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Strategies for overcoming the effects of unstable family structures on learners' well-being during covid-19

 Thobeka Angel Mbhele¹,  Kananga Robert Mukuna^{2*}

^{1,2}*Department of Education Foundations, University of the Free State, South Africa.*

Corresponding author: Kananga Robert Mukuna (Email: mukunakr@ufs.ac.za)

Abstract

Learner's well-being is a complex and multidimensional concept encompassing physical, emotional, social, and mental dimensions. This study determines strategies to mitigate the effects of unstable family structure on learners' well-being during COVID-19. This study used non-probability sampling, often associated with multiple case studies and qualitative research designs. It adopted an interpretive paradigm that seeks to understand human experience. The sample consisted of four learners and four teachers from two high schools in Bergville, KwaZulu-Natal province, South Africa. Data was collected using classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. Participants were selected through convenience and purposive sampling. The collected data was analysed through narrative analysis. The findings showed that counselling programmes, extra lessons, and tutorials could be used to overcome the effects of unstable family structure on learners' well-being during COVID-19. It concludes that the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for targeted support strategies to address learners' unique challenges from unstable family structures. This study showed that unstable family structure is a significant factor in learners' health behaviour, mental health, and perceived academic achievement. By implementing the above strategies, educators, community leaders, and policymakers can collaborate to support learners from unstable family situations and improve their well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic. Teacher education, training programs, school counselors, and psychologists can develop strategies to support the learner's social-emotional learning and well-being.

Keywords: COVID-19, Family structure, Learners' well-being, Unstable family structure.

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1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented unique challenges to learners worldwide, worsening existing vulnerabilities and creating new ones. The effects of unstable family structures on learners' well-being are a key issue. Family structures including nuclear family, which is defined as a family consisting of a wife, husband, and their children living together in their own home [1] there is other so-called "alternative families," along with single-parent families, in which children are dependent on only one parent, grandparent families, in which children are raised by grandparents, child-headed families, whereby children are the head of the household and blended families known as stepfamilies, according to studies. Unstable family structures caused by divorce, poverty, or domestic violence can have a profound impact on learner's emotional, social, and academic development. According to the U.S. Census Bureau [2] the family structure includes interactions at the intersection of biological relatedness, marital and partnership status, and living circumstances. According to Pelser [3] children's health is determined by their surroundings on a global scale. Whereas Soutter [4] indicate that well-being is what people have been able to do and be, as well as being happy with one's life or having good mental health. The family is the centre of modern life, even though family structures and habits are changing in modern society and continue to have significant issues [5]. Unstable family structures bring different problems for learners. Family structure is the most important among the several other elements that affect children's development and safety.

Indeed, there are empirical indications that family structure and children's development and well-being are causally related [6, 7]. Numerous studies, for example, have demonstrated that children raised in single-parent households had a lower likelihood of completing high school than children raised in two-parent households, and they also have negative behaviour Coleman [8] and McLanahan [9]. Watts, et al. [10] study revealed that learners' academic performance improves when parents actively participate in their education. For example, both parents support their children's schooling for better outcomes. Therefore, research indicates that learners from single-parent, grand-parent, and child-headed households experience emotional issues such as anger, hyperactivity, and hostility.

A study conducted by Richter and Lemola [11] indicated that learners from single-parent households faced emotional problems like coldness, hyperactivity, antagonism, and violence. Parental love is important in child development. On the other hand, a study conducted by Richter and Lemola [11] revealed that when their parents' love is strained or divided, learners face academic obstacles and worry about the future. Put another way, children from single-parent households typically score lower on academic assessments. Education is essential to human social, physical, and psychological development and is linked to an individual's well-being and opportunities for better living. The rise of COVID-19 affected not only family structures but also the education sector. According to the Department of Social Development [12] COVID-19 significantly impacts the well-being of South African families and Learners. According to Attanasio, et al. [13] learners with low socio-emotional and academic skills and parents with less education are more likely to be harmed by the coronavirus than students with parents with higher incomes or more education. After COVID-19 hit the world in late 2019, schools shifted from traditional to online learning. The education sector had to adapt to the major changes caused by COVID-19.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Strategies For Overcoming the Effects of Family Structure on Learners' Well-Being

COVID-19 has exacerbated the challenges learners face from unstable family structures, impacting their social, emotional, and academic well-being. This literature review explores strategies to mitigate these effects. Family and parental support are essential elements in development. According to Bidell and Deacon [14] learners who exhibit disruptive classroom behaviours frequently are removed from their classes for disciplinary referrals, resulting in detention, suspension, or expulsion. While Hammond [15] suggested family counselling should be available for all families. However, White and Kelly [16] proposed that other ways for school counsellors to create successful counselling programs

while attending to the needs of students include teacher advisory programs, tutoring help, and mentoring. Providing emotional support and counselling to families can help alleviate stress and improve relationships.

