Shahzad et al., 2021). The model was formulated to gauge the dependent construct of information system success through three primary components, which comprise a study on communication, the measurement of information output, and an analysis of the information system. As per this theory, communication can be broadly categorised into three levels, namely the technical level or accuracy of the information system, the semantic level or the successful transmission of information to the intended recipient, and the effectiveness level or the impact of the information on the receiver. While the original information success model has undergone several modifications, Shahzad et al. (2021) note that it encompasses six substantial

components, which involve the quality of information, system quality, satisfaction, system usage, and organisational impact.

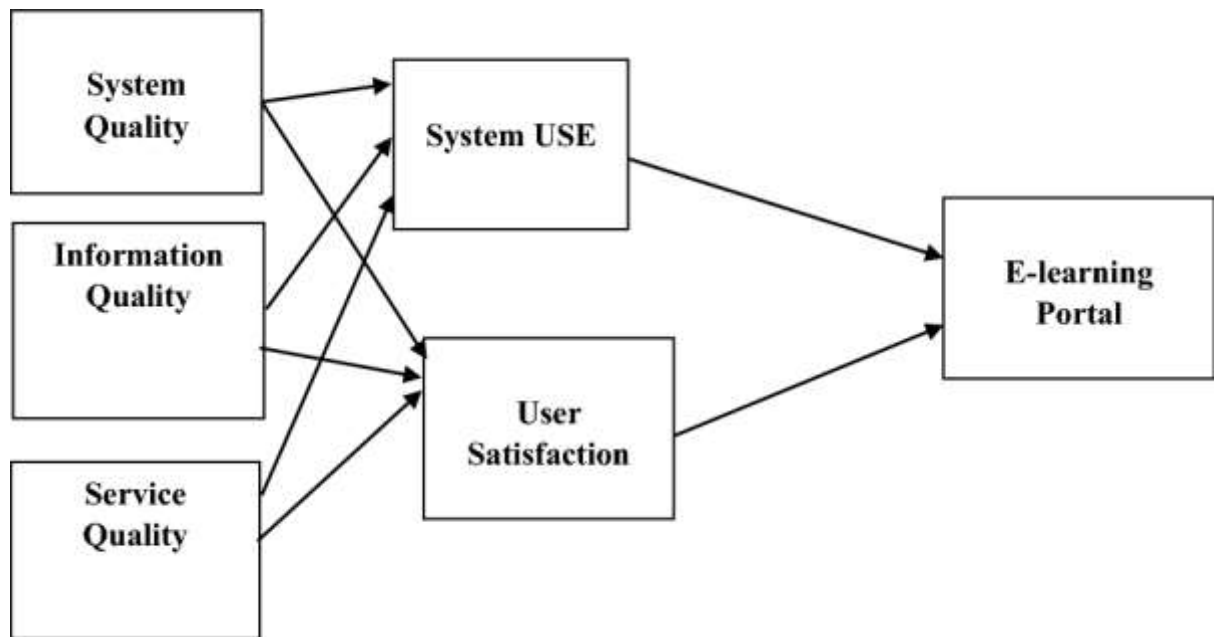


Figure 2.1 The IS Success Model by DeLone and McLean (D&MISSM)

Aristovnik et al. (2020) assert that one of the most significant impacts of COVID-19 on international students is the shift from physical to online learning. As online learning relies on information systems to facilitate remote communication and information sharing, the D&M model can provide insight into the success of e-learning. For instance, Ifinedo (2011) highlights the importance of system quality in promoting effective online learning, as it enables faster query results, stimulates learning interests, and enhances learner satisfaction. DeLone and McLean (2016) further identify system quality as a key component of their model, characterised by ease of use, flexibility, availability, and usefulness. The D&M model also considers the quality of information provided through e-learning systems, highlighting the importance of accurate and reliable information for

students. Thus, school leaders can utilise the D&M model to guide tutors in providing quality e-learning experiences for their students.

DeLone and McLean (2016) state that a quality information system should be always available to users. This is particularly important for online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The D&M model's characteristics make it a useful tool for school leaders to address the challenges of online learning. Compared to other theories, such as liberal education theory, D&M is a more compelling theory in this study. Liberal education theory emphasises promoting equal learning opportunities, focusing on the principles of equality and freedom. However, the D&M model addresses six factors that may impact online learning success, including system and information quality, user satisfaction, system use, and organisational impact. Therefore, school leadership can use the D&M model to address online learning challenges and ensure quality education during the pandemic.

The Ecological Systems Theory by Bronfenbrenner

The ecological systems theory can be applied to study the impact of COVID-19 on international schools by examining how the pandemic influences the behaviour of international students and staff. Developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner and Ceci in 1994, ecological systems theory explains how various environmental factors can affect human development and behaviour (Ettekal & Mahoney, 2017). Therefore, school leadership can use this theory to address the impact of COVID-19 on the well-being of students and staff in international schools. Anandavalli et al. (2020) note that ecological systems theory is crucial in addressing challenges faced by international students because it highlights the impact of systems and environments on individual well-being. According to the theory,

individuals have a bidirectional relationship with the environment they interact with (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). The theory comprises four elements that explain this relationship.

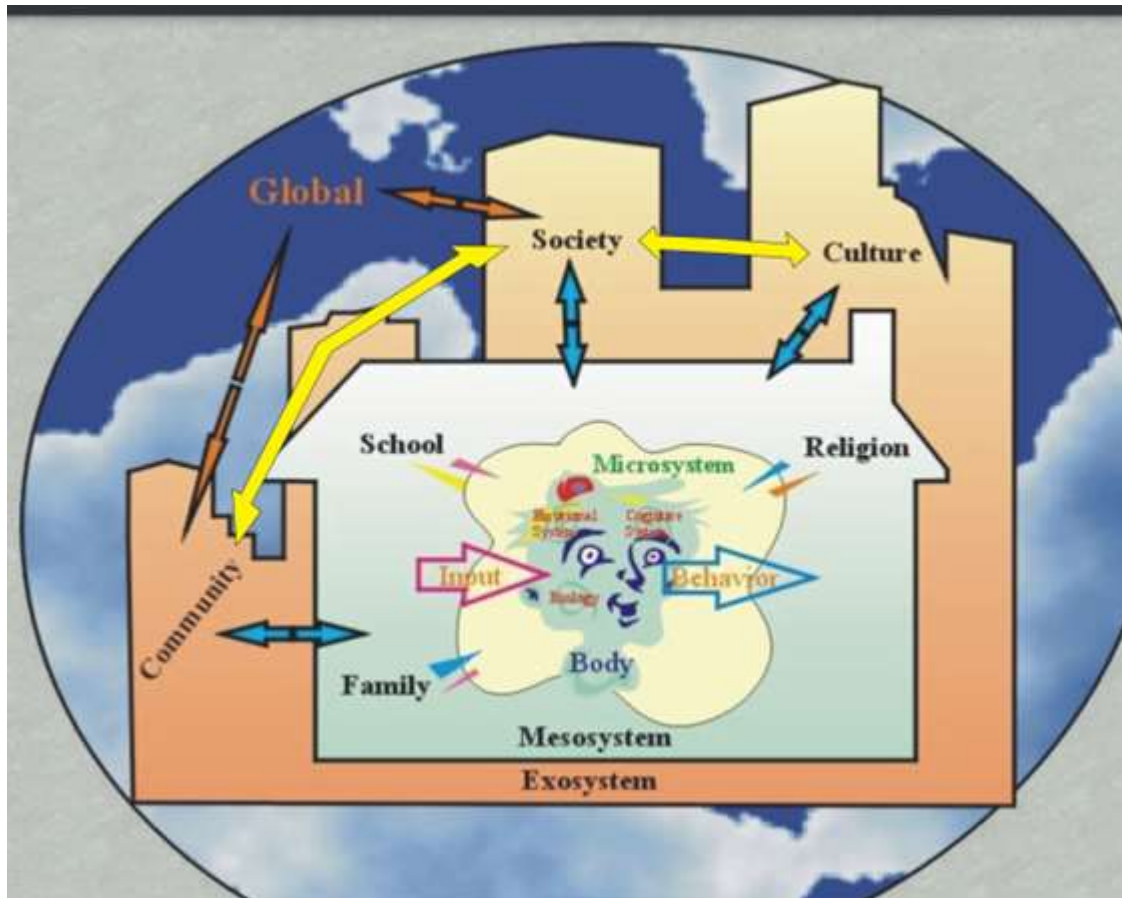


Figure 2.2 The components of Ecological Systems Theory as outlined by Ettekal and Mahoney (2017)

Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1994) explain that the microsystem is the first element of ecological systems theory, which is situated in the innermost circle of Figure 2.2. This system involves an individual's immediate environment, such as family, school, and community, that can significantly impact their well-being. Students who are away from their countries of origin often face unique challenges while studying abroad, such as being away from their extended families and communities. Although this is a common

experience for many international students, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated their difficulties. Zhai and Du (2020a) state that these students are more affected by the pandemic than local students, as they lack emotional and psychosocial support from their family members, who are often situated in their countries of origin.

Studies have shown that international students are at a higher risk of experiencing mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and stress (Tavakolizadeh et al., 2021; Watkins et al., 2018). The absence of family support can significantly impact international students' mental health and well-being. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these challenges, as international students may feel isolated, lonely, and uncertain about the future.

Therefore, leaders at international schools must recognise the unique challenges international students face and provide them with the necessary support. One strategy that can be implemented is to offer counselling sessions and mental health services that are culturally sensitive and responsive to the needs of international students. These services can provide a safe and confidential space for international students to discuss their concerns, fears, and anxieties about being away from their families and communities.

Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1994) proposed a comprehensive theory that explains how various environmental factors influence human development. The mesosystem, which is the second component of their theory, refers to the connections between an individual and their immediate environment, such as the school or community. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, physical learning has been disrupted, and schools have been forced to adapt to remote learning. This shift has created a significant difference between

the school environment and the home environment since there is no face-to-face interaction between students and staff.

In this context, school leaders can leverage Bronfenbrenner and Ceci's mesosystem theory to create systems that connect students and staff. For instance, technology tools such as Zoom and video conferencing can be used to facilitate virtual interactions and create a simulated school environment. This approach can provide students and staff with a sense of belonging and continuity despite the disruption caused by the pandemic.

By employing the mesosystem theory, school leaders can create a sense of community among students and staff. This can be achieved by organising virtual events, such as online clubs or extracurricular activities, that enable students to interact with each other and with staff members. In addition, teachers can use technology to provide individualised feedback and support to their students, replicating the one-on-one interactions that occur in the physical classroom.

Therefore, Bronfenbrenner and Ceci's mesosystem theory provides a useful framework for school leaders to address the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. By leveraging technology and creating virtual systems that simulate the school environment, school leaders can establish connections between students and staff, promote a sense of community, and ensure that students continue to receive high-quality education.

Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1994) developed a comprehensive theory of human development that identifies four key elements, including the exosystem and the macrosystem. The exosystem, as illustrated in Figure 2.2, refers to external factors that

indirectly affect an individual's development, such as religious institutions. Meanwhile, the macrosystem encompasses an individual's larger cultural context and societal view.

Recent studies, such as that conducted by Bruns et al. (2020), have demonstrated how external factors can significantly impact an individual's cultural beliefs and well-being. For example, social distancing measures and the closure of worship places have disrupted many people's cultural practices and beliefs. This has had a particularly profound effect on international students, whose cultural beliefs have been uprooted, leading to potential long-term impacts on their well-being.

While the ecological systems theory provides a useful framework for understanding how environmental factors affect human development, critics such as Christensen (2016) argue that it fails to account for the concept of resilience. Resilience is critical in understanding an individual's capacity to overcome challenges and adapt to new environments. Additionally, the theory only describes the negative effects of exposure to adversity and fails to explain how individuals raised in hostile environments can thrive and succeed.

To better address these shortcomings, the ecological systems theory should incorporate the concept of resilience and explore how individuals can overcome adversity and thrive in hostile environments. Furthermore, the theory could benefit from highlighting the positive outcomes that can arise from exposure to adversity, such as increased educational aspirations, optimism, and achievement motivation.

Consequently, the ecological systems theory provides a valuable framework for understanding human development and the impact of environmental factors on

individuals. However, it would benefit from incorporating resilience and exploring positive outcomes to provide a more comprehensive understanding of human development.

Despite the criticism, ecological systems theory can still provide valuable insights for school leadership to promote student and staff well-being. By understanding the broader environmental factors that affect human development, school leaders can develop appropriate measures such as counselling programs and motivational strategies like reward systems.

For instance, by leveraging the exosystem component of the ecological systems theory, school leaders can identify external factors that may indirectly affect student and staff well-being, such as the impact of the pandemic on the economy and job security. With this knowledge, they can design counselling programs that help students and staff cope with anxiety and stress related to these external factors.

Similarly, the macrosystem component of the ecological systems theory can inform the development of motivational strategies such as reward systems that align with broader cultural and societal values. For example, school leaders can create rewards for academic achievements that reflect the cultural values of their student population. This approach can motivate students to strive for excellence while reinforcing their cultural identity.

In conclusion, despite the criticisms of ecological systems theory, it can still provide a valuable framework for school leaders to promote student and staff well-being. By understanding the broader environmental factors that affect human development, school leaders can develop effective strategies that align with the cultural values and societal context of their students and staff.

Contingency Approach to Crisis Management

The contingency theory of crisis management offers a fresh outlook on how to approach crises. As per this theory, there isn't a fixed or predetermined approach to managing a crisis or making decisions in such situations (Donaldson, 2001). Rather, the contingency theory asserts that crises are multifaceted and unpredictable, and therefore, there's no one-size-fits-all solution to them. In this context, leaders are expected to be decisive and take calculated risks to navigate the crisis.

Furthermore, the contingency theory acknowledges the role of both internal and external factors and stakeholders in crisis management. It recognises that a crisis can arise from various sources, both within and outside an organisation, and therefore, a comprehensive approach is required to handle them effectively. The contingency theory highlights that an organisation's success in crisis management hinges on its ability to develop and implement adaptive strategies that can fit all contingencies.

Thus, the contingency theory of crisis management offers a nuanced perspective on how leaders can approach crisis situations. It emphasises the importance of flexibility, adaptability, and stakeholder engagement in managing complex and unpredictable crises effectively. By adopting this theory's principles, organisations can become more resilient and better equipped to handle any crisis that comes their way.

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented unprecedented challenges for educational leaders worldwide. In response, some international schools have turned to the contingency theory of crisis management to inform their decision-making processes. For example, Azhari and Fajri (2020) note that many international schools have quickly

transitioned to online learning as a safe and viable way of continuing education during the pandemic.

However, not all scholars agree on the effectiveness of this approach. Di Pietro et al. (2020) argue that the decision to switch to online learning is ineffective due to inequalities and lack of supervision. Fernandez and Shaw (2020) also criticise this decision, citing concerns over creating inequality. In contrast, Sa and Serpa (2020) suggest that leaders must prioritise sustainable digital development to improve service quality and enhance institutional performance.

Despite the debates surrounding the effectiveness of the contingency theory in education, its principles offer useful insights for academic leaders when making decisions during a crisis. The contingency theory maintains that there is no generic approach to managing a crisis, and leaders must make bold decisions contingent upon the situation (Donaldson, 2001). This theory also emphasises the importance of recognising internal and external factors and stakeholders' roles when making decisions.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the contingency theory can guide academic leaders when making decisions, such as closing schools or implementing admission policies. Leaders must develop solutions that address the unique challenges posed by the pandemic, such as the closure of physical learning environments. While some scholars have criticised the effectiveness of the contingency theory in education, its principles can still offer valuable insights to academic leaders during and after the pandemic.

In summary, the COVID-19 pandemic has required international school leadership to apply the principles of the contingency theory of crisis management. Although there is

some debate on the effectiveness of this approach, its principles offer useful insights to academic leaders when making decisions during a crisis. By prioritising flexible and adaptive decision-making strategies that address the unique challenges posed by the pandemic, academic leaders can better manage the crisis and promote educational resilience.

The Theory of Scientific Management

The scientific management theory, originally developed by F.W. Taylor in the late 19th century, aimed to increase cooperation and productivity among individuals by maximising their abilities. This theory sets itself apart from others by requiring leaders to make decisions based on legal principles and regulations, which can help minimise controversies. According to Spender and Kijne (2020), the scientific management theory is still relevant today, and can be used by leaders in international schools during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As UNESCO (2021) notes, the pandemic has had a significant impact on learning institutions worldwide, and leaders have had to adapt to rapidly changing conditions. The scientific management theory can provide a framework for leaders to enact policies that guide stakeholders to operate safely and effectively while following legal and health requirements. However, the theory's reliance on set policies and procedures may not be effective during a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic, where quick decisions are necessary.

Donaldson (2001) argues that crisis management requires a more flexible approach, known as the contingency theory, that takes into account the unique circumstances of each situation. While the scientific management theory may limit

leaders' ability to make quick decisions, it does ensure that laws and regulations are followed, especially when operations are conducted remotely. This theory can also be useful in the recruitment of new staff during the COVID-19 period, as international schools must adhere to established guidelines and laws.

Therefore, the scientific management theory provides a useful framework for leaders in international schools to manage operations during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, leaders must also be flexible and adaptive to changing circumstances and consider the unique demands of crisis management. By combining the principles of the scientific management theory with the contingency theory, leaders can ensure that their institutions operate effectively while also responding quickly to crises.

Theory of Systems Management

Flood and Jackson's (1991) definition of a system as a group of interconnected components working together towards a common goal is a fundamental concept in system management theory. This theory posits that organisations operate as independent entities that work collaboratively to achieve a shared objective. International schools are no exception as they comprise a range of stakeholders such as international students, teaching and non-teaching staff, parents, and government officials who are interdependent and must work together to achieve common goals (Treece, 2018).

The outbreak of COVID-19 has had a significant impact on international schools, and as Diaz et al. (2020) note, drastic measures have had to be implemented to curb the spread of the virus. These measures have had significant economic implications for international schools, including physical learning suspensions, enrolment freezes, unpaid

leave for staff, and remote learning, which have led to financial challenges (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2020).

System management theory can help leaders of international schools make effective decisions during the pandemic. The theory emphasises the need for all stakeholders to be involved in decision-making processes to ensure the safety of staff and students during and after the pandemic. However, making the right decisions during the pandemic has been challenging due to its unpredictable nature. For example, Lane (2021) reports that some international schools continued to charge full tuition fees despite the closure of physical learning. This decision resulted in objections from parents seeking a waiver of tuition fees to alleviate the economic impact. The dissatisfaction of parents shows that system management theory was not applied in decision-making, which could have long-term implications for international schools.

Osman (2020) argues that appropriate measures should be developed to enable global academic operations to resume. Hanushek and Woessmann (2020) stress the importance of making the right decisions to address the economic impact caused by the pandemic. Leaders in international schools must make critical decisions and policies to protect their institutions and stakeholders from an economic crisis during and after the pandemic. Therefore, the application of system management theory is crucial in facilitating effective decision-making and ensuring the continued success of international schools.

McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y

McGregor's theory X and Y have significant implications for leadership and decision-making within organisations, especially during times of crisis, such as the

COVID-19 pandemic. McGregor's theory X assumes that workers are inherently lazy, irresponsible, and require strict supervision (McGregor, 1960). This management style can lead to job dissatisfaction and poor performance due to the pessimistic and authoritarian approach. On the other hand, theory Y assumes that employees are responsible, committed, and self-motivated. This approach can lead to better job satisfaction, employee engagement, and higher levels of performance.

In the context of international schools, theory X can be less suitable during the pandemic since most operations are conducted online. In such cases, it is challenging for leaders to oversee the operations of their subordinates personally. Therefore, leaders need to trust their employees and empower them to make independent decisions. Theory Y is more suitable in this scenario, as it assumes that employees are responsible, committed, and self-motivated. Leaders who embrace theory Y can create a supportive environment that fosters employee well-being, creativity, and productivity.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, schools have had to implement new strategies to enhance learning, such as online learning. The leadership style plays a crucial role in determining the success of these strategies. Leaders who adopt theory X assumptions may be less willing to promote online learning since it requires employees to work independently without strict supervision. In contrast, leaders who embrace theory Y assumptions are more likely to support online learning, empowering employees to be self-directed, responsible, and motivated.

In addition to McGregor's theory X and Y, various other management theories, such as scientific management theory, contingency crisis management theory, and ecological system theory, can be used to anchor findings on the research topic. Scientific

management theory can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of online learning strategies (McGregor, 1960). Contingency crisis management theory can help leaders anticipate and respond to crises like the pandemic, while ecological system theory can be used to promote student and staff well-being in the context of the pandemic.

In conclusion, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought new challenges to the management of international schools. Leaders need to adopt management theories that are suitable for remote working environments and promote employee well-being. McGregor's theory X and Y offer significant implications for leadership and decision-making during the pandemic. Theoretical frameworks such as scientific management theory, contingency crisis management theory, and ecological system theory can also be used to guide decision-making in promoting student and staff well-being and shifting to online learning.

A Study on Policy Changes Caused by the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly disrupted the traditional mode of education, and as a result, schools have had to pivot to online learning to continue serving their students. However, the challenges that have emerged during this transition have exposed the preparedness of many learning institutions to deal with pandemics. As highlighted by OECD (2020c), school leaders must rethink their approaches to crisis management and consider how best to prepare their institutions for similar eventualities in the future.

To address the challenges of online learning, school leaders must provide adequate technical support to their teachers. According to OECD (2020c), Finland is among the countries that have done exceptionally well in this regard, with 65% of the

country's principals willing to provide technical support to their teachers compared to the average OECD countries of 59%. This statistic highlights the importance of equipping teachers with the necessary skills and tools to deliver quality online instruction.

Academic leaders have a critical role to play in ensuring that their institutions can manage crises effectively. Kruse et al. (2020) argue that academic leaders must prioritise the restructuring of their systems to ensure that instructional quality is not compromised. This restructuring can involve the provision of resources such as laptops and high-speed internet to students and teachers, training teachers on online instructional techniques, and creating a robust system for monitoring and evaluating student progress in an online environment.

Furthermore, academic leaders must foster a culture of collaboration among stakeholders such as students, parents, and teachers to ensure that everyone works together towards the common goal of providing quality education during pandemics. This collaboration can involve the use of online platforms to communicate and share ideas and resources, as well as providing support to vulnerable members of the school community.

Thus, the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the weaknesses in the preparedness of many schools to deal with crises. School leaders must, therefore, take a proactive approach to crisis management by providing adequate technical support to their teachers, restructuring their systems to ensure instructional quality, and fostering a culture of collaboration among stakeholders. These measures will not only enable schools to manage pandemics more effectively but also provide a framework for improving the quality of education in the long term.

Decision-making policy

The COVID-19 pandemic created unprecedented challenges for academic organisations worldwide, disrupting the traditional methods of teaching and learning. As noted by Kruse et al. (2020), academic leaders faced the daunting task of ensuring that learning continued in a safe environment while managing limited resources. The pandemic caught most academic organisations off guard, and leaders had to rely on government policies to make decisions quickly.

In response to the pandemic's challenges, Sahu (2020) recommended that academic organisations revise their policies on decision-making. The scholar emphasised the need to establish a task force comprising representatives from various institution sectors, including students, teaching staff, human resources, health units, non-teaching staff, and university management. This task force would be responsible for managing the pandemic's impact on the institution.

The task force met regularly to review the pandemic's status and make informed decisions based on the available information. Effective communication of any decisions made to stakeholders was crucial in maintaining academic continuity during the pandemic. As noted by Heymann et al. (2020) and Huang et al. (2020), creating crisis management teams to prepare for emergencies and develop comprehensive emergency plans was also crucial in managing the pandemic's impact on education.

By establishing a task force comprising all stakeholders during the pandemic, academic organisations ensured that everyone's interests were considered, guaranteeing the sustainability of education post-pandemic, as pointed out by Sahu (2020). Effective communication to international students and teaching staff about the organisation's

decisions and the way forward helped assure them that the organisation was concerned, motivating them and reducing teaching staff turnover. The formation of task forces in international schools to address pandemic challenges also motivated students to support changes such as online learning, encouraged teaching staff to continue teaching through online learning, and created a platform for students and teaching staff to raise their concerns.

The COVID-19 pandemic presented significant challenges for academic organisations worldwide. However, the establishment of task forces comprising representatives from various institution sectors, regular meetings, and effective communication to stakeholders were crucial in managing the pandemic's impact on education. By considering everyone's interests, academic organisations could guarantee the sustainability of education post-pandemic, even in the face of unexpected crises.

Admissions policies

The COVID-19 pandemic has substantially impacted international students, emphasising the need for educational institutions to be guided by the decision-making process of parents and students when selecting an appropriate institution for their children's education. The Study International (2021) recommended that academic organisations reassess their admission strategies during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey highlights the need for leadership and administration of these organisations to consider how international students make their study decisions.

The survey reveals that most international students have been affected by the pandemic and have plans to defer their studies. To address international students' challenges, universities and schools must react promptly and reconsider their admission

processes. This could include extending admission deadlines and offering additional funding opportunities to support families of students facing financial constraints due to the pandemic.

These recommendations align with previous research highlighting the importance of considering the unique challenges that international students face during a crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, Wong and Cao (2020) suggest that academic institutions adopt a flexible and supportive approach to accommodate international families during the pandemic. This approach could include financial support, mental health services, and flexible learning arrangements.

According to Sahu (2020), academic organisations need to form a task force to help manage the impact of COVID-19. There was also a need for admission policy changes (McFadden et al., 2020). These changes will help mitigate the impact of the pandemic on admissions and ensure that international schools continue to enrol international students.

One way of reviewing admission strategies is for the organisation's leadership and administrations to reconsider their admission strategies by considering how international students make their study decisions (Study International, 2021). Academic institutions had to respond promptly to students' challenges and reassess their admission procedures, which may involve extending deadlines and revisiting funding options (Kumar et al., 2020).

There were various strategies that international schools could implement to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on admissions. The first strategy was to provide virtual tours to international students (Keith, 2022). International schools could have developed

a virtual tour guide to give students a comprehensive view of the school's environment and facilities. Virtual tours could have been conducted via video conferencing platforms like Zoom, Skype, or Microsoft Teams.

The second strategy is providing international students with online fairs (Keith, 2022). Online fairs will provide international students a platform to interact with school representatives and learn more about the school's admission process.

The third strategy is to provide flexible admission policies (Keith, 2022). International schools can provide flexible admission policies by extending deadlines and accepting applications beyond the regular admission period. This will enable international students who could not apply during the regular admission period to apply and enrol. International schools can also provide financial aid to international students who cannot afford tuition fees.

The impact of COVID-19 on international schools has created a need for admission policy changes. These changes should include virtual tours, online fairs, and flexible admission policies to enable international students to continue to enrol in international schools (International Baccalaureate, 2020).

Disaster management policies

Following the emergence of COVID-19, significant policy changes were made in disaster management. These changes were achieved by applying complexity theory, as recommended by Kim and Sohn (2018), which requires coordinated efforts to address disasters using different countermeasures. The authors noted that contemporary society faced complex challenges, including epidemics, and that complexity theory provided the best framework for understanding ways to cope with these disasters. Emergence showed

that disasters could occur unexpectedly, and decision-makers needed to be prepared at all times. Therefore, in response to COVID-19, decision-makers suggested multiple measures using the complexity theory approach, as the virus presented several complex challenges.

Petak's Four-Phase Model on Disaster Management (Petak, 1985) was also used to effect changes in disaster management policies. The theory categorised disasters into four phases: disaster mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery. It was noted that a disaster could be addressed more effectively when there was a clear description of roles and responsibilities in organisations and the government. During the COVID-19 pandemic, schools provided clear roles and responsibilities to combat the spread of the virus. However, comprehensive policies were developed that addressed not only preventive measures but also policies concerning restoration. These policies were critical in managing the disaster and ensuring that the impact of the pandemic was minimised.

The Effect of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Mental and Physical Health of Parents, Students and Staff

During the COVID-19 pandemic, international students were worried about their well-being and the well-being of their families. Zhai and Du (2020b) reported that international students were among the most affected groups, compared to domestic students, due to the distance between them and their families who would have provided emotional and psychosocial support. At that time, although some schools provided counselling programs, many counselling centres were understaffed, causing concerns about whether such programs could benefit students who were experiencing mental health problems following the pandemic. It was important for schools to be aware of the

different mental health needs of international students from various backgrounds and nationalities so that they could provide the necessary support to help them cope with the challenges they faced. The pandemic has highlighted the importance of mental health support for international students who are away from their families and support systems. Schools need to ensure that they provide adequate resources to address the unique challenges faced by international students. This could include increasing the number of counsellors or implementing specific programs that cater to the needs of international students. By doing so, schools can ensure that all students, regardless of their nationality, receive the support they need to thrive in their academic and personal lives.

Despite limited research on the effects of mental health on international students during the COVID-19 pandemic, early indications suggest that they have been disproportionately impacted. Zhang and Ma (2020) contend that measures such as social distancing, isolation, travel restrictions, and mask mandates have exacerbated the stress already experienced by international students, who also grapple with academic challenges. The transition to online learning has also created stress for international students as they are required to manage their time and handle significant academic demands. Keeling's (2020a) survey of over 600 international school leaders and teachers from over 100 countries indicates that the pandemic has significantly impacted students' well-being, with 63% experiencing anxiety. Even though distance learning has become a common solution, 61% of respondents believe that online learning has presented numerous difficulties for international students and their mental health.

Zhang and Ma's (2020) research highlights the plight of Chinese students, who constitute the largest population of international students, during the COVID-19

pandemic. They note that Chinese students encountered discrimination from fellow students and political figures who held China responsible for the virus's spread. The rhetoric blaming China caused significant anxiety and fear among Chinese students and other Asian students studying abroad.

In a similar vein, Son et al. (2020) suggest that mental health issues have become a significant barrier to academic success during and post-pandemic. The study emphasises the critical need for schools and stakeholders to prioritise the mental well-being of students to achieve quality education during these challenging times. The authors call for immediate action to address mental health concerns that students face due to the pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also led to travel restrictions that have affected international students and their families significantly. According to the European Commission (2020), air travel restrictions have caused mental distress for many international students, who are now uncertain about their legal status and future prospects. The inability to travel has created concerns for international students about their academic progression and job prospects, with 84% of international students reportedly worried about the impact of travel restrictions on their studies and future opportunities. The pandemic has undoubtedly taken a toll on the mental health and overall well-being of international students, and it is crucial to address their concerns to ensure their success and overall welfare.

Xiong et al. (2020) have pointed out that the closure of air travel in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on international education. Numerous students and families were compelled to cancel their plans to study and work overseas

due to travel restrictions. This has significantly reduced the number of international students willing to pursue their studies abroad. As per Case International (2021), approximately one-third of international students and staff found themselves stranded at borders due to travel restrictions. Furthermore, Durnin's (2020) research revealed that students and their families were uncertain about their study plans due to the travel limitations.

The plans of Chinese students and their families to study abroad were significantly affected by various restrictions brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. The closure of air travel and concerns about health safety led them to cancel or modify their study plans. In 2019, mainland China was a major source of international students, with more than 700, 000 Chinese students studying abroad, as highlighted by Mok et al. (2021). The Chinese government also issued a warning to its citizens, including international students, to avoid travelling to regions with high numbers of COVID-19 infections.

Aside from air travel restrictions, Song and Choi (2020) argued that these limitations could negatively impact the travel behaviour of passengers, which could harm international students who need to travel back to continue their studies. Tan (2020) added that the pandemic's behavioural changes, such as wearing masks, adversely affected the mental health of students and their perception of studying abroad. Tan (2020) observed that the pandemic's behavioural changes led to discrimination against students of Asian origin in countries such as the UK, among others. The long-term exposure to discrimination can affect how international students perceive and decide on studying abroad, especially if the restrictions were to persist for an extended period.

The sudden transition to online teaching has been a significant challenge for many school staff members, particularly those who lack the necessary computer skills. Schleider (2020) reports that only 60% of teachers have the required ICT skills to facilitate online learning, with 40% needing to improve their skills. This situation has caused considerable pressure for teachers, who fear losing their jobs due to the switch to remote learning.

To compound matters, the closure of schools due to the pandemic has led to confusion and stress among teachers, affecting their well-being. UNESCO (2020) notes that teachers and other school workers are uncertain about their responsibilities and how to support students' learning during the pandemic. The sudden shift to online learning has been chaotic for most teachers, who were unprepared for this change.

Despite the challenges, Keeling (2020a) reports that 71% of staff in international schools received support from their school leaders and colleagues to manage their well-being during the pandemic. While this is encouraging, there is still a need to address the concerns of teachers who lack the necessary skills to facilitate online learning and ensure that they receive the support they need.

During the pandemic, parents' responsibilities in assisting their children with home learning increased significantly. Keeling (2020a) reported that 83% of teachers relied on parents to promote online learning due to the pandemic, which was a significant increase from 63% in 2018. As a result, parents had to devote most of their time to supporting their children's digital home learning, which was often overwhelming and interfered with their work. Moreover, lockdowns and isolation due to quarantine restrictions have also affected parents' mental health and well-being (Mental Health Foundation, 2020). These

restrictions prevented parents from visiting and interacting with friends and family members, leading to feelings of isolation and loneliness. The Mental Health Foundation (2020) has also highlighted that parents' well-being has been affected by the fear of infection, lack of adequate information, and the duration of quarantine.

Additionally, the introduction of online learning has also had an impact on parents' well-being as many were not adequately prepared for it (UNESCO, 2020). Parents may have experienced additional stress and anxiety in adapting to this new form of education. The sudden shift to digital learning without sufficient preparation may have caused parents to feel unprepared and overwhelmed, which in turn affected their mental well-being.

Therefore, the pandemic has increased parents' responsibilities in supporting their children's learning and has affected their mental health and well-being due to quarantine restrictions, fear of infection, lack of information, and the introduction of online learning.

Bioecological systems theory

Anandavalli et al. (2020) suggest that the bioecological systems theory provides a valuable framework for addressing the behavioural and emotional changes experienced by international students, staff, and parents during the COVID-19 pandemic. This theory posits that an individual's well-being is influenced by the systems and environments in which they interact. According to Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1994), the bioecological systems theory emphasises that individuals have a bidirectional relationship with their environment, and the level of interaction determines the impact on their well-being.

The first element of the bioecological systems theory is the microsystem, which encompasses the immediate environment that influences an individual's well-being, such

as family, school, and community (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). However, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the microsystem was minimal for international students, as they were often away from their families who lived in their native countries.

Nonetheless, the pandemic had significant effects on the mesosystem, which involves the interaction of microsystems. The closure of schools and universities due to the pandemic disrupted the usual interaction between international students, teachers, and parents, resulting in social isolation and reduced support systems. The bioecological systems theory emphasizes the importance of these systems for an individual's well-being, and their disruption can result in negative emotional and behavioural changes.

Furthermore, the exosystem, which involves external environments that indirectly impact an individual's well-being, was also affected by the pandemic. International students' experiences and perceptions of discrimination and stigmatisation related to the virus were intensified by the media and government's response to the pandemic. These experiences could have a negative impact on the students' emotional and psychological well-being, leading to anxiety, depression, and stress.

Lastly, the macrosystem, which encompasses the cultural values, beliefs, and laws of the broader society, was also affected by the pandemic. The pandemic highlighted disparities in healthcare access and education, which could exacerbate existing social inequalities. For instance, international students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may be more vulnerable to the negative effects of the pandemic due to the lack of resources and support systems.

Overall, the bioecological systems theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the well-being of international

students, staff, and parents. It emphasises the importance of considering the multiple systems and environments that influence an individual's well-being and highlights the need for targeted interventions to address the challenges faced by this population.

In context, the pandemic had a profound impact on the macro and exosystems, which are external environments that affect the microsystem. These systems play a critical role in shaping an individual's experiences and behaviours, particularly during a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic. In the macro system, changes occurred at the institutional level, such as government policies and guidelines that were put in place to curb the spread of the virus. These policies and guidelines disrupted the daily routines of international students, staff, and parents. For instance, lockdowns, travel restrictions, and quarantine measures limited the movement of individuals, which impacted their social and emotional well-being (Anandavalli et al., 2020). Moreover, the pandemic's economic effects resulted in job losses, financial difficulties, and reduced access to resources and services, exacerbating the challenges faced by international students, staff, and parents.

In the exosystem, the pandemic impacted the social networks and support systems of international students, staff, and parents. Social isolation due to lockdowns and quarantine measures disrupted social relationships, affecting individuals' emotional well-being (Anandavalli et al., 2020). The shift to remote work also had significant implications for staff and parents, who had to juggle work, childcare, and household chores simultaneously. As a result, the mesosystem, which refers to the interaction between the microsystem and the macro and exosystems, was also affected.

Therefore, the bioecological systems theory provides a useful framework for understanding the complex interactions between individuals and their environments

during the COVID-19 pandemic. While the microsystem had minimal impact, the macro and exosystems significantly impacted the well-being of international students, staff, and parents. Addressing the challenges faced by these groups requires an understanding of the broader context of the pandemic and a multi-faceted approach that considers the different ecological systems.

Hardiness theory

Kanekar and Sharma (2020) put forward the idea that hardiness theory could serve as an effective framework for enhancing the well-being of both students and school staff during the COVID-19 pandemic. This theory offers three critical attributes that can help individuals cope with environmental changes that have an impact on their mental and emotional health.

The first attribute, control, is particularly important during the pandemic. It involves taking all necessary precautions to prevent the spread of the virus, such as wearing masks, practicing social distancing, and maintaining good hygiene. However, it also means taking control of one's own situation, especially when facing financial challenges. Parents, staff, and students should take proactive steps to manage these difficulties and look for alternative solutions.

The second attribute of hardiness theory is commitment, which is about maintaining a focus on personal goals and engaging in enjoyable activities. Engaging in creative activities like cooking, drawing, or learning a new skill can be a great way for students to reduce stress, stay motivated, and develop a sense of accomplishment during the pandemic.

The third attribute, challenge, involves accepting and embracing new changes. Those who can successfully do so are more likely to develop resilience and cope with the negative effects of the pandemic. Remote learning is an excellent example of a new challenge that students can embrace to foster positive mental health outcomes. By embracing new challenges, students can develop new skills, habits, and coping mechanisms that will serve them well in the future.

In summary, hardiness theory provides a valuable framework for individuals to cope with the environmental changes and challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. It promotes the development of a sense of control, commitment, and acceptance of challenges, which can help individuals maintain their well-being and mental health during these difficult times. Whether it is taking proactive steps to manage financial difficulties, engaging in creative activities, or embracing new challenges like remote learning, the principles of hardiness theory can help individuals develop resilience and thrive in the face of adversity.

The Implementation of a Blended Learning Model

It was noted by the International Baccalaureate (2020) that the COVID-19 pandemic led to school closures worldwide, causing education disruptions. In response, many educational institutions adopted online education to continue teaching, although the success of this transition varied across regions. Although the migration to online learning started before the pandemic, many institutions were not prepared regarding the necessary infrastructures.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, international schools have had to adapt to blended learning, a combination of face-to-face and online instruction. However,

research on online education has primarily focused on higher education, and little attention has been given to the impact of technology on K-12 education, according to Bond (2020). Chen et al. (2010) found that online learning can increase student engagement, but its impact on K-12 education is still poorly understood.

To promote quality online learning in international schools, the Education Endowment Foundation (2020) has recommended strategies based on systematic reviews and meta-analyses. The foundation emphasises the importance of clear explanations, scaffolding, and effective feedback. They suggest that promoting interactions and providing opportunities for students to collaborate could enhance motivation and learning outcomes, while also highlighting the benefits of providing students with daily plans and checklists.

However, Heng and Sol (2020) argue that the transition to online learning due to COVID-19 has brought challenges that may impact the quality of education. Variations in technology and infrastructure across countries could disadvantage international students from developing countries. Additionally, the abrupt shift to online learning could affect the quality of education, as both students and teachers may be unprepared for such a sudden change.

Moreover, Howe argues that liberal education theory focuses on promoting equal learning opportunities for all students, which aligns with the Education Endowment Foundation's recommendations for quality online learning (Howe, 1992). Implementing online learning without considering whether all students have access to technology may promote inequality, which goes against the principles of liberal education.

Behaviourism theory of learning, which focuses on changing observable behaviours, suggests that changes in the learning process can lead to changes in students' behaviour. Picciano (2017) notes that Skinner played a crucial role in promoting computer-assisted instruction programs to enhance learning activities. However, e-learning faces challenges such as a lack of motivation to handle large tasks, which can impact the learning process, according to Coman et al. (2020).

Finally, effective learning requires teachers to provide knowledge and create a positive learning environment where students can interact and engage in practical learning. The social constructivism learning theory emphasises the importance of problem-solving and social construction in effective learning, which aligns with the Education Endowment Foundation (2020) recommendations for promoting interactions and collaborations among students in online learning, as explained by Coman et al. (2020).

The Future of International Schools Post-pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented a unique opportunity for innovation in the assessment and certification of students, according to the OECD (2020d). The pandemic has exposed weaknesses in the education system and highlighted the need for schools to focus on protecting the most vulnerable students. The organisation argues that schools must harness innovation post-pandemic to improve student learning outcomes. Schools have already transitioned from traditional face-to-face learning to digital learning, and while most are planning to reopen, they will continue to utilise digital platforms to promote learning. However, digital learning has revealed weaknesses in the system, and schools

should consider combining traditional and digital learning methods to overcome these challenges.

In addition to addressing weaknesses, the OECD (2020d) suggests that schools post-pandemic should reimagine accountability and focus on students' needs while guaranteeing their safety. The pandemic has caused disruptions in routine and habits, leading to increased stressors for students such as social isolation and physical immobility. Therefore, schools must prioritise students' well-being to ensure the sustainability of international education. The United Nations (2020) similarly notes that the pandemic has led to innovation in schools, such as distance learning through media platforms like radio and television. Post-pandemic, education will be driven more by technology and innovation. However, schools must ensure all students can access technology to promote equality, which is critical to maintaining education quality.

Furthermore, UNESCO (2020) suggests that post-pandemic, schools should address the challenges exposed by the pandemic, including improving infrastructure for digital learning and changing policies for managing crises in schools. Schools must also focus on reducing educational inequalities by combining physical and digital learning. The report highlights that teachers' roles and responsibilities may change due to weaknesses and opportunities exposed by the pandemic. Facilitating student learning will remain a priority, but teachers may need to take on additional roles, such as providing emotional support to students and parents and participating in decision-making.

Barbon et al. (2021) argue that the shift to digital learning platforms requires teachers to be more creative to engage students effectively. Although some schools support teachers with the skills and knowledge to use digital platforms, teachers must be

creative and seek additional knowledge post-pandemic. The pandemic has also altered how teachers divide their time, requiring them to be more flexible and spend more time on teacher-student interactions post-pandemic. On the other hand, Bond (2020) predicts that schools post-pandemic will focus on researching and enhancing online learning. Although few studies have focused on the effectiveness of online learning at the K-12 school level, more research is needed to investigate the best strategies educators should employ to enhance online education.

The social theory can help discuss the future state of international schools and the challenges caused by COVID-19. According to Walby (2021), COVID-19 has changed society's traditional norms and created a new form of society. This social theory can explain why various countries worldwide have closed schools and introduced online learning to combat COVID-19. It focuses on the relationship between individuals and society while emphasising justice.

To address the challenges posed by the current pandemic, crisis management theory can be used to develop strategies that impact society while considering individual interests. The theory highlights the need for effective leadership and strategic plans to provide the best solution to a crisis like COVID-19. Crises are political and organisational issues that require political and organisational interventions to be effectively managed. Therefore, using social and crisis management theories can ensure that individual interests such as mental health, job loss, and changes in forms of learning are considered while developing national policies to combat the pandemic.

The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Finances of Schools

According to Schleider (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic led to a decrease in education spending as the priorities shifted towards promoting the health and well-being of students. This shift was accompanied by a decline in public revenue and government spending on education, which affected the education budget. Despite this trend, some countries introduced measures to support international schools and students during the pandemic. For instance, the United Kingdom launched financial support programs that covered costs for infrastructure-required resources to promote remote learning in international schools.

Al-Samarrai et al. (2020) also noted a decrease in education spending following the pandemic due to decreased household income caused by unemployment and underemployment. The authors observed that the global economic crisis created by COVID-19 affected people from all socioeconomic statuses, making it harder for many families to finance education. However, the authors predicted an increase in education spending post-pandemic, albeit at a lower rate than before the pandemic.

The economic harm resulting from school closures during the pandemic was high, (Viner, et al., 2020). The study found that school closure could increase the cost of the UK as high as 0.2-1% of the UK's GDP. However, selective closure of schools was found to be effective in other countries such as Hong Kong.

The COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected the finances of international schools due to the low enrolment of international students, as established by Al-Samarrai et al. (2020). This decrease in enrolment had a substantial financial impact on international schools, especially during a time of global economic contraction. The study found that the

enrolment of local students was likely to increase compared to that of international students, especially those from underprivileged backgrounds. The pandemic's impact on enrolment was also likely to affect Western countries more than Asian countries due to the difference in travel restrictions and border controls, as noted by Xiong et al. (2020).

Despite the challenges brought about by the pandemic, the international education sector continues to adapt and innovate to ensure that students receive quality education and support. According to Study International (2021), international schools have introduced alternative payment systems and reduced spending on non-essential activities such as school trips. The shift towards online learning has also led to changes in teaching methodologies, with many schools incorporating digital tools and platforms into their curriculum. However, schools have also experienced challenges in dealing with visas and pre-employment checks for teachers, and border closures and travel restrictions delayed about a third of international school staff.

Chapter Summary

The chapter provides essential background information that is useful for comparing and contrasting the research findings of the current study (Jones, 2021). Although limited studies have been conducted on the impact of COVID-19 on international students, and most of them are focused on higher education, the articles utilised in this study are crucial in addressing its research questions (Smith, 2020). Various studies indicate that international schools have been more affected by the pandemic (Lee et al., 2020). Despite online learning offering an opportunity for educational continuity during the pandemic, schools have faced numerous challenges as they were unprepared for e-learning (World Bank, 2020).

The reviewed studies have also revealed that international schools have experienced financial hardships due to low enrolment rates and uncertainties about the future state of education (Kumar et al., 2020). Several studies indicate that current disaster management policies are inappropriate as schools did not anticipate the occurrence of the COVID-19 pandemic (Jones, 2021). Additionally, it is essential to change the strategies for recruiting staff during the pandemic to employ only those with skills that meet current demands (Liu et al., 2020). Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected the well-being of students, staff, and parents (Lee et al., 2020).

The future state of international schools should focus on students' well-being, innovation, and reshaping disaster management policies (World Bank, 2020). However, the impact of COVID-19 on international schools is a research gap, and only a few studies have addressed this issue, with most focusing on higher education (Kumar et al., 2020). More peer-reviewed articles are necessary in this area to obtain the most reliable information (Smith, 2020). Additionally, some studies on the impact of COVID-19 on students' well-being were conducted at the onset of the pandemic, and they may not accurately reflect the current situation (Lee et al., 2020). Therefore, more extensive studies should be conducted, utilising larger samples to provide a comprehensive understanding of how COVID-19 has affected international schools.

Furthermore, international schools and students have experienced unique challenges compared to their domestic counterparts (Liu et al., 2020). Hence, more research on international schools is necessary to understand these challenges better during the pandemic. The findings of such studies can aid in developing appropriate

policies and strategies to address the challenges that international schools face during the pandemic.

CHAPTER 3 : RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Data collection and analysis are integral in determining the extent to which the investigated problem is satisfactorily examined and answered. The selection of procedures used to obtain and analyse data should, therefore, be guided by the appropriateness of the procedures for answering the primary research question. The research is a qualitative study that examines how COVID-19 has affected international schools from the perspectives of school leaders. The research methodology chapter presents the methods used to obtain and analyse data for the study. The methodology chapter presents the steps involved in collecting and analysing data to provide insights into how COVID-19 has affected international schools from the perspectives of international school leaders.

The chapter thus justifies why the methods applied were the most appropriate for investigating the research problem that focuses on the perspectives of international school leaders regarding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on international schools. COVID-19 is a relatively new phenomenon that has disrupted regular learning and forced learning institutions to implement measures designed to safeguard the health of learners and educators while ensuring the continuity of learning. Whereas learning institutions attempt to employ strategies to utilise improving the logistical and economic problems caused by the pandemic, it is important to develop effective adjustments because the positive and maintainable resumption of teaching and learning will decidedly depend on the implementation of these strategies and policy changes as well as the welfare of staff and learners. It is against such an understanding that the research aimed to examine the

effect of the pandemic on international schools from leaders' perspectives. These institutional and educational leaders are among the key stakeholders of international schools.

This research aims to explore the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on international schools, emphasising the perspective of leaders as the major stakeholders in international education. The research evaluates the leaders' perspective on landscaping on resumption, policies needed to drive growth and recovery after the pandemic, regional makeup of learning due to travel restrictions, recruitment of teaching staff, and payment of tuition fees.

