RESEARCHERS CHALLENGE

#OPENUPYOURTHINKING

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THEME 3:

Exploring educational lives of the excluded youth under COVID-19 in the SADC region

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Date: June 2020

UNESCO

SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY
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List of acronyms

ADEA	Association for the Development of Education in Africa
COVID-19	Corona Virus Disease 2019
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
GBV	gender-based violence
GCRF	Global Challenge Research Funds
GEC	Global Education Coalition
HEI	Higher Education Institution
ICTs	Information Communication Technologies
IMF	International Monetary Fund
JAWS	Job Access with Speech
L&T	Learning and Teaching
OSF	Open Society Foundations
PENCS	Phenomenological-Exploratory Nested Case Study
ROSA	UNESCO Regional Office for Southern Africa
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SASSA	South African Social Security Agency
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
TESFP	Transforming Education for Sustainable Futures Project
UN-DESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UN-IANYD	United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Fund
WHO	World Health Organization

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

About 80.5 million learners from early childhood to tertiary levels of education in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) are affected by countrywide school, college and university lockdown in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Of these 48% are female and 52% male, some already experiencing some forms of exclusion that, under COVID-19, further hampers their learning.

In this research project, the term 'excluded youth' refers to any person between the ages of 10 and 35 who has been systematically disadvantaged and discriminated against as a result of pre-existing conditions and is unable to access equitable and quality education in the changing teaching-learning landscape precipitated by response to the pandemic. The aim of the research project was to explore educational challenges experienced by excluded youth amid COVID-19 among selected SADC countries in order to inform policy decisions and actions that improve their educational lives. The objectives of the project were to: document excluded youths' understandings of COVID-19; explore life stories of how excluded youth were living, surviving and adapting or not adapting to the changed and changing learning environments amid COVID-19; document how the learning needs of excluded youth are being addressed by governments, their partners and other development stakeholders; explore possible learning opportunities for the excluded youth arising from the COVID-19 crisis and how these are, or can be effectively utilised; and devise regional policy recommendations on how to address the learning needs of excluded youth amid COVID-19. The project was a phenomenological exploratory nested study in which semi-structured interviews were used to gather information with the aid of Google Forms which was used to record the collected information. The sample consisted of 89 youth participants who were purposively sampled across six SADC countries namely, Malawi, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Six key informants were interviewed from universities, non-governmental organisations and government education and youth departments so as to inform the research with their expert knowledge.

The study found that excluded youth are more knowledgeable about the symptoms and preventative measures of COVID-19 than its origins. The use of masks and social distancing were the widely adopted preventative measure on account of being cost effective. New forms of learning exclusion include: lack of access to internet and e-learning, lack of access to e-learning gadgets, lack of adequate exposure to emerging learning technologies, lack of electricity for operationalisation of e-learning, psychological distrust of one another, isolated learning, high cost of internet, poor radio and TV signal, among others. The study indicates that before COVID-19, the learning experience was conducive and inclusive. There was opportunity for youth to socialise and discuss school work, share notes and ideas, and it gave them confidence in their individual academic progression and potential success in the examinations in spite of their socioeconomic exclusions. However, during COVID-19, learning and learning environments have become exclusive, favouring those from socio-economically advantaged families who are familiar with the use of educational technologies, have access to electricity and connectivity, and can afford to buy TVs and other e-learning equipment. Social distancing has unanimously been cited as the main source of learning exclusion because pupils can no longer be, and learn, together as per Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) principles. The study recommends the need to urgently devise strategies to address the impact of social and physical distancing on the learning process which has affected the process of learning together among pupils and teachers. Moreover, the timing for online and TV channel classes should not coincide with peak hours for domestic chores such as sweeping, cooking, and others which tend to disadvantage girl children. Rural schools should be re-opened subject to strict adherence to all public health rules because rural learners have been the most affected and widely excluded by the current mode of learning. Further research to investigate the impact of COVID-19 and responses to the pandemic have affected the educational lives of persons with disabilities is also highly recommended. Radio broadcasts of school programmes is also recommended for continuous delivery of lessons, especially for the underprivileged.

REPORT

1   Background and Contextual Analysis

This research project focused on one of the six thematic areas of the 'OpenupYourThinking: SADC* Researchers Challenge'. The research challenge was organised and commissioned by JET Education Services in collaboration with the UNESCO Regional Office for Southern Africa (ROSA) and partners from the Global Challenge Research Fund's Transforming Education for Sustainable Futures project (South African node) and the Open Society Foundations (OSF).

The main purpose of the Research Challenge was to contribute to the generation of evidence of how education and training systems in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) are affected by, and can respond to COVID-19. The Research Challenge provided opportunities to contribute meaningfully to shaping solutions to pressures on education systems using an evidence-based approach; allowed for real time inputs to be made into other national education processes led by organisations in the SADC; and ensured that a wider group of younger researchers (younger than 35 years) was collectively engaged during the lockdown period while giving them an opportunity to grow as they worked under the guidance of experienced researchers. The SADC Researchers Challenge covered six thematic areas, namely:

Theme 1:   Education for sustainable development: COVID-19 education response intersection with the food, water and economic (livelihoods) crisis

Theme 2:   Teacher preparation for distance learning during major disruptions

Theme 3:   Exploring lives of the excluded youth amidst COVID-19

Theme 4:   Exercising global citizenship amidst COVID 19

Theme 5:   Green skills for sustainable livelihoods in a post-COVID-19 context

Theme 6:   Curbing the spread of fake news in Southern Africa - what we can and cannot do

As indicated in the research title, this research project focused on Theme 3 and was commissioned by JET Education Services from19May until22June 2020. The research process for thematic area 3 was led by the University of Zambia, where the thematic lead was selected to coordinate with seven other young researchers from Malawi, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania and Zimbabwe.

Whilst strategic target 4.7 of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 seeks to attain quality and inclusive education for all, COVID-19 presents a key challenge to the attainment of this target. The pandemic further forewarns of possible recurrence of similar challenges to the successful attainment of SDG 4that need to be brought to the attention of education policy makers. According to recent data available from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2020:1), '1.57 billion learners worldwide (91.4% of the world's student population) were unable to go to school or university due to measures to stop the spread of COVID-19.' As in other parts of the world, COVID-19 caused unprecedented changes in the conduct of education, economic, social and other activities in both the formal and informal sectors of most SADC countries (SADC, (2020a); World Health Organization (WHO), 2020). According to SADC (2020a), the first SADC COVID-19 case was recorded early in March, 2020, in South Africa. What appeared initially to be a small challenge, especially in the African context in general, soon paralysed all learning activities and education systems, and socioeconomic activity that promotes livelihoods, because the infection numbers increased exponentially. For example, by15 April 2020, of the 16 SADC member states, 14 had recorded infections, namely Angola, Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eswatini, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe (SADC,2020a).

By 24 May 2020, the WHO (2020) reported that there were over 30,000 confirmed cases in the SADC region and that these statistics would continue to rise, with South Africa being the worst hit by the pandemic with statistics as of 28 May2020 at over 25000 infections, over 13000 recoveries and over 500 deaths (Department of Health

South Africa, 2020). Whilst the cumulative statistics of the direct effects of COVID-19 might be lower than those of developed countries, such as Italy with more than 231000 infections, the effects on socio-economic activities and the educational process at large were to date proving to be devastating, affecting everyone, especially those already discriminated against, and particularly the youth whose only hopes for the future lie in their attainment of education. To be more specific, COVID-19hadubiquitously affected all educational institutions and their beneficiaries in the SADC region with countrywide lockdowns of all learning institutions from preschool to tertiary levels, as shown in Figure 1 below (UNESCO, 2020).
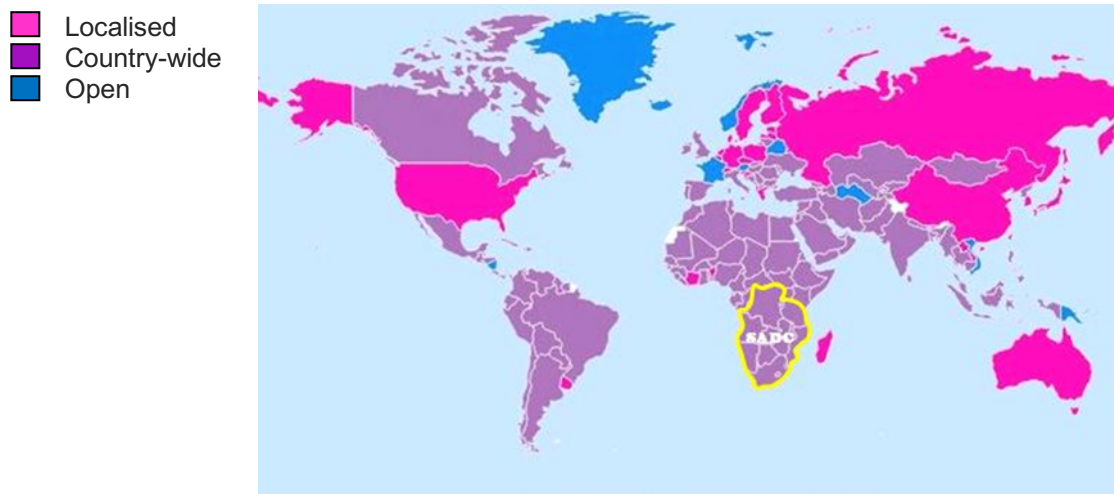
Figure 1: Global monitoring of School and University/College caused by COVID-19.

Source: UNESCO (2020)

According to the UNESCO Global Education Coalition (2020), in 11 countries of the SADC region, 80.5 million pupils and students from preschool to tertiary level of education were affected by countrywide school and university lockdowns with, according Table 1 below, about 48% of these being female and 52% male. Without any doubt, some of these from each gender category were already excluded or experiencing some form of exclusion that was aggravated under COVID-19. Given these statistics, SADC countries had a significant challenge, to address not only the immediate, but also the prospective effects of COVID-19 on school-going youth and especially on those already excluded in diverse ways.

Premised on the aforementioned, this project aimed at investigating the above issues, not only from a single-country perspective but also from other contexts across the SADC region, in order to establish a spatially-distributed understanding of on-the-ground evidence regarding how the educational lives of excluded youth were being affected under COVID-19. It is hoped that through this research challenge, stakeholders might be supported to make informed decisions and take action on how to improve the lives of excluded youth currently enrolled in school, college or university.

Table 1: Statistics of Pupils and students affected by COVID-19 School and Tertiary institutions lockdown

SN	Countries	Number of Learners	% distribution by gender F	M
1	DR Congo	19,185,425.00	46.4	53.6
2	Tanzania	13,861,603.00	49.9	50.1
3	Angola	8,692,733.00	45.1	54.9
4	Zambia	3,501,816.00	50.3	49.7
5	Mozambique	7,993,520.00	47.9	52.1
6	Malawi	6,855,636.00	49.9	50.1
7	Zimbabwe	4,130,348.00	49.6	50.4
8	Botswana	595,707.00	50.6	49.4
9	Namibia	748,375.00	51.6	48.4
10	Eswatini	377,935.00	48.4	51.6
11	South Africa	14,612,546.00	50.5	49.5
Total		80,555,644.00	48.5	51.5

Source: UNESCO (2020) https://en.unesco.org/COVID19/educationresponse/globalcoalition

Due to the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic, most SADC countries unprecedentedly shifted teaching, learning and assessment to online platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet and Moodle, especially in higher education institutions (HEIs)(SADC, 2020b). This indisputably affected the learning process: preparation for internal and external assessment of learners and, eventually, the academic progression of these learners has been put at high risk of stagnation (SADC, 2020b). This risk is especially significant for those socio-economically discriminated against, and excluded youth with no access to Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) that various governments were using as intervention strategies to ensure continuity of learning. There was also a high probability of many SADC countries cancelling examinations due to widespread uncertainties regarding when the lockdowns imposed to curb the spread of COVID-19would be lifted (Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), 2020). According to Burgess and Sievertsen (2020), the disruption in learning might not just prolong, but might also increase inequality, especially for the youth already excluded. For example, within the COVID-19 crisis, home schooling under the guidance of family members became crucial, especially for adolescent youth, but the concern was that those living with illiterate family members or those with no interest in education were likely to be exposed to a new form of exclusion even if they were not initially excluded prior to COVID-19. Successful homeschooling is, to a large extent, dependent on a self-motivated, economically viable and literate family, without which affected youth benefit nothing and may even become demotivated (Bjorklund and Salvanes, 2011). Being one of the most novel challenges ever to have confronted the SADC countries in recent times, COVID-19 generally created unprecedented hysteria which seemed to have resulted in a dystopia for many youth in their final year of study and whose trajectories were severely affected by the many learning disruptions consequent to the pandemic.

Box 1: Definition of excluded youth

An excluded youth as per SADC regional perspective is any person between the ages of 10 and 35 years, who is systematically disadvantaged and discriminated premised on his or her already existing exclusions and is unable to access equitable, inclusive and quality education in the changed and changing teaching-learning landscape amidst COVID-19.

While some parents in economically viable households could successfully school their children at home and sponsor their youth in colleges and universities to learn online amidst the COVID-19 lockdown, this was not universally possible in most SADC countries where many youth were already excluded and living in impoverished conditions (SADC, 2020b). For example, one Zambian case study showed that COVID-19 would negatively impact the performance of students in the 2020 Grade 12 national examinations vis-à-vis mathematics, science and design and technology subjects due to widespread confirmation of COVID-19 cases, low levels of technology use and limited technology resources in secondary schools in Zambia (Sintema, 2020). In fact, even some of those having the financial resources to invest in online learning facilities were excluded, given that the lockdown prevented them from making the necessary purchases (Sintema, 2020).

Globally, in Africa and in the SADC region in particular, internet and social media were full of reports of how the youth were successfully responding to the pandemic (United Nations Inter Agency Network for Youth Development (UN-IANYD), 2020), but not much was reported on educational experiences of those youth already excluded from school or university, and how their excluded status was further aggravated by COVID-19. Before the outbreak of COVID-19, youths were already three times more likely than adults to be unemployed (UN-DESA Policy, 2020), and given the anticipated delays in their academic graduation due to COVID-19, unemployment rates were likely to be high even among those not initially at risk of unemployment. There were suggestions that many unemployed graduates might face new forms of exclusion, such as reduced employment opportunities due to uncertainties regarding the duration ofCOVID-19 lockdown constraints on the economy. Even school leavers were in a dystopic state of not knowing when they would enter college, given that in most countries in the SADC Region, ICT technologies were not adequately developed to provide for enrolment into online degree programmes.