Implementing social-emotional learning support and academic guidance can help learners cope with pandemic-related challenges. According to White and Kelly [16] these programs can offer more specific services to learners at risk of dropping out while offering positive social and academic support for all learners. However, Macaraan [17] suggests that the increased awareness of the pandemic and behavioural changes in people's personal hygiene and self-care habits have assisted in preventing diseases and the spreading of germs, as well as COVID-19 regulations.

2.2. Teachers' Strategies in Teaching and Learning During COVID-19 and Unstable Family Structures

According to Kistner, et al. [18] teaching and learning strategies are important aspects of consistently promoting self-regulated learning in classrooms. This means that learning strategies are the main foundation for achieving the success of learning objectives because they can help teachers facilitate the teaching process. Teaching strategies must be adapted to existing conditions. As we know, South Africa is one of the countries that has the destructive effects of the COVID-19 virus disease, including the national learning system.

Several studies have focused on the strategies teachers applied to cope with challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Lockdown limitations were one of the key backup plans governments put in place nationwide. These limitations were implemented using risk-based, five-level strategies in the South African setting. Studies have revealed that maintaining social distance and social isolation are important strategies a person may adopt to eliminate the risk of COVID-19 [19]. Protective measures can reduce the spread of COVID-19. This is supported by Mukuna and Aloka [19] who found that appealing protective measures can significantly reduce infections. Virtual classrooms were also a strategy to deal with COVID-19 that is accessible to complement the educational experience, such as reading modules and developing extra-class activities.

The efficient integration of digital technology is crucial in making teaching and learning more meaningful and enjoyable. Technology is an alternative way to solve the problems in educational institutions conducting teaching and learning activities. It can even be assumed that teaching and learning activities depend on digital technology as the medium for delivering the materials. Even though some studies revealed that the limitation of technology becomes a burden for teaching and learning, the presence of technology can assist teachers and learners in avoiding the risk of spreading COVID-19 [20, 21]. The government established a learning platform to give teachers access to pertinent recordings and lesson videos.

Hence, Rugani and Grijalva [22] discovered that synchronous learning requires multiple tools and techniques. Teachers sometimes interact with their learners through instant messaging, a popular tool like WhatsApp, and even develop blogs or primers. According to Nsengiyumva, et al. [23] instructors scrambled to use technological and other multifaceted tools to be able to conduct their classes remotely and promote learners' engagement during a lockdown or when they faced circumstances that prevented learners from attending physical classes. Some scholars revealed that teachers rely on traditional assessments in favours of more creative ones, with quizzes and tests being the most common assessment tool. Daar, et al. [24] found that teachers asked or invited learners who do not possess learning devices, such as Android and mobile phones, to come to school to take the assignments. Moreover, learners are given some exercises to accomplish within a certain time limit. They do those activities at home under parents' supervision and guidance.

Parents are partners in education. Nsengiyumva, et al. [23] found that the best tip for school success is to ensure parents and teachers work together as allies. Similarly, in their study, Lebasté [25] reported that parents must play an active role in their children's remote learning. In other words, teachers and parents should work together to ensure that their children engage with the content, learn excellently, and receive quality education without compromising their safety. Great teachers make the parents their allies in learners learning [26]. For example, parents and teachers should be in regular touch, and teachers should advise parents about different means they can use to keep their children engaged and focused while learning from home. The UNICEF [27] found that teachers used technologies for school counselling services during the pandemic. In most public schools in South Africa, school councillors or psychologists ensure learners' well-being is good; they motivate and support learners from diverse backgrounds.

3. Objective of the Study

This study determines strategies to overcome the effects of family structure on learners' well-being during COVID-19.

4. Research Methodology

Henning, et al. [28] cited in Plessis and Mestry [29] defined methodology as a "coherent combination of approaches that complement one another and have the goodness of fit to give data and findings that reflect the research question and meet the goal". Irvine, et al. [30] cited in Plessis and Mestry [29] mentioned that methodology is a "different group of methods that complement one another and have the goodness of fit to deliver data and findings that reflect the research question and suit the purpose of the study". According to Kivunja and Kuyini [31] research methodology is a term used to refer to research design, methods, approaches, and procedures used in an investigation that is well planned to find out something. The researcher used a research method to investigate the influence of family structure on learners' well-being.