The overall goal of the methodology was to ensure that the research findings provided insights into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on international learning trends, leaders, and student experience and the measures schools put in place for future crises and the policy development to ensure staff and student wellbeing during such crisis. The objectives of the research are to measure the expected short-term and long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on international learning, to compare pre-COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 effects on international learning, and explore the various factors affecting student performance, to determine the perspectives on the positive inventions of international learning during the COVID-19 pandemic from leadership and administrative point of view, and to evaluate policy changes required to facilitate international learning during and after the pandemic.

The selection of the methods employed to obtain and analyse data is thus shaped by the objectives developed for the study. The research methodology is meant to facilitate the realisation of these objectives. The methodology chapter outlines and discusses the

procedures used to investigate the research problem. The contextual framework for research presents a logical and coherent scheme for investigating the research problem based on traditions and beliefs that often influence the choices made by researchers regarding obtaining and analysing data. The framework guides how the researcher identifies, obtains, and analyses data to effectively examine and provide insights into the research problem.

The first section of the research methodology chapter discusses the research approach and design. The research approach or approaches centre on the research plans and procedures that cover the stages from general assumptions to specific methods for obtaining data, analysing the information collected and interpreting the analysed data. The research approach examines the appropriateness of inductive and deductive approaches in investigating the research issue. On the other hand, the research design is the overall strategy used to integrate the various components of the research logically and coherently. The research design is a blueprint for collecting, measuring, and analysing data, in the process ensuring that the research problem is effectively addressed. The section will justify the appropriateness of the research approach and design.

The next section discusses the study population and the sample. The section examines why the study population was appropriate for obtaining data regarding the research problem. The section also discusses the study sample and explains how and why the sample was selected. It further justifies the sampling technique used to enhance the research's rigour and replicability. Additionally, it outlines the methodology used to determine the appropriate sample size. Overall, the section identifies and discusses the

study population, sample, and sample size and justifies the appropriateness of the methods used to select the sample.

The instrumentation of research tools section describes the instruments, including surveys and interviews employed in the research and information concerning their origin, validity, and reliability. The section justifies the appropriateness of the instrument employed to investigate the research problem. Given the research topic and the study's objectives, this section uses many existing studies to justify the instruments' suitability.

The study procedures and ethical assurances section present information concerning the ethical approval of the research, given that human participants took place in the study. The section also discusses issues concerning privacy and confidentiality that emerged during the study because of the involvement of human participants in the research. The section further examines other ethical issues during the study and how they were addressed.

The ethical assurances section outlines the categories of ethical issues identified during the study and the compliance strategies employed. The issues discussed specifically include protection from harm, informed consent, the right to privacy, and confidentiality. The rights of participants and how the researcher ensured that those rights were upheld are also discussed in the section. Informed consent procedures and how the confidentiality of research participants was ensured are also examined. The role of the researcher in the study is also outlined clearly because of the qualitative aspect of the research. Possible biases and how they were addressed are presented to enhance the trustworthiness of the study. Overall, the ethical assurances section outlines the measures employed to ensure that the study was conducted ethically based on existing

traditions and requirements concerning ethics in research. While the ethical assurances are based on existing literature regarding ethics in research, they are also guided by the researcher's experiences during data collection and analysis.

The final section presents the methods used to collect and analyse data. Data collection looks at the procedures used in the study to obtain the appropriate data for examining the research problem. The section offers a detailed description of how data was collected and the appropriateness of the data collection methods regarding the research questions and hypotheses. The data collection methods play a key role in answering the research question. Methods for recording or collecting data from the research participants are provided, including their suitability for the study. Data analysis techniques used in the study and their appropriateness based on the research question and objectives are also examined in the section. Since the research is qualitative, the section describes and justifies the methods used to analyse the qualitative data collected. The section discusses the tools used to analyse both data types and thoroughly examines the data analysis techniques to ensure the study can be replicated. Specifically, a detailed and justified description of the method used to analyse non-numeric data is provided, drawing on existing studies.

The chapter concludes with a summary of all the key issues discussed. The summary essentially summarises the main concepts discussed in the methodology chapter.

Research Approach and Design

The study employed a qualitative research method with an inductive research approach. Qualitative research uses non-numeric data to investigate a research issue in-

depth (Hennink et al., 2020). The research method is mainly concerned with interpreting subjective meanings, indicating that it is grounded in the tradition of interpretivism (Chowdhury, 2014). The understanding that people have different experiences that influence or shape how they view issues is integral in driving qualitative research's focus on subjective meanings (Ormston et al., 2014). For the current study, the researcher sought to understand the perspectives of the leaders of international schools. Since they were unlikely to have the same opinions and experiences, obtaining and examining their subjective experiences was necessary. The research method was thus meant to be geared towards obtaining the subjective meanings they derive from their experiences within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and its effect on international schools.

A quantitative research method would have made it difficult to obtain the subjective meanings that the leaders of international schools have made from their experiences and observations about how the COVID-19 epidemic has affected international schools. According to Queirós et al. (2017), quantitative studies focus on values and facts. This research method is unsuitable for exploring subjective meanings derived from experiences by members of the study population. As such, a qualitative research method was employed to examine leaders' perspectives regarding how COVID-19 has affected international schools because it was the most suitable research method for gaining insights into their views and experiences concerning the effects of the pandemic. The questions that qualitative studies ask focus mainly on three major issues:

- Language as a resource for exploring communication processes and interaction patterns within specific social groups.
- Description and explanation of subjective meanings ascribed to actions and situations.

- The development of new theories and concepts by discovering connections and patterns within non-numeric or qualitative data (Fossey et al., 2002).

The first area of language suggests that subjective meanings can be displayed through how people express themselves using language (Mills & Birks, 2014). In the present study, the language the leaders used to express themselves enabled the researcher to gain insights into their subjective experiences and the meanings from those experiences about the impact of the pandemic on international schools.

By examining the type of language used, the researcher was able to develop an understanding of what the leaders meant concerning how COVID-19 has impacted learning institutions and, specifically, international schools. The second area that qualitative research focuses on indicates that qualitative research methods examine the meanings individuals assign to specific situations and actions and interpret those meanings to gain insights into a research issue (Fossey et al., 2002). The researcher thus extensively examines how an individual describes and explains a particular action or situation to draw meanings from those descriptions and explanations (Aspers & Corte, 2019). In the present study, how leaders described and explained actions and situations based on their subjective experiences enabled the researcher to understand their perspectives on the impact of COVID-19 on international schools.

A quantitative study would have limited the extent to which those explanations and descriptions are obtained, given that the research method aims to create rules or law-like generalisations. Quantitative studies do not allow individuals to explain situations and actions in their way and based on their own experiences. Instead, the research method confines individuals to particular responses or options because it mainly centres on

creating rules and law-like generalisations. Using a qualitative research method was thus suitable for examining leaders' perspectives about how COVID-19 has impacted international schools since it identifies and examines subjective meanings that individuals derive from their experiences.

The third area that qualitative research focuses on is the development of theories. Given that COVID-19 is a relatively new phenomenon. There is minimal information in existing studies concerning how the pandemic has impacted international schools, so it was necessary to have a research method that enabled the development of new theories and concepts regarding how the pandemic has impacted international schools. The study employed a qualitative method to analyse non-numeric data, facilitating the identification of new patterns and connections. These patterns and connections were then used to develop new theories and concepts. In contrast, quantitative studies primarily focus on verifying existing theories and concepts, making this approach unsuitable for the current study. The qualitative research method was chosen for this study because there was limited information regarding the impact of COVID-19 on international schools and how their leaders perceive these effects.

Additionally, there was no existing theory or concept to test in relation to this topic. Therefore, the qualitative research method was the most appropriate choice for this study, allowing for exploring new ideas and insights (Park & Park, 2016).

Using a qualitative research method enabled the study to make important theoretical and conceptual contributions towards the development of knowledge concerning the impact of the pandemic on international schools from the perspective of leaders. For instance, Almonacid-Fierro et al. (2021), Ela et al. (2021), and Nolan and

Owen (2021) employ qualitative research methods to examine the impact of COVID-19 on various aspects of teaching and learning. The main reason for selecting the research method was the lack of knowledge concerning how the pandemic affected various teaching and learning aspects. Qualitative research aimed to develop new concepts and build theories regarding how the pandemic has affected teaching and learning. Similarly, the current research employed a qualitative method to investigate an issue with minimal information in existing studies.

Overall, qualitative studies are appropriate for answering 'how' and 'why' questions (Teherani et al., 2015). The current study sought to establish how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted international schools from the perspective of leaders. The research method was thus suitable for answering the 'how' aspect of the research topic to provide in-depth insights into how the pandemic has impacted international schools. A quantitative research method would not have supported answering such a research question because it focuses on facts and values that cannot be attained when different subjective experiences and meanings are involved in the perception of a phenomenon (Ryan, 2015). Human beings do not act in the same way as physical phenomena, implying that they can perceive the same issue differently based on various mediating factors such as social groupings, culture, and actual environment and thus make different meanings (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). Thus, the research method enabled the researcher to gain insights into leaders' perspectives without limiting their responses to particular options. A qualitative study was useful for understanding how different leaders perceive the impact of the pandemic.

The research problem was investigated using an inductive research approach in this study. This approach is consistent with qualitative studies as it involves searching for patterns of meaning in data to develop theories and concepts (Liu, 2016). Inductive research is appropriate for investigating research phenomena with limited or no existing knowledge (Lodico et al., 2010), as it explains observed patterns through generated hypotheses, thereby creating new knowledge. Inductive research is based on inductive reasoning, where general principles are developed from observations (Azungah, 2018). This approach involves broad generalisations from particular observations, moving from the specific to the general (Lodico et al., 2010). For example, if the few school leaders involved in the study share similar views or experiences, the study concludes that their views or experiences are representatives of those of the general population.

The research approach focuses on proving or disproving original assertions, meaning those assertions must already exist. The researcher assumes that the observed patterns of meaning apply to the general population of leaders within the context of international schools. The approach differs from deductive reasoning, where an individual moves from general observations to specific ones (Azungah, 2018). A deductive approach focuses on investigating a single issue by collecting many people's responses and determining the most common response that is ultimately used to make a specific conclusion (Zalaghi & Khazaei, 2016).

In the context of the current research, a deductive research approach was not appropriate because there were no original assertions to examine to draw specific conclusions on how COVID-19 has impacted international schools. Rather, the research was grounded on developing new insights into how COVID-19 has impacted international

schools from leaders' perspectives. COVID-19 has only existed for about two years, so there were barely enough research studies to draw specific conclusions concerning the pandemic's impact on international schools. The phenomenon and its impacts are still being studied. Thus an inductive research approach offered the most appropriate pathway for developing new insights into how it has impacted international schools. The research approach is thus often applied where there are no research hypotheses to test because the study's main objective is to build theories and develop new concepts (Goddard & Melville, 2004).

Due to the absence of hypotheses to be tested, the study is guided by research objectives. The researcher is never sure about the findings to be made until the study is completed, an issue that makes such a study different from quantitative studies, where the outcomes are already predicted at the start of the research through the hypotheses presented (Lodico et al., 2010). As was the case in the current research, there were no hypotheses to be tested. Instead, the research was guided by research objectives. Using an inductive approach was thus consistent with the study's primary aim, centred on developing new insights into how COVID-19 has impacted international schools from the perspective of leaders.

An inductive research approach is a bottom-up approach to gaining knowledge or insights into a research issue, as shown in Figure 2 below.

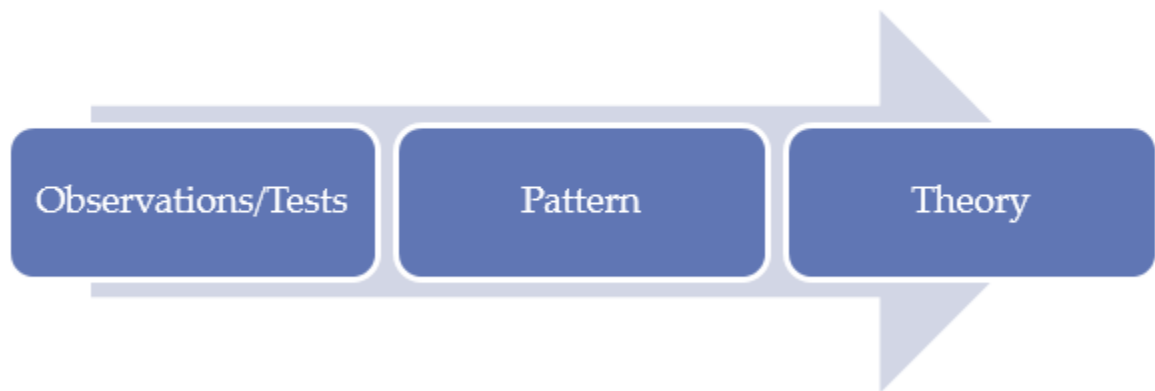


Figure 3.1 Knowledge Development in Inductive Research (Lodico et al., 2010)

As shown in Figure 3.1, the research makes observations to identify patterns of meanings from those observations. In this case, the term ‘observation’ focuses on how the researcher views the responses provided by the research participants, who were leaders within the context of international schools. The leaders shared their views, experiences, and the meanings that they made from those views and experiences. On the other hand, the researcher examined the responses and subjective meanings contained in those responses to conclude what they meant and implied. The conclusions were then used to develop new concepts and theories concerning the impact of COVID-19 on international schools. Since the theories developed through inductive research approaches are new, the theories have to be tested using new studies to develop law-like generalisations (Khan, 2014). The implication is that an inductive research approach provides a basis for examining a research phenomenon further to establish the truth about the conclusions drawn. The research approach thus enabled the study to develop new concepts and theories concerning how COVID-19 has impacted international schools.

The findings provide a basis for further investigating how the pandemic has impacted international schools.

The research approach uses exploratory data analysis to aid the process of identifying patterns of meaning and theory development (Dudovskiy, 2014). Since the researcher does not know the conclusions the study will arrive at, an exploratory data analysis supports the development of concepts and knowledge that provide new insights into the issue being investigated. Narrative description and constant comparison of individual responses enable the researcher to develop new insights from the patterns of meanings identified in the subjective experiences and meanings shared by the research participants (Jebb et al., 2017). Exploratory data analysis was crucial in the current study because of the need to provide new insights into COVID-19 was affecting international schools. Therefore, an inductive research approach was the most appropriate for investigating the research problem.

For the research design an exploratory research design was employed in the study. The research design is consistent with the qualitative and inductive research methods because it centres on developing new theories and concepts concerning a research phenomenon (Swanson & MHR, 2015). An exploratory research design examines an unclear problem (Swedberg, 2020). The research topic is key in influencing the research design (Swanson & MHR, 2015). In the current research, the study sought to examine the impact of COVID-19 on international schools from the perspective of leaders. The research topic is significantly general because it does not aim to investigate a particular impact of COVID-19. Instead, it seeks to discover those impacts, indicating many unknowns concerning the pandemic's impact on international schools. The

research design accords the researcher's flexibility to gain new insights into a research issue (Ponelis, 2015). As the name suggests, it is exploratory, meaning the researcher can always discover something new or unexpected.

The research design utilised in this study allows for discovering various options or alternatives that can be further investigated to establish their veracity (Swedberg, 2020). While the design may lack the rigour typically associated with conclusive studies, it still plays a critical role in developing knowledge by serving as the initial step in establishing facts or truths about a particular issue (Dudovskiy, 2014). Therefore, the qualitative information generated through an exploratory research design is crucial in understanding a research phenomenon. The need to gain new insights into how COVID-19 has affected international schools was a significant reason for choosing this research design. As the literature review highlights, only a few studies have explored or provided insights into how COVID-19 has impacted international schools.

Most existing studies have focused on teaching and learning without paying specific attention to international schools. International schools are only a section of the education system, and most studies have focused on primary, secondary, or tertiary education in general when examining the impact of COVID-19 on teaching and learning. The researcher did not, therefore, have adequate information that could function as a foundation for the current research. The most suitable design choice was thus an exploratory research design to enable the researcher to develop new insights and concepts regarding the research problem. The lack of existing information was the key determinant of the design selection since exploratory studies examine new problems that have not been studied extensively in existing research.

The research design made it possible to develop a new understanding of how the pandemic has impacted international schools specifically. Therefore, the research design was the most suitable for achieving the study's primary aim. Future studies can use the concepts and theories developed through this research to understand better how the pandemic has impacted international schools.

The research method, approach, and design are all interconnected. The qualitative research method focuses on identifying patterns of meaning within non-numeric data. The method is suitable for research studies seeking new insights into a research issue because it enables the researcher to answer the 'how' and 'why' aspects of a research problem. A qualitative research method was selected over a quantitative method because of the need to generate new insights into the problem being studied. Quantitative studies focus on proving theories or concepts, something that the current research did not seek to do. The study also used an inductive research approach often associated with qualitative research.

The research approach utilised in this study supports the development of new insights into the research problem by relying on research objectives rather than hypotheses to guide the research process. The inductive approach was employed to obtain patterns of meaning from the qualitative data collected, allowing for the development of theories and new insights regarding how COVID-19 has impacted international schools.

The research approach was deemed appropriate due to the minimal knowledge of the pandemic's impact on international schools in existing studies. Additionally, the study employed an exploratory research design, which, as the name suggests, focuses on

exploring patterns of meaning and developing new knowledge that can be further examined to create law-like generalisations.

The scarcity of concepts and theories related to the impact of COVID-19 on international schools necessitated the use of an appropriate research design to address this gap. The exploratory research design effectively examines phenomena with limited knowledge or understanding (Dudovskiy, 2020). In this case, an exploratory research design was deemed the most suitable due to its ability to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research phenomenon (Saunders et al., 2018).

As the name implies, the primary focus of exploratory research design is to explore a research problem and obtain a deep understanding of the research phenomenon (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The design is not used to test specific hypotheses or theories. Instead, it aims to discover and develop new insights and concepts regarding a phenomenon (Saunders et al., 2018).

In this study, the research problem involved the impact of COVID-19 on international schools. This area has not received adequate attention in the existing literature. Therefore, the exploratory research design was deemed appropriate as it allowed for identifying and exploring various aspects of the research phenomenon without preconceived notions or biases.

Moreover, the exploratory research design enabled the researcher to generate new insights and develop new concepts that can be examined further in future research (Dudovskiy, 2020). As such, this design was ideal for this study as it provided an opportunity to examine the impact of COVID-19 on international schools and develop new insights into the phenomenon.

Therefore, an exploratory research design was deemed appropriate for this study due to its ability to explore the research problem comprehensively and develop new insights and concepts. The lack of concepts and theories in existing studies regarding the impact of COVID-19 on international schools also justified the use of this design.

Population and Sample of the Research Study

The primary objective of the research was to determine how international schools have been affected by COVID-19, with a specific focus on the viewpoints of their leaders. The study centred on the perspectives of leaders operating in the context of international schools, with the target population of these leaders. Since the findings are meant to be based on how leaders viewed the impact of the pandemic on international schools, the researcher sought to examine the views, opinions, and experiences of individuals in leadership positions within the context of international schools using selective sampling. People who were not in leadership positions would not have provided insights into the impact of the pandemic from the perspective of individuals charged with providing leadership and guidance during the pandemic.

Since this study was exploratory, the researcher wanted a general overview of how COVID-19 has impacted international schools globally. The research topic and the objectives of the research thus played a key role in determining the target population. The population, however, consisted of school leaders in international schools in Qatar, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Russia, China, Egypt, South Africa, France, Mexico, and the United States of America (USA). The countries that the study focused on enabled the researcher to gain insights into how the pandemic has impacted international schools across the globe.

Understanding International Schools and their Unique Context

International schools are educational institutions that offer a curriculum different from the host country's national curriculum and are mainly designed for the children of the international community (Bunnell et al., 2016). They typically provide education in an international environment, often using an international curriculum, and promote international mindedness among students. These institutions cater to a diverse population of students, which can include children of expatriate families, foreign embassy personnel, international business people, as well as local families who desire an international education for their children (Bunnell et al., 2016).

In the last few decades there has been an exponential growth in the number of international schools globally. This is due to globalisation, increased mobility of the workforce, and the growing appreciation for international education (International School Consultancy, 2021). According to the International School Consultancy (2021), there were more than 10,000 international schools worldwide, with over 5.6 million students enrolled.

The curriculum for these schools can range from country-specific (like American or British) to truly international like the International Baccalaureate (IB), Cambridge International, or Edexcel. These international curriculums are recognised globally and provide students with flexibility and mobility, ensuring their educational continuity regardless of their location (International School Consultancy, 2021).

International schools exist in a unique space where they are influenced by the educational policies and culture of both their host country and the country or countries their curriculum originates from. This duality often positions these schools as a bridge

between cultures, fostering an environment of global understanding and mutual respect (Bunnell et al., 2016). However, it also presents unique challenges for international school leaders, particularly in times of crisis (International School Consultancy, 2021).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, international schools faced a complex set of challenges. They had to navigate not only the public health crisis and its impact on their school community, but also shifting governmental policies, logistical constraints, and the divergent expectations of their diverse stakeholders (International School Consultancy, 2021). This crisis highlighted the need for effective crisis management strategies and underscored the importance of preparedness for future emergencies (International School Consultancy, 2021).

Qatar

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the education sector worldwide, including international schools in Qatar. One significant impact of the pandemic on international schools in Qatar has been the shift to online learning. In March 2020, the government mandated the closure of all educational institutions, including international schools (Pérez-López et al., 2022). As a result, schools had to quickly transition to online learning to ensure continuity in education (Al-Maliky et al., 2021). The shift to online learning was a significant challenge for some schools, particularly those with limited technological resources and infrastructure. However, schools already invested in e-learning platforms were better equipped to adapt to the new situation.

Another impact of the pandemic has been the cancellation of extracurricular activities, field trips, and other events essential to the school experience. These activities allowed students to socialise, develop new skills, and participate in community service.

Cancelling these activities has been challenging for students, particularly those looking forward to participating in them (Al-Maliky et al., 2021).

The pandemic has also affected the mental health and well-being of students, teachers, and staff in international schools in Qatar. The shift to online learning has been particularly challenging for students, leading to feelings of isolation and disconnection from their peers and teachers. Teachers and staff have also had to adapt to new working conditions, which have been stressful and demanding (Al-Maliky et al., 2021).

To mitigate the impact of COVID-19, international schools in Qatar have implemented several measures. These measures include providing training and support to teachers on delivering online learning effectively, implementing strict health and safety protocols, and providing mental health support to students, teachers, and staff (Al-Maliky et al., 2021).

One significant measure taken by schools has been to invest in technology and infrastructure to support online learning. Schools have also provided laptops and other devices to students who do not have access to them at home (Al-Maliky et al., 2021). In addition, schools have introduced hybrid learning models that combine online and in-person learning to ensure that students receive a quality education while maintaining social distancing. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on international schools in Qatar. While schools have had to adapt to new regulations and guidelines, shift to online learning, and cancel extracurricular activities, they have taken measures to mitigate the impact of the pandemic. These measures have helped to ensure that students receive a quality education and maintain their physical and mental well-being.

Bahrain

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the education sector worldwide, including international schools in Bahrain (Al-Sabbagh, 2021). The closure of educational institutions mandated by the government has resulted in a shift to online learning for international schools (Al-Sabbagh, 2021). While this has been challenging for some schools, those already invested in e-learning platforms were better equipped to adapt to the new situation (Al-Sabbagh, 2021).

The pandemic has also resulted in the cancellation of extracurricular activities, field trips, and other events that were an essential part of the school experience (Eduvation, 2020). These activities allowed students to socialise, develop new skills, and participate in community service (Eduvation, 2020). Cancelling these activities has negatively impacted students, particularly those looking forward to participating in them (Eduvation, 2020).

The pandemic has also impacted the mental health and well-being of students, teachers, and staff in international schools in Bahrain (Al-Sabbagh, 2021). The shift to online learning has led to isolation and disconnection from their peers and teachers (Al-Sabbagh, 2021). Teachers and staff have also had to adapt to new working conditions, which have been stressful and demanding (Eduvation, 2020).

To mitigate the impact of COVID-19, international schools in Bahrain have implemented several measures. These measures include providing training and support to teachers on how to deliver online learning effectively, implementing strict health and safety protocols, and providing mental health support to students, teachers, and staff (Al-Sabbagh, 2021; Eduvation, 2020).

Schools implemented various strategies to facilitate remote learning amidst the pandemic. For instance, they have significantly invested in technology and infrastructure to support online learning (Al-Sabbagh, 2021). Additionally, schools have distributed laptops and other devices to students who lack access to them at home (Eduvation, 2020). Furthermore, schools have adopted hybrid learning approaches that blend online and in-person learning to ensure students receive a quality education while adhering to social distancing guidelines (Eduvation, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on international schools in Bahrain. While schools have had to adapt to new regulations and guidelines, shift to online learning, and cancel extracurricular activities, they have taken measures to mitigate the impact of the pandemic.

United Arab Emirates

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted international schools in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The pandemic has disrupted education globally, and the UAE is no exception. This article will examine the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on international schools in the UAE and the measures taken to mitigate its effects.

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced international schools in the UAE to adapt to new teaching and learning methods. Many schools have shifted to online learning, which has presented challenges for students, teachers, and parents. The shift to online learning has required schools to invest in technology and training to ensure students receive a quality education. Additionally, online learning has affected students' social and emotional development, as they have limited opportunities for face-to-face interaction with their peers and teachers.

The pandemic has also resulted in a decline in student enrolment in international schools in the UAE. According to a report by Consultancy-me.com, the number of students attending private schools in the UAE declined by 3% in the 2020-2021 academic year due to the pandemic (Consultancy-me.com, 2021). This enrolment decline has resulted in financial challenges for schools, as they rely heavily on tuition fees.

To mitigate the impact of the pandemic on international schools in the UAE, the government has taken several measures. The UAE government has provided financial support to schools, including fee waivers and rent reductions for school premises. The government has also implemented measures to ensure the safety of students, teachers, and staff, such as mandatory temperature checks, social distancing, and the use of face masks in schools.

International schools in the UAE have also implemented measures to ensure the continuity of education. Schools have introduced hybrid learning models, combining online and face-to-face learning, to ensure students receive a quality education. Additionally, schools have supported students and parents in addressing their concerns and providing guidance on navigating the challenges posed by the pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted international schools in the UAE. Schools have had to adapt to new teaching and learning methods, deal with a decline in enrolment, and face financial challenges. However, the UAE government has taken measures to support schools, and schools have implemented measures to ensure the continuity of education. The pandemic has highlighted the importance of flexibility and adaptability in education. International schools in the UAE have demonstrated their resilience in responding to the challenges posed by the pandemic.

Russia

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced international schools in Russia to implement remote learning programs to comply with government regulations and protect students, teachers, and staff from the virus (Kusnetsova, 2020). The transition to remote learning has been challenging for many schools, requiring adapting to new technologies and teaching methods (Solovyova, 2020). International schools in Russia have also faced financial difficulties due to the pandemic's economic impact, as some families have been unable to pay tuition fees (Fessenden, 2020).

Moreover, international schools in Russia have had to address the mental health of their students, who have been affected by the pandemic's disruption to their social and academic lives. For example, the British International School in Moscow has implemented a well-being program to support students' mental health during the pandemic (Newsletter, 2020). The program includes regular check-ins with students, counselling services, and virtual activities to promote social interaction and maintain a sense of community.

International schools in Russia have also implemented measures to maintain the quality of education despite the pandemic's disruptions. For instance, the International School of Moscow has introduced a hybrid learning model combining in-person and remote learning to ensure students receive a comprehensive education (The International School of Moscow, n.d.). The school has also provided additional training to its teachers to help them adapt to the new teaching environment.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on international schools in Russia. These schools have had to adapt to remote learning, financial difficulties, and the mental health of their students. However, international schools in Russia have

demonstrated resilience and innovation by implementing measures to maintain the quality of education and support their students' well-being.

China

The Chinese government responded rapidly to curb the spread of the virus by closing schools and universities in January 2020, which led to the adoption of online learning by international schools operating in the country (Zhang & Ma, 2020). The sudden shift to virtual teaching presented a significant challenge for schools, especially those with limited technological infrastructure and resources. However, schools already invested in e-learning platforms were better prepared to adapt to the new situation.

Moreover, the pandemic has resulted in the cancellation of extracurricular activities, field trips, and other events essential to the school experience. These activities offered students opportunities to socialise, develop new skills, and participate in community service. Their cancellation has adversely affected students, particularly those who looked forward to them (Wang et al., 2021).

The pandemic has also impacted the mental health and well-being of students, teachers, and staff in international schools operating in China. The shift to online learning has resulted in students, teachers, and staff feeling separated and disconnected from their usual social and academic support networks (Zhang & Ma, 2020). Teachers and staff have also had to adapt to new working conditions that have been stressful and demanding. A study by Liu et al. (2021) revealed that teachers in China reported high stress, anxiety, and burnout levels during the pandemic.

To mitigate the impact of COVID-19, international schools in China have implemented several measures, such as providing training and support to teachers on

effective online teaching, introducing strict health and safety protocols, and offering mental health support to students, teachers, and staff members (Wang et al., 2021; Zhang & Ma, 2020).

As a direct response to the pandemic, international schools in China enacted many new regulations to support remote learning. One of the many measures taken is funding and developing infrastructure and technology for online education. This has been one of the many initiatives taken (Zhang & Ma, 2020). In addition, schools have developed hybrid learning models, which combine traditional classroom instruction with online and other forms of instruction, to ensure that students receive a quality education while adhering to social distance regulations (Wang et al., 2021).

While schools have had to adapt to new regulations and guidelines, shift to online learning, and cancel extracurricular activities, they have taken measures to mitigate the impact of the pandemic. These measures have helped to ensure that students receive a quality education and maintain their physical and mental well-being. However, monitoring the situation and making necessary adjustments to support the education sector during and after the pandemic is essential.

Egypt

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on international schools in Egypt. With the implementation of lockdown measures and travel restrictions, international schools have had to adapt their teaching methods to provide online learning platforms to students. This transition to online learning has been challenging for teachers and students, with many schools struggling to provide a stable and effective online learning experience (Zakaria & Khalil, 2021).

Furthermore, the pandemic has resulted in declining enrolment rates in international schools in Egypt. The decrease in enrolment has led to financial difficulties for some international schools, with some struggling to stay afloat (El-Sherif, 2021). Due to health and safety concerns, families have been reluctant to send their children to school.

In addition, international schools in Egypt have had to comply with regulations implemented by the Egyptian government to ensure the safety of students and staff. These regulations include temperature checks, mask-wearing, and social distancing protocols (El-Sherif, 2021). Schools have had to invest in additional resources to implement these measures, which has added to the financial strain on some institutions.

Overall, the COVID-19 pandemic has presented significant challenges for international schools in Egypt. While some schools have been able to adapt and provide effective online learning, others have faced financial difficulties due to a decline in enrolment and increased expenses to comply with government regulations.

South Africa

The pandemic has caused disruptions in learning and teaching in South Africa, resulting in the closure of schools and a shift to online learning. According to a study by Heleta (2020), international schools in South Africa were closed for an extended period, with some schools switching to online learning to minimise the impact of the pandemic. The study further notes that online learning has presented challenges for teachers and students, with issues of access to technology and reliable internet connectivity affecting the quality of education delivered.

According to Kasiram and Bhana's (2020) research, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused students and staff in international schools in South Africa to experience anxiety, stress, and feelings of isolation and depression. Furthermore, the pandemic has affected the mental health and well-being of students and staff in international schools in South Africa. The study recommends that schools support students and staff through counselling services to help them cope with the pandemic's mental health challenges.

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted international schools in South Africa, with closures and a shift to online learning affecting the quality of education delivered. Additionally, the pandemic has affected students' and staff's mental health and well-being, requiring schools to provide counselling services to help them cope. Policymakers and education stakeholders must find ways to mitigate the effects of the pandemic on education systems to ensure that student's learning is not compromised.

Mexico

According to a study by the Mexican Association of International Schools, the pandemic has led to a decline in enrolment rates in these schools, with a decrease of up to 25% in some cases (Mendieta, 2021). The closure of schools due to the pandemic has also resulted in a shift towards online learning, with schools adapting quickly to this new mode of education delivery.

Furthermore, the pandemic has had a financial impact on international schools in Mexico, with many facing significant financial losses due to the decrease in enrolment rates and additional expenses associated with implementing safety measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 (Lopez-Ortega, 2020), which led to schools implementing cost-

cutting measures such as reducing staff, affecting the quality of education and support available to students.

United States of America

International schools in the United States of America serve expatriate families, diplomatic communities, and students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. According to the Institute of International Education, over 53,000 international students enrolled in K-12 schools in the United States in 2019 (Institute of International Education, 2021). However, the pandemic has disrupted the education of these students and posed unprecedented challenges for international schools.

One major impact of COVID-19 on international schools in the United States has been the shift to online and hybrid learning models. With social distancing measures in place, many schools have had to adopt remote learning or a combination of online and in-person classes to minimise the risk of infection. This has posed challenges for students who may struggle with technology or have limited access to the internet. For example, the International School of Boston had to quickly adapt to remote learning during the pandemic, with teachers and students using online platforms such as Zoom and Google Classroom (International School of Boston, 2021). However, this transition was not without its challenges, including technological issues and the need to modify teaching strategies for online instruction.

Another impact of COVID-19 on international schools in the United States has been the decline in enrolment due to travel restrictions and economic uncertainties. Many expatriate families and international students have returned to their home countries or opted for alternative educational options, creating financial challenges for some

international schools, which may rely on tuition revenue from international students to operate. For example, the International School of Minnesota reported declining enrolment from international families due to the pandemic (International School of Minnesota, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted international schools in the United States, affecting their teaching models, enrolment, and financial stability. As the pandemic continues, international schools must adapt and innovate to ensure the education and well-being of their diverse student populations.

France

According to a French Ministry of Education report, the pandemic particularly affected international schools due to the diverse student population and the need for international travel (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale de la Jeunesse et des Sports, 2021). The pandemic has also led to decreased enrolment in some schools as families have chosen to delay or cancel their plans to send their children abroad for education.

International schools in France have had to adapt quickly to the changing situation. For instance, the American School of Paris (ASP) transitioned to virtual learning during the pandemic, implementing a hybrid model that combined synchronous and asynchronous learning (American School of Paris, n.d.). The school also adopted strict health and safety protocols, including mandatory mask-wearing, social distancing, and frequent testing, to ensure the safety of its students and staff. Similarly, the International School of Paris (ISP) implemented a comprehensive health and safety plan that included temperature checks, frequent hand washing, and reduced class sizes (International School of Paris, n.d.).

The pandemic has also led to changes in extracurricular activities at international schools in France. For example, the British School of Paris (BSP) had to cancel its annual sports day due to restrictions on large gatherings (British School of Paris, n.d.). The school also shifted its performing arts program to a virtual platform to enable students to continue participating in drama and music activities.

Sample selection through purposive sampling

The participants were selected through purposive sampling. Data collection is an important aspect of research because the data or information collected is expected to support a better understanding of the issue being investigated (Etikan et al., 2016). The study sample selection should thus be guided by sound judgment because it contributes to gathering useful data for developing insights into the research problem (Etikan & Bala, 2017). In the current research, there was a need to have participants that understood how COVID-19 had impacted international schools. At the same time, the participants had to be leaders because the research focused on the perspective of leaders. The implication is that individuals who worked in international schools and understood the pandemic's impact would not have contributed to a better understanding of the research issue because there was a focus on what leaders believed and experienced regarding the impact of COVID-19.

The study sought to understand the issue from the point of view of persons charged with providing leadership, especially when the pandemic altered how teaching and learning occurred in schools. Leaders could provide better and more insightful information concerning the impact of the pandemic on international schools. Due to the primary objective of the research, purposive sampling was used to select the study participants.

The sampling technique is appropriate for selecting participants because of their qualities (Acharya et al., 2013). The technique is a non-random sampling method that does not require a given number of respondents or underlying theories (Etikan et al., 2016). In this sampling method, the researcher decides what needs to be known and finds the individuals that can provide the required information based on their experience, knowledge, or position. The sampling method contributed to the research's primary aim, which was to develop new concepts and theories concerning the impact of COVID-19 on international schools from the perspective of leaders.

Purposive sampling is often used in qualitative studies to identify and select data sources that offer in-depth insights into the research problem being investigated. For instance, Şahin et al. (2016) employ purposive sampling to examine potential mathematics educators' pedagogical content knowledge concerning fractions in the context of student mistakes. Since the focus of the research was on understanding the pedagogical content knowledge of potential mathematics educators, purposive sampling was used to select respondents that were prospective teachers of mathematics. Current teachers of mathematics would not have enabled the researcher to gain insights into the pedagogical content knowledge of potential mathematics educators. Additionally, other potential teachers other than those of mathematics would not have supported answering the research question.

Purposive sampling is also employed by Anif et al. (2019) to examine the effectiveness of pedagogical competence. Purposive sampling was used to select respondents that understood how to measure and improve teacher competence. The individuals selected to participate in the study included biology teachers, education

officers, principals, and the head of the agency that deals with educational quality assurance. The respondents had the experience and knowledge to provide insights into how teacher competence could be measured and developed. In the same way, the current research employed purposive sampling to select respondents in leadership positions with a more insightful understanding of how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted international schools.

The sampling technique was selected over convenience sampling, which does not focus on the qualities or attributes of individuals. Convenience sampling is often used when every member of the population can provide responses that can be used to understand a research issue (Etikan et al., 2016). In the current research, not everyone working in international schools could provide important insights into how the pandemic has impacted the institutions. Therefore, there was a need to ensure that those selected to participate in the study possessed knowledge and experience that could be examined to develop a deeper understanding of the impact of the pandemic on international schools. Purposive sampling was thus the most appropriate sampling technique for selecting the research participants.

The respondents included both men and women. However, gender was not an important characteristic to consider when selecting the research participants because the focus of the study was not on the perspectives of leaders of a particular gender. Furthermore, there was no deliberate action to ensure gender balance when selecting the research participants. Ultimately, the selected leaders' views, opinions, and experiences were relevant irrespective of gender. There was also no specific focus on age. The common practice is that leaders of organisations are people with work experience and

individuals with the necessary knowledge and skills to enable them to lead a team of professionals. The participants were thus bound to be individuals above the age of 25 years because of the experience factor.

The selection of individuals serving as current leaders of international schools was necessary to ensure that they clearly understood how the pandemic had impacted the learning institutions. The leaders had to be in the learning institutions' top management to ensure they had access to the required knowledge. The leaders selected were those still actively involved in leading international schools, not those who had retired. Individuals in junior leadership positions were thus not selected to participate in the research.

The research focused on different countries, so recruiting the participants through personal visits was impossible. The researcher employed technology in identifying and selecting the research participants. A simple internet search was used to identify international schools in Qatar, Bahrain, UAE, Russia, China, Egypt, South Africa, France, Mexico, and the USA. The school websites were used to obtain information contact information, that is, phone numbers and email addresses, that individuals can use to contact the school. The phone contacts and email addresses available on the websites were used to seek the contacts of the school leaders to request them to participate in the research.

Once contacts were obtained, the leaders were sent emails requesting them to participate in the research. The emails sent to the potential participants were standardised, meaning that all the potential participants received uniform communication. The email provided a brief overview of the research and what is expected to achieve. The

communication also explained to the potential respondents why their participation in the research was important and necessary. The recruitment goal was to select at least three respondents from each country. Out of the international schools (Ela et al., 2021) identified and contacted, positive responses were obtained from 34 schools. These were leaders at the top management levels at the learning institutions. Out of the 34 leaders who agreed to participate in the research, 4 were omitted from the list because they were unavailable during the interview. Eventually, the final sample consisted of 30 participants because saturation had been achieved. Additional respondents were unlikely to offer new insights or information into the issue being investigated.

The responses provided by the participants were examined to gain an understanding of how COVID-19 had impacted international schools. Patterns of meaning were identified from the responses provided to develop key concepts and theories concerning the impact of the pandemic on learning institutions. Related words and phrases were used to develop coding schemes to examine the research problem, as suggested by Clarke and Braun (2014). The coding schemes were influenced by the research questions to ensure that the research findings effectively answered the questions developed for the study. The coding schemes focused on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on international learning, leaders' perspectives on the positive inventions on international learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, policy changes required to facilitate international learning during and after the pandemic, and policy changes that have been made to secure staff and students' wellbeing during a time of crisis. The coding schemes were, therefore, geared towards ensuring that the research

findings were useful, especially to international schools seeking to overcome the negative effects of the pandemic on teaching and learning.

Since this was qualitative research, the validity and reliability of the instrument were not examined. There is no formula for determining validity and reliability in qualitative research. Instead, trustworthiness issues were addressed to ensure the research findings were credible.

In summary, the study population consisted of school leaders in international schools in Qatar, Bahrain, UAE, Russia, China, Egypt, South Africa, France, Mexico, and the US. Conversely, the sample consisted of senior-level leaders of international schools in Qatar, Bahrain, UAE, Russia, China, Egypt, South Africa, France, Mexico, and the US. A purposive sampling technique was used for participant selection in the research because of the particular qualities being sought. Recruitment of participants was carried out using email. The final study sample comprised 30 participants because saturation was attained after the responses provided by the 30th participant.

Materials and Instruments Used in Qualitative Research Data Collection

Interviews were used as a research instrument to collect data from the study participants. An interview guide was an appropriate tool for collecting data to ensure that the subjective meanings of the participants' experiences were captured (Kasper, 2015). The selection of the research instrument should often be guided by the aim of the study (Majid et al., 2017). In the current research, the study's main aim was to gain insights into leaders' perspectives concerning the impact of COVID-19 on international schools. The selection of the research instrument was thus meant to be guided by the need to collect data that could provide a deeper understanding of how the pandemic has impacted

international schools from the perspective of leaders. To achieve this aim, the research instrument selected had to enable the researcher to collect data that could provide insights into the issue being investigated. The research instrument should be tied to the research method, meaning that the tool used to collect data should be consistent with the research methodology employed (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). The study employed a qualitative research method to investigate the impact of the pandemic on international schools from the perspective of leaders, indicating that the data collected ought to be non-numeric or qualitative. Using interviews as a research instrument was thus consistent with the research methodology.

Interviews are usually associated with qualitative studies. Qualitative interviews provide rich and in-depth information that can be used to understand people's experiences (Dilshad & Latif, 2013). In the current research, qualitative interviews were necessary to gain insights into leaders' experiences within the context of the impact of COVID-19 on international schools. Since the leaders were selected from various schools and locations, it was important to collect data to enable them to share their unique experiences. The subjective meanings that the participants drew from those experiences could then be used to develop concepts and theories about how the pandemic has affected international schools.

The natural-based inquiry that forms the foundation of qualitative research emphasises the collection of information regarding the experiences of research participants and the subjective meanings that those participants derive from their experiences. The research instrument enables the researcher to essentially engage in the process of natural-based inquiry, understanding that people do not necessarily have

similar experiences and that how they make meanings from their experiences is mediated by several factors, such as culture and socialisation. Interviews enable research participants to express their views, opinions, and beliefs without being limited to the range of answers they can provide. Using interviews to collect data was integral in obtaining the different viewpoints of leaders of international schools.

Individual interviews were used in the study for various reasons. One of the key reasons is that the participants were located in different countries, making it difficult to conduct focus-group interviews. Focus group interviews can support the collection of credible qualitative data since the participants can question and check the claims made by other participants within the group (Alshenqeeti, 2014). Additionally, the group interviews can enable the researcher to uncover issues that had not been discovered (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013). Sharing and discussing ideas within focus group discussions can enhance the development of new concepts and theories concerning an issue being investigated (Adler et al., 2019). However, focus groups can also be difficult to manage, especially when the participants are highly opinionated. The interviewer will require the skills and competencies to control group discussions to ensure that only constructive and useful engagements occur (Guest et al., 2017).

Group interviews were not used primarily for this research because of logistical challenges. The different locations of the participants made it nearly impossible to conduct group discussions. At the same time, language challenges could have made it difficult to conduct group interviews. While the discussions could have been conducted in English, diction and cultural factors could have led to miscommunication, which could have ultimately hindered the realisation of the main objective of the discussions and the

research. Individual interviews were, therefore, the logical tool for collecting data because they enabled the researcher to interview the research participants individually without having to deal with the logistical challenges of getting them together to participate in group discussions. The individual interviews were also appropriate for obtaining the personal experiences, opinions, views, and subjective meanings drawn from those experiences (Morgan et al., 2016). The research instrument enabled the researcher to personally engage with the respondents in a way that motivated them to share deep insights into how the pandemic had impacted international schools. At a more personal level, the participants could engage freely and offer their views and experiences regarding the effects of the pandemic on international schools.

The research instrument was designed to ensure that the participants shared views and experiences relevant to the research aim. As a result, semi-structured interviews were used as the research instrument. In a semi-structured interview, the researcher or interviewer attempts to elicit information from the study participant by asking specific questions (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). While the interview usually has predetermined questions designed to support the collection of data that can be used to gain insights into the research issue being investigated, the interviews unfold in such a way that the participants have an opportunity to discuss issues that they feel are important to them and the issue being investigated (Paine, 2015). The unfolding of semi-structured interviews in a conversational manner is more pronounced when face-to-face interviews are used as research instruments. The researcher can read or observe the expressions and body language of the respondent in a manner that enables them to ask follow-up questions (Nguyen, 2015). However, the interviews can be designed to anticipate

responses and follow-up questions pre-determined. For instance, an interview question was designed to ask participants “how COVID-19 had impacted the financial positions of international schools”. The follow-up question focused on providing specific examples of how the negative impacts could be addressed.

A semi-structured interview ensured that the interview proceeded on the topic because of the need to collect data that could be used to understand how COVID-19 had impacted international schools. Without measures to ensure that responses were relevant to the research aim, the data collected could not have effectively answered the research questions developed for the study. A semi-structured interview is typically conducted with one participant at a time while employing a blend of open-ended and closed-ended questions (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). The questions are usually followed by how and why indicating they are appropriate for qualitative inquiries. Qualitative studies are appropriate for answering ‘why’ and ‘how’ questions in research (Hennink et al., 2020). A semi-structured interview (SSI) thus supports the answering of such questions. The data collection tool was consistent with the research method and supported the realisation of the research aim, which justified its selection.

An interview guide was used to obtain answers from the research participants. The guide enabled the researcher to have a structured plan for conducting the interview. Developing the interview guide was a critical aspect of the research process. Pre-existing knowledge about the topic being investigated is important when developing an interview guide that can lead to collecting data capable of providing insights into the research problem. In the current research, the literature review was an important part of the study because it enabled the researcher to develop useful knowledge concerning how COVID-

19 has impacted the education system and the world. The review also revealed the research gap and informed the researcher about the important issues that should be examined during the study.

Apart from the literature review findings, local and international news concerning the pandemic provided important insights into how COVID-19 has impacted the education system. Pre-existing knowledge thus played an integral role in developing the interview guide. The utilisation of pre-existing knowledge in developing an interview guide when conducting a qualitative study was informed by the research findings conducted by Zander et al. (2015), who stated that it was imperative to use pre-existing knowledge, previous findings and existing literature to develop an interview guide. A similar claim was made by McIntosh and Morse (2015), who stated that the construction of an interview guide should be informed by existing knowledge concerning the issue being investigated. Using existing knowledge to develop an interview guide ensures that the research findings can fill the research gap and provide new concepts and theories about the research topic. The method ensures that the questions developed for the interview can provide a new understanding of the issue that is being investigated.

The study by Smulowitz (2017) offers insights into developing a suitable interview guide that can support the collection of qualitative data that enables the realisation of the research aim. The author notes that in a semi-structured interview, the interviewer should be flexible with the interview to enable the research participants to expand on their initial responses. The researcher adopted this strategy and designed an interview guide that allowed the study respondents to provide further explanations for their initial responses. On the other hand, the specific structure of the guide was informed by existing studies on

how to develop an interview guide effectively. The interview guide developed did not, therefore, restrict the participants to certain responses. Instead, it allowed them to engage in discussions aligned with the research aim while sharing insights the researcher did not anticipate. The approach allowed for the inclusion of rich data into the study.

Interview Questions

The interview began with a general question to set the tone for the engagement. Each respondent was asked about the duration that they had been in their current positions and whether they thought life would ever go back to normal following the impact of COVID-19 on the world.

The first question in the interview guide sought to establish whether the international school had local and international students. The question aimed to determine why a particular school was referred to as an international school. There was a need to ask this question because international schools can have both local and international students. On the other hand, schools can also be referred to as international schools because they use the education system of a foreign country. For instance, some schools in the Middle East use the British education system. The schools are thus referred to as international schools because they offer a foreign curriculum. Responses to this question also provided insights into how COVID-19 could have impacted a school with international students.

Given the travel restrictions that countries have put in place to contain the spread of the coronavirus, an international school with international students is likely to experience physical learning challenges if international students cannot travel into the country. As determined earlier, a country such as Russia implemented travel restrictions

in the wake of COVID-19. This issue made it difficult for international students to travel into the country. This suggests that international schools in the country have had to develop measures to address the challenges faced by international students who cannot travel into a country due to travel bans and restrictions. The question was also selected as a first question because it was simple and thus eased the respondent into the interview.

The second question sought to establish how COVID-19 has impacted teaching and learning. The question was informed by pre-existing knowledge of how the pandemic has generally affected teaching and learning. The school calendars of most countries have been affected because many governments initially restricted physical learning since physical interactions contributed to the spread of COVID-19. Social distancing is one of the key measures introduced by states to curb the spread of the disease. The need to socially distance has meant that physical learning is untenable. While children may face significantly lower risks of COVID-19 complications compared to adults, they can still transmit the disease.