Hence, this research project embarked on exploring the educational life experiences of youth at risk of, and suffering educational exclusion, in order to obtain factual and meaningful insights into their realities. It was with the hope that these insights would inform initiatives that would not only help to address the ambitions of youth who have been subject to discrimination (based on place of residence, age, gender, race, HIV status, physical disability, education and many other), but also lead to the creation of spaces that might introduce meaningful, dignified and just change into their lives.

1.1   Operational meaning of a youth

There is no universally agreed definition of whom and what constitutes youth. Organisations and countries use different definitions (Hilker and Fraser, 2009). For example, the United Nations General Assembly defines 'youth' as the period between the ages of 15 and 24. The WHO and United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF) classify those between the ages of 10 and 19 as 'adolescents', those between the ages of 15 and 24 as 'youth', and uses the term 'young people' for all of these collectively. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) defines a child as 'everyone under the age of 18'. The African Union through the African Youth Charter adopted by the 7th Ordinary Session Assembly held in Benjul, Gambia, defines 'youth' as persons between the ages of 15 and 35 years.

Such variations in conceptualisation of the youth justify the need for a localised definition for the SADC region. Contextually, and in accordance with a review of all SADC countries' policies on youth, a youth is defined as any person between the age of 10 and 35 years. This is the context in which a youth must be understood throughout this report.

Similarly, the concept of excluded youth lacks a universal definition, given variations in socioeconomic and cultural landscapes from one country to another. The African Union Youth Charter notes with concern the exclusion of youth in Africa through uneven distribution of wealth and power, rising unemployment, poverty and hunger fuelled by collapsing economies, illiteracy coupled with poor quality education, huge exposure to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, poor access to health care systems and information, exposure to domestic and gender-based violence and involvement in politically-motivated violence and armed conflicts (African Union, 2006).

National-specificity implies that any comparison between youth exclusion among countries in SADC requires a context-dependent definition. At regional scale, country-specific evidence shows that the concept of excluded youth is multidimensional. The multi-dimensionality of exclusion transcends a narrow conception of material poverty, whether conceived in terms of income or the fulfilment of basic needs (Silver, 2004). It touches on a myriad of aspects ranging across gender exclusion, physiological challenges, education, health, cultural orientations, lack of participation in decision making processes, human trafficking and violence, drug addiction, among others.

1.2   Operational definition of an excluded youth

For the purpose of this research whose main concern is education, an excluded youth in the SADC region is any person between the ages of 10 and 35 years who is systematically disadvantaged and discriminated against premised on pre-existing exclusions and is unable to access equitable, inclusive and quality education in the changed and changing teaching-learning landscape amidst COVID-19. This means that the youth is already in the school system, but due to COVID-19 disruptions lacks access to educational tools, reflexive competences and resources for emerged and emerging media of instruction such as online learning, for example bandwidth, laptops

and other tools, and as a consequence his/her learning process is disrupted and he/she is left behind. For practical purposes and for facilitating the development of a simplified survey tool, it may be useful to specify 'exclusion' in the context of education referring to those youth experiencing:

- lack of access to safe learning and teaching environments;
- lack of resources needed for e-learning (affordable data bundles technologies and infrastructures); and
- lack of adequate social interaction for physical and mental health in a learning environment.

The exclusion lies in the reality that youth have no individual means by which to address these learning needs in any way, but are dependent on what is publicly available, and are at the mercy of what and when particular local (and national) authorities are able, or choose to provide for these communities.

The research aimed to explore the lives of excluded youth who were still in school or university amidst COVID-19 within the SADC region, and to investigate how COVID-19 further exacerbated their exclusion.

1.3   Current Intervention Strategies and their Viability in Addressing Learning Needs of Excluded Youth

Box 2

Efforts require more systemic creative and transgressive ways of thinking and doing things. More so, it needs to be contextualised because the youth experience is likely to vary uniquely irrespective of their living within the same region or even country.

Efforts to mitigate the short and long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic require unprecedented youth engagement in shaping responses, and youth need to be meaningfully included in all aspects and phases of the response. However, there still remains a class of excluded youth whose lives are strained amidst various challenges such as climate change, poverty, unemployment, illiteracy and, now, COVID-19 (UN-IANYD, 2020). Many countries in the SADC region recognise that the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic cut across many aspects of socio-economic and education spheres, resulting in diverse, and complex challenges, and devastating impacts not only on elderly adults, but also on the youth. This indisputably shows that, if one is not infected with COVID-19, he or she is invariably 'affected', thereby calling for systemic and concerted efforts to address the impact, especially among the excluded youth (SADC, 2020). Systemic effort is needed and more innovative and transgressive ways of thinking and doing things are required. More so, it needs to be contextualised because the youth experience is likely to vary uniquely irrespective of their living within the same region or even country.

With e-learning remaining a challenge amongst the urban poor and rural learners, this pandemic consequently impacts their learning and their final grades. To mitigate some of the challenges, especially education challenges, posed by COVID-19, some SADC countries have made efforts to ensure that their public education system continues to operate (Department of Basic Education, 2020). Almost all SADC region countries have developed a variety of learning programmes through on-line, radio and television platforms as media for dispensing information. Although these platforms have been useful and available to some youth, they have not translated widely into access and usability, thereby propagating possible new forms of learning exclusion (Sintema, 2020:1). Hence, learning exclusion under COVID-19 was the interest of this study, in order to explore its implications for the educational lives of youth who are already socio-economically discriminated against.

In South Africa, being the country worst hit by COVID-19 in the SADC region, there has been a tremendous drive in the education sector in general, but particularly the tertiary education sector to provide virtual interventions to address the lack of conventional learning and teaching (L&T) for excluded students. Universities, for example, have launched fundraising campaigns to provide laptops and data to those who need them most. This has been in conjunction with online L&T initiatives, such as iKamva, etc. (University of the Western Cape, 2020). Furthermore, the South African government changed the level of restrictions from Level 4 to Level 3 which came into effect on 1 June 2020 (EyeWitness News,2020). This entails, among other things, the phased-in return of learners to school under certain restrictions. Given the immense socio-economic disparity in the country, it may be worth investigating how this change in level impacts on excluded youth upon their return to their places of learning. Some of the real-life aspects associated with so-called 'township' life for excluded youth include: the distance travelled between home and school, the safety element involved, the costs involved with returning to school, catching up on time and lessons missed during the lockdown, access to resources, the morale to continue, attitude towards assessments, the social and recreational aspects of school, and others.

Another critique to the on-line platform interventions was that in themselves they exacerbate exclusion. For example, remote learning will not reach those without internet access, which is the case in many settings of Tanzania, and learning will be challenging for many without appropriate supervision. Youth on the move are already disproportionately affected by learning disruptions, and they are at great risk of exclusion from online or other alternative learning options. Similarly, in Malawi, concerns have been raised regarding the viability of online learning for public students particularly those located in remote areas where there is little to no internet access (Chisamba, 2020). This has prompted the government to explore other means of continuing to provide education, such as the direct delivery of printed learning materials to the students in their various locations (Gowelo, 2020) and the use of local radio programmes (Tembo, 2020). Table 2 summarises intervention measures adopted in various countries of the SADC.

Table 2: Selected intervention measures adopted in the SADC region

Region	Intervention strategies amidst covid-19
SADC	- Distance learning by developing and disseminating lessons through TV, radio, SMS and online platforms such as Moodle, Zoom and Google Meet - Textbooks distributed to schools in the most vulnerable areas to offer additional incentive for students to return to school while improving the student textbook ratio - Installation of hand washing stations and provision of water disinfectants in schools located in areas that have been the most affected by COVID-19 - Remedial programmes and distribution of accelerated learning materials for students attending examination classes - Provision of printed materials to facilitate learning continuity for the most vulnerable students, particularly girls - Back-to-school campaigns to sensitise caregivers about the importance of ensuring their children, especially girls, return to school. - Awareness campaign to disseminate messages on girls' safety, and help prevent gender based violence, pregnancy and early marriage - Total school lockdown

Experts have said it could be months, if not years, before schools open again. Home schooling is being strongly encouraged and supported but this initiative is not an inclusive one and generates many forms of intersectional discrimination. One striking example in this regard is the exclusion of learners with disabilities (a) by radio and television home schooling activities through content which is not accessible to learners with hearing impairment, visual impairment and other forms of impairments that create learning barriers; and (b) by parents and guardians who have insufficient basic knowledge to support home schooling for learners with deafness, blindness, autism and other forms of impairments that create learning difficulties (Tembo, 2020).To address various challenges presented by the response to COVID-19, various media platforms have been used to promote e-learning, and governments in the region had considered establishment of a system that reviews and validates the educational programme content offered on private and public television channels as part of standardisation and quality assurance. Nonetheless, early study findings showed poor quality of service delivery (ADEA, 2020). For example, a study in Zambia showed poor quality in the e-learning process, given that Zambia was still in its infancy in delivery of e-learning, and consequently that government attempts to prevent educational exclusion were thus actually promoting it in a new form (Sintemba, 2020).

1.4 Nexus Points between COVID-19, Existing Forms of Exclusion and Interventions

1.4.1 Gender and rights to education

In exploring the ways in which the pandemic is affecting the excluded youth, and understanding the types of exclusion, particular attention was paid to the gender factor. Like the Ebola and Zika outbreaks, the COVID-19 pandemic showed that infectious diseases can magnify existing inequalities, particularly with respect to gender. The UN Secretary General's Policy Brief on the Impact of COVID-19 on Women (April, 2020) pointed out that 'women could be the hardest hit by this pandemic but they could also be the backbone of recovery in communities'

(UNSG, 2020). For example, in Zambia it is projected that the pandemic is likely to have a lasting impact on the country's socio-economic conditions with an estimated 1.2 million households that could fall further behind, including nearly 230000 young female-headed households (United Nations, 2020).

Women and girls have unique health needs but they are less likely to have access to quality health services, essential medicines and vaccines, maternal and reproductive health care. In the face of the economic recession, women, face greater barriers to economic activity than men, and are at greater risk, particularly where the informal sector represents the source of income of many youth. As the COVID-19 pandemic deepens, economic and social stress coupled with restricted movement and social isolation measures, could lead to exponential increase in gender-based violence. Many women were being forced to 'lockdown' at home with their abusers at the same time that services to support survivors were being disrupted or made inaccessible, including access to HIV treatment (United Nations, 2020). Victims would also experience difficulties in reporting abuse in circumstances where the abuser and victim share the same space, thus, the abuser could overhear the report, which might put the victim's safety at further risk, young women and girls being the prime targets of the atrocity.

Box 3

Amidst COVID-19, Young women and girls in particular are at increased risk of crimes such as sexual abuse committed by co-inhabitants. Although gender-based violence has been wide spread before the pandemic, it has worsened in the last two months.

The National Peace and Reconciliation (2020)

For example, Mutongwizo (2020) stated that the Zimbabwean government lockdown measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 had heightened mental health issues and domestic violence. Young women and girls in particular were at increased risk of crimes such as sexual abuse committed by co-inhabitants. Although gender-based violence had already been widespread before the pandemic, it had worsened during the lockdown. The National Peace and Reconciliation Commission noted(2020) that domestic violence seemed to worsen as families struggle with anxiety, economic stress and living in close physical proximity to one another. The Musasa Project recorded 1757 gender-based violence (GBV) calls between 30 March and 13 May, 2020 lockdown period, which marked a 70% increase on pre-lockdown levels, with 94% of the cases reported by women (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2020).

1.4.2 Social and economic challenges and inequalities

Although the lockdown intervention succeeded in helping to combat the spread of the corona virus pandemic, it brought varying degrees of inconvenience and discomfort for marginalised youth especially in the informal economies of the SADC Region, where viability is determined by location. Kubatana (2020) noted that the informal sector had become the life blood of the economy as the biggest employer and arguably the engine of regional productive capacity. For most youths already living in poverty, this pandemic aggravated their situation, with lengthy forced confinement indoors adding a further depression to their circumstances. With high unemployment in SADC, most youth exert their efforts in the informal sector labour force. The huge population of youth in all SADC countries presented a paradox of big numbers and big challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In some ways, amidst the COVID-19 crisis, excluded youth risked increased prejudice against stereotypes, especially if they were infected by the virus and the possible stigma which might discourage infected youth from seeking health care: families might even have been hiding sick young family members for fear of discrimination. In some extreme instances, youth exclusion might raise aspects of race and nationality resulting in violence being directed at young foreigners infected by COVID-19, with the argument that they were responsible for the socioeconomic, psychological and cultural malaise in one's own country. This could be a possible scenario in some SADC countries where several effects of COVID-19 were prevalent (United Nations, 2020). For example, the COVID-19 infection in Tanzania moved from imported cases to community transmission. Despite, or perhaps because of the number of measures the government took, Tanzania witnessed the impact of COVID-19 on the tourism sector, especially in Zanzibar whose economy was heavily dependent on tourism. A number of hotels on the island and mainland were closed, including the beaches in Dar-es-Salaam. This not only affected the workforce who were laid off, but also families who were supplying vegetables and poultry products to the hotels and other sectors. This filtered down through the value chains, affecting other industries such as education and those that produce raw materials for animal feeds and other food stuff traded to help support children's academic progress.

In South Africa,COVID-19 was said to expose the underlying systemic inequality that further excluded and marginalised those youth already being discriminated against (McDonald, 2020). On the other hand, at the outbreak of COVID-19, the South African government had at least recognised those who were unemployed and above the age of 18, by putting in place a six-month social relief grant worth USD20 per person per month. A number of welfare grants were increased for children, pensioners and persons with disabilities, although this was also criticised for lack of transparency(Broughton, 2020; South African Social Security Agency (SASSA), 2020).Some of the opportunities, such as a monthly stipend, created by the South African government could be seen as a problem for the excluded because of their

meagreness. The rationale behind arriving at the amount of USD 20 per month, which derogatively translated into less than USD 1 per day, was also not clear. The concern was, what could USD20 per month purchase in South Africa and what educational impact would this have on excluded youth? Those socio-economically deprived (and consequently excluded) would use the meagre funds to cater primarily for their most basic needs: food and perhaps health supplies. Would USD20 per month stretch far enough to also address a young excluded learner's needs? It might be worth exploring the impact, if any, of this USD 20 per month or USD0.67 per day stipend on the excluded youth in general, and particularly on their education under the national lockdown.

