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Cases of Principal Leadership Responses in a Volatile, Uncertain and Complex School Environment

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Abstract

The findings of a small-scale qualitative study of school leadership responses to the volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) school environment performed among secondary schools in the Mpumalanga Circuit are presented in this paper. The article looks at how principals were responding to the pandemic's disruptive effects and how they were planning to mitigate the effects on school operations. It employed qualitative, multiple case-study approaches to collect data from to secondary sample schools in Mpumalanga Circuit, using 10 principals as respondents. The findings illustrate how principals dealt with the issues posed by the implementation of the social distance and COVID-19 regulations in a VUCA-oriented school environment. Teacher leave applications contributed to the intricacy, with unexpected results such as teacher shortages and subjects not being taught. Despite these challenges, the principals were able to achieve their goals.

Keywords: volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguity, turbulent

1. Introduction

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, top management has been confronted with changes that have caused volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA) [1]. For the principals, administering the schools in the face of the coronavirus's marauding torrent has been unfathomable. Principals had to deal with systemic challenges such as deteriorating infrastructure, a lack of basic sanitation, and a politicised school atmosphere. In both primary and secondary schools, the unsustainable redesigned classroom was unable to handle the staggered phasing in of all grades. Existing discrepancies between the previous ex-model C and House of Delegates to the township and rural schools added to the woes of the ongoing contestations between the National Education Ministry policymakers and the Joint Teacher Unions, further complicating these complex difficulties. The reports from the Joint Teacher Unions were contradictory.

The responses of school principals in maintaining school functionality in a turbulent, uncertain, and complicated school environment are examined in this research. It looks at how social distancing has affected timetabling, as well as teaching and learning. It examines how each principal in their leadership has chosen the types of models to ensure that all grades are phased in at school. It demonstrates some of the difficulties that schools were confronted with, when teachers or students were infected with the coronavirus. Finally, it highlights the principals'

leadership in ensuring that, despite debilitating conditions and the possibility of the coronavirus, programs for recovering lost time were developed at school.

The following are the key research questions:

- i. How did principals handle school management and the implementation of policy directives?
- ii. How did the principals deal with the loss of control?

We feel that the information gathered while answering all of these questions will be useful in understanding how principals responded to COVID-19's disruptive effects on school operations. It is critical that, before looking for empirically generated answers to these concerns, we review what is currently known in the literature about the pandemic's overall disruptive effect on the educational system.

2. Literature on the subject

We conducted a general evaluation of the current literature on COVID-19's disruptive influence on the educational landscape. We looked at the research on the harmful consequences of lockdown policies on the educational system. These included the impact of lost teaching time on student advancement, as well as the impact of social distance measurements on learner accommodation in classrooms and teaching time. We also addressed the mitigation of lost teaching time through the use of catch-up and rehabilitation programs.

Darvasi [2] noted on the unpredictability and unusual nature of the effect of 1–1.5 m of social separation in crowded classrooms. As a result of social distancing, the available school spaces may not be able to accommodate all of the students, as was the case before COVID-19. The screening of teachers and students necessitated the implementation of isolation measures to prevent the potential of retaliation. Catch-up programs, according to Montoya [3], can help schools mitigate the loss of teaching time caused by the COVID disruptive effect. During the first and second terms, most schools did not participate in Easter vacation, winter camps, or Saturday classes as part of their catch-up and recovery programs. Professor Nicky Roberts, an education expert, proposed that the Basic Education Department look into other solutions for students who were having their academic year disrupted by the COVID-19 outbreak [4]. The gap between fee-paying and non-fee-paying students are widening, according to Roberts.

She feared that the 4-week school closure would burden the study of grade 12 students even more [4]. Mthethwa [4] discovered that some grade 12 students were highly concerned about their prospects and preparation for the upcoming National Senior Certificate in his conversation with them. The staggered phasing in was further disrupted as the Joint Teacher Unions put pressure on the Education Ministry to close schools as more evidence emerged that schools had been impacted by the quickly expanding pandemic during the peak period of June to July 2020. President Cyril Ramaphosa has stated that the second term will be adjourned from the 7th to the 12th of August. We must remember that this abrupt shutdown followed a brief period of reopening on June 8th for only grades 7 and 12 as exit classes. Due to these uncertainties and disruptions, policymakers at the National Education Ministry was faced with the difficult task of finalising the school calendar, which resulted in a great deal of academic instability.

