Leadership Practices and Experiences of Eswatini Primary School Principals During a Pandemic

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Abstract:- **The study reported in this paper examined leadership practices and experiences of school principals during a pandemic. The critical question was: 'How have Eswatini primary school principals experienced leading schools under a pandemic?' This is a qualitative paper embedded in the interpretative paradigm employing a case study design and sense-making theory in which data was generated through semi-structured interviews with purposively and conveniently sampled Eswatini primary school principals. Data was analysed through thematic analysis. The findings revealed several leadership practices that reflected diverse experiences of leading a school during a pandemic such as adaptation, collaboration, and learning from colleagues. From the narratives of principals, I deduced three conclusions, which are significant for understanding leading a school during a pandemic which is; creativity and innovation, adapting and coping with change, and that effective leadership is about the identification of what works in a given context rather than sticking to rules and regulations. The study further recommends that training and support should be provided for school principals to enable them to effectively lead a school during a pandemic.**

Keywords:- Challenging Contexts, Pandemic, Remote Learning, Coping, Compliance.

I. INTRODUCTION

School principals are key leaders in educational systems. They are responsible for carrying out the school's vision and mission and play an integral role in the smooth functioning of schools. As such, their roles and responsibilities revolve around planning; they plan school activities, finances, and operations. Under their position, they are always involved in all aspects of the school's operations. Ressa, (2021) has rightly put it to say school principals are leaders responsible for providing leadership in the development and implementation of all educational programs and projects in the school. They play a vital role in achieving the government's aim of providing basic quality education. Moreover, school principals execute various roles and remain accountable to several stakeholders. The role of a school principal requires a combination of skills such as management, leadership, communication, and decision-making. It requires a deep commitment to student success and a willingness to take on a wide range of responsibilities and challenges. A principal must maintain the discipline of

the school as well as look up the study process and outcome if the students are active enough. Kathula, (2020); Harris and Jones (2020) observe that every principal faces some of the biggest frustrations in controlling and managing the day-to-day operations of a school. Moreover, principals play a critical role in leading their schools through unprecedented crises.

Significantly, in 2020, school principals had to face new challenges brought on by the pandemic, which struck the whole world and stretched beyond a year. The COVID-19 pandemic has ravaged large parts of the world and wreaked havoc on education systems (Kniffin, Narayanan, & Van Vugt 2021). During this period, school principals were met with numerous unanticipated circumstances, with some requiring immediate solutions, and in some instances, it was difficult to have those solutions. Some situations required inaccessible solutions. Despite the pandemic and the challenges encountered, school principals were still expected to execute the uncompromised role of effectively leading schools and ensuring that there is direction. Schools across the globe and in Eswatini were forced to close for extended periods, and when they reopened, they had to implement new health and safety protocols. This included adapting to remote learning, providing support to students and assisting staff members in dealing with the challenges of the pandemic.

The pandemic challenged school principals' roles and responsibilities in planning school activities. Most of what happened during the COVID could not be planned for; on one day, there would be a rise in the number of infections on another day the death of a teacher or a parent. The situation was dire. Bakker and Demerouti (2017) observed that during such a lengthy crisis, it is likely that long-term demands will exceed the personal strengths and employment resources of school leaders, making them vulnerable to their leadership roles. Kniffin et al. (2021) reported that principals suffered from home-school navigation possibilities and high burnout in both administrative and managerial roles. Importantly, Ressa (2021) observed that the COVID-19 pandemic is unprecedented, and most school principals do not have expertise in dealing with such protracted-complex crises. The pandemic significantly influenced everyone's daily life within the school, as it called for social distancing among all individuals, and this was a tall order, especially for young children.