Additionally, teachers faced higher risks of the adverse effects of the disease. The decision by most governments to restrict learning in physical classrooms was thus informed by the need to protect both teachers and parents since students can transmit the disease to their parents. The question, therefore, aimed to establish how the pandemic had impacted learning and teaching in international schools. The question also sought to determine how school leaders had dealt with the impact to ensure the continuity of teaching and learning.

The question was followed up by an inquiry into the challenges schools face to ensure that teaching and learning continue amidst the pandemic. The follow-up question

was important for gaining insights into the importance of management and leadership when the pandemic has caused a crisis in the education sector. The question was also vital for identifying the specific measures schools implemented to support teaching and learning during the pandemic. Additionally, the inquiry was important for determining the extent to which the efforts by international schools to address the challenges presented by the pandemic were limited. In this regard, the researcher sought to determine the external and internal factors that made it difficult for the leaders of international schools to address the teaching and learning challenges presented by the pandemic.

The third question asked about other impacts of the pandemic on international schools other than on teaching and learning. The question was framed in this manner to ensure that it did not limit the participants from sharing what they believed to be the impacts of the pandemic. The researcher hoped that framing the question would enable participants to provide new insights into the extent to which COVID-19 had impacted international schools. The literature review showed that the pandemic had negatively affected school finances. The researcher thus developed the question to allow the school leaders to share information on how the pandemic has impacted the revenue generation of international schools, given that teaching and learning have been interrupted due to the public health crisis created by COVID-19.

The question was also developed to enable the participants to offer insights into the effects of the crisis on the welfare of both students and the teaching staff. Due to factors such as government lockdowns and travel restrictions, the global economy has been negatively affected, the process resulting in economic hardships and associated mental health challenges. The researcher thus aimed to establish whether students and

the teaching staff had also experienced mental health problems because of the pandemic. The assumption was that since the participants were leaders, they would likely have insights into how COVID-19 had led to mental health challenges in international schools.

The framing of the question also justifies the selection of leaders as research participants. Individuals not in leadership positions were likely to have limited knowledge of how the pandemic had impacted international schools because some of the important information concerning these impacts could only be accessed by leaders. The framing of the question was also important to ensure that the researcher did not direct the research participants on what they could or could not identify as the impact of the pandemic. In other words, the researcher framed the question in such a way that it did not influence the participants to share only information that seemed to support the preconceived beliefs of the researcher.

The next question centred on what the participants believed to be the best way of addressing the negative impacts identified. The question was developed to enable the study to provide results that international schools could use to overcome some of the challenges they have encountered due to the pandemic. The study findings could only be important to policymakers and school leaders if they offered a way to deal with the pandemic's negative effects. As leaders, the research participants had views that could provide a deeper understanding of how the challenges caused by the pandemic could be addressed.

The participants were also asked how international schools could better prepare themselves to deal with similar problems caused by COVID-19 in the education sector. The question aimed to understand whether international schools had learned from their

experiences and how they intended to apply those lessons to mitigate the negative effects of public health crises.

The final section of the interview guide asked the participants to share any additional information they had concerning COVID-19 and how it had impacted international schools. The inclusion of this part was necessary to ensure that the participants could share more thoughts, views, and opinions regarding how the pandemic had impacted international schools. The assumption was that as leaders, they had a clear view of the situation and could provide useful information regarding how the pandemic had impacted COVID-19. The belief also informed the section by the researcher that the initial interview questions could have omitted or overlooked some important issues relevant to the research. Since the interview questions were developed based on pre-existing knowledge and the literature review findings, there might have been information that the researcher was unaware of and was not revealed in the literature review. The final part of the interview that asked for additional information was thus based on the need to gain new insights into the impact of the pandemic on international schools.

Overall, the interview guide was designed to enable participants to share information concerning the impact of COVID-19 on international schools in a manner that supported knowledge discovery. The questions were not formulated to lead the respondents to provide certain answers but to allow them to independently share the subjective meanings they have derived from their experiences in the workplace. The design of the questions was further influenced by the need to ensure that the researcher's biases did not influence the types of responses shared by the participants.

Study Procedures and Ethical Assurances

The study received approval from UREC prior to data collection. The approval was granted after the researcher submitted information concerning data collection and sampling to the panel. The information submitted for ethics approval detailed the participants that would be involved in the research, how they would be identified and selected, the type of data that would be obtained from those participants, and the methods that would be employed to obtain this data as well as the measures put in place to ensure that ethical issues are addressed.

UREC was satisfied that the study adhered to the established ethics guidelines, affirming that the researcher had taken the appropriate steps for ethical assurances. Ethical approval was important to ensure the research was conducted within the established ethical guidelines for studies involving human participants. Several ethical issues often emerge when data is collected directly from human participants (Roberts, 2015). In the current research, data was obtained from leaders within the context of international schools. Therefore, there was a need to take measures that would ensure that the research was conducted ethically.

Data collection presented an ethical issue because it threatened the anonymity of the research participants and a breach of confidentiality about confidential information shared. Confidentiality is often used interchangeably with anonymity. Even though the two terms are closely related, they mean different things. Confidentiality refers to a situation where the researcher knows the participant's identity. Still, steps are taken to protect this identity and the private information shared by the respondent (Lancaster, 2017). In the current research, the identity of each study participant was known to the

researcher because the researcher personally selected them to participate in the study. Furthermore, interviews were conducted via virtual meetings, meaning the researcher could see the participants. There was a need, therefore, to put in place measures to safeguard the identity of the participants.

Anonymity, on the other hand, refers to a situation where the identities of research participants are not known to third parties (Snyder, 2016). Anonymity can be achieved through the measures taken to maintain confidentiality. By keeping personal information private and confidential, the researcher ensures that the study participants remain anonymous to third parties that should not have access to information concerning their specific responses during the interview (Novak, 2014). Both confidentiality and anonymity were thus key concerns during the study.

The data for the research was gathered from school leaders operating in international schools. The study sample comprised senior-level leaders from international schools in Qatar, Bahrain, UAE, Russia, China, Egypt, South Africa, France, Mexico, and the USA. Due to the geographical distances between the researcher and the study participants, data were collected via virtual interviews. The data collection entailed asking respondents questions about the research topic and allowing them to share their views and opinions without directing them to the specific answers provided. The data collection method meant that participants had an opportunity to share honest views concerning the impact of the pandemic on international schools. Some of these views were likely to be considered an attack on the system or an institution, which made it important to ensure that the respondents remained anonymous.

Each interview lasted about 45 minutes, indicating that the participants had adequate time to share much information concerning how the pandemic had impacted international schools and what, in their view, they believed to be the best strategies for dealing with the challenges presented by the pandemic. The researcher mainly guided the direction of the interview. At the same time, the participants shared the subjective meanings they had derived from their experiences.

The interview discussions were audio-recorded before being transcribed. Third parties could identify the participants through their voices and the personal information they shared at the start and during the interview. Audio-recording the interviews was necessary because the researcher could have omitted some important information shared during the interview if the information shared by the research participants had been written simultaneously. The researcher could have focused more on writing down what was shared than listening to and engaging the research participants. Audio-recording data meant that the voices of the research participants and the raw information shared were all captured. The data collection procedure thus made it necessary to take appropriate steps to ensure that anonymity was safeguarded during the study.

Confidentiality was ensured by storing the audio files in a password-protected folder on the researcher's personal computer, as suggested by Skinner (2014). The strategy ensured that only the researcher could access the audio files. Immediately after the audio files were transcribed, they were destroyed to mitigate the risk of third parties accessing information that could be used to identify the research participants. On the other hand, anonymity was ensured by referring to participants using numbers in the transcribed data instead of their actual names. The approach ensured that it was

impossible to establish the identity of the participants using the information provided in the data analysis. The researcher also avoided referring to the participants using their actual names during the interview even though the interviewer already possessed this information, as suggested by Vainio (2013) concerning anonymity in qualitative studies. This step was considered a precautionary measure for ensuring that the anonymity of participants was safeguarded if a third party somehow accessed the audio files. Safeguarding the anonymity of the participants was generally vital for ensuring that the respondents shared information that was important to the study without the fear of victimisation by their superiors.

Most of the participants were at ease sharing information about the challenges that their schools faced with COVID-19 and the measures that had been put in place to deal with those challenges because they understood that they would remain anonymous in terms of the information that they had shared and thus risked no backlash from stakeholders that might have felt that some information shared was inaccurate or unnecessary. The researcher thus had to act this assurance and ensure that the information shared and published could not reveal the participants' identities. Avoiding referring to participants using their names during the interview and assigning numbers instead of using participants' names in the transcribed data were important steps for ensuring that anonymity was maintained.

The anonymisation of data was crucial during the data analysis stage because it enabled the researcher to share direct quotes from the responses provided by the participants without revealing their identities. The sharing of direct quotes in qualitative research is a criterion for trustworthiness known as confirmability (Pandey, 2016).

Individuals reading the research findings need to be certain that the information provided during data analysis is not merely the subjective view of the researcher but an interpretation and analysis of the subjective meanings that the research participants derived from their experiences (Dennis, 2013).

Confirmability enhances confidence that the study findings are based on the words and narratives of the participants as opposed to the researcher's biases (Chowdhury, 2015). Therefore, during data analysis, the researcher used direct quotes of the words and narratives shared by the research participants to enhance trustworthiness without revealing the actual identities of the participants that shared those words and narratives. While quoting the respondents, the researcher referred to them as 'Participant 1', 'Participant 2', and so on instead of referring to the participants using their real names when quoting their responses. The strategy enabled the researcher to anonymise data and ensure that the respondents remained anonymous even as their narratives and words were quoted directly in the study.

Data anonymisation was also ensured by amending direct quotes to prevent third parties from identifying the research participants through references that could only be attributed to them. For instance, when a leader referred to their school by name during the interview or made a specific reference, the researcher anonymised such references in the transcribed data and direct quotes using generalisations. By generalising some statements, the researcher ensured that third parties could not connect information and establish the identity of a particular respondent.

Confidentiality and anonymity were key concerns during the research because of the procedures employed in data collection. Maintaining confidentiality was important to

protect the study participants identity and the respondents' private information. Confidentiality was maintained by storing audio files and transcribed data in password-protected folders on the researcher's computer. Personal information shared was also kept confidential by destroying the audio files immediately after they had been transcribed.

On the other hand, anonymity was ensured by referring to participants using numbers in the transcribed data instead of their actual names. The approach ensured that it was impossible to establish the identity of the participants using the information provided in the data analysis. The researcher also avoided referring to the participants using their actual names during the interview, even though the interviewer already possessed this information to avoid revealing the true identity of the participants to third parties. Finally, the researcher generalised some information during data analysis to ensure that readers could not decipher the responses provided by the research participants to establish their identity.

Ethical Assurances

Specific categories of ethical issues in the research were addressed during the study to ensure that the research was conducted within the confines of research ethics.

Protection from Harm

There is often a need to protect research participants from harm, both direct and indirect, and physical and mental (Chowdhury, 2015). The data collection method meant that there was minimal risk of direct physical harm to the participants. The data collection method entailed interviews that enabled the researcher to converse with each participant. Additionally, the interviews were held via virtual meetings, a factor that further minimised

the risk of physical harm to the participants since they took part in the research in a physical environment that was convenient and with which they were familiar. Still, there was a need to protect the participants from mental harm. The steps are taken to preserve confidentiality and ensure anonymity played an integral role in protecting the participants from mental harm resulting from criticism due to their views and opinions during the study.

The participants were allowed to freely share their views on how the pandemic had impacted international schools. The data collection method meant that some of the honest views and concerns shared by the participants regarding how the pandemic had been handled could offend their employers and colleagues and damage their relationships at the workplace, ultimately leading to work-related stress. The decision to preserve confidentiality and ensure anonymity thus played a crucial role in protecting the participants from mental harm. The researcher ensured that the information shared could not be traced back to them and used to victimize them in the workplace or cause the loss of employment.

Mental harm was a significant ethical issue, especially considering that many institutions, including governments, have struggled to find the best way to deal with the pandemic. Criticism of their handling of the pandemic, deemed unfair, can result in mental harm through victimisation of the participants in their places of work. Confidentiality preservation measures and the steps to ensure anonymity ensured the participants were safeguarded from mental harm.

Informed Consent

Informed consent is an integral aspect of research ethics. This ethical assurance intends that individuals taking part in a study take part voluntarily, having been made

aware of their rights during the research process and the implications of their participation in the study (Cohen et al., 2013). In other words, research participants should be fully aware of why they are taking part in a particular study and the type of study in which they would be taking part. Before accepting to participate in the study, the researcher explained to each potential participant in detail what the research was about and what it aimed to achieve. The researcher ensured that the participants were made aware of the type of study being conducted and why their participation was required (Rogers & Ludhra, 2013).

The participants were informed that the study sought to examine the impact of COVID-19 on international schools from the perspective of international school leaders. The study required obtaining the views and experiences of leaders because they had been involved in making decisions relating to dealing with the pandemic and had insights into how the pandemic had impacted their institutions. The participants were also informed about how their share information would be utilised. The briefing also informed the participants about their rights during and after the study. Once the potential respondents shared all of this information, the leaders who were eventually selected to participate in the research were provided with consent forms to read and sign. The consent form is in APPENDIX 2, and it details the rights of the research participants and their role in the study.

The form also provides information concerning how data would be treated once obtained from the participants. Since the researcher and participants did not meet physically, consent forms were sent via email. The participants were requested to read, sign, and send the signed and scanned copy to the researcher. Only participants who

sign consent forms are permitted to participate in a study (Wallace & Sheldon, 2015). In the case of the current research, no selected respondent refused to sign the consent form. Informed consent was necessary to protect the researcher's and the study's integrity. No participant could then turn around and claim they were misled to participate in the study when they read and signed the consent form (Williams et al., 2017). Informed consent was thus a key ethical assurance element implemented to ensure that the study was conducted with the full knowledge and awareness of the participants regarding what the research entailed.

Right to Privacy

Informed consent rests on the foundation that the participant's right to privacy will be maintained. The consent form states that participants' right to privacy shall be maintained, indicating that the researcher must ensure that participants' privacy is not breached. Privacy refers to the prerogative of individuals to control access to themselves. Research participants have the right to reveal information about themselves only to the extent that they are comfortable with revealing such information (Macnish, 2020). The researcher cannot force respondents in a study involving human participants to reveal certain information about themselves if they are uncomfortable sharing such information (Chen et al., 2018). Participants may also require privacy about not being identified as participants in a given study (Brooks et al., 2014). Confidentiality measures and data anonymisation ensured the right to privacy in this regard.

The identity of participants could easily have been established, and their right to privacy breached if outside parties had access to audio files that revealed their voices and, thus, identity. As previously discussed, audio files were stored in a password-

protected folder on the researcher's personal computer to mitigate third parties having access to those files and identify the individuals that took part in the study. The researcher thus stored the files in a secure folder destroyed after transcription was completed to safeguard the participants' privacy. Data was also anonymised to protect the privacy of the research participants. The participants were assigned numbers and referred to in the study report using these numbers instead of their actual names to safeguard their privacy. Privacy was also maintained by sharing information that could not lead to the identification of the respondents. For instance, the researcher omitted references to specific places, people, or institutions when analysing results to ensure that such information could not be used to identify the participants.

Safeguarding the privacy of the respondents was an important undertaking because of the need to protect participants from harm that might have resulted from the information they shared concerning their institutions being misconstrued or viewed as damaging to the reputation of their employers. In some cases, the specific information shared by participants was generalised to prevent such information from being used to establish the identity of the research participants. Maintaining participants' privacy was also ethical because the right to privacy was an assurance in the signed consent. Failing to protect participants' privacy would thus be deemed a breach of that assurance.

Honesty with Professional Colleagues

Research should always be presented honestly without fabricating findings to attain a preconceived conclusion (Shaw & Satalkar, 2018). Since scholars can also use the current research findings to examine further how public health epidemics can impact international schools and the education sector, it was important to ensure that the results

presented reflect the data obtained from the research participants. The researcher also took steps to avoid plagiarism by attributing information obtained through secondary research to the respective authors, as Chowdhury (2015) suggested. Plagiarism is a form of academic dishonesty. Thus, the researcher took appropriate steps to properly cite the information.

Role as Researcher

Ethical assurance can also be attained by clearly outlining the role of the researcher in the study. In the current research, the researcher's role was to interview the study participants through a semi-structured interview. As previously stated, the interview questions were developed using pre-existing knowledge of the impact of COVID-19 on the education sector and key concepts and theories concerning the research topic identified in the literature review. While the approach used to formulate interview questions created an opportunity for researcher biases to influence the line of questioning during the interview, the researcher ensured that the questions asked were not leading.

The absence of leading questions minimised researcher biases from influencing the research participants' views, experiences, and opinions. The respondents thus provided information that reflected their experiences as opposed to the beliefs and views of the researcher. The researcher's role also involved analysing and interpreting the qualitative data collected. The role of the researcher regarding data analysis also posed ethical challenges because it was possible for the researcher's interpretation of the views and experiences shared by participants to be influenced by personal biases. The ethical challenge was, however, mitigated through confirmability.

The sharing of direct quotes ensured the aspect of trustworthiness. By using direct quotes to confirm that the analysis and interpretation were shaped by the responses provided by the research participants, the researcher limited the extent to which their personal biases influenced the analysis of the results. Confirmability improves confidence that the study results are based on the views and experiences of the research participants as opposed to being shaped by researcher biases.

Researcher biases were also addressed through reflexivity. The concept of reflexivity refers to examining personal judgments, beliefs, and practices in conducting a research study and how they have shaped the research (Reid et al., 2018). Part of the process entailed outlining potential areas of bias, as in this section. The other step involved keeping a reflexive journal to detail and question how personal biases could impact the research, as stated by McFadyen and Rankin (2016). The researcher was thus acknowledged as an important part of the study instead of muting their role. The strategy enhanced openness and improved research ethics.

Data Collection and Analysis

This section describes the procedures that were used in the collection and analysis of data. The section provides a detailed description of the procedures involved in data collection and justifies the methods used. Data analysis techniques and procedures are also described and justified in this section. Finally, the role of the researcher during the data collection and analysis process is also examined in this section.

Data Collection

Data collected from the research participants were analysed to provide in-depth insights into how COVID-19 has impacted international schools from the perspective of

leaders. Data was collected from the research participants using semi-structured interviews. An interview guide was prepared to enable the researcher to conduct the interview and save time while ensuring that information obtained from the research participants could provide insights into how COVID-19 has impacted international schools. The researcher scheduled the interviews in advance with the participants to ensure that they were conducted when respondents had adequate time to share in-depth insights into how COVID-19 had impacted international schools. Scheduling interviews in advance was also necessary because of the need to have uninterrupted discussions.

The researcher created a timeline for conducting the interviews and discussed with the participants the most appropriate time for them to be interviewed. The interviews were conducted via virtual meetings because, as previously explained, the participants were located in different countries, making physical interviews challenging. Conducting interviews via virtual meetings was also a suitable approach to data collection because it enabled the researcher to observe the respondents' body language, facial expressions, and emotions when responding to particular questions. Such observations enhanced the ability of the researcher to gain more insights into the subjective meanings that the participants derived from their experiences.

The virtual meetings interviews were recorded for transcription after the conclusion of the interviews. Recording the interviews were necessary to enable the researcher to focus on the data collection instead of writing down the responses shared by participants and to improve data quality (Berazneva, 2014). Additionally, recording the interviews created an environment where data collection seemed to be a discussion instead of a formal process of gathering data. The environment created enabled respondents to be

more engaged in the discussions and to share in-depth insights regarding how COVID-19 had impacted international schools.

Qualitative study as a research method was used to gain an in-depth understanding of how COVID-19 had impacted international schools. The recorded interviews were then transcribed for each participant. The transcription of data was crucial to enable the analysis of the responses provided by the participants. The transcription process yielded non-numeric or qualitative data, which was consistent with the aim of the research method employed for this study. The research method was meant to yield non-numeric data providing a deeper understanding of how the pandemic impacted international schools and why the schools had experienced the identified impacts.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data obtained through interviews were analysed using thematic analysis. The data analysis technique is appropriate for analysing non-numeric information since the researcher can read through the data set and identify patterns of meaning within the data collected (Clarke & Braun, 2014). The patterns of meaning identified are then used to answer the research questions. For the current study, the patterns of meaning identified were used to provide answers regarding how the pandemic had impacted international schools from the perspective of leaders. The analysis technique was consistent with the exploratory research design, as suggested by Terry et al. (2017). The study employed the research design to enable the researcher to develop new concepts and theories concerning how the COVID-19 pandemic had impacted international schools. The researcher thus explored the data collected to identify patterns of meaning.

The researcher was not looking for specific information or meaning from the data set. Instead, the researcher explored the data set to identify relevant and important information that could help illuminate international experiences regarding the pandemic. The data analysis technique was thus consistent with the research design because it supported the development of new theories and concepts that existing studies had not identified or examined about how the pandemic had impacted international schools. The data analysis approach was thus inductive because the researcher was not guided by hypotheses or theories concerning the impact of the pandemic on international schools. Rather, the researcher was guided by the study's objectives when exploring the data set. The main objective of the research was to establish the impact of the pandemic on international schools. Information relating to this objective was thus relevant to the researcher. Overall, the data analysis technique was consistent with the research method, design, and approach employed in the study.

The analysis of data was conducted manually for two major reasons. The first reason is that there were only 30 scripts to analyse, meaning that the volume of data collected was relatively small. The second reason is that the researcher wanted to engage more with the data collected and gain a deeper understanding of the subjective meanings that leaders had derived from their experiences dealing with the pandemic, a strategy suggested by Belotto (2018). The researcher read through the transcribed data for each participant to familiarize themselves with the general views and experiences of the participants. The familiarization process was crucial for data analysis because it enabled the researcher to understand how the pandemic impacted international schools.

After the familiarization process, the researcher highlighted relevant words and phrases. The highlighted words and phrases summarised key information concerning the research topic. Only words and phrases deemed important to answering the research questions were highlighted (Terry, 2016). Related words and phrases were highlighted using the same colour, a process referred to as coding. Manual coding was employed to ensure that the researcher identified all the important and relevant information that might have been overlooked had software been used to analyse the data. The codes generated were then placed into categories, an important process for theme development. The categories were further defined by eliminating repetitive codes. The creation of themes then followed the formation of categories. Themes were the concepts and theories that provided insights and explanations concerning how the pandemic had impacted international schools. The identified themes were reviewed, and those relevant to the research topic were retained while others were discarded.

During the themes review, the researcher returned to the data set and explored it to identify themes that may have been overlooked during the initial coding process. The final themes were then named in readiness for analysis. The names of the themes were succinct summaries of the information they presented. The final step of the data analysis process involved preparing a report based on the developed themes. The report entailed an analysis of the results, that is, the themes and sub-themes developed from the data set. The results analysis focused on interpreting the themes to establish what they implied regarding the impact of COVID-19 on international schools.

The analysis of themes entailed using direct quotes from the data set to support the claims and arguments advanced by the researcher. The method ensured that the

arguments and claims advanced by the researcher were not influenced by researcher biases but guided by the views and subjective meanings shared by the study participants (Nowell et al., 2017). Several direct quotes from the data set thus supported the analysis of each theme.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher played a key role during data collection and analysis. During the data collection process, the researcher was the interviewer that asked the research participants questions to gain insights into their views and opinions about the pandemic in international schools. The researcher only guided the direction of the interview but did not lead respondents on the types of answers to provide. In other words, the main role of the researcher during data collection through interviews was to facilitate the interviews. The researcher also played a central role in transcribing the recorded virtual meeting interviews. The researcher's role at this stage was primarily to transcribe data word for word without altering the responses provided by the study participants. The researcher also played a central role in analysing data.

The subjective nature of data analysis in the thematic analysis technique is a major reason why questions have been raised concerning the analysis method's ability to yield accurate and useful results. The researcher read through the transcribed interviews to develop codes. However, the coding process was guided by the research objectives, and the researcher could only highlight the information that the participants provided. The extent to which the researcher could develop codes that supported preconceived findings was thus limited because of the role of research objectives in guiding the analysis process. While interpreting themes, the researcher used direct quotes from the data set

to ensure that interpretation was based on the responses provided by the research participants and not guided by researcher biases.

The researcher also kept a journal for reflecting on the analysis process. The researcher used the journal to examine their biases during data analysis, as suggested by Mackieson et al. (2019). Acknowledging these biases enabled the researcher to conduct data analysis in a manner that was objective and capable of yielding useful and credible findings.

In summary, the data collection method employed in the study enabled the researcher to gain insights into what leaders thought, believed, and experienced concerning the impact of COVID-19 on international schools. Using interviews to obtain data was consistent with the research method centred on collecting non-numeric information. Interviews enabled the researcher to collect qualitative data from the study respondents. The use of virtual meetings to conduct interviews ensured that the researcher could examine the expressions and body language of the participants to gain more in-depth insights concerning their views and experiences about the impact of the pandemic on international schools. The recorded virtual meetings and interviews were then transcribed. For data analysis, thematic analysis was used to identify patterns of meaning within the non-numeric information collected. The technique was consistent with the research method and research design because it enabled the researcher to explore qualitative data to identify new concepts and theories regarding the impact of the pandemic on international schools.

Summary

The chapter has presented and justified the methods used to collect and analyse data for the study. First, the methodology chapter presented the research method, approach, and design. The study employed a qualitative research method with an inductive research approach. Qualitative research uses non-numeric data to investigate a research issue in-depth (Hennink et al., 2020). The research method is mainly concerned with interpreting subjective meanings, indicating that it is grounded in the tradition of interpretivism (Chowdhury, 2014). The understanding that people have different experiences that influence or shape how they view issues is integral in driving qualitative research's focus on subjective meanings (Ormston et al., 2014). The chapter justified the appropriateness of the research method for the current study by demonstrating that since leaders of international schools from various countries are likely to have different experiences, it was important to employ a research method that could support an examination of those subjective experiences and the meanings derived from the experiences.

Examining the subjective meanings that leaders derive from their experiences could provide insights into how the pandemic impacted international schools while acknowledging that the respondents may have had different experiences. The questions that qualitative studies ask focus mainly on three major issues: language as a resource for exploring communication processes and interaction patterns within specific social groups; description and explanation of subjective meanings ascribed to actions and situations; and the development of new theories and concepts by discovering connections and patterns within non-numeric or qualitative data (Fossey et al., 2002). Given the

population and sample size of the study, the research method was thus appropriate for examining the responses shared by the research participants to identify the meanings and implications of those responses based on the language used by the participants.

Additionally, the chapter shows that the research method was suitable for answering 'how' and 'why' questions (Teherani et al., 2015). The research aimed to determine how the pandemic had impacted international schools from the perspective of leaders and why the schools had experienced those impacts. The research method was, therefore, also justified by the framing of the research topic. A quantitative research method would not have supported answering such a research question because it focuses on facts and values that cannot be attained when different subjective experiences and meanings are involved in the perception of a phenomenon (Ryan, 2015). A qualitative research method was thus the most appropriate research method for the study.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Introduction

The research sought to qualitatively assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on international schooling to establish how the pandemic has affected learning. School leaders' perspectives were obtained to gain insights into how the pandemic had impacted the schools intending to provide recommendations to mitigate its short-term and long-term effects. This chapter analyses the results of the qualitative interviews to gain insights into the research topic. Generally, it is known that the pandemic has had a negative impact on the education system by interrupting regular learning. The importance of social distancing as a means of curbing the spread of the disease led to the implementation of state policies that suspended learning in physical classrooms. Schools, therefore, have had to adjust their teaching and learning practices to ensure that learning can continue even when students cannot attend physical classrooms.

The pandemic strained the socioeconomic well-being of individuals and families due to its negative effect on the global economy. In other words, the pandemic has negatively impacted education affordability due to the economic challenges families had to deal with due to poorly performing businesses and the lack of employment. These issues are generally known because mainstream media extensively covered the pandemic's effects. However, international schools are a unique part of the education system because they target local and international students. The primary purpose of the research was thus to establish how the pandemic has impacted the schools given their status as a niche market. The study sought to understand the pandemic's effects from leaders' perspectives. Therefore, the researcher collected international school leaders'

views, experiences, and opinions to gain insights into how COVID-19 impacted the schools. Data analysis yielded themes and sub-themes that are analysed in this study.

The analysis yielded the theme of a 'shift to online learning.' The theme offers insights into how international schools have adopted online learning to deal with the impact of the pandemic on teaching and learning in international schools. The analysis also identified the theme of 'challenges of online learning.' The disruptions brought on by the pandemic served as the inspiration for this topic's central focus, which was on the challenges encountered by international schools in their efforts to incorporate online learning. Under this particular theme, several sub-themes were identified. The sub-themes included lack of educator training, distraction among students in online learning, lack of vibrant discussions, and more focus on theory than practice.

Another theme was 'international travel restrictions as a hindrance to learning.' The theme focused on how countries' travel restrictions have affected international school students. The results also revealed the theme of 'economic challenges' that provides insights into how the pandemic has impacted the financial performance of international schools. The analysed data also identified the theme of 'mental health issues among staff and students. The theme examined how the students and staff of international schools have been affected mentally by the pandemic and how the schools have implemented measures to address mental health issues. The overarching question that was addressed was how to mitigate the damaging effects of the pandemic. The theme focused on how international schools can address the adverse impact of COVID-19, such as learning disruptions, mental health issues, and poor financial performance. Several sub-themes were identified under the theme. These sub-themes were to train educators on online

teaching, develop an effective online curriculum, prepare for disjointed classrooms, and establish alternative income sources.

This chapter examines the findings to gain a more in-depth understanding of the research topic. The themes and sub-themes are the patterns of meaning derived from examining data gathered through qualitative interviews. The chapter aims to answer the research questions asked at the beginning of this dissertation, and the chapter is organized around the research questions.

The first research question is centred on the impact of the pandemic on international learning. The question functions as a sub-topic and the appropriate themes and sub-themes are examined. The framing of the question shows that it seeks to identify the various ways in which international learning changed due to the pandemic. A relevant theme under this research question is the shift to online learning. International schools shifted to online education due to various government and state policies prohibiting learning within the physical classroom. These policies aimed to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Many international schools thus had to shift to online classrooms to ensure that education continued when learning within the physical classroom was prohibited. Global learning also occurred due to the need to address the needs of international students stranded outside the host country due to government and state policies restricting international travel. The theme of challenges of online learning is also examined under this research question because it relates to how the pandemic impacted global education.

The second research question aims to answer the school leaders' viewpoints on inventions within the context of international learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Under this research question, the issue of establishing counselling services is considered. For some schools, counselling services for teachers and students are an invention directly attributed to the pandemic and its impact on mental health. The other invention pertains to online learning. The exact manner in which schools have engaged in online learning is examined under this research question. Additionally, inventions concerning alternative sources of income are also examined since most of the leaders interviewed believed that international schools should create alternative sources of revenue to shield themselves from the negative impacts of pandemics.

The third research question examined in the chapter focused on policy alterations and developments needed to support international learning during and after the pandemic. In other words, the question was formulated to investigate the policy changes made to ensure that international schools are better prepared for similar crises in the future. Under this research question, strategies for dealing with the negative impacts of the pandemic are examined. The analysis focuses on the policy changes that international schools can implement to enhance learning efficacy during a pandemic. This section addresses teacher training, alternative sources of revenue to ensure teachers are duly remunerated, an effective online curriculum, and preparation for a disjointed classroom where international students can learn online in their home countries when travel restrictions exist.

The final research question examines policy changes implemented to enhance staff and students' well-being during a crisis. Under this research question, measures for addressing students' mental health are examined because of the assumption that the pandemic had a detrimental impact on the well-being of students and staff. Personal

experiences during the pandemic demonstrated that it had adverse effects on well-being. While the theme is repeated, it provides insights into how the well-being of both students and staff can be enhanced in a time of crisis.

The results chapter analyses the study's findings to answer the research questions and establish their meanings and relevance. Evaluating findings provides insights into the results, an essential issue in knowledge development that typically occurs through research.

Trustworthiness of Data

There is a need to identify how trustworthiness was achieved in the study, especially given that the current research is qualitative. Trustworthiness within qualitative research is equivalent to reliability and validity in quantitative studies (Elo et al., 2014). Establishing trustworthiness within the context of qualitative research increases readers' confidence that the findings are credible and valuable (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). The trustworthiness of data in qualitative research is crucial because the research method is often considered to lack research rigour (Burke, 2016). Improving the trustworthiness of qualitative data can, therefore, positively impact the extent readers take the research findings seriously. Trustworthiness establishes the reliability and validity of qualitative data (Stahl & King, 2020). However, since reliability and validity are often associated with quantitative research, qualitative researchers generally adopt other mechanisms for establishing data trustworthiness, given that quantitative and qualitative studies use different research approaches (Kornbluh, 2015). Trustworthiness in qualitative research is, therefore, grounded in four key areas. Specifically, these areas comprise credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

Credibility as an area of trustworthiness in qualitative research refers to the confidence that the research findings represent the truth (Hadi & Closs, 2016). Credibility determines whether the study's findings represent credible information obtained from the respondents' original information or data and is a truthful construal of the research participants' original views, experiences, and opinions (Elo et al., 2014). Since validity focuses on the accuracy of measures, credibility is regarded as the equivalent of validity in qualitative research because it focuses on the accuracy or truthfulness of data (Candela, 2019). Credibility is the most critical aspect of trustworthiness in qualitative studies because of its focus on the truth. The connection between the findings of a research study and the reality of the research participants or study context serves a primary function in determining whether an investigation has effectively provided an understanding of the issue investigated (Birt et al., 2016). Credibility is also significantly connected to the usefulness of research findings, given its focus on reality and truth.

Member Checking

Additionally, credibility has the highest number of techniques available compared to other aspects of trustworthiness (Smith & McGannon, 2018). Credibility was ensured through member-checking and a thick description of the research process for this research. Birt et al. (2016) identify member-checking as a valuable technique for ensuring the credibility of qualitative research. This approach is called participant validation because it entails returning results or data to research participants to check for resonance and accuracy regarding their experiences (Reilly, 2013). Member checking enhances rigour in qualitative studies because the research method is anchored on providing

accurate interpretations or descriptions of phenomena (Candela, 2019). Member checking in the current research was conducted by returning interview transcripts to the research participants. The technique enabled the individuals who had taken part in the study to confirm whether the transcribed data represented their actual views and experiences concerning the impact of COVID-19 on international schools. The strategy ensures that any inaccurately transcribed issue is rectified on the interview transcripts, reflected in the research findings.

Thick description

The other strategy employed in the research to enhance credibility had a thick description. The thick description in qualitative research entails presenting a detailed and in-depth description of the circumstances and context surrounding the issue being investigated to ensure that the meaning and significance of events and behaviours can be fully understood. A thick description of the research process and results is necessary for readers to follow clearly how the study was conducted. To achieve this objective, the researcher has to justify the selected method for the reader to understand why it was the most suitable procedure for collecting and analysing data. The researcher should also clarify the research process, fully provide details of the methods for obtaining data, including the raw data collected, and specify the technique used to analyse the collected data. The researcher has comprehensively explained the research method, design, and approach, including the rationale for selecting them. The data analysis method is also described in detail to ensure that readers understand how the themes analysed in this study were developed.

Confirmability

Confirmability is also a criterion for judging the validity of qualitative research. The concept denotes how the discoveries can be confirmed or substantiated. In other words, the reader needs to be sure that what is presented as the understandings and thoughts of the research participants are the understandings and views of the contributors and not the biased beliefs and viewpoints of the researcher. Given that qualitative research can be highly subjective, it is crucial to ensure that the results can be corroborated to enhance the extent readers trust the results presented. The sharing of direct quotes in qualitative research is a criterion for trustworthiness to ensure confirmability (Pandey, 2016). Individuals reading the research findings need to be sure that the information provided during data analysis is not merely the subjective view of the researcher but an interpretation and analysis of the subjective meanings that the research participants derived from their experiences (Dennis, 2013). Confirmability enhances assurance that the study discoveries are based on the words and narratives of the participants as opposed to the prejudices of the investigator (Chowdhury, 2015). Therefore, during data analysis, the researcher used direct quotes of the words and narratives shared by the research participants to enhance trustworthiness without revealing the actual identities of the participants that shared those words and narratives. The researcher ensured that for every theme or sub-theme, there were corresponding direct quotes to confirm to the reader that what is being claimed is based on the experiences, views, and realities of the study participants. Using direct quotes helped demonstrate that the researcher was not merely advancing personal narratives but engaging in an objective analysis of the responses provided by the research participants. Confirmability thus also played an

integral role in ensuring that researcher biases did not influence the development of themes and sub-themes during data analysis.

Transferability

The researcher employed transferability to deal with trustworthiness issues in the study. The concept refers to the scope to which the discoveries of qualitative research can be applied in other settings or contexts or the degree to which the findings can be generalised (Burke, 2016). Naturally, the results of qualitative studies cannot be generalised because they often use a relatively small sample size. However, the results or methods can be transferred to other contexts if there is research rigour. The transferability of results or methods is equivalent to external validity. Transferability is achieved by providing a dense or detailed description of the population being studied, mainly by describing the demographics and geographic boundaries of the research. For this study, the demographics and geographic boundaries of the research were extensively described.

Demographics and Transferability

The study population consisted of school leaders in international schools that all offered education from kindergarten to final year. These schools were in Qatar, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Russia, China, Egypt, South Africa, France, Mexico, and the United States. The geographic boundaries were defined, and the rationale for the boundaries was provided. Qatar was selected as a study location because it continues to attract foreigners. The Qatari government has put in place measures to make the destination ideal for expatriates looking to work, do business, or study in the Middle East. For instance, non-Qatari can own property in more areas than they previously could.

Foreigners can also use real estate in more areas than they once could, according to a statement issued by the Qatari government (Reuters, 2020). These factors suggest that many students in the country are enrolled in international schools. Qatar has several international schools: Qatar International School, International School of London, ACS Doha, Dukhan English School, and Doha British School Ain Khaled. Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates were also selected as study locations because they are considered some of the most liberal Gulf states (Carey, 2021), indicating they are likely to attract many expatriates.

Additionally, these countries have many international schools to meet the educational needs of both local students and expatriates. On the other hand, Russia and China were selected because they are some of the two major economies in the far East, and their education systems attract many foreigners. At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, Russia restricted the countries from which international students could fly to control the spread of the virus (ICEF Monitor, 2021). Such measures made it essential to examine how the pandemic had impacted international schools in the country. China, on the other hand, is the alleged origin of the virus. There was a need to examine how COVID-19 had impacted international schools in the country, given that it experienced the first significant outbreak.

Egypt and South Africa were selected as study locations because major African economies will likely attract many expatriates. Furthermore, in South Africa, in Johannesburg alone, there are more than 25 international schools, indicating the high number of international schools in the country.

Mexico and the US were selected to offer a perspective on the impact of COVID-19 on international schools in the Americas. As one of the largest economies in the world, it was imperative to include the United States in the study to gain insights into how the pandemic has impacted its education system.

Finally, France was selected for the study because it has put in place efforts to attract international students and is also a popular destination for international students (Highman & de Gayardon, 2022). The detailed description of the geographic boundaries and the rationale for selecting the study countries enhanced the transferability of the study findings. A researcher seeking to conduct a similar study can use the description of the boundaries to design the research.

Dependability

The final element of trustworthiness is dependability. The concept emphasizes the need for the researcher to acknowledge the constantly changing context within which the study occurs (Burke, 2016). The researcher should describe the changes within the study setting and how the changes impacted how the research was approached. The researcher used a journal to record the research process, including personal biases and how such biases were addressed during the research. Dependability for the study was ensured through reflexivity.

Despite the strategies to increase the trustworthiness of data, there are still potential weaknesses in the interpretation or validity of the data collection and analysis. One of the potential weaknesses of the data collection method is that participants can provide information that does not reflect reality. The researcher cannot verify the views and experiences shared by the participants unless privacy and confidentiality are to be

breached. The possibility that respondents can provide inaccurate information reduces the validity of the data collection instrument. Another potential weakness is related to the interpretation of data. As much as confirmability is used to enhance the validity of qualitative research by ensuring that the findings can be confirmed or corroborated, there is still a possibility that researcher biases can influence the interpretation of themes. The subjective nature of the thematic analysis is a significant reason qualitative research lacks research rigour (Bashir & Marudhar, 2018). At the same time, the researcher can use quotes from participants to demonstrate that the respondents provided the information being analysed. The direction of analysis is determined by the researcher, an indication that there is a possibility that researcher biases can shape data analysis and interpretation in reducing the study's validity. The potential weaknesses demonstrate the need for the researcher to engage in objective data analysis and acknowledge and address potential biases during the data analysis process.

Truth Value and Consistency of data

Truth value and data consistency are the equivalents of validity and reliability in qualitative studies.

Validity is centred on examining the accuracy of the results (Sousa, 2014). Validity is separated into internal validity, which denotes the validity of the measurement and tests themselves, and external validity, which, on the other hand, denotes the capability to generally apply the discoveries to the target population (Lakshmi & Mohideen, 2013). Both are useful for analysing a research study's relevance, significance, and practicality.

Reliability deals with the general uniformity of a research study's measurement instrument. Assessing the reliability of study discoveries calls for the investigator to make

decisions or judgments concerning the ‘soundness’ of the study regarding the application and suitability of the methods employed in the research and the integrity of the conclusions made (Noble & Smith, 2015). Qualitative studies are usually criticized for not having scientific rigour and poorly justified methods, the absence of transparency in the data analysis process, and the results merely the subjective opinions of the researcher. While the tests and measures used to establish reliability and validity in quantitative studies cannot be used to establish the same in qualitative research, there are various ways to address validity and reliability in qualitative studies. Lincoln and Guba (1985) address validity and reliability in qualitative studies. Validity and reliability are assessed using truth value, consistency, neutrality, or confirmability.

Truth value

Truth value is a terminology used in qualitative research to refer to validity or data accuracy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Truth value is based on the notion that multiple realities exist, and the researcher has to recognise this fact. Truth value as an aspect of validity in qualitative research is enhanced by presenting different viewpoints when analysing data. To effectively evaluate data and respond to research questions, the researcher cannot rely on their viewpoints and experiences but must take into account the points of view of all of the participants in the study and portray those points of view appropriately. The researcher should also outline personal biases that might have led to methodological bias. For this study, truth value as an aspect of validity was enhanced by including respondents from different countries and international schools. The researcher examined the perspectives of these respondents to provide insights into how COVID-19 has impacted international schools.

Including diverse perspectives enhanced the truth value of the findings because identifying patterns of meaning within the collected qualitative data indicated that there was truth to some of the concepts and arguments presented in the results section. The fact that the quotes of various participants were used to support data analysis demonstrates that the findings were not a summary of the personal views and opinions of the researcher but rather a representation of the truth or reality as far as the impact of COVID-19 on international schools is concerned. To enhance truth value and thus the validity of the data collection method, the researcher ensured that a variety of direct quotes from the research participants supported each theme and sub-theme. The validity of the research instrument was also secured by designing questions that did not lead the respondents to provide specific answers meant to confirm or support the researcher's personal views. Instead, the interview guide was designed so that the respondents provided responses that reflected their experiences and realities as opposed to the viewpoints of the interviewer. The approach to creating the interview guide was crucial for enhancing truth value in the study because the data collected represented the realities of international schools regarding how they had dealt with the COVID-19 pandemic as opposed to what the researcher believed they had experienced.

Additionally, truth value was ensured by the researcher outlining personal biases and how they were addressed during the study. A reflexive journal was used to outline beliefs concerning personal preferences during the study to demonstrate that the researcher acknowledged these biases and took measures to ensure they did not result in methodological bias. Finally, truth value was confirmed through an accurate presentation of the views and experiences of the research participants, including during

the transcription process. The researcher did not manipulate the data collected to advance a particular narrative. Focusing on presenting the truth improved the study's validity and the extent to which the results could be generalised to the entire population. Therefore, the study's results can be used to help international schools overcome the difficulties they have encountered because of the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

Consistency of Data

Reliability is ensured through consistency. As stated earlier, reliability addresses the overall consistency of a research study's measurement instrument (Noble & Smith, 2015). Consistency in qualitative research is ensured by the researcher maintaining a decision trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A decision trail means that the procedures employed in data collection and analysis and the rationale for their selection can be understood based on the detailed description of the methodology provided by the researcher. The implication is that the researcher's decisions must be clear and transparent. An independent researcher employing the same methods should be able to attain comparable or similar results. Reliability in the research was ensured by having consistent data collection and analysis methods. In the methodology section, there is a detailed description of why the research method was selected and its suitability for examining the research problem.

Data collection, research method, and analysis are consistent because they are all grounded in qualitative methods. Data collection was completed through semi-structured interviews that enabled the researcher to collect qualitative data, indicating that the data collection and research methods are consistent. Data analysis was also conducted using thematic analysis appropriate for identifying patterns of meaning within

qualitative data. A researcher seeking to conduct a similar study thus has a decision trail upon which they can base their research methods. The consistency of the decisions regarding the research methodology ensured the trustworthiness of the methods used to collect and analyse data. Demonstrating clarity of thought process was key to improving the trustworthiness of the method and the study findings.

Reliability was also enhanced through neutrality during the study. Neutrality is realised when consistency, applicability, and truth value have been addressed (Carminati, 2018). Applicability relates to whether research findings can be applied in another context apart from the context of the current study. Neutrality centres on recognizing the complexity of protracted engagement with the study respondents and acknowledging the methods employed. The results are intrinsically connected to the researcher's experiences, philosophical positions, and perspectives (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The issues should be accounted for and distinguished from the research participants' accounts. The researcher focused on remaining neutral and objective throughout the study by enhancing truth value and ensuring consistency in the research methodology. The researcher also used a reflexive journal to outline personal biases and how they were dealt with during the study. Transparency thus played an integral role in ensuring that the researcher remained neutral and that the research findings were reliable and could be applied in other contexts.

Results

This section presents the study's results to provide insights into how COVID-19 has impacted international schools. The study examined leaders' perspectives regarding how the pandemic has impacted international schools. The research topic shows that the study did not examine a particular impact but aimed to understand better how COVID-19 has impacted international schools. The leaders selected to take part in the study were senior leaders. The participants selected were leaders that are school heads, board chairpersons, or proprietors of international schools. The leaders selected to participate in the study were individuals with significant decision-making power.

Demographic Information

Table 0.1 Demographics of participants

Country	Gender	Position	Age
Qatar	Male	School Head of International School	46
Qatar	Male	School Head of International School	53
Qatar	Male	School Board Chairman of International School	60
Bahrain	Male	School Head of International School	48

Bahrain	Male	Owner of International School	60
Bahrain	Male	Owner of International School	54
United Arab Emirates	Male	Board Chairperson of International School	55
United Arab Emirates	Male	School Head	52
United Arab Emirates	Female	School Head	40
Russia	Female	School Head	53
Russia	Female	School Head	51
Russia	Female	School Head	55
China	Female	School Head	47
China	Male	School Head	48
China	Male	School Owner	55
Egypt	Male	School Head	51
Egypt	Male	School Head	54
Egypt	Male	School Head	47
South Africa	Female	School Head	47
South Africa	Female	School Head	51
South Africa	Male	School Owner	54
France	Female	School Head	55

France	Male	Board Chair	57
France	Male	School Principal	51
Mexico	Female	School Head	56
Mexico	Male	School Head	47
Mexico	Male	Board Chair	59
USA	Female	School Head	52
USA	Female	School Head	48
USA	Male	Board Chairperson	46

The total number of school leaders selected to participate in the research was 30. The participants were drawn from Qatar, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, Russia, China, Egypt, South Africa, France, Mexico, and the US. Three participants were selected from each country deliberately to ensure a balance in terms of the views and experiences shared by each country. The researcher did not focus on the gender of the participants because it did not contribute to answering the research problem. Still, this section provides a breakdown of the demographic characteristics of the study sample to enhance research rigour and the trustworthiness of the study findings.

Two participants selected from Qatar were both school heads of international schools. The third participant was the board chairperson of an international school. The participants were all male, perhaps a reflection of the national culture that considers leadership to be a preserve of the man. Kemp et al. (2015) noted that Qatar and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia have remained more traditional than other Gulf Arab states,

meaning that there are fewer women in leadership positions in the two countries compared to the other Gulf Arab states. The selection of two male international school leaders and one school board chairman from the country to take part in the research thus demonstrated how cultural factors were likely to shape the research findings. Given the importance of culture in the country, the researcher believed that the views and opinions of the participants on how the pandemic has impacted international schools and the potential solutions to the challenges experienced were going to be significantly influenced by culture.

The participants from Qatar also had several years of experience as educators and leaders within the international school sector. One of the participants was 46 years old and had been a school head for seven years. The other participant, who was 53, had served in the position for approximately five years. The school board chair, aged 60, had served in the position for six years, indicating that they understood the workings of international schools, including challenges and opportunities. All of the respondents, therefore, had a good understanding of the normal functioning of their schools and how the pandemic had altered the operations and performance of their institutions. Another essential piece of information is that all participants were non-native citizens of Qatar. The participants were non-natives because most of the school heads in Qatar are non-natives. A native headed none of the schools identified and contacted by the researcher.