After a protracted period of debates about the return and phasing in of the remaining grades, namely grades 1–6 and 8–11 in the primary and secondary schools, finality was reached. After a long period of debates over the return and

Term	Duration	No. of weeks	No. of school days	Actual no. of school days
1	(13) 15 Jan–18 March	10	(48) 46	(48) 46
2	(01 June) 08 June–07 August	(10) 09	(50) 45	(50) 45
3	12 August–23 September	07	31	31
4	05 October–15 December	11	52	52
Total	Duration	(38) 37	(181) 174	(181) 174

Table 1.
Amended school calendar.

phasing in of the remaining grades, grades 1–6 and 8–11 in the primary and secondary phases, respectively, finality was reached. Another factor that affected the substantial alterations to the school the calendar was the pressure from Joint Teacher Unions on the Education Minister to close schools because of an increase in infections during the peak period of July and August 2020. This led to a 2-week hiatus beginning on August 7th and ending on August 12th, when the school reopened for the third term. As a result, depending on how the school organised the phasing in of the other grades, some students were only allowed to return to school on August 12th. The final calendar, as shown in **Table 1**, was approved by all important parties. The third term begins on August 12th. As a result, depending on how the school organised the phasing in of the other grades, some students were only allowed to return to school on August 12th. The final calendar, as shown in **Table 1**, was approved by all important parties. A careful examination of the calendar reveals that the academic year has been pushed into the first 2 weeks of December, something that has never happened before. After the presidential declaration of the movement to go from Level 4 to Level 1 measures on September 19th, there was a sense of stability. Teachers who had previously sought for temporary release based on underlying comorbidities were recalled by the District Offices to resume work on September 21, 2020 [5–7].

The gap in the number of lost teaching days owing to the enforced lockdown from the 16th March to the reopening date on the 8th June 2020 is shown in **Table 1**. The dates in brackets refer to the dates on which teachers were expected to begin their tasks at school before students arrived. Due to the increased spread of the coronavirus, the modified schedule shows a reduction in the number of days available for teaching and learning in schools, particularly in term three. The worst-case scenario was that students in grades 8–11 had to make sacrifices to accommodate grade 12 trial examinations and final examinations in late September and early November, respectively, to the 15th of December. This adds to the problem by causing some schools to lose instructional time for these grades.

3. VUCA as the conceptual framework

VUCA refers to how the principals dealt with the unpredictable nature of the school environment from the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic through the end of the final exams, as a conceptual framework that underpins this article. There are several features and emphases of the VUCA world’s application that may or may not apply to this paper. However, we will only consider those factors that help to explain the quandary that our schools faced after reopening till the end of the semester. The study examines the principal’s management of the school’s operations throughout a challenging and uncertain academic year. There are different interpretations and application of the concept VUCA.

Volatility has a connotation for meaning an unstable change, where information is available and the situation is understandable, however change is characterised by being frequent and unpredictable. Uncertainty pertains to a situation where the lack of knowledge may be considered to be not showing any relation between cause and effect. What makes the situation look complex is the multiple parts that are interconnected, whereas ambiguity is the nature of doubt that comes into play in understanding whether there is a cause and effect relationships [8].

Certain groups agree that in a VUCA-oriented school climate, leadership is thrown out the window. In terms of their leadership and management of the schools, the principals were unable to cope with such a high level of unknown, unpredictable, and complex issues, which could not have been learned in any recent educational leadership textbook. The purpose of this article is to learn how these secondary school principals dealt with these problems in a tumultuous school climate. Complexity in this paper refers to the interconnectedness and interdependence of numerous components in the educational system that points to the school's functionality [1]. When it comes to intricacy, scholars must bear this in mind. Because of the non-linear interaction and interdependencies among diverse actors, as well as the complex activities and interactions at the school, the outcomes of a consciously managed settings are surprising.

4. Data presentation and methodology

The goal of the study on which this report is based was to examine how principals used their leadership skills in response to the interruptions to school operations caused by the COVID-19 outbreak. The study used a case study methodology to conduct a qualitative investigation. It incorporated both quantitative and qualitative information. The Mpumalanga Circuit Manager, who supervises the 10 secondary principals, cleared all of the initial ethical issues with the Kwazulu-Natal Department of Education, Office of the Director in Pinetown District and the Chief Education Specialist (CES) at Umhlathuzana Circuit Management Centre. Participating principals were handed questionnaires with informed consent letters from these authorities, who were asked to sign their letters of consent to participate in the study. To protect their identity, schools were given pseudonyms. All the 10 selected secondary schools are located in the Mpumalanga Township across the circuit. The Mpumalanga Circuit has 32 schools, 10 of which are secondary schools, whilst 22 are primary schools. Amongst the 10 selected there are only two female principals, whilst the rest of the eight are males. The Mpumalanga Township is located outside of the EThekweni Metro.