Netolicky (2020) remarked that if principals fail to play a key role in planning and coordinating the teaching-learning process, learners' learning outcomes are likely to be affected. Thus, unplanned institutional closures negatively affect learners' learning outcomes (UNESCO 2020a). Being in school provides vital learning, and when institutions close abruptly, learners are deprived of opportunities that may not be replaced. The drawbacks are disproportionate for economically poor learners, who tend to have fewer educational opportunities outside of school (UNESCO, 2020b). When institutions close, parents are frequently asked to enable their learners to learn at home and often struggle to accomplish this duty. This is particularly true for parents with limited resources and support for their children and in the Eswatini context.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Pandemics have always existed and have negatively impacted society. A few examples of pandemics in history include; the spanish Flu (1918-1920), the Asian Flu (1957-1958) and the HIV/AIDS Pandemic (1981-present) including droughts and storms that are not documented. The global community has recently experienced the Covid-19 pandemic which has had devastating effects, particularly on the education system. When the pandemic manifested itself, governments across the globe supported by World Health Organisation (WHO) took a stance to close schools immediately. It may be highlighted that the education sector was the worst hit by the pandemic. As the pandemic intensified each week and month, there was a need for remote learning. In different countries including Eswatini, the departments of education decided to engage schools in remote learning due to the prolonged pandemic. In Kenya, for instance, the education system had to take advantage of remote education and cope with the COVID-19 pandemic; teachers were quickly equipped with the necessary computer knowledge.

Studies (Harris & John, 2020; Netolicky, 2020) on online learning during the COVID-19 era indicate that principals experienced several challenges. Ravitch (2020) stated that principals in Kenya have reported challenges concerning access to learning. It was noted from the principals' narratives that access to and knowledge of how to use online digital tools and equipment for learning are significantly influenced by children's socio-economic backgrounds. Most schools in this country are characterized by a high rate of poverty. According to a survey on remote learning by Ressa (2021), access to learning was low and inequitable, parental awareness varied, the most utilised platform for remote learning was not the most accessible, and public schools were the least prepared to support the digital learning approach. Principals indicated that schools were not empowered to handle remote learning (Harris & John, 2020). However, Constantia, Christos, Glykeria, Anastasia, and Aikaterini (2021) note that schools are always in a better position to try and implement any form of feasible education strategies.

The operations of schools under the pandemic also required specialized infrastructure, such as wash basins and bigger spaces, to accommodate students, which was a tall order for schools and the Ministry of Education and Training (UNESCO, 2020). Besides infrastructure, the Ministry of Education and Training needed to provide more support to teachers and, in particular, to learners from poor backgrounds if they were to realise the equitable and inclusive provision of continued learning as intended. As such issues of gadgets and connectivity also featured as a challenge for learners in taking up their studies. It should be noted here that smartphones in countries like Eswatini are beyond the reach of most rural communities and populations. Even when adults have smartphones, tensions around privacy and children's unsupervised Internet use render access to learning nonexistent. In addition, where electricity and technology exist, the cost of the Internet is too high. Such disadvantages present challenges for rural families and learners, who must compete with their more privileged peers for tests and national examinations.

Of significance all these challenges boiled down to the leadership role of the school principal. A study of primary school principals in India by Bailey and Breslin (2021) found that principals faced challenges, such as lack of access to technology, difficulty in maintaining student engagement, and managing the workload of teachers. A similar Australian study by Mills and Lingard (2020) found that principals faced challenges, such as managing workload, supporting teachers in adapting to online learning, and addressing equity issues for students with limited access to technology. The authors highlighted the importance of collaboration, communication, and support from the government and other stakeholders in helping principals lead their schools during this crisis.

Kathula (2020) noted that there was education exclusion among learners. Immediately after schools closed in Kenya, the Ministry of Education and Education Support agencies indicated that learners should undertake online or technology-mediated learning on TV, radio, and mobile phones. Kathula (2020) argues that while such learning may take place in urban areas, for many marginalised children in remote villages including refugee children in camps as well as those living with various disabilities learning during COVID-19 school closures was a deep challenge. By sharing the same view, Netolicky (2020) emphasized that learning mediated through educational technologies remains out of reach for many disadvantaged children due to connectivity challenges. In remote areas, for example, electricity does not reach households, excluding children from online learning. Ajayi (2020) noted that the transition to remote or hybrid learning models highlighted the digital divide, with some students lacking access to technology, reliable internet connectivity, or necessary learning resources. Principals had to bridge this gap by securing funding for devices, providing internet hotspots, and coordinating with community organizations for support. Principals must play a crucial role in providing professional development opportunities, fostering collaboration among

teachers, and addressing teachers' concerns about workload, stress, and burnout.