The participants selected from Bahrain were all male. One of the participants was a school head, while the other two were proprietors or owners of an international school. The principal has been in charge of the school for six years. He had been an educator for more than 15 years before being appointed as the head of an international school,

showing that he had profound insights into the operations of international schools and how the pandemic had influenced the school's routine operating while he was the leader. The school head was an education degree holder with a post-graduate degree in business administration. During the time of the study, the participant was 48 years.

On the other hand, one of the proprietors was an expatriate who had owned the international school for 20 years and was aware of its normal operations, mission, goals, teaching, and learning approaches. Since the participant was significantly involved in the school's running, he was in a position to offer insights into how the pandemic had impacted the institution. The participant was not only responsible for the teachers and leaders of the school but had a duty of care concerning the student population as critical institution stakeholders. Regarding educational background, the proprietor had a degree in education and had been a teacher before quitting teaching to open their school. The proprietor was 60 years old at the time of conducting the research. Both the school head and proprietor were non-natives of Bahrain. The other proprietor had owned an international school in Bahrain for eight years. The proprietor had lived in the country for nearly a decade and had a degree in business. The 54-year-old understood Bahrain because they had essentially made the country their home.

For the United Arab Emirates, the participants were two males and a female. One of the male participants was the board chairperson of an international school, meaning that they participated in developing strategies and goals of the organisation and reviewing the institution's performance. The participant was aged 55 years and was a United Arab Emirates national with experience in finance and teaching. While they did not possess professional qualifications in teaching, they had experience lecturing in higher learning

institutions. The participant had served as a faculty member at a leading university in the country for 12 years. The respondent had also served on different boards in varying capacities. As board chairperson of the international school, they served for four years and oversaw the institution's expansion. The participant had spent considerable time at the school and, as a result, understood its workings well, including the institution's academic performance in recent years. Being the chairperson of the board of directors, the participant also had inside information on the financial position of the organisation and the needs and expectations of both teachers and students. The other male participant had been a school head for six years. As a principal, the participant was responsible for leadership at their school, providing guidance and direction to staff and students. The participant also participated in developing essential policies at the board level, meaning that they substantially influenced the formulation of school policies and strategies. The 52-year-old understood the school's challenges and the opportunities available for exploitation.

On the other hand, the female participant was a school head with four years of experience in the same position. The 40-year-old participant had a degree in education with 20 years of experience as a teacher. She had taught at the international school for eight of those years. Both of the respondents were United Arab Emirates nationals.

Three participants were also selected from international schools in Russia. All of the participants were female heads of schools. One of the participants had a bachelor's degree in education and a postgraduate degree in leadership. The participant had been a teacher for 25 years, with nearly half of this time spent teaching local schools instead of international schools. The school head had served in various capacities, including the

director of studies and the deputy school head. The participant had served as the head of the international school for five years and had overseen its expansion during this period. The second participant also had a bachelor's degree in education with 27 years of experience as a teacher. The participant had been the head of the international school for seven years. They previously served as the head of the careers department and the school's deputy head. The third participant had a doctoral degree in education and had been a teacher for more than 15 years. The participant had been a school principal for four years, meaning they understood the institution's challenges and the needs of both educators and students. The 51-year-old had also worked abroad briefly, so they could provide perspectives based on their experiences in other parts of the world.

All of the participants selected from Russia were Russian nationals. Additionally, all participants were above 50, with one being 51 years, one being 55, and the other being 53. The selection of the participants based on nationality was influenced by the assumption that cultural perspectives were likely to influence the views and opinions shared by the research participants.

There were also three participants drawn from international schools in China. Two participants were school heads, while the other was a proprietor of an international school. One of the school heads was a female educator working in the education sector for the last 15 years. At 47 years of age, the participant had a bachelor of degree in education and a post-graduate degree in business administration. The participant's teaching history is characterized by being a teacher at a public school for five years, a teacher at an international school for six years, two of those years serving as the assistant head, and the head of an international school for four years. The participant was a

Chinese national living in China and the United States. The second participant was a male school head who practised as a teacher for 16 years. The educator had a doctoral degree in education and had gained vast teaching experience by teaching in different parts of the world.

Additionally, the respondent had been a school head for five years. The 48-year-old had risen through the ranks in their current institution, starting as a teacher and attaining career growth to the level of a principal. The third respondent was a 55-year-old male owner of an international school in China. The participant also served as the board of directors' chair, meaning he was involved in the institution's running. The participant did not have a degree in education or formal training in teaching. The proprietor decided to establish an international school because they loved education and believed it was important for Chinese students to be exposed to the rest of the world through an international education system.

The three respondents selected from Egypt were all male and school heads. One of the participants was the head of an international school catered to local and international students. The 51-year-old educator had been in the teaching profession for 27 years. Much of this time was spent teaching in public schools, with the participant spending 15 years of their teaching career in various public schools in Egypt. The other 12 years were spent in international schools. The participant had worked in two international schools, including the one where he was currently the head. The participant had been in the present school for seven years, with three of those years as the deputy head and four years as the head. The Egypt national has a bachelor's degree in education and a post-graduate degree in psychology.

The second participant had been a teacher for 30 years. The 54-year-old had been an educator in international schools throughout his career. The respondent had served in the present position as the school head for eight years. The Egypt national also functions as a part-time guidance counsellor. The school head had a bachelor's degree in education and a post-graduate degree in social work. The third respondent had only been a teacher for six years and a principal for two. The participant had worked in various capacities in the government within the ministry of education. The respondent decided to resort to teaching because he was passionate about it. The 47-year-old was promoted to school head because of their extensive experience within the education sector.

There were three participants selected from international schools in South Africa. Two school heads were female and South African nationals, while one was a male expatriate school owner. One of the participants was 47 years old and had been teaching for 23 years. The participant had worked in public and private local schools before eventually securing employment in an international school. The school head had worked in the current school for ten years, initially recruited as a senior teacher before being promoted to deputy head, where they served for three years. The participant was then promoted to head of the school, a position they had held for four years. The school head had a bachelor's degree in education, a post-graduate degree in community development, and a certificate in leadership. The second respondent was a 51-year-old educator that had taught for 27 years. The participant had a bachelor's degree in education and a master's degree in business administration. The educator began their career in the public education system before eventually securing employment at the international school they presently headed. The participant served as the international

school's head for five years. The third respondent was a school owner who emigrated to South Africa in the early 2000s. The 54-year-old male had established an international school catered to local and international students. The participant had always been passionate about education, hence deciding to establish a school.

France also served as a study location, with three participants selected from the country. One of the participants was a school head, while the other was the board of directors' chair. The school head was a 55-year-old white female and a French national. The participant has been in the teaching profession for 15 years. Initially, the respondent was a university professor before being selected to head the international school. The participant had a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's degree.

Additionally, the school head had a doctorate in psychology. The respondent was not selected to teach at the school but to provide leadership and deal with students. On the other hand, the board chair was a 57-year-old white male French national. The participant had been the chair of the board for three years. While they did not have professional qualifications for teaching, they had a finance degree. They chaired various boards, including the current board. The third respondent was a male school principal who had taught for twenty years. The 51-year-old had a doctorate in education and leadership. Having been a teacher for nearly 15 years, they were promoted to the school's principal position.

Three participants were also selected from Mexico. Two respondents were school heads, while the other was a board chair. One of the school heads was a female with a background in education. The 56-year-old had been in the teaching profession for over 30 years. The respondent had a degree in education and had taught in public and private

learning institutions. The school head had been a staff member at the current institution for 11 years, with three years as the deputy head and four years as the school head. The second school head was male and had been teaching for 17 years. The 47-year-old had a master's degree in education and had been a principal at the international school for five years. The third respondent was a 59-year-old male who had served as an international school's board chair for four years. The participant had a law degree and had been practising as a lawyer for over 30 years. The participant had also served as the chair of several boards, including the current position. All the research participants selected from Mexico were Mexican nationals who had lived and worked there for several years.

The final three respondents were drawn from international schools in the United States. Two participants were female school heads, while one was a board chairperson. One of the participants was a 52-year-old white female with a background in education. The other was a 48-year-old white female with a degree in sociology. The third respondent was a 46-year-old male who served as a board chairperson. The respondent did not have a background in education. Still, they were selected to lead the board because of their leadership and entrepreneurial skills. The participants were all citizens of the United States.

In summary, three respondents were selected from each of the ten countries that served as a location for the study. Equal numbers of respondents were chosen from each country designed to ensure a balance of views and opinions from the participants concerning the impact of COVID-19 on international schools.

Research Question 1:

What are the leaders' perspectives on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on learning in international schools?

The research question sought to identify international school leaders' perspectives on how COVID-19 had impacted learning in international schools across the globe. The themes and sub-themes presented under this research question provide insights into how the pandemic has impacted learning in international schools.

Theme 1: Syllabus Coverage Disruption

The pandemic has disrupted the coverage of syllabi in international schools. Participant 8 provided insights into how the pandemic had impacted syllabus coverage by stating that:

We fell way behind in syllabus coverage because of the pandemic. When learning within the physical classroom was suspended, and some students had to travel, we took a while before getting ready to teach online.

Based on the participant's views, it is evident that the school was concerned about syllabus completion and the time lost as learning was suspended. The response shows a need to urgently implement plans to support syllabus coverage, given that a significant amount of time was considered lost. Participant 4 also shared similar views by stating:

We are not in the proper position in terms of syllabus coverage. The pandemic disrupted teaching and learning. It took us a while before we decided how to proceed with teaching and learning.

The response provided by Participant 4 shows that the school has a timeline and milestones to be achieved every school term and year. Due to the timelines and

milestones, educators and the school leadership can tell whether they are on course to complete the syllabus within the designated time. The response demonstrates that learning institutions significantly emphasise timely syllabus coverage because they consider realizing this goal to improve student's educational experiences. The impact of the pandemic on syllabus coverage was also identified by Participant 27, who stated:

There is always a timeline for completing the syllabus. Given that we closed the school for a while when the pandemic began, we are behind schedule regarding syllabus coverage and have to move fast to ensure that at least everything is covered.

The participant's perspectives shed light on how the pandemic caused a delay in curriculum coverage since the school was closed for an extended period. The notion that 'everything should be covered,' as Participant 27 stated, reinforces the assumption that international schools value syllabus completion because they equate it to education quality. To the institutions, failing to cover specific topics that should be covered within a term or school year is perceived as failing to deliver quality education. The pandemic forced the institutions to go on an unplanned break, interfering with their plans to deliver what they consider high-quality education. The problem with the extended closure is that it utilised time for regular school terms since it was not planned. In other words, students went for an abrupt holiday that ended up extending into time that should have been used for teaching and learning. Participant 13, on the other hand, provided insights into why delayed syllabus coverage was an issue by stating that:

We always plan for syllabus coverage to ensure that learners have adequate time to learn and understand every concept taught. We must rush the syllabus to compensate for lost time or limit holiday periods.

The views shared by participant 13 centre on why delayed syllabus coverage should be a primary concern for educators and learners. However, the response also shows that the timeline for syllabus coverage is designed to ensure that teachers have ample time to teach classroom concepts. In contrast, students have enough time to understand the concepts taught in the classroom. In other words, the institution tries to match syllabus coverage with positive learning outcomes. If the school calendar is disrupted, the administration prioritizes syllabus coverage over learning outcomes, as demonstrated by the response provided by Participant 13. Behind schedule, syllabus coverage can negatively affect teaching and learning outcomes because teachers can gloss over topics to compensate for lost time. The implication is that students may not have enough time to interact with and understand course content. Students who do not grasp concepts immediately are taught and must spend significant time before content mastery. Such an approach to teaching can adversely affect their learning experiences and educational outcomes. As noted by Participant 1:

There is a chance that teachers won't cover specific topics more extensively because of time constraints. The side effect is that some topics may be skipped or skimmed through to ensure the syllabus is covered up to the end.

The response shows that schools are often more concerned about syllabus coverage than students' grasp of subject content, hence the focus on completing the syllabus even if this goal is achieved at the expense of learners' educational experiences. Participant 22 also provided explanations as to why the pandemic caused syllabus coverage disruptions and the effects of these disruptions by stating:

The school term was concise when we resumed following the initial closure of schools. Topics had to be covered at a fast pace to make up for the lost time.

The views shared by Participant 1 demonstrate that international schools have to cover topics much faster because of the minimal time available for meeting the teaching and learning objectives of the school term. The response also raises questions regarding how international schools perceive quality education. The emphasis on completing the syllabus, even if it means that topics must be rushed, suggests that the institutions believe it provides quality education. Based on the participant's reflections, teachers will likely speed up syllabus coverage to ensure they complete it by the end of the academic year. The analysis also provides insights into the negative impacts of delayed syllabus coverage on learning outcomes. Covering a program rushedly will imply that some topics will not be covered in depth. In contrast, others may be omitted entirely, which will harm the learning process results. Ultimately, covering several topics within a short time adversely impacted the educational experiences of learners, especially those requiring much time to grasp what is taught in the classroom or those whose intellectual progress is slow.

Overall, Participant 13, Participant 27, and Participant 22 made the same claims as Participant 8, Participant 1, and Participant 4 by stating that one of the impacts of COVID-19 on international schools had been its disruption of syllabus coverage. The theme shows how the pandemic impacted teaching and learning in learning institutions. Because instructors are pressed for time to finish the syllabus before the school year's conclusion, interruptions in the coverage of the syllabus might have a detrimental effect on the learning outcomes of their students. This would be because certain concepts might

not be discussed in sufficient detail. The findings offer new understandings of the pandemic's potential short-term and long-term impacts on learning in international schools. The results raise questions regarding how the impact of the pandemic on syllabus coverage in international schools will likely impact the skills and competence of international school graduates in the future.

Theme 2: Shift to Online Learning.

Another impact of the pandemic on learning was identified from the qualitative data collected on teaching and learning methods. The responses provided by the study participants indicate that the pandemic forced international schools to shift from teaching and learning within the physical classroom to online learning. Participant 30 shared their experience by stating:

It was the only logical course of action. Without provisions for online learning, students would have wasted nearly a year of schooling, which would have been a burden on the school itself and the parents.

The participants' views indicate that the pandemic created the need for online learning because students could have lost valuable time and spent more years in school without this approach to teaching and learning. A significant driver of the shift towards online classrooms was the need to cover the syllabus, further indicating that schools focus more on syllabus coverage than learning outcomes. The schools created online learning platforms also to advance their interests because, to Participant 30, an additional year of study for students could also have burdened the schools.

Participant 19 stated that:

We had to adopt online learning because we had suspended learning for a long time. Some students had also travelled back to their home countries and could not get back.

The response shows that international schools were worried about lost time and thus decided to shift to online learning. However, the views shared by the participant also indicate that the decision was necessary because of international travel restrictions. International students who had returned to their native countries could not resume learning within the physical classroom due to their inability to travel from their home countries to the countries where they studied. To ensure equitable educational experiences, the institution shifted to online learning. International students would thus not be disadvantaged as they learned online while others learned within the physical classroom. The move ensured that all students learned online. Participant 2 also stated that:

We resorted to online learning to ensure that students continued to learn. Learning within the physical classroom was impossible, especially with the need to practice social distancing.

The views shared by the participants demonstrate how the pandemic caused international schools to adopt online learning to ensure the continuity of learning. The participants shared that the need for social distancing and policies implemented to stop the spread of the virus made it challenging to continue learning within the physical classroom. The schools had no option but to abide by government directives because there would have been potential consequences for breaching government directives concerning learning within the physical classroom. As stated by participant 10:

The government shut all schools and initiated policies aimed at ensuring social distancing. When physical classrooms were suspended, we had to resort to online learning because defying government directives would have had negative consequences.

The response provided by Participant 10 shows that the need to conform to government policies influenced the schools to shift to online classrooms. However, the participant's views also show that the government did not move to assist schools with the negative impacts of their policies. Instead, they were forced to rely on their resources. The response provided by Participant 10 indicates disapproval of how the government handled the education sector. The framing of the response creates the sense that the directives issued by the government oppressed international schools. While international schools would like government support through policies that help the institutions meet their goals, such support is not forthcoming. The directives were initiated without input from key stakeholders such as international schools. International schools were forced to embrace physical learning because government directives suspended physical classrooms. The shift to online learning was thus not optional but a means of ensuring learning continuity amidst policies to stop the spread of the virus. Many international schools were unaware of how long learning within the physical classroom would be suspended, influencing them to use online learning to advance syllabus coverage. Participant 7 provided further insights into how government directives to suspend learning within the physical classroom influenced a shift to online learning by stating that:

We had to find a way to ensure that students would not spend so much time without learning. Similarly, we were worried about lagging in terms of syllabus coverage. Online learning was thus the most plausible option.

By stating that ‘we had to find a way, Participant 7 suggests that they were neglected by the government and struggled to meet their goals and deliver education to learners. The institutions considered online learning as their best option for ensuring that students continued to learn despite the policies implemented to contain the spread of the virus, which meant that regular learning could not continue in the foreseeable future. The participants' views also show that concerns regarding syllabus coverage when learning within physical classrooms was suspended played a key role in influencing international schools to shift to online learning. The learning method ensured that syllabus coverage was not extensively disrupted. Furthermore, concerns regarding students spending long periods without learning indicate that online learning was adopted to ensure students were engaged and remained busy. At the same time, the government suspended learning within the physical classroom. International schools wanted to ensure that students did not wholly forget classroom concepts. This issue made it necessary to have online classes.

Theme 3: Less Learning Through Online Classrooms.

The pandemic also limited the extent of learning. According to Participant 11:

Online learning enabled teaching and learning to continue, but only a few topics could be covered daily compared to learning in the physical classroom. We focused more on theory as opposed to practice. Students certainly learned less.

The response provided by the participant indicates that less learning took place as a result of the pandemic. The shift to online learning meant that only a few topics were covered compared to what would typically be covered in physical classrooms. Students had more in-depth coverage of topics in physical classrooms than online learning. The views also offer insights into some of the limitations associated with online learning. Participant 4 also shared similar views by stating:

The pandemic certainly impacted the pace and quality of learning. Online instruction and learning have drawbacks that limit broad topic coverages and confine teaching and learning to theory instead of practice.

The views shared by the participant show that the quality of learning declined because students were mainly taught theories with minimal to no engagement in practice. The response further suggests that educators and school leaders believe that quality learning is accompanied by practical lessons where students have more in-depth engagements with concepts taught in theory. Participant 23 also advanced a similar narrative by stating that:

Online learning has certain limitations that physical classrooms do not have. Most teachers found it difficult to teach practical aspects of subject content and also experienced challenges in conveying information and interacting with students. They were simply not trained for this.

The views shared by Participant 23 suggest that many teachers struggled with online teaching due to the lack of appropriate training, and this led to less learning when international schools shifted to online platforms. The delivery of lessons lacked efficiency due to teachers' lack of appropriate online teaching skills and competencies. The findings

suggest that the ability of teachers to cover topics fast and in a manner that leads to positive learning outcomes is determined by their skill and competence levels. Furthermore, the participant notes that the teaching and learning approach had limitations that physical classrooms did not have, contributing to less learning when the schools adopted the distance learning approach. The response indicates that while online learning has benefitted international schools, it cannot fully replace learning within the physical classroom because of its benefits. Participant 9 also alluded to the impact of the pandemic on learning levels by stating:

Students could continue with their education, but the level of learning was not as intense because online learning has certain limitations when teaching subjects that require practical lessons, such as physics and biology.

The views shared by Participant 9 indicate that the pandemic had a detrimental impact on the quality of learning because of the limitations that online learning imposed on teaching methods. There were mandatory practical lessons in physical and biological science subjects that students could not undertake because of the absence of physical classroom learning. Similarly, since practical lessons are mandatory in physical and biological sciences, failure to engage in such practical lessons meant that syllabus coverage was not conducted effectively. Because students could not participate in practical lessons, there was insufficient coverage of the curriculum, which led to a failure on their part to achieve the desired learning outcomes. According to the data, the pandemic had a detrimental impact on the educational outcomes of pupils attending international schools. As stated by Participant 14:

I received complaints from some students that they did not believe that the quality of teaching was up to speed. Students raised concerns about not undertaking practical chemistry, biology, and physics lessons.

The complaints made by students show that they had expectations concerning teaching and learning, especially regarding undertaking practical lessons to understand classroom concepts better. However, from their experiences with online learning, they believe that learning outcomes have not met their expectations concerning engaging in practical learning to improve their understanding of classroom concepts. The views shared by Participant 14 show that students noted that there was less learning when classrooms were shifted online. The inability to undertake practical lessons in science subjects means less learning occurred when classrooms shifted to digital platforms. However, less learning did not only occur due to teaching methods but also due to the logistics involved in planning and implementing online classrooms. Participant 17 stated that:

There is a lot of planning and coordination involved in implementing online lessons.

You cannot coordinate all of the teachers and still be able to have the same number of lessons in a day as you did when learning occurred within the physical classroom.

The views shared by the participant show that much time was spent organizing online lessons, which led to teachers having less time to focus on actual teaching. The schools could only have a few lessons each day compared to the number of lessons possible during regular learning. Whereas online classrooms ensured learning continuity, they had limitations that resulted in less learning. Students would have learned and

understood more concepts had they been able to undertake practical lessons instead of theories. Overall, the theme reaffirms the negative impact of the pandemic on learning in international schools. At the same time, it shows that learning within physical classrooms has several advantages over online learning within the context of learning outcomes.

Theme 4: Declined Academic Performance.

The impact of COVID-19 on learning in international schools is also captured by declining academic performance. The theme indicates that many international schools recorded declined academic performance during the pandemic. Participant 29 highlighted the decline in academic performance by stating that:

I noticed that the overall academic performance of students declined during the pandemic. I think many students were disoriented because of the effects of COVID-19, while some also suffered poor performance due to struggles with online learning.

The response provided by Participant 29 shows that the poor academic performance that many students recorded during the pandemic was due to the well-being issues that they faced. By using the word ‘disoriented,’ the leader suggests that many students who recorded a decline in academic performance experienced mental health and psychological well-being challenges that hindered their academic ability. The participant also states students recorded poor performances because they struggled with online learning. The claim suggests that students experienced learning challenges that they did not typically experience when learning in the physical classroom. The response further shows that there are issues associated with online learning that can negatively impact learning outcomes and learners' educational experiences. Participant 19 also noted that a decline in students' performance characterized the pandemic by stating:

The pandemic had a negative impact on learning. In the first exams, after we had taken a break, performance was generally poor. Either the students did not read or did not understand what was taught in the classroom.

The views shared by Participant 19 indicate that students generally performed poorly based on their test scores during the pandemic. Disparities in test scores caused the Participant's concerns regarding students' performance during the pandemic before the school went on a break and after learning resumed. The claims made by the participant also suggest that the environment impacts learning outcomes for students. The possibility that students did not read during a break indicates that the home environment did not support reading and learning. Participant 6 also shared similar concerns by stating:

Students failed tests to examine if they could recall what they had learned earlier. It is like they forgot about school when learning within the physical classroom was suspended.

The response provided by Participant 6 shows that by spending a significant amount of time away from the classroom and learning, students had forgotten classroom concepts and were thus failing tests that examined the mastery or understanding of concepts that had already been taught in the classroom. The views shared by Participant 6 also suggest that teachers might have had to revisit some of the concepts that had already been taught to ensure that teaching and learning could effectively transition to the following topics or concepts. However, the response provided by Participant 16 also raises questions concerning the instructional methods used and the ability of those methods to enhance content retention. The fact that students forgot what they had been

taught in the classroom after a relatively short time suggests that instructional methods are geared towards passing exams instead of content retention. Participant 20 confirmed that teachers had to find a way to improve the learning outcomes of students by revisiting some of the topics and concepts that had already been taught before learning was suspended when the COVID-19 outbreak started by stating that:

Most students fared poorly on the tests administered shortly after we started studying, necessitating a review of crucial topics and concepts before continuing teaching and learning.

Based on the response provided by Participant 20, the academic performance of students declined as a result of the pandemic. Most students did not read or engage with schoolwork during the break, resulting in many learners forgetting essential concepts taught in the classroom that were necessary for understanding subsequent topics and concepts. Revisiting concepts that had been taught led to more problems for international schools because it meant that time that was supposed to be used to cover new topics was utilised to revisit old topics. As stated by Participant 3:

Most students thought that the break would run for a long time... most of them did not engage with schoolwork and thus ended up failing standardized tests after learning resumed. Teachers had to refresh their memories by going over some key topics.

The pandemic's long-term effects on academic achievement in international schools are an issue that would need to be investigated separately. The views shared by Participant 3 demonstrate that the academic performance of many students declined after the break necessitated by the COVID-19 outbreak, and teachers had to reteach essential concepts to improve learning outcomes. However, from the responses provided by the

participants, the decline in academic performance might only have been short-term and was attributed to students not engaging with classroom material for the duration that teaching and learning were not taking place.

The results indicate that in the short term, COVID-19 had a negative impact on the academic performance of students in international schools. Poor academic performance was mainly attributed to the failure of students to engage with classroom material when teaching was suspended. Many students did not read their notes and textbooks, which resulted in most of them forgetting classroom concepts. Students thus performed poorly in tests explicitly designed to examine whether they still understood the concepts they had already been taught in the classroom before schools were closed following the COVID-19 outbreak. The problem was rectified by teachers revisiting classroom concepts and topics to support their recollection of what had already been taught.

The four themes, therefore, answer the first research question that aimed to establish the impact of COVID-19 on learning in international schools. One of the impacts of COVID-19 on international schools has been its disruption of syllabus coverage. Syllabus coverage interruptions have an adverse impact on learning outcomes because some concepts may not be covered as extensively as teachers rush to complete the syllabus by the end of the school year—another impact of the pandemic on learning identified from the qualitative data collected related to teaching and learning methods. International schools shifted to online learning after learning within the physical classroom was suspended following government directives to curb the coronavirus's spread. Another impact of the pandemic on learning in international schools is that less learning occurred. Whereas online classrooms ensured learning continuity, they had limitations

that resulted in less learning. Students would have learned and understood more concepts had they been able to undertake practical lessons instead of theories. Finally, the findings indicate that the pandemic negatively impacted international school students' academic performance, even though the impact was short-term.

Research Question 2:

What are the leaders' perspectives on inventions in international learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in international schools?

The second research question sought insights into leaders' perspectives regarding inventions in international learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The question is answered by themes that identify inventions in international learning during the COVID-19 pandemic and how international leaders perceive those inventions.

Theme 1: Online Portals for Efficient Assignments Submission and Performance Monitoring

By analysing the survey participants' comments, the researchers determined that many international schools have created online portals to improve the speed with which students can submit their assignments. This is a considerable divergence from the prior norm, in which assignments were predominantly handed in either electronically or in person. Participant 24 stated that:

The administration had to invest in a system that made it easier for students to submit assignments online, receive feedback, and access subject material. The system was designed to ensure that teachers also worked to meet the needs of students as learning continued online.

The views shared by Participant 24 indicate that international schools recognised the need to improve the educational experiences of learners when learning shifted to online platforms. By investing in a system that enabled students to submit assignments easily, receive feedback, and access study resources, the schools were moving to ensure that online learning did not negatively impact students' learning outcomes. Investment in such systems was also motivated by the need to ensure that educators performed their duties that benefitted students and contributed to positive learning outcomes.

Participant 3 explained this development by stating:

Previously most assignments were submitted physically or via email. Now, we have a robust school website that is friendly to students and enables them to submit and track their assignments.

The views shared by Participant 3 show that the previous process of submitting assignments was inefficient because it made it challenging to ensure that the assignments reached the respective teachers and that there was a verifiable custody chain. The utilisation of information technology has enhanced assignment submission efficiency and improved accountability among teachers and students because of the existence of an electronic paper trail. The portals ensure that students cannot claim to have submitted assignments when they had, in fact, not done the same. Similarly, teachers cannot claim not to have received assignments submitted by students when the online portal shows that assignments were indeed submitted. Participant 11 also shared a similar experience by stating that:

The development of the student portal is one of the new measures adopted to enable students to submit their assignments more efficiently. Cases of missing marks have significantly reduced because of the move.

The claims made by Participant 11 suggest that the physical submission of assignments had a negative impact on the performance of students due to cases of missing marks. The introduction of the online portal during the pandemic addressed the problem by making it easier for students to submit assignments. There was also easy retrieval of marks for students and teacher accountability regarding submitted assignments.

The findings indicate that the pandemic motivated international schools to develop robust websites supporting continued teaching and learning. Investing in information technology has benefited teaching and learning since it has made it simpler for students to hand in their work for grading and receive feedback. While student portals are not necessarily an invention, they are new developments in many international schools because of the pandemic disruptions to physical classroom learning. International schools also wanted to monitor teachers' performance and ensure that teachers were meeting the needs and expectations of students. As stated by Participant 15:

We had to find a way to adapt to online classrooms and ensure that students could submit their assignments in an ordered manner and one that enabled accountability. The online portal also allowed the administration to monitor teachers' performance.

The views shared by the participant show that investment in the online portal was crucial for improving teaching and learning outcomes. Based on the response, it can be deduced that some teachers had not been performing their duties to the expected

standards. The administration thus implemented the change to improve performance. The introduction of the online portals was thus geared towards ensuring that teachers were performing to the expected level. Participant 7 provided more insights into the role of the portals in enhancing the performance of teachers by stating that:

It was not easy at first to monitor teachers' performance since they were teaching remotely from home. Creating the portal made it possible to motivate teachers to put effort toward teaching students and marking assignments on time. Students also had access to several resources.

International schools had to develop strategies to enhance teachers' performance to ensure that learners' expectations and needs were met through online learning. The creation of advanced and efficient websites with user-friendly student portals thus impacted teaching and learning because the portals were developed to mitigate the adverse effects of remote teaching and learning. The results indicate that creating online student portals is a new development in many international schools considered in the current research. The school leaders interviewed in the study generally believe that the development of the portals was necessary to enhance the quality of teaching and improve learning outcomes. While the portals enabled students to submit assignments more quickly and efficiently, they also allowed the school management to monitor teachers' performance since they were working remotely and could engage in practices detrimental to teaching and learning. The development of student portals was, therefore, also aimed at improving staff productivity as they worked from home.

Theme 2: Virtual Reality and Virtual Learning Environments to Improve Collaboration and Learning Outcomes Among Students

Another invention that emerged within the context of international schools during the pandemic is the implementation of virtual learning environments (VLE) and virtual reality (VR) software applications. Participant 10 noted about VR in learning:

We have adopted new inventions within the education technology sector to improve collaboration among students and learning outcomes. A VR technology called Rumii creates a virtual social reality space where students can interact and collaborate.

The views shared by Participant 10 indicate that the pandemic motivated inventions within the education sector to support teaching and learning as schools shifted to online platforms. The response provided by Participant 10 further shows that the school was looking at how it could utilise new technology to improve the educational experiences of students. The development of VR technology to enhance collaboration among students on online platforms shows that online learning has limitations, especially regarding students collaborating and engaging in discussions as they would in physical classrooms. Rumii, the new VR technology, allowed students to interact and collaborate within social VR spaces to improve teaching and learning outcomes. The technology development further shows that international schools aim to ensure that students learn effectively when teaching and learning occur online. Participant 26 also highlighted the importance of VLEs in teaching and learning by explaining that:

We invested in VLEs, creating virtual classrooms where students interact with their peers and learn. The system implemented has significantly improved the educational

outcomes of the students. It is not just about creating a portal for online learning but also ensuring that students can attain positive outcomes when learning online.

The views shared by the participant indicate that students could learn better with the creation of virtual classrooms. VLEs enabled students to interact with peers and attain positive learning outcomes through collaboration. The school leader does not consider the technology to be a new invention but does consider it a new investment on the part of the school. The administration's primary objective was to ensure students attained positive educational outcomes when learning was shifted to online platforms.

Similar views were shared by Participant 18, who stated:

Virtual reality technology in learning has allowed students to have robust discussions and debates within virtual classrooms.

The views shared by Participant 18 suggest that school leaders view VLEs as a necessary invention because of how it supports online learning. The leaders believed that the technology could improve learning outcomes during the pandemic when international schools adopted online classrooms to ensure that education continued even as learning within the physical classroom was suspended. There is a consensus among the leaders that online learning has certain limitations that can have an adverse impact on learning outcomes. The adoption of VLEs to support robust debates and discussions within virtual classrooms demonstrates that the leaders believe that the quality of learning would be compromised without such discussions.

The results indicate that school heads believe that inventions in education technology have improved student collaboration and supported effective learning. The responses point to the shortcomings or limitations of online classrooms by demonstrating

that students cannot effectively collaborate or engage in robust discussions when learning online compared to learning within the physical classroom. However, inventions in VLE have resulted in education technology that can support collaboration and discussions among students within virtual classrooms. Virtual classrooms have similar characteristics to physical classrooms, except those students are in reality in different physical locations. The views shared by the participants suggest that collaboration among students is crucial to attaining positive learning outcomes because of knowledge exchange, a goal that is difficult to achieve through online learning. New inventions such as VLE collaborative spaces are essential for enhancing student collaboration and learning outcomes. Participant 5 further highlighted the importance of the new inventions for learning in international schools during the pandemic by stating that:

We invested in new education technology to enable our students to have the experiences they usually have when attending physical classrooms...students learn best when they can collaborate and engage in discussions. VLE space technology was essential for providing them with this experience.

The views shared by Participant 5 indicate that international schools did not want to compromise on the quality of learning when they shifted to online classrooms. Innovation within the field of VLEs resulted in new education technology that enabled schools to improve teaching and learning outcomes during the pandemic. In contrast, learning was shifted to online classrooms. The results indicate that the leaders of international schools were aware of the shortcomings or limitations of online learning and thus sought to implement education technology supporting collaboration and debates among students. The general perspective is that VLEs improve learning outcomes since

students learn better by collaborating and engaging in debates within virtual spaces. Participant 2 emphasized the importance of developments in VLEs during the pandemic by stating:

We wanted students to continue learning in a manner that improved their ability to retain classroom concepts. VLEs complemented online classrooms by supporting practical engagements and debates among students.

The results indicate that school leaders believe that online classrooms should be supported with tools and mechanisms that enable students to engage with other students as if they were within the physical classroom. School leaders believed that new developments in education technology, especially social spaces created through VLEs, improved learning outcomes during the pandemic as online classes were adopted to ensure learning continuity. The technology enabled the institutions to transfer some of the benefits of the physical classroom to online classrooms.

The theme offers insights into how the pandemic influenced technological innovation within the education sector, particularly in international schools. New technology was used to address the limitations of online classes and enhance learning outcomes. School leaders view VLEs, which created VLE collaborative spaces to enable student collaboration, as one of the most important inventions that emerged during the pandemic to support teaching and learning.

Theme 3: Guidance and Counselling Offices to Enhance Psychological Wellbeing

Many international schools also established guidance and counselling offices during and after the pandemic to help teachers and students cope with its adverse effects on their mental well-being. Participant 17 stated the development:

The school responded to the mental health challenges caused by the pandemic by establishing an office for guidance and counselling. We figured out that enhancing the mental well-being of staff and learners is necessary.

The views shared by Participant 17 demonstrate that the pandemic had a negative impact on the mental well-being of both teaching staff and students. Additionally, the pandemic drew the attention of the leaders of international schools to the importance of addressing the mental well-being of staff and learners because of the realisation that mental health was a key determinant of their performance. Participant 21 also noted the importance of guidance and counselling offices by stating:

The school has been taking mental health more seriously. The epidemic highlighted the requirement to address mental health in school. The leadership responded by restructuring the current guidance and counselling office to enable it to address mental health issues among students and educators.

The views shared by Participant 21 show that before the pandemic, the existing guidance and counselling office was not well-equipped to deal with mental health issues among students and teachers. However, following the effect of the pandemic on mental health, the school leadership decided to restructure the office to enhance its capability to address mental health issues among students and teachers. The pandemic thus

impacted the policies of international schools in terms of addressing mental health within the institutions.

Participant 14 also shared similar views by stating:

The newly established guidance and counselling office are managed by professionals whose prominent role is to help improve the psychological health of students and teachers. The pandemic has got people going through a lot.

The claims made by Participant 14 show that school leaders took the issue of mental well-being seriously and thus hired individuals with the skills and professional qualifications necessary to provide practical guidance and counselling to people experiencing mental health challenges. Hiring professionals further indicates that school leaders believed addressing mental health issues was a worthwhile investment.

School leaders believed that guidance and counselling were essential to help students and teachers cope with the pandemic's detrimental consequences on mental health. The leaders believed that the pandemic adversely affected the mental health of learners and educators. Thus there was a need to institute measures that could address those adverse effects. While establishing a guidance and counselling office is not an invention in the conventional sense, many international schools did not have the office, especially one dedicated to dealing with mental health issues. Participant 3 pointed to this development by stating:

Our guidance and the counselling office were mainly for helping students to make the correct subject selections. Now the office also deals with mental health issues. The pandemic has shown us the importance of having such an office.

While the primary concern of international schools' guidance and counselling offices was initially to enable students to improve their academic performance and choose the right career paths, the pandemic showed that addressing students' mental health concerns were also significant. The views shared by Participant 3 show that school leaders appreciated the importance of attending to the mental health concerns of students as a result of the pandemic. Participant 11 noted that mental health also impacted the academic performance of students by stating:

Students experiencing mental health challenges are nearly incapable of focusing on class and excelling. Establishing a guidance and counselling office was crucial for improving the performance of teachers and students during and after the pandemic.

The results indicate that the pandemic influenced the leaders of international schools to pay more attention to the importance of mental health among students and the teaching staff. The views shared by Participant 11 show that the school's leadership believed it was necessary to address mental health issues among students and teachers. Therefore, a guidance and counselling office significantly developed during the pandemic because it enhanced mental well-being and academic excellence. The establishment of guidance and counselling offices equipped to deal with the mental health issues experienced by students and teachers indicates that school leaders believed it was necessary to address mental health issues to enhance teaching and learning outcomes. Whereas the analysis of the responses shows that school leaders did not consider guidance and counselling offices to be inventions, they regarded them as new developments influenced by the adverse effects of the pandemic on the mental health of teachers and students. Decisions to establish guidance and counselling offices were

motivated by the understanding that teachers could not perform their roles effectively when experiencing psychological challenges. Students could also not excel in academics without good mental health.

Theme 4: Online Learning to Complement Learning within the Physical Classroom

Online classrooms became commonplace during the COVID-19 pandemic as international schools sought to ensure that students continued learning even as physical classroom learning became untenable. School leaders believe online learning should complement physical learning even after the pandemic. Participant 20 stated that:

The pandemic made online learning necessary, but I believe that the mode of learning should not be abandoned even if learning within the physical classroom normalizes. Online classes can improve the performance of students.

The views shared by Participant 20 show that they consider online classes to be a good strategy for international schools because the classes can improve the performance of students. The optimism displayed by the participant showed that they believed that technology could improve teaching and learning outcomes and was generally beneficial to teachers and students. The statement by Participant 20 also suggests that school leaders experienced and understood the benefits of online classes during the pandemic. Due to the benefits the schools and leaders identified in using online classrooms, they believe the learning mode should be retained even after the pandemic to complement learning within the physical classroom. Participant 14 shared similar views by stating:

Teachers can continue to conduct online classes to complement the regular classes to ensure students properly grasp classroom concepts. It can be a great way to advance the performance of students.

The statement made by Participant 14 demonstrates that school leaders believe that the performance of students can improve when online classes are used to complement learning within the physical classroom. The views shared by the participants thus show that school leaders believe that online classes should continue to be provided because they can enhance teaching and learning outcomes. While most international schools adopted online learning to ensure learning continuity when physical classrooms become untenable, school leaders believe that online classes should be retained because they can complement learning within the physical classroom and improve students' performance. The development is not temporary or a stop-gap but should be integrated into regular teaching and learning programs.

School leaders consider online classes complementary to physical classrooms from an economic perspective. According to Participant 5:

One thing that we have learned with online classes is that they can provide an opportunity to generate more revenue. The school can provide paid online classes to students within and outside the country.

According to the statement provided by Participant 5, international schools can increase revenue generation by offering online classrooms. Online classes should thus be an integral component of the operations of international schools because of their capability to generate more revenue for the institutions. Participant 25 noted that:

The institution realised during the pandemic that it could not continue depending on tuition fees from regular students alone. The school has to generate additional income to meet its expenses. We decided to retain online classrooms to enrol more students and increase revenue generation.

The response provided by the participant implies that international schools consider online classrooms as a means of generating additional revenue. Participant 25 said online classes allowed the institution to diversify and generate more income. Participant 9 also shared a similar perspective by stating:

I think online classes might be here to stay. As a school, we can use them to improve our students' performance, increase enrolment, and generate more income.

The views shared by Participant 9 demonstrate that school leaders view online classes as an opportunity for international schools to increase revenue generation. The classes are thus likely to continue even after learning within the physical classroom has resumed.

The findings show that school leaders consider their institutions as business entities that should generate income. The leaders believe that online classes can complement physical classrooms in revenue generation. While international schools generally generate revenue from students that attend physical classrooms, there is a belief among the schools' leaders that online classes can also create new income streams and improve the financial performance of the institutions. The leaders aim to make the new development a mainstay of the schools because it can impact their revenue generation. Participant 1 noted the importance of online classrooms as international schools recover from the economic impacts of the pandemic by stating that:

How online classes ensured the continuity of learning despite distance during the pandemic certainly got us thinking. We can use digital platforms to offer distance learning and training and attain more income streams.

The statement provided by Participant 1 indicates that school leaders have come to appreciate the economic opportunities provided by online classrooms. While the shift to online classes mainly occurred due to the COVID-19 pandemic interrupting learning within the physical classroom, the leaders seek to make it a permanent teaching and learning approach because of the online learning capability to increase revenue generation. In other words, the leaders have embraced the new development because of the economic benefits that it has created. The findings suggest that international schools are likely to invest in information technology to take advantage of opportunities presented by online classes.

The analysis of the themes discovered under the second research question provides a new understanding of the inventions and innovations within the context of international schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. The analysis also offers insights into how the leaders of international schools perceive these inventions, innovations, and developments. The results indicate that international schools developed online portals to enhance the efficient submission of assignments. This is a notable shift from the previous practice, where assignments were mainly submitted via email or physically. Creating online portals for submitting assignments is one of the new developments identified from the participants' responses examined. School leaders believed that the development of the portals was necessary to enhance the quality of teaching and improve learning outcomes. While the portals enabled students to submit assignments more quickly and

efficiently, they also allowed the school management to monitor teachers' performance, given that they were working remotely. School leaders thus perceive the creation of these portals as a positive development toward improving teaching and learning outcomes.

The analysis also shows that international schools have embraced VLEs to improve student collaboration and enhance teaching and learning outcomes. The theme offers insights into how the pandemic influenced technological innovation within the education sector, particularly in international schools. New technology was used to address the limitations of online classes and enhance learning outcomes. VLEs created virtual social spaces to enable student collaboration. School administrators regard the development as one of the most important inventions that emerged during the pandemic to support teaching and learning. While the results do not indicate that international schools developed the new technology, they suggest that the schools adopted VLEs because of their ability to create social spaces to support collaboration among students despite geographical distance. The new technology has proved beneficial in improving learning outcomes, as demonstrated by the views shared by the school leaders. Research question 2 has also been answered by the theme, which showed that many international schools established guidance and counselling offices during and after the pandemic to help teachers and students cope with its adverse effects on their mental well-being.

School leaders believe the pandemic heightened mental health issues among students and the teaching staff. Mental health challenges limit the ability of teachers to excel in their roles. The challenges also negatively impact the academic performance of students. Therefore, school leaders believe that establishing guidance and counselling

offices that can address the psychological health challenges students and staff face can improve the productivity and role performance of instructors and students' academic performance. The findings further show that online learning is a new development within the context of international schools during the pandemic. Although online classes are not a new invention, the results show that international schools only adopted the learning mode during the pandemic to ensure that students could continue learning when learning within the physical classroom was suspended. School leaders perceived online classrooms as an important development that should be used to complement learning within the physical classroom. The implication is that the leaders expected online learning to continue even after students resumed learning within the physical classroom because of the ability of the model of learning to enhance teaching and learning outcomes. Teachers can use online classrooms to help students understand classroom concepts better. Additionally, the results indicate that school leaders expected online learning to stay and complement learning within the physical classroom because of the learning mode's economic opportunities. School leaders believe their institutions can earn more revenue by providing local and international students with online classes.

In summary, the themes examined under the research question indicate that international schools became innovative during the pandemic to achieve various goals related to teaching and learning. School leaders generally consider innovative strategies beneficial to international schools. They believe they should continue being applied even after the return of normalcy. Online learning, VLEs for student collaboration, guidance and counselling offices and programs to improve psychological well-being, and online portals for assignment submissions are the main new developments in international

schools during the pandemic. School leaders perceive the developments positively and believe they can enhance teaching and learning outcomes while driving international schools' financial performance.

Research Question 3:

From the leaders' perspective: How has the pandemic impacted the future preparedness of international schools concerning disruptions to learning caused by public health crises?

The third research question sought to determine how the pandemic impacted the future preparedness of international schools concerning disruptions to learning caused by public health crises. The question sought to establish how international schools had moved to limit or prevent a pandemic's negative impacts on their future activities. The themes presented and analysed under this research question offer insights into what international schools have learned from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their activities.

Theme 1: Training Teachers for Online Teaching

The study's findings show that international schools sought to prepare for future pandemics by training teachers to enhance their ability to teach effectively online. Participant 30 noted that:

Teaching online classrooms is difficult. Educators require additional skills to teach such classrooms effectively. We decided to invest in teacher training to improve their ability to successfully teach online classes, given that technology has also become a big part of education.

According to the participant, teachers found it difficult to teach online classes due to the lack of appropriate skills and competencies. The challenge prompted the school's leadership to invest in teacher training to teach online classrooms and improve student learning outcomes. Consequently, teacher training was necessary because of the increasing technology usage in education. The response implies that the administration needed to ensure that teachers were well-prepared to work in an environment where technology is crucial.

Participant 16 stated that:

Many of our teachers lacked the skills and competencies required to teach online effectively. In my opinion, this negatively impacted students' ability to understand classroom concepts taught online. We have to train our teachers on how to teach effectively online.

While the pandemic created an urgency concerning ensuring that teachers could offer online lessons effectively, it also highlighted a problem within the international school sector that should be resolved. The statement provided by Participant 16 shows that many international schools were not prepared for online classes. However, the lack of teacher competency in online teaching points to a broader problem. It demonstrates that teacher training institutions do not prepare teachers for work in an environment significantly shaped by information technology. The view by Participant 16 that international schools have to train their teachers to provide online classes effectively suggests that there is a lack of education training policies geared towards preparing teachers for work in an environment that is extensively shaped by technology. International schools must take the initiative to train their teachers for online teaching to

enhance teaching regarding educational results in online classrooms. Participant 20 also shared similar views by stating:

Educators require some skillsets if online classes are to achieve similar goals as teaching within physical classrooms. We aim to fund the training of teachers to ensure that they can teach online in a way that improves teaching and learning results.

There are significant challenges that teachers face within the context of online classrooms that can be addressed through training. The statement by Participant 20 shows that international schools will fund the training of teachers to enhance their online teaching competencies and skills because of the realisation that most teachers lack the skills required to teach effectively online. The notion of funding the training by themselves also demonstrates that governments have not given much consideration to the need to train teachers in a way that equips them for teaching within the online environment. Participant 28 also noted the importance of training and the challenges that the school faces in this regard by stating:

The government has not come to appreciate that online classrooms are a crucial part of teaching and learning in the contemporary education sector. We must train teachers to teach effectively online because the government has not invested in teacher training to this extent.

The response indicates that international schools prefer that education policymakers change the teacher training curriculum to ensure that education graduates can effectively teach online classes. However, since the government has not prioritized this issue, the schools have to bear the cost of training teachers to improve their ability to teach online to lead to positive educational experiences for learners. The school leader

noted that online learning had become integral to education. Ensuring all teachers are well-equipped to work in roles that offer online instruction is vital. Participant 6, on the other hand, highlighted the challenges that teachers and students experienced with online classes to demonstrate why the school had decided to invest in training teachers on effectively teaching when classes are offered online. Participant 6 stated that:

Many teachers struggle with their delivery when teaching online. Many pupils complained about their inability to understand many classroom concepts when teaching was conducted online. We had to train our educators for then and the future.

The results indicate that international schoolteachers were not adequately prepared to teach online. The pandemic occurred when many schools were not prepared to provide online classes. Therefore it meant that teachers had to teach online even though they lacked the skills and competencies necessary to enhance teaching and learning outcomes when teaching and learning occur online. The views shared by the school leaders show that the lack of online teaching skills and competencies among international school teachers negatively impacted learning outcomes. Students did not understand some online concepts because of educators' teaching skills and abilities. The findings suggest that teaching and learning outcomes would have been better had the lessons been offered within physical classrooms. International schools are training teachers on online teaching to ensure that they can teach online classes in a manner that leads to positive learning outcomes to prepare for future interruptions from learning in the physical classroom. Participant 9 noted the importance of such training by stating:

Technology is increasingly becoming an integral aspect of teaching and learning. I think that it is essential for international schools to prepare for a future where digital classrooms are commonplace.