The enrolments from the 10 selected secondary schools range from 350 to 940 learners. Their quintiles range from 1 to 4, and six of them are no fee schools, although all are provided with the feeding scheme for learners.

Closed and semi-structured questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data, while free-form interviews were used to obtain qualitative data. During the peak of the epidemic, questionnaires were sent to 10 secondary schools in the Mpumalanga Circuit through email. When collecting a big amount of quantitative data, the respondents are advised [9]. Short face-to-face interviews with principals supplemented the semi-structured and closed questionnaires to gain clarification on how they performed trials examinations, catch-up programs, and pre-planning for the final upcoming assessments. After the pandemic's tremendous storm had passed, 10 secondary school principals participated in free attitude interviews.

As part of following the research protocols, pseudonyms were allocated to the names of the schools and principals. Attitudes that are free interviews allow people to express themselves freely. This guarantees that participants are treated with respect rather than being marginalised [10]. Audio recordings of free attitudes interviews were made and subsequently transcribed verbatim into themes. As part of the investigation, questionnaires were circulated using emails to 10 secondary schools in the Mpumalanga Circuit during the peak of the pandemic. Questionnaires are recommended for the collection of a large volume of quantitative data [9]. The semi-structured and closed questionnaires were supplemented by short face to face interviews with principals to seek clarity on how they conducted trials examination, the catch-up programmes and preplanning for the final oncoming examinations. Free attitudes interviews were conducted after the great storm of the pandemic was over with 10 secondary school principals. The pseudonyms were assigned to the names of the schools and principals as part of observing the protocols for research. Free Attitudes Interviews enable the participants to freely express themselves. This ensures that participants are respected and not undermined [10]. Free attitudes interviews were audio-recorded and then, they were transcribed verbatim into themes. We read each transcript numerous times to ensure that we were comfortable with the interview facts in general [11]. We then extracted ideas from each transcript and analysed them. Then, using descriptive codes, we came up with topics and categories [12]. We also noticed ethical principles including non-maleficence, participant autonomy as evidenced by voluntary engagement, informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity [9, 13]. The questionnaires' analysis showed several features of the schools' functionality. These were analysed, and the results are given in the following tables as part of the paper's quantitative findings. Open-ended questions were provided to clarify some of the replies from the questionnaires, and content analysis was utilised to analyse them.

These were analysed, and the results are listed in the following tables as part of the paper's quantitative findings. Open-ended questions were posed to clarify some of the responses from the questionnaires, and content analysis was used to analyse them. The scope of this paper was narrowed because school functionality is a broad aspect that contributes to a conducive environment for teaching and learning. It was limited to the reengineering of classrooms and their configurations, the implementation of COVID-19 policies, revision planning, catch-up and recovery programs, and final examination planning. We present the analyses and comparative tables based on the responses from the 10 secondary schools, and how they contribute to the functionality of the school. In the reviewed literature we investigated the disruptive effect of the COVID-19 on school functionality, teaching and learning and timetabling and the reconfigured classroom.

The pseudonyms allotted to each of the secondary schools are presented in **Table 2**. These are the pseudonyms of the 10 secondary schools in the Mpumalanga Circuit.

1	uMasingana	6	uLwezi
2	uNdasa	7	uNtulikazi
3	uMbasas	8	uNcwaba
4	uNhlaba	9	uMandulo
5	uNhlangulana	10	Zibandlela

Table 2.
Pseudonyms of schools.

5. Data presentation

The COVID-19 Committee activities, the staggered phasing period, assessment and revision plans, and catch up programs are among the issues that emerged from this research. These are deliberately recognised as significant characteristics of the school's functionality to better understand how principals coped in a highly VUCA-oriented educational environment. These features of school functionality may not be congruent with existing literature because no literature on the subject was available at the time. However, in such a chaotic school climate, school leadership and management may not contradict the construct and conceptual literature on VUCA.