Similar measures were implemented in Malawi, where the government announced an emergency cash transfer programme through which eligible households would be given USD 46.7 monthly. The programme targeted one million vulnerable households for a period of six months (Aljazeera, 2020). However, as in the South African instance explained above, the programme lacks transparency; for example, there were no comprehensive criteria for determining the eligibility of a household. Further, the programme attracted criticism for exacerbating exclusion because it targeted only one million of over four million households (National Statistical Office, 2019) even though more than half of the population live below the poverty line (International Monetary Fund (IMF), 2017).

By documenting selected life stories of the excluded school going youth, it was hoped that the study would contribute to a more nuanced understanding of youth exclusion amidst COVID-19 in the SADC region. Using a phenomenological explorative approach, the researchers profiled the educational lives of excluded youth, and their survival and resilience mechanisms in terms of social movement building, and/or strategies to seek assistance from existing institutions.

1.5   Conceptual Framework and Rationale for the Project

Figure 2 below presents the conceptual framework, which provides a tentative theoretical meaning of the research project. The framework illustrates the idea that by exploring excluded youth understandings ofCOVID-19 and their concepts of learning exclusion and needs, researchers in the fields of education, social welfare and economics, as well as decision makers, would better comprehend the starting point for efforts to strengthen literacy and socioeconomic support for the excluded youth during the current pandemic.

It also shows that myriad forms of youth exclusion already exist in the current educational landscape in the SADC region and, amidst COVID-19, these forms of exclusion are worsening the lives of the youth who are already excluded. There is also a prospect that, amidst COVID-19, there are novel emerging forms of learning exclusion which must be explored and understood in order to address the learning needs of the excluded youth amidst COVID-19 more effectively.

Various forms of learning exclusion generally show that excluded youth were faced with myriad forms of intersectional exclusion and were adapting to the novel crisis diversely depending on the form of exclusion experienced. This implies that planning for improvement of the educational lives of excluded youth requires educationists and decision-makers to shift from common sense ways of doing things to more proactive, creative and versatile strategies. The framework also depicts the optimistic idea that behind every seemingly detrimental situation, there are learning opportunities which can be explored and constructively utilised to inform policy decisions. Therefore, as much as COVID-19 may be devastating, it is also a boon that challenges us to think and do

things in ways we have not considered or used before. The envisaged policy recommendations should also, therefore, be informed by the possible opportunities that are emerging from theCOVID-19 response situation.

This research project aimed to provide investigative policy guidelines on how excluded youth were living amidst COVID-19 and how their needs could be addressed. It is hoped that this will be useful to national and regional policy makers as well as to the general education sector in all SADC countries.
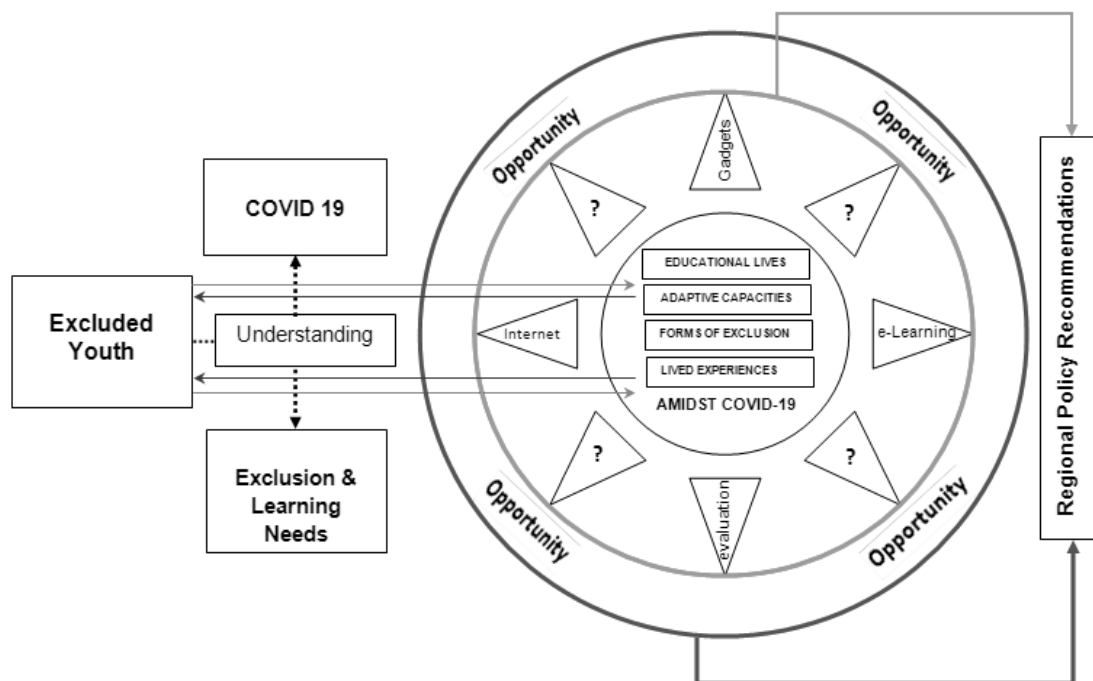
Figure 2: Conceptual framework of the project

2   Objectives

The key objectives of the research project were to:

i.   Document excluded youths' understandings of COVID-19;

ii.   Explore the concepts and forms of exclusion from excluded youth's perspective in the SADC region;

iii.   Explore life stories of how excluded youth are living, surviving and adapting or failing to adapt to the changed and changing learning environments amidst COVID-19;

iv.   Document how the learning needs of the excluded youth are being addressed by governments, their partners and other development stakeholders;

v.   Explore possible learning opportunities arising for excluded youth from the COVID-19 crisis and how these are being, or could be effectively utilised; and

vi.   Devise regional policy recommendations on how to address learning needs of excluded youth amidst COVID-19.

3   Key Research Questions

i.   What are excluded youths' perspectives about on COVID-19?

a)   What forms of exclusion are already prevalent in the SADC region among school-going excluded youth that already make them more vulnerable amidst COVID-19?

b) What are the emerging forms of exclusion(s) of school-going youth in the SADC region are emerging that exclude the school-going youth amidst the COVID-19?

ii. How are excluded youth living, surviving and adapting (or not) to the changed and changing learning environment amidst COVID-19?

iii. How are the learning needs of the excluded youth being addressed by the governments and , their partners, families and other development stakeholders?

iv. What learning opportunities for the excluded youth have arisen or may possibly arise from the COVID-19 crisis in the SADC region?

v. What policy recommendations should be put in place to address the learning needs of the excluded youth amidst COVID-19 in the SADC region?

4   Research Outputs and Regional Prospects

i. One full report on the educational lives of excluded youth amidst COVID-19 in the SADC Region;

ii. A set of regional policy recommendations to address the needs of excluded youth in the SADC region amidst COVID-19;

iii. Research skills and capacity of seven participating researchers built and strengthened;

iv. Networking of youth researchers in the SADC region established, and strengthened interpersonal skills;

v. Possibility of publishing part of the findings in a peer reviewed journal as a motivation to the participating researchers;

vi. Scaling up and extension of the project to the post-COVID-19 Lockdown Project to document sustainability lessons for adaptation to unprecedented global pandemic or crisis; and

vii. Funding for postgraduate training around COVID-19 and excluded youth in school.

5   Research Approach and Methods

The research project involved an interactive dialogic process between the JET Education Services team and a team of youthful researchers from different SADC countries. Table 3 summarises the entire methodological process involving the planning and implementation of the research project.

Table 3: Research approach and methodological decisions

Research approach and design: Agile Qualitative Approach (Phenomenological-Exploratory Nested Case Study (PENCS))

Target group: Excluded youth in schools, post-school and tertiary institutions
Sample size: 89
Participants' Selection criteria: Participants were selected across each specific country based on their status as youth between 10 and 35 years of age and their exclusion consequent to the emerged system of learning amidst COVID-19. Expert informants such as government policy makers, NGOs, and trainers were selected on account of their engagement with issues affecting the young pupils and students.
Sampling approach: Non-probability approach
Sampling techniques: Exponential Snowball Sampling, convenience and purposive sampling. This involved locating individual educationally excluded youth through social media announcements and connection through the experts involved in various issues affecting the youth.

Thematic areas		Description
Demographic Data	**Specific data sets**	Age, gender, level of education, residence (urban, peri-urban, rural), means of livelihood, form of exposure to COVID-19 (infected or affected?), disability, etc.
	Sources of data	Primary sources: Sampled participants (excluded youth) & experts dealing with excluded youth in SADC region, Secondary sources: Various conceptual literature sources (CLS) (grey literature) such as online blogs, social media, national and regional reports and bulletins related to thematic area of focus
	Methods and tools	Interviews based on semi-structured interview guides inform of a Google form and recorders Document analysis- review of National Development Plan
	Analytical techniques	Descriptive statistics using tables of frequencies and bar graphs
	Data quality check and consistency	Triangulation of primary data with secondary data from national and regional policy documents and bulletins about issues of excluded youth. Open Google drive peer reviewing
Objective 1 Excluded youths' understandings of COVID-19	**Specific data**	Narratives on meanings of COVID-19 by excluded youths
	Specific data sources	Sampled participants (excluded youth) in the SADC region
	Methods and tools	Interviews based on interview guides in form of Google forms and recorders Document analysis also used
	Analytical techniques	Thematic analysis and Narrative analysis
	Data quality check and consistency	Expert formative peer reviewing Transparent and interactive researchers' peer reviews
Objective 2 Concept and forms of educational exclusion from the excluded youth perspective in the SADC Region	**Specific data sets**	Narratives on the conceptions of 'Exclusion' and 'discrimination' Existing forms of exclusion facing youth in the SADC region, and who they intersect (gender, poverty, disability, etc.) Emerging or emerged forms of exclusion amidst COVID-19
	Sources of data	Primary sources: Sampled youth participants Key informants (youth workers, focal persons from youth-oriented organization, Ministry of Youth personnel) Secondary sources: National and regional documents on various forms of exclusion
	Methods and tools	Interviews based on interview guides in form of Google forms and recorders Conceptual literature (grey literature) also used

	Analytical techniques	A combination of Narrative analysis and the Thematic analysis.
	Data quality check and consistency	Sharing notes, transcripts via the same Google drive platform Expert formative peer reviewing Triangulation of primary and secondary data
Objective 3 Life stories of how excluded youth are living, surviving and adapting to the learning environment amidst COVID 19	Specific data sets	Audio narratives, transcripts and pictures on how the excluded participants are surviving and adapting or not adapting during COVID 19
	Sources of data	Sampled participants (excluded from 7 SADC member states
	Methods and tools	Interviews supported by interview guides in form of Google forms and recorders, and phone recorder
	Analytical techniques	Narrative analysis focusing on life stories and experiences which will be shared by participants
	Data quality check and consistency	Sharing notes, transcripts and pictures via the same Google drive platform. Expert formative peer reviewing Methodological and mirror data triangulation where different methods and techniques of data collection will be employed and participants will be asked to confirm their responses after interview by running them through selected data they will provide.
Objective 4 How learning needs of the excluded youth are being addressed by stakeholders	Specific data sets	Narratives of needs of excluded youth amidst COVID-19 Narratives of specific measures implemented/being implemented by different stakeholders to address needs of the excluded youth amidst COVID-19
	Sources of data	Selected participants (excluded youth) & stakeholders dealing with youth issues National and regional documents related to excluded youth contexts
	Methods and tools	Online, telephone, open-ended and semi-structured interviews with the aid of interview guide/ Google form, recorders and cameras Document analysis
	Analytical techniques	Narrative-text analysis and thematic analysis
	Data quality check and consistency	Checking authenticity of data that will be obtained from online sources Sharing notes, transcripts via the same Google drive platform Expert formative peer reviewing Triangulation of primary and secondary data
Objective 5 Learning opportunities for the excluded youth arising from the COVID-19 crisis and how are they being or whether they can effectively be utilised	Specific data sets	Already existing learning opportunities arising from COVID-19 for excluded youth and how these are being utilised Emerging learning opportunities from COVID-19 for excluded youth and how these can be used Capacity of the excluded youth to take advantage of both existing and emerging learning opportunities
	Sources of data	Sampled participants (excluded youth) and expert informants dealing with excluded youth matters National and regional documents and online data
	Methods and tools	Interviews based on interview guides in form of Google forms and recorders and recorder document analysis and online resources
	Analytical techniques	Narrative-text analysis and thematic analysis
	Data quality check and consistency	Data triangulation by ground observations of some measures claimed to have been implemented Expert formative peer reviewing Transparent & interactive researchers' peer reviews

Objective 6 Regional policy recommendations on how to address the learning needs of the excluded youth amidst COVID 19.	Specific data	Data on already existing and proposed measures to address the needs of excluded youth amidst COVID-19
	Sources of data	National and regional policy documents and statements around COVID-19 Sampled participants (excluded youth) and key informants dealing with issues of excluded youth
	Methods and tools	Interviews based on interview guides in form of Google forms and recorders
	Analytical techniques	Text content analysis which is commonly used to analyze data in form of texts and media. Thematic analysis of the participants' primary submissions
	Data quality check and consistency	Adequate referencing Source verification

The methodological framework is informed by scholarly works of Bryman (2008); Bickman and Rog (2008); Creswell (2009); Leedy and Ormrod (2001); Yin (1994); and Danermark *et al.* (2002).

5.1   Research ethics

i.   The research project adhered to the International Science Council Ethics Statement approved by the JET Team (Appendix A and B).

ii.   An Informed Consent form was presented to the participants before commencement of interviews. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly upheld.

iii. All online sources were carefully verified and scrutinised for authenticity, and sources acknowledged. Participants were informed that they were free to leave the research process and not obliged to remain.

iv.   Potential benefits were explained to the participants before proceeding with the study, including on how the project will revert to them with the final findings. Respect for all participants' personal feelings, socio-economic backgrounds and orientations was upheld.

v.   Concerning the inclusive dimension of the study, it was noted upfront that the adopted methods (online, telephone interviews) of data collection were inherently exclusive to already excluded youth, however, whenever possible, limited visitations for face-to-face interviews were used to cater for the excluded youth who were not able to access internet and telephone facilities. Downscaling the focus to the educational dimension was, in itself, excluding to youth who have already dropped out of school for various social, cultural, political and economic reasons, and who may have more stressful experience during the COVID-19 crisis. The project proposes a separate study on youth who have dropped out of school.