The statement indicates that international schools should prepare for online learning necessitated by pandemics that disrupt learning within the physical classroom and prepare for a future where digital learning has been normalized. The leaders have realised that information technology will be a feature of the education sector and pedagogy in the long term. As stated by Participant 17:

Online learning is becoming a source of competitive advantage for learning institutions. International schools must embrace this trend to conduct business successfully in a business environment significantly influenced by technology, and teachers must be trained for it. Look at what the universities have done.

The views shared by Participant 17 show that preparing for a digital future is a crucial consideration that international schools have to make to enhance their competitive advantage in the education sector. Training teachers to operate in a digital environment is thus a necessity and not merely an option for international schools. The results also demonstrate that COVID-19 merely drew the attention of international schools to the urgency of training teachers to operate in a working environment primarily shaped by technology. According to Participant 12:

We realised the need to train teachers to improve their digital literacy and online teaching capability during the pandemic. However, I believe schools should have done this much earlier because of how fast things are shifting to online platforms.

The results emphasize the importance of training teachers to improve their skills and capabilities in using digital tools to meet the needs and expectations of learners. International schools would not have experienced teaching and learning challenges or encountered limited difficulties within online classrooms had they prepared adequately for an environment widely shaped by technology. In the future, school leaders contend that international schools must train teachers to ensure they can perform their roles effectively in a digital environment.

Theme 2: Alternative Income Streams

The pandemic also influenced international schools to plan for alternative or additional income streams to minimise economic challenges when regular learning is interrupted. Participant 28 revealed the importance of having alternative income streams by stating that:

We have experienced significant financial challenges because we relied on minimal income streams. We need to diversify to reduce such risks in the future. The leadership has already proposed ways to ensure that we do not experience an economic crisis of a similar magnitude.

The response indicates that the pandemic negatively impacted the international school's financial position because it relied on few income sources. The school leadership seeks alternative income sources to ensure that the school continues to finance its projects and expenses even when the regular school calendar is disrupted.

Participant 4 stated that:

One issue that the board has seriously discussed is how to cushion ourselves from economic shocks if the school calendar is interrupted. We are working towards establishing alternative revenue generation projects.

The views shared by Participant 4 suggest that international schools experienced significant financial challenges caused by the pandemic and the fact that they did not have alternative investments to help them deal with economic shocks. The financial challenges have influenced the leaders of these schools to discuss how to diversify investment to ensure that the negative economic impacts of future pandemics are mitigated. Participant 7 also highlighted the importance of having alternative income streams by stating that:

As an institution, we must consider our options regarding generating revenue. The pandemic caused severe financial troubles that made us lose some essential teachers. We must invest in other ventures to ensure continuous income generation.

The statement shared by Participant 7 shows that school leaders are looking for ways to reduce the adverse economic effects of pandemics on their financial performance. The adverse effects were amplified by the lack of diverse investments since international schools mainly relied on revenue from tuition fees. International schools lost essential employees because they could not meet their wages during the pandemic. The loss of teachers motivated the school leaders to discuss additional investments. As noted by the participant, it was important for the institutions to consider additional investments to mitigate the negative economic impacts likely to be experienced in a similar pandemic.

The responses demonstrate that international schools experienced financial difficulties due to the pandemic. Some institutions struggled to pay their staff because of interruptions to normal operations. According to Participant 10:

I think we rely too much on tuition fees. We had to take credit facilities during the pandemic to pay our teachers because we would lose many capable educators. We are now looking at additional investments to increase revenue generation.

The findings indicate that international schools have learned from the adverse economic effects of the pandemic and want to increase the variety of their sources of revenue to minimise the extent to which loss of income from tuition fees can result in negative financial consequences for the learning institutions. Many schools have been relying on revenue generated from tuition, a source disrupted when the school calendar was suspended and teaching discontinued. The school leaders believe that international school management needs to identify investment opportunities that can result in additional sources of revenue for the institutions. As stated by Participant 13:

We had not prepared for this moment. Most schools were complacent because there is no recollection in recent memory where learning was interrupted to such an extent. It has been a teachable moment, and now we are diversifying.

The views shared by Participant 13 demonstrate that many international schools had not considered the need to diversify their revenue sources because they were assured revenue generated from the tuition fee. However, the pandemic's negative impact on international schools' financial performance motivated them to consider alternative sources of income significantly when external factors limit the extent to which they can obtain revenue through tuition fees. Participant 9 and Participant 18 termed the

consideration of alternative sources of revenue as spreading the risk. Participant 9 noted that:

We now recognise the significance of spreading risks. Relying mainly on one source of revenue is highly risky, as seen during the pandemic. We are working on a business model that would increase revenue generation.

The views shared by the respondent indicate that the institution's leadership has not yet identified additional income streams. While the administration recognises the importance of diversifying the business, it is unclear how the learning institution can venture into other business areas to increase revenue generation. Participant 18, on the other hand, stated that:

I think the business approach was risky because when the pandemic hit, we could not pay our staff. We mainly relied on tuition money to generate revenue. Now we know better and are diversifying investment.

The response provided by Participant 18 indicates that the leaders of international schools have come to appreciate the importance of spreading risks to ensure business continuity and meet their financial obligations when regular learning is interrupted. The main concern of the participant is staff salaries, indicating that the school experienced significant human resource challenges when they could not pay their staff. The views shared by the Participant further demonstrate that schools should develop strategies that enhance their ability to reimburse their teachers appropriately. As noted by the respondent, diversification can ensure that international schools minimise the economic challenges that may arise due to the overreliance on revenue generated through tuition fees. According to Participant 26:

We need to find and keep the top talent in the market. That means we have to pay competitive salaries and keep our teachers happy. Having additional income sources ensures that our teachers are well compensated and salary is consistent even during a pandemic.

The response indicates that the school leader believes that teachers are an essential asset and that the institution cannot afford to lose these teachers, especially when they are talented. Additional income sources would improve staff retention and the institution's competitive advantage since talented teachers will likely translate into high-performing students.

The findings indicate that the pandemic influenced international schools to diversify investments and spread risks. Overreliance on one revenue source worsened the pandemic's economic effects on international schools. The school leaders believe that the schools can survive future pandemics and disruptions to the school calendar by ensuring that they invest in other ventures. Diversifying investment minimises the institutions' financial risks, especially during a pandemic such as COVID-19. Having alternative revenue sources is thus an essential strategy that international schools can implement if they intend to mitigate the negative economic impacts of similar pandemics in the future. However, the results also show that school leaders still do not have specifics regarding alternative investments besides using online classrooms to increase revenue generation. The lack of ideas regarding additional investments suggests that international schools are often over-relied on tuition revenue. The findings also indicate that international schools are now just beginning to discuss how they can increase revenue

generation and mitigate the financial risks they face because of a limited number of investments.

Theme 3: Hiring Teachers with Online Teaching Competencies

International schools are also preparing for the future by hiring teachers with the skills and competencies required to work effectively in an environment shaped by technology. Participant 11 stated that:

We are changing our hiring policies and designing the recruitment process to support selecting technologically savvy teachers. We need people that can work successfully in this era of online classrooms.

Hiring teachers with the skills and capabilities necessary to work effectively in an environment extensively shaped by technology is necessary. The response provided by Participant 11 shows that school leaders believe that the future of international schools will be significantly influenced by technology. While the respondent did not mention the need to hire teachers that can teach online classes effectively, the leader's reference to technological savviness indicates that they believe that teachers should be capable of performing their roles successfully when technology is a crucial part of school operations. Participant 20 was more specific about the importance of hiring teachers that can teach online classes effectively by stating:

Since the importance of online classes has been established and the challenges that teachers face identified, I think that we now know that we should recruit teachers who can effectively teach when classes are offered online.

The statement shared by Participant 20 demonstrates that international schools are preparing for a future where teachers would have to teach online classes more

frequently or regularly. The recruitment of teachers that can teach such classes effectively is considered necessary by school leaders because of the challenges teachers experienced with teaching online classes when physical classrooms were suspended due to COVID-19. Participant 6 made similar claims by stating:

I think that it is essential that we hire teachers that are already capable of teaching online classes well. At least this will ensure that students achieve positive learning outcomes even when classes take place online.

The statement provided by Participant 6 offers insights into the concerns of international school leaders concerning online classes. The classes can hinder students from attaining positive learning outcomes if teachers do not have the skills and capabilities to teach online classes. Instead of training teachers to teach online classes when needed, the leaders believe they should hire teachers already skilled in teaching such classes. Apart from hiring teachers with online teaching competencies because of the need to prepare for a future where online learning is commonplace, leaders also believe that hiring teachers with the appropriate online teaching skills reduces or eliminates the costs that international schools would likely incur by training teachers within the context of online teaching. Participant 17 highlighted the economic aspect of the strategy by stating:

While current teachers should be trained to improve their ability to teach effectively online, I think that going forward, we should recruit teachers that already possess the skills that we are looking for to save on training costs.

The views shared by Participant 17 indicate that training costs are a concern for international schools. To eliminate or reduce these costs, the leaders believe they should recruit teachers with the skills and competencies to teach effectively online. Participant 4

provided similar insights into the importance of hiring teachers that are already trained in online teaching by stating that:

Training teachers on online teaching will result in extra costs for the institution. While the school has to train and develop teachers constantly, we can save on costs by hiring competent teachers in online teaching.

The statement provided by Participant 4 shows that school leaders believe that teachers should be trained and developed. However, the institutions can save on training costs by hiring teachers already competent in online teaching. The views shared by the school leaders suggest that international schools seek to enhance learning outcomes in online classes by recruiting teachers that can effectively teach such classes. While the main objective of the recruitment approach is to ensure preparedness for online teaching, the recruitment of teachers that have been trained on how to teach effectively online is also a preferred strategy by international schools because it helps to cut costs that would have been incurred in training teachers on how to teach effectively online.

The three themes identified and discussed answered the research question on how the pandemic impacted the future preparedness of international schools concerning disruptions to learning caused by public health crises. The results indicate that international schools aim to minimise disruptions to learning in the future by ensuring that instructors receive instruction on how to teach effectively in online classrooms. The current research has shown that teachers in international schools experienced challenges with online teaching because they lacked the requisite skills and competencies needed to teach effectively in online classrooms. The results emphasize the importance of training

teachers to improve their skills and capabilities in using digital tools to meet the needs and expectations of learners.

International schools would not have experienced teaching and learning challenges or encountered limited difficulties within online classrooms had they prepared adequately for an environment widely shaped by technology. In the future, school leaders contend that international schools must train teachers to ensure they can perform their roles effectively in a digital environment. The findings also demonstrate that international schools can prepare for the future by having alternative income streams. The pandemic led to financial challenges for international schools, with some teachers quitting because of delayed and sometimes absent salaries. Attrition can negatively impact teaching and learning, especially when experienced teachers leave. The findings indicate that the pandemic influenced international schools to diversify investments and spread risks.

Overreliance on one revenue source worsened the pandemic's economic effects on international schools. The school leaders believe that the schools can survive future pandemics and disruptions to the school calendar by ensuring that they invest in other ventures. Diversifying investment minimises the institutions' financial risks, especially during a pandemic such as COVID-19. Finally, international schools can also prepare for the future by changing their recruitment policies to ensure that the recruitment process leads to already employed skilled and competent teachers in online teaching. Hiring teachers with the skills and capabilities necessary to work effectively in an environment extensively shaped by technology is necessary. School leaders believe that teachers should be capable of performing their roles successfully when technology is a crucial part of school operations. The recruitment approach also has economic benefits because it

enables international schools to hire teachers that can effectively teach online classrooms without incurring training costs.

Research Question 4:

How has COVID-19 impacted policy development to secure staff and students' well-being during international school crises?

The fourth research question examined how COVID-19 impacted policy development to secure staff and students' well-being during a crisis. The question specifically focused on the well-being of students and teachers and how international schools aim to improve their well-being in the future.

Theme 1: Increased Focus on Mental Health

International schools have developed policies addressing mental health issues within the school environment. Participant 24 noted that:

The pandemic demonstrated that it is important to take mental health seriously. We are now paying more attention to the issue. We have created policies to help prioritize mental health and ensure that those that require assistance find it.

The response provided by the participant shows that the school paid more attention to mental health after observing the pandemic's effects on the mental well-being of students and staff. The institution's leadership developed policies to help support this shift and address mental health. Participant 5 advanced a similar narrative by stating that:

The school has developed policies that have placed more emphasis on mental health. COVID-19 showed just how important mental health is, and the school has developed appropriate policies to support mental well-being, including having a mental health week.

The statement shared by Participant 5 indicates that international schools have developed policies to create more awareness around mental health to enhance the mental well-being of both students and staff. The idea of having a mental health week shows that international schools are looking to draw attention to the importance of mental health, even among students that do not necessarily require counselling. Participant 10 offered more insights into the importance of increasing awareness around mental health by stating that:

We've learned from the pandemic that it's essential to pay attention to the mental health of everyone around us. We have created policies that will help students and staff to pay more attention to both their own and other people's mental health.

The views shared by Participant 10 show that the school introduced policies designed to increase awareness around mental health and enhance the capability of students and staff to pay more attention to their surroundings' mental health requirements. The policies generally seek to improve mental well-being within the school. According to Participant 18:

The school did not have policies created to help address mental health. It was not regarded as necessary until the pandemic happened, and we saw how students and staff were affected by it. Now we want everyone to be on board.

Participant 18 states that 'now we want everyone to be on board, indicating that everyone within the schools should be able to support the mental well-being of others as they also improve their mental health. Therefore, the policies' development has been influenced by the pandemic and how it affected the psychological well-being of teachers and students.

International schools have had to develop their policies because the government has not moved to develop and implement sector policies to address the psychological well-being of students and teachers. Participant 19 noted that:

The education ministry has not supported schools addressing mental health issues. We have had to rely on our policies and resources to improve mental well-being.

The views shared by Participant 19 demonstrate that the government has not considered the importance of mental health in international schools and has thus failed to develop policies that would support the education sector in addressing mental health issues among students and staff. The learning institutions have had to utilise their resources to implement policies designed to enhance the psychological well-being of both teachers and students. Participant 1 made similar claims by stating that:

I think the government has been slow in creating policies to improve mental well-being in the education sector. We set ourselves the objective of addressing mental health, especially considering what we have observed with COVID-19.

The statement shared by Participant 1 shows that international schools consider mental health as an issue that should be addressed urgently. However, since the government is not moving fast to help schools deal with the issue, the leaders of international schools have taken it upon themselves to develop and implement policies that can help to improve mental well-being among teachers and learners. The school leaders believe mental health is an important issue that should receive significant attention primarily due to COVID-19's negative impacts.

The results provide insights into how COVID-19 has impacted policy development in international schools concerning mental health. The responses show that international

schools have begun to pay increased attention to mental health because of the pandemic's unfavourable effects on the psychological well-being of students and staff. Therefore, the schools decided to develop policies that would help address and improve mental well-being among students and educators. The policies have been developed by international schools without support from the government mainly because while school leaders viewed mental health as an urgent and essential issue that should be addressed, governments were not moving with the desired urgency to create and implement policies that could help the education sector to enhance the mental well-being of educators and learners.

Theme 2: Remuneration Policies to Ensure Pay Continuity

International schools have also developed policies designed to ensure pay continuity. Participant 30 noted that:

We lost some teachers when the school calendar was suspended, and we could not pay total salaries. We have decided to develop strategies to ensure pay continuity even when a pandemic and tuition fee declines significantly.

The response by Participant 30 implies that the institution did not have policies aimed at ensuring that teachers are fully paid, including when the school calendar has been suspended. However, the pandemic showed that having several sources of revenue is essential to mitigate risks associated with economic shocks. The response also shows that the school has not yet decided on the additional sources of revenue because the respondent did not discuss them in detail but provided general statements that showed desire instead of action. Vagueness regarding diversification was a recurrent feature in

the responses provided by the participants. It was clear that the school leaders believed it necessary to avoid over-relying on tuition fees. According to Participant 4:

It was crucial to develop policies ensuring pay continuity even when the school calendar is interrupted to improve staff retention after staff loss during the pandemic. Many teachers welcomed such policies and have been settled at the school.

By stating that teachers have been settled, Participant 4 suggested that teachers' psychological well-being had improved since they were not worried about the future. The statement further shows that many teachers experienced psychological challenges during the pandemic due to salary interruptions since students were not in school for a long time. International schools have thus moved to prevent a repeat occurrence by introducing policies ensuring pay continuity even when the school calendar is interrupted. Similar claims were shared by Participant 12, who stated:

Many teachers suffered during the pandemic because some were on half salary while others did not receive their pay. We are introducing policies to ensure that teachers continue receiving their pay even when the school calendar is interrupted.

The claims made by Participant 12 indicate that teachers experienced financial hardships caused by a lack of pay during the pandemic. Financial constraints can lead to psychological problems, as noted by Participant 7, who stated:

Several teachers informed us that they were looking for alternative employment due to a lack of pay or low pay during the pandemic. A significant proportion of teachers claimed they could not meet their needs due to a lack of money. We have developed policies to rectify that.

The views shared by Participant 7 suggest that teachers were under significant stress because of financial challenges. As a result of the problems encountered due to lack of pay, several sought alternative employment. International schools have thus moved to introduce policies that will enhance the well-being of teachers by ensuring that they continue to receive their pay even when the school calendar is interrupted. However, the policies are not only designed to improve the well-being of teachers but also to minimise staff attrition. The school leaders noted that the schools lost many staff members during the pandemic due to inadequate pay. Introducing policies designed to ensure pay continuity is thus also beneficial to international schools through improved organisational commitment.

The notion of being settled among teachers due to the new policies suggests that policies introduced to ensure pay continuity have improved teachers' psychological well-being in international schools. As reaffirmed by Participant 13:

After introducing pay continuity policies, we conducted a survey and found that many teachers were very settled and happy. They were no longer worried about what another lockdown would do to their finances.

The issue of remuneration had caused significant stress to the administration, and its resolution had brought them relief. The views shared by Participant 13 demonstrate that policies developed and implemented to ensure pay continuity improved the psychological well-being of teachers in international schools. The assurance that salary would continue to be paid even if the regular school calendar was disrupted eliminated the desire to leave or look for alternative income sources. Participant 10 emphasized the importance of the approach to the well-being of teachers by stating that:

We wanted to make our teachers worry less about their future. I believe it was also essential to ensure that our teachers did not experience significant economic challenges because of delayed or absent salaries.

The views shared by Participant 10 suggest that the leaders of international schools came to appreciate the importance of ensuring pay continuity for teachers and thus developed policies aimed at enhancing the psychological well-being and organisational commitment of staff members through pay continuity. The relationship between pay and the psychological well-being of teachers indicates that international schools can improve the well-being of their staff members by ensuring that they are paid on time and in a manner that is commensurate with their needs and expectations. COVID-19, therefore, impacted the development of policies ensuring that teachers are paid as long as they are employed, even when schools are temporarily closed due to public health crises. Participant 17 noted that schools have begun considering alternative sources of income or revenue to ensure teachers are paid even when schools are closed. According to Participant 17:

We have developed strategies to ensure continued revenue generation to pay our teachers even when the school calendar is interrupted. Therefore we must consider how our teachers were adversely affected by the lack of adequate pay.

The statement made by Participant 17 indicates that international schools have developed policies designed to ensure that they generate revenue from additional sources to reduce overreliance on tuition fees as a source of revenue. The revenue policies seek to ensure that teachers are paid their salaries even when the school calendar is interrupted. School leaders understand that remuneration impacts the well-

being of teachers. Thus alternative revenue sources can ensure that international schools improve and maintain the welfare of their staff.

The findings show that school leaders believe that remuneration is an area through which international schools can address the well-being of teachers. The relationship between pay continuity and psychological well-being among teachers demonstrates the importance of developing and implementing policies that ensure teachers are appropriately paid even when schools are temporarily closed. The adverse effects of COVID-19 on the economic welfare of teachers prompted international schools to develop policies that would enhance their well-being through pay continuity.

Theme 3: Teacher and Students' Training to Improve ICT Skills

International schools also developed policies to improve teachers' and learners' well-being by equipping them with ICT skills. According to Participant 23:

Since online learning will be a crucial part of instruction strategies, we decided to ensure that teachers and students are trained to use computer systems. For teachers, the training was a bit extensive. Students only needed to learn the basics.

The views shared by the participant indicate that the school developed policies to support the training of teachers and students to improve their ICT skills. The respondent noted that such training was necessary because online learning would continue long-term. Participant 13 stated that:

Most of our teachers and students experienced challenges regarding remote learning. Teachers especially found their jobs more stressful because they did not have the skills required to teach effectively online. We want to train both teachers and students to improve their ICT skills

The response shared by Participant 13 shows that teachers and students experienced psychological stress because they did not have the appropriate skills for teaching and learning, respectively, in an environment primarily grounded in technology. The views demonstrate that teachers experienced work-related stress because they effectively found it challenging to teach online without the appropriate skills and competencies. International schools reduce the stress associated with ICT resources by training teachers and students, improving their well-being. Participant 20 made similar claims by stating:

We want to ensure that our teachers love their work. To do this, we have to train them on how to use information technology resources, especially in the era of online teaching and learning. ICT training policies have been put in place to achieve this.

The views shared by Participant 20 indicate that there is a relationship between the motivation of teachers to work and having the necessary skills to discharge their duties. The participant states that teachers can only love their work when they possess the right skills to perform their roles effectively. The absence of motivation or love of work without proper training suggests that teachers experience work-related stress when their skills are inadequate to meet their roles' requirements. Participant 20's comments further indicate that online teaching and learning have resulted in new challenges for teachers and learners, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic—the challenges related to working result in stress and, thus, loss of mental well-being for teachers. Policies are developed to train teachers and improve their competence regarding online teaching, improving their well-being. Training enables students to use ICT resources with minimal

challenges. This factor eliminates the stress associated with using such resources. Participant 10 noted that:

Technology can be complicated for many teachers, especially when teaching online. During the pandemic, many teachers had challenges teaching online because of the lack of ICT knowledge. We have invested in training to reduce these difficulties and make their work easier.

The views shared by Participant 10 indicate that international school leaders are aware of the challenges that teachers face as a result of online learning. The challenges were amplified during the COVID-19 pandemic when teachers were forced to teach students online even when they had not been trained to teach effectively on digital platforms. The lack of skills to use ICT resources made it difficult for them to perform their roles effectively, given that they were required to teach online without adequate preparation. International schools thus invested in teacher training to reduce the difficulties associated with teaching online, reducing stress related to work.

The results show that international schools developed training policies to improve the well-being of teachers by reducing the stress associated with working in an environment that is extensively shaped by ICT. International schools reduce the difficulties teachers will likely encounter when performing their roles by equipping teachers with the skills necessary to teach effectively online. Minimal difficulties in the course of work are linked to reduced work-related stress and, thus, enhanced psychological well-being among teachers. The findings also indicate that few international schools have seen the need to train students to improve their ICT skills. Much focus has been on teachers and how their skills and competencies in online teaching can be

improved through appropriate training. International schools have overlooked the need to train students to reduce their challenges in using ICT resources. Participant 8 explained why there was minimal focus on the ICT skills of students by stating that:

These students are Generation Z. They have grown up with technology. They do not have a problem with operating a computer or using ICT. The teachers have challenges because many of them are either Generation X or early millennials.

The comments made by Participant 8 show that many students in international schools do not have challenges using ICT resources because they have grown up in a culture defined by technology. The school leaders assume that students do not require training on ICT resources because they already possess the skills required to use them. Participant 6 made similar claims by stating:

We have students that are good at technology. These people have grown up with ICT and cannot find challenges in navigating websites or using online platforms. It is just a generation thing.

The statement by Participant 6 shows that many of the students in international schools possess the skills required to use ICT resources and do not need the training to use ICT resources employed in online teaching and learning. The views shared by the participant provide insights into why international schools do not focus on improving the ICT skills of students and instead pay attention to the needs of teachers in terms of training.

Overall, the findings indicate that the well-being of teachers in international schools can be improved through training to enhance their ICT skills. Training reduces job-related stress and motivates teachers to enjoy their jobs, especially within online teaching.

Therefore, international schools develop training policies to improve teachers' ICT competencies and skills. This strategy enhances their well-being through reduced job-related stress.

Theme 4: Many Schools are Working to become Trauma-Informed

Leaders' decision to create trauma-informed institutions was a critical pattern that also emerged about how COVID-19 impacted policy development to secure staff and students' well-being during a crisis. Leaders believe there is a need to develop policies that enhance students' and staff's information concerning trauma and how to overcome it. According to Participant 11:

We have developed policies to train students and staff on how to deal with trauma and provide social support to those who have experienced trauma. Training will be conducted twice a year to improve trauma information.

The views shared by Participant 11 indicate that the leaders of international schools believe that a significant challenge that made it difficult to overcome the negative impacts of the pandemic on the well-being of students and staff is the lack of information on trauma management. Developing policies to make students and staff more informed on trauma and how to cope with it plays an integral role in minimizing the adverse effects of a pandemic on well-being. Participant 29 stated that:

Mental health is not just the responsibility of the guidance and counselling office. We developed policies to ensure that both students and teachers became aware of how trauma can impact the well-being of individuals. These policies were established to increase the support available to those experiencing mental health challenges.

The participant was passionate about mental health, indicating they had come to appreciate the importance of addressing mental health within the school. The response shows that the pandemic drew attention to ensuring teachers and students can provide psychosocial support to those experiencing mental health challenges. The responsibility should not be left to the guidance and counselling office alone. The reasoning of the school leadership is influenced by the notion that becoming a trauma-informed institution would positively impact the mental well-being of educators and students. Participant 3 emphasized the importance of information concerning trauma by stating:

Many students and teachers were adversely affected by the pandemic, but few people understood how to support individuals most impacted by COVID-19. Many teachers and students were left to deal with the challenges independently. Being informed on how to support those affected by pandemics is a significant issue that the school must address.

The participant was detailed in explaining why the school needed to be trauma-informed, indicating that they believed this was a significant policy development. The response provided by the participant shows that the administration was aware of the mental health challenges that emerged following the pandemic. The response further suggests that without the pandemic, the school's leadership might not have paid attention to mental health and developed appropriate policies to address the issue. While the views shared by the leader show that the school has not developed the necessary policies to enhance trauma information, they demonstrate that the leader believes that schools should develop policies designed to improve the information of students and teachers on

how to deal with the adverse effects of a pandemic. Participant 17 shared similar views by stating:

If there is one crucial thing that the pandemic has revealed, schools should work towards enhancing the capability of students and staff to deal with the adverse effects of pandemics. I think a move towards training is crucial at this point.

Participant 17 claims that through training, schools can improve the ability of students and staff to deal with the adverse effects of pandemics. Training is often associated with gaining knowledge; therefore, teachers and students will likely become more informed about trauma with appropriate training.

The results show that the leaders of international schools believe that being trauma-informed institutions can prepare them better to deal with the adverse effects of pandemics in the future. Knowing how to deal with and support people with trauma can ensure that individuals adversely affected by pandemics receive the support necessary to improve their well-being.

The four themes discussed under this research question offer an understanding of how COVID-19 has impacted policy development to secure staff and students' well-being during a crisis. The first theme of increased focus on mental health shows that teachers and students can experience challenges related to their psychological well-being. The COVID-19 crisis drew the attention of international schools to the importance of mental health and psychological well-being for teachers and students. The results provide insights into how COVID-19 has impacted policy development in international schools concerning mental health. Because of the pandemic's adverse effects on the psychological well-being of students and staff, international schools have begun to pay

more attention to mental health. Therefore, the schools decided to develop policies that would help address and improve mental well-being among students and educators. The policies have been developed by international schools without support from the government mainly because while school leaders viewed mental health as an urgent and essential issue that should be addressed, governments were not moving with the desired urgency to create and implement policies that could help the education sector to enhance the mental well-being of educators and learners. The results also show that international schools have developed remuneration and pay continuity policies to enhance teachers' psychological well-being. School leaders believe that remuneration is an area through which international schools can address the well-being of teachers. Many teachers experienced financial challenges during the pandemic because of delays or a lack of salaries. Financial challenges have an adverse impact on individuals' psychological well-being, a relationship demonstrated by many teachers' decisions to search for alternative employment during the pandemic. The relationship between pay continuity and psychological well-being among teachers demonstrates the importance of developing and implementing policies that ensure teachers are appropriately paid even when schools are temporarily closed. The adverse effects of COVID-19 on the economic welfare of teachers prompted international schools to develop policies that would enhance their well-being through pay continuity. International schools also developed policies for additional income sources to ensure teachers are paid even when the school calendar is interrupted.

The analysis also identified the theme of training to improve the ICT skills of teachers and students. Teachers experienced challenges relating to online teaching

because of the lack of skills in using ICT resources. The absence of these skills led to job-related stress and thus impacted the mental well-being of teachers negatively. The results show that the well-being of teachers in international schools can be improved through training to enhance their ICT skills. Training reduces job-related stress and motivates teachers to enjoy their jobs, especially within online teaching. Therefore, international schools develop training policies to improve teachers' ICT competencies and skills. This strategy enhances their well-being through reduced job-related stress. Finally, the study identified the need for international learning institutions to be trauma-informed. Knowing how to deal with trauma creates a comprehensive support network for teachers and staff adversely affected by the pandemic. Additionally, possessing such knowledge can ensure that schools are more effectively equipped to deal with the trauma caused by pandemics, including providing social support to those affected.

Summary of results

A summary of the results for research question 1 is shown in table 0.2.

Table 0.1 Research Question 1 Results Summary

Themes	Participant	Interview Comments
Syllabus Coverage Disruption	Participant 8	<i>We fell way behind in syllabus coverage because of the pandemic. When learning within the physical classroom was suspended, and some students had to travel, we took a while before getting ready to teach online.</i>
	Participant 4	<i>We are not in the proper position in terms of syllabus coverage. The pandemic disrupted teaching and</i>

	<i>learning. It took us a while before we decided how to proceed with teaching and learning.</i>
Participant 27	<i>There is always a timeline for completing the syllabus. Given that we closed the school for a while when the pandemic began, we are behind schedule in terms of syllabus coverage and have to move fast to ensure that at least everything is covered.</i>
Participant 13	<i>We always plan for syllabus coverage to ensure that learners have adequate time to learn and understand every concept taught. We must rush the syllabus to compensate for lost time or limit holiday periods.</i>
Participant 1	<i>There is a chance that teachers won't cover specific topics more extensively because of time constraints. The side effect is that some topics may be skipped or skimmed through to ensure the syllabus is covered up to the end.</i>
Participant 22	<i>The school term was concise when we resumed following the initial closure of schools. Topics had to be covered at a fast pace to make up for the lost time.</i>

Shift to Online Learning

Participant 30	<i>It was the only logical course of action. Without provisions for online learning, students would have wasted nearly a year of schooling, which would have been a burden on the school itself and the parents.</i>
Participant 19	<i>We had to adopt online learning because we had suspended learning for a long time. Some students had also travelled back to their home countries and could not get back.</i>
Participant 2	<i>We resorted to online learning to ensure that students continued to learn. Learning within the physical classroom was impossible, especially with the need to practice social distancing.</i>
Participant 10	<i>The government shut all schools and initiated policies aimed at ensuring social distancing. When physical classrooms were suspended, we had to resort to online learning because defying government directives would have had negative consequences.</i>
Participant 7	<i>We had to find a way to ensure that students would not spend so much time without learning. Similarly, we were worried about lagging in terms of syllabus coverage. Online learning was thus the most plausible option.</i>

Less Learning Through Online Classrooms

Participant 11	<i>Online learning enabled teaching and learning to continue, but only a few topics could be covered daily compared to learning in the physical classroom. We focused more on theory as opposed to practice. Students certainly learned less.</i>
Participant 4	<i>The pandemic certainly impacted the pace and quality of learning. Online instruction and learning have drawbacks that limit broad topic coverages and confine teaching and learning to theory instead of practice.</i>
Participant 23	<i>Online learning has certain limitations that physical classrooms do not have. Most teachers found it difficult to teach practical aspects of subject content and also experienced challenges in conveying information and interacting with students. They were simply not trained for this.</i>
Participant 9	<i>Students could continue with their education, but the level of learning was not as intense because online learning has certain limitations when teaching subjects that require practical lessons, such as physics and biology.</i>
Participant 14	<i>I received complaints from some students that they did not believe that the quality of teaching was up to</i>

Declined Academic Performance		<i>speed. Students raised concerns about not undertaking practical chemistry, biology, and physics lessons.</i>
	Participant 17	<i>You cannot coordinate all of the teachers and still be able to have the same number of lessons in a day as you did when learning occurred within the physical classroom.</i>
	Participant 29	<i>I noticed that the overall academic performance of students declined during the pandemic. I think many students were disoriented because of the effects of COVID-19, while some also suffered poor performance due to struggles with online learning.</i>
	Participant 19	<i>The pandemic had a negative impact on learning. In the first exams, after we had taken a break, performance was generally poor. Either the students did not read or did not understand what was taught in the classroom.</i>
	Participant 6	<i>Students failed tests to examine if they could recall what they had learned earlier. It is like they forgot about school when learning within the physical classroom was suspended.</i>
	Participant 20	<i>Most students fared poorly on the tests administered shortly after we started studying, necessitating a</i>

	<i>review of crucial topics and concepts before continuing teaching and learning.</i>
Participant 3	<i>Most students thought that the break would run for a long time... most of them did not engage with schoolwork and thus ended up failing standardized tests after learning resumed. Teachers had to refresh their memories by going over some key topics.</i>

The results summary for research question 2 is shown in Table 0.3.

Table 0.2 Research Question 2 Results Summary

Themes	Participant	Interview Comments
Online Portals for Efficient Assignments Submission and Performance Monitoring	Participant 24	<i>The administration had to invest in a system that made it easier for students to submit assignments online, receive feedback, and access subject material. The system was designed to ensure that teachers also worked to meet the needs of students as learning continued online.</i>
	Participant 3	<i>Previously most assignments were submitted physically or via email. Now, we have a robust school website that is friendly to students and enables them to submit and track their assignments.</i>
	Participant 11	<i>The development of the student portal is one of the new measures adopted to enable students to submit their assignments more efficiently. Cases of missing marks have significantly reduced because of the move.</i>
	Participant 15	<i>We had to find a way to adapt to online classrooms and ensure that students could submit their assignments in an ordered manner and one that</i>

Virtual Reality to Improve Collaboration and Learning Outcomes Among Students		<i>enabled accountability. The online portal also allowed the administration to monitor teachers performance.</i>
	Participant 7	<i>It was not easy at first to monitor teachers performance since they were teaching remotely from home. Creating the portal made it possible to motivate teachers to put effort toward teaching students and marking assignments on time. Students also had access to several resources.</i>
	Participant 10	<i>We have adopted new inventions within the education technology sector to improve collaboration among students and learning outcomes. A VR technology called Rumii creates a virtual social reality space where students can interact and collaborate.</i>
	Participant 26	<i>We invested in VLEs, creating virtual classrooms where students interact with their peers and learn. The system implemented has significantly improved the educational outcomes of the students. It is not just about creating a portal for online learning but also ensuring that students can attain positive outcomes when learning online.</i>

Guidance and Counselling Offices to Enhance Psychological Wellbeing	Participant 18	<i>Virtual reality technology in learning has allowed students to have robust discussions and debates within virtual classrooms.</i>
	Participant 5	<i>We invested in new education technology to enable our students to have the experiences they usually have when attending physical classrooms...students learn best when they can collaborate and engage in discussions. VLE space technology was essential for providing them with this experience.</i>
	Participant 2	<i>We wanted students to continue learning in a manner that improved their ability to retain classroom concepts. VLEs complemented online classrooms by supporting practical engagements and debates among students.</i>
	Participant 17	<i>The school responded to the mental health challenges caused by the pandemic by establishing an office for guidance and counselling. We figured out that enhancing the mental well-being of staff and learners is necessary.</i>
	Participant 21	<i>The school has been taking mental health more seriously. The epidemic highlighted the requirement to address mental health in school. The leadership</i>

	<i>responded by restructuring the current guidance and counselling office to enable it to address mental health issues among students and educators.</i>
Participant 14	<i>The newly established guidance and counselling office are managed by professionals whose prominent role is to help improve the psychological health of students and teachers. The pandemic has got people going through a lot.</i>
Participant 3	<i>Our guidance and the counselling office was mainly for helping students to make the correct subject selections. Now the office also deals with mental health issues. The pandemic has shown us the importance of having such an office.</i>
Participant 11	<i>Students experiencing mental health challenges are nearly incapable of focusing on class and excelling. Establishing a guidance and counselling office was crucial for improving the performance of teachers and students during and after the pandemic.</i>

Online Learning to Complement Learning within the Physical Classroom

Participant 20	<i>The pandemic made online learning necessary, but I believe that the mode of learning should not be abandoned even if learning within the physical classroom normalizes. Online classes can improve the performance of students.</i>
Participant 14	<i>Teachers can continue to conduct online classes to complement the regular classes to ensure students properly grasp classroom concepts. It can be a great way to advance the performance of students.</i>
Participant 5	<i>One thing that we have learned about online classes is that they can provide an opportunity to generate more revenue. The school can provide paid online classes to students within and outside the country.</i>
Participant 25	<i>The institution realised during the pandemic that it could not continue depending on tuition fees from regular students alone. The school has to generate additional income to meet its expenses. We decided to retain online classrooms to enrol more students and increase revenue generation.</i>
Participant 9	<i>I think online classes might be here to stay. As a school, we can use them to improve our students' performance, increase enrolment, and generate more income.</i>

Participant 1	<i>How online classes ensured the continuity of learning despite distance during the pandemic certainly got us thinking. We can use digital platforms to offer distance learning and training and attain more income streams.</i>
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The results summary for research question 3 is shown in Table 0.4.

Table 0.3 Research Question 3 Results Summary

Themes	Participant	Interview Comments
Training Teachers for Online Teaching	Participant 30	<i>Teaching online classrooms is difficult. Educators require additional skills to teach such classrooms effectively. We decided to invest in teacher training to improve their ability to successfully teach online classes, given that technology has also become a big part of education.</i>
	Participant 16	<i>Many of our teachers lacked the skills and competencies required to teach online effectively. In my opinion, this negatively impacted students' ability to understand classroom concepts taught online. We have to train our teachers on how to teach effectively online.</i>

Participant 20	<i>Educators require some skill sets if online classes are to achieve similar goals as teaching within physical classrooms. We aim to fund the training of teachers to ensure that they can teach online in a way that improves teaching and learning results.</i>
Participant 28	<i>The government has not come to appreciate that online classrooms are a crucial part of teaching and learning in the contemporary education sector. We must train teachers to teach effectively online because the government has not invested in teacher training to this extent.</i>
Participant 6	<i>Many teachers struggle with their delivery when teaching online. Many pupils complained about their inability to understand many classroom concepts when teaching was conducted online. We had to train our educators for then and the future.</i>
Participant 9	<i>Technology is increasingly becoming an integral aspect of teaching and learning. I think that it is essential for international schools to prepare for a future where digital classrooms are commonplace.</i>
Participant 17	<i>Online learning is becoming a source of competitive advantage for learning institutions.</i>

Alternative Income Streams		<i>International schools must embrace this trend to conduct business successfully in a business environment significantly influenced by technology, and teachers must be trained for it. Look at what the universities have done.</i>
	Participant 12	<i>We realised the need to train teachers to improve their digital literacy and online teaching capability during the pandemic. However, I believe schools should have done this much earlier because of how fast things are shifting to online platforms.</i>
	Participant 28	<i>We have experienced significant financial challenges because we relied on minimal income streams. We need to diversify to reduce such risks in the future. The leadership has already proposed ways to ensure that we do not experience an economic crisis of a similar magnitude.</i>
	Participant 4	<i>One issue that the board has seriously discussed is how to cushion ourselves from economic shocks if the school calendar is interrupted. We are working towards establishing alternative revenue generation projects.</i>
	Participant 7	<i>As an institution, we must consider our options regarding generating revenue. The pandemic</i>

	<i>caused severe financial troubles that made us lose some essential teachers. We must invest in other ventures to ensure continuous income generation.</i>
Participant 10	<i>I think we rely too much on tuition fees. We had to take credit facilities during the pandemic to pay our teachers because we would lose many capable educators. We are now looking at additional investments to increase revenue generation.</i>
Participant 13	<i>We had not prepared for this moment. Most schools were complacent because there is no recollection in recent memory where learning was interrupted to such an extent. It has been a teachable moment, and now we are diversifying.</i>
Participant 9	<i>We now recognize the significance of spreading risks. Relying mainly on one source of revenue is highly risky, as seen during the pandemic. We are working on a business model that would increase revenue generation.</i>
Participant 18	<i>I think the business approach was risky because when the pandemic hit, we could not pay our staff. We mainly relied on tuition money to generate revenue. Now we know better and are diversifying investment.</i>

Hiring Teachers with Online Teaching Competencies	Participant 26	<i>We need to find and keep the top talent in the market. That means we have to pay competitive salaries and keep our teachers happy. Having additional income sources ensures that our teachers are well compensated and salary is consistent even during a pandemic.</i>
	Participant 11	<i>We are changing our hiring policies and designing the recruitment process to support the selection of technologically savvy teachers. We need people that can work successfully in this era of online classrooms.</i>
	Participant 20	<i>Since the importance of online classes has been established and the challenges that teachers face identified, I think that we now know that we should recruit teachers who can effectively teach when classes are offered online.</i>
	Participant 6	<i>I think that it is essential that we hire teachers that are already capable of teaching online classes well. At least this will ensure that students achieve positive learning outcomes even when classes take place online.</i>
	Participant 17	<i>While current teachers should be trained to improve their ability to teach effectively online, I</i>

think that going forward, we should recruit teachers that already possess the skills that we are looking for to save on training costs.

Participant 4 *Training teachers on online teaching will result in extra costs for the institution. While the school has to train and develop teachers constantly, we can save on costs by hiring competent teachers in online teaching.*

The results summary for research question 4 is shown in Table 0.5.

Table 0.4 Research Question 4 Results Summary

Themes	Participant	Interview Comments
Increased Focus on Mental Health	Participant 24	<i>The pandemic demonstrated that it is important to take mental health seriously. We are now paying more attention to the issue. We have created policies to help prioritize mental health and ensure that those that require assistance find it.</i>
	Participant 5	<i>The school has developed policies that have placed more emphasis on mental health. COVID-19 showed just how important mental health is, and the school has developed appropriate policies to support mental well-being, including having a mental health week.</i>
	Participant 10	<i>We've learned from the pandemic that it's essential to pay attention to the mental health of everyone around us. We have created policies that will help students and staff to pay more attention to both their own and other people's mental health.</i>

Participant 18	<i>The school did not have policies created to help address mental health. It was not regarded as necessary until the pandemic happened, and we saw how students and staff were affected by it. Now we want everyone to be on board.</i>
Participant 19	<i>The education ministry has not supported schools addressing mental health issues. We have had to rely on our policies and resources to improve mental well-being.</i>
Participant 1	<i>I think the government has been slow in creating policies to improve mental well-being in the education sector. We set ourselves the objective of addressing mental health, especially considering what we have observed with COVID-19.</i>

Remuneration Policies to Ensure Pay Continuity

Participant 30	<i>We lost some teachers when the school calendar was suspended, and we could not pay total salaries. We have decided to develop strategies to ensure pay continuity even when a pandemic and tuition fee declines significantly.</i>
Participant 4	<i>It was crucial to develop policies ensuring pay continuity even when the school calendar is interrupted to improve staff retention after staff loss during the pandemic. Many teachers welcomed such policies and have been settled at the school.</i>
Participant 12	<i>Many teachers suffered during the pandemic because some were on half salary while others did not receive their pay. We are introducing policies to ensure that teachers continue receiving their pay even when the school calendar is interrupted.</i>
Participant 7	<i>Several teachers informed us that they were looking for alternative employment due to a lack of pay or low pay during the pandemic. A significant proportion of teachers claimed they could not meet their needs due to a lack of</i>

	<i>money. We have developed policies to rectify that.</i>
Participant 13	<i>After introducing pay continuity policies, we conducted a survey and found that many teachers were very settled and happy. They were no longer worried about what another lockdown would do to their finances.</i>
Participant 10	<i>We wanted to make our teachers worry less about their future. I believe it was also essential to ensure that our teachers did not experience significant economic challenges because of delayed or absent salaries.</i>
Participant 17	<i>We have developed strategies to ensure continued revenue generation to pay our teachers even when the school calendar is interrupted. Therefore, we must consider how our teachers were adversely affected by the lack of adequate pay.</i>

Teacher and Students ' Training to Improve ICT Skills

- Participant 23 *Since online learning will be a crucial part of instruction strategies, we decided to ensure that teachers and students are trained to use computer systems. For teachers, the training was a bit extensive. Students only needed to learn the basics.*
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- Participant 13 *Most of our teachers and students experienced challenges regarding remote learning. Teachers especially found their jobs more stressful because they did not have the skills required to teach effectively online. We want to train both teachers and students to improve their ICT skills*
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- Participant 20 *We want to ensure that our teachers love their work. To do this, we have to train them on how to use information technology resources, especially in the era of online teaching and learning. ICT training policies have been put in place to achieve this.*
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- Participant 10 *Technology can be complicated for many teachers, especially when teaching online. During the pandemic, many teachers had challenges teaching online because of the lack*

	<i>of ICT knowledge. We have invested in training to reduce these difficulties and make their work easier.</i>
Participant 8	<i>These students are Generation Z. They have grown up with technology. They do not have a problem with operating a computer or using ICT. The teachers have challenges because many of them are either Generation X or early millennials.</i>
Participant 6	<i>We have students that are good at technology. These people have grown up with ICT and cannot find challenges in navigating websites or using online platforms. It is just a generation thing.</i>

Many Schools are Working to become Trauma-Informed

Participant 11	<i>We have developed policies to train students and staff on how to deal with trauma and provide social support to those who have experienced trauma. Training will be conducted twice a year to improve trauma information.</i>
Participant 29	<i>Mental health is not just the responsibility of the guidance and counselling office. We developed policies to ensure that both students and teachers became aware of how trauma can impact the well-being of individuals. These policies were established to increase the support available to those experiencing mental health challenges.</i>
Participant 3	<i>Many students and teachers were adversely affected by the pandemic, but few people understood how to support individuals most impacted by COVID-19. Many teachers and students were left to deal with the challenges independently. Being informed on how to support those affected by pandemics is a significant issue that the school must address.</i>
Participant 17	<i>If there is one crucial thing that the pandemic has revealed, schools should work towards</i>

enhancing the capability of students and staff to deal with the adverse effects of pandemics. I think a move towards training is crucial at this point.

Evaluation of Findings

This section briefly reports what the research findings mean. While the issue will be expanded upon in Chapter 5, this part describes whether or not the literature predicted the outcomes achieved. In addition, the section offers probable explanations for surprising or contradictory outcomes.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on:

Pedagogical practices, curricular adaptations, and student engagement

The first research question explored the impact of COVID-19 on international pedagogical practices, curricular adaptations, and student engagement. The question was significant because education is the prime objective of these schools. Leaders of schools who participated in the study provided their thoughts on how the pandemic affected classroom learning. This study indicates that the switch to online education has degraded the quality of teaching and learning. According to the opinions expressed by school administrators, many students considered that teachers were ill-equipped to provide high-quality online instruction that would improve teaching and learning results.

The findings show that schools were not adequately prepared for online learning, negatively impacting teaching and learning quality. The results were expected because the literature review revealed that learning institutions would experience significant

teaching and learning challenges without adequate online teaching and learning preparation. The findings are consistent with the statements made by the OECD (2020c) that school leaders must reconsider how prepared schools are to deal with pandemic cases because, even though many schools offer online learning throughout the epidemic, the obstacles that have been noticed during the pandemic have highlighted the preparedness of learning institutions. The results mean that many international schools experienced a decline in teaching and learning quality because of the lack of adequate preparation.

The results also reaffirm the claims made by Kruse et al. (2020) that educational institutions may address the COVID-19 crisis by reorganizing their systems to improve the quality of instruction. The argument means that international schools did not effectively restructure their systems to improve online instruction quality amidst the Pandemic, negatively impacting teaching and learning quality. Moreover, the results are congruent with the statements that Aristovnik et al. (2020) stated that the Pandemic impacted learning in educational institutions by forcing them to abandon learning within the physical classroom and shift to online classrooms with varying success. The notion of varying success means that while some schools could effectively implement Online classes without sacrificing teaching and learning quality, others experienced a decline in students' academic performance because of a decline in the quality of teaching.

The current research findings show that many international students' academic performance declines because of teaching and learning challenges associated with online classrooms. According to Adedoyin and Soykan (2020), the COVID-19 Pandemic similarly disrupted traditional learning in physical classrooms and forced educational

institutions to adapt to online learning. Although the move to online learning began before the coronavirus epidemic, most institutions were pushed to fully implement it despite many lacking the requisite infrastructures.

During the Pandemic, the absence of these infrastructures had a negative impact on the quality of instruction and, as a result, the learning results. Heng and Sol (2020) asserted that because the transition to online learning occurred unexpectedly, most students and teachers were unprepared for the change, which had a detrimental impact on the quality of teaching and learning in online classrooms. According to Heng and Sol (2020), inexperience and inadequate training in using the technology involved in online learning are hurdles for both teachers and students. These impediments have a harmful effect on the quality of teaching and learning.