5.1 Activities of the COVID-19 Committee

The number of coronavirus cases reported and the number of days lost to teaching and learning are shown in **Table 1**. The KZN Circular No 41 of 2020 has been followed by all principals whose schools were affected. The principal of Umasingana indicated that the circular had been misinterpreted in terms of its implementation, particularly the method to follow for teachers with underlying illnesses. Principals were unsure whether or not the teachers who had applied had to wait for the approval. However, due to the circuits' high level of unionism, many of the teachers who applied stayed at home without permission. The Umbasa principal described how he bargained with teachers who had underlying illnesses to attend school and teach within the periods allotted to them rather than leave the school grounds. This flexibility guaranteed that all subjects were covered and that the needs of the teachers were met.

All 10 principals reported incidents of teachers who tested positive for the coronavirus, whether it was identified during the school day or the summer vacation. In some circumstances, the circuit manager came to visit schools where positive cases had been reported solely to clarify the protocol to be followed and to de-escalate the issue. This meant that provisions had to be taken for the isolation and quarantine of those teachers and students who were infected by the coronavirus. It also meant that schools would be closed for 3 days as the classrooms were fumigated. The procurement of a service provider to fumigate Ulwezi's school has been delayed, according to the school's principal. As a result of the reported service delay, the school lost 5 days of non-teaching and learning time. The method requires that the national policy direction be followed.

It is obvious that most schools were impacted in some way by the cases of sick teachers. However, as the policy procedures became more explicit, a great deal of ambiguity was avoided. Undasa and Umbasa were forced to wait nearly 14 days before the District found a service provider to complete the fumigation at the school. Teachers were initially forced to quarantine for 14 days, however, this was eventually reduced to 10 days. Principals claimed that several teachers used their medical aids to conduct their COVID-19 assessments at the new private hospital. In this way, the private hospital's results and feedback were faster than the local health clinics'.

5.2 Untaught subjects

The principal of Umbasa stated that there was a high level of fear and worry among the workers. Due to a shortage of available counselling services within the Kwazulu-Natal Department of Education, the schools were not receiving any counselling. According to the Principal of Umasingana, four teachers were granted

exemption based on underlying sicknesses. The policy was announced in June 2020 until the announcement of the Level 3 measure in September 2020, which forced them to return to their respective schools. Furthermore, five teachers at uMasingana were admitted to the hospital, adding to the school's burden of altering the timetable and subject allocation. There were no substitute teachers assigned to fill in for these gaps in subject instruction. The principal of Umasingana stated that at a school with 32 students, Maths Lit, Maths, Religion, Business Studies, English First Additional Language (FAL), Zulu Home Language in grade 10 and English FAL in grade 11, were not taught to teacher shortages. The principal of Uncwaba claimed that there were no teachers for Life Science and Mathematical Literacy in grades 10 and 11. Considering that Zibandlela is a Small school, there were numerous issues with teacher shortages as well.

Accounting in grades 10 and 11 and physical science in years 10 and 11 were the topics that were not taught. Due to the small number of students, the school was in the process of lowering the number of topics offered.

The comparison in the number of reported cases and the effect this had on the number of school days lost is shown in **Table 3**. This added to the numerous days that had already been lost due to the Level 5 and 4 lockdowns. The COVID Committees were in charge of overseeing the daily operations at each of the 10 schools. All of the principals were in charge of fostering a positive learning environment. The level of volatility and unpredictability caused by the epidemic, on the other hand, crippled teaching and learning. The loss of 14 days in Umbasa owing to a lack of systems to obtain the services of organisations responsible for fumigation of those impacted areas schools areas is an uncommon situation worth noticing. The National COVID-19 policy guideline created a number of loopholes that contributed to school dysfunction. Another factor is the lack of coordination of services at the level of the Pinetown District in providing the required service providers to fumigate the schools.

No.	School	No. cases	No. of days lost	Intervention
1	Umasingana	1	5	Kitchen: closed for 1 week; the service provider fumigated the school premises
2	Undasa	1	14	Service provider fumigated the school after 14 days
3	Umbasa	8	3	Service provider fumigated school after 14 days lost
4	Unhlaba	1	No closure	It was still early days, as a result there were no systems and structures and policies to service providers to fumigate the school
5	Unhlangulana	1	3	Service provider fumigated the school
6	Ulwezi	4	10	Service provider conducted fumigation
7	Untulikazi	2	School vacation	Service provider conducted during school vacation
8	Uncwaba	2	10	Service provider conducted fumigation
9	Umandulo	1	4	Service provider conducted fumigation
10	Zibandlela	1	10	No fumigation was done
Total		21		

Table 3.
Reporting on cases and interventions.