Bailey and Breslin (2021) concluded that the COVID-19 pandemic created an unprecedented and multifaceted crisis for school principals. These challenges encompass various aspects of school operation. Principals must constantly adapt to evolving guidelines and requirements from government agencies, health authorities, and school districts. This involves interpreting complex regulations, making informed decisions amidst uncertainty, and communicating changes effectively to the school community (Rishi, 2022). Principals needed to maintain open and transparent communication with parents and stakeholders regarding school policies, changes in operations, and concerns related to student safety and well-being. This requires regular updates, multiple channels of communication, and addressing of parental anxiety. Principals have implemented and enforced health protocols to minimize the risk of COVID-19 transmission in schools. This included maintaining social distancing, ensuring proper hygiene practices, and managing contact tracing and quarantine procedures.

The pandemic has strained school budgets, leading to resource limitations and funding cuts. Principals had to make critical decisions regarding resource allocation, prioritize school needs, and scout funding sources to support school operations. This was an overwhelming workload requiring juggling multiple demands from various stakeholders, including parents, teachers, students, and other parties with vested interests in education. Principals had to prioritize tasks effectively, manage their time efficiently, and delegate responsibilities to maintain a balanced approach (Kim, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has required principals to demonstrate exceptional resilience, adaptability, and leadership skills. They had to navigate uncharted territories at a high speed, make risky decisions, and provide resolute support to their school communities.

➢ *Theoretical Framework*
This study used sense-making theory to explain principals' experiences of leading a school during a pandemic. This theory was developed by Karl Weick in the late 1960s and refers to how people structure the unknown to be able to act in it (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). Sense-making is a process by which people give meaning to confusing and unexpected experiences (Weick, 1996; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). Sense-making as a theory seeks to provide clarity and meaning to otherwise ambiguous phenomena (Mills and Lingard 2010). This theory enables people to interpret situations in a manner that supports their beliefs. Therefore, different people may interpret the same situation differently. Sensemaking is also driven by plausibility rather than accuracy (Weick, 1996). When people try to make sense of a situation, they select meanings that make their sense-making seem logical and reasonable, rather than accurate. Applied in this study, this theory helped the researcher understand how principals made sense of leading schools during the unprecedented pandemic.

➢ *Significance of the Study*
This study has the potential to guide the education sector and stakeholders in the overall readiness and response to any pandemic. School principals serve in the education sector and play a pivotal role in leading schools and ensuring that students receive quality education. Occurrences such as pandemics can greatly hamper principals' effectiveness in executing their roles. The findings of this study therefore might provide valuable insights into the leadership practices and experiences of Eswatini primary school principals during the pandemic. This information can be used to inform the development of professional programs for school leaders and to support the development of educational policies and practices that are responsive to the needs of schools and students during times of crisis.

In addition, the study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on educational leadership in times of crisis, which is still relatively limited. The study also provides a unique perspective on educational leadership in the context of a developing country, which is often underrepresented in the research literature. This study further makes a significant contribution to the understanding of educational leadership in times of crisis and supports the development of effective leadership practices for school leaders in Eswatini and other developing countries.

➢ *Purpose of the Study*
This study sought to explore the leadership practices and experiences of Eswatini primary school principals during the pandemic.

➢ *Study Objectives*
The study aimed to answer the following questions:

- What leadership practices did Eswatini primary school principals employ during the pandemic?
- What experiences do Eswatini primary school principals have in leading their schools during the pandemic?
- Which challenges did Eswatini primary school principals face in leading their schools during the pandemic?

➢ *Problem Statement*
The COVID-19 pandemic posed unprecedented challenges for schools and educational leaders worldwide, including Eswatini. School principals in Eswatini continued to lead their schools through the pandemic, but they faced several challenges, including ensuring student learning, supporting teachers, managing resources, and communicating with stakeholders. Despite these challenges, primary school principals in Eswatini played a critical role in keeping schools open and ensuring that students continue to receive education. However, there is a limited understanding of the leadership practices and experiences of Eswatini primary school principals during the pandemic.