The results indicate that the Pandemic negatively impacted students' academic performance because of the challenges associated with online learning. The findings indicate that students performed poorly in the classroom due to a significant reduction in the quality of instruction because international schools did not employ appropriate strategies to improve the quality of teaching and learning when classes were moved online. The results were anticipated based on the insights Shahzad et al. (2021) provided regarding implementing information systems to increase learning. Shahzad et al. (2021) based their claims on DeLone and McLean's (2016) D&M model. The model analysed the success of information systems and proposed that the technical level of the information system and the effect of information on the recipient influence the efficacy of information system-mediated communication. As established in the current study, many teachers experience difficulties in online teaching because of the lack of skills and

competencies to use information systems to teach effectively. The quality of teaching and learning thus declined, causing a drop in academic performance among international school pupils during the Pandemic.

However, the findings did not provide insights into the extent to which the home environment impacted the quality of online learning. Based on the claims made by Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1994) that the home environment can have an adverse impact on online learning since students are accustomed to the physical learning environment that is often conducive to teaching and learning, the expectation was that the results would show that the academic performance of students also declined because of the negative impact of the home environment on online learning. The lack of such results could be because the study focused on school leaders' perspectives, not teachers or learners. A research study that focused on the perspectives of teachers or students could have provided a more profound understanding of how the home environment can impact the quality of learning when learning and teaching are conducted online. The results do not also conform to the argument made by Christensen (2016) that the environment in which a student studies can affect learning outcomes. Instead, the findings focus on teachers' lack of competencies and skills concerning online teaching and the limitations of remote learning compared to physical classrooms. As previously mentioned, the findings mean that school leaders have primarily focused on the ability of teachers to teach effectively online as a factor that can be used to enhance the quality of learning outcomes within online classrooms. The disruptions likely to occur because of the home environment are thus largely absent in the research findings.

An argument by Fernandez and Shaw (2020) emphasized the need for schools to consider how external inequalities can impact the quality of learning when classrooms are shifted online. This study has, therefore, not discovered the environmental factor and its effect on the quality of online instruction and learning. On the other hand, the disruptions caused by the home environment are largely ignored.

The evaluation of the findings concerning the first research shows that the results are consistent with existing literature findings to the extent that the Pandemic had an adverse effect on learning in international schools. Many students experienced learning challenges because teachers were not adequately equipped to teach online when learning was shifted to online platforms. As a result, students' academic performance declined because of a decline in the effectiveness of teaching and learning when classes moved to online platforms.

Innovations in International Learning

The second research question's outcomes revealed leaders' perceptions of innovations in international learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The findings provide an understanding of the inventions that emerged within the context of international schools during the Pandemic and how leaders perceive those inventions.

One of the inventions is developing online portals to enhance efficiency during assignment submissions and performance monitoring. Many international schools have developed online portals to enhance the efficient submission of assignments. This is a significant departure from the previous practice, where assignments were mainly submitted via email or physically handed to teachers. The findings indicate that the Pandemic motivated international schools to develop robust websites supporting

continued teaching and learning. Investing in information technology has benefitted teaching and learning by ensuring students can easily submit their assignments for marking and feedback. At the same time, the portals have been used by international schools to monitor the performance of teachers, a practice that is regarded to be important in improving teachers' performance when teaching is shifted to online platforms. According to Ifinedo (2011), system quality is vital for enhancing online learning since it provides faster query results. The results support these claims.

The ability of students to receive feedback fast for marked assignments improves the quality of learning because they can use assignment feedback to enhance their knowledge. A robust system that supports faster-obtaining results, whether or not such outcomes correspond to teachers' performance, can increase the quality of online teaching and learning quality. System quality, as defined by usability, flexibility, availability, and usefulness, can improve user experiences with information technology systems in the educational sector, according to research by DeLone and McLean (2016). System developments that enhance the experiences of students and teachers can, therefore, improve teaching and learning outcomes. A robust system that makes it easier for students to submit assignments and receive feedback means that students can avoid the frustrations associated with submitting assignments manually or through emails that may be accidentally deleted.

The assignment submission method can enhance teachers' ability to register submitted assignments efficiently, mark them, and provide feedback. The findings also corroborate the assertions made by Edovald and Nevill (2021) that clear explanations and constructive feedback are crucial for online learning success. The significance of

online feedback spurred the creation of systems that allow students to submit assignments and receive prompt feedback promptly. The feedback received following the marking of assignments can be used to improve knowledge of specific topics. OECD (2020d) noted that international schools would need to embrace innovation in the wake of the COVID-19 Pandemic to improve the quality of teaching and learning outcomes. The results of the present study demonstrate that international schools are adopting new technologies and technological innovations to improve teaching and learning quality on online platforms. Some international schools have included online education in their curriculum.

The study findings also show that international schools implemented VLEs in online learning to improve learning outcomes. New technology was used to address the limitations of online classes and enhance learning outcomes. School leaders view VLEs that created collaborative spaces to enable student collaboration as one of the most important inventions that emerged during the Pandemic to support teaching and learning. Collaboration within the learning environment is essential for attaining positive learning outcomes. The results of online cooperative learning were anticipated. Cui et al. (2021) claim that providing students with opportunities to work together boosts their motivation to study and final grades. Consistent with the statements stated by Heng and Sol (2020), which state that there are some constraints to online learning that do not exist in traditional classroom settings, the results provide further evidence for this view.

School leaders think positively about technology because they understand the importance of collaboration in the learning environment. One of these limitations is the inability to collaborate among students within the online space. Collaborative spaces in

VLEs address this limitation by enabling students to collaborate effectively when classes are offered remotely. The results show that these spaces create environments that enhance students' learning abilities. The results further reaffirm the claims made by Ifinedo (2011) that system quality can lead to the development of learning interests and increase learners' level of satisfaction because, as seen with collaborative spaces, students can collaborate and benefit from online classes when technology makes collaboration possible. This determination is consistent with the argument advanced by Anandavalli et al. (2020) that systems and environments can impact the ability of students to learn and achieve positive learning outcomes.

VLEs allow students to connect, confer with one another, and receive support, essential for realizing positive learning outcomes. As shown by the views shared by the leaders, students require collaboration because, in this way, they learn more and better than when they rely on their capabilities alone. VLE spaces enable students to interact with peers, attain necessary support and learn. The results are not unexpected because Zhai and Du (2020a) already established that emotional and psychosocial support are essential for students because they play an integral role in improving learning outcomes.

Collaborative spaces offered in VLEs create an opportunity for students to receive emotional and psychosocial support that can enhance the quality of learning outcomes. Their understanding thus informs the importance of international school leaders attached to these online collaborative spaces of how collaboration and social networks support learning. A system is deemed essential to learners, hence the adoption of VLEs that enables students to have systems that support their learning. Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1994) pointed out that a person obtains a bidirectional link with the environment in which

they engage. Therefore, having meaningful connections with the people within a system is crucial. Therefore, interacting with other students can benefit their learning, a conclusion also made by Ettekal and Mahoney (2017). The evaluation thus shows that the findings were expected given the importance of environment and collaboration in online learning and the school system generally.

Another invention that the leaders of international schools believe was encouraging is the establishment of guidance and counselling offices to attend to the mental health needs of faculty and students. Many international schools established guidance and counselling offices during and after the Pandemic to help teachers and students cope with its adverse effects on their mental well-being. The results indicate that many international schools initially had guidance and counselling offices but did not focus on teachers' psychological well-being. While they addressed the challenges students faced, they were more inclined toward helping students improve their academic performance than addressing their mental health needs. The Pandemic influenced school leaders to pay more attention to the psychological well-being of students and teachers and to establish guidance and counselling offices capable of dealing with mental health issues.

The results demonstrate how international school leaders developed a contingency management approach during the crisis. The decisions were influenced by the need to address emerging challenges, primarily since the pandemic increased mental health issues among teachers and students. The findings are consistent with the claims made by Donaldson (2001) that the contingency leadership approach is suitable for managing complex and uncertain crises. This method of leadership is based on the idea

that adapting an organisation's operations to a changing environment requires creating and implementing novel strategies and decisions. The findings are, therefore, not unexpected because the crisis, based on the views shared by the leaders of international schools, had an adverse effect on the mental well-being of students and teachers in a way that the institutions had not witnessed before. Zhai and Du's (2020a) contention that international students from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds have varying mental health needs and that schools should be mindful of these nuances to assist their students in achieving greater psychological well-being is supported by these results. The results were also expected because, as noted by Cui et al. (2021) and Keeling et al. (2020b), the shift to online learning has caused stress to international students. Leaders and teachers believe that COVID-19 has affected students' well-being.

The establishment of guidance and counselling offices with qualified staff to deal with mental health issues is thus consistent with what has already been established in the existing literature. The results also corroborate the arguments made by Son et al. (2020) that schools must collaborate closely with all relevant parties to best support students' mental health in the wake of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Establishing guidance and counselling offices with skilled and competent professionals is consistent with the claims made by Cui et al. (2021) that schools should focus on employing competent guidance and counselling professionals that can handle students with mental health issues. However, the result of the current study indicates that such an office should also extend services to teachers and not just students.

According to Keeling et al. (2020b), most international school employees say that their school's administration and fellow employees have been supportive in addressing

their mental health concerns in the wake of the Pandemic, an indication that the importance of guidance and counselling services for teachers in schools has been largely overlooked as an essential policy issue. Therefore, school leaders believe that creating guidance and counselling offices with competent professionals capable of handling issues relating to mental health among teachers and learners can enhance the well-being of students and staff, especially following the impact of the Pandemic on mental health. While guidance and counselling offices are not an invention in the traditional sense, their creation reflects a new trend among international schools in addressing mental health issues.

The findings also show that online classrooms became commonplace during the COVID-19 Pandemic as international schools sought to ensure that students continued to learn even as learning within the physical classroom became untenable. School leaders believe online learning should complement physical learning even after the Pandemic. Again, online classrooms are not new, but many schools had not adopted and used them widely before the Pandemic. The determination that international schools will not abandon online classes even after the Pandemic was not unexpected, given that Pandey (2016) established that COVID-19 had compelled international schools to implement blended learning. In other words, international schools have embraced both learnings within the physical classroom and online learning.

The results are also in accord with the assertions made by Picciano (2018), who stated that computer-assisted education systems have the potential to play an essential part in developing constructive learning behaviours. Online education is still widely used in international schools because of its many advantages to pupils as a teaching and

learning approach. School leaders believe the learning mode should be retained because of those benefits. While most international schools adopted online learning to ensure learning continuity when physical classrooms become untenable, school leaders believe that online classes should be retained because they can complement learning within the physical classroom and improve students' performance.

The findings also show that online classes have been used for additional revenue. International schools have decided to retain and expand online learning to attract new students and offer distance learning. The results correspond with the argument advanced by Viner et al. (2020), who stated that the pandemic had negative economic impacts on international schools. International schools' decision to retain and expand online classes post-pandemic is understandable. School leaders had to reconsider how to manage the negative effects of future pandemics, making this outcome unsurprising. The results also reaffirm the claims made by Al-Samarrai et al. (2020) that international schools are likely to experience a decline in enrolment because of the Pandemic and should, therefore, develop strategies to increase enrolment. According to the most recent survey findings, international schools have continued utilising online education to expand their student bodies and boost their financial success.

Consistent with Hanushek and Woessmann's (2020) claims the literature supports the results that the Pandemic has led to a decline in students' enrolment and, thus, negative economic impacts on international schools. By retaining online learning even when schools are allowed to have physical classrooms, international schools address the economic challenges presented by the Pandemic through increased enrolments and additional revenue streams. According to Wood (2021), international schools have had to

either freeze tuition or marginal increases in annual tuition during the Pandemic. The decline has been caused by a fall in students' enrolment numbers and the inability of schools to charge the same tuition fee when offering online classes as they charge when learning occurs within the physical classroom. School leaders have realised that online classrooms and learning within the physical classroom enable them to address the challenges presented by a decline in revenue generated through tuition fees during the Pandemic and in the future.

Future preparedness of international schools

The study findings also provide insights into how international schools have prepared to deal with future disruptions to learning caused by public health crises. One of the most valuable aspects we discovered was that international schools tried to prepare for potential pandemics by providing their educators with training to improve their capacity to teach effectively online. The results indicate that challenges to online learning mainly arose because teachers lacked the skills and competencies required to teach effectively online. International schools want to be prepared for online learning in the future by ensuring that teachers are trained and ready for online classrooms. These data support the OECD's (2020c) observations that school administrators should prepare instructors to teach online during the Pandemic. As established in the present study, teachers may find it challenging to instruct students when lessons are conducted online effectively without appropriate training. To avoid a similar challenge in the future, school leaders believe that international schools should make it a policy issue to train teachers on online teaching.

The findings also provide support for the thesis that was presented by Heng and Sol (2020), which states that insufficient training and lack of familiarity with the technologies involved in online learning may have a detrimental impact on the quality of education, which may ultimately lead to a decrease in the academic performance of students. Training teachers, therefore, also entails enhancing the capability of teachers to use new technology and deliver online lessons effectively. The inability of teachers to use information and communication technology can have an adverse impact on learning outcomes when teaching is conducted online. Training teachers thus enhances their ability to use online teaching and learning technological resources.

The findings are also consistent with the narrative advanced by DeLone and McLean (2016) that teachers should be guided on the usage of new technology resources when teaching and learning shifts to online platforms, an indication that teachers may lack the necessary knowledge and skills required to use online teaching and learning platforms. Training, therefore, ensures they can use the resources to perform their duties effectively. The results further reiterate the claims that Carbon and Serrano (2021) argued that the transition to online learning requires teachers to be more creative to engage students and thus need additional skills to teach effectively online. International schools can improve teaching and learning outcomes and the well-being of teachers by ensuring that educators receive appropriate training to enhance their ability to teach online effectively.

The study findings also demonstrate that international schools have prepared to mitigate the adverse effects of pandemics in the future by planning for alternative or additional income streams to minimise economic challenges when regular learning is

interrupted. The COVID-19 Pandemic caused interruptions to the regular school calendar and the ability of international schools to generate revenue. The problem mainly emerged because most international schools rely on tuition fees to generate revenue. The findings are compatible with the claim that Hanushek and Woessmann made (2020), which stated that international schools ceased physical learning, enrolment of new students, unpaid leaves to some personnel, and introduced remote learning in line with government standards since these practices caused economic concerns for the learning institutions. Therefore, the schools could not generate revenue when students were at home and learning was not occurring. The development of alternative sources of revenue can help international schools to ensure business continuity when similar pandemics occur in the future.

In addition, these findings lend credence to the contention made by Viner et al. (2020), which states that the economic damage caused by the closure of schools during the pandemic was significant. International schools experienced financial challenges when the schools closed, and some of their employees had to find alternative sources of income because their pay was reduced. Reduced pay resulted in further negative impacts on the well-being of staff. This issue emphasizes the need for leaders to develop strategies that support identifying multiple revenue streams. Developing alternative sources of income can ensure that international schools are effectively prepared for future adverse economic impacts of similar pandemics.

International schools are also hiring teachers with the skills and competencies required to teach online to be prepared for future disruptions to learning within the physical classroom. The strategy aims to reduce costs associated with training teachers and the

challenges that arise within online teaching when teachers do not have the appropriate skills and competencies. The study findings indicate that the leaders of international schools believe that the problems experienced concerning online teaching were partly caused by the fact that teachers were not prepared to conduct online classes due to the lack of appropriate skills and competencies. Hiring teachers with the right skills can help schools remain prepared for online classes if a similar pandemic occurs.

The results corroborate the statements of Carbon and Serrano (2021), who argue that educators must acquire the necessary expertise to facilitate their students' transition to digital learning environments. The decision to hire appropriately skilled teachers is thus geared towards ensuring that the schools can improve online teaching and learning outcomes. The results are also consistent with the argument advanced by Reimers and Schleicher (2020) that schools usually face financial constraints because of limited government support, especially concerning developing the infrastructure required to support teaching and learning. International schools reduce their operating costs by hiring already trained teachers because they will not need to invest in training teachers within the context of online teaching. Hiring already-trained teachers will ensure that the schools are always prepared to teach online if there is a need to shift entirely to online teaching.

While international schools can train teachers to teach online, the results indicate that hiring teachers trained online is a more sustainable and long-term strategy. The results further reiterate the claims made by Reimers and Schleicher (2020) that the Pandemic has demonstrated that there is a need for schools to hire teachers with computer skills. Online teaching is likely to become an essential aspect of international schools, indicating that the schools need to prepare for this future by hiring teachers who

can effectively discharge their duties in such an environment. The findings also reiterate the conclusions Kruse et al. (2020) arrived at that resources are generally scarce during a crisis, meaning that schools are unlikely to have the resources required to train teachers. As such, they were hiring teachers already trained in online teaching to enable international schools to avoid the financial challenges associated with training teachers to improve their online teaching skills.

Efforts to Strengthen Crisis Planning

The final research question examined COVID-19's impact on policy development to secure staff and students' well-being during a crisis.

International schools have developed policies addressing mental health issues within the school environment. International schools have developed policies to create more awareness around mental health to enhance the mental well-being of students and staff. The policies have been developed by international schools without support from the government mainly because while school leaders viewed mental health as an urgent and essential issue that should be addressed, governments were not moving with the desired urgency to create and implement policies that could help the education sector to enhance the mental well-being of educators and learners.

The findings are consistent with the claims made by Zhai and Du (2020b). They noted that international students are worried about their well-being and their families during the COVID-10 Pandemic. This factor has created the need for international schools to develop policies designed to address the well-being of their students and staff. The results also reiterate the claims made by Keeling et al. (2020b) that 71% of staff in international schools reported that school leaders and their colleagues helped them to

deal with issues relating to their well-being during the Pandemic. Developing policies to improve well-being is thus crucial for international schools during the Pandemic. The need for international schools to develop policies that support the well-being of students and staff is also consistent with the claims made by Cui et al. (2021) that COVID-19 restrictions measure such as social distancing, isolation, travel restrictions, and compulsory wearing of the mask contribute to stress among international students. International schools have thus moved to develop policies that would help the learning institutions to mitigate the adverse effects of future pandemics on the well-being of students and staff. There is an increasing realisation that the status of their wellness also impacts the ability of students to learn effectively.

The study also established that international schools had developed policies to ensure pay continuity. Financial hardships experienced by international school teachers during the Pandemic due to disruptions to the regular school calendar and economic challenges encountered by the institutions led to mental health challenges. To ensure that teachers do not experience psychological challenges caused by financial hardships linked to pandemics in the future, international schools aim to develop remuneration policies that ensure pay continuity. Such policies will ensure that teachers are paid even when physical learning and the academic calendar are interrupted due to a pandemic. The findings reaffirm the claims made by Kanekar and Sharma (2020) that there is a need to control the adverse effects of pandemics, such as financial hardship, to prevent mental health challenges associated with economic problems. The results are also consistent with the claims made by Al-Samarrai et al. (2020) that poor and middle-income families were most affected by the Pandemic, and school teachers belong to a most international

category. International schools seek to ensure that their staff is not adversely affected by pandemics in the future. One of the critical strategies to be employed is to develop remuneration policies that ensure pay continuity. Since one of the main challenges teachers experience is financial hardship, such policies would mitigate the adverse economic effects of future pandemics on teachers.

The results further reiterate the argument made by Hanushek and Woessmann (2020) and Viner et al. (2020) that school closures due to the COVID-19 Pandemic caused financial hardships among staff in the education sector. Developing remuneration policies to ensure pay continuity even during a pandemic is thus an appropriate approach for ensuring that teachers do not experience mental health challenges due to financial hardships caused by school closures.

International schools also developed policies aimed at improving the well-being of teachers and students by equipping them with ICT skills. The study established that learners and teachers experience psychological stress due to lacking ICT skills. The inability to effectively use ICT resources to teach online and the lack of online teaching skills make their work more stressful for teachers. Students also experience stress when they cannot easily use ICT resources procured for online learning. Equipping teachers and students with ICT skills can reduce the psychological stress of using technology in online learning. The findings are consistent with the claims made by Heng and Sol (2020) that since the transition to online learning came abruptly, students and tutors were not prepared for such an abrupt change, affecting the quality of learning. Abrupt change can lead to adaptation challenges and, thus, the stress associated with operating in the new environment.

The results also reiterate the conclusion made by Carbon and Serrano (2021) that teachers have to be more creative to ensure that they improve learning outcomes when teaching online. The need to be more creative can cause stress, especially when teachers lack the skills and competencies to teach effectively online. By training teachers and students, international schools can reduce stress linked to teaching and learning online and improve the mental well-being of teachers and students. The results are also consistent with Reimers and Schleicher's (2020) assertions that online instruction requirements have posed challenges for school personnel because of some lack of computer capabilities. The lack of these skills can create stress because of the challenges associated with using technology. Training staff on how to use technology concerning online learning can reduce the stress associated with using technology when one does not have the skills and competencies required to use the technology.

The findings demonstrate that international schools understand the importance of ensuring that teachers and students can use the technology employed in online learning. Investing in equipping teachers and students with ICT skills is, therefore, a means of improving the mental health of teachers and learners. Teachers' and students' training to improve ICT skills is a valuable strategy for addressing the psychological well-being of teachers and students in the short and long term. COVID-19 has influenced international schools to relook at how they can enhance the well-being of students and teachers. This factor has led to the development of policies that improve the ICT skills of teachers and students.

The leaders of international schools believe that a significant challenge that made it difficult to overcome the negative impacts of the Pandemic on the well-being of students

and staff is the lack of information on trauma management. The study also determined that international school leaders must develop policies that enhance students' and staff's information concerning trauma and how to overcome it. Developing policies to make students and staff more informed on trauma and how to cope with it plays an integral role in minimizing the adverse effects of a pandemic on well-being. The findings are consistent with the results of Zhai and Du (2020a) that psychosocial support is essential during pandemics for individuals whose mental health has been adversely affected by the crisis. By becoming trauma-informed schools, international schools ensure that those experiencing psychological problems due to pandemics receive the necessary support.

The results also reaffirm the conclusions made by Carbon and Serrano (2021) that students require emotional and psychological support because of the mental health challenges that they experience due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. While the study by Carbon and Serrano (2021) showed that teachers should provide this support, the current research findings demonstrate that the responsibility of providing support should fall on both teachers and students. Learners can offer psychosocial support to other students affected by the Pandemic when they become trauma-informed. International schools improve the ability of students to provide psychosocial support by ensuring that the learning centres become trauma-informed.

The current research findings are similar to the assertions made by Son et al. (2020). They identified the urgent need for schools to collaborate closely with all stakeholders to assist children suffering from mental health issues due to the coronavirus pandemic. By becoming trauma-informed, international schools ensure that all key

stakeholders, including students and teachers, participate in addressing the needs of those suffering from mental health issues associated with the Pandemic.

Evaluation of the Research Findings in Relation to the Research Problem:

From the detailed summary provided, several themes emerge regarding the impact of COVID-19 on international schools, with a primary focus on leadership perspectives. To evaluate whether the research problem has been adequately addressed, we need to cross-reference the research objectives or questions with the outcomes.

Impact on Education

The research vividly captures the negative effects of the pandemic on students' academic performance in international schools. The drop in academic performance due to lack of revision, delayed syllabus coverage, and shift to online teaching methods can be said to address the research question on how education was affected by the pandemic. However, the solutions, such as revisiting classroom concepts, underscore the adaptability of these institutions.

Leaders' Perceptions on Innovations

The findings delve deeply into how international schools adapted to the challenges posed by the pandemic. The establishment of online portals for assignments, utilization of Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs), and emphasis on guidance and counselling show an adaptive and innovative leadership response to the pandemic's educational challenges.

Preparedness for Future Disruptions

The research findings spotlight how international schools are planning for potential similar disruptions. Teacher training for online teaching, diversifying income streams, and

changing recruitment policies to acquire technologically proficient teachers show foresight in leadership and address the query on future preparedness.

Policy Development for Staff and Student Well-being

The emphasis on the mental well-being of both educators and learners, coupled with the development of remuneration and training policies, illustrates a comprehensive approach to ensuring the well-being of the school community during crises. The trauma-informed approach indicates that schools are not only looking at academic implications but also the holistic well-being of their community.

Conclusion:

In light of the above, the study aptly addresses the research problem, offering a holistic view of the pandemic's impact on international schools from a leadership perspective. The findings highlight both the challenges posed by the pandemic and the solutions and adaptations that leadership has implemented or is considering for the future. The study successfully paints a picture of a sector that, while deeply affected, showcases resilience, adaptability, and foresight, thus filling the gap in literature regarding the pandemic's effects on international schools.

Summary of the Results

This chapter's findings provide a fresh perspective on how COVID-19 has affected international schools. The findings are based on the perspectives of international school leaders. The themes offered in the results section contribute to answering the four research questions created for this study.

The first research question aimed to determine how COVID-19 had affected education in international schools worldwide. The results of the research question indicate that in the short term, COVID-19 had a negative impact on students' academic performance in international schools, meaning that the Pandemic caused a decline in the academic performance of learners in these schools. Many students failed to read and revisit concepts taught before the Pandemic, contributing to poor performance. Students, therefore, performed poorly in tests explicitly designed to examine whether they still understood the concepts they had already been taught in the classroom before schools were closed following the COVID-19 outbreak. The problem was rectified by teachers revisiting classroom concepts and topics to support their recollection of what had already been taught in the classroom. Another impact of COVID-19 on international schools was its disruption of syllabus coverage. The respondents considered delayed syllabus coverage a significant problem caused by the Pandemic. From their responses, it was apparent that international schools place significant emphasis on syllabus coverage—another impact of the Pandemic on learning identified from the qualitative data collected related to teaching and learning methods.

International schools shifted to online learning after learning within the physical classroom was suspended following government directives to curb the coronavirus's spread. Virtual classrooms became a means for schools to continue teaching students despite distance since some learners could not return to school due to international travel restrictions. Online classrooms enable equitable learning experiences for all students. Another impact of the Pandemic on learning in international schools is that less learning occurred. Whereas online classrooms ensured learning continuity, they had limitations

that resulted in less learning. Students would have learned and understood more concepts had they been able to undertake practical lessons instead of theories. Much time was also utilised in coordinating online lessons, an issue that reduced the time available for teaching. The results show that the Pandemic negatively impacted international schools' teaching and learning, including students' academic performance.

The second research question sought to elucidate leaders' perceptions regarding innovations in international education during the COVID-19 pandemic. The data reveal that international schools have built online portals to improve the efficiency of assignment submission, a significant shift from the previous practice of submitting assignments primarily via email or in person. Creating online portals for submitting assignments is one of the new developments identified from the participants' responses examined. School leaders believed that the development of the portals was necessary to enhance the quality of teaching and improve learning outcomes. Students could easily submit their assignments and access educational resources while the administration monitored the performance of educators. School leaders thus perceive the creation of these portals as a positive development toward improving teaching and learning outcomes. The analysis also shows that international schools have embraced VLEs to improve student collaboration and enhance teaching and learning outcomes.

The theme offers insights into how the Pandemic influenced technological innovation within the education sector, particularly in international schools. New technology was used to address the limitations of online classes and enhance learning outcomes. School leaders believe that peer-to-peer learning is crucial for improving educational outcomes. VLEs enabled students to collaborate with their peers in virtual

spaces to attain better learning experiences. Research question 2 has also been answered by the theme, which showed that many international schools established guidance and counselling offices during and after the Pandemic to help teachers and students cope with the Pandemic's adverse effects on their mental well-being. School leaders believe the Pandemic heightened mental health issues among students and the teaching staff. Mental health challenges limit the ability of teachers to excel in their roles.

The challenges also negatively impact the academic performance of students. Therefore, school leaders believe that by establishing guidance and counselling offices that can address the psychological health challenges students and staff face, they can improve the productivity and role performance of teachers and students' academic performance. In addition, the findings demonstrate that online education is a recent phenomenon within the framework of international schools during the Pandemic. School leaders perceived online classrooms as an important development that should be used to complement learning within the physical classroom. The implication is that the leaders expected online learning to continue even after students resumed learning within the physical classroom because of the ability of the mode of learning to enhance teaching and learning outcomes. Teachers can use online classrooms to help students understand classroom concepts better.

The results show that the Pandemic highlighted the problem associated with over-relying on one source of revenue. Additionally, the results indicate that school leaders expected online learning to stay and complement learning within the physical classroom because of the learning mode's economic opportunities. School leaders believe their institutions can earn more revenue by providing local and international students with

online classes. The institutions are moving towards changing their business models to improve their financial performance in the short and long term.

The third research question sought to determine how the Pandemic impacted the future preparedness of international schools concerning disruptions to learning caused by public health crises. The question sought to establish how international schools had moved to limit or prevent a pandemic's negative impacts on their future activities. The results indicate that international schools aim to minimise disruptions to learning in the future by ensuring that teachers are trained on how to teach effectively in online classrooms. The current research has shown that teachers in international schools experienced challenges with online teaching because they lacked the requisite skills and competencies needed to teach effectively in online classrooms.

The results emphasize the importance of training teachers to improve their skills and capabilities in using digital tools to meet the needs and expectations of learners. International schools would not have experienced teaching and learning challenges or encountered limited difficulties within online classrooms had they prepared adequately for an environment widely shaped by technology. In the future, school leaders contend that international schools must train teachers to ensure they can perform their roles effectively in a digital environment. The findings also demonstrate that international schools can prepare for the future by having alternative income streams. The Pandemic led to financial challenges for international schools, with some teachers quitting because of delayed and sometimes absent salaries. Attrition can negatively impact teaching and learning, especially when experienced teachers leave. The findings indicate that the Pandemic influenced international schools to diversify investments and spread risks.

Overreliance on one revenue source worsened the Pandemic's economic effects on international schools. The school leaders believe that the schools can survive future pandemics and disruptions to the school calendar by ensuring that they invest in other ventures. Diversifying investment minimises the institutions' financial risks, especially during a pandemic such as COVID-19.

Finally, international schools can also prepare for the future by changing their recruitment policies to ensure that the recruitment process leads to already employed skilled and competent teachers in online teaching. Hiring teachers with the skills and capabilities necessary to work effectively in an environment extensively shaped by technology is necessary. School leaders believe that teachers should be capable of performing their roles successfully when technology is a crucial part of school operations. The recruitment approach also has economic benefits because it enables international schools to hire teachers that can effectively teach online classrooms without incurring training costs.

The fourth research question examined how COVID-19 impacted policy development to secure staff and students' well-being during a crisis. The question specifically focused on the well-being of students and teachers and how international schools aim to improve their well-being in the future. The three themes highlighted in response to this research question explain how COVID-19 has impacted the establishment of policies to ensure the safety of staff and students during a crisis. The first theme of increased focus on mental health shows that teachers and students can experience challenges related to their psychological well-being. The Pandemic had various negative repercussions that negatively impacted the psychological well-being of

international schoolteachers and pupils. In response, either directly or indirectly, international schools developed policies designed to address the needs and expectations of teachers and learners, improving their psychological well-being. The policies have been developed by international schools without support from the government mainly because while school leaders viewed mental health as an urgent and essential issue that should be addressed, governments were not moving with the desired urgency to create and implement policies that could help the education sector to enhance the mental well-being of educators and learners.

The findings show that pay uncertainty caused teachers to stress because of the associated hardships experienced due to the inability to meet needs and wants. International schools developed policies to ensure pay continuity to address the problem and improve teachers' psychological well-being. School leaders believe that remuneration is an area through which international schools can address the well-being of teachers. International schools also developed policies for additional income sources to ensure teachers are paid even when the school calendar is interrupted. International schools also developed policies concerning guidance and counselling to address issues concerning psychological health among teachers and learners.

Finally, the analysis identified the theme of training to improve the ICT skills of teachers and students. Teachers experienced challenges relating to online teaching because of the lack of skills in using ICT resources. The absence of these skills led to job-related stress and thus impacted the mental well-being of teachers negatively. The results indicate that the well-being of teachers in international schools can be improved by enhancing their ICT skills through training. Training reduces job-related stress and

motivates teachers to enjoy their jobs, especially within the context of online teaching. International schools can also improve the well-being of teachers and students by becoming trauma-informed. Trauma-informed schools enhance psychosocial support for learners and educators experiencing mental health issues due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. Overall, the Pandemic drew the attention of school leaders to the need to develop policies that address the welfare of teachers and students.

An evaluation of the findings reveals that while some existing studies have already provided insights into how COVID-19 has affected schools, there is still a dearth of information on how the Pandemic has impacted international schools and how they have responded to the impact of the Pandemic. This study provides new insights into the impact of the pandemic on international schools and how these institutions have devised short- and long-term response measures.

CHAPTER 5: IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

This research aimed to determine how the global pandemic of COVID-19 impacted international schools. The pandemic has adversely impacted the education sector by disrupting regular learning and resulting in economic challenges for learning institutions and mental health issues for educators and learners. Policymakers have examined the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic to develop appropriate intervention mechanisms, especially in the education sector. However, such intervention measures may not be effective without considering critical industry stakeholders' views and experiences. The current study focused on international schools where stakeholders include teachers, students, tutors, and school leaders. The perspectives of these stakeholders on the pandemic's impact and how negative consequences can be mitigated in the short- and long-term are crucial for establishing effective measures for addressing the implications of COVID-19 on international schools.

The problem that the study focused on was identifying the impact of COVID-19 on international schools from the perspective of leaders because leaders are well-positioned to understand the challenges caused by the pandemic and the potential solutions that could be implemented in the short-term and long-term to deal with the adverse effects. While institutions try to implement measures for recovering from the challenges caused by the pandemic, it is essential to come up with practical and proper adjustments because the successful and sustainable resumption of studies will highly rely on the adoption of these measures and policy changes as well as the well-being of staff and students. It is against such a background that the study sought to assess the impact of COVID-19 on international schools, considering the leaders' perspectives. These educational and

institutional leaders are the major stakeholders in international education. Therefore, the purpose of the research was to explore the perspectives of the leaders of international schools concerning the impacts of COVID-19 to gain insights into how the pandemic has impacted the learning institutions and how the leaders believe that the emerging challenges can be solved. A fundamental assumption made in the study was that school leaders have access to information and know how the pandemic has impacted international schools and the appropriate solutions for the adverse effects of the pandemic on learning institutions.

The study employed a qualitative research method to investigate the research problem to develop an understanding of how the pandemic had impacted international schools from the perspective of leaders. The research method was selected to ensure that the findings provided insights into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on global learning trends, leaders, and student experience and to explore some positive steps toward promoting international schools. The objectives of the research were to examine the expected short-term and long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on international learning, to compare pre-COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 implications on international education and explore the various factors affecting student performance, to determine the perspectives on the positive inventions of international learning during the COVID-19 pandemic from leadership and administrative point of view, and to evaluate policy changes required to facilitate international learning during and after the pandemic.

The research methodology was supposed to facilitate the realisation of these objectives. The study also employed an inductive research approach to investigate the research problem. An inductive research approach is consistent with qualitative studies

because it involves the search for patterns of meaning in data to develop theories and concepts. For the research design an exploratory research design was employed in the study. The research design is consistent with the qualitative and inductive research methods because it centres on developing new theories and concepts concerning a research phenomenon. An exploratory research design enabled the study to offer new insights into how the pandemic had impacted international schools. The research design allowed the flexibility to gain new insights into the research issue. The target population was leaders within the context of international schools.

The research aimed to establish the impact of COVID-19 on international schools from the perspective of leaders. Since the findings were supposed to be based on how leaders viewed the impact of the pandemic on international schools, the researcher sought to examine the views, opinions, and experiences of individuals in leadership positions within the context of international schools. People not in leadership positions would not have provided insights into the impact of the pandemic from the perspective of individuals charged with providing leadership and guidance during the pandemic. The study population consisted of school leaders in international schools in Qatar, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, Russia, China, Egypt, South Africa, France, Mexico, and the United States. Since this was an exploratory study, the researcher wanted a general overview of how COVID-19 had impacted international schools globally.

A total of 30 participants were selected for the research, with three from each country. The participants were selected through purposive sampling. Purposive sampling was used to select respondents that understood how to measure and improve teacher competence. In the current study, there was a need to have participants that understood

how COVID-19 had impacted international schools. At the same time, the participants had to be leaders because the research focused on the perspective of leaders. The respondents had the experience and knowledge to provide insights into how teacher competence could be measured and developed. The respondents included both men and women. However, gender was not an important characteristic to consider when selecting the research participants because the focus of the study was not on the perspectives of leaders of a particular gender.

Qualitative data obtained through interviews were analysed using thematic analysis. The data analysis technique is appropriate for analysing non-numeric information since the researcher can read through the data set and identify patterns of meaning within the data collected. The patterns of meaning identified were then used to answer the research questions. As seen in the previous chapter, several key concepts were identified and discussed. The concepts or themes offered in-depth insights into how COVID-19 has impacted international schools from the perspective of school leaders.

COVID-19 is a relatively new challenge that has contributed to few studies on how the pandemic has impacted schools, specifically international schools. There were methodological limitations that emerged in the research. The sample size used in the study was small, limiting the research findings' ability to be generalised. There was also a lack of previous studies on how COVID-19 has impacted international schools. Therefore, few studies compared their results with the current research findings. The literature review is vital to a research study because it helps identify key concepts that have emerged in a particular research area. The review of literature findings provides the foundation for achieving the research objectives.

There were also ethical considerations made during the study. Since data was obtained from human participants, there was a need to uphold privacy. Personal information shared by the participants needed to be safeguarded. The researcher used the anonymisation approach to ensure that information could not be traced back to particular respondents. The respondents use numbers instead of their actual names in the dissertation report.

The research findings' results are discussed in this chapter. In this chapter, we discuss the meaning of the findings, as well as their significance and consequences of those findings. In addition, the chapter concludes the study's findings and provides some recommendations. The discussions in this section are organized around the research questions. The discussion also entails how potential limitations may have impacted the interpretation of the results. The findings are placed back into context by describing how the results respond to the study problem, fit with the purpose, align (or not) with the conceptual framework, demonstrate significance, and contribute to the existing literature described in Chapter 2.

The discussion also explains whether the results were expected given the literature and provides potential explanations for unexpected or conflicting results. The section further describes the implications of practising for the applied degree. It discusses how the study builds to the existing body of research on this topic for the doctoral degree in the context of the literature review. Recommendations for application and recommendations for future research follow the implications discussions. The final part of the chapter is the conclusion, which provides a reflective summary of the research findings.

Implications

The study sought to answer four research questions from the perspective of international school leaders:

What is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on learning in international schools?

The first research question sought to examine the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on international learning. This research question focused on how the pandemic had impacted the core activity of international schools. Learning is a primary activity in international schools because the main reason for the enrolment of students in institutions is to learn.

The research findings show that the quality of teaching and learning declined due to the shift to online learning. The decline was marked by poor academic performance. The overall academic performance of students declined during the pandemic. Many students were disoriented because of the effects of COVID-19. At the same time, some also suffered poor performance due to struggles with online learning. An analysis of the responses provided by the school leaders indicates that learning within the physical classroom presented advantages in relation to teaching and learning outcomes. These results offer insights into the extent to which the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the core activity of international schools and impacted the needs of students. The findings imply that the needs of most students in terms of teaching and learning were not met due to the disruptions caused by the pandemic.

A shift to online learning negatively impacted some students' ability to grasp classroom content and excel in tests. Teaching approaches employed by teachers when

teaching online classrooms impacted teaching and learning outcomes. For many students, as noted by the school leaders, most teachers struggled with teaching in online classrooms. They thus failed to deliver lessons that improved student learning outcomes. There was also less learning because of the pandemic compared to pre-pandemic. The pandemic played a key role in influencing international schools to shift to online learning, affecting students' academic performance due to poor teaching and learning outcomes when lessons are conducted online.

Additionally, the quality of learning declined because students were mainly taught theories with minimal to no engagement in practice. There seemed to be a consensus among the research participants that online learning has certain limitations that can negatively impact the quality of teaching and learning and, ultimately, students' academic performance. The results were expected because, as in Chapter 2, the COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact on the education sector. The findings are consistent with the results obtained by Di Pietro et al. (2020), which showed that the pandemic had generally had a negative impact on teaching and learning because most schools were not prepared for it and the disruptions that it caused to normal teaching and learning.

While the study did not offer extensive insights into how the pandemic had impacted learning in international schools, it demonstrated that teaching and learning outcomes in schools, including international schools, were likely to be adversely impacted due to COVID-19. Even the findings by Sahu (2020) intimated that the pandemic had had a negative impact on teaching and learning, results that are consistent with the views shared by the leaders of international schools that education quality in the learning institutions had declined during the pandemic as the schools shifted to online learning

without adequate preparation. The current research results were also predicted in the findings of the study conducted by Cui et al. (2021), who noted that students struggled in school due to the effects of the pandemic on their mental health. The findings obtained by Cui et al. (2021) indicated that students' academic performance declined during the pandemic because the mental health challenges they experienced due to the adverse effects of COVID-19 made it difficult to focus on school.

The current research results expand on these findings by demonstrating that education performance declined because the shift to online learning presented teaching and learning difficulties for educators and students. The current research findings also offer further insights into how the shift to online learning might have led to a decline in academic performance by showing that less learning occurred when classes were shifted to online platforms. Subjects that required practical learning were more impacted because students were mainly taught theory due to the virtual nature of the classrooms. The results demonstrate that lack of training and ICT skills have mainly been blamed for declining academic performance when classrooms shifted to online platforms. At the same time, there are clear limitations of online learning caused by the very nature of online classrooms. The results were expected because of the insights Shahzad et al. (2021) provided concerning how information systems can be implemented to promote learning. The claims made by Shahzad et al. (2021) were based on the D&M model proposed by DeLone and McLean (2016). The model examined the success of information systems and suggested that the technical level of the information system and the impact of information on the receiver influence the efficacy of communication relayed using information systems.

As established in the current study, many teachers experience difficulties in online teaching because of the lack of skills and competencies to use information systems to teach effectively. The quality of teaching and learning thus declined, leading to a decline in the academic performance of students in international schools during the pandemic. The absence of the views of teachers and students limited the interpretation of the findings regarding how online learning led to less learning and poor academic performance. The interpretation of the results has mainly relied on the views and experiences shared by school leaders who were not directly involved in teaching and learning.

The results offer an interesting perspective on why students' performance declined when learning shifted to virtual classrooms. Still, further exploration of the issue is hindered by the lack of in-depth information from the research participants. The school leaders that participated in the study had more knowledge and experiences concerning issues that the institutions in general as opposed to the specific challenges that teachers and learners experienced when learning shifted to the virtual classroom.

The study's results, however, reinforce the notion that lack of training and ICT skills significantly contributed to the teaching and learning challenges that international schools experienced as they shifted to online learning. Based on the views shared by the school leaders, many students believed that teachers were struggling with online teaching and were ill-equipped to deliver high-quality instructions that could enhance teaching and learning outcomes. Online learning has certain limitations that physical classrooms do not have. Most teachers found teaching practical aspects of subject content difficult and experienced challenges in conveying information and interacting with students. The

educators lacked training for online teaching. These were indirect impacts of the pandemic on learning because as much as COVID-19 forced the transition to online learning, the declining performance of students was partly attributed to the lack of appropriate online teaching skills among teachers.

The current research results show that schools were not adequately prepared for online learning, negatively impacting teaching and learning quality. The results were expected because the literature review in Chapter 2 demonstrated that learning institutions would experience significant teaching and learning challenges without adequate preparation for teaching and learning online. Teachers struggled to teach effectively online, and this had a negative impact on the quality of learning. The findings are consistent with the claims made by the OECD (2020c) that school leaders have to rethink how prepared schools are to deal with pandemic cases because while many schools are supporting online learning during the pandemic, the challenges that have been witnessed have exposed the preparedness of learning institutions during the pandemic.

The results mean that many international schools experienced a decline in teaching and learning quality because of the lack of adequate preparation. The results also reaffirm the claims made by Kruse et al. (2020) that learning institutions can manage the COVID-19 crisis by restructuring their systems to enhance instructional quality. The argument means that international schools did not effectively restructure their systems to improve online instruction quality amidst the pandemic, negatively impacting teaching and learning quality. The findings are also consistent with the claims made by Aristovnik et al. (2020) that the pandemic impacted learning in educational institutions by forcing them to

abandon learning within the physical classroom and shifting to online classrooms with varying success. The notion of varying success means that while some schools could effectively implement online classes without compromising the quality of teaching and learning, others experienced a decline in students' academic performance because of a decline in the quality of teaching.

The current research findings show that many international students' academic performance declines because of teaching and learning challenges associated with online classrooms. Similarly, Adedoyin and Soykan (2020) established that the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted normal learning within physical classrooms and forced learning institutions to adapt to online learning. Although a shift to online learning began before the coronavirus pandemic, most institutions were forced to fully implement online learning, some of which were not ready regarding the required infrastructures. The lack of these infrastructures negatively impacted the quality of teaching and, thus, learning outcomes during the pandemic.

The lack of adequate preparation, as established in the current research, is also consistent with the claims made by Heng and Sol (2020). They argued that because the shift to online learning occurred abruptly, most students and teachers were not prepared for the sudden change, an issue that had a negative impact on the quality of teaching and learning within the context of online classrooms. As Heng and Sol (2020) noted, inexperience and inadequate training in using technologies in online learning create challenges for both students and teachers. These challenges have a negative impact on the quality of teaching and learning. The findings imply that online learning has not always been a priority for many international schools. Indeed, as shown by the responses from

the leaders of international schools, the learning institutions had to adopt online learning without adequate preparation.

The results suggest an overreliance on teaching and learning within the physical classroom, even as technology becomes a key part of human life. The pandemic exposed the lack of preparation among international schools to embrace technology in teaching and learning. Still, the findings demonstrate that the pandemic forced an abrupt transition to online learning without adequate preparation for change. There was a universality in how international schools shifted to online learning. The change was fast, unforeseen, and poorly implemented. While the current research results do not point to resistance to change by teachers and students, they reveal that they were unprepared for it. The school leaders also failed to discuss whether they engaged students and teachers before developing online teaching and learning strategies. If they did, the implementation was poor because of the many challenges teachers and students experienced as schools shifted to online platforms.

The study results offer insights into the importance of training teachers and students on using education technology. The training of teachers specifically may have to incorporate training on ICT skills and online teaching approaches to improve their ability to teach students when classrooms shift to virtual platforms effectively. As demonstrated by the current research results and consistent with the concepts identified in the literature review, teachers require online teaching skills to teach in a way that enhances teaching and learning outcomes. Teacher training curricula should enhance the ability of teachers to teach effectively in an environment significantly shaped by technology.

Overall, the study findings address the research problem by providing insights into how COVID-19 impacted international schools. The results help answer the research problem by showing how the pandemic impacted school learning from leaders' perspectives. The pandemic negatively impacted students' academic performance because of the challenges associated with online learning. The findings suggest that students performed poorly in the classroom because the quality of teaching significantly declined since international schools did not implement effective measures to enhance the quality of teaching and learning when classrooms were shifted online. Teachers and students were not adequately prepared for online teaching and learning, as shown by the lack of ICT skills, negatively impacting teaching and learning outcomes.

The results essentially answer the question concerning the experiences of international schools related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The teaching and learning problems mainly emerged because international schools abruptly shifted to online classrooms. The results offer a new understanding of how the pandemic impacted learning in schools, which helps to answer the research problem that sought to identify and examine the impact of COVID-19 on international schools. However, the findings did not provide insights into the extent to which the home environment impacted the quality of online learning. Based on the claims made by Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1994) that the home environment can have a negative impact on online learning since students are accustomed to the physical learning environment that is often conducive to teaching and learning, the expectation was that the results would show that the academic performance of students also declined because of the negative impact of the home environment on

online learning. The lack of such results could be because the study focused on school leaders' perspectives, not teachers or learners.

A research study that focused on the perspectives of teachers or students could have provided a more profound understanding of how the home environment can impact the quality of learning when learning and teaching are conducted online. The results do not also conform to the argument made by Christensen (2016) that the environment in which a student studies can affect learning outcomes. Instead, the findings focus on teachers' lack of competencies and skills concerning online teaching and the limitations of remote learning compared to physical classrooms. The disruptions likely to occur because of the home environment are thus largely absent in the research findings. As previously mentioned, the results mean that school leaders have primarily focused on the ability of teachers to teach effectively online as a factor that can be used to enhance the quality of learning outcomes within online classrooms.

On the other hand, the disruptions caused by the home environment are largely ignored. An argument by Fernandez and Shaw (2020) emphasized the need for schools to consider how external inequalities can impact the quality of learning when classrooms are shifted online. Therefore, this study has not identified the aspect of the environment and its impact on the quality of learning when teaching and learning are conducted online. The perspectives of learners would have provided more insights into how environmental factors impacted their ability to learn when classrooms were shifted online. The researcher relied on school leaders' perspectives that did not provide in-depth insights into students' actual experiences in the home environment. The results imply that even as international schools implement online learning strategies, they should understand that

students may not have adequate environments to support effective learning when classrooms are shifted to online platforms. The views shared by the school leaders failed to demonstrate how international schools will improve teaching and learning when classrooms are moved to online platforms from the perspective of students' learning environments.