4.1. Research Paradigm

This study adopted an interpretive paradigm. This paradigm inherently reflects the researcher's beliefs about the world participants live in and want to live in Kivunja and Kuyini [31]. It seeks to comprehend the subjective world of human

experience. The researchers continue by saying the central endeavour of the interpretive paradigm is to understand the subjective world of learners' experiences. Thanh and Thanh [32] highlighted that a research paradigm comprises three elements: a belief about the nature of knowledge, a methodology, and criteria for validity. Creswell [33] indicates that interpretive research aims to understand complex situations and the subject of human experience. In educational research, the term paradigm describes a researcher's 'worldview' [31]. Furthermore, the worldview is the perspective, thinking, school of thought, or shared beliefs that inform the meaning or interpretation of research data. The interpretive paradigm usually seeks to understand a particular context, and the core belief of the interpretive paradigm is that reality is socially constructed [32].

In the interpretive paradigm, the researcher interprets and observes the events and provides an understanding of the social world in its natural state. The interpretive paradigm guided the researcher to explore or observe teachers and learners' during the teaching and learning process in a classroom environment because of getting a rich and detailed understanding of the learners' reality. The researcher intended to better understand learners' well-being from various family structures through the data collection method. Hence, the researcher tried to conduct the interviews and observations in learners' and teachers' natural environments without being invasive. Therefore, by engaging in an interaction between teachers and learners based on their well-being, the researcher acquired socially constructed meanings as the participants were placed in their social contexts. To explore the participants' understandings, an interpretive methodology provides a context that allows the researcher to examine what the participants in the study have to say about their experiences [32].

4.2. Research Approach

4.2.1. Qualitative Approach

Du Plessis [34] state that qualitative research aims to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, or the perspectives and worldviews of the people involved. Qualitative research is multi-method in focus, involving an interpretative, naturalistic approach to its subject matter [35]. This implies that qualitative researchers study teachers and learners in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena regarding the meaning participants bring [36]. According to Flick [37] qualitative research is "engaged in analysing subjective meaning or the wider implications of issues, events, or practices through the collection of non-standardised data and the analysis of texts and images rather than numbers and statistics."

Hence, the role of the researcher in qualitative research is to attempt to access the thoughts and feelings of study participants. The qualitative approach helped the researcher understand the social context in which learners live and why they are experiencing challenges. In this study, the researcher chose to understand the world of learners from various family structures by interpreting various comments and experiences conveyed by participants. Qualitative research helped the researcher construct meaning regarding learners' experiences influenced by family structures in rural schools. Therefore, the study was embedded in the notion that family structures influence learners' well-being in a rural school, which would suit the investigation.

Furthermore, qualitative research reveals the nature of certain situations, settings, processes, relations, systems, or people. It allowed the researcher to gain insights about a particular phenomenon, develop new concepts, and discover its problems. In this study, the researcher observed and interviewed teachers and learners in their settings, which enabled the researcher to gain more insight into learners' well-being.

4.3. Research Design

4.3.1. Multiple Case Study Design

"Research design reflects a researcher's ideas" Aspers and Corte [36]. Aspers and Corte [36] describes research design as a plan, structure, and investigation strategy adopted to obtain answers to research questions with optimal control of variables. This study employed a multiple case study design. Hof [38] states that a multiple case study design examines more than one case and aims to find the common themes and patterns between the cases. Furthermore, multiple case studies can augment contrasting results for expected reasons or augment comparable results [38]. The researcher uses multiple case study designs to understand the similarities and differences between the cases of learners from various family structures. In this study, the researcher was interested in understanding the influence of family structure's influence on learners' well-being. By selecting a multiple case study strategy, the researcher could analyse distinctive, individual company cases in detail regarding how family structure influences learners' well-being. The multiple case study method was chosen as it facilitates the comparison of different data sets and focuses on contextual conditions pertinent to pursuing the research questions Wilcox, et al. [39]. Vohra [40] emphasized that multiple cases strengthen the results by replicating the patterns, thereby increasing the robustness of the findings. The researcher aimed to use a multiple case study design to get accurate data. The findings were accurate since the researcher repeated the same study with different participants. Research design determines the kind of analysis that is to be done to get the desired results. In this study, the research design articulates the required data and the methods used to collect and analyse the data. This study employs a multiple-case study design.

4.4. Data Collection Methods

Due to this study's nature, a qualitative data collection approach was chosen. Pholotho and Mtsweni [41] highlight that qualitative research relies mostly on non-numeric data, such as interviews and observations. This study used a triangulation. Fusch and Ness [42] noted that "triangulation involves the employment of multiple external methods to collect data as well as the analysis of the data". Vohra [40] states that triangulation involves combining data sources to study the same social phenomenon. In this study, triangulation is how the researcher explores different perspectives of the

same study. Methodological triangulation ensures that the researcher gets data that is rich in depth. The researcher collected data during normal school and weekend hours [43].