5.2   Data management strategies

A centralised and thematised Microsoft Excel template was automatically generated on the Google Shared Drive for all researchers to upload raw data in real time through Google Forms and to ensure simultaneous data analysis and interpretation. Thorough data checking and inspection was done by all researchers including principal peer reviewers and the research assistant from JET.

6   Project Planning Approach

The project plan was developed using the Agile Participatory Approach (APA) of project planning. Through the agile approach, the thematic lead tasked every team member available to work simultaneously around all parts of the project plan on a shared drive. Thereafter, a fairly complete version of the strategic research project plan was twice submitted for peer reviewing to principal peer reviewers prior to implementation. JET research assistant team members and, occasionally, peer reviewers attended about 12 scrum meetings on WhatsApp and Google Meet, where they evaluated the latest versions of the research project plan and made suggestions for

improvement. Through the shared drive online, interactive and dialogic formative reviews were done for the planning team to create different versions with the suggested changes effected. The expert peer reviewer also glanced through the subsequent versions and suggested possible directions that the project protocol could take. Peer reviewing continued through two versions until the scrum process had addressed all the requirements for a ready-to-use strategic project plan. The APA was useful in planning to respond to emergence events such as COVID-19 (Koppensteiner and Udo, 2009).

7 Thematic Presentation of Findings and Interpretation

7.1 Demographic profiling of the excluded youth

With a gender perspective as the main bedrock, the research studied 89 youth participants from the SADC countries whose demographic data were collected based on age group, marital status, number of children and dependants they care for, level of education, type of residence, employment status and means of livelihood as well as nature of exposure to COVID-19. Due to diverse circumstances prevailing in each country context at the time the research was conducted, the samples were not equally spread. The 89 sampled youth were distributed as shown in Figure 3 below, with Zambia having the highest number of participants. The majority of youth participants were clustered between the ages of 16 and 20 years.
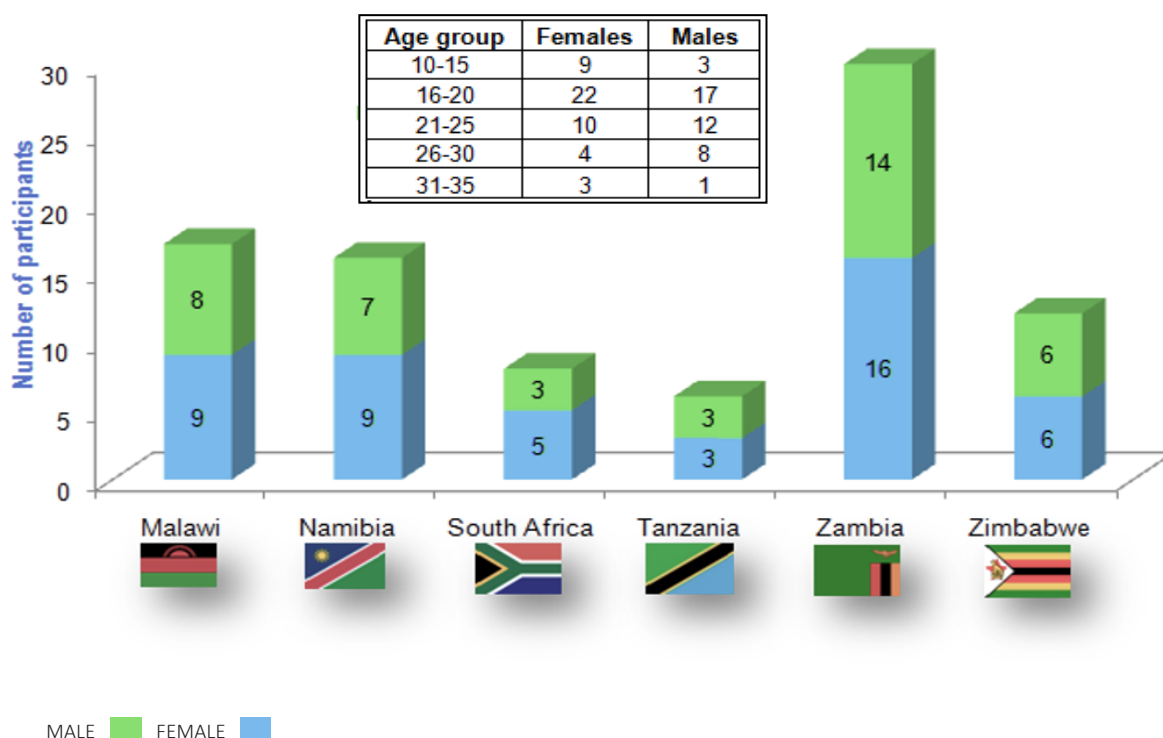

Age group	Females	Males
10-15	9	3
16-20	22	17
21-25	10	12
26-30	4	8
31-35	3	1

Figure 3: Distribution of excluded youth participants by age group, country and gender

Of the total number of school youth interviewed, 46% (41) were male and 54% (48) were female (Figure 4). Figure 5 overleaf summarises the findings on marital status and educational profiles of the participants. A few male (1%) and female (3%) youth were found to be married and managing children and dependants. Generally, the majority were still unmarried. It was found that 15% and 18% of male and female participants respectively had reached the tertiary level of education. The sample included 28% of males and 26% females at secondary school; and of those at primary level of education, 2% were female and 11% were male.

Those who were married were at both secondary and tertiary levels of education. Field experience revealed that a few among the unmarried participants also had children. Hence, the statistics shown in Figure 5 concerning

number of children and dependants did not refer only to those who were married but also some who were unmarried. Educational background by gender did not vary widely at secondary and tertiary levels, but at primary level, the gap between male and female was quite wide.
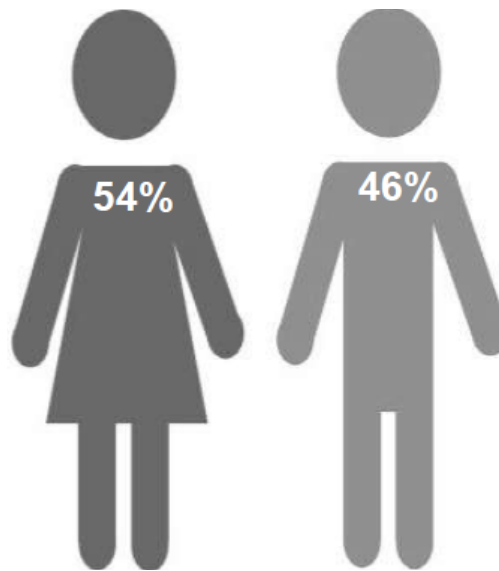

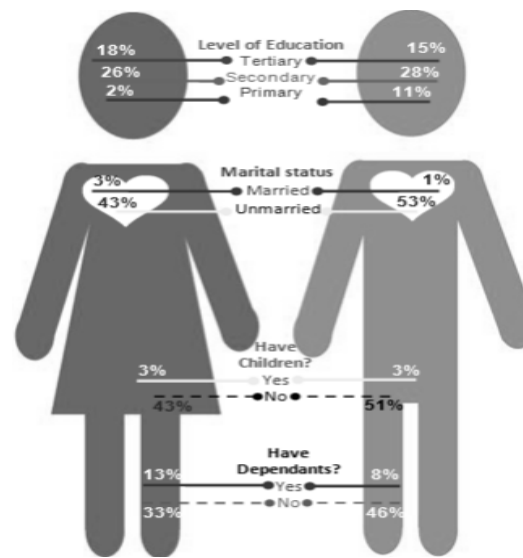**Figure 4: Percent distribution of youth participants by gender**

Figure 5: Distribution of youth participants by selected demographic variables

Extra responsibilities were found to have a profound negative influence on the adaptive capacities of learners amidst COVID-19. This is discussed in detail in the section on synthesis, analysis and interpretation.

As illustrated in Figure 6, the majority of youth participants were not in any formal employment, 40% being male compared to 49% female. This could be attributed not only to their age and educational status but also to general widespread unemployment among the youth in the SADC region (SADC, 2020). Only 6% and 4% respectively of male and female youth were found to be in some formofemployment, and thesewere already ata tertiary level of education.
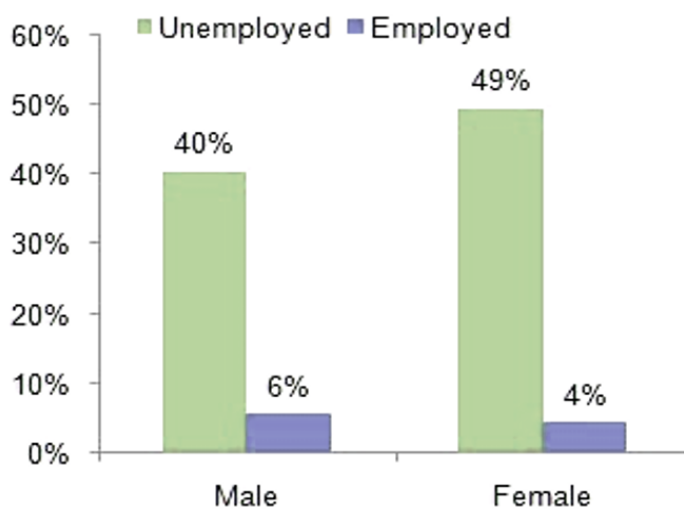

Figure 6: Formal employment status of the youth participants

No participants were infected with COVID-19, but all admitted to having their socioeconomic livelihoods profoundly affected by the pandemic, as well as being affected educationally. Figure 7 shows that a combined total of 67% participants were dependants whilst some (4% of females, 2% of males) subsisted through illegal activities such as unlicensed gold mining. A total of only 10% of the participants were in formal employment.
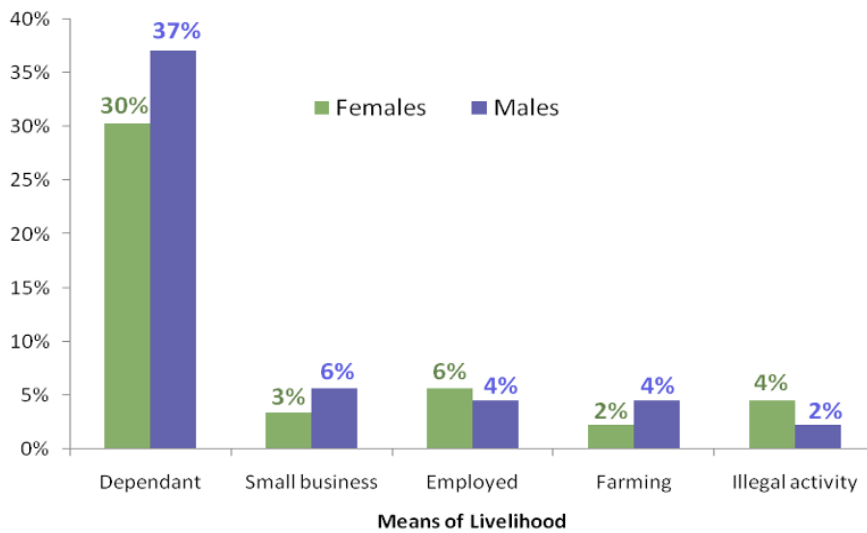
Figure 7: Means of livelihood for the youth participants

Although few participants had disabilities, the study noted with concern that COVID-19 has affected their learning more than those with no disabilities. About 2% of female and 3% of the male youth participants had disabilities such as impaired hearing and blindness (Figure 8).The pandemic has widened the existing gap between learners with and without disabilities.

Figure 8: Distribution of participants with and without disabilities

7.2 Excluded youth's understanding of COVID-19

7.2.1 Understanding of causes of COVID-19

> **Box 5: How selected youth understood the causes of COVID-19**
>
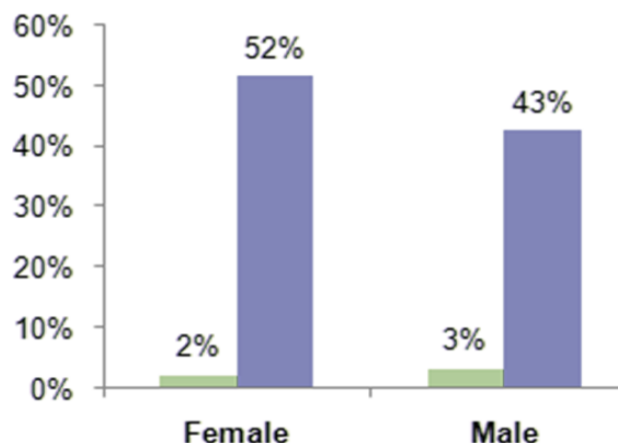> How selected youth understood the causes of COVID-19
>
> 'Well, this disease is believed to be caused by Corona virus that affects the respiratory system and can be transmitted through various ways such as touching surfaces that have previously been touched by an infected person or by directly physically contacting with an infected person. It has claimed many lives so far.' 'COVID came from China that's where it started' I believe it was caused by an experimental mishap of biological weapon' 'According to the information provided by different sources, I think this virus was caused by the fusion of a bat and snake's genes and it entered human bodies through the consumption of these organism as food.'

Understandings of the causes of COVID-19 were diverse, as demonstrated in Table 4. Youth participants' perspectives included causes that included pathogenesis, sanitation and hygiene, spatial-cultural orientation, socio-demographics, politics, religion, conspiracy and others. Whilst in some instances participants expressly connected the cause of COVID-19 to the actual Corona virus, in other instances, it was attributed to China as noted in a direct expression.

It was also thought to be caused by various domestic and wild animals and, in some cases, by God. This shows that the teaching and learning process should mainstream COVID-19 so as to conceptually clarify its actual causes, in order to minimise misconceptions where they exist.