5.3 Period of staggered phasing

Table 4 shows the various ways taken by the 10 schools studied to accommodate phasing in grades 8–11 when they returned to school. A closer examination of the data reveals that there were additional teaching time losses as a result of the phasing in grades 8–11, as will be seen. The incident occurred as the principals attempted to use the juggling effect to fit the remaining grades into the available classrooms. The majority of schools preferred the alternate and bi-weekly approaches, while one school employed a mixed strategy. Due to a lack of classrooms, the grades used an alternate strategy in which they alternated days in terms of class attendance. The bi-weekly model means that some of these grades would go to school for 1 week and then not return until the following week.

5.4 Assessment and revision plans

The principals reported that the abrupt closure of schools on the 16th March 2020, disturbed some of the Term 1 assessments. Normally secondary schools would conduct extra tuition for a week during the end of the first term as part of their catch up and recovery programmes. After the partial reopening on the 8th of June for grade 12, the principals managed to finalise the Term 1 assessments to have a record of the results for purposes of the Continuous Assessment programme (CASS). At the time of conducting the face to face interviews with the principals, all

No.	School	Grade and no. of days attended per week				Model explained
		11	10	9	8	
1	Umasingana	3	2	2	2	Alternate; 10 days cycle; weeks 1 and 2; grades alternate 3/2 days/week
2	Undasa	3	2	2	2	Alternate; grades 8 and 9 divided into two groups; A and B: alternate Monday (A); Tuesday (B); Wednesday (A); Thursday (B)
3	Umbasa	5	1	1	1	Biweekly; grades 8–10 were coming only 1 day/week
4	Unhlaba	2	2	1	1	Alternate days allocated to grade 11 (2 days); grade 10 (2 days); grade 9 (1 day); grade 8 (1 day)
5	Unhlangulana	2	1	1	1	Alternate; grade 11: (Monday and Wednesday); grade 10: Tuesday; grade 9: Thursday; grade 8: Friday
6	Ulwezi	5	2	2	2	Biweekly; grade 8–10; grade 11 (5 days a week)
7	Untulikazi	5	3	2	2	Biweekly: grade 10: 1st week; grade 11: 2nd week; Monday; Wednesday and Friday; grade 9: Tuesday and Thursday; grade 8: Tuesday and Thursday; 2nd week: grades alternate days
8	Uncwaba	2	1	1	1	Alternation: (Monday and Tuesday; grade 11; grade 10) Wednesday; grade 9: Thursday; grade 8: Friday
9	Umandulo	3	2	3	2	Alternate days; 10 days cycle; week 1 and 2; grades alternate 3/2 days/week
10	Zibandlela	3	3	2	2	Alternate days for attendance grade 8; 9; 10; grade 12 learners ceded to nearby secondary school due to post provisioning norm (PPN) challenges

Table 4.
Staggered phasing models.

the secondary schools had just finished the Trial Examinations for grade 12 that were held in the last 2 weeks of September. It also meant that the principals were arranging the revision plans for grade 12 learners during the 1 week vacation as part of the catch-up and recovery programme. In all the 10 secondary schools the principals and Senior Management Teams were finalising the preplanning for both the internal and external assessments. By internal assessments we mean the final examinations for grades 8–11 and by external we mean the National Senior Examinations (NSC) for grade 12.

Social distancing had a knock-on effect on the types of examinations that schools required to prepare to fit the current grade, 12 students in 2020, into the available classrooms. The 2020 NSC examinations were unique in that due to the cancellation of the June Part-time NSC tests, part-time grade 12 learners and repeaters of grade 12 had to be accommodated at these adjacent schools for their examinations. According to all 10 principals, they were obligated to provide seats for three groups of students. The present grade 12 students, part-time students, and repeaters who required to write certain topics were divided into three groups. This created a lot of difficulties when it came to interpreting the schedule. Let alone the impact it had on an already tumultuous academic year caused by social isolation. The current NSC examinations were accommodated by principals for the final NSC tests.