➢ *Methodological Underpinnings*
This is a qualitative study that adopted a case study design within the interpretive paradigm. A case study design allows researchers to balance the in-depth understanding of

each case under investigation (Creswell, 2018). Qualitative inquiry is popular for its emphasis on the meaning that people attach to their experiences (Mcmillan & Schumacher, 2016). Within the qualitative approach, the interpretive paradigm was preferred because of its position that human life can only be understood from the inner person's subjective experiences, and it cannot be treated alone from context (McMillan and Schumacher, 2016). Purposive and convenience sampling methods were used to identify the five principals who participated in this study. The sample was purposive because I first wanted primary school principals who had led schools before and during the pandemic to participate in the study. The sampling was further convenient because I wanted schools that were within the reach of my duty station to minimize travel costs and increase data collection time, which were to be located in the Manzini-Matsapha corridor. The data were generated through semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews enabled the participants to speak freely; to share ideas comfortably, and also enabled the researchers to do probes, follow-ups, and member checking to confirm interpretations (Creswell, 2018). Following initial e-mail contact, the principals were approached to obtain informed consent and decide on a suitable time for the interview. The principals were interviewed at their respective schools at a convenient time. To ensure trustworthiness, I used Guba and Lincoln's (2013) framework, which includes four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Ethical considerations were also considered in this study. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality of participants, Principals A, B, C, D, and E were used as pseudonyms for the participants.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The current study aimed to uncover the experiences of principals in leading schools during a pandemic. It is important to highlight here that the study was conducted at a time when school principals were still grappling with the reality and remnants of the pandemic. It transpired during the conversations that principals had little time available to dedicate to research activities. This made it impossible for me as a researcher to make many visits to each school principal as initially planned.

➢ *Schools were Chaotic*

Schools became chaotic during the pandemic for a multitude of reasons which all intertwined with the unique challenges presented by COVID-19. Narrating his experience of leading his school under a pandemic Principal C had this to say; "*First of all, schools closed abruptly. Under normal circumstances we prepare for school closing; we clean and store everything accordingly. We make sure we have all perishables exhausted. When schools closed abruptly we had food in quantities that students were to use for the whole term. Schools in Eswatini were closed the whole year from March to December. Only finishing classes were allowed to return at the end of August. By then beans, mealie-meal, Rice, and samp were spoilt. Vegetables were spoilt within a week of school closure.*" Principal A added that; "*Teaching was completely disrupted no school-based*

learning took place for months but towards the end of the year completing classes were recalled. However, it was late there was a need to put in place accelerated learning to recover lost time. Parents had fear of infection for their children which made it more difficult to send their children to school. Schools tried to have extra support and services but it was difficult to convince parents. Several learners irregularly attended classes."

Principal D added that; "*there were a lot of changes in school infrastructure and activities that we needed to adhere to. As principals responding to a directive by the Ministry of Education, we needed to quickly construct hand washing bays, mark social distance space for learners, cut on morning assembly time, and completely stop chapels*".

Principal E added that; "*Endless disciplinary cases were constituting in most instances the discrimination and stigmatization of learners who were affected and or infected. The crisis took a long time; we suffered burnout in the process, and we were drained. We did not know whom to run to for help at times. The officials from the Ministry of Education at some point were overwhelmed with consultations from various schools and the reception would not be a good one.*"

"*Many actors came to partner with the ministry in providing online learning platforms, including MTN. Eswatini Television and Eswatini Broadcasting Service. Some stakeholders approved of this approach, while many had reservations as they perceived the environment of implementation as ill-prepared for this purpose. With too many parents, the environment was generally unprepared in ways that would make it difficult for the ministry to achieve its objective of providing learning equitably and inclusively. Consequently, learning opportunities were reportedly unequally distributed, with devastating consequences for marginalised learners; learners who did not have a radio or television. These learning platforms did not assist as we taught the syllabus where it was left when schools closed.*" Principal B concluded.

The findings from the narratives of the participants reveal the chaotic nature of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. The principals highlighted several challenges, including the abrupt closure of schools that left schools unprepared, with food and other resources spoiling. Teaching and learning were completely disrupted for months, with only finishing classes allowed to return at the end of August. This led to a need for accelerated learning to recover lost time Alhouti, (2020). Parents had a fear of infection their children, which made it difficult to convince them to send their children to school. This resulted in irregular attendance by learners. Moreover, schools had to adhere to several changes to school infrastructure and activities, such as constructing hand washing bays, marking social distance spaces for learners, and cutting down on morning assembly time (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

There were several disciplinary cases related to the pandemic, such as dealing with discrimination and stigmatization of learners who were affected or infected. Principals and other school staff experienced burnout due to the challenges of leading schools during the pandemic. Online learning platforms were provided by the Ministry of Education and partners, but these did not assist with teaching the syllabus where it was left when schools closed. Additionally, the environment for online learning was ill-prepared, with many learners not having access to radios or televisions. These findings suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on schools in Eswatini. The challenges faced by schools were complex and multifaceted. The findings also highlight the need for increased support for schools during times of crisis.

