



UNIVERSITY OF  
KWAZULU-NATAL

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INYUVESI  
YAKWAZULU-NATALI

**PROMOTING PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT FOR THE WELLBEING OF  
LEARNERS IN A RURAL SCHOOL CONTEXT**

**BY**

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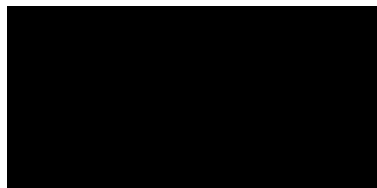
**JANUARY 2024**

## DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, **Nonhlanhla Nestar Mthlane** 982231040 declare that: **Promoting psychosocial support for the wellbeing of learners in a rural school context**, abides by the following rules:

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This dissertation is submitted with/  my approval



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**Dr Ncamisile P. Mkhize-Mthiyane (Supervisor)**

**Date: 05 January 2023**

## **DEDICATION**

This study is dedicated to my parents Eunice and Zakhele Mthlane for their prayers, support and for believing in me.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- First and foremost, I thank The Lord Almighty for enabling me to go through the Masters journey.
- I thank God Almighty for providing me with strength, commitment and motivation to complete this dissertation.

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## ABSTRACT

This research study aimed to promote psychosocial support for the wellbeing of learners in a rural school context. The literature review covered the conceptualisation of psychosocial challenges; psychosocial support; rural school contexts and wellbeing; the psychosocial needs of learners in a rural school context; and, lastly, parental engagement in rural school contexts. The Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishment (PERMA) Theory of Wellbeing was adopted as the theoretical framework, with a qualitative approach employed to conduct the study at a purposively selected primary school in the rural context of Ugu District in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN). The sample consisted of a Head of Department, Life Skills teacher, Life Orientation teacher and a member of the school governing body, as well as three parents.

Data were gathered by means of a one-on-one semi-structured interview with the Head of Department and two focus group discussions, one with the Life Skills and Life Orientation teachers, and the other with the three parents and the school governing body member. The themes that emerged included: teachers and parents' understanding of psychosocial support and learner wellbeing; teachers and parents' role in the provision of psychosocial support for learners' wellbeing; teachers and parents' understanding of educational policies or frameworks that promote psychosocial support; and lastly, the Department of Basic Education and the school's role in promoting learners' wellbeing. All ethical requirements were adhered to.

The data analysis revealed that promotion of psychosocial support in rural primary schools is not only important to learners, but also to teachers and parents as it promotes good behaviour, improved academic performance and positive self-esteem among learners and, surprisingly, among parents and teachers. The findings also highlighted the need for teachers and parents to collaborate to promote psychosocial support for the wellbeing of learners as well as to formulate strategies to assist learners confronting psychosocial challenges.

**Keywords:** Psychosocial challenges; psychosocial support; rural school context, wellbeing and learner

## LIST OF ACRONYMS

AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DoE	Department of Education
DBST	District Based Support Team
DH	Departmental Head
DoH	Department of Health
DSD	Department of Social Development
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency virus
LO	Life Orientation
LS	Life Skills
NCS	National Curriculum Statement
PERMA	Positive Emotions, Relationship, Meaning and Accomplishment
SAPS	South African Police Service
SBST	School Based Support Team
SGB	School Governing Body
SIAS	Screening Identification Assessment and Support
SNES	Special Needs Education Services
RSA	Republic of South Africa
KZN	KwaZulu-Natal
KZNDBE	KwaZulu-Natal Department of Basic Education
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America
OVC	Orphans and vulnerable children

## APPENDICES

<b>APPENDIX A</b>	<b>UKZN Ethical Clearance</b>	<b>106</b>
<b>APPENDIX B</b>	<b>Permission letter for the Department of Education</b>	<b>107</b>
<b>APPENDIX C</b>	<b>Permission from the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Basic Education</b>	<b>108</b>
<b>APPENDIX D</b>	<b>Permission letter and consent form for school principal</b>	<b>109-110</b>
<b>APPENDIX E</b>	<b>Permission letter and consent form for Departmental Head</b>	<b>111-112</b>
<b>APPENDIX F</b>	<b>Permission letter and consent form for Life Orientation teacher</b>	<b>113-114</b>
<b>APPENDIX G</b>	<b>Permission letter and consent form for Life Skills teacher</b>	<b>115-116</b>
<b>APPENDIX H</b>	<b>Permission letter and consent form for parents</b>	<b>117-118</b>
<b>APPENDIX I</b>	<b>Permission letter and consent form for school governing body</b>	<b>119-120</b>
<b>APPENDIX J</b>	<b>Semi-structured interview schedule for Departmental Head</b>	<b>121-122</b>
<b>APPENDIX K</b>	<b>Interview schedule for teachers</b>	<b>123-124</b>
<b>APPENDIX L</b>	<b>Interview schedule for parents</b>	<b>125-126</b>
<b>APPENDIX M</b>	<b>Editor's Certificate</b>	<b>127</b>
<b>APPENDIX N</b>	<b>Turnitin certificate</b>	<b>128</b>

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	iv
ABSTRACT.....	v
LIST OF ACRONYMS.....	vi
APPENDICES.....	vii
CHAPTER ONE .....	1
ORIENTATION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY .....	1
Introduction .....	1
Background to the study .....	1
1.3 Purpose and focus of the study .....	4
1.4 Motivation for the study.....	4
1.5 Problem statement.....	6
1.6 Significance of the Study .....	7
1.7 Research objectives .....	8
1.8 Research questions.....	8
1.9 Definition of key concepts .....	8
1.9.1 Psychosocial challenges .....	8
1.9.2 Psychosocial support.....	8
1.9.3 Rural school context.....	9
1.9.4 Wellbeing.....	9
1.9.5 Learner .....	9
1.10 Delimitations of the study.....	9
1.11 Outline of the study .....	10
1.11.1 Chapter One .....	10
1.11.2 Chapter Two .....	10
1.11.3 Chapter Three .....	10
1.11.4 Chapter Four .....	11
1.11.5 Chapter Five .....	11
1.12 Chapter summary.....	11
CHAPTER TWO.....	12
LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK .....	12
2.1 Introduction.....	12
2.2 Literature Review.....	12
2.2.1 Conceptualisation of psychosocial challenges, psychosocial support, rural school context and wellbeing.....	12

2.2.2 Psychosocial needs of learners in rural school context .....	22
2.2.3 Parental engagement in rural school contexts .....	23
2.3 Theoretical Framework .....	28
2.3.1 The PERMA Theory of Wellbeing framework and its building blocks (Chaudron et al., 2015, p. 50) .....	29
2.3.2 Benefits and importance of the PERMA Theory of Wellbeing Model .....	32
2.4 Relevance of the PERMA theory to the study .....	32
2.5 Chapter summary .....	33
<b>CHAPTER THREE</b> .....	<b>34</b>
<b>RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY</b> .....	<b>34</b>
3.1 Introduction .....	34
3.2 Research paradigm .....	34
3.3 Research design .....	36
3.4 Research approach .....	37
3.5 Research context .....	38
3.6 Selection of participants, methods and procedures .....	39
3.6.1 Participants and their relevance to the study .....	39
3.7 Data generation methods .....	41
3.7.1 Semi-structured interviews .....	41
3.7.2 Focus Group Discussions .....	43
3.8 Data analysis approach and procedures .....	43
3.9 Issues of trustworthiness .....	44
3.10 Ethical Considerations .....	45
3.11 Limitations of the study .....	46
3.12 Chapter summary .....	46
<b>CHAPTER FOUR</b> .....	<b>47</b>
<b>DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS</b> .....	<b>47</b>
4.1 Introduction .....	47
4.1.1 Background information .....	47
4.2 Data presentation and discussion .....	48
4.2.1 Teachers and parents' understanding of psychosocial support and learner wellbeing .....	49
4.2.2 The role played by parents and teachers in the provision of psychosocial support for learners' wellbeing .....	56
4.2.3 Parents and teachers' understanding of educational policies or frameworks that help to promote psychosocial support for the wellbeing of learners .....	65

<b>4.2.4 The Department of Basic Education and the school’s role in promoting learners’ wellbeing</b> .....	69
<b>4.3 Chapter summary</b> .....	74
<b>CHAPTER FIVE</b> .....	75
<b>SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b> .....	75
<b>5.1 Introduction</b> .....	75
<b>5.2 Summary</b> .....	75
<b>5.2.1 Chapter One</b> .....	75
<b>5.2.2 Chapter Two</b> .....	75
<b>5.2.3 Chapter Three</b> .....	76
<b>5.2.4 Chapter Four</b> .....	76
<b>5.3 Conclusions</b> .....	76
<b>5.3.1 Understanding of psychosocial support and learner wellbeing</b> .....	76
<b>5.3.2 The need to promote psychosocial support</b> .....	77
<b>5.3.3 The Department of Basic Education and the school’s role in promoting psychosocial support</b> .....	78
<b>5.4 Importance of psychosocial support</b> .....	79
<b>5.4.1 Importance of psychosocial support provided by teachers and parents for the wellbeing of learners in a rural school context</b> .....	79
<b>5.5 Recommendations</b> .....	80
<b>5.5.1 Teachers and parents’ need for training to understand psychosocial support</b> .....	80
<b>5.5.2 Networking with other departments</b> .....	80
<b>5.5.3 Parent-teacher collaboration to provide psychosocial support</b> .....	80
<b>5.5.4 An inclusive environment as a support system for learners</b> .....	81
<b>5.5.5 Parents working together to promote psychosocial support for the wellbeing of learners</b> .....	81
<b>5.6 Limitations of the study</b> .....	82
<b>5.7 Chapter summary</b> .....	82
<b>6. Reference List</b> .....	83

# CHAPTER ONE

## ORIENTATION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

### **Introduction**

Psychosocial support for learners has been and continues to be an issue in primary schools, especially those in rural areas. This study explored strategies to promote psychosocial support for the wellbeing of learners in a rural primary school context. Chapter one introduces the study by presenting the background to the research, the purpose and motivation for the study, the problem statement, the study's significance and the research objectives and questions. It also defines the key concepts and the study's delimitations, and outlines of the structure of the dissertation. The chapter concludes with a summary.

### **Background to the study**

This study aimed to explore the psychosocial support that could be provided by teachers to promote learners' wellbeing in a rural school context. The term 'psychosocial' refers to the link between psychological and social processes that interact with and influence each other in a person through their behaviour and how they react to challenges (Thomas et al., 2020; Nilsson et al., 2020; Mogashana & Basitere, 2021). Many learners do not receive the necessary psychosocial support from their schools. Indeed, the lack thereof in rural schools is one of the main challenges confronting the Department of Basic Education (DBE). According to Booth (2017), schools in rural areas require assistance from the DBE and other public entities to support learners who face psychosocial challenges.

Maffea (2020), Belanche et al. (2021), Britannica (2023) and Fureys (2023) define rural communities as areas that are far from towns or cities. They are usually large, open areas with a small population that is widely-distributed and lacks access to public services (Dijkstra et al., 2020; Wineman et al., 2020). According to Nicolaides and Dlodla (2023), due to the nature of their location, there is limited development in rural communities that also lack access to technology and are characterised by a low standard of education. Nonetheless, learners' progression from primary to high schools in these areas points to some success in inculcating knowledge and skills (McKnight et al., 2019; Thomhave, 2019; Volmer, 2023). While those who reside in rural areas may not define them as psychosocial support, they do engage in activities that offer such support. Examples include attending school meetings, volunteering for school activities, reading letters from schools to illiterate parents and forming relationships

among themselves and with professionals like nurses and teachers who assist parents to support their children. Taylor (2019) and Barilec (2021) state that engagement, relationships and meaning are part of basic structural and functional units of life.

Kirby (2022) of the United States Census Bureau notes that rural schools, particularly primary schools, are defined as those located in districts with less than 600 learners and fewer than 2 500. Duma et al. (2021) and Myende and Maifala (2020) define rural primary schools as those located on the outskirts of the country that are usually far from town, and are characterised by poor topography, and limited access to information technology as well as services and facilities like electricity, water and sanitation. While they many offer free education and play a critical role in rural development, du Plessis and Mestry (2019) note that rural primary schools confront challenges such as a lack of parental interest in learners' education, insufficient funding from the DBE, a lack of resources, underqualified teachers as most qualified teachers prefer to teach in urban and township schools, and multi-grade teaching where a teacher teaches different grades in one classroom at the same time. Lepere (2023) observes that the South African government's failure to provide adequate resources has led to declining numbers of learners in rural primary schools, with the consequent planned closure of close to 250 schools in KZN from 2024.

Education White Paper 6 on Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System (EWP6) (2001) proposes the establishment of School Based Support Teams and District Based Support Teams (SBSTs and DBSTs) that include educational psychologists and school counsellors to implement psychosocial support interventions. The lack of psychosocial support in rural primary schools has negatively impacted learners' academic performance and overall wellbeing (Thida et al., 2020; Motsa & Morojele, 2016). A school environment with supportive structures enables learners to improve their academic performance and to build healthy relationships that enhance psychosocial wellbeing which, according to Kimbempe (2017), promotes effective teaching and learning in a rural school context. This is due to the fact that schools play a significant role in shaping and grooming learners.

Wellbeing refers to a person's experience of health and happiness, including mental and physical health, physical and emotional safety, a feeling of belonging, a sense of purpose, achievement, and success (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2017). Hargreaves and Shirley (2018) identify five major types of wellbeing, four of which apply to learners. The first is *emotional wellbeing* which involves a learner's ability to manage his/her emotions and nurture those that make him/her feel good. Secondly, *physical wellbeing* is a learner's ability to improve his/her health by adopting a healthy diet and engaging in exercise.

The third type, *social wellbeing*, refers to a learner's ability to communicate, develop meaningful relationships with others and create an emotional support network. Lastly, *societal wellbeing* is the learner's ability to participate in community activities that promote a sense of belonging.

Davis (2019) and Hargreaves and Shirley (2019) explain that wellbeing is important in schools, especially primary schools because schools play an essential role in supporting learners to make choices that will benefit their health and wellbeing (Rawal et al., 2022) and enable them to improve their academic and overall performance (Kiser, 2020). According to Day et al. (2019) and Ellis (2020), healthy lifestyle choices include learners being able to talk to their parents, guardians or teachers when experiencing difficulties, getting enough sleep so that they can concentrate at school, being able to distinguish right from wrong, and being able to help those who cannot help themselves. Schools can provide learners with reliable information that deepens their understanding of the choices they face. They also inculcate intellectual skills, which according to Career Insights (2022), refer to verbal comprehension, analysis, problem solving and reasoning skills that are required to reflect critically on their choices and factors in the broader community that impact them, including peer pressure, social media and family and cultural values (Ellis, 2020). According to Clarke (2020), Oxford Education, (2021), Holzer et al. (2022) and Klapp et al. (2023), there is a direct link between wellbeing and academic achievement.