The disruption led to some classes closing early to make room for these final exams. The early closure for grade 8–11 students also meant they were hardly getting enough time to be taught because they were either using the alternate or bi-weekly model. Five principals reported that they were bound to start grade 8–11 internal final examinations earlier than the requirements specified in the provincial circular. In other cases, the principals adopted the platoon technique due to adequate planning, which allowed some of these students to write in the afternoon sessions or alternately in the morning when the grade 12 NSC examinations were not seated according to the timetable. As a result, final internal evaluations for grades 8–11 were held in four secondary schools from early October to late October, before the start of the NSC final examinations on November 5th.

The disruptive effect it caused meant some of the classes needed to open the space for these final examinations, and therefore early closure for the grade 8–11 learners who hardly got enough time to be taught as they were either using the alternate or bi-weekly model. In the five secondary schools, the principals were bound to start early the internal final assessments for grades 8–11. In other instances due to proper planning, the principals used the platoon method, which meant some of these learners could write in the afternoon sessions or alternately in the morning when the grade 12 NSC examinations were not seated in terms of the timetable. As a result in four of the secondary schools, the final internal assessments for grades 8–11 were conducted early in October till late October before the commencement of the NSC final examinations on the 5th of November.

All 10 principals said they were juggling a lot of things and making a lot of adaptations to fit internal and external exams into the available learning spaces. Ulwezi school grade 11 students wrote the Isizulu and English Paper 1 and 2 earlier on the 7th and 8th of October to free up classroom space. As these were regarded to be language papers, this would allow teachers to complete their marking. The principle of Umbasa had written to the circuit manager, requesting that the grade 8 and 9 students be kept at home at the end of the third term to make room for grades 10–11 internal examinations. The principal at Umbasa wanted to make sure that grade 10–12 students shared lessons for both internal and external NSC exams.

At the time of some of the interviews, all 10 secondary schools had just completed the Trial Examination at the end of September, and teachers had just begun marking to provide feedback to students at the start of the fourth term. The input

and results of the trial exams for grade 12 students helped teachers plan and prepare focused areas that would impact revision plans for the 1 week of holiday. The grade 12 revision program, which began on October 26th and ended on October 30th, was designed by all 10 principals. This included attending Saturday courses as part of the final stretch of preparation for the final examinations, which began on the 5th of November and ended on the 15th of December. After grade 12 students had completed their exams, just nine secondary schools began a 3-week revision program.

As part of the ongoing catch-up programs, the principal of Uncwaba reported that two teachers were delivering Maths and Physical Science lessons at the Provincial Ukhozi Radio program. Uncwaba’s principal was sure that the school would be able to make up for lost time and meet the goals set before the COVID-19 delays. The Undasa principal’s grade 12 review technique was to divide students into groups based on their performance to prevent a one-size-fits-all approach that failed to address the risky students. The principals of Ulwezi and Uncwaba participated in networking, team teaching, and exchange programs to capitalise on the talents of the teachers, particularly in Math and Physical Science, respectively.

5.5 Programs for a catch-up and recovery

The principals only conducted the catch-up program as a final push before the final NSC examinations at nine schools. Because Zibandlela School did not have enough teachers for the other subjects, the grade 12 students were sent to Unhlaba School. The Mpumalanga Circuit’s only rescue strategy was to keep the school open and avoid more problems with children who were unable to find teachers due to the PPN (Table 5).

No	School	Saturday classes	Revision plans (3 weeks)	Spring school (1 week)
1	Umasingana	Yes	Yes	Yes
2	Undasa	Yes	Yes	Yes
3	Umbasa	Yes	Yes	Yes
4	Unhlaba	Yes	Yes	Yes
5	Unhlangulana	Yes	Yes	Yes
6	Ulwezi	Yes	Yes	Yes
7	Untulikazi	Yes	Yes	Yes
8	Uncwaba	Yes	Yes	Yes
9	Umandulo	Yes	Yes	Yes
10	Zibandlela	No	No	No

Table 5.
School catch up programmes.

6. Findings

The conclusions touch on a variety of topics related to the school’s operation. We have condensed these for this study to concentrate on the most important points. The findings suggest to early confusion in the system and structures that administrators had set up to apply the defined policies and procedures, particularly when there were reports of both teachers and students being infected with the coronavirus. The COVID Committees did their screening and cleaning tasks at all 10 schools,

reporting any irregularities to the administrators. As the system and structures became more stable, the principals followed the procedures and reported to the circuit managers, which enhanced alignment with the local health clinics. Principals were pressured by the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU) to close schools at the height of the pandemic to put pressure on the National and Provincial governments [14].

