Education Inequality In South Africa

Will COVID-19 have a long-term negative impact on education inequality? With conclusive evidence and thorough and sufficient research, I can conclude that the answer is no. Despite having already and continuing to have a negative impact on South Africa's education inequality now; the COVID-19 pandemic will not have a lasting effect on the education system in the future. It is more likely that the pre-existing issues (before the COVID-19 era) will continue to have a greater and longer-lasting impact on education inequality rather than COVID-19.

South Africa is considered to have one of the most unequal education systems in the world according to "Inside Education." We live in a country with 2 education systems, one being the wealthy and the other the poor. This stems from the issues from the past that affected the education system and continues to do so. The most impactful is apartheid. During apartheid, people were segregated by race, with only schools in white communities properly resourced. As a result, a child's experience and opportunity of education are now dependent on wealth and race. Another factor is infrastructure, resources, and facilities. Here are some statics from the department on public schools in 2018: out of 23 471 public schools; 20 071 have no laboratories, 18 019 have no libraries and 16 897 have no internet. 1 000 schools have no sports facilities and 239 have no electricity at all. Without proper resources, a child cannot achieve learn. Wealth, area of residence, and travel have a significant impact on inequality. People in poorer areas cannot afford to send their children to the best schools with the best teachers, resources, and technology; instead, they are forced to go to cheap schools with poor standards. Sometimes people can afford a decent school but live out of the zone, are not excepted, and end up in local schools that are of inferior quality. Lastly is travel, travel affects students the most. Lots of children are having to walk for hours just to get to school, this results in tiredness, lack of energy and lack of focus when they arrive. This is a profoundly serious matter affecting inequality among students across South Africa. According to Amnesty International in KZN alone more than 659 000 children walk for over an hour to school each day. The last factor is none other than the teachers. From a news article on news 24, I found that 10% of teachers are absent daily, and 79% of grade 6 teachers are not educated enough to learn at a grade 6 level. What are the effects of these issues? Issues have a significant impact on education inequality in this country. Here are some statistics on poor vs wealthy schools: in poor communities, 8 out of 10 in Grade 4 cannot read for understanding. In rural areas, 25% of non-paying school pupils 48% pass mathematics and 67% in public paying schools while 85% of students in wealthy schools will pass. f the top 200 schools in the country, 185 are former white-only schools, and all 185 charge significant fees, keeping most black learners locked out of these quality schools. In addition to that the drop rate increases and the amount of people who obtain a matric pass also decreases. The wealth gap only gets bigger as the richer get the best schooling, best-paying jobs and send their children to the best schools while the poor get poor education and become poorer. Lastly, unemployment increases as people are not qualified to get jobs.

Let us now look at COVID-19 and compare its impacts to the pre-existing ones. The COVID-19 pandemic has added to inequality in education. The richer, well-equipped schools have managed to reach out to their students and continue with the syllabus as per normal, these also happen to be the schools who ready for their students to come back once the Minister

announced that we were allowed to return. However, most children in South Africa have not picked up a book in 4 months. Many schools do not have the funds or resources to get hold of their pupils and teach them during these times and that is huge a problem. People with no access to or no funds to afford technology and data will suffer during these times, as even though the school may not contact them, they could have done online courses. Despite all of this, COVID-19's impact is limited to 2 years at maximum. Although students are behind others in the syllabus and students have been away from school for 4 months, this is not something that will affect inequality 20 years down the line. In fact, it will not affect us in 2 years; the government is considering changing the syllabus and extending the terms to ensure every student has a good opportunity to do well in their exams. People can repeat the year if they do not feel like they are ready to move on and that does not negatively impact others. It may set someone back one year but will ensure a better future. Unlike the pre-existing issues, there are many things one can do to help themselves to ensure this does not have a long-lasting impact on society. Another substantial difference is how much more the government is doing to help resolve these issues than the post-COVID issues. The government has done a lot such as: put up zero-rated online pages for students to use to learn, the Department of Basic Education and SABC have launched a multi-media learner support initiative; it has programs scheduled daily on all SABC channels to make sure people have access to some form of learning. The government has also acted on solving issues pre COVID that they were previously ignoring; in hundreds of schools, they have installed and fixed water supply, toilets, and bathrooms. Universities such as WITs have acted too, WITs provided 5000 laptops to their students who could not afford it and partnered with big Data corporates like Telkom to make all their lecture sites zero-rated. More is being to help inequality in this crisis, than before and that a reason why its impact won’t extend further than 1 or 2 years alongside it being that education system and syllabus have adapted so that nobody is affected by being away from school for so long. COVID-19 has made a significant impact on education inequality, but it will not affect it in the future, it instead has helped people adapt to a potential new way of learning; it has also been dealt with far better than post-COVID issues, which will continue to impact inequality in the future and far for longer than COVID.

As much as studies and efforts being made show us that COVID-19 will not have a longterm impact on education inequality, there is always a chance that it will. If the poorer students who have not been educated in 4 months go back, their syllabus will be rushed and they won’t have ample time to learn or they won’t complete the syllabus and be behind everyone else, they are not equipped to complete their exams resulting in a handful of failures, which can lead to series of dropouts. Also, think about the young grades. It takes a long time to teach the fundamentals of reading, writing, language, and math to a young child; now take half the year away from those children and expect them to move onto the higher grades. They will be helpless and struggling further in something they were already struggling at. Due to COVID-19, the students in poor communities could potentially struggle due to lack of knowledge and skills resulting in poor marks and failures, which in return results in poor low paying jobs and then their children are sent to the same poor schools they went to because of the financial situation thereby creating an endless cycle. If that is that is the case, then yes, COVID-19 will have a long-lasting impact.

COVID-19 has and will continue to impact inequality into the near future, but it will not have a long-lasting impact however it is not to say that won’t. We have seen that the pre-existing factors will outlast and outweigh the impact has on inequality compared to COVID-19, because the effects of COVID will be long-termheld to a minimum by the efforts of the government and

other companies. Inequality will always be there, but it is on the decline and we can be assured that COVID-19 will not have a lasting impression on it.