One of the challenges in seeking to promote learners' wellbeing in schools, especially those in rural areas, is a focus on a single type of wellbeing rather than the range of types required. Mujeeb (2020) and Anahana (2023) assert that physical, social and societal wellbeing should be promoted. This calls for the involvement of all school staff whether teaching or non-teaching, parents and the community (Collie et al., 2015; Perezniето et al., 2017).

Davis (2018) notes that the DBE's limited funding of schools in rural contexts means that they do not have the resources to appoint school psychologists and invest in infrastructure like classrooms to reduce overcrowding or the support material required for quality teaching and learning to help learners improve academically and cover curriculum content within the time stipulated by the National Curriculum Statement (NCS). Their control is generally limited to formal examinations and tests and the length of the school day. Learners that do not receive psychological support and the attention they require in class are likely to perform poorly.

Wilson (2019) notes that the South African DBE has introduced support programmes like the Care and Support for Teaching and Learning Programme (2008), the Early Grade Reading Programme (2020), the School Safety Programme and the Integrated School Health Programme (2012) to provide psychosocial care and support in primary schools, including the

deployment of psychologists from district offices through the DBST. However, Wilson (2019) argues that such programmes have not reached many rural primary schools. According to Bizo (2018) and Mkhize (2018), this can have a devastating impact on learners' wellbeing. Joubert and Hay (2020) observe that a lack of psychosocial support undermines learners' academic performance.

### **1.3 Purpose and focus of the study**

This study focused on provision of psychosocial support with the purpose of exploring the psychosocial support that could be provided by teachers for the promotion of learners' wellbeing in a rural school context.

### **1.4 Motivation for the study**

I was mainly motivated to conduct this study by my personal observation of the negative effects of a lack of psychosocial support on the wellbeing of learners in a rural school context. In my 29 years' experience as a teacher, I have observed that learners experience psychosocial challenges such as their parents' illness and death, and abuse and violence in families and rural communities. This results in learners dropping-out of school due to personal problems, barriers to learning, child-headed households and high levels of absenteeism which demotivate teachers and negatively impact sustainable learning in rural primary schools. My conversations with teachers at my school and neighbouring schools confirmed that learners experience similar psychosocial challenges, with minimal psychosocial support provided by the DBE, negatively affecting their wellbeing.

My experience, coupled with media reports and documentaries on the psychosocial challenges faced by learners, awakened me to their harsh realities and motivated me to conduct this study. Witnessing the psychosocial challenges such as poverty, illiterate parents or grandparents and limited resources that the learners I teach confront made me realise that this is a widespread problem. The lack of relevant psychosocial support in my community and the school where I teach motivated me to explore possible ways of promoting such support. I was of the view that identifying different strategies and mechanisms to provide psychosocial support would enhance learners' wellbeing while creating a sustainable learning environment in rural primary schools.

Learners' wellbeing in rural primary schools is compromised by the limited resources offered by the school and the rural context in which they live (Ramatea, 2021). The lack of funding

from the DBE leads to inadequate resources (West, 2020) such as textbooks and suitable classrooms as well as overcrowding, negatively impacting academic performance and leading to high dropout rates.

My professional experience of teaching in a rural primary school characterised by poverty and a lack of resources revealed that psychosocial challenges are a reality, resulting in learners underperforming. Limited access to psychosocial support, including the non-availability of physical resources like libraries where learners, teachers and community members could access information on such support, the lack of laboratories in rural primary schools and DBSTs' inability to offer sufficient psychosocial support (Kondirolli & Sunder, 2022) place rural schools at a disadvantage. Learners thus endure the hardship of living in rural contexts without receiving psychosocial support. Such hardships are the result of high levels of unemployment and poverty amongst parents, causing learners to lack proper school uniforms and nutritional food at home.

Teachers sometimes find themselves playing the role of psychologists to learners. Some schools engage with local businesses to donate school uniforms to learners in need. Rural primary schools also encourage unemployed parents to establish vegetable gardens on the school premises to supplement their food supply and perhaps sell produce in order to boost their income. While parents do not fully understand the concept of psychosocial support, they provide different kinds of support to their children by, for example, taking them to clinics and seeking advice from teachers on how to promote their children's wellbeing. Some even go to the extent of establishing telephonic contact with teachers so that they can discuss personal issues that affects their children's wellbeing.

When traumatic incidents such as death, abuse, illness and violence are left unattended, they can lead to a breakdown in learning, poor performance and dropping-out, as they directly impact learners' wellbeing, with ripple effects on teachers and the wider school community (Shikalepo, 2020; Makwela & Smit, 2022). Some schools retain weak learners in lower grades for multiple years instead of providing relevant support, while, as noted by Wentzel (2016), others allow them to progress to the next grade without providing any form of support. This could result in poorly performing learners leaving school before they reach matric. According to Aspers and Corte (2019), rurality is an added vulnerability due to the socio-political deprivation that characterises such areas and educated people's exodus to the cities. It is against this background that this study explored how to promote the psychosocial support that is urgently needed in rural school communities to enhance learners' wellbeing and promote sustainable learning.

## **1.5 Problem statement**

A problem is a hurdle or a harmful situation that needs to be addressed (Edgar, 2021). While research has been conducted on the prevalence of psychosocial challenges among learners and their impact, few studies have focused on the unique predicament faced by rural learners in accessing psychosocial support and how this affects their wellbeing (Nichols et al., 2017; Goforth et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2022; Myende & Maifala, 2020). Psychosocial support systems are crucial to create awareness and support not only for learners, but also for teachers and parents in rural contexts to enable them to assist learners who face such challenges (Nkambule, 2022).

Ndlovu (2019) notes that, in South Africa, it is the task of the SBST working with the DBST to plan and implement psychosocial support in cooperation with teachers to improve learners' wellbeing. While the DBE (2015) aims to ensure that schools are inclusive centres for learning, care and support, Asper and Corte (2019), Shikalepo (2020), Khondirolli and Sunder (2020) and Smit (2022) note that learners continue to confront daily psychosocial challenges in schools and the community, including bullying, violence in the community, a lack of knowledge of psychosocial support, overcrowded classrooms (Duma, 2019), child-headed households and a lack of qualified teachers due to migration to urban areas.

The DBE strategy on inclusive education as set out in EWP6 (2001) is underpinned by the values espoused in Section 29 (1) (a) of the South African Constitution that states that “everyone has the right to basic education”. The EWP6 (p. 27) acknowledges that, in order for learners to learn, the education system needs to cater for their needs by providing the necessary support through SBSTs and DBSTs.

Children are dependent on their parents, caregivers, family and guardians for care and protection. Shikalepo (2020) and Makwela and Smit (2022) note that the trauma caused by psychosocial challenges in school communities is often left unattended and leads to a breakdown in learning, poor performance and dropping out, as they directly impact learners' psychosocial wellbeing, with a ripple effect on educators and the wider school community. Rural schools in disadvantaged contexts suffer the greatest impact of such challenges. However, Hartnack (2017) asserts that many schools remain unaware of policies in relation to provision of relevant support.

Rural primary schools lack resources and access to educational infrastructure like libraries with internet connectivity. Du Plessis and Mestry (2019) also point to the decline in the number of teachers willing to teach in rural areas, marginalisation of school principals, constraints

imposed by multiple roles, problems relating to access, technology and curriculum challenges and poverty. The literature confirms that schools are currently not meeting the expectation that they will provide psychosocial support for learners to enhance and sustain their wellbeing.

Policies such as that on mental health (the Department of Health National Mental Health Policy Framework and the National Mental Health Strategic Plan, 2013-2020), the psychosocial recovery plan (Human Sciences Research Council Policy, 2021), the regional psychosocial support initiative (2002) and the Care and Support in Schools Programme (School Based Support Team Policy, 2014) were designed to provide psychosocial support. However, learners remain affected by psychosocial challenges that negatively impact their wellbeing and education. Therefore, this study explored strategies that teachers could use to provide psychosocial support and promote learners' wellbeing in a rural school context.

### **1.6 Significance of the Study**

The study not only identifies and addresses the psychosocial challenges learners face in a rural school context, but also suggests how relevant psychosocial support could be provided by teachers to promote learner wellbeing. The recommended practical psychosocial support initiatives and strategies could assist the DBE to improve existing initiatives set out in educational programmes and policies like the South African Schools Act of 1996, Special Needs Education Services (SNES) (2001), SBSTs (2014) and DBSTs (2014) in order to enable them to serve their purpose, be contextually relevant, and add value to the education system.

The one-on-one interview and focus group discussions (FGDs) offered the participants in a rural primary school a platform to share their experiences of the psychosocial challenges faced by learners and to identify ways to enhance their psychosocial wellbeing. The parents that participated in the study said that this was the first time they had collaborated with teachers to discuss issues that affect them and their children and to identify solutions that could benefit the school, them as parents and their rural community. The study assisted parents in understanding the value of their children's safety, health, welfare and overall wellbeing and how they could work collaboratively with schools to help those facing psychosocial challenges with minimal or no support. In line with the Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishment (PERMA) Theory in which the study was grounded, building a relationship between the school and the community could improve the psychosocial support offered to learners in a rural school context and uncover existing gaps and inequalities in the psychosocial support services rendered to learners by the DBE. Furthermore, the study's findings could promote collaboration among parents, learners and teachers in this rural school

context, as well as with the Department of Health (DoH), DBE psychologists, social workers, the Department of Social Development (DSD), and the South African Police Service (SAPS) to work towards the common goal of enhancing learners' psychosocial wellbeing.

## **1.7 Research objectives**

This study's objectives were:

- To explore the psychosocial support that is provided for the wellbeing of learners in a rural school context.
- To understand how psychosocial support for the wellbeing of learners can be promoted in a rural school context and why it should be done in this way.

## **1.8 Research questions**

Based on the objectives, the two research questions that guided the study were:

- What kind of psychosocial support is provided for the wellbeing of learners in a rural school context?
- How can psychosocial support for the wellbeing of learners be promoted in a rural school context and why should it be done in this way?

## **1.9 Definition of key concepts**

### **1.9.1 Psychosocial challenges**

Psychosocial challenges are difficulties and obstacles people face due to their mental processing ability (Terras & Ramsay, 2018). Tiny and Foo (2019) define psychosocial challenges as problems that occur due to a person's cognitive and psychosocial abilities. This means that they affect learners who struggle to mentally deal with the challenges they face.

### **1.9.2 Psychosocial support**

According to Thomas et al. (2020) and Mogashana and Basitere (2021), psychosocial support involves both mental and social support. The Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (2018) states that psychosocial support refers to processes and actions that promote people's holistic wellbeing.

### **1.9.3 Rural school context**

According to the Draft Policy on Rural Education of 2017 and Echazarra and Radinger (2019), rural school contexts are schools located on the outskirts of urban centres. While some Model C schools are similarly located, rural schools are also defined by their social and economic deprivation, poverty, lack of service delivery and the physical and cultural environment of the school and area.

### **1.9.4 Wellbeing**

Wellbeing refers to a person's experience of health and happiness, including mental and physical health, emotional safety, a feeling of belonging, and a sense of purpose, achievement and success (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2018). According to Davis (2019), it includes enjoying good mental health, high levels of life satisfaction, a sense of meaning or purpose, and the ability to manage stress.

### **1.9.5 Learner**

According to the South African Schools Act (SASA) 84 of 1996 (South Africa, DBE, 1996), a learner is a person, young or old, who receives education or is obliged to receive education. The Collins English Dictionary (2018) defines a learner as someone who is learning about a particular subject or how to do something.

## **1.10 Delimitations of the study**

George (2023) explains that delimitations in a study represent the choices a researcher makes regarding the focus and scope of the research objectives and questions. This study focused on a single rural primary school in KZN, in Ugu District. Under normal circumstances it would have been conducted in the whole of KZN. Teachers in this school stated that, while they provided support to learners, they were frustrated by the fact that they received no assistance from district officials on how to provide relevant psychosocial support. Some parents were reluctant to participate because of their limited education levels and lack of knowledge of psychosocial support.

Tigere and Makhubele (2019) and Seroke and Mkhize (2023) note that some parents, particularly those who live in rural areas, may experience challenges due to their limited knowledge of support systems for their children. This highlights parental connectedness as a

possible factor that influences psychosocial support. It is due to the lack of promotion of psychosocial support in rural areas. Learners' development is not solely the responsibility of parents, but is a team effort involving the school, family members and the community as a whole. Some parents who felt that they did not know how to provide psychosocial support to their children felt that their participation would not be useful and were sometimes reluctant to answer questions or engage with other participants. Lastly, due to the study's small sample of seven participants, the results cannot be generalised.

## **1.11 Outline of the study**

The study is divided into the following five chapters:

### **1.11.1 Chapter One**

Chapter one is the introductory chapter that covers the background of the study, its purpose and the motivation behind it, the problem statement, and the study's significance, research objectives and questions. The key concepts are defined and the delimitations are discussed, followed by an outline of the structure of the dissertation and a chapter summary.

### **1.11.2 Chapter Two**

Chapter two reviews the literature relevant to this study under various sub-headings, including the conceptualisation of psychosocial challenges, psychosocial support, rural school context and wellbeing. This chapter also focuses on the psychosocial needs of learners in rural learning communities and parental engagement in a rural learning context. It presents the PERMA Theory of Wellbeing which was employed as the theoretical framework.

### **1.11.3 Chapter Three**

This chapter outlines the research design and methodology adopted to conduct the study. It commences with the research paradigm followed by the research design which is presented under various sub-headings, including the research design and approach, the sample and sampling methods, and data generation, analysis and procedures. The chapter also discusses ethical considerations and the procedures followed to ensure that ethical principles were adhered as well as the trustworthiness of the study. It concludes with a summary.

#### **1.11.4 Chapter Four**

Chapter four presents, analyses and interprets the data captured in the rural primary school in line with four themes. The data were generated from a one-on-one semi-structured interview with a Head of Department and FGDs with an LO teacher, a LS teacher, three parents, and a member of the School Governing Body (SGB). These respondents interacted with learners who were most likely to be in need of psychosocial support. The data analysis and interpretation presented in this chapter aimed to develop an understanding and generate meaning from the data to answer the research questions. Direct quotations by the participants are presented, with pseudonyms used to ensure confidentiality.

#### **1.11.5 Chapter Five**

The last chapter draws on different parts of the study to present a summary of the findings. It also presents conclusions, recommendations and suggestions for future research based on the findings.