➢ *Lack of an Intervention Plan for Arresting the Crisis*

The findings also revealed that there was a lack of an intervention plan to arrest the crisis hence Principal C had this to say; "*the worst-case scenario was the fact that there was no intervention plan to arrest the crisis. As principals, we were expected to have solutions and answers to all the problems. Parents were looking up to us, students were looking up to us, and teachers were looking up to us. The situation was draining emotionally and physically. The government took a long time trying to structure how the World Health Organisation (WHO) plan was to be implemented in schools. This was not a surprise because the government herself was caught off guard by the pandemic. As principals, we were in despair, complete despair. Eyi the pandemic experience is something we do not want to remember or to experience again. We could not even put a home learning plan in place because teachers were not equipped to handle this our schools did not have internet access; no computer laboratories in the school. More so, parents and families were not equipped to provide home learning. The Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) started radio classes for students. However, it is important to note that these radio classes could not be accessed by all students as there are still several students who live below the poverty line and families cannot afford a radio*". Principal E had this to say, *"Compliance with policies and laid down procedures were difficult and nearly impossible at times."*

Principal D said; *"As principals, we needed to act swiftly and provide all forms of support to teachers, learners, and parents. We heard that in some countries staff members who were at risk were excused from physically participating in school activities. In this school, we lost two teachers and two parents to the pandemic. The two teachers we lost were teachers with chronic illnesses who could have been excused from work during the intense COVID-19 period. However, the employer did not consider that. Even the mental health of students was greatly affected. All the community members were looking up to us for the smooth running of schools without new infections or reinfections and this was beyond our control. At some point, we felt the community at large was not supportive particularly parents of learners in lower primary as children would sometimes come to school without masks. The voice of Principal D*

clearly explains the foregoing point: "Some students did not have masks, the young ones continued to share even sweets and exchanged masks".

An interesting finding was that some of the school principals chose to adjust and adapt the information supplied by the government to what was more suitable for them. Principals indicated that staff meetings were held after lessons in all subjects had already taken place. The reduction of teaching time to accommodate staff meetings is against departmental policies, but principals remained resolute that leadership has to respond to local contextual realities in this regard. Principals did not regret their actions of interfering with teaching to accommodate time for staff meetings. Instead, the argument was extended that policymakers ought to think from their awareness of the contextual realities. Principal D had this to say; "*Government officials theorise most of the time. They do not care about what happens on the ground hence most of what they say does not align with what happens in schools. So, normally, what they say does not always assist us in effectively running school worse during a period such as Covid*" (Principal B).

➢ *We had to Adapt and Cope*

Principals narrated the reality that they faced during the COVID-19 pandemic and revealed that the pandemic presented a unique set of challenges that required them to be flexible, resourceful, and resilient. The utterance below by Principal B is informative in this regard;

"*…Finally, all students returned to school in March 2021. We had no choice but to adapt as some of our classes were overcrowded and we could not comply with Covid-19 requirements. The situation was so fluid and unpredictable that we had little or no control over it. We needed to do what was feasible at a given time. Planning did not help much Covid-19 had its complications."*

The findings indicated that principals have struggled to balance the obligation to provide quality education with minimizing the infection risk. However, the role of the broader community in preventing infections in schools has been a largely neglected consideration as narrated by the principals. To protect the school communities, there must be a collective acceptance for continuing general public health measures such as wearing masks in dense social settings, limiting contacts, and activities with elevated risks of viral spread, and availing of vaccination and testing. While the risk of severe illness and death related to COVID-19 is low in school-aged children, it is not negligible, and marked uncertainties regarding the long-term sequelae exist. The role of school in community spread and the negative impact of disruptions to in-person schooling by quarantine measures remain strong arguments to focus on protecting schools. Children deserve safe access to education. To achieve this, schools need a dynamic mitigation plan community investment in public health measures, and the systematic collection of data to assess which strategies are effective.