In summary, the current research results offer new perspectives on how COVID-19 impacted learning in the education sector, specifically in international schools. A critical issue that the study aimed to examine was how the pandemic had impacted learning in international schools. The findings demonstrate how the COVID-19 pandemic altered education in international schools and its effects on teaching and learning outcomes. The results make an essential contribution to the existing literature on the impact of the pandemic on learning. The literature review in chapter two showed that only a few studies have delved into the specific ways the pandemic impacted understanding. Many studies mainly focused on how COVID-19 impacted the education sector, with minimal research on the teaching and learning challenges that emerged when schools shifted to online learning.

The results of the current study imply that international schools should invest in not only training to improve the skills and competence of teachers within the context of online learning but also collaborate with parents to ensure that students receive the necessary support required to improve learning outcomes when classrooms are shifted to online platforms. The results also show that the training of educators should incorporate skills and competencies that can enable them to succeed in their roles in an environment significantly impacted by technology. Those pursuing degrees in education should

graduate when they can effectively and competently teach on online platforms. Furthermore, the findings highlight the importance of developing competencies in using educational technology in an environment where technology is crucial to teaching and learning.

What are the leaders' perspectives on the positive inventions in international learning during the COVID-19 pandemic?

The research question aimed to understand how the COVID-19 pandemic had driven innovation within the education sector, specifically in the international school sector. The study also explored how the pandemic had impacted inventions within the context of learning in international schools to understand the impact of COVID-19 on international schools. The results provided insights into leaders' perspectives on inventions in international learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The study findings identify the different inventions spurred by the pandemic or which became more beneficial due to the impact of the pandemic on learning and teaching in international schools. One of the inventions identified in the research relates to developing online portals to enhance efficiency during assignment submissions and for performance monitoring for students and teachers. Developing online portals to support online learning is not necessarily a new invention. Still, international schools invested in developing such portals during the pandemic to enhance teaching and learning outcomes. International schools developed online portals to improve the efficient submission of assignments, a notable shift from conventional practice where assignments were primarily submitted for marking via email or physically handed to teachers. School leaders believed that creating the online portals was essential to enhance the efficacy of

teaching and learning when classrooms became virtual. To the leaders, the pandemic was vital in driving the change because the schools needed to ensure that the learning needs of students were met when classrooms were shifted to online platforms.

The development of online portals to submit assignments more efficiently and monitor educators' performance shows that the performance of both teachers and students during distance learning was a significant concern for the leaders of international schools. Reliance on information technology was thus geared towards improving teachers' performance and ensuring students could submit and track their assignments more effectively.

The results respond to the study problem by offering insights into how the pandemic impacted international schools regarding invention and innovation. The main concern of the research problem was to identify the various ways the pandemic had impacted international schools. By identifying the different inventions and innovations propelled by the pandemic, the results respond to the research problem by offering insights into how the pandemic impacted international schools. The impact was not negative since it centred on innovation that improves the effectiveness of online teaching and learning.

The findings indicate that the pandemic motivated international schools to develop robust websites supporting continued education and learning. In other words, the pandemic influenced international schools to invest in information and technology to enhance teaching and learning outcomes when classrooms were shifted to online platforms. Investing in information technology has benefitted teaching and learning by ensuring students can easily submit their assignments for marking and feedback. Having

a robust website is not an invention. Still, the schools innovated their existing websites and online learning portals to respond to the teaching and learning changes caused by the pandemic.

The portals were essential for teaching and learning because international schools used them to monitor teachers' performance. Given that teachers and students only interacted online, the websites were crucial to ensuring that teachers performed in a way that met the expectations of the students and the administration. The findings imply that school leaders believed some teachers would not fulfil their roles diligently when learning and teaching occurred remotely without a mechanism for monitoring their performance. As the findings of the study show, it was difficult at first to observe teachers' performance since they were teaching remotely from home. Creating the portal made it possible to motivate teachers to put effort toward teaching students and marking assignments on time.

School leaders sought to ensure that students received quality education through dedicated teachers even when teaching and learning occurred remotely. At the same time, students benefited from the portals by accessing critical educational resources. It was not anticipated that international schools would establish websites and online learning portals to monitor teachers' performance and allow students to submit assignments and access their grades conveniently. The literature review has not indicated that schools adopted new technology during the pandemic to support monitoring teachers' performance.

Similarly, the review has not shown that schools invested in robust websites to enhance the efficacy of assignment submission and learning resource access among

students. These are revealing findings that have been made possible by the focus of the study. Examining school leaders' perspectives enabled the research to gain in-depth insights into how international schools used innovation and inventions to overcome challenges that emerged when teaching and learning shifted to online platforms.

To an extent, the results were not completely unexpected because the literature review showed that technology played a central role during the pandemic when international schools resorted to online learning. Therefore, developing robust and more advanced websites is within the context of educational technology's evolution during COVID-19. The results are consistent with the claims made by Ifinedo (2011) that system quality is crucial in promoting online learning because it produces query results more quickly. The current research findings show that the leaders of international schools considered robust websites vital for improving teaching and learning outcomes because of their capabilities. The ability of students to receive feedback fast for marked assignments improves the quality of learning because they can use assignment feedback to enhance their knowledge. A robust system that supports obtaining results faster, whether such results relate to teachers' performance, can improve the quality of teaching and learning when learning and teaching occur online.

While the findings are not exactly similar to the concepts examined in chapter 2, they are consistent with the review. They offer insights into the importance of having a robust website when teaching and learning occur remotely. As demonstrated by the literature review, the COVID-19 pandemic made it important for schools to invest in technology to support teaching and learning. Similarly, the current research has shown that international schools believed that investing in robust websites could improve

teaching and learning outcomes. The results were also expected because the study by DeLone and McLean (2016) determined that system quality, characterised by ease of use, flexibility, availability, and usefulness, can enhance user experiences when information technology systems are employed in the education sector. The current research determined that having a useful website from the perspective of the needs of learners improves learning outcomes when classrooms are shifted to online platforms. A system that is useful to students supports their learning needs. Based on the school leaders' perspectives, students benefit significantly from systems that enable them to submit their assignments easily and receive fast feedback for marked assignments. System developments that enhance the experiences of students and teachers can, therefore, improve teaching and learning outcomes. A robust system that makes it easier for students to submit assignments and receive feedback means that students can avoid the frustrations associated with submitting assignments manually or through emails that may be accidentally deleted. The assignment submission method can enhance teachers' ability to register submitted assignments efficiently, mark them, and provide feedback.

The findings imply that international schools should collaborate with organisations developing online learning systems to ensure that such systems meet end-users' needs. The results further offer insights into the importance of ensuring stakeholder engagement when developing new systems for online learning. Based on the claims made by the school leaders, there was a need to put in place systems that would enhance the learning experiences of students when classrooms were shifted to online platforms. The findings also conform to the claims made by Edovald and Nevill (2021) that clear explanations and effective feedback are important in ensuring online learning success.

The current study demonstrates that international schools have invested in user-centred systems. That is, they meet the expectations and needs of the end users. In this case, end users are students engaged in online learning. The school leaders who participated in the current research intimated that students desire prompt feedback for submitted assignments. A system that facilitates the efficient submission of assignments and the receipt of feedback enhances students' learning experiences and outcomes in international schools when classrooms are shifted to online platforms. Investing in advanced websites has been crucial to ensuring that online learning does not frustrate students since they are not close to teachers. Improving students' experiences with online classrooms was key in influencing international schools to invest in robust websites. OECD (2020a) noted that international schools would have to embrace innovation following the COVID-19 pandemic to enhance the quality of teaching and learning outcomes. The current study's results demonstrate that international schools are adopting new technologies and technological innovations to improve the quality of teaching and learning on online platforms. Some international schools have made online learning an integral part of the school system.

The results offer insights into the research problem by demonstrating that due to COVID-19, international schools invested more in developing educational technology that could improve teaching and learning outcomes. The findings present new understandings of the role of websites in online learning and the need for schools to understand user needs when investing in information technology to support teaching and learning. The results also show that it is important for the leadership of international schools to consider students' views when investing in new information technology to support their learning.

While the study did not examine students' perspectives, the views shared by the school leaders indicate that students usually desire websites that enable them to access learning materials easily and submit their assignments while receiving prompt feedback. For those pursuing degree courses in education and school management, the results show that it is important to involve students in decision-making when implementing changes designed to alter teaching and learning. Students can provide useful information that helps drive change's successful implementation. The need to consider students' perspectives when investing in information technology is even more important when the technology invested in aims to improve students' experiences with online learning.

The study findings also show that international schools implemented virtual learning environments in online learning to improve learning outcomes. Again, these findings respond to the research problem by demonstrating how COVID-19 impacted international schools in innovation designed to enhance teaching and learning outcomes when classrooms were shifted to online platforms. Implementing a virtual learning environment was not borne out of international schools' innovativeness. However, the development of a new virtual learning environment was driven by the impact of the pandemic on teaching and learning. Tech companies engaged in innovating virtual learning environments to provide schools with educational technology that could improve teaching and learning outcomes during the pandemic. The schools invested in acquiring new technology to support teaching and learning when classrooms were shifted to online platforms.

On the other hand, international schools used this technology innovatively to ensure that students realised positive learning outcomes even with the inability to

participate in learning within physical classrooms. International schools invested in virtual learning environments that created virtual classrooms where students could interact with their peers and learn. The system implemented significantly improved the educational outcomes of the students. New technology was used to address the limitations of online classes and enhance learning outcomes, indicating that the COVID-19 pandemic impacted how international schools acquired and implemented new educational technology. School leaders believe that developing online learning systems that facilitate student cooperation is one of the most significant innovations in education since the pandemic began. The pandemic drove international schools to embrace online learning. Still, as noted by the school leaders, the learning approach has inherent limitations compared to learning within the physical classroom. Collaboration is a critical limitation identified by the school leaders participating in the study. According to the leaders, collaboration is vital in learning because it enables students to gain and share knowledge. The virtual learning environment was thus implemented to improve student collaboration and learning outcomes when teaching and learning shifted to online platforms.

While the results concerning the new virtual learning environments were unexpected, the findings which show that international schools implemented new technology to support collaboration among learners were consistent with concepts examined in the literature review. Findings about collaboration within the online space were expected because, as stated by Cui et al. (2021), creating opportunities for students to collaborate enhances the motivation to learn and improves learning outcomes. The results of the current study have shown that online learning can limit collaboration and thus negatively impact learning outcomes. International school leaders emphasize

students' need to learn in an environment that enables them to collaborate with their peers. Collaboration is easier when students learn in physical classrooms. However, given that students are essentially in different locations when attending online classes, they cannot collaborate easily with their peers unless there is the technology that provides the capabilities of physical classrooms regarding collaboration.

The findings are also consistent with the claims made by Heng and Sol (2020) that online learning has certain limitations that face-to-face classrooms do not have. As shown by the responses provided by the school leaders, students benefit from collaborating with their peers. However, one of the limitations of distance learning is the inability to collaborate among students within the online space. Schools invest in new technology to overcome limitations and ensure students attain positive learning outcomes through collaboration. Virtual learning environments address this limitation by enabling students to collaborate effectively when classes are offered remotely. The spaces mirror physical classrooms and allow students to engage in discussions with their peers. School leaders think positively about technology because they understand the importance of collaboration in the learning environment.

Based on the school leaders' responses, creating a virtual learning environment to support collaboration in online spaces was crucial to ensure students' learning needs were met even as teaching and learning shifted to online platforms. The findings further highlight the importance of implementing online learning systems that improve student learning outcomes. The results thus reaffirm the claims made by Ifinedo (2011) that system quality can lead to the development of learning interests and increase learners' level of satisfaction because, as seen with virtual learning environments, students can

collaborate and benefit from online classes when technology makes collaboration possible. COVID-19 forced schools to shift to online learning and also address the limitations of online learning. While virtual learning environments might have been developed and implemented even without COVID-19, the pandemic created an urgency to ensure that online learning met students' needs. International schools did not simply use online classes as an option. Still, they employed this approach as the primary method of teaching and learning. Students did not have other provisions through which to learn. This factor made it crucial for international schools to invest in technology that could enhance student learning outcomes through collaboration.

The results show that virtual learning environments create environments that enhance students' learning abilities. This determination is consistent with the argument advanced by Anandavalli et al. (2020) that systems and environments can impact the ability of students to learn and achieve positive learning outcomes. While the claims do not explicitly refer to virtual learning environments, they are consistent with the current research findings that system capability influences learning outcomes in online classrooms. International schools adopting this new technology understand the benefits of the technology for students, especially when learning takes place online.

Virtual learning environments allow students to connect, confer with one another, and receive support, which is important for realizing positive learning outcomes. As shown by the views shared by the leaders, students require collaboration because, in this way, they learn more and better than when they rely on their capabilities alone. Virtual learning environments enable students to interact with peers, attain necessary support and learn. In essence, technology creates an environment that is conducive to learning. By

collaborating within virtual spaces, students can learn better and more effectively as if they were in physical classrooms. The findings thus respond to the research problem by offering insights into how COVID-19 has impacted the technology investment decisions of international schools. Schools are acquiring innovative and more advanced technology to meet the new teaching and learning challenges associated with online learning. The results were also not unexpected because Zhai and Du (2020a) already established that emotional and psychosocial support are important for students because they play an integral role in improving learning outcomes.

Even though the findings did not explicitly identify virtual learning environments as important avenues for students to acquire emotional and psychosocial support, they demonstrated that students' learning outcomes could be improved through technology that enables interactions. Such interactions can enhance emotional and psychosocial support. Virtual learning environments create an opportunity for students to receive emotional and psychosocial support that can enhance the quality of learning outcomes, which could have been impossible without innovative technology such as virtual learning environments. The leaders who participated in the study understand that students require different types of support from their peers, including academic support.

Their understanding thus informs the importance of international school leaders attached to virtual learning environments of how collaboration and social networks support learning. Within the context of the research problem, the findings offer insights into how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the thinking of international schools regarding how they can enhance students' learning experiences when classrooms shift to online platforms. A system is deemed essential to learners, hence adopting a virtual learning

environment that enables students to have systems that support their learning. The pandemic thus influenced technology adoption by international schools.

The importance of having a functional system is highlighted by Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1994). They state that connecting with people within a given system is vital because a person receives a bidirectional relationship through interacting with the environment. As demonstrated by the current research results, students desired a system that enhanced collaboration because of the benefits of such cooperation. Collaboration improved the ability of students to share and gain knowledge through peer learning. Therefore, interacting with other students can benefit their learning, a conclusion also made by Ettekal and Mahoney (2017). While virtual learning environments have been enabled by technological innovation and have thus not been extensively examined in the existing literature about COVID-19, the adoption of the technology by international schools should not be surprising because current studies have highlighted the importance of peer collaboration among students.

The new technology enables peer collaboration among students on online platforms. The results indicate that those taking doctoral degrees in education and school management should appreciate the importance of peer collaboration in learning. Educators and school administrators need to develop skills and competencies to ensure that they can implement strategies that support peer collaboration among students. Doctoral degree candidates in education should also work towards researching new ways to improve peer collaboration among students in the age of technology. Virtual learning environments have been a positive invention for international schools because they have ensured that students can effectively collaborate within virtual spaces. The design

underscores the importance of continuous technological innovation, even within the field of education, to ensure that educational technology is geared towards improving students' learning outcomes.

The results were expected because COVID-19 has harmed the mental health of individuals across the globe. From everyday occurrences, many people have experienced financial challenges due to lockdown policies that have negatively impacted the global economy and the business environment. Lockdown policies have also harmed the social lives of individuals and, thus, their mental health. Due to the obvious challenges presented by the pandemic, international schools were expected to implement strategies to address mental health issues attributed to COVID-19. The results also indicate that the leaders of international schools believed establishing guidance and counselling offices to address the mental health needs of students and staff was a constructive invention. Many international schools established guidance and counselling offices during and after the pandemic to help teachers and students cope with its adverse effects on their mental well-being. As explained by the school leaders that took part in this research, the pandemic influenced the administrators to pay more attention to the mental health of students and teachers.

Again, while establishing guidance and counselling offices is not an invention in the strictest of terms, it was a new development for international schools that have not invested significantly in the mental well-being of students and staff. The findings show that many international schools initially had guidance and counselling offices but did not focus on teachers' psychological well-being. At the same time, the existing offices were not adequately designed to enhance the well-being of both teachers and students. Based

on the responses of school leaders that participated in this research, COVID-19 impacted how school leaders and administrators viewed mental health. Initially, while international schools addressed students' challenges, they were more inclined toward helping students improve their academic performance than addressing their mental health needs.

The pandemic influenced school leaders to pay more attention to the psychological well-being of students and teachers and to establish guidance and counselling offices capable of dealing with mental health issues. Mental health is now addressed without tying it to academic performance, an indication that leaders consider it a crucial point that should often be attended to, even if it is not impacting academic performance. The findings respond to the research problem by providing insights into how COVID-19 influenced the thinking of international schools concerning mental health. The school leaders took a positive approach to addressing mental health in the learning institutions by developing new strategies for improving the efficacy of guidance and counselling services.

The results demonstrate how international school leaders developed a contingency management approach during the crisis. This is called a contingency approach because it has been adopted based on the prevailing situation. The literature review demonstrated that the education sector leaders could take a contingency approach to deal with emerging crises. The decisions were influenced by the need to address emerging challenges, primarily since the pandemic resulted in more mental health issues among teachers and students than the international schools had experienced before. The responses provided by the leaders that took part in the study indicate that they did not rely on existing policies or procedures but sought to develop

new ones that could enable them to effectively respond to the negative impact of the pandemic on the mental well-being of teachers and learners.

The findings are consistent with the claims made by Donaldson (2001) that the contingency leadership approach is suitable for managing complex and uncertain crises. The contingency leadership approach is grounded in the understanding that an organisation's effectiveness can be enhanced by developing and implementing new strategies and decisions relevant to the emerging situation. The results respond to the research problem by demonstrating how the pandemic impacted international schools' policies for dealing with mental health issues. The leaders of international schools were dealing with a relatively new and complex problem because mental health had never been a significant concern in the institutions before. The pandemic, however, made it a vital issue, and the leaders had to develop strategies to mitigate the new challenge. As demonstrated by the current research findings, international school leaders adopted strategies that sought to deal with the problem of mental health by establishing practical guidance and counselling offices. The results are thus not unexpected because the crisis, based on the views shared by the leaders of international schools, harmed the mental well-being of students and teachers in a way that the institutions had not witnessed before. Due to the novelty of the crisis, a contingency leadership approach proved to be the most suitable approach for dealing with the heightened mental health challenge.

The findings are also consistent with the claims made by Zhai and Du (2020a) that international students from different backgrounds and nationalities have unique mental health needs. Schools must know such requirements and help the students attain improved psychological well-being. Leaders and teachers believe that COVID-19 has

impacted students' well-being. The results of the current study indicate that the pandemic impacted students and the teaching staff differently, probably because of their backgrounds, even though that is not clear in the findings because the participants did not dwell on the issue. Furthermore, the current study did not examine the perspectives of students and educators concerning how the pandemic impacted their mental health. This factor limited the ability of the research to provide insights into the different factors that mediated the pandemic's impact on students' and teachers' mental health. The results were also expected because, as noted by Cui et al. (2021) and Keeling et al. (2020b) the shift to online learning has caused stress to international students.

The responses shared by the school leaders show that many educators and students experienced challenges associated with the shift to online learning. For educators, the lack of online teaching skills has made their work more difficult, automatically resulting in work-related stress. Students have also experienced learning difficulties, primarily due to the lack of physical classroom benefits such as learning by practice. These problems, in addition to the pandemic itself, have harmed the mental well-being of students. This issue has influenced school leaders to relook at how to address mental health issues in the institutions. The establishment of guidance and counselling offices with qualified staff to deal with mental health issues is thus consistent with what has already been established in existing literature because the pandemic has been linked to an increase in mental health issues in schools in existing studies. The findings also reiterate the claims made by Son et al. (2020) that there is an urgent need for schools to work closely with all the stakeholders to help students suffering from mental health due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The current study results show that mental health can no longer be treated casually in international schools, especially after the negative impacts of the pandemic on the mental well-being of teachers and students. The school leaders' responses show that mental health is treated as a crucial and urgent issue following the effects of the pandemic on the mental well-being of students and teachers. Directing additional and necessary resources toward guidance and counselling services also reinforces what has been identified in existing studies as an association between COVID-19 and increased mental health issues in learning institutions.

Establishing guidance and counselling offices with skilled and competent professionals reaffirms the claims made by Cui et al. (2021) that schools should focus on employing thoughtful guidance and counselling professionals that can handle students with mental health issues. The views shared by the leaders indicate that previously, international schools did not direct much effort toward hiring highly skilled and competent guidance and counselling professionals. With the adverse impact of the pandemic on mental health, the schools have decided to change their recruitment approaches to ensure that individuals working in guidance and counselling offices can address the mental health issues educators and students face. The current research findings thus respond to the research problem by demonstrating that the pandemic has impacted the hiring practices of international schools regarding staff working in guidance and counselling offices.

The results are also consistent with the concepts identified in the literature review to the extent that schools have largely overlooked the need for teachers also to access guidance and counselling services. The views shared by the study respondents indicate

that guidance and counselling offices were mainly established to provide services to students as opposed to both students and teachers. The current study's findings suggest that these offices should also extend assistance to teachers and not just students because teachers have experienced just as significant mental health challenges as students because of the pandemic. Indeed, one could argue that teachers have faced even more adverse mental health problems than students due to the pandemic. When school calendars were suspended, many teachers experienced financial challenges that negatively impacted their mental well-being, as noted by the school leaders who participated in this study. The importance of addressing mental health for teachers, as demonstrated by this research, is consistent with the claims made by Keeling et al. (2020b) that a majority of staff in international schools turn to school leaders and their colleagues to help them deal with their mental health issues following the pandemic, meaning that educators also require services that can assist them to improve their mental health. International schools are now developing policies that can improve the mental well-being of both students and teachers.

Whereas the creation of guidance and counselling offices operated by professional guidance and counselling staff is not an invention in the strict sense, the approach adopted by international schools towards guidance and counselling is new. The schools now consider guidance and counselling for teachers and students as an essential undertaking that cannot be treated casually. Investing in guidance and counselling offices where professionals operate indicates that the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted how school leaders view guidance and counselling. The results also show that those pursuing degrees in education and leadership should consider mental health a crucial issue for the

teaching staff and student fraternity. Even without the pandemic, the findings suggest that several factors, including work conditions for teachers and student environment, can negatively impact the mental well-being of teachers and students.

Another positive invention for international schools during the pandemic is the concept of online learning. Whereas online learning is not a new development because many colleges now offer online or distance learning, it is a new development for most international schools that have had to shift to virtual learning environments due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Online classrooms benefit international schools economically, as shown by the current research findings. The findings indicate that online classrooms became common within the international school sector during the COVID-19 pandemic as international schools sought to ensure that students continued learning even as physical classroom learning became unsustainable. The school leaders that participated in this study believe this is a positive development because of the benefits that international schools have derived from online classrooms.

The findings respond to the research problem by showing how the pandemic impacted the thinking of international schools toward online learning and classrooms. The results indicate that international schools invested significantly in online learning or virtual classrooms due to the pandemic and the potential benefits of the teaching and learning approach in the short and long term. The results also demonstrate that international schools are not ready to abandon the concept of online learning even when the pandemic ends and regular learning within the physical resumes.

The research findings show that online learning allows international schools to generate additional revenue. This significant incentive has influenced schools to invest in

information technology. The determination that international schools will not abandon online classes even after the pandemic was not unexpected, given that Hodges et al. (2020) established that COVID-19 has forced international schools to resort to blended learning. Blended learning means that international schools have resorted to using physical and virtual classrooms to teach students. In other words, international schools have embraced both learnings within the physical classroom and online learning.

The findings address the study problem by providing insights into how the pandemic impacted international schools' business and education strategies. Blended learning is, in part, a business strategy because, as shown by the responses of the school leaders, international schools view online or distance learning as a means to improve their financial performance as business entities. Instead of using online learning as a temporary measure, international schools are using the strategy to attain long-term financial goals even as they ensure that learning is not interrupted due to COVID-19. The school leaders believe international schools retain online learning primarily because of the economic benefits. While it enables distance learning and students can engage in discussions within virtual learning environments, a key reason for retaining the blended learning approach is the economic benefit of distance learning.

The findings show that online classes have been used to attain additional revenue as international schools strive to improve their financial performance. International schools have decided to retain and expand online learning to attract new students and offer distance learning. The current research findings provide insights into the business aspect of international schools. Whereas the institutions have been established to provide

education, they are foremost business institutions seeking to maximise returns for investors.

Of course, COVID-19 adversely impacted the business environment, including the international education sector. The results demonstrate that the decision by international schools to retain online classrooms even as physical classes resumed was informed by profitability concerns. The schools can increase student enrolment through distance learning and improve financial performance. The results are consistent with the argument advanced by Viner et al. (2020), who stated that the pandemic had had negative economic impacts on international schools. The determination that international schools retained online classes after physical classrooms had resumed was thus expected. International schools were bound to consider new ways to generate revenue and cushion themselves from future pandemics' negative economic consequences. The findings have implications for education scholars because they suggest that while recommending policies to improve teaching and learning, it is essential also to consider that international schools are business entities with profit objectives.

The results showing that international schools have decided to retain online classrooms to increase enrolment are also consistent with the claims made by Al-Samarrai et al. (2020) that international schools are likely to experience a decline in enrolment because of the pandemic and should, therefore, develop strategies aimed at increasing enrolment. The schools are using online learning to address the declined enrolment due to COVID-19 and to ensure an overall increase in student enrolment. Retaining online classrooms is that part of a long strategy to increase the student population in these schools. An increase in student population is directly related to the

financial performance of the schools because the higher the student enrolment, the higher the revenue generated through tuition fees. In the short term, however, the strategy proved helpful in ensuring that international schools continued to enrol new students even as the COVID-19 pandemic diminished prospects for an increase in enrolments.

The results respond to the study problem by understanding how the pandemic impacted the business strategies of international schools. The schools had to be creative and thus developed new ways for increasing revenue generation. The results were also expected because Hanushek and Woessmann's (2020) study showed that the pandemic has led to a decline in students' enrolment and, thus, negative economic impacts on international schools. The schools have, therefore, been forced to embrace new approaches for addressing declining enrolment and the adverse economic consequences of the pandemic. The leaders of international schools consider creative business strategies, especially the decision to retain online classrooms, as a positive development because these strategies are likely to improve the financial performance of international schools in the long term. Wood (2021) states that international schools have had to freeze tuition fees and have had marginal increases due to the pandemic. Since the schools mainly rely on tuition fees for revenue, the decline in tuition fees had negative economic consequences for international schools. The current research is thus expected to identify the steps that international schools have taken to cushion themselves from the negative impact of the pandemic on their financial performance.

The study results thus show that international schools have had to embrace innovation and creativity in addressing their financial challenges. While online classes are not an invention, the decision by the schools to have the classes even as physical classes

continue demonstrates that the schools are adopting a new way of thinking regarding improving their financial performance. As the research findings show, the decline in the financial performance of international schools during the COVID-19 pandemic had been caused by a fall in students' enrolment numbers and the inability of schools to charge the same tuition fee when offering online classes as they charge when learning occurs within the physical classroom. This means that international schools faced a fundamental problem that could only be addressed effectively by innovating their business model.

The research findings indicate that international schools had to do what they had never done before to overcome the adverse economic challenges caused by the pandemic. The leaders of international schools realised that online classrooms and learning within the physical classroom enabled them to address the financial problems caused by the pandemic.

There is also a need to note that while most international schools adopted online learning as a way of ensuring learning continuity when physical classrooms became untenable, school leaders are of the view that online classes should be retained because they can complement learning within the physical classroom and improve the performance of students. The decision by international schools to continue with online learning because of its benefits to students is also consistent with the claims made by Picciano (2018) that computer-assisted instruction programs can play an integral role in promoting positive learning activities. One of the critical goals of international schools is to ensure that teaching results in positive learning outcomes for students. As shown by the views shared by the school leaders that participated in the research, there is always

a need to ensure that students excel academically because this is a reliable means for determining whether teaching leads to positive educational experiences.

The findings address the study problem by providing insights into how COVID-19 impacted international schools' adoption of information technology in teaching and learning. The strategy was partly aimed at ensuring that students attained positive learning outcomes. The current research results were thus expected because the literature review already identified the benefits of online learning other than being used as a stop-gap measure for learning continuity during COVID-19. Overall, the results have implications for practice by demonstrating that educators can also use educational technology to improve teaching and learning outcomes.

One of the potential limitations that may have limited the interpretation of the results is the lack of input from teachers and students in terms of how they benefit from online classrooms. Teachers may have provided more in-depth insights into employing information technology to improve learning outcomes. Additionally, students' perspectives may have enabled the researcher to provide more extensive and critical interpretations of how students have benefited from online classrooms. Focusing on the attitudes of school leaders alone meant that the researcher could only interpret the results based on the distant views and opinions of the leaders since most of them are not involved in teaching. Still, the research findings demonstrate how having both online and physical classrooms can benefit international schools in the short and long term.

How has the pandemic impacted the future preparedness of international schools concerning disruptions to learning caused by public health crises?

The pandemic has offered many lessons for organisations, learning institutions, and society in general on how to be prepared for similar public crises in the future. The third research question, therefore, examined the impact of the pandemic on the future preparedness of international schools regarding disruptions that COVID-19 had on learning. The research findings under this question were significant because international schools' core activity is providing education. As shown by the study results, many international schools were undoubtedly unprepared for the pandemic and the disruptions it caused to teaching and learning. Due to the lack of preparedness, many schools struggled with not only offering education that met the needs and expectations of students when teaching and learning shifted to online platforms but also experienced challenges regarding the competence and skills of teachers in teaching online classrooms. The pandemic thus impacted how international schools prepared for similar crises in the future due to its impact on learning.

The study results show that international schools sought to prepare for future pandemics by training teachers to enhance their ability to teach effectively online. Based on the views shared by the school leaders, international schools had to shift to online classrooms because learning within the physical classroom was suspended. At the same time, there was a need to ensure that students continued learning even when learning could not occur regularly. Shifting to online learning was necessary for the schools, yet they were unprepared for the change. The results show that challenges to online learning

mainly emerged because educators lacked the skills and competencies required to teach effectively online.

The findings showed that international schools want to ensure teachers can always teach effectively online, even when learning occurs mainly in the physical classroom. Unlike teaching within the physical classroom, where teachers easily interact with students, online classrooms present unique challenges for teachers because, as the results demonstrate, educators require crucial skills to teach effectively online. When teachers lack these essential skills, students can experience educational outcomes that do not meet their expectations. International schools want to be prepared for online learning in the future by ensuring that teachers are trained and possess appropriate skills and competencies for online teaching.

The results respond to the study problem by providing insights into how the pandemic impacted international schools' thinking regarding appropriate teaching qualifications and competencies. The views shared by the school leaders that took part in this study show that international schools had developed training policies designed to ensure that teachers can effectively teach online classrooms without the struggles that the educators encountered when they were abruptly expected to teach online classes. Based on the claims made by the school leaders, most teachers were not trained on how to teach online classrooms, which negatively impacted their ability to teach in a way that enhanced students' learning experiences. The schools learned from the effects of the pandemic and chose to invest in the training of teachers to avoid such outcomes in the future.

The results were expected as the literature review in chapter 2 showed that online teaching could be challenging when educators have not been appropriately trained to teach in online classrooms. The research by OECD (2020b) recognised that while most teachers could competently teach students within physical classrooms because they have been trained, many lack the skills required to teach effectively online. The pandemic exposed this challenge because, as stated by the school leaders interviewed for this study, most teachers struggled with teaching online classrooms since they were not trained in teaching such classes. The findings reaffirm the conclusions that OECD (2020b) made that school leaders should train teachers to deliver online teaching during the pandemic.

The pandemic also saw many teachers experiencing increased mental health challenges because of work-related stress. Furthermore, since international schools embrace online teaching and learning platforms, teacher training has become imperative. As demonstrated in the present study, teachers may find it difficult to effectively teach students when lessons are conducted online without appropriate training. The problem was already pervasive during the pandemic and is bound to reoccur in the future, especially as more international schools embrace online teaching and learning unless teachers are appropriately trained. To avoid a similar problem in the future and as online teaching and learning grow, school leaders believe that international schools should make it a policy issue to train teachers on online teaching.

The findings offer insights into the study problem by demonstrating that the pandemic likely impacted international schools' hiring, recruitment, and training policies. The findings also reiterate the argument advanced by Heng and Sol (2020) that

inexperience and inadequate training on how to use technologies involved in online learning may negatively affect the quality of education, ultimately resulting in a decline in the academic performance students. The current research findings have shown that most students' academic performance declined during the pandemic because international schools were unprepared to shift to online classrooms. Both teachers and students struggled with the change. For teachers, challenges mainly emanate from the lack of appropriate training for online teaching. The findings imply that training teachers should also entail improving the capability of teachers to use new technology and deliver online lessons effectively.

As shown in existing studies and the current research, some teachers struggled to teach online because they were not technologically savvy, a factor that limited their ability to exploit the advantages of information technology to teach in a way that resulted in positive learning outcomes for students. The inability of teachers to use information and communication technology can negatively impact learning outcomes when teaching is conducted online because teachers' delivery is crucial to determining learners' educational experiences. Students cannot attain positive learning outcomes when teachers' delivery does not meet their learning needs. Training teachers is, therefore, a means of improving preparedness for future pandemics because it enhances their ability to use technological resources available for online teaching and learning to lead to positive student learning outcomes. The results were also expected because, as DeLone and McLean (2016) determined, educators should be guided on using new technology resources when teaching and learning shifts to online platforms. Teachers will always struggle to teach students online if they lack the appropriate skills to use new technology

to deliver lessons. Training teachers on how to teach online and use new information technology is thus a way of ensuring that students' performances do not decline when teaching and learning occur online. They also reaffirm the claims made by Carbon and Serrano (2021) that the transition to online learning requires teachers to be more creative to engage students and improve learning outcomes. Creativity, in this instance, refers to delivery, that is, how educators teach and communicate concepts to students. Teachers can improve students' performance when classrooms shift to online platforms through creative teaching approaches.

However, the lack of the perspectives of teachers and students in this study may have limited the ability of the researcher to interpret the importance of training teachers on how to teach effectively online. The researcher was unable to identify the training needs of teachers and how training programs can be designed to improve the skills and competence of educators regarding online teaching. Similarly, the researcher could not identify and interpret students' experiences concerning their online classroom experiences. To this end, the study lacks important insights concerning how the competence of teachers can be improved through training.

On the other hand, the research findings show that international schools can improve teaching and learning outcomes and the well-being of teachers by ensuring that educators receive appropriate training to enhance their ability to teach online effectively. The results have implications for those undertaking doctoral degree courses in education and leadership because they demonstrate the importance of having technical skills in the current education sector. Teaching is no longer confined to the physical classroom because online platforms have become important places for teaching and learning.

Therefore, individuals pursuing doctoral degrees in education and education management should also seek to understand how technology will likely impact their ability to perform their roles effectively. The findings also form a good basis for future research because they demonstrate a need to examine the challenges teachers face concerning online teaching and the strategies that can be employed to improve their job performance when teaching and learning are shifted to online platforms.

The study results also demonstrate that international schools are working to ensure that learning is not interrupted in the future due to pandemics by developing additional income sources. One of the issues identified in the current research is that some teachers resigned and looked for other sources of income when the school calendar was suspended. Most of them were not receiving their full salaries. The financial challenges experienced by the teachers motivated them to seek alternative employment. This factor negatively impacts learning, especially due to losing important talents and experienced teachers. Due to teachers' important contributions toward students' learning outcomes, attrition is bound to impact teaching and learning negatively.

Additionally, establishing additional sources of revenue has become important because economic hardships faced by international schools during the pandemic also limited their ability to meet the learning needs of students effectively. Alternative sources of income will ensure that international schools can still meet students' educational needs even when there is a decline in collected tuition fees. The study findings show that most international schools rely on tuition fees to generate revenue, a major risk because the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated how relying on one source of revenue can pose economic challenges. Even for teachers, only relying on their salary proved to be a major

problem when the salary stopped normally. The findings reaffirm the argument made by Hanushek and Woessmann (2020) that when international schools suspended physical learning, enrolment of new students declined, and unpaid leave to some staff members increased. Remote learning was introduced in line with government policies. The resultant economic challenges hindered the learning institutions' ability to effectively meet students' learning needs. Limited finances were a major problem because they prevented the institutions from effectively performing their core duty.

The development of alternative sources of income can help international schools to ensure business continuity when similar pandemics occur in the future. That learning is not interrupted due to cash flow and capital challenges. When international schools cannot meet their obligations to their teaching staff, students also suffer because teachers cannot perform their roles effectively when their needs and interests are unmet.

The results also reaffirm the argument that economic harm resulting from school closure during the pandemic was high (Viner, et al., 2020). International schools experienced financial challenges when the schools closed, and some of their employees had to find alternative sources of income because their pay was reduced. Lack of staff commitment and attrition harmed teaching and learning. In the end, students could not attain positive education experiences when teachers were not committed to their roles. There was a mass exit of dissatisfied educators. However, failure to obtain the perspectives of teachers and students may have limited the researcher's interpretation of the importance of developing alternative revenue streams to prevent future learning interruptions.

School leaders likely avoided discussing thoughts and beliefs that could have depicted them as ineffective managers and leaders because, as leaders, they are responsible for the welfare of both teachers and students. On the other hand, teachers and students could have shared important information on how the economic challenges experienced by the institutions impacted learning. Ultimately, the leaders failed to make a strong connection between the economic challenges that the institutions experienced and the declining academic performance of students during the pandemic. There was an attempt to blame the lack of teacher competence and the students' environment without offering insights into how the shortage of resources in the schools during the pandemic could have led to the decline in academic performance. What is clear from the results is that school leaders believe that international schools can no longer continue relying only on tuition fees as their source of revenue. The institutions cannot meet their obligations properly without adequate income.

The pandemic impacted the business strategies of international schools by influencing them to consider alternative revenue sources to ensure that learning continues without significant challenges in the future. Developing alternative sources of income can ensure that international schools are effectively prepared for the adverse economic impacts of similar pandemics in the future on learning. The findings also have implications for those pursuing doctoral degrees in education and education management by providing insights into how the financial positions of schools impact teaching and learning.

The results demonstrate that unless state resources or charitable organisations fully fund a school, they are business entities that must generate income to meet their

obligations effectively. Successful learning cannot occur in a school with a shortage of financial resources since many factors that support teaching and learning require funding. There is a need for those pursuing doctoral degrees in education and management to embrace realism when considering how to improve learning outcomes in private learning institutions.

Without financial success, institutions cannot effectively meet the learning needs of students. Indeed, the current research has shown that international schools need to hire competent staff for their guidance and counselling offices to address the mental well-being of students and teachers, invest in teacher training, implement new technology to enable collaboration among students within online spaces, and ensure that teachers are appropriately compensated. These factors impact the schools' ability to improve students' educational experiences. The importance of educational outcomes for students in international schools cannot, therefore, be delinked from the criticality of the financial success of the institutions. The financial success of international schools enables them to implement policies and changes that prevent learning disruptions.

International schools should change their recruitment and selection policies to ensure that teachers hired to teach in the schools have the skills and competencies required to teach online. The strategy aims to ensure that learning proceeds unencumbered by the inability of teachers to teach effectively in virtual classrooms. The research findings show that the leaders of international schools believe that the problems experienced in online teaching and learning were partly because many teachers had not been trained to teach online. As a result, many struggled with meeting students' learning needs and expectations during the pandemic when learning shifted to online platforms.

There is a possibility that students' academic performance declined during the pandemic because teachers could not teach in a way that met the learning needs of students. The study's results also show that to prevent learning interruptions in the future.

The findings respond to the research problem by demonstrating how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the hiring practices of international schools. The results were expected because the literature review offered insights into how students can experience learning challenges when classes are shifted to online platforms when teachers lack the right skills and competencies to teach virtual classrooms. As stated by the leaders that participated in the study, many students experienced learning challenges because teachers were ill-equipped to teach online regarding appropriate skills and competencies. The findings reaffirm the claims made by Carbon and Serrano (2021) that the shift of teaching and learning to digital platforms requires teachers to have appropriate skills and knowledge to use digital platforms and improve student learning outcomes.

By changing their recruitment and selection policies, international schools ensure they are prepared to operate in an environment where technology is crucial in determining students' learning experiences. Schools are hiring teachers who can effectively teach online classrooms to improve learners' educational experiences and avoid interruptions to learning. The findings were also expected because, as shown in the literature review chapter, Reimers and Schleicher (2020) believe that schools usually face financial constraints because of limited government support, especially in developing the infrastructure required to support teaching and learning.

The lack of adequate resources can interrupt teaching and learning. In the case of international schools, a decline in revenue generation due to the pandemic could have

negatively impacted the institutions' ability to meet students' learning needs. However, the school leaders that participated in the study did not provide insights into how declining revenue impacted learning and students' academic performance. However, the results show that learning did not proceed as expected because teachers were inexperienced or lacked training in online classes. Recruiting teachers already trained in online teaching will ensure that the schools are always prepared to teach online if there is a need to shift completely to online teaching to avoid interruptions to learning, as witnessed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Interruption to learning, in this case, refers to the notion that students could not meet their learning objectives because teachers' delivery failed to meet their needs when classrooms shifted to online platforms.

The findings also reaffirm the conclusions Kruse et al. (2020) made that resources are normally scarce during a crisis, meaning that schools are unlikely to have the resources required to train teachers. The scarcity of resources can also lead to the interruption of learning. The current research shows that many teachers left their positions during the pandemic, negatively impacting learning in international schools. Changing human resource management approaches can help international schools ensure that learning is not interrupted during a pandemic, as was the case at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Effective financial and human resources management is vital for the continuity of learning. Even though existing literature does not directly link the financial success of learning institutions and students' educational experiences, they show that financial success is a major goal for schools. Without attaining their financial objectives, the schools could not recruit highly talented and qualified teachers that could meet the challenges of the new job environment.

The researcher failed to examine school leaders' perspectives concerning the connection between the financial performance of the institutions, recruitment approaches, and students' educational experiences in an education sector significantly impacted by technology. This factor limited the researcher's ability to interpret the extent to which the financial success of international schools shapes their recruitment strategies and students' learning experiences.

How has COVID-19 impacted policy development to secure staff and students' well-being during a crisis?

The COVID-19 pandemic revealed that it is vital for schools to address the well-being of students and staff. The pandemic harmed the mental health of both teachers and students. The current research findings show that educators especially experienced significant challenges due to financial constraints and job-related stress associated with suspending the regular school calendar and shifting to online classrooms. Therefore, the final research question examined COVID-19's impact on policy development to secure the well-being of staff and students during a crisis, given that the pandemic had shown that it is essential to safeguard the well-being of students and staff.

The study results show that international schools have developed various policies and strategies to safeguard the well-being of students and staff following the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. International schools have developed policies addressing mental health issues within the school environment. The research findings indicate that mental health was a major concern for international schools during the pandemic. Many teachers experience mental health challenges because of work-related stress. The change to online teaching and learning came abruptly. Most teachers lacked the

competency and skills to teach effectively online. Similarly, many teachers experienced economic challenges that harmed their mental well-being.

Students also experienced mental health challenges during the pandemic due to the shift to online learning and the general impacts of COVID-19 containment measures. Unfortunately, many international schools had not invested in mental health care before the pandemic. The institutions had to develop policies to create more awareness around mental health to enhance the mental well-being of students and staff following the effects of the pandemic on the mental health of students and staff. International schools had to bear this responsibility without the government's support, given that they are private institutions and most governments had also not prioritized mental health in schools.

The results respond to the research problem by providing insights into how the pandemic impacted the mental health policies of international schools. Policies geared towards increasing awareness around mental health only became more important for schools during the pandemic. The findings were expected because a literature review revealed that mental health became a key issue in the education sector due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Increased focus of international schools on the issues was thus not unexpected. The findings reaffirm the claims made by Zhai and Du (2020a) that international students are worried about their well-being and their families during the COVID-19 pandemic. The notion of worry suggests that the pandemic has negatively impacted their mental health. Instead of focusing on learning, the students were distracted by concerns for their family's well-being at the height of the pandemic. The findings imply that students could not focus on their education, negatively impacting their academic performance.

The current research findings show that students' academic performance declined when classrooms shifted to online platforms during the pandemic. The lack of students' perspectives in the current research limited the ability of the researcher to examine the extent to which family concerns impacted students' mental well-being and how the strategies put in place by the learning institutions to address mental health benefited the students. The results were also expected because the literature review showed that Keeling et al. (2020b) established that 71% of staff in international schools reported that school leaders and their colleagues help them deal with issues relating to their well-being during the pandemic. These findings suggested that international schools did not have appropriate strategies for addressing mental health needs and would thus be forced to develop appropriate strategies and policies due to the impact of the pandemic on students' mental well-being. The schools had to develop appropriate policies to address teachers' mental health.

The results are also consistent with the claims made by Cui et al. (2021) that COVID-19 restrictions measure such as social distancing, isolation, travel restrictions, and compulsory wearing of masks harmed the mental well-being of students, implying that the learning institutions needed to create policies that addressed the mental health needs of students. However, the current study results show that existing studies have not extensively examined the practices that schools, especially international schools, have adopted to address the mental health needs of students. Therefore, the current research findings offer new insights into how international schools approached the mental health issue among students and staff at the height of the pandemic.

These findings are significant because they demonstrate that it is important for policymakers to develop policies to improve the mental well-being of students and staff in the education sector. Currently, international schools are left on their own to determine how best to approach mental health issues and safeguard the well-being of students and staff in the short and long term.

The findings also have implications for those pursuing doctoral degrees in education and education management because they demonstrate the importance of mental health for education success. Students may not attain positive learning experiences when the learners and educators are experiencing mental health challenges. The findings point to the need for education leaders to examine how they can develop and implement effective policies that enhance the mental well-being of students and teachers.

The study findings also showed that economic issues negatively impacted teachers' mental well-being during the pandemic. To enhance the well-being of teachers, international schools developed policies to address the financial challenges teachers faced during the pandemic, which negatively impacted their mental well-being. The current research results indicate that the leaders of international schools understood the psychological challenges teachers experienced because of the economic problems they encountered when their salaries did not come on time or were reduced as part of austerity measures. To underscore the psychological problems teachers experienced due to financial constraints, the school leaders noted that some resorted to seeking alternative employment to meet their financial needs. The adverse economic effects of the pandemic influenced international schools to develop policies that would ensure that teachers

continue to receive their regular compensation even when a similar pandemic disrupts the school calendar.

The results respond to the study problem by providing insights into how the pandemic impacted the remuneration policies of international schools. The learning institutions changed their remuneration policies to address teachers' well-being and reduce staff exit. The current study's findings show that many teachers exited because of financial difficulties, which negatively impacted teaching and learning. The results were expected because the study by Kanekar and Sharma (2020) already determined a need to control the adverse effects of pandemics, such as financial hardship, to prevent mental health challenges associated with economic problems. Teachers in international schools experienced mental health challenges because of the financial difficulties caused by the pandemic. The results were also expected because, as Al-Samarrai et al. (2020) determined, poor and middle-income families were most impacted by the pandemic, suggesting that teachers were also likely to experience economic hardships associated with the economic disruptions of the pandemic. The school leaders noted that addressing the financial needs of teachers by implementing appropriate remuneration policies would enhance their well-being. The teachers would not have to deal with the psychological challenges associated with the inability to meet their needs because of the lack of pay or low pay. The altered compensation policies would safeguard teachers' well-being and mental health in the long term.

The results are also consistent with the argument made by Hanushek and Woessmann (2020) and Viner et al. (2020) that school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic caused financial hardships among staff in the education sector. The current

research findings were thus expected to the extent that teachers would experience economic challenges due to the negative economic impacts of the pandemic. However, existing studies have failed to examine how the pandemic impacted private schools that rely on tuition fees to meet their obligations in terms of remuneration policies to meet the financial needs of teachers when the school calendar is disrupted. Therefore, the current research provides new insights into how learning institutions address their teaching staff's needs following the pandemic's effects on the global economy. The leaders of international schools recognise that without ensuring pay continuity, teachers would still experience financial challenges and stress if regular learning is interrupted. Developing and implementing policies to ensure pay continuity during a pandemic is an effective strategy for ensuring that teachers do not experience mental health challenges due to financial hardships caused by school closures. However, the interpretations of these findings for the researcher were limited by the lack of teachers' perspectives on the economic challenges they experienced during the pandemic and how international schools can effectively prevent such challenges in the future.

The results have implications for those pursuing doctoral degrees in education and education management because they provide insights into the importance of remuneration policies in enhancing the well-being of educators. The results further imply that an important area of research in education scholarship is how to improve teachers' motivation and the relationship between motivation and students' educational experiences. Motivation is a crucial factor for teachers because, without it, they cannot perform their jobs in a way that enhances learners' educational experiences.

The study's results showed that the transition to online learning harmed the well-being of teachers and students because of the challenges associated with using technology. Many students and teachers experienced difficulty using online teaching and learning platforms, negatively impacting their psychological well-being. The study findings indicate that international schools developed policies to improve teachers' and learners' well-being by equipping them with ICT skills.