Second, due to the early closure of schools from August 7 to 12, the staggered phasing-in method for grades 8–11 was delayed and disrupted. It was more of a case where we decided that a slice of bread was preferable to not having even half a loaf. To accommodate the phased grades 8–11, Principals and SMTs had to juggle subject allocation and change the timetables.

Finally, studies show that principals' troubles were exacerbated by their preparation for the trial and the final NSC examinations. Due to the need to prepare for trials and NSC exams, principals prioritised grade 12 students. For grades 8–11, the unanticipated consequences meant more missed time for teaching and learning. The administrators were optimistic that the grade 12 students would meet their goals, given the effectiveness of the catch-up programs, notwithstanding some concerns.

Finally, the catch-up programs that were scheduled once the school reopened benefited only grade 12 students. These catch-up programs aided grade 12 students in their preparation for the Trial exams. The catch-up programs also helped students feel more secure about sitting for final exams, which began on November 5th and ended on December 15th. The principals were successful in guiding the schools through both internal and external assessments, but with significant compromises in teaching and learning for students in grades 8–11.

7. Conclusions

We can make conclusions from the above discussion. In terms of lost interaction time between teachers and learners, the staggered phasing-in method had a negative impact. However, proclaiming that grade 8–11 students would be required to stay at home until the next year became the worst-case scenario.

Second, because neither the biweekly nor the alternate day's models were imposed on the teachers, they were accepted. The principals and staff made decisions based on what was appropriate and practical in their situation.

Third, we may deduce that some of the disciplines that were not taught will negatively affect those learners in terms of content and skills as they go through the grades and even to the level of tertiary education entrance due to a lack of specialism in specific areas. We can say that there will be students who are taken into consideration.

Fifth, it is understandable that some of the lost teaching time could have been prevented if our schools did not have such a strong union culture. On the other hand, if active unionism had not existed, school instructors and students would have been forced to work in surroundings that would have become epicentres for the coronavirus pandemic. The school-level reactions to the pandemic have educated and prepared principals for the delayed opening of schools in February 2021, yet the most concerning element was the amount of casualties caused owing to the new form of the virus.

We feel this study is unable to make any claims, but it does have the potential to do so. We feel that while this study cannot make any claims, it can add to the expanding body of knowledge that informs school administrators, policymakers, researchers, and teachers about how to plan for the coming academic year. Finally, the study may inform stakeholders about the pandemic's approaching effects and

the necessity for collaboration among people interested in education. The findings may contribute to filling some of the identified gaps in the literature study in terms of the primary leadership in handling pandemic concerns, therefore allowing for the implementation of VUCA studies.

A. Annexure No. 1

The Principal

_____ School

Dr. BS Mchunu: Topic: Cases of principal leadership responses in a volatile, uncertain and complex school environment

Dr. BS Mchunu: is conducting a study on the experiences of Principals in managing teaching and learning in the midst of COVID-19 Pandemic. The study explores the experiences of principals in implementing DBE COVID Sector Plan and other KZN Circulars No 44 and 57 as a policy guideline to manage teaching and learning in the face of the challenges posed by the corona virus. We hereby request your experiences in implementing such and to understand the challenging situation on ground. The name of the Principal and School will not be used, rather a pseudonym (anonymous name) will be allocated. Responses are strictly confidential and anonymous. There is no right or wrong answer. The researcher will give an opportunity to the respondents to check the responses before publication.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Yours in education

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Kindly fill the questionnaire and survey by opening this site attached:

This questionnaire is examining the experiences of Principals in responding to the volatile, uncertain and complex school environment caused by the disruptive effect of the pandemic at Mpumalanga Circuit.

NB: Questionnaire to the principals

1. Indicate below the number following information as part of the school profile

Learners acc. grades	Grade R	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total
No of learners									
Estimate the average prior to COVID									
Estimate the average with COVID (social distancing)									
Estimate the average prior to COVID									
Estimate the average with COVID (social distance)									

2. Indicate the number of classrooms (teaching space available) for conducting teaching and learning prior to social distancing and during the observation of social distancing.