Several of the principals described their experiences of leading a school during a pandemic to entail being expected to have answers to everything and having to make some decisions based on insufficient knowledge. Some of the principals expressed that it was difficult to know how the rules were to be interpreted and that organising everyday school life according to the infection control measures provided by supervisors was very difficult in practice if not impossible. In that regard, several schools received good support and help from their superiors. However, some school leaders stated that they did not always get clear answers on how to solve challenges they encountered in practice and felt alone with their decisions. Thus some of the principals turned to their colleagues to gain clarification and make joint decisions for the ministry. Principal D stated: "*I noticed that we had an enormous responsibility; ensuring the proper running of the school was very difficult. There were so many disturbances; and unexpected emerging cases when you think things were falling into place. The consequences can be so great. You think that the consequences could be that someone dies from it ... based on the choice I took. That is usually not the case.*"

Principals indicated that they could not even think of remote learning during the pandemic because of a lack of capacitation on all stakeholders (learners, teachers, and parents) involved. It was noted that most of the schools did not have ICT equipment and teachers were not equipped with ICT skills (Netolicky, 2020). It may be important to note here that principals also indicated that learners themselves would have not been reachable through remote learning as some could not even access the radio or the television not to mention the internet and the costs associated with it. To take advantage of remote education as a strategy to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic, principals, teachers, and learners must be equipped with the necessary skills. Beyond being equipped principals and teachers should also be supported in adapting to the use of technology. Governments and schools can support teachers in different ways such as offering professional development opportunities and addressing both the use of technology and teaching strategies in the context of remote education. The Ministry of Education and Training through schools can find ways to assist learners who may not have a radio at home to secure one as radios come in handy where issues of ICT are impossible. Harris and Jones (2020); and Constantia, Christos, Glykeria, Anastasia, and Aikaterini (2021) have noted that schools are always in a better position to trial and implement feasible remote education strategies. School principals felt the situation was dire as they had no experience in crisis management and prolonged crises of this magnitude. These findings resonate with Bailey, and Breslin, (2021) whose assessment of the pandemic on schools indicated that the challenges faced by school principals during the COVID-19 pandemic represent a crisis of unprecedented scale and complexity. School principals are typically responsible for the day-to-day operations of their schools, including managing staff, overseeing curriculum and instruction, and ensuring student safety and well-being. However, the COVID-19 pandemic presented a host of new challenges that many school principals were not prepared to handle. For example, school principals had to suddenly make decisions about how to continue providing education to their students in the face of school closures and stay-at-home orders. They also had to implement new health and safety protocols to protect students and staff from the virus. In addition, they had to provide support to students and families who were struggling with the emotional and financial impacts of the pandemic. These challenges were exacerbated by the fact that many school principals had no experience in crisis management or prolonged crises of this magnitude. As a result, many school principals felt overwhelmed and unsure of how to best respond to the pandemic.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

➤ *Based on the Findings the following Conclusions have been Drawn;*

- Eswatini primary school principals displayed a range of leadership practices in leading the school during the pandemic.
- The pandemic had a significant impact on the work of Eswatini primary school principals. Principals reported working longer hours, experiencing increased stress and anxiety, and facing new challenges in their roles.
- The pandemic highlighted the importance of strong leadership in schools. Strong leadership is essential for helping schools navigate crises and ensuring that students continue to receive quality education despite unprecedented contexts.
- There is a need for more support for Eswatini primary school principals to help them effectively lead their schools in times of crisis.

RECOMMENDATIONS

➤ *Based on the findings and the conclusions of the study I recommend that;*

- Training and empowerment of current and future school principals is essential to enable them to lead schools during unprecedented circumstances or pandemics. Training can be provided in areas of technology integration, decision-making, communication, and emotional intelligence.
- Principals should be empowered with technology skills. Technology is not a solution by itself, but principals who are proficient in using ICT in their practice can be more effective during challenging times, provide better education, and further develop their teachers' ICT skills.
- Support for principals is essential, especially during difficult times. This support should come from all stakeholders, including community leaders and parents.
- To effectively handle their roles and responsibilities of leading a school during a pandemic, principals should also empower themselves and collaborate with other principals to learn how best to provide leadership during such times.

STUDY LIMITATIONS

The study used a small sample of school principals to establish their experiences of leading a school during a pandemic. To establish the experiences of principals in leading a school during a pandemic it may be necessary to conduct a study with all primary school principals in Eswatini. However, due to limited time and funds, it was impossible to carry out such a study. Moreover, this study used only a qualitative research design, and of note is that combining research designs in the study might have possibly resulted in different findings.

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