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**NAMIBIA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**

**MASTER AND PHD SUPERVISION FORMS**

**1. Summary of the Research Proposal (SRP)for the Higher Degrees Committee**

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| |  |  | | --- | --- | | **Proposed Title** | A reception analysis of selected cartoon messages on Covid-19 by upper primary school learners at Highlands Christian School in Windhoek | | **Student’s Full Name** | Faith Mundodzi | | **Student Number** | 220014841 | | **Qualification Registered For** | Master of Journalism & Media Technology | | **Thesis or Mini-Thesis** | Thesis | | **Faculty** | Human Sciences | | **Department** | Communication | | **Supervisor/Qualifications/Affiliation** | Dr H. Mapudzi  PGCHE (NUST), PhD Comm. (UFH), M.A. Journ & Media Studies (Rhodes), PG Dip: Media Mgmt (Rhodes), B Soc Sc Hons (UFH), B. Applied Comm. Mgmt. (UFH) | | **First Co-Supervisor/Qualifications/Affiliation** | N/A | | **Second Co-Supervisor/Qualifications/Affiliation** | N/A | | | | |
| **Signatures** | | **Student** | **Supervisor** | **FPGC Coordinator** |
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1. **Background to the Study**

Coronavirus disease (Covid-19) has affected all aspects of human life (Toros & Falch Eriksen, 2020). The pandemic arguably resulted in great social, economic and psychological impact on both adults and children. Research also demonstrates that the Covid-19 pandemic has indeed changed the way messages are being communicated across the globe (Marra, Buonanno, Vargas, Iacovazzo, Ely, & Servillo 2020). The pandemic has caused a global health predicament which resulted in huge communication consequences (Marra et al., 2020). As a result of uncertainties caused by the pandemic, there is fear and frustration in both adults and children. Plebanek and Sloutsky (2017) state that children can focus for a very short time as they cannot handle a lot of distractions as adults do. They take in all the information communicated to them without filtering (Plebanek & Sloutsky, 2017). Thus, for children to understand all aspects of the Covid-19 pandemic, various media messages need to be effective, interesting and engaging, as well as age appropriate, culturally sensitive, inclusive and positive (Plebanek & Sloutsky, 2017). The study, thus, seek to assess how upper primary school learners at Highlands Christian School in Windhoek interpreted selected cartoon messages on Covid-19. In the study upper primary school learners are children ranging from the age of 11-13 years old (Melese, Tadesse & Asefa,2009).

**Statement of the Problem**

Porter and Abane (2008) writes, in research children are mostly marginalised and seen as passive, vulnerable and not competent. Unlike adults, children easily get distracted and can find it hard to pay attention. Instead, they usually find themselves concentrating more on other aspects than what is intended (Plebanek & Sloutsky, 2017). Online cartoons and comics were created to disseminate messages about Covid-19 to children and some were translated into several languages. However, messages encoded by the media may have different meanings to the audience due to factors like age, race, culture, ethnicity religion and gender. The reception of Covid-19 media messages by children in Namibia has not been critically assessed, except for the social and psychological effects experienced by children as a result of self-isolation during the pandemic. The aim of this study, therefore, is to establish how upper primary school children make meaning out of the messages intended for them, considering their age and other factors like the fact that they do not pay close attention to detail. The study aims to establish whether the intended messages influenced the children in any way, for instance, observing the Covid-19 restriction protocols. In view of that, the study aims to fulfil the following objectives.

**3. Objectives of the study**

The main objective of this study is to establish how cartoon message interpretation on Covid-19 influenced

learners understanding and dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic.

The following sub objectives will be addressed:

• To establish the nature of Covid-19 related cartoon messages that the learners were exposed to.

• To Investigate how learners interpret the cartoon messages on Covid-19.

• To assess how the Covid-19 cartoon messages influenced the learners’ behaviour towards observing Covid-19 protocols.

4. **Literature Review**

Covid-19 is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus. This new virus can spread quickly from one person to another and has become a global pandemic (Chakraborty, Sharma, Bhattacharya, Sharma, & Lee, 2020). To date, several scholars have done research of the psychological effects of Covid-19 on children. Giménez-Dasí, Quintanilla, Lucas-Molina, and Sarmento-Henrique (2020) investigates the psychological effects of quarantine on Madrid children using the System of Evaluation of Children and Adolescents (SENA) and they found out that the most effects of isolation are impulsivity, attentional difficulties emotional regulation difficulties, and hyperactivity. The psychological effects and the need to monitor children and adolescents’ well-being are not known and need to be considered. Šramová and Pavelka (2017) researched on how preschool children interpret media content and its sensitivity. The main research method used in the study was the semi-structured interviews with parents and children. The research findings revealed that preschool children are influenced by mass communication and are able to identify the messages that can shape their behaviour. The researchers also found that the consumption of media is ritualised and the Television remains the dominant form of media. Thompson and Zerbinos (1997) investigated how children perceive the presentation of a male and female characters in cartoons. Structured interviews with 89 children ranging in age from 4 to 9 years were used in the study. In the study, children observed more cartoon characters in conventional ways. The boys were fierce and full of life whilst girls were soft, fascinated by boys, and concerned with how they look. Children noticed differences in the way male and female characters are portrayed in television cartoons.