This study collected data to understand teachers' and learners' situations better. The researcher employs two methods of data collection in the study. Hence, methodological triangulation was used to compare the data from the two data collection methods: observation and semi-structured interviews. The motivation for choosing the methods and how the researcher used the methods are discussed below. When collecting data, the researcher was accompanied by a school psychologist to guide the learners' well-being.

4.5. Observations

Observations are central tools to an in-depth understanding of the natural unfolding of the phenomenon under investigation. This technique is beneficial because it helps obtain a close and intimate familiarity with selected individuals and their practices through an intensive involvement with people in their environment, usually over an extended period [44]. The researchers conducted classroom observations and selected high school teachers who volunteered to participate in the study. They observed how participants carried their teaching and learning in the classrooms daily in grades nine, ten, and eleven, respectively. The researchers observed during the Life Orientation subject, the Physical Education task, and creative arts in drama sessions. Researchers observed repeatedly to identify consistency in the teaching process and to understand classroom management, discipline, learners' interaction in the learning process, and teachers' interactions with learners. Researchers observed the learners' interactions with their classmates in classrooms.

The researcher further observed the class attendance register, both formal and informal exercise books, test, and examination scripts, and how teachers assist those learners who are lacking due to challenges they experience at home. The researcher also observed learning materials and uniforms for learners. Furthermore, the marks on the record sheets were reviewed to determine the learners' performance. Observation was one of the researchers' tools because the researcher wanted to gather data from the natural setting, the school environment, and the classrooms. The observation was effective since the researcher, as the observer, noticed relevant things within the school environment that the participants may be taking for granted. The observation allowed the researcher to look at what is happening in the situation rather than relying on second-hand information. The researcher used an observation guide to observe learners.

4.6. Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were adopted as a data-collecting tool because it was necessary to structure the participants' responses to gain information on the required area [44]. semi-structured interview, the interviewer prepares a list of subjects to address and questions to ask the participants [38]. Semi-structured interviews are most like a natural conversation that one would have with another individual. According to Moser and Korstjens [44] Interviews are a data collection method in which an interviewer asks the respondents face-to-face, telephone, or online. The interview questions for this study ensured that each participant was asked the same set of questions. This allowed the researcher to build a conversation with each participant. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted through telephonic conversations and face-to-face interviews, where they were recorded with participants' permission to understand participants' perceptions better.

Interview questions were asked, and teachers and learners were allowed to express their perspectives. The essence of the semi-structured interview was to understand better how family structure influences learners' well-being in rural schools during COVID-19. For this study, the researcher conducted the interviews in a mutually agreed upon location and accepted to 20-30 minutes of the participant's time to conduct the interview. The purpose of interviewing was to uncover what could not be found from observations and to understand the participant's perspective [38]. Four high school teachers and four learners participated in the semi-structured interview processes. A follow-up interview was also conducted for the researcher to gather more information and persuade participants to clarify what was being observed.

Regarding the clarity of questions, the researcher rephrased the questions; similarly, the participants were asked to elaborate on clear answers. Interviews were done during lunchtime, after school, and on weekends. The semi-structured interviews involved interaction between the researcher and the respondents, which must be documented. The interviews were tape-recorded in this study, and the researcher took notes simultaneously. The major aim of qualitative interviews was to see the world through the eyes of the participants. This helped the researcher better understand the teachers' and learners' experiences, feelings, and perspectives.

4.7. Participants

This study used non-probability sampling, often associated with multiple case studies and qualitative research designs. Regarding the latter, multiple case studies tend to focus on small samples. They are intended to examine a real-life phenomenon, not to make statistical inferences about the wider population [32]. According to Ahmed, et al. [45] sampling is the "subset of the population representing the whole group, used for making inferences about population characteristics or generalising to the existing population. Mills [46] defined sampling as a group of smaller people selected from a population for investigational purposes. This study's sample size was a subset of eight participants, including two female high school learners and two male high school learners from grades nine, ten, and eleven. Four high school teachers with three years or more of teaching experience in the senior and FET phases. The choice of gender was to emphasise gender equity, and the choice of experienced teachers was to get participants who have knowledge of learners' backgrounds or have been with learners longer. Participants were selected through purposive and convenience sampling.