#### **1.12 Chapter summary**

The introduction and background presented in this chapter highlighted the importance of psychosocial support for the wellbeing of learners and discussed its impact on their academic performance. Chapter one also explained the significance of the study and its potential to not only identify and address the psychosocial challenges confronting learners in a rural school context, but also suggest how teachers could provide relevant psychosocial support to promote learners' wellbeing.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter presented the introduction to the study, its background and motivation, and the problem statement. It also highlighted the significance of the study, the research objectives and questions, and delimitations, and outlined the structure of the dissertation. This chapter reviews the literature relevant to the study topic, namely, promoting psychosocial support for the wellbeing of learners in a rural school context. It reviews both local and international research and identifies gaps in the current literature on psychosocial support for learners, mainly in a rural context.

#### **2.2 Literature Review**

According to the University of Edinburgh (2023), literature reviews examine and outline the body of academic literature on a particular topic. Frederikson et al. (2018), Guillaume (2019) and Luft et al. (2022) explain that a literature review is a systematic and explicit method that evaluates available literature on a given subject or topic. It helps to identify gaps and provide intellectual context to a study. Daniel (2023) and McCombes (2023) describe a literature review as a summary that examines and outlines a specific area of the study which allows the person reading the dissertation or thesis to gain an understanding of the researcher pursued a particular study. According to Duma (2019), the purpose of a literature review is for the researcher to familiarise him/herself with past and present facts and evidence in the area of study. The literature review presented in this chapter is structured as follows: conceptualisation of psychosocial challenges; psychosocial support; rural school context and wellbeing, psychosocial needs of learners in a rural school context, and parental engagement in a rural school context. This is followed by a discussion on the theoretical framework that underpinned the study and the chapter summary.

##### **2.2.1 Conceptualisation of psychosocial challenges, psychosocial support, rural school context and wellbeing**

This part of the literature review covers five topics, namely, understanding psychosocial challenges in school contexts; conceptualisation of a rural school context; the effects of

psychosocial challenges on learners and rural school contexts; the need for psychosocial support in rural primary schools; and learner wellbeing in rural primary schools with a sub-topic on promoting the health and wellbeing of learners in rural primary schools.

### **2.2.1.1 Understanding psychosocial challenges in school contexts**

The term psychosocial needs to be defined in order to understand psychosocial challenges. According to Shrestha et al. (2022) of Purbanchal University in Nepal, and De-Juanas et al. (2020) of the University of National Education in Madrid, the term psychosocial refers to how one reacts or conducts oneself as a result of personal challenges in interaction with society. Terras and Ramsay (2018) describe psychosocial challenges as the difficulties and obstacles learners face due to their mental processing ability. Similarly, Thomas et al. (2020) state that psychosocial challenges are problems that occur due to a learner's cognitive and psychosocial abilities. This means that they affect learners who struggle to mentally deal with challenges they face. According to Malinga (2021), this is sometimes caused by witnessing physical abuse at home and being unable to focus in the classroom due to external challenges.

Lockhart (2022) and Mkhize (2018) identify depression, bullying and anxiety caused by stress as some of the main psychosocial challenges learners face in schools. The DBE appoints psychologists to assist learners with such challenges; however, according to Chigbu et al. (2023), due to funding constraints, district psychologists only visit schools in urban areas, neglecting those in rural areas. LO and LS teachers may request permission to raise funds from local businesses and the local municipality to assist the school and needy learners (DiBenedetto & Ferdman, 2023). With the assistance of the Economic and Management Sciences teacher, they could also promote entrepreneurship among learners by hosting market day at school, with all funds raised being channeled back to the school and learners in need (Sastri, 2022). The South African government should ensure that emotional and psychological support is provided to learners to improve their academic performance (Coetzee et al., 2022, Dunge, 2022; Pillay et al., 2023). Furthermore, Chigbu et al. (2023) observe that psychological issues not only affect learners, but teachers as well and that they should also be able to access psychological support because of the conditions under which they work.

According to Ferrara et al. (2019), Malinga (2021) and Maphosa (2022), psychosocial challenges arise when learners witness physical abuse at home and are unable to focus in the classroom. Tomlinson (2022) observes that, in order to address such challenges, the South African government alongside the DBE and the DoH should provide counselling sessions and programmes like self-awareness activities and body, mind and soul exercises to learners. The DBE should also educate teachers as a study conducted by Lever et al. (2017)

in New Zealand found that teachers are not trained to provide emotional, psychological and spiritual support to learners. The South African Social Security Agency (SASSA), parents, the community as a whole and trade unions should also be involved in psychosocial support programmes to assist learners (Chinyama, 2020; Daly, 2022; Hourani & Kotob, 2022).

According to Mkhize (2018), depression is one of the mental disorders affecting learners in primary schools. Lockhart (2022) observes that they are likely to be vulnerable to mental disorders due to the challenges they face at school such as bullying, body shaming and anxiety caused by stress.

Manzini (2018) argues that the psychosocial issues that affect learners in primary schools include the social environment, anxiety, stress levels and depression. Interventions should thus not only focus on schools; the household structure and the environment where learners grow up need to be considered in order to determine the causes of anxiety and depression in learners and address these issues. Gilbert (2017) notes that the environment in which learners learn is not conducive due to factors such as the lack of proper infrastructure in schools, and a lack of psychological support and resources to assist them.

Mkhize (2018) is of the view that a lack of emotional support in school can have a devastating mental impact on learners. Many learners in rural primary schools are from poor backgrounds, experience violence in the home and the community, and have parents who work away from home. Furthermore, they receive little or no support from school and at home in confronting these challenges. Given Anderson's (2018) finding that low household income is a major cause of psychosocial challenges, the school, parents, the DBE and other stakeholders need to identify sustainable solutions which can help learners to deal with psychosocial challenges.

### **2.2.1.2 Conceptualisation of a rural school context**

Graves (2021) of the University of Barcelona describes a rural context as a rural area with a less diversified economy and few or no job opportunities that lies on the outskirts of densely populated urban areas in a town or city. Compared to an urban area, a rural area is characterised by open areas, few houses and a small population, and suffers economic stagnation which leads to poverty (Gebre, 2019 & Vasile et al., 2019). Yuheng et al. (2019) of the KTH Royal Institute of Technology in Sweden and Catteneo et al. (2022) of the University of Chicago also state that rural contexts are far less populated than urban areas and that the level of education is lower than in urban areas. This is because rural areas are remote and have limited access to technology. Moreover, rural schools receive less attention than their urban counterparts (Echazarra & Radinger, 2019).

The Draft Policy on Rural Education of 2017 notes that a rural school is not only defined by its geographical location, as some Model C schools are also located on the outskirts of urban centres. Rural schools are also defined by their social and economic deprivation, poverty, a lack of service delivery and the physical and cultural environment of the school and area.

Moreover, more attention tends to be paid to urban schools (Echazarra & Radinger, 2019; Weiss & Heinz-Fischer, 2022) than schools in rural areas that lack necessary resources and basic infrastructure like sanitation, water and information technology (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019; Harmon & Weeks, 2022; Tieken & Montgomery, 2021). Schools in rural areas also face the challenge of parents' lack of interest in their children and as a result, poor teacher-parent relationships (Munje & Mncube, 2018). While the above sources highlight the challenges faced by primary schools in rural areas, Kotler from the United States Department of Agriculture (2017) argues that amidst these challenges, rural primary schools have a sense of authenticity within rural communities. Kotler adds that they play an important role in addressing social issues like poverty and often have a strong sense of values and identity.

The Constitution of South Africa and the South African Schools Act of 1996 provide that every learner in South Africa must have access to learning and teaching, similar facilities and equal educational opportunities (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). However, this is not the case for schools in rural areas that confront more challenges than those in urban areas (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). Harmon and Weeks (2022) of the State University in the United States of America agree with Du Plessis and Mestry (2019) that urban schools are unlike rural schools and that learners that attend school in rural areas do not receive the same educational opportunities as their urban counterparts. Harmon and Weeks (2022) add that the fact that rural schools are located in remote and underdeveloped areas creates logistical problems in delivering school supplies that often arrive late, delaying the start of the school curriculum.

Graves (2021) concurs that schools in rural areas lack the necessary resources and basic infrastructure for sanitation, water and information technology. The author adds that many rural parents show a lack of interest in their children's education, undermining the possibility of sound teacher-parent relationships. The South African Schools Act (1996) introduced SGBs as a means of decentralising education to communities and improving teacher-parent relationships. The SGB comprises of the principal, teachers, non-teaching staff and parents. However, parents that sit on SGBs in rural primary schools usually have limited knowledge and skills to effectively govern schools. This means that there is a lack of proper leadership in the SGB, resulting in a lack of school progress (Mkhize, 2018). It also means that the SGB does not play an active role in assisting teachers and learners, thus making it hard for learners

to receive relevant psychosocial support as there is limited or no collaboration between teachers and parents.

#### **2.2.1.3 Effects of psychosocial challenges on learners and rural school contexts**

According to Odeku (2022), most schools in rural communities are hampered by issues such as the lack of proper toilets, running water and sanitation, despite the fact that Section 29(1) (a-b) of the Bill of Rights of the Constitution of South Africa (1996) states that these are basic needs that should be fulfilled. Many learners who attend public primary schools are from poor backgrounds where parents are not working and rely on government social grants. They rely on the school nutrition programme and uniforms donated by other learners, teachers or local business people (Adewumi & Mosito, 2019; Evans, 2021 & Rueckert, 2019). Psychosocial challenges negatively impact learners in rural communities because of the lack of psychosocial support from school and home. Anxiety and depression are among the effects of psychosocial challenges on learners and without any help, it is very hard for them to overcome them on their own. Indeed, in the absence of support, these conditions are likely to get worse.

Suleiman (2022) and Turanovic (2022) state that psychosocial challenges like the death of a family member, violence at home and financial instability trigger anxiety and depression among learners. Bullying is a further challenge as learners who are exposed to violence tend to regard it as acceptable and normal and become bullies themselves (Nicolaidis et al., 2023; White, 2019). Older learners often bully younger learners. Machimdiza (2019) and Lewis (2021) traced bullying in schools to physical and emotional violence at home. This situation calls for the South African government and the DBE to ensure that district psychologists visit rural schools and provide relevant counselling to learners.

#### **2.2.1.4 The need for psychosocial support in rural primary schools**

According to Mogashana and Basitere (2021) and Thomas et al. (2020), the word psychosocial refers to the connection between psychological and social processes that interact with and influence each other. Therefore, psychosocial support can mean both mental and social support. Richter et al. (2022) assert that it is imperative to support learners in primary school so that teachers can focus on teaching and learning, and throughput. While the DBE has adopted the Care and Support for Teaching and Learning (CSTL) Framework policy and the policy on Screening Identification Assessment and Support (SIAS), these policies are all but impossible to execute in rural primary schools as district officials rarely visit

such schools and do not train SBSTs on their content (Kimbempe, 2017; Mbinqo-Gigaba, 2022). However, LO and LS teachers together with school management teams assist in work shopping teachers and implementing such policies in rural primary schools.

As noted previously, psychosocial support involves mental and social support (Mogashana & Basitere, 202; Thomas et al., 2020) to promote a person's holistic wellbeing in their social life (Hijazi & Eriksson, 2020; Kumar, 2020 & Mattingly, 2017). Psychosocial support aims to assist individuals to recover from psychosocial challenges (Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies, 2018). It is about helping people, whether young or old, to not only cope with but overcome challenging situations including the psychosocial challenges that affect rural primary schools (Nortje, 2022; Ntuli, 2020; Nyongesa et al., 2022 & United Nations Relief and Work Agency, 2015). Furthermore, it involves helping learners to have the courage to express themselves and ask for help from teachers or other school staff if they are experiencing psychosocial challenges in school or at home (Heltne et al., 2020 & Sekhu, 2019). Psychosocial support in schools includes providing a learner-friendly environment and positive classroom interactions which support learners (Heath et al., 2017). According to Richter et al. (2022), it is particularly important in primary schools so that learners can focus on their learning.

Ntuli and Madiba (2020) from the University of Pretoria argue that attention also needs to be paid to the psychosocial challenges that affect rural primary school teachers. Psychosocial support does not require health specialists and it is not about treating mental illness. Rather, as explained by Colizzi et al. (2020), it is about practical action that counsellors, other adults and in this case, teachers can take to enhance children's support, respond to their needs and provide healing, comfort and protection in schools. South Africa has adopted support programmes as part of psychosocial support in primary schools, including the deployment of psychologists to district offices. However, Walker (2023), Wiedermann (2023) and Wilson (2019) argue that these programmes have not reached many schools, particularly those in rural areas.

Richter et al. (2022) assert that psychosocial support is a necessity in primary schools so that learners are able to focus on learning. Schools should be conducive environments that foster progress, effectiveness and sustainability. However, several issues hinder learners in rural primary schools from reaching their true potential (Kimbempe, 2017). Moyo (2019) argues that it is important to provide emotional and psychological support to learners because they deal with psychological issues such as depression, anxiety and mental disorders that are exacerbated by the lack of emotional and psychological support in schools.

The United States of America has adopted policies such as the Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Policy (MHPSS) (2019). According to the United Nations Children's Fund (2022), it aims to increase mental health literacy among learners, teachers and parents by educating learners and teachers on mental health through a school curriculum that encompasses physical, social, emotional and psychological aspects of learners' health, safety, nutrition and wellbeing. The policy also aims to provide opportunities to enhance teachers and parents' skills so that they are able to promote and protect learners' mental health and wellbeing.

According to the Handbook for the Provision of an Integrated Package of Care and Support for Learners in Southern African schools, the CSTL programme was adopted by Ministers of Education in the Southern African Development Community (SADC). In 2008, it was endorsed by South Africa, Zambia, Mozambique, Democratic Republic of Congo, and eSwatini. This programme aims to address learners' educational rights by ensuring that schools become inclusive centres of learning, care and support. It also provides for nutritional support, health promotion, infrastructure, water and sanitation, safety and protection, social welfare services, psychosocial support and curriculum support, with a focus on rural schools.

South Africa's SIAS programme was developed in 2014 with the aim of improving access to quality education for learners who face challenges in learning, with an emphasis on learners in rural and special needs schools. It focuses on learners who are struggling in school due to barriers like family disruptions, poverty and disability, amongst others.

The programme also aims to manage and support teaching and learning for learners who experience challenges in learning within the National Curriculum Statement Framework for Grades R-12. This policy is aligned with the Integrated School Health Policy to create an early identification system and effective intervention to improve sustainable learning and reduce school dropouts. According to Mbinqo-Gigaba (2022) and the Western Cape Education Department (2020), the district offices under the DBE are in charge of providing psychosocial support in primary schools and they do so through DBSTs and SBSTs. However, Joubert and Hay (2020) argue that these support teams are only effective in urban primary schools. Rueckert (2019) explains that district offices focus on urban primary schools as they are closer to the district offices than rural ones.