The results respond to the study problem by providing insights into how the pandemic impacted international schools' ICT and training policies. The abrupt shift to online learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic made it necessary for international schools to develop policies to improve user experiences regarding information technology. The findings were expected because a review of existing literature showed that implementing online learning technology can be accompanied by challenges related to the lack of ICT skills. As determined by Heng and Sol (2020), the transition to online learning came abruptly, leaving many students and tutors unprepared for such an abrupt change. The difficulty associated with using information systems can lead to stress. However, the researcher's interpretation of the findings was limited because teachers and students did not participate in the study and could not share their perspectives concerning the challenges they experienced due to the absence of ICT skills. The researcher only relied on the views shared by the school leaders to understand the challenges students and teachers experienced due to limited ICT skills.

The results also reaffirm the conclusion made by Carbon and Serrano (2021) that teachers have to be more creative to ensure that they improve learning outcomes when teaching online. The notion of creativity suggests that teachers should be able to use

information systems to teach students online effectively. The absence of such skills can negatively impact teachers' job performance, potentially leading to job-related stress. Indeed, the current research findings indicate that teachers partly experienced job-related stress during the pandemic because of the challenges associated with using technology. The findings are also consistent with the claims made by Reimers and Schleicher (2020) that some teachers lack computer skills, which have been crucial as schools shift to virtual learning environments. International schools have had to address this problem by developing policies to equip teachers and students with ICT skills. These policies can positively impact the mental well-being of teachers and students as international schools continue to use online learning.

The results of the current study indicate that COVID-19 resulted in trauma for many students and educators. These occurrences influenced international schools to create policies that would improve students' and staff's knowledge concerning trauma and how to overcome it. International schools have also developed policies that enhance students' and staff's information concerning trauma and how to overcome it. The results respond to the study problem by providing insights into how the pandemic impacted the responses of international schools to the trauma associated with COVID-19. The results were expected because dealing with the trauma of the pandemic in learning institutions is an issue examined in existing studies. The results are consistent with the conclusions made by Zhai and Du (2020a) that psychosocial support is essential during pandemics for individuals whose mental health has been adversely impacted by the crisis.

The current research findings indicate that teachers and students were impacted by the pandemic, with some experiencing adverse mental health issues because of

COVID-19 and its effects. To safeguard the well-being of teachers and students, international schools sought to create and implement policies that would ensure that students and teachers receive valuable psychosocial support. In becoming trauma-informed learning institutions, international schools ensure that those experiencing psychological problems due to pandemics receive the necessary support to enhance their mental well-being. The findings are also consistent with conclusions made by Carbon and Serrano (2021) that students need emotional and psychological help during COVID-19 because of the mental health issues associated with the pandemic.

Without appropriate support, students would continue to experience mental health challenges. Whereas the study by Carbon and Serrano (2021) indicates that teachers should provide this support to students, the current research findings demonstrate that the responsibility of providing support should fall on both teachers and students. Increased knowledge on supporting those experiencing mental health challenges is crucial in improving the well-being of teachers and students during the pandemic and in the long term. For those pursuing doctoral degrees in education and education management, the study findings imply that there is a need for education graduates to have the ability to provide psychosocial support to both students and the teaching staff. Such skills and competencies would be pivotal in improving learners' educational experiences in international schools.

Overall, the research findings provide new and vital insights into how the pandemic has impacted international schools regarding their responses to the pandemic and the measures they have taken to deal with the challenges posed by COVID-19. The study

has provided crucial insights into school policy changes due to the pandemic by relying on school leaders' perspectives.

Recommendations for application

The study results provide insights into how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted international schools. The analysis of the findings has shown that essential practice changes should be made to mitigate the challenges caused by the pandemic now and in the future. This section makes recommendations for practice to enhance the ability of international schools to meet new challenges and respond to similar pandemics in the future.

Reform Education Policies to Address Mental Health

The findings of this study are essential for education policymakers in terms of how to create and implement reforms in the education sector to address issues relating to mental health. The study results indicate that some international schools responded to the mental health challenges caused by the pandemic by establishing an office for guidance and counselling. There was also a focus on the staff employed in these offices. The newly established guidance and counselling offices are now managed by professionals whose primary role is to help improve the psychological health of students and teachers.

Additionally, the findings demonstrate that policies to address mental health have been developed by international schools without support from the government primarily because while international schools treated mental health as an urgent and vital issue that should be addressed promptly, governments did not perceive the matter as critical and thus failed to create and implement policies that could help the education sector to

enhance the mental well-being of educators and learners. However, the current research results have shown that mental health is a critical issue in international schools because it impacts the well-being of teachers and students and, ultimately, the learners' academic performance.

Based on the research findings, teachers cannot perform their jobs to the best of their ability when experiencing mental health issues. Decisions to establish guidance and counselling offices were motivated by the understanding that teachers could not perform their roles effectively when experiencing psychological challenges.

Similarly, students cannot perform well academically when they are psychologically unwell. A guidance and counselling office significantly developed during the pandemic because it enhanced international schools' mental well-being and academic excellence. The results imply that mental health issues can impact even local schools without proper policies to improve mental health. Education policies must be developed to support schools dealing with mental health issues among teachers and learners. Such policies will ensure that schools have guidance on providing help to those experiencing mental health challenges. Creating appropriate education sector policies will ensure that schools do not consider establishing guidance and counselling offices an option but a mandatory policy issue.

The research findings also indicate that some schools find implementing policies designed to improve mental health difficulties because of resource constraints. The views of school leaders show that the education ministry has not supported schools in addressing mental health issues. The institutions have had to rely on their policies and resources to improve mental well-being. Supporting schools to address mental health

through appropriate sector policies can help them overcome the challenges associated with resource constraints.

The recommendation to make mental health an education sector policy issue is in line with the claims made by Zhai and Du (2020b) that although some schools have developed counselling programs, counselling centres are understaffed. This factor raises concerns about whether such programs will benefit students experiencing mental health challenges. The recommendation is also based on the argument advanced by Son et al. (2020) that the quality of education during and post-pandemic cannot be improved before addressing students' mental problems because mental health can be a significant barrier to academic success.

The creation of policies to address mental health in international schools is also supported by the claims made by Zhai and Du (2020b) that international students often experience mental health challenges because they stay far from their family members, which would have provided emotional and psychosocial support. Creating education sector policies to improve mental health in learning institutions, especially international schools, is thus an important consideration for policymakers.

International Schools Should Change their Business Models

The study recommends that international schools change their business models to increase revenue generation and ensure pay continuity for teachers when the regular school calendar is disrupted. The study findings have demonstrated that international schools experienced financial challenges during the pandemic because they relied significantly on tuition fees as a source of revenue. The school leaders that participated in the research noted that there was a need to have alternative or additional revenue

sources to cushion themselves from economic shocks if the school calendar is interrupted. Some schools had to take credit facilities during the pandemic to pay their teachers because they would lose many capable educators if they did not address the issue of remuneration. The leaders of international schools consider it essential for institutions to retain their educators because of the benefits of having experienced staff. Attrition can negatively impact teaching and learning, especially when experienced teachers leave.

As shown by the current study's findings, having alternative or additional revenue streams can help international schools to enhance organisational commitment among teaching staff and improve students' educational experiences. By changing their business models, international schools can have additional sources of revenue and ensure that teachers receive their pay even when the school calendar has been disrupted. International school leaders also consider changing the business model to spread risks. Relying mainly on one source of revenue is highly risky, as seen during the pandemic.

International schools should also change their business models to generate funds for implementing essential strategies. The current research findings show that international schools should invest in technology to facilitate effective online teaching and learning. One of the technologies that international schools can support is virtual learning environments that enable learners to collaborate with their peers. Virtual learning environments in education have allowed students to have robust discussions and debates within virtual classrooms. The technology can ensure students attain positive learning outcomes even when classrooms are shifted to online platforms.

The schools also require financial resources to train teachers to enhance their ability to teach effectively on online platforms. The research findings have shown that the lack of ICT and online teaching skills among international school teachers made it difficult to perform their roles effectively, given that they were required to teach online without adequate preparation. Consequently, the school leaders that participated in the research emphasized the need for teacher training in light of the increased role of technology in education. Many international schools have decided to make online learning an integral part of their operations, indicating that teachers should also have the skills and competencies necessary to teach effectively when classrooms are shifted to online platforms.

The results of the study also indicate that there is a need for international schools to invest in mental health care. The pandemic has demonstrated that schools can no longer treat mental health casually, and guidance and counselling offices should be designed to meet the emerging challenges in learning institutions. The guidance and counselling offices established in international schools require competent staff to help address the psychological needs of both students and teachers. The newly established guidance and counselling offices in international schools are managed by professionals whose primary role is to help improve the psychological health of students and teachers. To this end, the research findings suggest that international schools may substantially require additional resources to enhance the capacity of their guidance and counselling offices.

International schools can meet financial obligations and implement various strategies by changing their business models to increase revenue. To implement these

strategies, international schools will require financial resources, especially in training teachers, investing in information and technology to support online learning, and establishing guidance and counselling offices to address students' and teachers' mental health needs. The institutions are business enterprises that rely on generated income to finance these strategies. Altering their business models would thus reduce their reliance on tuition fees and improve their ability to respond appropriately to challenges in the business environment.

The recommendation that international schools should change their business models is supported by the claims made by Reimers and Schleicher (2020) that a decline in public revenue and government spending on education has impacted the education budget. This claim implies that international schools must devise new ways to fund their budgets. Suppose government spending cannot enable international schools to attain their objectives in the business environment by investing most of their strategies. In that case, the schools should change their business models to increase revenue generation and profitability. The recommendations are also supported by the argument advanced by Al-Samarrai et al. (2020) that international schools experienced financial challenges during the pandemic because their business model relies extensively on revenue generated through tuition fees. When enrolment declined, revenue generation declined significantly because the schools primarily depended on students' registration to earn income. A change in the business model would enable the schools to reduce the economic risks associated with over-relying on one source of revenue.

The recommendation is further supported by the findings of the study conducted by Wood (2021), which showed that international students are still required to pay total

tuition fees despite the suspension of learning within physical classrooms, a decision that led to protests from international students who wanted a reduction on tuition fees to caution them from the economic impact of the pandemic.

Additionally, many students believed that the learning institutions were not justified in charging the full tuition fee while learning in the physical classroom was suspended. The insistence on charging the full tuition fee even when regular learning was suspended indicates that international schools were determined to continue generating revenue during the pandemic. However, the business model grounded on tuition fees became unsustainable during the pandemic, indicating that the institutions should change their business models to ensure they can still meet their financial obligations even when regular learning is suspended.

Changing the business models of international schools would ensure that they continue to generate revenue even when the school calendar is suspended. The strategy would also ensure they meet their financial obligations to employees while implementing important projects designed to improve teaching and learning outcomes. The recommendation is also reaffirmed by Hanushek and Woessmann (2020) that leaders in international schools should make critical decisions and policies to protect their institutions and other key stakeholders from an economic crisis similar to the situation caused by the pandemic.

Organisational Cultures to Improve Well-being

International schools should create organisational cultures that improve the well-being of teachers and students. The current study's results indicate that students' well-being impacts their academic performance. One of the reasons that caused many

students to perform poorly during the pandemic was the absence of mental well-being. Some students were also learning in environments that hindered their ability to attain positive learning outcomes. The research findings also demonstrate that the lack of well-being among teachers can harm learning. Many teachers in international schools left their jobs because of the financial challenges they experienced due to pay issues. These challenges had a negative impact on their well-being and their ability to deliver quality education to students.

Furthermore, teachers also experienced well-being challenges due to the lack of ICT skills and competencies required to teach students successfully in virtual classrooms. Many teachers found it challenging to teach students online because they lacked the skills to teach online classrooms. The results show that many teachers lacked the skills and competencies required to teach online effectively, adversely affecting students' ability to understand classroom concepts. Educators need specific skill sets if online classes achieve similar goals as teaching within physical classrooms. This implies that teachers that lack these skills will experience job-related stress, which will negatively impact their well-being and, ultimately, their ability to attend to the needs of students appropriately.

Creating an organisational culture that supports the well-being of students and teachers is thus a critical issue for international schools. Such a culture would ensure that the institutions develop policies and strategies that support the well-being of teachers and students to improve teaching and learning outcomes. The recommendation is consistent with the claims made by Anandavalli et al. (2020) that environments and systems can impact students' well-being. Creating systems and environments that enhance the well-being of learners can, therefore, improve their academic performance. Organisational

culture can lead to the establishment of systems and the creation of an environment that is beneficial to the well-being of students. The recommendation is also supported by the claims made by Zhai and Du (2020b) that international students require emotional and psychosocial support because they experience mental well-being challenges due to being far away from their families and potentially their source of psychosocial support. An appropriate organisational culture will ensure that these students often receive the necessary psychosocial support that can improve their well-being and academic performance. A positive organisational culture will ensure that members of the organisation appreciate the importance of supporting those experiencing mental well-being challenges.

The importance of an appropriate organisational culture is also reaffirmed by the claims made by Bruns et al. (2020) that measures instituted to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 have harmed cultural beliefs and, thus, the well-being of some students. Creating an organisational culture can help to address this challenge by ensuring that students ascribe to the values and norms of the institution. An organisational culture will provide students with shared beliefs and values that are not perceived as alien or disruptive to personal beliefs. The recommendation to create an appropriate organisational culture is thus relevant to international schools as they seek to enhance the well-being of students and educators.

The current research findings support this recommendation's implementation by demonstrating that some educators cannot perform their roles effectively unless monitored. As stated by a school leader, the online portal enabled the administration to monitor teachers' performance. This claim implies that some teachers do not perform their

duties well unless monitored. The research findings further indicate that sometimes teachers fail to acknowledge the assignments that students have mailed to them.

The results highlight the need for an organisational culture that leads to a high-performance work environment. Such a culture will ensure that teachers perform their roles well, even without monitoring. A high-performance work culture can benefit international schools by providing that educators work towards supporting positive learning outcomes for students. The established values and norms will play an integral role in influencing the behaviours of educators and ensure that they work towards the realisation of the institutions' goals. The recommendation is supported by the claims made by Arslan and Staub (2013) that managers perceive stakeholders such as teachers to have the individual conviction that enables them to care about the institution. Developing an appropriate organisational culture will ensure that teachers care about the institution and work towards advancing its goals.

The schools do not have to implement systems to monitor teachers' performance. Even if such systems are implemented, they are only designed as a formality instead of extensively monitoring teachers' performance. The conclusions further support the recommendation arrived at by Gannon and Boguszak (2013) that employees should be responsible, committed, and self-motivated. Educators will likely display these traits when an organisational culture influences them to be accountable, committed, and self-motivated. The recommendation is also reaffirmed by the argument advanced by Diaz et al. (2020) that school leaders will have to trust the decisions and judgments of other employees and stakeholders at their locations. Creating an appropriate culture can enhance the ability of employees to make sound judgments or decisions. In the case of

international schools, such a culture can ensure that teachers make decisions that improve student learning outcomes.

Overall, creating an appropriate organisational culture can work to the advantage of international schools in improving students' outcomes. International school leaders can improve teachers' performance by establishing organisational cultures that enhance their decision-making and ensure they are committed to realizing the institution's goals. Leaders do not always have to monitor the performance of educators when the appropriate organisational culture is created.

Recommendations for Future Research

The study has offered insights into areas that require further research. The COVID-19 pandemic is a new pandemic that has presented unique challenges to international schools. The research findings demonstrate various policies that international schools should implement, which have not been highlighted in existing studies. The recommendations for future research are thus based on the current study's findings. Future research must extend the results to provide a deeper understanding of the issues.

Factors that Impact the Motivation of Educators in International Schools

A key area of future research should be on factors that impact the motivation of educators in international schools. The current research findings have shown that teachers sometimes lack the drive to perform their jobs. A significant result is that teachers can be demotivated to work when there are salary issues.

The current research shows that some teachers opted to leave their employment when their salaries were delayed or reduced. International schools also invested in

systems to monitor the performance of teachers. The schools wanted to monitor teachers' performance and ensure that teachers were meeting the needs and expectations of students. The fact that teachers were working remotely made it even more urgent to monitor their performance. Some teachers frustrated students during assignment submissions and did not show accountability. International schools had to find a way to adapt to online classrooms and ensure that students could submit their assignments in an ordered manner, enabling accountability by both the students and teachers. The results imply that some teachers were not motivated to perform their jobs and had to be monitored to ensure that they performed their duties and met the needs of learners.

This study identified some factors as capable of impacting teachers' motivation. One of these factors is remuneration. The study's findings suggest that teachers can remain motivated to perform their jobs with the proper pay. The school leaders noted that the schools lost many staff members during the pandemic due to inadequate compensation. Meeting the remuneration demands of educators in international schools can, therefore, increase motivation. Introducing policies that ensure pay continuity benefits international schools through improved organisational commitment and staff motivation.

Teacher motivation is a crucial issue because it affects students' educational experiences. The other factor that impacts teacher motivation is well-being. The lack of psychological well-being can harm teachers' performance and drive to perform their roles. Teachers especially found their jobs more stressful because they did not have the skills required to teach effectively online. Due to job-related stress and the absence of well-being, many teachers were not motivated to meet the learning needs of students. There

is a need to conduct further research to gain insights into factors that impact teacher motivation in international schools, especially in the era of online classes, where some teachers lack the skills to teach effectively.

The recommendation for future research is supported by the claims made by Reimers and Schleicher (2020) that online learning has exerted much pressure on teachers who fear losing their jobs since education is now conducted remotely. The teachers are demotivated because they believe they will lose their jobs, given the increasing role of technology in teaching.

Future research should examine the extent to which online learning demotivates teachers and the measures that international schools can implement to mitigate a decline in teacher motivation. The recommendation is also supported by the conclusion made by Carbon and Serrano (2021) that the shift to online classrooms requires teachers to be more creative to engage students. Teachers are likely to be demotivated by the challenging nature of online teaching, given that they have to be more creative to improve learners' educational experiences when classes shift to online platforms. Examining how online teaching can demotivate teachers and the strategies that international schools can use to enhance teacher motivation is thus an important research area. The need to look at teacher motivation in international schools is also reinforced by the argument advanced by Xiong et al. (2020) that most Asian countries developed containment measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The implication is that international schoolteachers will likely face additional obstacles related to international travel. This issue may demotivate them from working in some countries.

Future research should thus examine how COVID-19 containment measures concerning international travel have impacted teachers' motivation. While the current research findings did not identify how travel restrictions can affect teachers' motivation in international schools, they did show that these restrictions harmed the well-being of international students. Educators will likely experience similar challenges if they travel to their home countries. Studies on the factors that affect teacher motivation in international schools can offer a deeper understanding of how school leaders can improve teacher motivation, especially after the pandemic's negative impact on educators' well-being.

Teachers' motivation during COVID-19 was an issue that has not been extensively explored in existing studies and should focus on new research. Whereas the results of the current research point to the potential lack of motivation among teachers due to the challenges associated with the pandemic, the responses provided by the school leaders do not explicitly reveal the impact that the pandemic had on teachers' motivation. Due to the framing of the research topic, the school leaders did not discuss how the pandemic impacted motivation among the teaching staff. Similarly, the leaders did not discuss the motivation of teachers in general. Future research can offer insights into teachers' motivation in international schools and the factors that affect this motivation.

Diversification as a Business Strategy for International Schools

The current research findings show that international schools experienced economic and business challenges during the pandemic because of limited revenue sources. The schools have to attract and retain the best talent in the market, so they have to pay competitive salaries and keep their teachers happy. Additional income sources ensure that teachers are well compensated, and compensation is consistent even during

a pandemic. The adverse economic effects of the pandemic were augmented by the lack of diverse investments since international schools mainly relied on revenue generated from tuition fees. Future research should examine how international schools can diversify their business and whether this is a sustainable strategy, given that their core business is education provision.

The pandemic caused severe financial troubles that made the schools lose influential educators due to pay or remuneration issues. Some schools had to take credit facilities to pay their teachers during the pandemic because they would lose many capable educators. The schools had not diversified their economic risks because of the over-reliance on one source of revenue. The leaders noted that they have come to appreciate the importance of spreading risks because relying mainly on one source of income is highly risky, as seen during the pandemic. The leaders in this study noted that institutions have to consider their options for generating revenue. The leaders emphasized that they must invest in other ventures to ensure continuous income generation even when the school calendar is interrupted and tuition fees and enrolments significantly decline. International schools have projects that require financial resources. Most of these projects are designed to improve educational outcomes for students.

The research findings show that international schools require financial resources to implement key strategies to improve learners' educational experiences. For instance, the study results indicate that international schools should establish guidance and counselling offices operated by professionals to address mental health issues among students and staff. The guidance and counselling offices are managed by professionals whose primary role is to help improve the psychological health of students and teachers.

International schools require financial resources to hire professional staff and fund the operations of guidance and counselling offices.

The research findings also show that international schools should invest in information technology to support online learning. For instance, developing the student portal is one of the new measures to enable students to submit their assignments more efficiently. Developing and maintaining the portal would require financial resources. International schools also invest in virtual learning environments to improve learning outcomes when classes are transferred to online platforms. The schools have adopted new inventions within the education technology sector to enhance student collaboration and learning outcomes. Besides investing in new technology, international schools also invest in teacher training. Many teachers in international schools lacked the skills and competencies required to teach online during the pandemic effectively. This issue harmed the ability of students to understand classroom concepts taught online. The school leaders noted that they had to train their teachers to teach effectively online.

The alternative is to change their recruitment and hiring processes to ensure the teachers employed have the skills and competencies required to teach online. While current teachers should be trained to improve their ability to teach effectively online, some schools are looking to recruit teachers with the right skills to save on training costs, indicating that funding is always a key concern for international schools. The implementation of most strategies would require additional financing. During a pandemic, international schools will likely struggle with meeting their financial obligations and funding their strategy if they do not have alternative revenue sources.

The study results demonstrate that international schools should develop additional revenue and income streams to finance their strategies and meet their financial obligations during a pandemic. One of the strategies that international schools can use to diversify their income sources is the creation of online classrooms, even when physical classrooms resume. The online classes are designed to target potential students that cannot manage to learn within physical classrooms.

According to the research participants interviewed in this study, online classes can provide an opportunity to generate more revenue. The school can provide paid online classes to students within and outside the country. Besides online classes, the leaders failed to specify the diversification strategies that international schools can use to increase revenue streams. Therefore, a significant knowledge gap can be filled in future studies. The studies can examine how international schools can diversify as business entities to improve their financial performance in the long term while meeting their current financial obligations. Such studies would also provide insights into the challenges posed by diversification.

The recommendations are supported by the conclusions made by Reimers and Schleicher (2020) that a decline in public revenue and government spending on education has negatively impacted the education budget, meaning that international schools have to develop strategies to generate revenue and meet their financial obligations. Future research should thus examine how diversification can help international schools to finance their projects when the government has not allocated funds to these schools. The recommendation is also supported by the claims made by Hanushek and Woessmann (2020) that the suspension of learning within the physical classroom in international

schools in line with government guidelines resulted in economic challenges for the schools due to a decline in new enrolments. The argument implies that international schools mainly rely on tuition fees as revenue; without this source, the schools will likely encounter economic hardships. Diversification would benefit the schools because they would not have to depend on one source of income.

While the business approach would benefit the institutions, there is minimal knowledge on how international schools can implement diversification as a business strategy to cushion themselves from the economic challenges resulting from relying on one source of revenue. A study that focuses on the issue of diversification and its applicability within the context of international schools would provide important insights into how learning institutions can overcome financial challenges that advance their goals and objectives.

Factors that Impact the Academic Achievement of Students in Online Learning

Future research should also examine the factors that impact students' academic achievement in online learning. The current study has established that students' performance declined when learning within the physical classroom was stopped and students had to learn online. Students failed tests that essentially sought to examine if they could recall what they had learned earlier. The results suggested that the students either lacked something they had when learning in a traditional classroom setting or faced difficulties that harmed their well-being and, by extension, academic performance. The results of the study indicated that students performed poorly because many teachers did

not have the skills and competencies required to teach online, adversely affecting the student's ability to understand classroom concepts.

Additionally, some students had mental health issues that hindered them from focusing on learning. Mental health problems have a negative impact on the educational outcomes of students. The results further show that some students struggled with online learning due to lacking ICT skills. The decline in academic performance during online learning could also have been caused by the fact that the learning method did not allow for or significantly limited practical learning. Some of the school leaders that took part in the study stated that they received complaints from some students who did not believe that the quality of teaching was sufficient to enable them to meet their education goals. Students raised concerns about not undertaking practical chemistry, biology, and physics lessons. The findings indicate that various factors could have contributed to the poor performance of students when learning was shifted to online platforms. Unless these factors are addressed, students will most likely record a decline in academic performance when classrooms are moved online.

Whereas the current study has offered insights into factors that could lead to a decline in students' academic performance in online learning, a significant knowledge gap should be filled. Future research should examine factors that impact students' academic achievement when learning is shifted to online platforms. The recommendation is supported by the research findings from Shahzad et al. (2021), which showed that the quality of information, the quality of the system, satisfaction, system use, and organisational impact influence the experiences of individuals using information systems. In the same manner, these factors could impact the academic performance of students.

Similar to the current research, the study by Shahzad et al. (2021) fails to focus on how the use of information systems in learning can impact students' academic performance. The recommendation is also supported by the claims made by Aristovnik et al. (2020) that factors impact students' experiences when learning occurs through information systems. However, these factors' impact on student's academic performance is not examined.

The need for future research in the proposed area is also supported by the conclusions made by Ifinedo (2011) that system quality can create learning interests and increase learners' level of satisfaction, a factor that could impact the academic achievement of learners when classes are shifted to online platforms. Ifinedo's (2011) study suggests that system quality can influence students' academic achievement without demonstrating the relationship between the two factors.

Further research can provide more information on the nature of the relationship. The need for such a study is also shown by the findings of DeLone and McLean (2016), which showed that system quality is characterized by ease of use, flexibility, availability, and usefulness. The implication is that a high-quality system can improve students' learning experiences and academic achievement.

Future research examining factors that impact students' academic achievement in online learning can provide essential insights into how international schools can ensure that online learning leads to positive student learning experiences. Currently, few studies have attempted to make a connection between online learning and academic achievement.

Conclusions

The study examined the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on international schools. The study focused specifically on school leaders' perspectives to gain insights into the study problem. Focusing on school leaders' perspectives was crucial for obtaining in-depth insights into how the pandemic had impacted learning institutions. School leaders are at a vantage point because they can access information concerning various aspects of school performance, including the financial aspects, that teachers and students may be unable to access. Indeed, the overall research findings show that school leaders have essential information concerning how the pandemic impacted international schools. The research has obtained and analysed critical conclusions about the research topic.

The study has determined that the pandemic impacted learning in international schools in various ways. The pandemic disrupted teaching and learning, and it took many schools a while before deciding how to proceed with teaching and learning. The schools always planned for syllabus coverage to ensure learners had adequate time to learn and understand every concept taught. However, the pandemic disrupted the syllabus coverage timelines and made the schools lag. The schools had to rush the syllabus to compensate for lost time or limit holiday periods. Due to the disruptions, teachers failed to cover specific topics more extensively because of time constraints. The side effect is that some topics may be skipped or skimmed through to ensure the syllabus is covered up to the end. The finding raises questions on whether international schools have contingency plans for syllabus coverage if disrupted school calendars are.

Additionally, the results draw attention to the role of policymakers in ensuring that the interruption of the school calendar does not compromise the quality of teaching and learning. Given that there is always the risk that the school calendar may be suspended because of extraordinary events, it is surprising that international schools did not have contingency plans to ensure that the syllabus was adequately covered. The results respond to the study problem by demonstrating that the pandemic harmed syllabus coverage in international schools. The findings contribute to pedagogy theory by providing insights into teaching and learning quality challenges when the regular school calendar is disrupted or suspended. The results also add to pedagogy theory by understanding how the focus on syllabus coverage can compromise students' learning experiences. When institutions focus on covering the syllabus, there is a possibility that students may fail to understand classroom concepts due to the speed at which those concepts are covered. The pandemic negatively impacted learning in international schools because of the disruptions it caused to syllabus coverage.

The study also shows that the pandemic influenced international schools to shift to online learning to enable teaching and learning continuity when learning within the physical classroom was suspended. The schools had to adopt online learning because they had suspended learning for a long time. Some students had also returned to their home countries and could not get around. The government shut all schools and initiated policies aimed at ensuring social distancing. When physical classrooms were suspended, international schools had to resort to online learning because defying government directives would have had negative consequences. The schools had to find a way to ensure students would not spend so much time without learning.

Similarly, the institutions were worried about lagging in terms of syllabus coverage. Online learning was thus the most plausible option. The results have effectively addressed the research problem by demonstrating how the pandemic impacted international schools regarding instruction approaches. The schools had to implement changes that could support teaching and learning continuity. The results contribute to the existing literature by demonstrating the increasing importance of technology in teaching and learning. Schools can teach students despite the distance. The findings also contribute to practice by showing how schools can ensure learning continuity by investing in information technology.

While online learning proved essential during the pandemic, the findings indicate that less learning occurred when classrooms were shifted to online platforms compared to when learning happened within the physical classroom. Online learning enabled teaching and learning to continue. Still, only a few topics could be covered daily compared to learning in the physical classroom. Teachers focused more on theory as opposed to practice. Students had more in-depth coverage of physical classroom issues than online learning. There are limitations to online teaching and learning that limit comprehensive topic coverages and confine teaching and learning to theory instead of practice. The quality of learning declined because students were mainly taught theories with minimal to no engagement in practice. There were mandatory practical lessons in physical and biological science subjects that students could not undertake because of the absence of physical classroom learning. Some students complained that they did not believe the teaching quality was adequate or appropriate. The complaints made by students show that they had expectations concerning teaching and learning, especially regarding

undertaking practical lessons to understand classroom concepts better. However, from their experiences with online learning, they believe that learning outcomes have not met their expectations regarding engaging in practical learning to improve their understanding of classroom concepts. The inability to undertake practical lessons in science subjects means less learning occurred when classrooms shifted to digital platforms. However, less learning did not only happen due to teaching methods but also due to the logistics involved in planning and implementing online classrooms.

The findings show that it is challenging to coordinate all of the teachers and still have the same number of lessons in a day as when learning occurs within the physical classroom. The results address the study problem by demonstrating how the pandemic impacted learning quality. Students had negative learning experiences when classrooms were shifted to online platforms because of the lack of practical learning. The findings contribute to pedagogy theory by offering insights into the importance of practical learning. The study shows that practical learning plays a crucial role in improving the educational outcomes of students. In practice, schools should ensure that instruction methods are also grounded in practice to support the realisation of positive learning outcomes. Students struggle with learning classroom concepts when instructions are mostly theory. The results contribute to existing online learning literature by revealing some challenges regarding online classrooms. Learning institutions should develop strategies to address these limitations and improve learning outcomes when classrooms are shifted to online platforms.

A decline in learning quality also led to a decline in academic performance. The research findings show that students performed poorly during the pandemic compared to

when learning occurred mainly within the physical classroom. However, the decline in academic performance was not only because of the challenges associated with online learning. Students failed tests to examine if they could recall what they had learned earlier. Most of them performed poorly in the tests issued immediately after learning resumed. Teachers had to revisit essential topics and concepts before teaching and learning could proceed. Most students thought the break would run long and thus did not engage with schoolwork. As a result, they failed standardized tests done after learning resumed. Teachers had to refresh their memories by going over some key topics. The results contribute to pedagogy theory by raising concerns about how students can retain concepts taught in the classrooms. The findings show that students had forgotten concepts introduced in the classroom even though they had been home for a relatively short time. Scholars should examine how instructional methods can be designed to enhance student content retention. The results further call into question teaching objectives in international schools. The inability of students to recall course content after a short break from learning might mean that students are mainly taught to pass exams instead of being taught to apply whatever they have learned.

The study results also indicate that international schools had to become creative and innovative to deal with the challenges presented by the pandemic. Many schools invested in creating online portals for assignment submission and teachers' performance monitoring. Previously most assignments were submitted physically or via email. Due to the pandemic, most learning institutions invested in a robust school website that is friendly to students and enables them to submit and track their assignments. The development of the student portal is one of the new measures adopted to enable students to submit their

assignments more efficiently. Cases of missing marks have significantly reduced because of the move. An online portal also allowed the administration to monitor teachers' performance. It was not easy at first to monitor teachers' performance since they were teaching remotely from home. Creating the portal made it possible to motivate teachers to put effort toward teaching students and marking assignments on time. Students also had access to several resources.

The findings address the study problem by demonstrating how the pandemic influenced innovation in international schools. The results also contribute to the existing literature by providing insights into how technology can support teaching and learning. The innovation has improved the learning experiences of students. Additionally, it can improve academic outcomes because of the ease of access to educational resources. International schools also adopted virtual learning environments to improve student collaboration and enhance learning outcomes. Virtual learning environments create a virtual space where students can interact and collaborate. Some schools invested in this technology to recreate some of the benefits of physical classrooms. The study findings show that collaboration among students is key to supporting learning. Virtual learning environments in learning has allowed students to have robust discussions and debates within virtual classrooms. Students learn best when they can collaborate and engage in discussions. A virtual learning environment was important for providing them with this experience.

The results contribute to pedagogy theory by demonstrating the importance of peer learning. Schools can develop policies that improve student-student collaboration and, thus, learning outcomes. The study findings indicate that learning within the physical

classroom has always been advantageous because students can collaborate. Investing in a comprehensive virtual learning environment can achieve the same benefit in online learning. A comprehensive virtual learning environment complemented online classrooms by supporting useful engagements and debates among students. Being innovative and creative can thus enable international schools to meet the needs of students and improve their educational experiences. Many international schools also responded to the pandemic by being innovative in dealing with mental health issues among students and teachers. The schools established guidance and counselling offices during and after the pandemic to help teachers and students cope with its negative effects on their mental well-being. The newly established guidance and counselling offices are managed by professionals whose main role is to help improve the psychological health of students and teachers.

The findings address the study problem by demonstrating how the pandemic impacted international schools' mental health treatment. The institutions took mental health more seriously and invested in guidance and counselling offices after noticing the extent to which mental health issues were prevalent among students and staff during the pandemic. The results contribute to the existing literature by offering insights into the importance of well-being for students and teachers. Teachers are unlikely to perform their roles effectively if they are experiencing mental health challenges. Similarly, students may not focus on learning when they are psychologically overwhelmed. Students experiencing mental health challenges are nearly incapable of focusing on class and excelling. Establishing a guidance and counselling office was crucial for improving the performance of teachers and students during and after the pandemic.

The results are relevant for practice because they indicate that schools should invest in mental health to enhance the well-being of teachers and learners. Another innovation during the pandemic relates to online learning. Online classrooms became commonplace during the COVID-19 pandemic as international schools sought to ensure that students continued learning even as physical classroom learning became untenable. The results respond to the study problem by demonstrating how the pandemic influenced international schools to use online platforms to provide instructions. The findings also contribute to pedagogy theory by showing that information technology can improve teaching and learning outcomes. For international schools, the findings show why they should invest in information systems to support teaching and learning. Students can attain more positive learning outcomes with access to more learning resources. Besides improving learning outcomes, online classrooms are also considered a means of generating additional income. The research participants emphasized the need to generate additional income given the economic challenges they experienced during the pandemic because they relied primarily on tuition fees to generate revenue. The findings address the research problem by demonstrating how the pandemic impacted international schools' thinking regarding financing their operations and goals.

The study findings further provided insights into how the pandemic impacted the preparedness of international schools concerning disruptions to learning caused by public health crises. The study results show that international schools are investing in teacher training to ensure that teachers can effectively teach students online. While the pandemic created an urgency with regard to ensuring that teachers could offer online lessons effectively, it also highlighted a problem within the international school sector that should

be resolved. Many teachers lacked the skills and competencies required to effectively teach online, adversely affecting students' ability to understand classroom concepts. The lack of teacher competency in online teaching points to a broader problem. It demonstrates that teacher training institutions do not prepare teachers for work in an environment significantly shaped by information technology. Educators require some skill sets if online classes achieve similar goals as teaching within physical classrooms. To prepare for online classes, international schools are investing in teacher training so that if learning within the physical classroom is interrupted, teachers and students would not face similar challenges to those they faced at the height of the pandemic.

Technology is increasingly becoming an integral aspect of teaching and learning. International schools must prepare for a future where digital classrooms are commonplace. Additionally, teacher training is essential because online classes have become a mainstay within the education sector. The research findings show that these classes generate additional revenue and improve learning outcomes. The results are relevant for practice because they demonstrate the importance of training teachers for online teaching. Schools can benefit from skilled and competent educators teaching online classrooms. The pandemic also influenced international schools to plan for alternative or additional income streams to minimise economic challenges when regular learning is interrupted. The pandemic had a negative impact on the financial position of international schools. Due to declining tuition fees, many institutions could not meet their obligations, such as paying teachers' salaries. The schools can mitigate such problems in the future by having alternative sources of income.

The results answer the question of the study by showing how the pandemic changed the way international schools thought about making sure they would be financially successful in the long run. The results are relevant to practice because they illustrate the need for business strategies to reduce the economic risk of over relying on tuition fees. International schools should change their business models to improve their financial performance.

The study's findings also show that international schools are preparing for the future by hiring teachers with the skills and competencies required to work effectively in an environment extensively shaped by technology. Since the importance of online classes has been established and the challenges that teachers face identified, international schools are now moving to recruit teachers who can teach effectively when classes are offered online. The recruitment of teachers that can teach online classes effectively is considered necessary by school leaders because of the challenges teachers experienced with teaching online classes when physical classrooms were suspended due to COVID-19. While current teachers should be trained to improve their ability to teach effectively online, in the future, international schools are looking to recruit teachers with the right skills to save on training costs.

The findings address the study problem by demonstrating that the pandemic influenced international schools to change their hiring and recruitment strategies. Hiring teachers who already possess online teaching skills and competencies is crucial for the institutions, given that training requires additional financial resources. By recruiting prepared teachers to teach online, the schools are also ensuring that they reduce the costs associated with training. The findings are relevant for practice because they

demonstrate the importance of developing human resource management strategies that respond to international schools' current needs and challenges.

The study also looked at how COVID-19 affected the making of policies to protect the safety of staff and students during a crisis. The results of the study show that international schools have made policies to deal with mental health problems at school. The schools have developed policies that place more emphasis on mental health. The institutions have created policies that will help students and staff pay more attention to their mental well-being and that of those around them. Many schools did not have policies created to help address mental health because they did not consider it a critical concern until the pandemic, when students and teachers were adversely impacted by it. The policies have been developed by international schools without support from the government, mainly because while school leaders viewed mental health as an urgent and vital issue that should be addressed, governments were not moving with the desired urgency to create and implement policies that could help the education sector enhance the mental well-being of educators and learners. The results respond to the study problem by providing insights into how the pandemic influenced the attitudes of school leaders toward mental health. The results are also relevant to practice because they show that schools must develop policies that can help address mental health among teachers and students. As determined by the current research, mental well-being impacts students' ability to learn and teachers' ability to teach effectively. The findings show that school leaders believe that remuneration is an area through which international schools can address the well-being of teachers. International schools have also developed policies designed to ensure pay continuity. The relationship between pay continuity and

psychological well-being among teachers demonstrates the importance of developing and implementing policies that ensure teachers are paid appropriately even when schools are temporarily closed. International schools also developed policies to improve teachers' and learners' well-being by equipping them with ICT skills. Most teachers and students experience challenges regarding remote learning. Teachers, in particular, found their jobs more stressful because they lacked the necessary skills to teach effectively online. Work-related stress thus increased due to the lack of online teaching skills and competencies.

In the same way, students who had trouble using information systems felt stressed and had problems with their mental health. The results show that international schools developed training policies to improve the well-being of teachers by reducing the anxiety associated with working in an environment that is extensively shaped by ICT. International schools reduce the difficulties teachers will likely encounter when performing their roles by equipping teachers with the skills necessary to teach effectively online. Minimal challenges in the course of work are linked to reduced work-related stress and, thus, enhanced psychological well-being among teachers.

The findings contribute to motivation literature because they provide insights into how training can affect motivation and teachers' performance. Leaders' decision to create trauma-informed institutions is a critical pattern that also emerged about how COVID-19 impacted policy development to secure staff and students' well-being during a crisis. Leaders believe there is a need to develop policies that enhance students' and staff's information concerning trauma and how to overcome it. The findings address the study problem by demonstrating how the pandemic impacted trauma-awareness policies in

international schools. International schools should develop policies that can help improve the well-being of those experiencing trauma and mental health challenges.

The study offered essential insights into how the pandemic impacted international schools. By examining school leaders' perspectives, the research has presented a deeper understanding of the challenges that the schools faced because of COVID-19. The findings show that international schools experienced several challenges due to the pandemic. Apart from economic challenges, the schools were also unprepared for the shift to online classrooms, which led to a decline in the quality of teaching and learning. The institutions also recorded increased mental health issues and a decline in student enrolment. Many international schools had not paid attention to the importance of mental health before the pandemic and, therefore, failed to develop policies to address mental health. The school leaders developed strategies to deal with the short- and long-term challenges.

The study has shown that many schools have developed policies to enhance psychological well-being. As international schools move to recover from the negative impacts of the pandemic, governments have done little to assist them. The institutions have had to rely on their resources to overcome the adverse effects of the pandemic. The study has also shown that several issues should still be examined further. One of the issues concerns how international schools can change their business models to improve their financial performance. There is also a need to examine teacher motivation in international schools and the challenges students face in online learning. The current study has indicated that motivation is vital in international schools since some teachers must be monitored to perform their jobs.

In light of the tumultuous events the world has witnessed, this study has carved out a deeper understanding of the repercussions faced by international schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The gravity of the pandemic's impact, not only from an economic perspective but from the abrupt transition to online classrooms, has undeniably caused a rippling effect, deteriorating the quality of teaching and the mental well-being of both educators and learners. Before the pandemic, the overarching importance of mental health was significantly under-addressed within many international schools, resulting in an inadequacy of policies centred on its implications.

Remarkably, in response to the unprecedented challenges, school leaders formulated robust strategies both for immediate solutions and for long-term recovery. These strategies mainly targeted enhancing psychological well-being, ensuring remuneration continuity, and uplifting the competence of teachers and students in online educational environments. Such proactive measures were imperative, especially in light of the limited assistance from the government. Moreover, a significant finding was the emphasis on creating trauma-informed institutions, highlighting the dire necessity for policies that extend knowledge on trauma and strategies to surmount it.

Yet, as comprehensive as these findings are, there remain opportunities for further exploration. The financial underpinnings of international schools, how they might remodel their financial structures, and a deeper dive into teacher motivation within these settings stand as potential areas for future research. Furthermore, understanding the intrinsic challenges students confront in online learning landscapes presents another avenue.

In conclusion, this study serves as a testament to the resilience and adaptability of international schools in the face of a global crisis. Their unwavering commitment to the

well-being of their communities, despite limited external support, paints a hopeful picture. As we reflect upon the outcomes of this research, it reinforces the idea that in times of adversity, the strength and determination of educational institutions play a pivotal role in shaping the future of learning and well-being. The outcome of this argumentation beckons a more holistic integration of mental health into educational paradigms and an earnest collaboration between schools and governments to ensure a robust foundation for the generations to come.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Interview Guide

APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW GUIDE

The impact of Covid-19 on international schools in some selected developed and developing countries - A leader's perspective.

Interviewee Number:

Interview date:

Phone # or meeting room:

“Ice Breaker”

Before we begin this interview, please share with me what you think about Covid-19? Do you think that the world will ever be the same? How long have you been in your current position?

What type of students do you have in your school?

- Local
- International
- Both local and international

Has Covid-19 influenced how teaching and learning is conducted at your school? How has it done this?

In what other ways has the pandemic impacted the school?

- In the short-term
- In the long-term

What are some of the strategies that you have used to address the challenges caused by the pandemic if any?

Appendix 2: Informed Consent Form



UU_IC - Version 2.1



Informed Consent Form

Part 1: Debriefing of Participants

Student's Name: Eileen Pretorius

Student's E-mail Address: eileenpretorius@yahoo.com

Student ID #: R1701D2186328

Supervisor's Name: Prof. Melody Nddi Modebelu

University Campus: Unicaf University Malawi (UUM)

Program of Study: UUM: PhD Doctorate of Philosophy - Education

Research Project Title: The impact of Covid-19 on international schools in some selected developed and developing countries - A leader's perspective.

Date:

Provide a short description (purpose, aim and significance) of the research project, and explain why and how you have chosen this person to participate in this research (maximum 150 words).

The study aims to examine how the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted international schools. The research issue is being investigated from the perspective of leaders because the primary objective of the study is to gain in-depth insights into how the pandemic has impacted international schools, and leaders are well-positioned to provide the necessary information. Data for the study is collected through a semi-structured questionnaire designed to obtain the views and opinions of the leaders of international schools in relation to the impact of the pandemic on the schools.

The above named Student is committed in ensuring participant's voluntarily participation in the research project and guaranteeing there are no potential risks and/or harms to the participants.

Participants have the right to withdraw at any stage (prior or post the completion) of the research without any consequences and without providing any explanation. In these cases, data collected will be deleted.

All data and information collected will be coded and will not be accessible to anyone outside this research. Data described and included in dissemination activities will only refer to coded information ensuring beyond the bounds of possibility participant identification.


I, Eileen Pretorius, ensure that all information stated above is true and that all conditions have been met.

Student's Signature:

Informed Consent Form

Part 2: Certificate of Consent

This section is mandatory and should to be signed by the participant(s)

Student's Name:	Eileen Pretorius
Student's E-mail Address:	eileenpretorius@yahoo.com
Student ID #:	R1701D2186328
Supervisor's Name:	Prof. Melody Ndidi Modebelu
University Campus:	Unicaf University Malawi (UUM) 
Program of Study:	UUM: PhD Doctorate of Philosophy - Education
Research Project Title:	The impact of Covid-19 on international schools in some selected developed and developing countries - A leader's perspective.

I have read the foregoing information about this study, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and discuss about it. I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions and I have received enough information about this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw from this study at any time without giving a reason for withdrawing and without negative consequences. I consent to the use of multimedia (e.g. audio recordings, video recordings) for the purposes of my participation to this study. I understand that my data will remain anonymous and confidential, unless stated otherwise. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study.

Participant's Print name:

Participant's Signature:

Date:

If the Participant is illiterate:

I have witnessed the accurate reading of the consent form to the potential participant, and the individual has had an opportunity to ask questions. I confirm that the aforementioned individual has given consent freely.

Witness's Print name:

Witness's Signature:

Date:

Appendix 3: UREC Decision



UREC Decision, Version 2.0



Unicaf University Research Ethics Committee Decision

Student's Name: Eileen Pretorius

Student's ID #: R1701D2186328

Supervisor's Name: Prof. Melody Ndidi Modebelu

Program of Study: UU-PhD-Edu-900-3

Offer ID /Group ID: O29373G30832

Dissertation Stage: DS 3

Research Project Title: The impact of Covid-19 on international schools in Qatar, Bahrain, UAE, Russia, China, Egypt, South Africa, France, Mexico and the US: A leader's perspective

Comments:

REAF:
b - Disabilities - please add the following: 'People with mental disabilities will not be included'
informed consent Part 1: sign the form. Add information regarding audio/video recording of the meeting. All participants should sign the informed consent.
gatekeeper letter:
ool 2- you should use the informed consent template provided (IC2).

Decision*: B. Approved with comments for minor revision

Date: 31-Mar-2022

*Provisional approval provided at the Dissertation Stage 1, whereas the final approval is provided at the Dissertation stage 3. The student is allowed to proceed to data collection following the final approval.

Appendix 4: Gatekeeper Letter



UU_GL - Version 2.0



Gatekeeper letter

Address: Building 33, Street 447, Zone 70, Doha

Date: 05-Apr-2022

Subject: Participation in Online Interview

Dear XXXX,

I am a doctoral student at Unicaf University Malawi.

As part of my degree I am carrying out a study on [insert project / research topic and area].

I am writing to enquire whether you would be willing to participate in this research.

Subject to approval by Unicaf Research Ethics Committee (UREC) this study will be using online, recorded interviews to ask questions relating to the research.

Under the supervision of Prof. Melody Ndidi Modebelu, I will be conducting a study that aims to examine how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted international schools. The research issue is being investigated from the perspective of leaders because the primary objective of the study is to gain in-depth insights into how the pandemic has impacted international schools, and leaders are well-positioned to provide the necessary information.

All data and conclusions made from the interviews, informal discussions, and questionnaires are kept strictly confidential and anonymity will be maintained. The data gathered from these research methods will be reported in a research paper available to all participants on completion. No children will be involved in the research project and data I collect.

Thank you in advance for your time and for your consideration of this project. Kindly please let me know if you require any further information or need any further clarifications.

Yours Sincerely,

Eileen Pretorius

Student's Name: Eileen Pretorius

Student's E-mail: eileenpretorius@yahoo.com

Student's Address and Telephone: Building 33, Street 447, Doha, Qatar, +97450630353

Supervisor's Title and Name: Prof. Melody Ndidi Modebelu

Supervisor's Position: Professor

Supervisor's E-mail: m.modebelu@unicaf.org