4.8. Research Setting

The study occurred in two high schools in a deep rural area of Bergville within the uThukela district, KwaZulu-Natal province, South Africa. This rural area is approximately fifty km from Bergville town. All participants were Black and were Zulu people. Researchers gained greater access to potential participants based on their familiarity and accessibility with the region. The community was ruled by royalty and was surrounded by threes. The first school has a principal, ten teachers, cleaners, and security guards. The overall number of learners was approximately three hundred. In grades eight and nine, three learners were seated per desk. Learners travelled on foot, and teachers mostly used public transport to school because the conditions of the roads were impractical for their cars. Teachers used mobile phones in classrooms as an additional teaching and learning delivery mode since the building was not enough to cater to all learners. At the other school, some learners travelled to school by scholar transport while others were pedestrians. The school building blocks could accommodate the classrooms and administrative offices. Fifteen staff members were employed, including the principal and teachers. Four hundred and fifty learners were enrolled in this school.

4.9. Data Analysis

4.9.1. Narrative Analysis

According to Davidson [47] data analysis is a system of making sense of data regarding the participants' definitions of the situation. This study employed a narrative analysis to analyse the collected data. Narrative research is a type of qualitative method that is understood from spoken or written texts describing accounts of events that are chronologically connected [48]. Narrative inquiry emphasises relational engagement between the researcher and participant by co-creating participants' experiences. Co-creating stories with study participants allows the researcher to live alongside the participants and listen to their stories. Merriam and Tisdell [49] state that stories define the lives of the individual and narrate his or her lived experiences.

Two sources of data collection were identified as the most common methods used in the narrative process for this study, namely semi-structured interviews and observation, which are referred to as primary sources of data [48]. The interviews were tape-recorded for this study, and the researcher took notes simultaneously. After the interviews, the researcher reviewed the tape and notes and wrote down direct quotes that were found to be relevant. Researchers also wrote notes based on the events during the observation and narrated stories based on the teachers' responses. Narrative analysis was useful because it allowed the participants to tell a coherent and realistic story about their lives [49]. semi-structured interviews were transcribed naturally, including all verbal cues (e.g., smiles, nods), extraneous words, and utterances (e.g., hms). The transcripts were then carefully checked against the audio recordings to ensure accurate accounts were obtained. This practice also allowed for active reflection on the interviews by identifying the participants' mood, tone, and overall conversation. This is an essential process for researchers to engage in as it allows for greater familiarity with data [47]. In this study, credibility was established by referential and interpretive adequacy.

Researchers portrayed a true reflection of the phenomenon to develop the credibility of the findings. It is essential to note that the data obtained were manually recorded from audiotapes to record the interview verbatim, meaning the transcripts were more accurate because researchers wrote notes during the interviews and observations. The data from participants, namely teachers and learners, were used in the study to understand strategies for overcoming teachers' challenges related to the effects of family structures. Transferability refers to the degree to which the findings can be applied to other settings or groups in the population [50]. Establishing transferability was attained through purposive and convenience sampling of appropriate participants and a detailed description of the methodology used in the study. Triangulation was used to ensure trustworthiness, reduce the effect of investigator bias, and demonstrate that their data are accurate and appropriate.

4.10. Ethical Considerations

This study considers all the ethical issues that might emerge when dealing with human participants. The researcher was actively involved with the participants during the interviews and observation. Researchers obtained ethical clearance from the University of the Free State ethics committee to conduct this study. They obtained written approval from the Head of the Department of Education in the Kwa-Zulu-Natal province and the Regional Director to conduct this research to access schools as a legal exercise. Schools' principals granted permission to access the school premises and contact teachers participating in this study. Once teachers and learners agreed to participate, the date and times were settled for when the field observations and interviews could be performed. The participants completed and signed the consent forms, which outlined the purpose of this study. Researchers ensured that no participants' information records could be accessed by a third party for whatever purpose. The participants' and schools' information remained anonymous, and pseudonyms were assigned to each participant to protect their confidentiality per ethical clearance conditions. This was exclusively for academic purposes, and their participation was voluntary. No risks could physically or psychologically damage their involvement in the study.

5. Results

5.1. Strategies For Overcoming the Effects of Unstable Family Structures on Learners' Well-Being In COVID-19

This study showed that counselling programmes, extra lessons, and tutorials could be strategies to overcome the effects of unstable family structure on learners' well-being during COVID-19.

5.2. Counselling Programmes

The findings demonstrated that providing counselling programmes could be a strategy to overcome the effects of unstable family structures on learners' well-being during COVID-19. They mentioned that qualified professional counsellors could meet with learners, parents, and family members to discuss concerns. Psychological and social services are essential for learners to understand the problems in their family structures and how to help them. Three participants' abstracts illustrated these.

"I think the strategy I can use is to provide learners access to counselling, psychological, and social services. Also, it is to get involved in the health decisions at school and ask parents to be involved in the parental organisation. I can also take time to talk to my learners and be an active listener" (Teacher A).