Support for learners can stimulate hard work, effectiveness and progress in the classroom. It also creates a sustainable environment where learners can reach their potential. As demonstrated, above, although support programmes such as DBSTs and SBSTs have been introduced as part of psychosocial support in primary schools and psychologists have been

deployed to district offices to assist learners with emotional and psychological support, Walker (2023) notes that they are not effective in reaching many rural schools that require support

Studies often neglect rural primary schools when discussing the psychosocial issues that affect learners. The DBE points to financial issues that prevent psychological support from being provided in every school (Walker, 2023). However, Hlongoane (2019) and Meshack (2019) maintain that this is also due to mismanagement of funds and irregular expenditure exacerbated by a lack of accountability and sound leadership from department officials.

Ruth (2018) also observes that teachers are not well equipped with skills and training to prepare them to assist learners with their psychosocial challenges. As stated by Darling-Hammond (2020), such programmes are discipline-specific and offer practical guidance such as manuals to school management and teachers. Darling-Hammond (2020) is of the view that teachers should attend training programmes at least three times a year to gain skills and understand psychosocial support, and thus equip them to assist learners who suffer from psychosocial challenges.

#### **2.2.1.5 Learner wellbeing in rural primary schools**

Hargreaves and Shirley (2018) define wellbeing as a person's experience of health and happiness, including mental and physical health, emotional safety, a feeling of belonging, and sense of purpose, achievement and success. It is the state of wellness and regardless of the ups and downs one faces, wellbeing is about how one feels and what makes one happy (Sinclair, 2021). The United Nations Relief and Work Agency (2015) describes wellbeing as adequately meeting a person's social and emotional needs, while Davis (2019) states that it is the experience of health, happiness, and prosperity. It includes good mental health, high levels of life satisfaction, a sense of meaning or purpose, and the ability to manage stress.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943) identifies human needs that must be satisfied in order to boost wellbeing and effectiveness. Prioritising learner wellbeing could thus improve performance and productivity in the classroom. Learner wellbeing is about navigating and eradicating psychosocial challenges (Ruth, 2018). Furthermore, issues outside the school environment may also directly affect and undermine learners' wellbeing. It is thus important for all stakeholders in the education sector to assist where possible with psychological and emotional support, particularly in the primary school context where several psychosocial issues have been identified.

According to Eiroa-Orosa (2020), psychosocial wellbeing is a higher construct that is made up of psychological wellbeing, social wellbeing and collective wellbeing and is about the

individual's quality of life. It is therefore a multidimensional construct consisting of psychological, social and subjective components which influence the overall functionality of individuals in achieving their true potential as members of society (Saadeh et al., 2020). The Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (2018) concurs and describes wellbeing as holistic health. It is thus physical, emotional, social and cognitive health, which refers to the ability to think clearly, learn and remember.

The Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (2018) adds that psychosocial wellbeing relates to what is good for a person, for example, having a meaningful social life and positive social relations with others, as well as living in a supportive environment that imparts positive life skills. Gamage et al. (2021) define learner wellbeing as close connections between the psychological features of a learner's experience, for example, his/her thoughts, emotions and behaviour, and wider social experience, for example, culture, religion and relationships. They use fear as an example, and how learners relate that fear to society.

The United Nations Relief and Work Agency (UNRWA) (2015) points out that disturbing and difficult events in a learner's life can have a significant psychological and social impact. Exposure to violence or disaster, loss, or any negative event in one's life can not only have psychological or social impacts, but also immediate as well as long-term consequences. Gamage et al. (2021) note that HIV and AIDS have also deeply affected the lives of many learners in rural areas, negatively impacting their wellbeing and making it hard to pay full attention at school. Gamage et al. (2021) add that learners thus need to receive more education on HIV and AIDS (not only at school but also at home) and how to behave around a learner who has been affected by the virus or whose parents have been infected and died.

According to the National Education Infrastructure Management System: National Assessment Report (2007), many rural schools still lack adequate infrastructure, rendering it difficult for them to reach their full potential. The report notes that in the Grade 6 systemic evaluation, there was a 35% difference in language studies with urban schools at 64% and rural schools at 29%. Learner wellbeing concerns a learner's overall development and quality of life in school, including his/ her physical, social, mental and emotional state (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2017 & Sun & Shek, 2017). While this does not mean that a learner should be happy and feel good all the time, Suto (2022) and Woolf and Digby (2021) state that it is about having the skills, capacity and resources to cope with emotions like fear, anger and frustration.

#### **2.2.1.5.1 Promoting the health and wellbeing of learners in rural primary schools**

Davis (2019) and Hargreaves and Shirley (2018) explain that the promotion of health and wellbeing is important in schools, especially primary schools because schools play an essential role in supporting learners to make healthy, positive choices. Addressing and promoting learners' wellbeing in school starts with helping learners to feel that they are known and valued as individuals in their own right and that school life has meaning and purpose for them (Ruggeri et al., 2020). Schools do this by developing an environment where learners feel safe and supported, by introducing peer or group assessments where learners are able to identify their own assessment needs and by running programmes on anti-bullying and harassment led by learners with the help of teachers. However, Hochfeld et al. (2022) state that it is difficult for primary schools in rural contexts to offer such services due to the high crime rate that negatively impacts schools' safety and the lack of assistance from district education offices and the government as a whole.

The wellbeing of learners is important in the school environment as it promotes effectiveness and efficiency. Heath et al. (2017) assert that learner wellbeing should be prioritised at all times. In the context of rural schools, several issues undermine such wellbeing, including the lack of supportive mechanisms, family issues and work-related challenges. Some rural primary schools work with local clinics and invite nurses to educate learners on how to look after themselves (Coetzee et al., 2022; Llyod, 2018). Thus, it is important for the DoH and the DBE to work together to promote learner wellbeing. Abrams (2023) and Lever et al. (2017) note that, due to life challenges in the community, at schools or at home, learners are likely to experience psychological challenges.

Chigbu et al. (2023) argue that although psychosocial support programmes like the DBST are in place and district psychologists have been employed, the DBE itself contributes to the lack of promotion of health and wellbeing for learners in rural primary schools. Epstein (2018) explains that this is because when it comes to psychosocial support in rural schools, the department claims that there are no funds and due to their remote location, psychologists rarely visit these schools. According to Thida and Kuppens (2020), most psychosocial challenges affecting primary school learners can be attended to by providing sufficient school-based psychosocial support programmes. They call for policies to establish systems and programmes not only for the protection of every child's rights, but also to address all psychosocial and structural obstacles to learning. Gardner and Stephens (2019) concur and point to the need for alternative educational programmes for learners in rural primary schools to prevent failure.

### **2.2.2 Psychosocial needs of learners in rural school context**

Goodier (2017) indicates that it is important for the South African government and the DBE to work together to establish effective mechanisms to provide essential psychosocial support to learners to deal with psychosocial challenges (Manzini, 2018). Gilbert (2017) asserts that district offices need to establish a better working relationship with rural schools when it comes to psychosocial support and learners' psychosocial needs. He adds that this can be achieved by making it mandatory for district psychologists to visit rural schools on a regular basis. As part of their psychosocial needs learners in rural schools need regular and predictable guidance, and support and monitoring of their wellbeing (Ebersohn et al., 2019).

Ebersohn et al., (2019) suggest that a community-and school-based multi-sectoral approach be introduced to provide psychosocial support to improve learners' wellbeing. This can be done through the introduction of social clubs and community activities, where the community can also be informed about psychosocial support and how to help learners who are facing psychosocial challenges. For this to happen there needs to be collaboration between municipalities and the DBE. Anderson (2018) and Heath et al. (2017) indicate that learners' psychosocial challenges are significantly linked to household economic challenges; hence, engagement with parents and other stakeholders could assist in finding sustainable solutions to help learners to deal with psychosocial issues and enhance their wellbeing.

The United Nations Relief and Work Agency (2015) states that psychosocial support assists learners to not only cope with but to overcome challenging situations and to respond to learners' needs and provide healing, comfort and protection in schools. Heath et al. (2017) note that the psychosocial needs of learners in primary schools include a learner-friendly environment and positive, supportive classroom interaction; for example, teachers could support learners by being approachable so that learners have a safe space to talk about challenges they are facing. They could also teach learners socially acceptable behaviour and how to interact with adults and one another.

Teacher also need to be trained in conflict resolution and encouraged to exercise tolerance and assist learners to think of the future in a positive manner (Bradshaw et al., 2019; United Nations Relief and Work Agency, 2015). Malinga (2021) observes that a positive psychosocial environment benefits learners and promotes sustainable teaching and learning. This highlights the need for emotional and psychosocial support to safeguard learners' wellbeing and needs whilst creating a conducive learning environment.

Khan (2018) calls for the South African government alongside the DBE to provide mechanisms and support programmes for learners. This includes parents and the community's involvement, especially in rural areas as the challenges that confront learners in their

communities need to be addressed and resolved (Bradshaw et al., 2019; United Nations Relief and Work Agency, 2015). Research in South Africa by Engelbrecht et al. (2017) and Savolainen et al. (2017) revealed a high percentage of vulnerable learners in rural primary schools. It is for this reason that Education White Paper 6 on Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System (2001) proposes the establishment of DBSTs and SBSTs that include educational psychologists and school counsellors to address learners' psychosocial needs.

Meeting learners' psychosocial needs is important in order to create a sustainable learning environment (Kimpembe, 2017). Morgan (2019) found that moral, emotional and psychological support is one of the aspects that promotes learners' wellbeing. A positive psychosocial environment benefits learners as they can focus on learning. Malinga (2021) maintains that learners must be provided with essential support mechanisms that include the community and parents that work with teachers and learners to come up with effective approaches to psychosocial issues, and thus create a conducive learning environment.

### **2.2.3 Parental engagement in rural school contexts**

This study adopted the definition of a parent in the South African Schools Act of 1996 as "(a) the parent or guardian of a learner. (b) The person legally entitled to custody of a learner. (c) The person who undertakes to fulfil the obligations of a person referred to the above sentences towards the learners' education at school". Parents can be biological or non-biological guardians or caregivers (Burger, 2022). In African tradition and customs, a parent is someone who is an adult and has the role of guiding and accompanying a child or children to become responsible adults (Duma, 2019); hence the phrase, "it takes a village to raise a child" which means that a child is not only raised by his/her biological parents or guardian, but the community also plays an important role.

#### **2.2.3.1 The role of parental involvement in enhancing psychosocial support for learners in rural primary schools**

Biber (2018) of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poland defines parental involvement as parents' communication with school personnel. Ntekane (2018) notes that it involves attending school-initiated functions and engaging in different types of activities to support their child or children's development and academic achievements. Parental involvement includes academic support and monitoring of children's home and school work. Nisbet (2021) is of the view that parents

are an effective channel to discuss some of the psychosocial challenges affecting learners' wellbeing.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2019), parental involvement in primary schools involves parents and school staff working together to improve learners' learning, development and health. It is thus a dynamic and interactive process where parents interact with schools and their children regarding schoolwork. Duma (2019) and Gross (2020) regard parental involvement as a shared responsibility where primary schools and community organisations reach out to parents and parents are committed to actively supporting their children's education. Thus, parental involvement in primary schools in South Africa is the support parents give their children for them to become more effective when learning in school.

Ntenkane (2018) states that globally, teachers advocate for and encourage parental involvement in schools as a crucial element of learners' academic performance. Ntenkane (2018) adds that in the United States of America, this is highlighted in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 that is part of the Every Student Succeeds Act. It promotes better education in schools by encouraging parental engagement and involvement in schools to help improve learners' academic performance.

According to the Department of Education Parental Contribution Guidelines of 2017, parents can enhance psychosocial support in rural primary schools by ensuring that their children abstain from unacceptable behaviour at home as this will have a positive effect on their academic performance at school. By virtue of their role, parents influence teachers and learners to work together to enhance learners' academic performance and wellbeing in a rural primary school. Maphoke (2017) adds that parents should also ensure that learners receive adequate psychosocial support, meaning that they should spend time with their children discussing their school life and how they are coping at school. Thus, parents play a crucial role in enhancing psychosocial support for learners in rural primary schools. At home, they also become "teachers" where they help their children with homework, help them to prepare for assignments and tests, and read a passage or a story to their child to improve his/her vocabulary (Maphoke, 2017).

Makamani's (2019) study in Namibia found that parents also play the role of bridging the gap between school, home and the community and that, in rural primary schools, the SGB is an effective way to enhance psychosocial support for learners. Parental involvement in enhancing psychosocial support for learners also takes the form of fundraising activities. For example, Roy et al. (2018) found that at some rural primary school in Uganda, parents donate old uniforms and/or school shoes to learners in need and also plant vegetables on the school premises for less fortunate learners. Lastly, Gunduz (2018) of the Turkish Ministry of National

Education and Iline (2017) note that, since learners are growing and changing, parents should ensure that their child receives adequate vitamins and minerals to help him/her to perform better in school. For example, Ginkgo biloba supplements help with concentration and memory loss.

A Western Cape Education Department circular of 2005 states that parents play three major roles in education. First, they need to ensure that their children complete their homework and assignments. Secondly, they should encourage their children to discuss their homework and be supportive, but not do it for them. Lastly, parents should discuss homework with teachers and make the homework experience a fruitful learning experience.

According to Boakye (2019), in the Weija community of Ghana, literacy levels are very low and parents are thus unable to help their children with their schoolwork. Boakye (2019) adds that the Ghanaian government has initiated the “Free compulsory basic education” campaign to boost adult education across the country so that they can help their children with school work.

However, Boakye (2019) notes that parental involvement remains low. This resulted in schools encouraging informal interaction between parents, educators and learners. The author notes that this has enabled parents to realise that, if they help their children get a good education, their children will one day take care of them. Furthermore, parents have come to see that it is their moral responsibility to be good parents.

#### **2.2.3.1.1 Importance of school-community engagement**

School-community engagement refers to community members' involvement in decision-making processes with regard to issues that affect them (GoVos, 2022; Hussey, n.d.). It is critical to school management as both parents and teachers could implement strategies that promote learners' wellbeing in a rural school context. School-community engagement is also necessary so that all stakeholders, including the school management team, SGB, parents, union representatives and education officials have the opportunity to express their opinions, reach common understanding and forge relationships (Epstein, 2018; Ntenkane, 2018). According to Main (2021), the community can play roles such as monitoring learners' behaviour at home and reporting to the school so that teachers can address some of the psychosocial issues facing them.

This will reduce pressure on teachers so that they can focus on teaching and learning. In many African countries like Ghana, compulsory education has become the primary ingredient to ensure children's success and has also been the key in improving the standard of living

(Boakye, 2019). However, low literacy levels and a lack of parental involvement result in learners not receiving the help they need at home. Danovitch (2019) states that a connection and communication between parents and children helps to deter learners from behaving badly and also enhances their academic performance. Furthermore, it makes it easier for parents to give their children the necessary support to improve their wellbeing.