Table 4: Contextual understandings of the actual and perceived causes of COVID-19

Sub-themes	Attributed causes of COVID-19
Pathogenic context	It is caused by a virus, bacteria and germs
	It is a virus spread through contacts
	A virus which is transmitted through sneezing, coughing from affected people
	It is caused by Corona Virus which affects the respiratory system
	The virus gets into the nose then into the respiratory system and then affects nearby cells
Sanitation and hygiene context	Poor hygiene and hand shaking
	Uncleanliness and not complying to rules that are stated by the government and health professionals
	Droplet from an infected person
	Irresponsibility in our health practices
	Chinese eating animals that they should not be eating
	Direct and indirect contact with a person that has been infected with the virus
Spatial-cultural context	Originated from China
	Chinese eating cats, bats and snakes
Socio-demographic context	It is people who move from other countries to our country
	Gathering of people and migration of people from other countries that might be infected. Too many people and ignorance
Religious context	Anger of God on His people

	It is a disease that came from God
Misconstrued context	Chinese people
	Eating mouse and mice
	From the atmosphere
	Animals like pigs, dogs, cats, cow, lions, tigers, elephants and chicken
	Eating bats and cats like the Chinese
	Disease that came from unknown animal
	Rats' virus
	Animals, although I am not sure which ones exactly
Skeptical and mythical context	COVID-19 is a disease caused by a virus but I am not sure about what causes that virus as there are many myths about its causes
	It's reported that it began in China in Wuhan. That is where the virus was found. And that is where it prevailed more. According to my understanding, it has not been mechanically been said on what exactly caused COVID19 but we do know that it is a virus. Virus usually are caused by already existing bacteria or other things.
Conspiracy context	It was caused because of virus created from China
	A biological accident that was caused by Chinese people involving unhealthy consumed organisms. Firstly, I believe it was caused by an experimental mishap of biological weapon
	Doctors trying to come up with treatment medicine, but it resulted in a dangerous virus. 5G Technology is also to blame for this COVID-19
Mainstream and social media context	I specifically do not know what the cause is but according to what I have read is that this deadly virus was created in a Chinese laboratory and it was said that it has originated from an animal...can't really tell what kind of animal. But the Chinese have more in this whole thing.
	According to the information provided by different sources, I think this virus was caused by the fusion of a bat and snake's genes and it entered human bodies through the intake/consumption of these organism as food.
	I am not sure because I hear different things from different people; it is confusing me
	A market in China that sells bats and once they were consumed the world got introduced to COVID-19
	Many people say it is because of the 5G network so I also believe that.
Political context	Negligence: all along government had information on COVID-19 but it did not conduct awareness campaigns
Do not know	Icalenga ati kube kovidi kwena awe nshaishiba. (What has caused COVID-19, I do not know)
	Don't know the cause, it is just a disease like others

7.2.2   Understanding of symptoms of COVID-19

Unlike the diverse explanations for the causes of the pandemic, the study overwhelmingly found that youth participants had a generally good understanding of the symptoms of COVID-19 as shown in Figure 9 below. This was noted in responses of both male and female participants, with the most frequently cited symptoms being dry cough, difficulty in breathing, fever and high body temperature as well as flu- and cold-like symptoms. Interestingly, malaria was also cited as a symptom of COVID-19 infection

although the understanding might be that COVID-19 and malaria have symptoms in common (for example, fever). Although it might be tempting to interpret a comparison between the generally good understanding of the symptoms of COVID-19 against the poorer understanding of its causes as due to better teaching of the former than the latter, it must be remembered that COVID-19 is also referred to as the 'novel' Corona virus, and was completely unknown until very recently. Although disadvantaged youth are suffering a form of exclusion from access to correct information about COVID-19 itself, this is something that they shared to varying extents with everyone else in the world, including the scientific community. Teachers will only be able to provide better information in this regard once more is known about this 'novel' disease: the exclusion from access to correct information is universal, rather than specific to the youth.
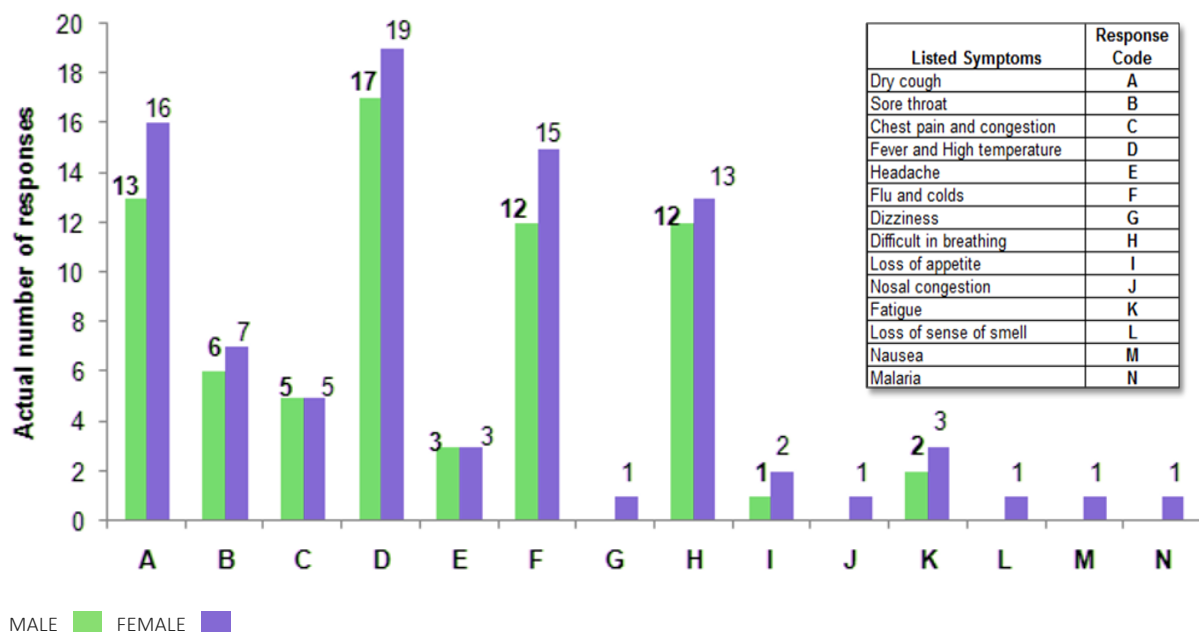
Listed Symptoms	Response Code
Dry cough	A
Sore throat	B
Chest pain and congestion	C
Fever and High temperature	D
Headache	E
Flu and colds	F
Dizziness	G
Difficult in breathing	H
Loss of appetite	I
Nosal congestion	J
Fatigue	K
Loss of sense of smell	L
Nausea	M
Malaria	N

Figure 9: Gender-based presentation of symptoms of COVID-19 known by the youth participants

Further, even though the symptoms were fairly well understood across the sample of participants, it cannot be disputed that knowledge about this new disease is at a very early stage and still being developed. Symptoms and their treatment across the world are still being investigated, discussed and debated, so early assertions, such as that the view expressed in Box 6 is false, that an infected person cannot be completely asymptomatic, are not altogether surprising. The use of face masks, social distancing and hand washing were the most widely identified preventative measures on account of being cost effective and easily accessible as well as inclusive for all. Some of the voices from the field (Figure 10) validate the reasoning behind the use of all of the above preventative strategies. These quoted responses inherently show that the youth were socio-economically disadvantaged already since they favour preventative measures that were as inexpensive as possible.

Table 5: Preventative measures used by participants

Listed Preventative Measures	Total actual frequency of responses	Actual frequency	
		Male	Female
Social distance and avoid handshaking	43	20	23
Washing hands with soap	42	19	23
Hand sanitising	23	11	12
Using face masks	46	21	25
Avoid touching face and nose	2	1	1
No speaking in public	1	0	1
Staying home	10	5	5
Avoid crowded gatherings	5	2	3
Being clean and hygienic all the time	3	1	2
Putting on gloves	1	0	1
Do not know anything	2	0	2

Figure 10: Field Voices of the participants on COVID-19 preventative strategies and reasons for using them

7.3   Forms of Exclusion from the Excluded Youth Perspective

7.3.1   Understandings of exclusion amidst COVID-19

Regarding the conceptual meaning of exclusion, the participants expressed themselves in different ways (Figure 11), but inherently referring to the same meaning. Based on a blend of all definitions given by the youth, exclusion is regionally defined as shown in Box 7, Box 8 provides specific example of exclusion.

"Exclusion means being disrupted from studies to avoiding contracting COVID -19" "It is when you cannot understand when a teacher is teaching and you cannot ask a question. It is when you cannot learn properly because schools have closed." "Exclusion in this context means how negative the pandemic of COVID-19 has affected the learners who do not have the means to gadgets such as smart phones and also cannot afford to purchase data bundles for them to learn. It is the situation where one is left out in various learning processes." "Not being part of something, in this case learning through online and electronic platforms." "I think it means being left out of learning on the basis that you are young, persons with disabilities, unemployed, or any other social status you may possess. It when you cannot watch what your friends are watching from the teacher"

"It means when your friends are learning but you, as an individual, you cannot learn with them. Isolated from being in same class as others who are learning. Exclusion means people that are not able to be part of the new E-learning system" "When you cannot learn the same things your friends are learning because you don't have TV at home. It is when you cannot learn in full when your friends are learning in full" Exclusion means being deprived of free cheap education. Means being disadvantaged from what one should have. it is when you are not able to cover the topics because schools have closed down and learning is just on TV, but you do not have TV."

Box 7:
Regional Meaning of Exclusion
It is a systemic process of educationally discriminating young learners from equitably accessing quality and inclusive education and resources through established online and electronic learning platforms due to their already disadvantaged-financial profile, gender, disability place of residence amidst COVID-19.

"Not having a face-to-face classes has kept me home, I am not able to learn fully well and have to stay busy with house work. Not involving learners living in rural areas or not being a able to accommodate them in the new learning process" "It is when schools have introduced online learning but its covering few people because few people can afford data. Being excluded from learning like when one doesn't have access to learning activities that are done online or access to reading newspapers" "Exclusion is when I cannot go to campus currently and when I compare myself like medical students are the only ones allowed to go to campus, which is not fair. They receive a spirit of encouragement and it is something I am missing right now. I do things all alone and I am unable to see other classmates, and I cannot even see the other learner are busy or not. Because seeing other learners doing work had encouraged me to do my own. I get really discouraged."

"Exclusion is when the things the governments has put in place to promote online education cannot be accessed by the learners. It means being left out of participation in the new form of learning due to COVID 19. It means being left behind or unable to benefit from learning rights. It is when you are removed from accessing education online or on TV. It simply means the inability by learners in school to access quality education due to the pandemic. The existence of disparities in which other learners have access to education through digital platforms whilst others can't because of their poor backgrounds"

Limited accessibility to learning material owing to high data costs. Being not part of a e-learning process that has been introduced. It means being able to learn in a separate environment without contact unlike the conventional ways. It means being not counted on educational issues that affect your life. Lack of equitable access to new form of education because I am in a village. It is whereby you have no one to help you to learn, you are on your own because of social distance, we are all being by ourselves, not being together. It is being unable to access the electronic education your friends are accessing. This means that people or students who are in villages or areas where there is no electricity and have no internet connections are isolated or being discriminated since they cannot access education that is being offered online.

"Exclusion means rural areas are being left out and they cannot be reached out either with information that can help them know about the spread of the virus and new way of learning. It is when the learners cannot afford to watch TV or go to the internet because data is expensive. It is when online learning is important, but pupils in villages don't know of it because they lack information. Exclusion means that for example as students, those that are in villages where there is no access to electricity and poor internet connections are discriminated or are excluded from online learning and they are being left out. Exclusion means rural communities, the poor, the vulnerable and the marginalized communities cannot learn in same way as those who have money. It means you cannot afford the necessary data and gadgets to utilize technology - and participate in the platforms of learning during the COVID-19 lockdown."

Figure 11: Gender-based perspectives on the meaning of exclusion and emerged regional meaning

7.3.2 Already existing forms of learning exclusion

The study observed that the youth who were educationally excluded amidst COVID-19 were already vulnerable to existing forms of exclusion such as lack of equitable access to quality learning resources, power outages affecting their studying for tests and examinations, gender-based exclusion from equitable and quality education, stagnation in regard to alternatives for students both poor and wealthy, lack of access to health as rural pupils, lack of prior knowledge of the use of e-learning facilities and internet, lack of money to pay for school fees and buy other school requirements, lack of electrical power connections at home and school, among the many others listed in Figure 11 above. The females were exposed to more forms of exclusion than the males at all levels of education. With all such pre-existing exclusions, it is no exaggeration to say that COVID-19 has increased their vulnerability to the emerged and emerging teaching and learning landscape.

7.3.3 Emerged and emerging forms of learning exclusion amidst COVID-19

According to the findings presented in Table 6 below, the study identified about 24 new and mutually-connected forms of learning exclusion which were thought to have excluded the youth participants from quality education amidst COVID-19. Among the newly-emerged and emerging forms of learning exclusion, the most cited were: social distancing, which was thought to have created a huge gap amongst the learners themselves and between the learners and the teachers. There was a loud cry that social distancing had affected every learner from primary to tertiary levels of education as it tended to promote the resurfacing of lone or individualistic learning, which is contrary to all tenets of quality education for sustainable development (Box 9). There was also a frequent citing of lack of access to internet, TV and all related infrastructure that promotes the newly-introduced e-learning processes. Worth noting also was the concern that some areas, especially rural areas in all selected SADC countries, had never had electric power, telecommunication and TV connections such that it was impractical to even think of e-learning, and that many rural learners were actually hearing of e-learning for the first time since the beginning of their academic journeys (Box 10).

Table 6: Emerged and emerging forms of learning exclusion amidst COVID-19

SN	New forms of learning exclusion amidst COVID-19	Actual frequency of responses		
		Group	Male	Female
1	No access to TV and internet connection	21	10	11
2	Lack of access to all e-learning infrastructure (i.e. android phone)	31	14	17
3	Poor internet and TV signal	21	10	11
4	Lack of knowledge on how to use internet and new technologies	3	1	2
5	Lack of equal prior knowledge on use of internet and learning on TV	5	2	3
6	Social distance is preventing us from learning with friends	64	29	35
7	Lack of electric power connectivity	6	3	3
8	Excluded from the library during lockdown	2	1	1
9	Reduced hours for learning	1	0	1
10	e-Learning has become exclusively expensive	12	6	6
11	No online learning for learners in government schools	1	0	1
12	Non-examination classes have remained closed indefinitely	2	1	1
13	Poor timing of online lessons	1	0	1
14	Disturbed concentration	1	0	1
15	Psychological fear and panic for fear of lagging behind and failure	2	1	1
16	There is shortage of text books because each pupil needs his or her own text book	6	3	3
17	Lonely learning without a teacher's explanation	3	1	2
18	School was a no-go area during lockdown	2	1	1
19	Inability to buy a mask.	2	1	1
20	Promote anti-social and lone learning behaviour because we cannot discuss in groups	2	1	1
21	Learning together as each other's suspects	4	2	2
22	Lack of learning Apps for persons with disabilities	5	2	3
23	Intimidating online learning school environment	14	6	8
24	Online home schooling favours those from literate families	13	6	7

Generally, COVID-19 was thought to be promoting education for financially stable families, given that internet access was a real problem for the poor who lacked the means to buy data bundles in the face of other competing social and economic challenges. As earlier noted earlier, the majority of the youth were dependent on parents or guardians whose socioeconomic status was already under strain due to industrial and business lockdowns. Some other direct reports concerning how COVID-19 has exacerbated the strain on quality learning for the youth are presented in Box 11 below:

7.3.4   Educational experiences of the youth before and during COVID-19

The study revealed that COVID-19 had negatively affected the educational lives of the young learners across all levels of education in the same way, although to varying intensities (Table 7). The general message for the SADC region and all policy makers is that before COVID-19, the learning experience was conducive and inclusive in spite of existing socio-economic exclusions.