"I think to get counselling sessions for both learners and their families because of other parents' divorce, which may lead to bad behaviours for learners, and others lost their loved ones during COVID-19" (Teacher B).

"In our school, there is an educational psychologist who deals with learners' issues, and teachers have WhatsApp groups to communicate with learners and give clarification on homework, and I advise them about their home situation" (Teacher D).

This could indicate that counselling programmes are vital to help teachers and learners who live in unstable family structures and struggle to overcome their lives. Learners are getting emotional and mental help to deal with the challenges they face at home. Professional counsellors improve learners' well-being by motivating, encouraging, and supporting them.

5.3. Extra Lessons

The findings revealed that monitoring extra lessons could be a strategy to overcome the effects of unstable family structures on learners' well-being during COVID-19. They stated that the extra classes during the weekend might ensure learners fully understood the content to pass end-of-year examinations. Teaching and learning activities outside of the normal school timetable could attempt to cover the formal school curriculum.

"I am doing extra lessons with my learners in the morning and on weekends because the time is not enough due to the rotation classes, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I had to ensure learners fully understood the content to pass end-of-year examinations" (Teacher B).

"I think class teachers should appoint those few individuals who monitor the implementation of extra classes in our school" (Teacher D).

The extra lessons are essential in improving learners' well-being as they assist those learners who did not understand the content in class. By offering extra lessons, learners understand the content better and achieve good grades at school.

5.4. Tutorial Classes

A tutorial is a lesson delivered to one or a small group of learners. Usually, it aids slow learners or those who fall behind. In a sense, parents are responsible for their expenses. One teacher declares this.

"Other learners in my class join tutorial sessions, and their parents paid them. It helped them a lot because some struggled academically" (Teacher B).

Tutorial classes improve learners' well-being by clarifying the concepts or information learned in class that they did not understand. It is helpful because learners are taught by someone who uses different learning styles and approaches. Tutorials are essential to learning as tutors use various techniques to encourage learners to participate in the activities and discussions.

5.5. Observations

In this study, the researcher visited two schools in a rural area, under the uThukela district, to observe inside and outside classrooms. The purpose of the observation is that the researcher wanted to gain insights into the influence of unstable family structures on learners' well-being in rural schools during COVID-19. The researcher observed what was happening inside and outside the classroom through this method. In both schools, the researcher observed four selected participants in certain. As a non-participant observer, the researcher had a chance to observe the interactions in the classroom freely without influencing them. The researcher planned what would be observed (Checklist) and had a clear purpose for the observations.

When the researcher perused documents like the class register, it revealed that some learners had lost both parents, some were abandoned and were left to the care of their grandmothers, and they did not even know their parents. Grandmothers are incredibly old, and some of them have died. Some live with one parent, and others are away because of work. Moreover, the researcher viewed the mark sheets to check the children's academic performance from different family structures. The checklist for observation had nine learners' characteristics relevant to the study. The criteria follow the researchers' expectations based on what is being observed.

5.6. Progressed Analysis of Learners' Academic Performance.

The findings revealed that the progressed analysis of learners' academic performance could be a strategy for overcoming the effects of unstable family structures on the learners' well-being during COVID-19. The results indicated that asking class managers for March 2024 result analysis was essential to know whether the learners' academic performance was outstanding, good, moderate, or poor. Achieved means that the learner got minimum pass requirements, and not achieved means the learner did not do well in the examination. Academic performance refers to how well learners

do in their educational pursuits. It is primarily measured through grades, test scores, and overall comprehension of academic material.

Table 1.

Progressed analysis of learners' academic performance (March 2024)

Name of participant	Grade	Year	IsiZulu (HL)	English (FAL)	Mathematics	Mathematical literacy	Life orientation	Economic and management science	Creative arts	Social science	Technology	Natural science	Business studies	Life science	Agricultural science	Physical science	Results
Learner 1	11	2024	62	58		47	80						61	52	38		Good
Learner 2	09	2024	55	48	44		64	38	74	51	44	49					Good
Learner 3	10	2024	38	41	32		56							32	29	27	Poor
Learner 4	09	2024	58	50	34		69	32	66	48	40	51					Good

Table 1 shows the progressed analysis of learners' academic performance at schools. The results symbolised satisfactory performance, which means learners who have passed the minimum requirements. Deficient performance means the learners are not doing well at school and failed to meet the pass requirements. They might fail the examination for a particular term.

5.7. Learners' Exercise Books

The findings suggested that inspecting learners' exercise books, classwork, and homework could be a strategy to overcome the effects of unstable family structures on the learners' well-being during COVID-19. This study suggested that observing learners' exercises for subjects such as mathematics, physical sciences, life sciences, social science, and IsiZulu might assist in knowing their family structures and to see if they completed their classwork and homework. Classwork is the part of a learners' work done in class to assess if a learner understands the lesson learned, and homework is the part of a learners' work done at home to assess if a learner understands the lesson.