According to Nisbet (2021), parents are an effective channel that can be utilised to discuss some of the psychosocial issues affecting the wellbeing of learners. Werner (2018) adds that school-parent meetings can act as a platform where parents can express their thoughts, ideas and feelings on what needs to happen in order to safeguard the wellbeing of learners. According to Johnson et al. (2019), such meetings allow teachers to engage parents by highlighting the issues that affect learners. They create an environment where teachers can build collaborative relationships with parents in order to help learners. During the discussions, parents come to understand the nature and extent of the psychosocial factors which undermine the wellbeing of learners. Such engagements are significant as they build strong relationships with teachers in relation to communication, responding to issues, and the willingness to solve issues that affect the wellbeing of learners.

The community is thus an important mechanism in schools and can contribute valuable ideas and solutions that could be introduced to address psychosocial issues that affect learners. Furthermore, the community understands the issues that learners experience; community members are thus well-placed to contribute to solution-driven programmes to assist learners (Daly, 2022). According to Epstein (2018), community engagement is critical because the school management team and teachers can present intervention strategies, and the community can implement them with learners. School-community engagement is necessary for all stakeholders, including the school management team, parents, unions and DBE officials to reach common understanding and to decide how best to enhance learners' wellbeing. The community can also monitor learners' behaviour at home and report to the school so that teachers can assist with some of the psychosocial issues facing them (Main, 2021). This will reduce the pressure on teachers so that they can focus on teaching and learning.

According to the School-Parent-Community Engagement Framework (2016), in rural communities, parents, the community and the school rather than teachers alone make a learner. What happens in the community, the school and in the household has a huge impact, whether positive or negative, on the learner. Community engagement is important in schools as learners do not only learn at school. Learning does not only begin when the child enters the school gates; nor does it end when they leave the school premises. It also takes place at

home and in the community, and this is seen in the child's behaviour, beliefs, practice and knowledge. Therefore, linking schools and communities is sound pedagogic practice.

### **2.2.3.2 The nature of parent-learner relationship to enhance learners' wellbeing**

According to Ndlovu (2019), the time parents devote to their children is crucial to their academic and social development. This helps to foster emotional stability and thus their wellbeing. Epstein (2018) notes that spending quality time together improves learners' cognitive skills and social development. It helps parents to prepare their children for successful schooling and equips children with social norms and skills (Wilson, 2019). Danovitch (2019) states that the connection and communication between parents and learners help to prevent bad behaviour and enhance their academic performance. According to Schoeman (2018), the principle of parental engagement is supported by the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 that aims to create inclusive schools.

The South African Minister of Basic Education, Motshekga (2015) noted that learners will succeed and perform better in schools if parents are involved in their child's education. They should thus not leave it to teachers. Schoeman (2018) explains that inclusive practices which include parental engagement in educational activities at home are also detailed in the Department of Education White Paper 6 on Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System (2001). A child's education is not confined to sending him/her to school; parents need to be involved to enhance academic achievement (Casey, 2022). Motshekga (2013) also acknowledged that parental involvement is an area that requires more attention. Ates (2021) states that, according to Patil (2022), current research shows that families' involvement in learning helps to improve learners' performance, reduce absenteeism, and restore parents' confidence in their children's education. A survey of teachers in 30 Kenyan schools in one district found that parents assisted with homework assigned to their children.

### **2.2.3.3 Challenges parents encounter in helping learners**

Durisic and Bunijevac (2017) observe that, while teachers often think that parents are not interested in their children's education, they need to understand the factors that prevent their involvement. Watt (2019) notes that single-parent, low-income households contribute to a lack of parental involvement. Watt (2019) adds that parents reported that they wait many hours before they are attended to by teachers and that teachers do not have welcoming attitudes towards them. The School-Parent-Community-Engagement Framework (2016) confirms that

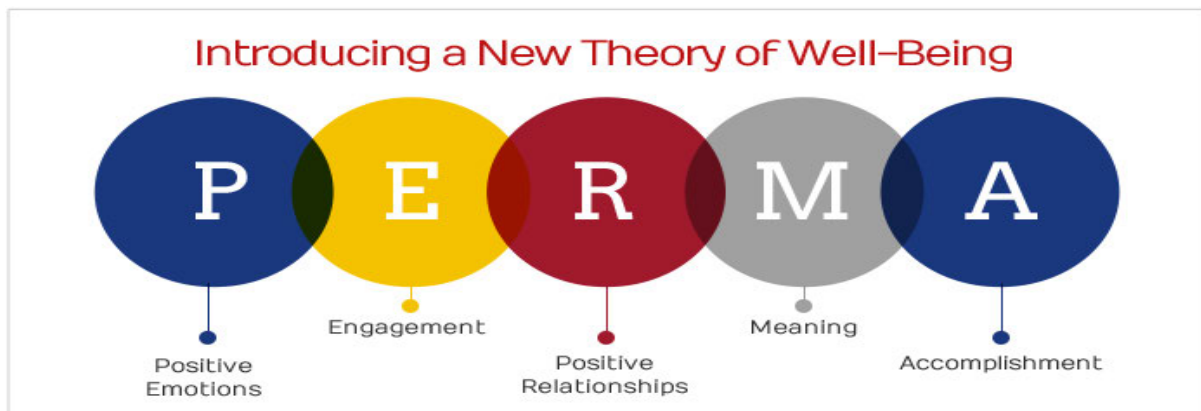
parents themselves face challenges that prevent them from helping their children with schoolwork. The challenges identified in the framework include poverty; single-parenthood; low literacy levels among parents; language barriers; occupation and time pressures; illness; cultural and socio-economic isolation; poor parenting skills; a lack of knowledge of the importance of their role in their children's education; hostile and unwelcoming attitudes by school teachers; and poor skills on the part of the school on how to communicate and collaborate with parents and the community as a whole. Main (2021) observes that parents' level of education has a significant impact on a learner's ability to learn at home and influences the way the child interacts, learns and performs in class. Main (2021) adds that while some teachers state that parents' lack of education contributes to their limited involvement, most educators in rural primary schools feel that parents use their lack of education as a convenient excuse to avoid their duties when it comes to their children's education.

According to Schneider (2018), research shows that more parents are working and spend most of their time outside the home for a significant part of their children's school years. This results in children competing for parental time with family income demands (Ndlovu, 2019). Their care and supervision are left to teachers and educational institutions. Ndlovu (2019) also notes that the values promoted in school may clash with those of the parents. Furthermore, a lack of parental involvement prevents children from forming a bond with their parents (Upadhaya et al., 2019). Ntenkane (2018) states that, while teachers feel that parents should not do their children's homework for them, they should guide and assist them.

### **2.3 Theoretical Framework**

According to Trefy (2020), the term 'theory' refers to explanations of an important feature of nature that is supported by numerous facts gathered from an existing theory that has been tested and validated. Sreekumar (2023) defines a theoretical framework as the application of a theory that is used to explain a particular phenomenon or research problem. This study was grounded in the PERMA Theory of Wellbeing. The theory was appropriate as its five building blocks explain how teachers and learners can help one another to improve their psychosocial wellbeing in the classroom.

### 2.3.1 The PERMA Theory of Wellbeing framework and its building blocks (Chaudron et al., 2015, p. 50)



#### Theory of wellbeing. Adapted from Chaudron et al. (2015, p. 50)

The PERMA Theory of Wellbeing is a model that was established under the Positive Psychology approach (Donaldson et al., 2022; Khan, 2023; Madeson, 2017). According to Seligman (2018) and Main (2023), Positive Psychology involves the scientific study of what makes life worth living. It is the study of human thoughts, feelings and behaviour which focuses on a person's strengths rather than their weaknesses. Seligman, who served as the president of the American Psychological Association in 1998, developed the theory, which, according to Seligman (2018) and Alarcon (2017), states that different people derive wellbeing from different spheres of life. For example, a good life for one person is not necessarily a good life for another.

The PERMA Theory of Wellbeing states that, unique as people are, five building blocks promote wellbeing and positive thoughts about life (Alarcon, 2017). According to Taylor (2019) and Barilec (2021), building blocks are basic structural and functional units of people's lives. Just like cells in a human body, PERMA's building blocks are vital for the life processes necessary for people to sustain their lives. These building blocks are discussed below.

#### 2.3.1.1 Building block one: Positive Emotions

Ching and Chan (2020) note that positive emotions are those that people typically find pleasurable in any experience. Ackerman (2019) describes positive emotions as pleasant responses to one's environment, with examples including love, joy, satisfaction, happiness, serenity and awe. This route to wellbeing is hedonic, which means that it increases positive emotions in a person. It helps us to deal with our past and present and also think about the

future in a positive way (Ackerman, 2019). For example, we can increase our positive emotions about the past by cultivating gratitude and forgiveness, our positive emotions about the present by being mindful and, lastly, our positive emotions about the future by building hope and optimism.

Unlike the other routes to wellbeing described below, this route is limited by the extent to which an individual can experience positive emotions. In other words, positive affectivity is partly inherited and our emotions tend to fluctuate within a range. Many people, by disposition, experience low levels of positive emotions. Traditional conceptions of happiness tend to focus on positive emotions. It can thus be liberating to discover that there are other routes to wellbeing, described below. With regard to this study, positive emotions could assist teachers and learners by promoting forgiveness towards those who have hurt them and being more positive. This will result in teachers and learners being more hopeful and optimistic even when they are confronting psychosocial challenges. This building block is beneficial in rural primary schools because, as explained by Hill (2020), positive emotions can trigger reward pathways in the brain, contributing to lower levels of stress and greater wellbeing. It therefore helps learners and teachers to manage or reduce their stress levels.

### **2.3.1.2 Building block two: Engagement**

According to Seligman (2018), engagement involves a person using his/her skills, strengths and focus in a challenging task. This building block is in line with Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's concept of flow, which speaks of being so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter (Heynderickx, 2020; Niwlikair, 2020). In other words, flow involves living in the present and dedicating oneself to the task at hand. Kovich et al. (2023) explain that when we are engaged, we concentrate on daily activities that build our strength. Flow thus helps one to perform to the best of one's ability, resulting in less anxiety.

Flow can be experienced in a range of activities, for example, engaging in a good conversation, a work task, playing or listening to music with people, sports training, or performance, to name but a few (Ackerman, 2019). With regard to this study, this building block is also important as it promotes concentration. Teacher and learners then acquire flow which enables them to improve their wellbeing through engagement in conversations in school, learners playing with one another or teachers playing educational games with learners.

### **2.3.1.3 Building block three: Relationships**

Seligman (2012) states that relationships are fundamental to wellbeing, and the experiences that contribute to wellbeing are often amplified through relationships, for example, great joy, meaning, laughter, a feeling of belonging, and pride in accomplishment. Connections to other people whether young or old can give life purpose and meaning. Support from and connections with others are one of the best antidotes to “the downs” of life and a reliable way to feel “up”. Research shows that doing acts of kindness for others produces increases wellbeing.

From an evolutionary perspective, we are social beings because the drive to connect with and serve others promotes our survival (Seligman, 2011). Developing strong relationships is central to adaptation and is enabled by our capacity for love, compassion, kindness, empathy, teamwork, cooperation and self-sacrifice. Relationships are very beneficial in rural primary schools as a good working relationship between a teacher and learner results in the teacher being able to teach well; thus, the learner is able to understand what is taught. A positive relationship between the learner and the teacher leads to positive engagement in the classroom, inculcating positive emotions.

### **2.3.1.4 Building block four: Meaning**

Lee, Krause and Davidson (2017) and Seligman (2011) note that a sense of meaning and purpose can be derived from belonging to and serving something bigger than oneself. Various social institutions promote a sense of meaning, including religion, family, science, politics, work organisations, social justice causes, the community, social causes and after-school programmes for children and the youth. Being part of any societal institution gives one a sense of purpose and belonging; thus, teachers and learners who are part of an organisation or institution have a sense of belonging that improves their wellbeing as being in school gives them a sense of meaning or purpose. The relationship between the teacher and the learner is more positive, resulting in the child improving in school and also being able to talk to the teacher when he/she experiences any kind of difficulty.

### **2.3.1.5 Building block five: Accomplishment**

People pursue achievement, competence, success, and mastery for their own sake in a variety of domains, including the workplace, sports, games, hobbies, etc. They pursue

accomplishment even when it does not necessarily lead to positive emotions, meaning, or relationships. According to Seligman (2018), wellbeing is not only valuable because it feels good; it is also beneficial to young or old. Compared to people with low levels of wellbeing, which is also a factor in psychosocial challenges, people with high levels of wellbeing perform better at school and work, have more satisfying relationships, whether romantically or professionally, are more cooperative, have lower levels of stress and anxiety and are more prosocial (Maccagnan et al., 2019; Plumptre, 2021).

### **2.3.2 Benefits and importance of the PERMA Theory of Wellbeing Model**

The PERMA Theory of Wellbeing model redefines psychological states by emphasising positivity and individual development. According to O'Dowry (2020) and TPC Leadership (2023), its advantages are that individuals, young or old, have the ability to re-evaluate problems they encounter. The theory promotes positive emotions among learners, inspires resilience and teaches them to never give up or back down from what they put their minds to that will help them succeed in life.

The School of Social Work (2021) at the University of North Carolina, Benoit and Gabola (2021) and Turner et al. (2023) state that the PERMA theory is an effective framework that helps to rephrase the mental status of an individual by focusing on his/her strengths rather than his/her weaknesses. It thus helps to reframe one's problems into positive challenges and can foster higher levels of wellbeing among learners. In turn, learners who experience wellbeing perform better at school, are more cooperative in the classroom, suffer from less depression and anxiety, enjoy better mental and physical health, exhibit better coping abilities when confronting challenges and are less likely to drop out of school.

### **2.4 Relevance of the PERMA theory to the study**

According to the Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.), relevance is the degree to which something is related or useful to what is happening or being discussed. The PERMA Theory is an evidence-based approach which aims to inculcate positive feelings like happiness and decrease anxiety, depression and stress in a person (Madeson, 2017). With regard to this study, positive emotions are relevant because relationships that learners create with their parents, peers and teachers lead to effective parental involvement, effective teaching and learning, and positive and collaborative attitudes that enable them to deal with their past and present and remain hopeful and optimistic about the future.

Through engagement which involves using one's skills and strengths to tackle a challenging task, one can accomplish the task if one has flow, which can be obtained through good conversations, sports training and educational games, writing or reading a book. This building block is relevant to the study because engagement encourages learners to forge friendships through conversations, participate in sports to improve psychosocial wellbeing and practice writing and reading which helps to improve their academic performance.

The third building block, relationship, is relevant to the study because good relationships with learners enable teachers to help learners when they face challenges. Relationships with people can give one purpose and meaning. This results in improved teaching and learning and thus academic improvement. Relationships enhance learners' wellbeing as they enable love, teamwork, cooperation and kindness.