No. classrooms	Grade 8	9	10	11	12	Total
(Prior to COVID)						
Social distance						

3. Indicate the number of shortages of classrooms (teaching space) in keeping with social distancing

No. classrooms	Grade 8	9	10	11	12	Total
No. required for social distance						
Shortage due to social distance						

4. Indicate which one of these steps has been taken by the school in managing the social distancing in classrooms after the Phasing in of the other grades at school (indicate against applicable model X)

Methods applicable	Comment and explain in details how it works
a Bi weekly approach (1 week attendance rotation of grades)	
b Alternate day approach (some grades attending on some days)	
c Platoon model (some learners attending in morning others in afternoon)	
d Maintenance of the status quo (small schools attending normally)	
e Combination of two of the above	
Explain the option you have chosen/how is working.	

5. Explain the model the school is using to give more clarity on how it is working at school.

6. Indicate the number of subjects in terms of grades that are not taught due to teacher shortages.

Grade	8	9	10	11	12
Subject names not taught due to teacher shortages					

7.1 Indicate the number of support staff that was allocated and that is available to ensure Implementation of the DBE Sector COVID-19 Plan.

• Screening of learners
• Screening of teachers

• Screening of learners
• Sanitisation of learners at entry points
• Cleaning and sanitisation of classrooms
• Handling of food by kitchen handlers

7.2 Provide the details below:

Comment in details
7.3 Do you have an isolation room: Yes/No
7.4 What is the school using as an isolation room?
7.5 Have you ever used for isolation purposes? YES/No
7.6 What is inside the isolation room?

8. Explain some of the actions that were taken based on the following:
8.1 Explain how did you report the cases of affected teachers/learners?
8.2 How did you notify the Circuit Manager when cases of affected teachers/learners were identified?
8.3 How did you notify the local clinic whenever there identified cases?
8.4 What was the procedure for the closing of the schools?
8.5 How long did it take to get the school fumigated?

9.1 Indicate the number of teaching staff on the basis of the following factors below.

Post provisioning norm (PPN) allocation	No. of teachers present	No. of teachers applied for risk management due to underlying comorbidities	No. teachers on sick leave	No. teachers on quarantine
9.2 Explain the effect of the teacher applications for leave on subject teaching				
Subjects not taught	Grade 10	11	12	

10. Indicate how you have taken any action in terms of the following procedures as part of the protocols in Circulars 44 and 57 respectively for implementation at school.

(Yes/No)

Provisions and procedures in circulars	Yes/ No	Clarify how action was taken
1. To isolate a learner with symptomatic signs high temperature, cough, etc.		
2. Isolate a teachers with symptomatic high temperature, cough, etc.		

Provisions and procedures in circulars		Yes/ No	Clarify how action was taken	
3. Notify Local Health Department of identified positive case(s)				
4. Notify district/circuit manager of your intended action				
5. Forced school closure				
6. Decontamination of the school after closure				

11. Indicate the number in terms of the following factors below since the schools reopened.

No. of reported cases of learners	No. of reported cases of teachers	No. of days school closed	No. of teachers in quarantine	Subjects affected whilst teacher/s on quarantine of teachers

12. Indicate how the prevalence of factors that informed the School Recovery Plan/Curriculum Catch Up programmes prior to COVID-19 and after COVID-19.

	Prior to COVID Yes/No	COVID period Yes/No	Comment how is worked/how long
s1	Grade 12 morning classes		
2	Grade 12 afternoon tutorials		
3	Saturday classes		
4	Sunday classes		
5	Evening classes/study		

13. Indicate the level of support for a Curriculum Catch Up programmes amongst teachers for the following during this COVID-19 period.

Very High (10); High (8); Moderate (6); Low (4); Very Low (2)

Changing of timetables adjustment of examinations	
Working on afternoon teaching programmes	
Working on morning teaching programmes	
Working on Saturday morning teaching	

14. Indicate the level of confidence by the school in achieving its set targets prior to COVID-19 by giving an estimate of the expected number in term of the factors below.

Very High (10); High (8); Moderate (6); Low (4); Very Low (2)

Grade 12 pass rate in 2019	Bachelor	Diploma	Higher certificate	Overall pass/ target
Estimated grade 12: set target (2020) prior to COVID-19				

Grade 12 pass rate in 2019	Bachelor	Diploma	Higher certificate	Overall pass/target
Estimated grade 12 target (2020) with COVID-19 disruption period				

15. What is the level of confidence in terms of the following factors?
(Very High; High; Moderate; Low; Very Low)

1. Completing tasks (ATPs)
2. Catch up programme implemented
3. Assessment tasks completed
4. All grade 12 learners returning to school
5. Teachers completing ATPs in other grades

Thank you for your inputs.
End of questionnaire and questions to Principals

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