The finding indicated that Learner 1 was observed in IsiZulu and Physical sciences, and this learner does her schoolwork because classwork and homework were completed, corrections were made, and notes were written. Learner 2 does schoolwork, but there were incomplete activities and homework, and in his English and EMS exercise books, there were few teachers' signatures. Learner 3 has incomplete activities for Life Sciences and IsiZulu and incomplete notes. This learner does not always correct activities; the teacher never marked his exercise book. Learner 4 exercise books have incomplete notes for social sciences and EMS, but activities were there, and there were corrections.

5.8. Learners' Class Attendance Records

The findings suggested that the learners' class attendance records could be a strategy for overcoming the effects of unstable family structures on their well-being during COVID-19. The findings indicated that the researcher asked for learners' class attendance register from managers to check which learners attend the class and help teachers maintain the record of learners absent, present, and on leave.

Table 2. Learners' class attendance record (for 2024: Term 1).

Name of the participants	Grade	Total number of term 1(2024) school days	Total number of days present	Total number of days absent
Learner 1	11	46	40	4
Learner 2	09	46	38	8
Learner 3	10	46	32	14
Learner 4	09	46	40	4

The table showed the number of school days in 2024 (term 1) and identified the number of days these learners were absent at school versus several days they were present. The names of participants categorise into the table, the grades they attend, the total number of school days, the number of days these learners were present at school, and the number of days they were absent from school. These could clarify and differentiate the learners' school attendance from family structures such as nuclear, grand-parent, and single-parent.

5.9. Answering an Oral Question

The findings suggested that the learners' answering oral questions could be a strategy for overcoming the effects of unstable family structures on their well-being during COVID-19. This study observed learners during Life Sciences,

IsiZulu, Life Orientation, and Mathematics sessions. Participating involves engaging with the material rather than passively listening to a teacher. It is a way of class discussion whereby learners interact with each other. It also shows if a learner understood the lesson.

The findings reported that Learner 1 was an active learner in class, and she participated well during the isiZulu lesson, where the teacher asked about the drama they learned. Learner 2 was observed during a life science session where the teacher revised a topic. The learner participated poorly, did not answer the teacher's questions, and was quiet in class. Learner 3 was observed during a life orientation lesson where learners were required to answer a case study. This learner did not answer any of the questions, even those at the level 1 cognitive level, and this learner was poor in participation. Learner 4 was observed during the mathematics session, where learners had to make corrections on the board. Learner 4 was one of those learners who made corrections and presented them in class; in other words, this learner participated well in class.

5.10. Learners' Interactions with Their Peers

The findings revealed that the learners' interactions with their peers could be a strategy for overcoming the effects of unstable family structures on their well-being during COVID-19. These findings indicated whether learners could play or interact with each other during creative arts, drama sessions, life orientation, and PET sessions. They mentioned that interacting and engaging with peers in activities helps learners for enjoyment and recreation rather than for serious or practical purposes. These could show the individual's personality.

The findings demonstrated that Learner 1 had a good relationship with her classmates because she could play well with them during Life orientation (PET). She was friendly towards her classmates. Learner 2 was part of the PET activity, and he was an average learner, even though he was shy because he was not playing with everyone. He chose certain individuals to interact with. Learner 3 tended to isolate himself. He looked tired. Learner 4 had a little violence during a performance during the Dramatic session. He was an average learner.

5.11. Sharing Learning Material with Peers

The findings found that the learners' sharing learning materials with their peers could be a strategy for overcoming the effects of unstable family structures on their well-being during COVID-19. The researcher observed whether learners can share learning material during Creative Arts, English, and Geography subjects, where learners must share learning material because it is insufficient. Learners usually share textbooks in pairs. Learning material means everything a teacher can use to facilitate learning for their learners. It can be textbooks, calculators, instruments, etc.

The findings indicated that Learner 1 was observed during the English session, and she could share material because it was her turn to carry the textbook, and they had it in class. Learner 2 was observed during the life orientation session, and they did not have a textbook because the learner had left it at home. Learner 3 had no English textbooks in front of them, meaning the learner could not share material. Learner 4 was observed during the mathematics session, and he could share material because they divided the weeks of the textbooks with his partner.