The meaning building block is relevant to the study due to the fact that relationships between teachers and learners result in learners wanting to stay in school because they are known and valued, and supported by teachers when they provide school uniforms and food for needy learners. When teachers provide psychosocial support, learners feel a sense of belonging and purpose, thus decreasing the likelihood of learner dropout.

The last building block which is accomplishment is also relevant to the study as it is another way of improving learners' wellbeing by encouraging good relationships amongst learners, teachers and parents. When teachers and parents are involved in learners' education, their academic performance improves and when they pass, teachers and parents feel positive.

## **2.5 Chapter summary**

This chapter reviewed the literature relevant to the study. It discussed the psychosocial challenges confronted by learners in school and at home; the conceptualisation of psychosocial challenges and their effects on learners; the conceptualisation of psychosocial support; rural school contexts; the health and wellbeing of learners in such contexts and, lastly, the conceptualisation of wellbeing. This chapter also examined the psychosocial needs of learners in a rural school context as well as parental engagement and the role parents play in a learners' psychosocial wellbeing. The theory that grounded this study, the PERMA Theory of Wellbeing, was explained in detail by tracing its background and explaining its building blocks.

The following chapter presents the research methodology employed to investigate and explore psychosocial support for the wellbeing of learners in a rural school context.

# **CHAPTER THREE**

## **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter reviewed the literature relevant to this study. It discussed the conceptualisation of psychosocial support, wellbeing and other relevant terms and examined the importance of psychosocial support in a rural primary school, amongst other relevant topics. The theoretical framework that underpinned the study was also explained.

This chapter presents and justifies the use of the research design and methodology employed to conduct the study. It discusses the research paradigm, design, approach, and context, the selection of participants, methods and procedures used, the participants and their relevance to the study, data generation and analysis, issues of trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and the study's limitations. It concludes with a chapter summary.

### **3.2 Research paradigm**

Nalini (2022), Nieuwenhuis (2016) and Ulz (2023) describe a paradigm as a set of assumptions or beliefs about aspects of reality that give rise to a particular worldview. It also describes a researcher's worldview (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). A paradigm thus serves as a lens through which reality is interpreted. Yong et al. (2021) identify four research paradigms, namely, positivism, realism, critical theory and interpretivism. This study was underpinned by the interpretivist paradigm.

Chun (2019) and Vitale (2023) note that the interpretivist paradigm is a systematic one that is concerned with how people interact and get on with one another. Alborough (2022) adds that how people interact depends on social constructions such as language, consciousness and shared meanings. According to Neville (2019), interpretivist research is associated with qualitative approaches and most interpretivists use participant observation and field research (Park et al., 2020). The interpretivist approach allows researchers to interpret data and explore other people's views by sharing information and knowledge. In Pham's (2018) view, the primary goal of the interpretivist paradigm is to understand how people behave in response to experiences of their world. In positioning myself in this paradigm, the goal was to unfold, interpret and understand how psychosocial support is promoted for learners' wellbeing in a rural primary school.

Ontologically, interpretivists believe that reality is the way things are and that there is no single reality or truth because reality is created by individuals. It is therefore complex and unpredictable (Nickerson, 2023; Rogers, 2020; van der Walt 2020). Interpretivists believe that reality is socially constructed (Qadir, 2022; Zhang, 2022). Alhazmi and Kaufmann (2022) and Pham (2018) state that they engage in an ontological exercise by assuming that social reality can be comprehended by exploring it from an internal perspective with the aim of understanding the essence of reality. By adopting an ontological stance in this study, the exploration led to the uncovering of numerous hidden truths within the phenomenon.

According to Hammersly (2017) and Stroll and Martinich (2023), epistemology refers to beliefs and principles regarding the methods and processes through which reality is investigated and knowledge is acquired. It encompasses the theories and frameworks that guide our understanding of how knowledge is obtained and made credible and thus addresses questions such as how we come to know things, what constitutes valid evidence, and what criteria should be used to determine the reliability and truthfulness of knowledge claims (Abbadia, 2022; Fatl, 2023; Zukauskas et al., 2018).

Interpretivists place emphasis on understanding how truth can be known, discovered, and revealed by giving priority to the perspectives of insiders rather than outsiders (Chowdhury, 2017; Obi et al., 2021). This involves considering what participants say, do, and feel, as well as how they construct meaning within the researched phenomenon. Msweli (2018) and Gemma (2018) note that, in an interpretive study, an epistemological stance involves meaningful dialogue between the participants and the researcher through reflective practice to gain insights into "how they perceive things from and within" the phenomenon under investigation. This assisted me in using FGDs and a semi-structured interview to ensure that the participants shared their knowledge and points of view on promoting psychosocial support for the wellbeing of learners in a rural primary school.

Methodologically, the interpretivist approach relies heavily on methods that facilitate dialogue between the researcher and the participants to collaboratively construct a meaningful reality (Haradhan, 2018; Kaushik & Walsh, 2019; Kinnear & Ruggunan, 2019). It also favours qualitative methodologies and since this was a qualitative study, I made use of a case study design and a semi-structured interview and FGDs to generate data. I interacted with the participants by engaging in dialogue and other methods that allowed them to share their knowledge based on their context. Putnam and Banghart (2017) and Rogars (2020) state that, in the course of their research, constructing knowledge became a shared responsibility among the participants and they learnt from one another by working collaboratively.

Since the study sought to promote psychosocial support for the wellbeing of learners that could be provided by teachers in a rural school context, strategies to provide such support needed to be context-based; thus, the interpretive paradigm was regarded as most appropriate as it considers the significance of context in relation to meaning (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). It assumes that all human action is meaningful and should be understood through social practices (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020; Ryan, 2018). As stated by Barak (2017) and Yousafzai (2020), this approach facilitated collaborative engagement with the participants, allowing for the exploration of diverse viewpoints and the emergence of multiple perspectives. In keeping with the paradigm's tradition, the research aimed to access and understand the participants' understanding of what they knew in relation to promoting psychosocial support for the wellbeing of learners in a rural school context.

### **3.3 Research design**

According to Akhtar (2016), Bhandari (2023) and Sileyew (2020), a research design is the blueprint within which research is conducted. In other words, it is the “glue” that holds the elements in a research project together. Emeritus (2023) and Romanchak (2023), further explain that a research design is not only an action plan, but a general plan of what is to be done in order to answer the research questions and how data will be generated. Zuckerman (2017) maintains that researchers must have a set of techniques to gather data.

A case study is used to examine features of a given phenomenon (Lucas, Fleming & Bhosale, 2018; Rashid et al., 2019). A case study design was used to explore the psychosocial support that could be provided for the wellbeing of learners in a rural school context. Cherry (2022) and Heale and Twycross (2017), state that a case study is an intensive study of a person, group of people, community, or event, which aims to generalise its findings. Chopard and Przybylski (2021) and Ridder (2017) observe that case studies are particularly well-suited for studying people's lives due to the dynamic nature of human beings. People are complex and multifaceted, making it challenging to predict the outcomes of their lives when they are exposed to different circumstances.

Mclead (2023) and Quintao and Andrade (2020) note that a case study involves the researcher actively working and studying alongside real people in real-life situations. This allows the researcher to directly observe the participants' reactions to naturally occurring events within their natural setting. Ndlovu (2019) adds that case studies allow researchers to collect data using a range of methods rather than a single one. The case study enabled me to use a semi-structured interview and FGDs to collect sufficient data. The case in this study was learners' psychosocial wellbeing and how it could be promoted in a rural school context. According to

Miller (2016), one of the greatest advantages of a case study is that it allows researchers to explore and understand phenomena that are often difficult and in some cases impossible to replicate in a laboratory. In this case, psychosocial support for learners was a need and therefore required collective engagement of individuals in a natural setting.

### **3.4 Research approach**

This study employed a qualitative approach that is a naturalistic inquiry that explores issues as they are (Tenny et al., 2022). Qualitative research is characterised by its objective of understanding aspects of social life and it generates words as data for analysis (Bricki & Green, 2018). Qualitative research puts the participants first, with data obtained through open-ended questions and conversations. It thus enables the researcher to capture the participants' attitudes as they change and evolve over the course of a conversation (Rahman, 2016; Zurba et al., 2017).

Qualitative research methods are not bound by the limitations of gathering non-numerical data; there is an opportunity for explanations that reveal more about the data. The methods and procedures followed in a qualitative approach can be changed to suit the participants' needs in order for them to be comfortable during interviews and FGDs in their natural setting (Rahman, 2016; Zurba et al., 2017). Niewenhuis (2016) indicates that qualitative research allows for more complex aspects of a participant's experience to come to the fore such as, in this study, learners' psychosocial challenges and how their wellbeing could be promoted. According to Gaudet and Robert (2018), the qualitative approach is an interactive process of knowledge production utilising various qualitative methods such as self-narratives, interviews, observation, FGDs, ethnography, and reflective practice (Gaudet & Robert, 2018). It enables researchers to engage in a dynamic and interactive cycle of data collection, analysis, and interpretation, fostering a rich and nuanced understanding of the research subject.

Unlike the quantitative approach, the qualitative approach uses the interpretive research paradigm. This means that the data collected using a qualitative method is more informative as, given that society is multi-dimensional, interpretivists use more than one lens to gather knowledge. Through the qualitative approach, the research participants were able to express themselves during a semi-structured interview and FGDs. According to Bussetto, Wick and Gumbinger (2020), researchers who employ a qualitative methodology are subjective and set out their interpretations in the study.

According to Rahman (2016), and Zurba et al. (2017), qualitative research offers numerous advantages; however, when it comes to putting participants first, there are four important ones.

The first is that the participants' opinions change and evolve over the course of a conversation and the researcher can capture this through qualitative research. The second advantage is that qualitative data collection and analysis allows for a great deal of flexibility. The third advantage according to Rahman (2016) and Zurba et al. (2017) is that techniques and methods that do not work are changed to suit the participants' needs in order for them to be comfortable during interviews and FGDs. Lastly, qualitative information gathering is directly targeted at the research participants.

Niewenhuis (2016) indicates that qualitative research allows for more complex aspects of a participant's experience to be studied. Data is not quantified; therefore, participants can provide it in their own way assisted by qualitative data generation methods. According to Juma (2023), the qualitative research approach provides a researcher with an in-depth understanding of the research phenomenon. It fosters detailed understanding of a research topic. As noted by Wilson (2018), the qualitative approach aims to study and examine people within their natural setting with the goal of comprehending a phenomenon through the perspectives of those studied. Social Science researchers usually adopt qualitative research to understand the research phenomenon and to answer the research questions using several data generation tools.

### **3.5 Research context**

This study was conducted in one rural primary school. For the purposes of this study, the school was named RPS. It is situated within Dududu in the Esidakeni area in the Ugu District of KZN. The Esidakeni area is in the west of uMdoni municipality. The school is a combined primary school which offers Grades R to 7. It has one principal, one departmental head, five educators and 173 learners. This is a quintile two public school, meaning that it is allocated funding by the DBE and is a no fee institution. However, the funding received is insufficient to cover annual expenses including electricity bills, servicing photocopying machines, maintenance of classrooms and the school grounds and minor renovations. The pass rate is relatively low, in part due to a lack of parental involvement. Some learners live with their grandparents who cannot help them with their school work, while some parents are illiterate and others do not support or help their children with their school work. The psychosocial challenges experienced by learners at home and in the community also contribute to the low pass rate. The psychosocial challenges confronted at home include, but are not limited to poverty, child-headed households, and parents being unemployed. There are no tangible strategies to support learners to promote their wellbeing. This is partly due to the fact that the

school is located in a rural area far from the district office resulting in a lack of relevant support and attention.

### **3.6 Selection of participants, methods and procedures**

This section explains the method used to sample participants and a detailed profile of the participants as well as how they were profiled. The participants were one LO teacher, one LS teacher, one Departmental Head (DH), three parents and one SGB member. Purposive sampling was used to select the relevant rural primary school and the participants. According to Campbell et al. (2020) and Jordan (2021), purposive sampling, also known as selective sampling involves a researcher relying on his/her judgment to choose or handpick information-rich participants to participate in the study.

#### **3.6.1 Participants and their relevance to the study**

According to Enago Academy (2019) and Pickering (2017), a participant is an individual from whom data is generated in the form of an interview, observation, or FGD. In this study, there were seven participants, comprising three teachers and four parents. Focus group discussions were held with parents and teachers, and a semi-structured interview was conducted with the Departmental Head. The following sub-section provides more details on how the participants were selected.

##### **3.6.1.1 Teachers**

With the help of the principal as the gatekeeper, three teachers were selected for the study, namely, a Grade 6 LS teacher, a Grade 7 LO teacher, and a DH.

##### **3.6.1.2 The Departmental Head**

The DH was selected because she deals with the implementation and monitoring of departmental policies including curriculum, school affairs and psychosocial support policies such as those catering for orphaned and vulnerable children in school and the school nutrition programme. The DH is assigned various roles and functions, but according to the Department of Basic Education Occupational Specific Dispensation on Educators School-Based and Office-Based (2008), and Bipath and Nkabinde (2018), the DH in this rural primary school had three main roles: that is, to engage in class teaching; ensure that the subject area or

phase is effectively taught to learners; and, lastly, to supervise teachers and organise extra-curricular activities for learners to improve their academic performance. Her participation in this study added value because she was familiar with most school policies and school management.

### **3.6.1.3 Life Skills and Life Orientation teachers**

The LS and LO teachers are responsible for teaching LS and LO and work closely with the DH to ensure the provision of psychosocial support within the school and the wellbeing of all learners, including those that are orphaned and vulnerable, on a daily basis. As such, these participants added value to the study. According to Career Insights (2022) and Modiba (2017), LS and LO teachers are responsible for teaching learners essential life skills that they require in their daily lives, such as communication skills, time management skills, self-care, personal responsibilities, and many others.

The LS and LO teachers also craft interventions to assist learners with special needs or disabilities to develop and improve the skills they require to live independently. Jaiswal (2019), Seherrie and Mawela (2022) add that they provide counselling to not only the learners they teach, but any other learner who is struggling emotionally with peer pressure, family conflict, or other psychosocial challenges. They are also a bridge between the school and psychologists from the DBE and they network with professionals from Social Services (social workers), the DoH and SAPS within the community.

### **3.6.1.4 Parents**

With the help of the principal, the DH and teachers, four parents of learners who attended the rural primary school were selected. The first was a SGB member. Members of the SGB attend all school-parent meetings, decide on the school's admission policies and the code of conduct, and work with the School Management Team. The second and third participants were two parents of learners who had received psychosocial support from the school, such as counselling from teachers; the LS or LO teacher, help from the school feeding scheme or other related assistance. The fourth participant was a parent of a learner who had not received any psychosocial support from the school. Engaging in discussions with these participants assisted in identifying ways in which school communities could provide psychosocial support for the wellbeing of learners in this rural primary school.