Before the pandemic, there generally was opportunity for youth to mingle and discuss school work, share notes and ideas, and it gave them confidence in their academic progression and chances of passing examinations, in spite of existing socio-economic exclusions. They were more socially engaged in their processes of learning from primary up to tertiary level of education. However, amidst COVID-19, learning and learning environments have become more exclusive, favouring youth from socio-economically advantaged families who already have experience in the use of educational technologies, have access to electric power connectivity, and can afford to buy TVs and other e-learning toolkits.

Social distancing was universally cited as the main source of learning exclusion because pupils could no longer be, and learn together as encouraged by the principles for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). During lockdown of all schools, disadvantaged youth were prevented by social distancing from visiting their privileged friends to learn with them on TV or online. The pandemic has since allowed the emergence of psychological fears and suspicions of one another such that learning from one another has become an impossibility leading to the resurgence of *lone learning* or *individualistic learning*, unlike collective learning.

Girls' concentration on school work has been hampered because they are frequently assigned to home chores during the lockdown. Some fear that, if the lockdown is prolonged, they might be vulnerable to sexual abuse from male relatives staying in the same household, and risk becoming pregnant. COVID-19 has affected the education of rural youth more than their urban peers due to poverty, lack of infrastructure such as telecommunication in some countries, lack of electric power connectivity, lack of resources, among others. Adaptation has so far proven

to be challenging for all the youth who are already socio-economically excluded, but more especially among the youth living in rural areas and those living with diverse physical disabilities such as blindness, and hearing impairment because they cannot see or hear the lessons being taught. Trainers and teachers living with disability were also excluded by new modes of teaching thereby affecting their pupils and students with special needs even more.

The students living with disability are already excluded in many ways, and responses to COVID-19 worsen ed the gap as far as educational life is concerned. For example, one of the key informants asked:

'How can a blind person keep social distance? If everyone keeps a distance from the other, how will the blind lecturer like me and the students with other disabilities going to survive? If as a lecturer I cannot afford to use the Moodle online learning platform to teach my students, how worse will it be to my students? I tried to engage the management over this excluding method of teaching before the university closed, but I was told, "we cannot fail to implement Moodle online learning because of only 10 students with disabilities as compared to over 10,000 others."'

Box 14:

'Before COVID19, we used to learn well from the teacher. When you don't understand, you ask your friend to help you. We were also happy to meet friends every day, even though we were poor, we were learning in the same way. Now after this COVID-19, it's not possible.'

This means that every student with special learning needs must find their own means to keep up with those who are fully able-bodied. Figure 12 provides an example of how students with special needs must motivate strategies for themselves.
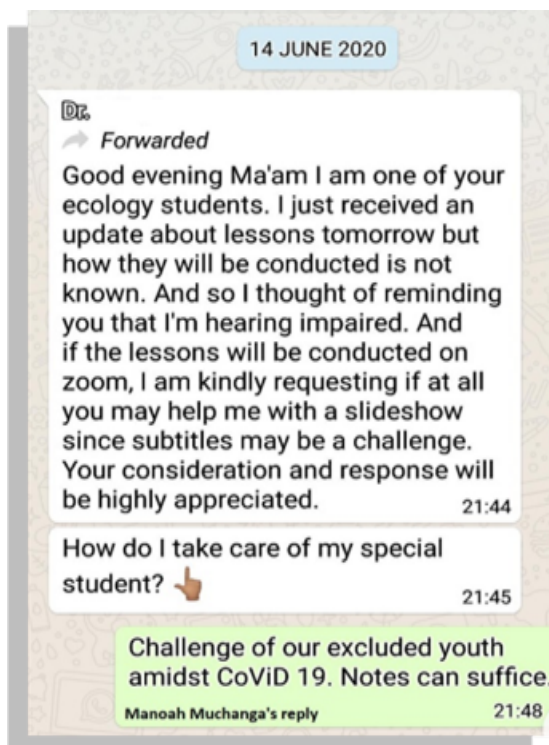

Figure 12: Screen shot of how youth with disability academically survive

Because the blind person could not practically keep social distance, he or she was not only vulnerable academically, but also had an increased chance of being infected by the virus, and suffering its consequences. Table 7 summarises the educational experiences of the excluded before and after COVID-19.

Table 7: Educational experiences of the excluded youth before and during COVID-19

Subthemes	Educational life stories of the youth before COVID-19	Educational life stories of the youth during COVID-19
Home-schooling challenges	It was going fine. Everything was okay. We just came back for the semester	Now it has changed because now we are just home and we don't know when we will go back. Online learning is not working.
No access to teachers	Before COVID I was well abreast with my syllabus and could meet my teachers and colleagues at school. Before COVID-19, we used to learn well from the teacher. When you don't understand, you ask your friend to help you. We were also happy to meet friends every day. Even though we were poor, we were learning in the same way.	A lot has changed as for now am not even involved in any school activities. I have to do my own self-study at home because my teachers gave us a once-off work. I can't have access to my teachers anymore because I can't afford data for e-learning. Now it has changed because there is no teacher explaining things. I used to study well in class unlike this way of just studying at home sometimes no one to help me where I am unable to do on my own. When I was at school, I used to ask teachers for assistance but now it's hard for me. COVID-19 really ruined everything The holiday is too long without being taught and sometimes I have to struggle on my own since we don't have access to the internet I don't think I'll reach all my goals as I'm already planning to quit all my high level subjects because I don't think teachers are going to finish if we happen to go back to school, time is already gone and we hadn't started with anything at school.
Psychological dystopia	Learning was good, then this disease came. I was more prepared to learn so that I could pass my exams so that I can go to my dream school. I was sad to hear that the disease came.	COVID-19 affected my project in Design and Technology and now I am panicking because I have to do many things, I have other subjects to study. When this COVID came it cut my plans.
Uncertainties on progression to next level of education and life	Me I was in grade 5, I started the first term I did not even knew there was COVID-19, that it will reach in Zambia. Learning was real, our teacher was teaching us. Initially, we were sure of progressing to the next level of education, graduate and find employment.	We have remained behind. I do not know if we are going to repeat grade 5 or we will go to grade 6. Now the teacher said what you learn from grade 5 to 7 will come in the exam, what are we going to do? The coming-in of COVID-19 has been a burden. We already planned about our expenses but now everything is disturbed. I should have finished my university degree by early June but now I can't do that. I am home waiting for the COVID-19 to end. My academic calendar has definitely changed due to the closure of the College. Instead of finishing school next year in June, I do not know when I will finish. Worsened: I was already affected as a distance student, now the condition is more than that, I don't know when I will be graduating my degree, or when I will be employed with my diploma. It has totally changed. I was expected to finish second year of university but as of now I have not yet finished. I cannot attend lessons or have access to my teachers. I don't know what will happen next. Now am stuck in the same academic year and unlike the brief holidays this period is proving unhelpful, there is no new development or progress even in myself.
Lack of access to Internet	Before the pandemic everything was done systematically and we were really not experiencing challenges like these.	It has changed since now learning is through Internet and in a case where one has no [data] bundles that means they have been left behind. It has been so difficult to adapt but we are now coping up with it.

	Before the global pandemic, I was supposed to attend university by physically attending classes and doing discussions in the library with my peers. Furthermore, my modules required one to present on various subjects and rewards were given as one actively participates in tutorials.	Currently, I have to use the internet so as I can join classes through Microsoft Teams. All presentations and exams are supposed to be done online. I'm now home studying on my own even if I don't understand. There's no one to help me out and I have no access to online learning
Declined quality of teaching	Before COVID-19 it was fairly great and inclusive for all. Everyone could attend lectures in the same way.	There has been a decline in the quality of standard of delivery of content. There has been so much compromise in the way the teaching was done online.
Disturbed social interaction in learning environments and reduced time for learning	Before COVID, we used to be many at school, we used to feel good meeting with friends and learn together. *Mulong'atwadin'ileng'anakuvwal a ma Maskiwanyi, Tukwenda mwezhi momutunakeng'eli. ChilaneyiAng'ezhi a nezitunatweshikuyihanging'ailan' aanumafukutunatwesikuhanging 'amutukushikolawezhimawanyi.* (Because we never used to wear masks, we used to walk or interact with others in any way we wanted, we were able to hug with each other at school and also visit, but now we cannot do that.) Before COVID-19, we were going to school and enjoying the lessons. We were learning all subjects per day, and we were not scared of going to school.	I no longer do discussions and they used to be very helpful in my learning, because some concepts I would not understand well in class so the other classmates would clarify for me. The knowledge I used to receive in group discussions is compromised. And I have to do the research by myself without doing any discussions with my classmates. And I can't even go to the lecturer to query. COVID19 has disturbed me because we cannot do group discussion with classmates because of social distance, I was depending on the teacher. No asking a friend where you did not understand because they stopped us from visiting friends in the neighbourhood. On TV if you do not understand something, you cannot ask anywhere. I cannot learn well with friends because I am scared maybe they have COVID. We have stopped greeting each other, when a friend comes closer, I am not feeling comfortable, but this is affecting my learning because I am scared. Now we are sitting one or distanced from one another, we cannot do what we used to do together at school. It is not nice. Even break time, we stand away from each because we are scared of each other. You cannot ask your friend in class when you are doing exercise. Now things are not the way they used to be, I am scared of even my closest my friends because I suspect they have COVID. We cannot make groups for discussion of subjects and sharing notes. Sometimes we do a lot of cleaning before we start learning. You can't be allowed in class without a face mask, this is an extra cost. Less sharing and
Disturbed social interaction in learning environments and reduced time for learning		Being extra careful what you touch and washing hands frequently is another stress. Before COVID-19 education was more exciting and fun and we had all sources available to use. It was really hard since I can't keep up with my fellow learners because I do not have a phone to do online learning. The schools went on lockdown and I stopped learning. And as a grade 12 I'm filled with a lot of uncertainty. We can no longer stay very long in school as it used to be because we are scared. We can no longer consult frequently with teachers to help you with one or two questions and with each other as pupils because of social distance. We are learning in fear now, you see, we are told this is a very deadly disease, we are human beings and we are afraid to die, which is making us not to live well as we used to do. Our academic interaction has changed.

No access to e-learning gadgets	Initially we never bothered about remaining behind in various subjects because we were learn in the same way.	We are no longer learning as it used to be in school. We have no TV. We have no money to buy those things which the government brought to learn on TV. Here we have no electricity, so even a TV cannot switch on.
Promoted gender inequalities at home	We used to have enough time for studying as girls because we were spending time at school.	At home they send me to do too many chores, when you want to study, they tell you to go draw water, when done, you are told to cook, when done again they tell you to sweep the surrounding, so at last, you get very tired, you cannot study. If the government does not open school fast, I am scared I can get impregnated or sexually abused by over staying home. Then my educational future will disturbed. So government must quickly open school. At home also parents like sending me to do sweeping, cooking, and washing instead of giving time to studies.
Promoted concentration in school	We used to learn well from class and I was able to ask questions. I was sharing with friends. I was not scared of my friends	Learning has changed now, we are learning a bit fast because examinations will come soon. We are not playing the way we used to play because COVID-19 reduced our time towards examinations
Feeling educationally betrayed	It was amazing because we basically meet with our lecturers in lessons and get chances of asking questions where we do not understand, practicing face to face communication and we also use to meet up in groups to discuss our assignments or other activities.	Negatively because we did not get the chance to sit for the exam at least to test our minds and this makes me feel betrayed because I feel like I did not learn anything at all.
Learning: no longer enjoyable	Before COVID-19, learning process was more enjoyable and interactive. We learnt from each other freely without suspicions	Learning process is no more enjoyable and interactive, there is this stereotyping especially if you come from a crowded compound. You have to learn most things by yourself. The teachers are too fast in teaching because they have to make up for the lost time.
Online learning financially unsustainable	Before COVID-19, I can say my education was going on smoothly. Of course, I cannot deny the fact that I could meet few problems to do with finances to buy data for internet for my studies, but these problems were minimal and short-lived as school had Wi-Fi which, despite tripping network, I would be able to use and excel.	It changed a lot because am in need of a lot of resources for my school life to be alive. There has been a rapid change. COVID-19 has brought in a huge demand for financial outflow to cope up with school, which, with already my poor state, it is quite difficult to survive in such new state.
Individualistic and lonely learning	My learning calendar was better defined and set up. I had some direction and guidance. I had a lot of workload and school pressure. My mindset was attuned to school.	Now I have to read, teach myself and understand. Now it's like I'm my own teacher and student at the same time; something like a baby trying to teach itself how to walk.

Educationally transformative	It was difficult because every time I need to study because we do not write tests with open books meaning I had to master everything by head to be able to make it after writing tests and examinations unlike now that we are writing tests with laptops and all the materials needed to support online learning.	It has changed a lot because we learned a lot like being safe for instance washing our hands and social distance. Positively because during face to face lessons as a student I wasn't putting efforts in internet work, I did not know how to use internet now I am really learning a lot. There are now few people in school and we can learn better with few people because there is teacher attention for all pupils. COVID-19 forced me to raise to the challenge to learn new educational technologies. Before COVID-19, we were carelessly spending, but now we have learnt not to be wasteful with food and even money because you have to spare some money for bundles

7.3.5   A synthesis of emerged educational story for excluded youth

Table 7 above has generally presented lengthy rich texts on the educational lives of the youth. These point to two themes that is, before COVID-19, their educational lives were fair and offered opportunities to learn from one another, consult more with the teacher and were generally enjoyable in spite of some existing forms of exclusion. However, following the COVID-19 incidence, the story has changed both negatively and transformatively.