5.12. Learners' School Uniforms

The findings demonstrated that observing the learners' school uniforms could overcome the effects of unstable family structures on their well-being during COVID-19. The observations' findings reported whether learners had full school uniforms or not. Both schools have summer and winter uniforms. Learners were observed in autumn on different weather days. Girls wear skirts, shirts, short socks, and hats in summer. The boys wear trousers, shirts, and hats. In winter, every learner is expected to wear tracksuits and blazers. A school uniform is the clothing that learners must wear at school. Every school has its uniform that is different from the other.

The findings highlighted that Learner 1 was observed on a sweltering day, wearing a full school summer uniform. This learner does have a full school uniform. Learner 2 was observed on a freezing day wearing a summer uniform, which means the learners do not have a full school uniform. Learner 3 was observed on a freezing day wearing summer clothes with no jersey; instead, he wore a short-sleeved shirt with a bright long-sleeved sleeve, which is against school uniform policy. This learner does not have a full school uniform. Learner 4 was observed wearing a summer uniform and a jersey on a sweltering day. This learner does have a full school uniform.

5.13. Learners' Behaviours

The findings showed that observing learners' behaviours could overcome the effects of unstable family structures on their well-being during COVID-19. This study observed learners' behaviours during Life Orientation PET and Creative Arts Drama. Behaviour is how someone conducts themselves and how something functions or operates.

The finding illustrated that Learner 1 was hyper and active; her behaviour was good in class, but she was an attention seeker as she was always speaking in class, and her behaviours did not harm anyone. Learner 2 was not behaving well because he was going up and down and was noisy. Learner 3 also behaved poorly because he shouted and argued with his deskmate. This learner showed no respect because there was a teacher in class. Learner 4 was an aggressive learner towards his classmates.

5.14. Learners' Concentration In Class

The findings revealed that the learners' concentration in class could be a strategy for overcoming the effects of unstable family structures on their well-being during COVID-19. This study observed learners' concentration during

Business Studies, English, and Mathematics lessons. Concentration is to direct your effort toward a particular activity, subject, or problem. It is to focus one's attention on a particular object.

The findings suggested that Learner 1 concentrates in class because she engages in activities done in class and answers questions from the teacher very well. Learner 2 sat next to the window and always looked outside during the lesson; this learner lacked concentration. Learner 3 was not concentrating because he answered questions that were not relevant to the content. Learner 4 was concentrating because she asked for clarity regarding the topic introduced to them.

6. Discussion

The study's main objective was to understand the strategies that could be used to overcome the effects of unstable family structure on learners' well-being during COVID-19. Family structure consisted of family types such as biological parent, single parent (mother or father only family), grandparent family, and child-headed family. This study's results are the same as those of other studies. Online learning was one of the main backup plans to escape COVID-19, despite some studies showing that the technological limitation during online learning becomes a burden for teachers and learners. The current findings show that teachers used a variety of strategies to overcome the effects of family structure on learners' well-being during COVID-19. These strategies included counselling programmes, extra lessons, and tutorials. There are direct-action strategies that attempt to eliminate the source of stress. These strategies may include seeking assistance from social workers, obtaining information from friends, accessing professional development opportunities, connecting with others, reflecting, and reframing [51].

Giving learners academic support has become more critical in complying with the syllabus. According to the findings of this study, most learners participated in tutorial sessions. They preferred that the tutor actively engage, observe, assist, and discuss learning instead of just passing along the knowledge to help learners develop their analytical and critical thinking skills and learn more. The findings of this study are consistent with those of Ogina and Mampane [52] who investigated the experiences of tutorial sessions as a source of learning help. According to the most recent research, learners saw tutorials as an advantageous support system that allowed them to interact with other learners and gain a deeper understanding of the course material. According to Hlatshwayo [53] the tutorial model is viewed as a means of assisting learners, particularly those ill-prepared for academic problems. According to Singh [54] tutorial sessions serve as learner support systems where learners interact with the instructor, facilitator, and course content.

7. Conclusion

This study aimed to determine the strategies that could be used to overcome the effects of unstable family structures on learners' well-being during COVID-19. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for targeted support strategies to address learners' unique challenges from unstable family structures. The study has explored various strategies to overcome the effects of unstable family structure on learner's well-being during the pandemic. Based on the findings of this study, the researcher made some conclusions. It was concluded that there are different family structures in all schools under this study. This includes nuclear, child-headed, single-parent, and grandparent families. It was concluded that counselling programmes by psychologists and school counselors are important for learners to deal with the problems they face in their home environment. Extra lessons, such as morning and afternoon classes or weekends, help learners fully understand the content. Tutorial lessons are also helpful as learners are taught by someone who uses different learning styles and approaches. Educators and policymakers should prioritize learner well-being and provide full support to promote social-emotional learning and mental health. This study should develop and evaluate interventions that target specific challenges faced by learners from unstable family structures.

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