### **3.7 Data generation methods**

Data generation refers to the theory and methods used by researchers to create data from a sampled data source in a qualitative study (Chun et al., 2019; Tenny et al., 2022). According to Duma (2019) and Ndlovu (2019), it is a data collection method where both the researcher and participants are aware of the study's objectives. Ghoberl (2023) and Ndlovu (2019) explain that data generation is the creation and production of new data from already available data to address the issues a researcher is exploring. Chun et al. (2019) and Ghoberl (2023) note that it refers to the creation or production of new data through collecting information from primary or secondary sources. Such sources may include human participants, documents, organisations, electronic media, and/or events. In this study, a semi-structured interview and FGDs were used to generate data with the selected participants.

Data for this study was generated by means of a semi-structured interview with the DH, an FGD with the LS and LO teachers and one with parents and the SGB member. Each interview had its own set of questions and they were conducted over a period of three days. This gave the participants and I sufficient time to engage on the topics to ensure the generation of meaningful, in-depth data. In the FGDs, I ensured that all participants answered each question before moving to the next one and the participants were also free to ask one another questions. To ensure the generation of adequate data, participants were free to answer in their mother tongue, isiZulu. The discussions were translated and transcribed for data analysis.

#### **3.7.1 Semi-structured interviews**

An interview is a formal social interaction where knowledge is constructed through conversations between two people, the interviewer and the interviewee (Cheron et al., 2022; Ruslin et al., 2022). George (2022) further explains that it is a qualitative research method where questions are posed to the participants to generate data where there is one interviewer and an interviewee or numerous interviewees. Elhami et al. (2022) and Perry (2022), identify four types of interviews for the purposes of research, namely, structured, semi-structured or unstructured interviews, and focus group interviews. Knott et al. (2022) recommend interviews as the most suitable technique to use in poor communities in less industrialised countries as such participants might not be able to write their answers, as in a survey, but are likely to be able to explain their experiences and views. Thus, interviews offer the opportunity to probe deeper into the topic at hand through discussions with the researcher. While there may be misunderstandings between researchers and participants in interviews, they remain a useful data collection tool (Pollock, 2019; Taherdoost, 2022).

This study utilised a one-on-one semi-structured interview, which Evans (2023) and George (2022) and Roberts (2020) describe as a mixture of a structured and unstructured interview. Unlike in an unstructured interview, in a semi-structured interview the interviewer drafts the questions beforehand. However, follow-up questions can be asked pertaining to issues that arise during the interview in order to obtain as much information as possible from the participant or participants. According to George (2022), one of the strengths of semi-structured interviews is that participants are able to freely express themselves.

According to Gaudet and Robert (2018), a semi-structured interview commences with general opening questions that trigger lengthy responses from participants on the issue at hand and are used to explore their thoughts, emotions and beliefs about phenomena (De Jonckheere & Vaughn, 2019; Mushuri et al., 2022). I re-organised and rephrased questions and did not rigidly follow the interview schedule (Pavlakis, 2017). Open-ended questions that could not be answered with a "yes" or "no" were posed; thus, the participants were flexible in their responses and could freely express themselves in a conversation on psychosocial challenges and possible interventions to support learners' wellbeing (Dowling & Brown, 2015). The interview took 30-45 minutes and the session was audio-recorded with the participant's permission.

While there are advantages of semi-structured interviews, there are also disadvantages (Alamri, 2019). Semi-structured interviews are time consuming, as the researcher needs to make time to sit down and interview the participants. Unlike quantitative questionnaires with close-ended questions that require yes or no answers, the open-ended questions in a semi-structured interview mean that it can take longer than both the researcher and participants desire. I sought to avoid these disadvantages by steering the interview so that it did not lose focus, while ensuring that the participant maintained some control.

Secondly, interviews pose a high risk of researcher bias. Semi-structured interviews' open-ended format might entice interviewers to ask questions that will influence the outcome, which can lead to observer bias. Alamri (2019) also identifies the risk of participants providing information that they think they researcher wants, which could result in social desirability bias, or they might act differently when they are observed. To counter this bias, I asked some questions twice in different ways so that the participant expressed honest opinions. I was also flexible with the order of my questions and asked open-ended questions that prompted more descriptive answers.

### **3.7.2 Focus Group Discussions**

An FGD is a method that offers qualitative researchers the opportunity to interview several participants or a group at the same time in one venue, prompting discussion on a specific topic (Babbie, 2021; George, 2023; Nyumba, 2018). This means that each participant can not only make comments, but also ask other participants questions or respond to their comments (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). According to Nieuwenhuis (2016), a focus group provides a more natural environment than an individual interview because the participants influence and are influenced by others while discussing a topic (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). Focus group discussions also allow participants to work collaboratively at an early age (e.g., primary school) to find positive and effective ways to solve their problems and those of others.

At the beginning of the FGD, I clearly outlined the purpose of this research study in an accessible language, isiZulu. During the group discussions, I allowed all the participants a chance to take turns to talk about their experiences of psychosocial wellbeing and also permitted them to ask one another questions. There were two separate FGDs of 30-45 minutes, one with teachers and the other with parents. The discussions were audio-recorded with the participants' permission.

Four disadvantages of FGDs were experienced during the course of the study. The first was that some voices were louder than others. I ensured that all voices were heard by explaining to participants that they must not speak over each other. The second disadvantage was that some participants were shy. To work around this, I asked them direct questions and told them there were no wrong answers. Thirdly, the FGDs were time consuming as participants found some questions more interesting than others. I set a timer for each question to ensure that the discussion did not last too long. The last disadvantage was that opinions of outspoken people were taken as common viewpoints. To address this, I re-read and listened to the transcripts so that a general viewpoint was reached that included the views of those who were not outspoken.

### **3.8 Data analysis approach and procedures**

Qualitative thematic analysis was employed to identify words, themes and concepts in the large volume of verbal data collected and transcribed from the interview and FGDs (Dawadi, 2020; Lockmiller, 2021). Thematic analysis is a method used to identify, analyse, and report patterns in the data (Akyildiz & Ahmed, 2021). It involves six overlapping stages (George, 2023; Nyumba, 2018). I began by reading the transcripts to familiarise myself with the content. I then proceeded to coding where I identified important features of the data that assisted me

in understanding that generated around the psychosocial wellbeing of learners in a rural school context. Thereafter, I searched for potential themes.

Four themes emerged, namely, teachers and parents' understanding of psychosocial support and learner wellbeing; teachers and parents' role in the provision of psychosocial support for the wellbeing of learners; teachers and parents' understanding of educational policies or frameworks that help promote psychosocial support; and, lastly the DBE and the school's role in promoting learners' wellbeing. The key feature of the systematic process of coding is examining for meaning (Jones, 2022). In this phase, I reviewed the themes to check if they told a coherent story based on the data generated from the participants. The themes were named and each was analysed in detail to identify connections between them. Lastly, I produced a report by writing up the findings and discussion in relation to the existing literature using the key themes and the PERMA Theory of Wellbeing.

### **3.9 Issues of trustworthiness**

Issues of trustworthiness involve ensuring that a study's findings reflect what the research set out to answer, rather than the researcher's bias (Bricki & Green, 2018). Tracy (2019) notes that qualitative research is said to be trustworthy if it adequately addresses the issues of credibility, confirmability, transferability, and dependability (Korstjens & Moser, 2017; Stahl & King, 2020).

As stated by Johnson (2020) and Kyngäs et al. (2020), credibility is the most important criterion in trustworthiness and it requires that a study's findings represent reality and the participants' viewpoints rather than those of the researcher. To ensure **credibility**, the participants were required to sign an informed consent form that explained the main aim of the study and stated that their participation was voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw at any time (Manti & Licari, 2018; Xu et al., 2020). To further ensure credibility, I used **triangulation**, which according to Tracy (2019) and Bhandari (2023), is the use of various approaches or data sources to cultivate a broader understanding of a phenomenon. Two data generation methods, a semi-structured interview and FGDs, were employed to minimise the effect of bias.

The PERMA Theory of Wellbeing was used to further promote credibility. This multifaceted perspective of wellbeing consists of five components: positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment (Shanmugam & Hidaat, 2022). According to Baxter et al. (2019) and Cuncic (2022), **transferability** is how applicable a study's results are in other settings or situations. To promote transferability of the study's findings to other contexts in future research, I clearly described the context and characteristics of the

participants that were purposefully selected. Jones (2022) and Snyder (2019) explain that **dependability** involves participants evaluating a study's findings, interpretation and recommendations to ensure that they are supported by the data received from them.

To promote dependability, I was transparent with the participants about the methods used for data generation and the study design. I also notified the participants that the transcripts and audio recordings will be made available to them should they wish to check if they actually said what was recorded. I also ensured confirmability in this study. As stated by Gidalew and Van den Berg (2018), **confirmability** is the degree to which a study's results can be confirmed or corroborated by other researchers. In order to promote confirmability, I ensured that I put aside my opinions in analysing the data and scrutinised the transcripts many times in order to be familiar with the participants' ideas.

### **3.10 Ethical Considerations**

Ethics are defined as a set of widely-accepted moral principles that offer rules and behavioural expectations of the most correct conduct towards participants (Bricki & Green, 2018). I applied for ethical clearance from the Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal where I am registered for a Master's degree. A written application was made to the KZN DBE seeking permission to conduct this study in one of the schools in Dududu, Ugu District in KZN, South Africa. I further requested permission from the principal as the gatekeeper of the selected school to use the school as the research site.

Participants in a study must be well informed about the research, the data generation methods that will be used, and where they will be conducted (Taherdoost, 2021). The participants signed informed consent forms (Tracy, 2019). I also requested permission by sending letters to the teachers, parents and an SGB member in isiZulu inviting them to participate in the study. The study's objectives and research processes were clearly explained. The participants were also informed about the ethical issues involved in research and how they would be protected. The research conformed to all research ethics including privacy, confidentiality, anonymity and voluntary participation (Maccagnan et al., 2019).

According to Baxter (2019), informed consent is the voluntary agreement of an individual who has the legal capacity to give consent. Voluntary participation is important as it gives potential participants the choice of whether or not to participate (Bricki & Green, 2018). While the participants were encouraged to be part of the study, they were made aware that their participation was voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw at any time.

Anonymity was ensured by assigning pseudonyms to the participants (Bos, 2020; Heaton, 2022). Important information about the participants was divulged in public domains including conference presentations, journal articles, and in my report. RPS was used as the pseudonym for the school. DH was used to identify the Departmental Head, LS teacher for the Life Skills teacher and LO teacher for the Life Orientation teacher. Names of trees such as Willow, Cedar, Jacaranda and Rosewood were assigned to the parnets. Confidentiality was also ensured by keeping the data generated from the one-on-one semi-structured interview and FGDs secure. The recordings were transferred from a cell-phone to a laptop in an MP3 format. The researcher also tranferred the data from the recordings into a PDF format on her laptop.

The 3-2-1 backup storage system was used to secure the data, with three copies kept. First, I secured the data on my laptop through the use of a password-protected zip file. I kept the data in an eternal copy on my USB in a password-protected zip file. Lastly, my supervisor also kept the data in her office, again in a password-protected zip file and only my supervisor and I have knowledge of the password. Both recorded and hard copies of the data, including the scanned signed participants' consent forms, will be kept for five years as per the requirements of the University and then shredded and burnt. However, as much as the confidentiality of all discussions was explained to participants, it is acknowledged that in discussions and conversations in qualitative research where knowledge is collaboratively constructed, only partial confidentiality is guaranteed.

### **3.11 Limitations of the study**

According to Ross and Bibler-Zaidi (2019), the limitations of a study are characteristics that impact or influence the interpretation of the findings. Given that the study was context-bound, it's findings could not be widely generalisable. Furthermore, in a qualitative research study, there can only be a small or limited number of participants. Hence, the study was limited to one rural primary school and utilised teachers and parents from that school only.

### **3.12 Chapter summary**

Chapter three presented a detailed explanation of the research paradigm, design and approach, selection of the participants, the methods and procedures, data generation methods, and data analysis approach and procedures. It also discussed issues of trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and the study's limitations. The chapter concluded with a summary.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

### 4.1 Introduction

Chapter three discussed the methodology and methods employed to conduct this study. This chapter presents the analysis and interpretation of the data generated from the one-on-one semi-structured interview with a DH at a rural primary school, an FGD with a LO teacher and an LS teacher, and an FGD with three parents and a SGB member. The aim of the data analysis and interpretation is to develop an understanding and meaning from the data generated from all sources to answer the research questions. The data analysis process involved making comprehensive sense of the data to understand the participants' views on the topic. Thematic analysis was used to arrange and discern patterns in the data.

Verbatim quotations are presented of the participants' responses, with pseudonyms used to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. The sampled school is referred to as RPS, with DH used for the Departmental Head, LS teacher for the Life Skills teacher and LO teacher for the Life Orientation teacher. Parents are assigned the names of types of trees, with Willow and Cedar employed for the two whose children received psychosocial support, and Jacaranda for the parent whose child had never received psychosocial support. Lastly, Rosewood is used for the SGB member.

The findings of this study were grounded in the following research objectives:

1. To explore the psychosocial support that is provided for the wellbeing of learners in a rural school context.
2. To understand how psychosocial support for the wellbeing of learners can be promoted in a rural school context and the reasons for doing it that way.

#### 4.1.1 Background information

Interviews were conducted with one DH, one LO teacher, one LS teacher, three parents, and one SGB member in a rural primary school in the Ugu District. The school is situated within a community living below the poverty line. Most community members have low levels of education or are unemployed. All the participants lived in the rural area of Ugu District and one was unemployed. The discussions with parents were conducted at the school that their children attend. In total, seven participants were involved in this study. All interviews and FGDs were conducted in a friendly and cooperative manner, with English used as the medium for

communication with the teachers and isiZulu with the parents who were better able to express themselves in their mother tongue. The responses from the parents and the SGB member were translated from isiZulu to English.

According to Caulfield (2019) and Villegas (2020), thematic analysis is a method used to examine qualitative data. It involves reading and analysing research data while looking for patterns to construct themes. The participants' feedback is at the centre of making sense of the data. I used Dufour and Richard's (2019) description of the stages of analysis of raw data as editing and coding. According to Anaesth (2017), editing refers to reading and checking research data so that it can be corrected where needed, ensuring consistency and legibility. Khatri and Semah (2023) state that coding is mainly used to represent the meaning of data. During coding, I read the transcripts repeatedly and familiarised myself with the content to gain a better understanding of the themes. The themes that emerged were used to better understand the data and formulate conclusions. The following themes emerged:

4.2.1 Teachers and parents' understanding of psychosocial support and learner wellbeing.

4.2.2 Teachers and parents' role in the provision of psychosocial support for the wellbeing of learners.

4.2.3. Teachers and parents' understanding of educational policies or frameworks that help promote psychosocial support.

4.2.4 The DBE and the school's role in promoting learners' wellbeing.

## **4.2 Data presentation and discussion**

This section presents the data under the themes that were developed from the responses to the one-on-one semi-structured interview and two FGDs. The first explored the participants' understanding of psychosocial support and learner wellbeing based on the literature on such. Eiroa-Orosa (2020) describes psychosocial support as a higher construct made up of psychological, social and collective wellbeing. It is a person's experience of health and happiness, including mental and physical health, emotional safety, a feeling of belonging and a sense of purpose, achievement and success (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2018).