On the negative side, response to COVID-19 has excluded the youth from accessing e-learning. Whilst youth from wealthy families were learning online and on television, those from poor families had no access, nor could they visit their friends and neighbours to learn, because of social distancing. Social distancing was experienced as the worst aspect of anti-social behaviour in a learning environment deterring pupils from learning from one another and making them suspicious of one another.

Some youth were unable to buy data bundles, since family finances extended only to food (Box 15). The school lockdown impacted doubly on females for various reasons: firstly, girls were subjected to extra home chores whilst the boys continued to study and waited to be served food by their female siblings. When asked how they coped with this situation, the girls reported that they spent less time sleeping at night to make up for the time spent doing home chores (Box 15). Secondly, the girls were subjected to fear of getting pregnant or even being sexually abused if the COVID-19 lockdown were prolonged, due to being locked together with males who may be abusers.

Although there was no specific evidence in SADC at the time of this study, Kenya allegedly reported a surging number of pregnancies during the COVID-19 lockdown (Capital FM. 2020), a situation that might be replicated in other countries of the SADC region. There was also complaint from both males and females that specific academic subjects presented gender-biased difficulties, with females complaining that they were having challenges understanding science and mathematics, and males were having challenges understanding English language, history and others. So, COVID-19 deprived them of learning from one another's academic strengths. One female student explained as follows in Box 16:

On the other hand, there were instances where some youth mentioned that the coming of COVID-19 had actually pushed them to rise to the challenge of learning about the internet of things and things of internet as far as education progression is concerned (Box 17) and even reduced the very sexual activities which some other youth were concerned about due to social distancing. So as much as COVID-19 was dreaded for causing some havoc in the educational lives of the youth, it could also be a boon, which all stakeholders can constructively use and about which they need to be educated.

Box 15:

'We are already poor. When I ask my parents for money to buy phone and [data] bundles, they say they only have money for food to feed the family, they cannot sacrifice the little money available for one person and leave the family to starve. So I just now wait until schools open because I cannot visit friends who have TVs and the internet.' (A)

'Kwena ukusambililatatulesambilila ngafilya cali kusukulu. Kabili tatwakwata ama TV na intaneti takwaba kuno. Takwaba ukwakutamba TV. Takuli ukwipusha umunobe apo tawacumfwikisha umulandu balitukanya ukutandalila abanesu mucipanda. Elo kung'anda balantumaisha, kutiwati ubule ibuku ati tapako amenshi, wapwisha ati ipika, wapwisha kabili ati pyangako ulubansa nomba icashashalako wanaka, teti ubelenge.'

(We are no longer learning as it used to be in school. We have no TV. No asking a friend where you did not understand because they stopped us from visiting friends in the neighbourhood. At home they send me to do too many chores, when you want to study, they tell you to go draw water, when done, you are told to cook, when done again they tell you to sweep the surrounding, so at last, you get very tired, you cannot study).

Grade 7 Female pupil, Chiengi District. (B)

7.3.6   New learning needs of the excluded youth amidst COVID-19

Box 16:

'COVID19 has disturbed me because we cannot do group discussion with classmates because of social distance, I was depending on the teacher. We are scared of each other in case maybe your friend has COVID. I am not able to use internet because I don't know how it work, here in the village, there is no electricity, there are no 'big phones', no TV, but our friends in town have. How can we write the same examination at the end of the year? Only those who have money can manage to buy so their children can learn.'

Teachers, schools and tertiary education institutions, government and parents are, to varying extents, actively involved in responding to new learning needs emerging as a consequence of response to the pandemic, but the study noted that reduction of social distancing in the learning process remains a big challenge. Newly-emerged learning needs for the youth include e-learning equipment (such as laptops, smart phones, TV and others), internet data bundles, quality and inclusive online learning and environment, personal protective equipment (PPE) such as face masks and hand sanitizer, tailor-made Apps for the physically challenged, mainstreaming of e-learning technologies, individualistic learning strategies, COVID-safe classrooms, and electricity connections, which have all become urgently necessary for all unconnected learners. Table 8 below lists specific learning needs indicated by research participants, and the frequency with which these were identified by participants is illustrated in Figure 13 following.

Box 17:

 "Positively because during face to face lessons as a student I wasn't putting efforts in internet work, I did not know how to use internet now I am really learning a lot." (A)

"For me I think, COVID-19 has made school youth to stay away from sexual relationship because they are scared of contracting COVID-19. I think this time everyone can focus on studying instead of wasting time with boys." (B)

Table 8: New learning need of the youth Amidst COVID-19

New learning needs amidst COVID-19	CODE	Actual frequency of responses		
		Group total	Male	Female
E-learning equipment (Laptop, TV, tablet and smart phones)	A	41	21	20
Electronic learning resources	B	7	5	2
Access to free internet with strong signal	C	43	18	25
More knowledge about COVID-19	D	2	1	1
Learn how to work with friends without physical contact	E	3	2	1
Personal Protective Equipment (i.e. mask)	F	4	3	1
Personal learning toolkit (personal books, mask & sanitizer in the bag)	G	2	1	1
Quality inclusive online learning skills and environment	H	27	16	11
Free extra lessons	I	1	1	
Free personal hand sanitizer	J	2	1	1
Classroom installed with equipped with all safety facilities	K	9	4	5
School radio station for radio lessons	L	1	1	0
Connection of Telecommunication facilities	M	1	1	0
Connection of electric power line	N	5	1	4
Teachers fully trained in ICT	O	1	1	0
Enough food at home during lockdown	P	1	1	0
Individual learning skills	Q	1	1	0
Revisions of text books to respond to the new needs	R	1	0	1
New Learning strategies	S	1	0	1
Social distance detecting and brail Apps for the physically challenged	T	5	2	3
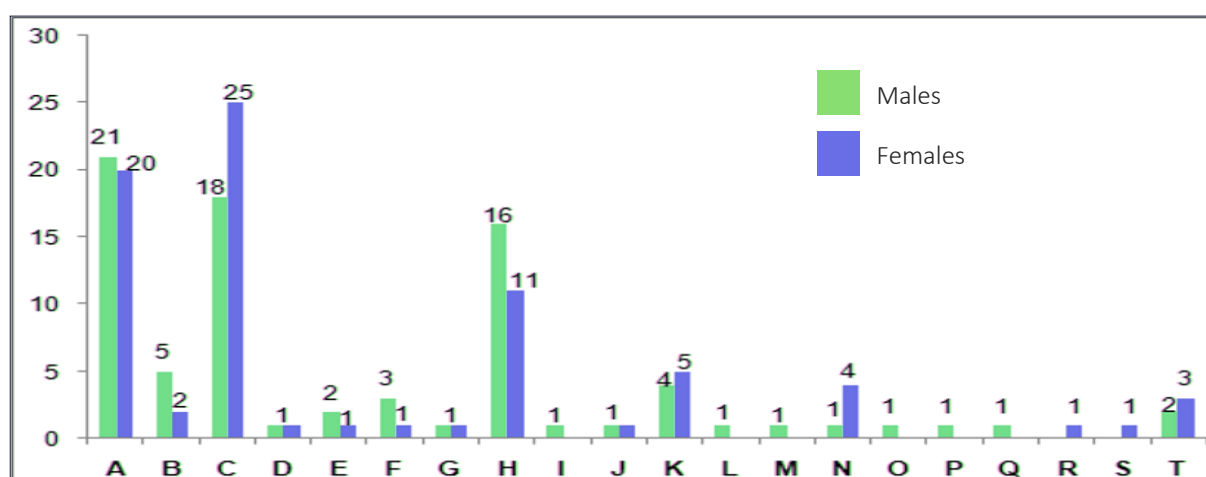
Figure 13: Graphic presentation of new learning needs by gender

In the newly emerged learning environment, access to all electronic learning resources should be made as available to the learners as possible (Box 18) and they, like everyone else worldwide, also need more knowledge about COVID-19. Learning how to work with others without physical contact has evolved as a new need everywhere. Pupils and students alike need this, since they need to adapt to the new social learning gaps created through social distancing infection prevention strategy. Since social distancing will probably be necessary for some time, personal learning toolkits such as personal books, masks and hand sanitizers should now be on the back-to-school budget to ensure hygienic schooling as far as possible. Currently, the cheapest way in which the new needs of the learners are being addressed is through encouraging the youth to wear masks, keep a social distance and keep washing their hands. Teachers are the main agents in promoting these practices. Addressing the new learning needs of the youth was unanimously considered to be a matter of urgency because most youth, except perhaps those in examination classes, are still not going to school or college and, unfortunately, still cannot access the available online learning interventions provided by their respective governments.

8 Learning opportunities arising from the COVID-19 pandemic

As illustrated in Box 19 social distancing in classroom situations was to some extent, considered to have had the potential to improve the quality of assessment because pupils can no longer copy from one another's answers.

This can encourage them to work harder to prepare for examinations. COVID-19 has provided a thematic area for final year research projects among students in the universities. It presents an irrefutable argument for providing rural areas with electricity and internet connectivity.

COVID-19 has challenged learners at all levels to move out of the comfort zones of traditional learning methods to those ICT-oriented strategies by exploring e-learning technologies such as Zoom, Google Meet and social media for learning instead of using them for entertainment only. The COVID-19 lockdown has partly afforded pupils time to study and to work academically with their parents at home. It has taught youth aspects of hygiene and living more sustainably. Significantly, COVID-19 has also challenged all learning institutions to start thinking of sustainable investment into e-learning. This will not only be sustainable environmentally, but will also improve institutional adaptive capacities for other future global pandemics. These e-learning opportunities are already being implemented especially in tertiary institutions (Box 20). If done strategically, e-learning can be used by individuals who do not like learning in traditional contexts. Some youth drop out of school not because they don't like learning, but because they find schools problematic. To be effective, there is the need for good programming, and for the equitable provision of technologies to enable access to the learning.

9 Meaning of Findings to the Broader Context of the SADC Region

The demographic data provided in this report highlights the need for regional educational planning amidst COVID-19 to take identity, socio-ecological, cultural, political and economic considerations into account, with a specific view to avoid exclusion, marginalisation and discrimination, which have always haunted different countries and the SADC region in general. In their expressions, experts who were interviewed from Zambia, Malawi, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Mauritius, and even the United Kingdom said it could be months before educational activities resume. The already strained socio-economic circumstances of the participants represent what could be the case for many youth across the region, as would most likely be confirmed by scaled-up country research into a demographic characterisation of educational circumstances of youth in the SADC region. Furthermore, the impact of COVID-19 on the educational lives of physically-challenged youth is another issue that requires reflection, in the sense that they are already moreexcluded in more diverse ways than thosewho are able-bodied. For example, one expert living with blindness and lecturing students with special needs had the following to say:

> *'In my view the excluded youth are those who by their socioeconomic status or physique are not able to participate in online educational information-sharing because of their vulnerability. For example, the university now has 37 students with disabilities – that includes those totally blind, deaf and those with severe disabilities – using wheel chairs. So these are in a triple tragedy because they are socially disadvantaged, physically challenged and now more educationally disadvantaged because of this COVID-19 crisis which has led to the e-learning system. For a blind student to use a laptop here, he or she needs about seven softwares to interface with all online learning systems. For example, for a blind person to work with a computer so as to access online a learning platform such as Moodle, he or she needs a software called JAWS (Job Access With Speech). You need USD 1200 to buy a licence for this software. How can a student or pupil who is already socioeconomically disadvantaged manage to buy this software? This JAWS is the most powerful software that interfaces with a lot of programmes on the computer and smart phones. What I know is that almost all the students that I so far train do not have JAWS. On that basis, it means that they are already excluded. Even myself as a lecturer who has been using JAWS for 15 years, I fail to access Moodle as a new teaching and learning platform. Now, the question is if I, who have been using this software for a long time, fail to access this Moodle, how can my students manage? As much as e-learning seems to offer a solution in some way, it is a serious exclusion to all learners, including myself as a lecturer, because we both cannot see and cannot access the provided platform for teaching and learning. If I, whom they consider to be their master, is failing, what about the students?'*

Policy decisions need to address the special needs of these learners. Initially, speculative opinion on the media seemed to indicate exclusion of all learners, but this investigative research explored the educational signature of COVID-19 among the excluded youth in SADC countries. The general social demographic profile of excluded youth is of concern and needs to be addressed by reducing the inequalities and forms of exclusion existing prior to the pandemic as well as those that are newly-emerged amidst COVID-19.

The study showed that the youth were more knowledgeable about the symptoms and preventative measures of COVID-19 than its origin. This means that education campaigns of countries in the SADC region have had success in regard to the symptomatic and preventative dimensions of COVID-19, and can hope for similar success as further knowledge about the symptoms as well as the causes emerges. The use of masks and social distancing were the widely adopted preventative measures on account of being cost effective. COVID-19 has confronted SADC decision makers with the new challenge to be proactive in its education investment so as to start thinking of full migration to e-learning, although this would require strong political will among decision makers in the education sector. Learners and students from rural communities are the most excluded from learning as compared to other young people in urban and peri-urban areas. Young learners in rural communities are unlikely to be able to afford data, which ultimately excludes them from the learning that is being done online during the COVID-19 period.
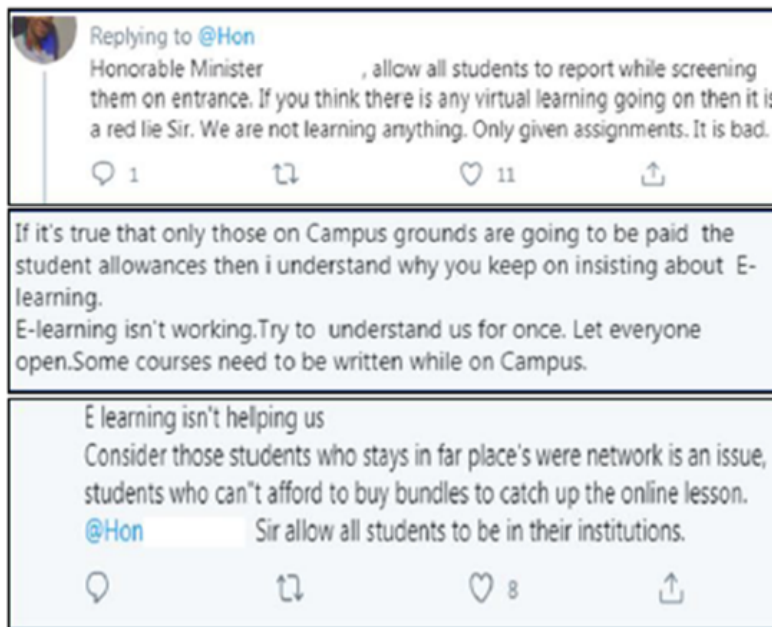
Figure 14: Tweeter reactions to phased reopening of higher learning

In addition to the fact that the youth were missing out on critical lessons, COVID-19 was a disruption to the continuity and routine of the regular classes that they were missing. Learners also indicated missing the in-person aspect of learning where they were able to see their teachers and ask questions for clarity. The new means of learning and teaching has caused stress for learners due to an overburdening workload because additional work had to be completed while attempting to catch up with pre-COVID-19 backlog. In addition to the participants' health being at risk, the excluded youth, especially the females, are also vulnerable to other potential risks that might emanate from prolonged school lockdown. The newly-emerged forms of exclusion are all e-learning-oriented and, as such, there is need for all the 16 countries in the SADC region to undertake detailed baseline studies to inform investment in quality online learning strategies that are inclusive for all, including youth with disabilities. As much as COVID-19 has caused educational havoc across the region, it also offers learning opportunities which can be explored for regional and country context use. As cautioned by a professor of inclusive education from Southampton University in the United Kingdom, SADC regional leaders should take care not to focus planning for learning too specifically on the COVID-19 crisis, but to acknowledge that COVID-19 had not brought these exclusions per se, but simply scaled up pre-existing exclusions. The focus for the SADC educational system should, therefore, be on addressing the underlying compounding factors for the current form of e-learning exclusion that had caught many countries unprepared.