5. **Theoretical Framework**

The theory guiding this study is the reception theory of 1973 by Stuart Hall. The model states that disseminated messages mostly have common interpretation with the receiver. The disseminator shapes how the receiver thinks or perceive the message. Messages that the receiver gets and interpret with the same meaning of the encoder are considered to be effective (Peterson, 2018). The disseminated spoken or written messages are sometimes decoded differently, therefore, conveying a totally different meaning and interpretation to the message sent. This therefore means that the audience only accepts a text like a novel, film or paintings based on what they have gone through in life as well as their cultural background (Peterson, 2018). The reception theory is relevant to the study as it is commonly used in audience reception studies. As the theory suggests, messages encoded by the media may have different meanings to the audience. The study will thus focus on different meanings interpreted by primary school learners due to factors like age, culture, religion and gender.

6. **Proposed Research Design**

In order to find out how learners interpreted selected cartoon messages on Covid-19, the study is underpinned by the interpretive philosophy which assumes that there is no single reality or truth, and therefore reality needs to be interpreted. Its epistemology is that the world does not exist independently of our knowledge of it, but knowledge has the trait of being culturally derived and historically situated (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Gallacher and Gallagher (2008) are of the view that children are inspiring but difficult to study, thus, the research needs to be designed in a natural and authentic setting using the methods in which children can easily understand and freely participate in. Therefore, this defines child centred research design. The design allows a researcher to explore restricted structures over time through comprehensive, detailed data collection involving numerous sources of data and reports a case description and case-based themes (Creswell, Hanson, Clark Plano, & Morales, 2007). The design is therefore, relevant to the study as it will help to understand how upper primary learners interpret selected cartoon messages on Covid-19.

This study falls within the qualitative research approach which emphasizes understanding a phenomenon when there is little knowledge about it through exploration. In qualitative research, the respondent`s reality can be understood by revealing values of the people, interpretative schemes, mind maps, belief systems and rules of living (Omona, 2013). The methods that are used in qualitative research have a significant element of child-centred research movement that do not impose adult centred perceptions on children.

In the study, the population includes 57 upper primary learners at Highlands Christian School in Windhoek. The selected population can engage better in a conversation and the school is within a proximity, which is convenient to the researcher. In order to get a reliable outcome, 20 upper primary learners will be purposively selected to participate in the study, so that the researcher can gain deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study (Acharya, Prakash, Saxena, & Nigam, 2013). In grade 5, only 6 learners will be sampled and out of that number, 3 are boys and 3 are girls in order to create a gender balance. In grade 6 and 7, the sample size will be 7 learners each and consisting of 4 boys and 3 girls because there are more boys than girls in those classes. In child-centred research, the respondents will purposefully be selected depending on their ability to provide the required information.

In this study, focus group discussions will be adopted. There will be 2 focus groups and each consisting of 10 learners and the time frame for each group will be roughly 30-45minutes. In-between the discussions there shall be 2 interactive (games) to encourage learners to participate. In a child centred research, it is mandatory that children participating in focus groups should have excellent communication skills. The discussions are going to take place at Highlands Christian School as learners are familiar with the environment. The researcher, supervisor and the appointed teacher from Highlands Christian School will approve the Covid-19 cartoons before there are shown to the learners. The appointed teacher will also be present in the discussions to make the learners feel at ease. Prior to the discussions, the researcher will play a few cartoons of Covid-19 messages which, then in the discussion, the learners will be asked what meanings are they deriving from the cartoons.

To address the primary goal of the study, data analysis goes through different steps like investigating, categorising, formulating and putting together the findings (Rabiee, 2004). Inductive thematic analysis will be used as a tool to classify, examine, and report themes within data (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). The researcher will use a computer data analysis programme called ATLAS.TI which analyses data as hand coding is laborious and takes time (Cresswell, 2014).

7. **Ethical considerations**

When conducting research, there are prescribed rules and guidelines to observe in order to protect human subjects. Voluntary and informed consent will be applied to make sure the school and learners participate knowingly and voluntarily. The purpose of the research will be explained to the parents of the learners who will give informed consent on behalf of their children. Anonymity, confidentiality and privacy will be strictly adhered to (Arifin, 2018). The researcher will seek permission from Highlands Christian School to use their premises and their learners to conduct research. The collected data will be protected and stored in encrypted devices with a password only known by the researcher (Arifin, 2018). Namibia University of Science and Technology`s ethical guidelines and policy will be followed. Covid-19 protocol to be carried out, that is, correct wearing of masks, thoroughly disinfect hands with alcohol based hand rub, maintain at least one metre distance from one another, well ventilated classroom with open windows, covering of mouth and nose with a bent elbow or tissue when coughing or sneezing, stay home and do not participate if you have minor symptoms such as cough, headache, mild fever, until you recover.

8. **Limitations to the study**

There are few limitations to the study. The sample size will not fully represent Namibia as the study will be carried out in Windhoek at a selected school. Another limitation is the constrained budget. If more finances were available, it means a big sample was going to be used.

9. **Significance of the study**

Since Covid-19 pandemic has caused a global health predicament which resulted in huge communication consequences, the study will assist policy makers in future if there is another global pandemic by using the correct effective communication media that children can easily understand and interpret. Through Child-centred design, children will learn to accept differences and commonalities between themselves and respect for each other and therefore contribute to more cohesive and inclusive societies. Lastly, since there is little to no literature about the reception analysis of cartoon messages on Covid-19, the study will validate the importance of the results in order to propose further research within the Namibian context and to add to the existing body of knowledge.

10. **References**

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