The phased reopening of learning institutions that saw those facing final examinations being allowed to return, was experienced as exclusionary given that all students were entitled to completion and progression to the next level without being delayed, and online strategies were not enabling this. For example, one of the online platforms showed mixed reactions to the phased reopening of the learning institutions where only final year students were to return to class whilst the rest were to be subjected to the e-learning platform as shown in Figure 14.

The inference is that one set of educational exclusions was being replaced by another. Another insight for the SADC region is that COVID-19 had psychological effects on the youth, especially those at primary education level, due to physical exclusion punctuated by COVID-19. Parents, grandparents and teachers shared that children had become anxious; some feeling traumatised because they were unable to make sense of the 'new normal'. Their lives were disrupted due to the uncertainty of the virus, and the feelings of restraint by the lockdown measures: missing fellow classmates, missing regular class, class routines, and others. Online strategies for teaching and learning should thus take cognisance of psychological factors that may also affect the learners' performance.

10   General Reflections on the Limitations of the Study

Attempts were made to mitigate the limitations of the study by using selected strategies as shown in Table 9.

Table 9: Limitations of the study and mitigation strategies

SN	Limitations	Mitigation strategy
1	Given the current COVID-19 lockdown, the adopted methods of data collection such as telephone-online interviews were inherently excluding to some participants.	Wherever possible, limited visitation for face-to-face interviews was used to cater for the excluded youth who may not have access to internet and telephone facilities.
2	'Youth' is defined differently in countries of the study population.	The definition of the youth was operationalised to regional context.
3	Identifying excluded young people for long face-to-face interviews was partly challenging.	Snowball sampling was used to identify those who might be accessible.
	Even those who were easily identifiable proved challenging to access given the current COVID-19 lockdown.	Telephone method was used to access and interview those who were not comfortable with physical contact amidst COVID-19 lockdown. Convenience sampling technique allowed for replacement of those who were not readily available for interviews
	Key informants were difficult to locate.	The JET team assisted in locating some.
4	Marginalised youth are found in urban, peri-urban and rural settings and they have different characteristics, gender, disabilities, culture and race. It would be challenging to get a strictly representative sample, which is needed in order to have a full picture of youth marginalisation during the pandemic.	The focus would not be on how representative the sample of participants should be, but on the profundity and perspicacity of information to be provided. The sample size was purposefully limited to a range of 10 to 30 per country which still fits within PENCS sample sizing requirements.
6	Limited timeframe.	Maximisation of available time through teamwork, close monitoring and motivation.

11   Conclusion and Recommendations

11.1 Conclusion

Based on the evidence provided in the study, it can be concluded that the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted the educational lives of learners and students, especially those from the lower economic strata. The most profound impact noted was their ineffective participation in online learning, teaching and assessments due to a lack of resources needed to access the online platforms. Health and safety of learners were the main concerns due to the nature of the new learning and teaching environment. The pandemic has affected both male and female youth alike, although females were further affected by the lockdown, which resulted in increased expectation that they should perform household chores that reduced their study time. The study also concluded that the rural areas were more vulnerable to the pandemic as far as e-learning was concerned, which means that they should be given priority during the intervention process.

11.2 Policy Recommendations for the SADC Region

1. There is need to urgently devise strategies to address the impact of social/physical distancing on the learning process which has been affected by response to COVID-19 for both learners and educators.

2. The timing for online and TV channel classes should not coincide with peak hours for domestic chores such as sweeping, cooking, and others which tend to disadvantage girl children. This should be accompanied by making affordable data bundles available.

3. Rural schools should be reopened subject to strict adherence to all public health guidelines, because rural learners have been the most affected and widely excluded by the current mode of learning.

4. A detailed research programme should be undertaken to investigate how people living with disabilities have coped educationally and adapted to the learning environment amidst COVID-19. Sign language interpreters must also be provided for TV and online lessons.

5. Governments should establish social media platforms for submission of reports of the challenges experienced by excluded youth. This would ensure effective evaluation of the e-learning platform.

6. If opening of schools would significantly be delayed, governments should cancel academic year for examination classes so as to prevent excluded youth from performing poorly as compared to who were not excluded.

7. Strong protection for girl children during COVID-19 lockdown is needed in order to prevent pregnancy and consequent premature end to their careers.

8. More teachers should be trained in e-learning skills so they can assist learners, especially those who are already excluded by the current mode of lesson delivery.

9. Governments should install hygiene and telecommunication facilities in rural schools, such as building more toilets, taps and boreholes, to help students maintain proper hygiene standards to prevent spread of the virus.

10. Government should install electricity in rural areas and villages to enable excluded youths in those areas to study and use e-learning facilities.

11. Poverty aggravates the impact of the pandemic on education. It is recommended that regional governments should reduce poverty levels and consequently reduce the impact of COVID-19 on learning.

12. The government should involve youth in implementing policies during COVID-19 because some youth have ideas that can help.

13. Blended teaching and learning through combinations of face-to-face and e-learning can be used as a pilot as a pre-cursor to more refined e-learning strategies.

14. Each school, college and university should consider investing in school/college/university radio stations which can cater for learners in school and those still at home.

15. Given the psychological effects of COVID-19 on young learners in general, there is a need for the teaching and learning processes to mainstream psychological counselling services so as to rebuild the academic confidence of the learners.

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Appendix A: Ethical statement

International Science Council
The global voice for science

COMMITTEE FOR FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY IN SCIENCE

Promoting and addressing freedom and responsibility
of science issues at the global level

STATEMENT

Ethical responsibilities of scientists at a time of a global threat

The vision of the International Science Council (ISC) is of science as a global public good. The COVID-19 pandemic highlights the importance of this conviction. Scientific knowledge is crucial to dealing effectively with SARS-CoV-2. The natural sciences will help us understand how it works and how it can be combated; the social sciences will enable us to evaluate its social impact; and interdisciplinary approaches will be an essential component of counter-measures to it as well as of efforts to arrive at effective models, solutions and insights in the context of pandemics.

The ISC applauds the unprecedented response to the pandemic by the global scientific community. The virus does not respect political or geographical borders and the scientific community almost immediately responded with an approach that recognized the problem as a global one. The sharing of data and knowledge across research teams, institutions and countries has been laudable, as have the number of research groups that have quickly pivoted their attention to the pandemic. Scores of academic journals have committed to making their research on COVID-19 freely available for the duration of the outbreak. We hope that best practices emerging from this response will be used as models for global threats, now and in the future.

Across various news and social media platforms there has been a deluge of information on the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of this is based on good scientific practice, but a significant proportion falls under the heading of misinformation, based on weak or no evidence, or deliberately misleading. Such misinformation is often interwoven with scientifically credible and accurate information, thus rendering it all the more difficult to identify trustworthy and reliable sources. These developments emphasize the importance of continuing engagement by the scientific community, which in so doing must maintain complete transparency and be explicit about both evidence-based information and potential shortcomings.

The pandemic highlights many important ethical issues. The right to scientific freedom is paired with the responsibility to ensure that research promotes the common good. The Principle of Freedom and Responsibility in Science, enshrined in the ISC's Statutes, requires researchers and institutions at all levels to conduct and communicate their research with 'integrity, respect, fairness, trustworthiness, and transparency, recognizing its benefits and possible harms.' To this end we highlight some ethical responsibilities of science as it deals with this grave global threat.

- Health and social policies should be guided by the best possible scientific evidence. When communicating to policy-makers or the public at large, scientists therefore have the responsibility to use the best evidence that they can.

- Misinformation can have dire consequences, from promoting panic or denialism to the use of unproven and possibly dangerous therapies. The scientific community has the responsibility to be vigilant in the face of such anti-scientific acts, to make publicly known their lack of validity, and to advocate strongly for scientific values and the scientific method.

- Scientists should recognize that the best social and health responses to the pandemic will not come from science alone. The right policies for an area will depend on many factors, including the demographics, health care system, law and values of that community. Science should aim to best inform policy, not dictate it.

- Scientists have the responsibility to communicate uncertainties, where they exist, to policy-makers and the public. What counts as a "reasonable risk" depends in part on one's values. For this reason the communication of uncertainties is crucial to societies' responses. Public health models, like all science, involve uncertainty, and it is important to communicate the uncertainties to avoid risks of being counter-productive in the long-run. Unless prefaced with the uncertainties involved, the results of inaccurate models could contribute to an erosion of the public's trust in science.

- The rapid development of new technologies and procedures, integrated with big data, is changing the way in which we conduct science. Researchers must continue considering how personal data is collected, managed and used, including but not limited to, obtaining informed and voluntary consent and ensuring privacy and security of the data. Technology can be used for benefit or harm. The "dual-use" of technology must still be appreciated, as governments often react to crises with increased surveillance and control. The serious threat posed by the pandemic should not be used as an excuse to ignore these basic ethical principles.

- COVID-19 highlights the fact that the vulnerable in society are generally the worst affected in a public health crisis. This is due to many reasons, from inadequate access to quality healthcare, poor health, and the need to accept risks to subsist. Scientists should recognize that there are always asymmetries between more and less vulnerable groups as they select patients for study, suggest therapies and policies, and much more.

Good science is absolutely essential to an effective response to the COVID-19 pandemic and other global threats. For it to be truly effective, scientists must have the right to scientific freedom but also pursue their research in an ethical and socially responsible manner.

The members of the Committee for Freedom and Responsibility in Science include Daya Reddy (Chair), Saths Cooper (Vice Chair), Richard Bedford, Craig Callender, Enrique Forero, Robin Grimes, Cheryl Praeger, Sawako Shirahase, Peter Strohschneider, Hans Thybo and Nadia Zakhary.

Read more on the ISC's commitment to protect scientific freedoms enshrined in the Declaration of Human Rights and our work in advocate for these responsibilities. The Principle of Freedom and Responsibility in Science is enshrined in ISC Statute 7.

www.counncil.science
www.council.science/current/press/cfrs-statement-15-june-2020/

Appendix B: Ethical Approval Letter From JET Education Services

transformation through knowledge

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17 June 2020

ADHERENCE TO THE INTERNATIONAL SCIENCE COUNCIL ETHICS STATEMENT TO BE USED DURING A TIME OF GLOBAL THREAT IN COMPLETING THE _#OpenUpYourThinking_ RESEARCH CHALLENGE IN SADC COUNTRIES DURING EMERGENCY SITUATIONS (COVID-19)

JET Education Services (JET) is an independent, non-profit organisation that works with government, the private sector, international development agencies, and education institutions to improve the quality of education and the relationship between education, skills development, and the world of work. JET is also one of two UNESCO/UNEVOC Centres in South Africa, having been admitted in 2014.

We are leading an international Research Challenge, #OpenupYourThinking, which is an opportunity for young (and not-so-young) researchers that want to do something about the threat of COVID-19 and its implications for education. The objective of this research project is to contribute meaningfully and find solutions to the pressures being placed on education systems using an evidence-based approach by looking at the macro, meso and micro-level implications of COVID-19 on Southern African education through the establishment of cross-cutting partnerships to benefit the education fraternity and broader community.

This initiative is being jointly implemented by the UNESCO Regional Office for Southern Africa (UNESCO ROSA), Open Society Foundations, and the SARChI Chair in Global Change and Social Learning Systems' Transforming Education for Sustainable Futures (TESF) project at Rhodes University over a five-week process. The online methodology being applied in this study draws on a combination of research volunteers who are supported by a credible research backbone being offered by JET. This coordinated approach allowed for innovative, fit for purpose, and agile research models and approaches to be adopted.

The research has a focus across six thematic areas, all being led by distinguished senior researchers based at various SADC Higher Education Institutions.

RESEARCH | IMPLEMENTATION | MONITORING & EVALUATION

1. *Theme 1:* Education for sustainable development: COVID-19 education response intersections with the food, water, and economic (livelihoods) crisis
2. *Theme 2:* Teacher preparation for distance learning during a major disruption
3. *Theme 3:* Exploring Lives of the Excluded Youth amidst COVID-19
4. *Theme 4:* Exercising global citizenship amidst COVID 19
5. *Theme 5:* Green skills for sustainable livelihoods in a post-COVID-19 context
6. *Theme 6:* Theme 6: Curbing the spread of fake news in Southern Africa - what we can and cannot do

In the context of conducting this research, JET adheres to a code of ethics consisting of principles and ethical standards that the subjects not be harmed. Principles such as confidentiality, anonymity, informed consent, and honesty follow from this premise. All the theme leads, all based at one of the participating SADC Higher Education Institutions, have also applied to their ethics committees. We acknowledge the importance of this but also recognize that this process may also take time to run its course to completion.

The very nature of this study and its goal to provide a meaningful response to the COVID-19 pandemic on education, therefore, resonate very strongly with the International Science CouncilEthics Statement to be used during a time of global threat. We, therefore, confirm that JET, in the undertaking of this research adheres to the principles advocated by this Statement.

Should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact Dr. James Keevy at james@jet.org.za

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Dr James Keevy
CEO