#### **4.2.1 Teachers and parents' understanding of psychosocial support and learner wellbeing**

The data generated from the semi-structured interview and FGDs revealed that most participants (teachers and parents) understood what psychosocial support entails. Asked to share their understanding of this phenomenon, and how to promote learners' wellbeing, especially in the rural primary school, the teachers responded as follows:

*I think psychosocial support refers to any kind of support one receives when they are dealing with challenges. For example, ... Grade 7 learners ... exiting the school ... donating their school uniforms to other learners in lower classes in this rural school who need uniforms is provision of support. Sometimes teachers are forced to bring or sometimes give leftover food from the school nutritional programme to learners who need the food more at their homes – which is provision of support and promotion of wellbeing of such learners and families. (LS teacher)*

*I think psychosocial support talks about how to help children living with adults who do not take care of them because some parents also neglect their children to the extent that these parents cannot see if their children are being abused. So, I think that psychosocial support refers to how to deal with challenging social issues that children or learners face. (DH)*

The LO teacher highlighted trust as one of the ways to promote psychosocial support for learners faced with psychosocial challenges:

*I think psychosocial support deals with the support we are giving to needy learners here at school and also the support that teachers give to learners who come to them and tell their problems as they have more trust in teachers than their parents and the community. Like let say a child is abused at home, they come to teachers and open up so the teacher must provide some kind of support and I think that is psychosocial support. (LO teacher)*

In terms of identifying and assisting learners who might require psychosocial support, the LO teacher emphasised the role played by physical activities:

*If a teacher notices a withdrawn learner, the teacher engages such learner, finds out the root problem and offers support. Sometimes it has to be a group that will be sitting in a room chatting about what is happening. It could be a dance club, or maybe a soccer team. That can also help, and can also be considered as a psychosocial support. (LO teacher)*

Like the LO teacher, the DH indicated that psychosocial support “*deals with the mental support of a person and the support you get from other people*”.

The parents responded as follows to the question on their understanding of psychosocial support and how they should provide it to their children so that their wellbeing is enhanced:

*I do not know what psychosocial support means and I do not have the knowledge on how to provide such support, but I would gladly appreciate being educated on psychosocial support and on how to help my child.* (Willow, parent of learner)

A similar response was given by a learner’s grandparent who stated:

*I do not know what psychosocial support is and I do not even know where to start to get knowledge about it and what to do if my grandchild needs such support. It will be difficult for me to understand this as I am uneducated* (Cedar, grandparent of learner).

The SGB member stated:

*I normally go to my neighbour who is a nurse and ask them to talk to my child like they do at the clinic, to find out if all is well with my child psychologically.* (Rosewood, SGB member).

During the semi-structured interview and FGDs, participants were also asked about their understanding of learner wellbeing. They provided different yet similar responses.

The teachers referred to learner wellbeing as both emotional wellbeing and physical health.

The LS teacher responded:

*I think when we speak of wellbeing we speak of how a person feels and the way they are treated as an individual. So, I think wellbeing looks at the psychological and physical health of an adult or a child and if they are well or suffering in any way.* (LS teacher)

The LO teacher stated:

*I think learner wellbeing has to deal with the health of the children that is a child’s emotions and everything.* (LO teacher)

The DH concurred with these teachers that the state of learners’ emotions is a measure of their wellbeing and added that, ‘*Wellbeing, is a state of how a person is. It is how they are mentally, physically and emotionally*’. In essence, the DH regarded wellbeing as encompassing the holistic feelings of learners or individuals and most importantly as context-based.

To comprehend parents' understanding of what learner wellbeing means, I rephrased the question and asked them to explain what they do to address their children's psychosocial needs. Most said that a child's wellbeing is having their basic needs taken care of, such as food, shelter, clothing, and others. They added activities at school, as well as being able to read, complete household chores and being able to communicate with their parent. Interestingly the grandparent's thoughts on wellbeing were as follows:

*Even though I am not quite sure, I tell him that school is very important. You don't want to be like me. I try to make means to ensure that he has a uniform and I take him to the clinic when he is sick, even though it is quite far (Cedar, grandparent of learner).*

A parent indicated that she checks her child's mental and physical abilities to gauge his wellbeing:

*Usually, I make my child read books that he brings home just to see if his brain is functioning well and if he understands the things they study at school and give him chores to see if he is able to do things. (Jacaranda, parent of learner)*

Another parent highlighted the importance of communication to assess a child's wellbeing:

*As a parent, I also make time to sit down with my daughter and just talk, just the two of us. I ask her about how school is going, and how things are in life so that she is not scared to come to me when she has a problem. (Willow, parent of learner).*

The SGB member agreed with the parents' views:

*I normally sit my child down and ask him general questions and some about school. That is how I can assess the wellbeing of my child, by making time to just talk to him just to see if everything is okay. If I see that I am unable to do it well, I normally go to my neighbour who is a nurse and ask them to talk to my child like they do at the clinic, to find out if all is well with my child psychologically. (Rosewood, SGB member)*

These parents associated a child's wellbeing with mental, physical and emotional health. This is confirmed by the PERMA Theory of Wellbeing (Alarcon, 2017), which holds that as much as people derive wellbeing from different spheres of life, it is what makes life worth living. With regard to relationships within the PERMA Theory, Seligman (2018) states that good relations with others result in acts of kindness that lead to positive relationships and enhanced wellbeing.

Initially, not all participants understood the meaning of learner wellbeing and psychosocial support; however, further probing revealed that they had some understanding of the term

psychosocial support. This was evident when the LO and LS teachers explained that psychosocial support is “*any kind of support one receives*” and added that it is support given by the school or other societal institutions to learners who live with adults that do not take care of them, resulting in neglect.

This is confirmed by Mogashana and Basitere (2021) Thomas et al. (2020) who define psychosocial support as mental and social support given to a person with the aim of helping him/her to address any psychosocial challenges. Amongst other ways of promoting psychosocial support, the LS teacher identified trust as an important element and explained that learners open up to teachers they trust about challenges they are facing and trust that teachers will provide some kind of support. Sound relationships between teachers and learners make it easier to pick up such challenges. The theory of wellbeing asserts that having positive emotions or attitudes and engagement with learners supports them psychosocially as they face challenges. Relationships are fundamental as the wellbeing that they engender fosters meaning, belonging and love (Seligman, 2011). Thus, connections with people one trusts give life purpose and meaning.

The teachers’ responses suggest that psychosocial support for learners in the primary school is mainly dependent on adults; however, learners could be capacitated through engagement in activities. This could include helping learners who deal with any social issues or challenges by involving them in activities that the school hosts and extra-curricular activities like a dance club, the school soccer team, donating school uniforms, and giving to other learners who need more support more than they do. The teachers highlighted the importance of trust and confirmed that some children come to them with difficulties they are facing. This is in line with Seligman’s (2012) contention that connections with others and developing relationships, whether one is young or old, give one purpose and meaning and that supporting one another in any way increases the wellbeing of the person giving and receiving support.

A parent’s response further suggested that engaging learners and giving them an opportunity to freely talk about what happens to them and their life at home and school, would minimise school dropouts because they would have trust in their relationships with teachers and their parents. Thus, the teachers and parents felt that wellbeing is the “*state of how learners are mentally, physically and emotionally*” and how “*a person feels and the way they are treated as an individual*”. The findings also imply that learners’ wellbeing is seen as a collective effort on the part of teachers and parents in a rural primary school. This is supported by Eiroa-Orosa (2020), who defines wellbeing as a higher construct that is made up of psychological, social and collective wellbeing.

The relationship between the school and home is important; therefore, parents felt that doing house chores gives children ‘*meaning*’ in life (Seligman, 2011). This could be derived from serving something bigger than oneself. They also highlighted the importance of parents making time to have conversations with their children to enable them to share challenges they are facing including violence, bullying and sexual abuse. This is in line with Epstein (2018) and Hargreaves and Shirley (2018) who state that wellbeing is a person’s mental and physical health and that spending time with their parents improves children’s cognitive skills and social development. A parent stated that she made time to talk to her daughter and bond over conversations as this made the child trust her and feel free to talk to her, thus enhancing her wellbeing. Therefore, the parents’ understanding of wellbeing is in line with the PERMA Theory that states that parents and teachers should have promote positive relationships as these are fundamental to wellbeing and result in positive emotions like a sense of belonging, joy and serenity (Ching & Chang, 2020).

Good relationships between parents and teachers, and children, build trust that encourage children to speak about challenges in their lives such as abuse, violence or bullying, orphanhood and poverty and undesirable living conditions, opening the door to psychosocial interventions.

#### **4.2.1.1 The need to promote psychosocial support in rural school contexts**

The findings from the one-on-one semi-structured interview and FGDs revealed that the participants felt that there was a need to promote psychosocial support in a rural primary school. They identified the kind of psychosocial support they felt was relevant and explained why these kinds of support are necessary.

*There is a need to support learners psychosocially. If a learner is exposed to family violence or any form of abuse, that learner will not perform well here at school. If a learner is not supported by people around him or her, their wellbeing will be affected because that learner does not get the support that they need. (D.H.)*

The other teachers noted that a lack of psychosocial support negatively impacts a learner's academic performance and thus compromises his or her psychosocial wellbeing. The LS teacher remarked:

*Some learners would even drop out of school due to their psychosocial wellbeing being compromised at home. They have no one to talk to and yet they are suffering. Thus there is a need to work towards the provision of psychosocial support for learners to keep them at school and happy. (LS Teacher)*

Both the LO and LS teacher observed that there are discrepancies in the level of psychosocial support provided to schools in rural areas and urban areas:

*There is a big difference in support that rural schools get and that urban schools get. The fact that urban schools are located in a developed place, they get sponsors very easily and the schools are well developed and well equipped. We are still developing and that means it is difficult for us to get sponsors or to get them easily because we are located in a rural area that is still developing. This means that we have to try raise donations like casual days where learners pay a certain amount to wear colour clothes at school so that we can raise funds to improve some things at the school. (LS teacher)*

*We do not get the same support as schools in urban areas. This is because rural areas are far from district offices that are supposed to be helping us. I also think that because most of the parents are poor and are not rich like those of urban schools, we do not get the same support. (LO teacher)*

Parents also highlighted the need to promote psychosocial support for learners to enhance their wellbeing as this would improve their academic performance and reduce the number of dropouts. One pointed to the negative consequences of leaving learner challenges unattended to or unresolved:

*If children do not get the support they need, they may not be able to focus on school work because they will be thinking about the problem they are facing and end up failing at school. I do believe that if they do not get help, they might end up dropping out of school. (Cedar, grandparent)*

Another parent observed:

*It is like when a child leaves home on an empty stomach because the family is struggling. That child will not be able to focus at school. They will only stare at the teacher, but will not be able to grasp anything because they are hungry. Even if it is a child that loves school, they will not be able to focus on an empty stomach. (Jacaranda, parent)*

Poverty and low socio-economic status are among the challenges that affect the wellbeing of learners both at home and in school, calling for support from schools to support parents and learners Willow, a parent stated:

*I believe that if a child is being abused at home and they are hiding it, they may fail at school because they will be thinking about what is happening at home instead of focusing on their school work. That child can also end up abusing other children at school and this needs to be reported to the school or the police and social workers for the benefit of a child.*

Another parent highlighted that compromised psychosocial wellbeing negatively impacts a child's overall behaviour:

*Sometimes a child becomes a bully because something is eating them up so you need to sit a child down and talk to them because they may be experiencing abuse of some sort, and they just need healing or to resolve that thing. Some kids are abused at home, for instance; some have lost their parents and they live under undesirable conditions and others are sexually abused at home and then they take it out on other kids at school and become abusive. (Rosewood, SGB member)*

Terras and Ramsay (2018) defined psychosocial challenges as difficulties and obstacles learners face due to their mental processing ability. Malinga (2021) notes that they are sometimes caused by learners witnessing physical abuse at home and being unable to focus in the classroom. Such challenges can cause learners to drop out or develop antisocial behaviour like bullying. The findings also suggested that the home environment in a rural context is the first place where the need for psychosocial support needs to be identified and provided for learner wellbeing. The DH stated that learners who witness or suffer from abuse at home do not perform well at school. Some abuse other learners at school and when this happens, the SAPS and social workers need to be informed so that the cause can be identified and addressed.

A parent concurred:

*Sometimes a child becomes a bully because something is eating them up so you need to sit a child down and talk to them because they may be experiencing abuse of some sort, and they just need healing or to resolve that thing. Some kids are abused at home, for instance, some have lost their parents and they live under undesirable conditions at home and then they take it out on other kids at school and become abusive. (Rosewood, SGB member)*

This is in line with Cortina et al. (2015) who state that the most common psychosocial challenges confronting learners are tension and violence in the family leading to such learners *becoming bullies at school*. Thus, changing unacceptable behaviour at home will have positive effects on learners' academic performance.

One of the roles of teachers is serve as a counsellor who provides psychosocial care to learners by engaging with them to find out what challenges they are facing. The PERMA Theory encourages teachers to engage with one another and with learners and parents to collaboratively develop skills and strengths to deal with psychosocial challenges and prevent dropping out of school (Ackerman, 2019; Seligman, 2011).

Heath et al. (2017), Morgan (2019) and the United Nations Relief and Work Agency (2015) state that learners' wellbeing promotes effectiveness and efficiency and thus enhances their academic performance. This study's findings revealed that, in the rural school context, several issues undermine learners' wellbeing such as the lack of supportive mechanisms, and a lack of focus and concentration due to family related challenges. However, teachers noted that schools in developed areas receive more sponsorship than those in rural areas. As a result, rural schools tend to have a low level of education (Catteneo et al., 2022).

Given this situation, participants suggested the need to educate communities as a form of intervention for learner wellbeing. Catteneo et al. (2022) and Yuheng et al. (2019) note that rural areas are less populated and have low levels of education compared to urban areas. If engaged, parents will learn to be responsible for their children's education and to form relationships at home with their children and with the school and their community. Involving all stakeholders in providing for the school's needs would enable rural communities to prioritise the wellbeing of learners and education (Davis, 2019; Heath et al., 2017; Hochfeld et al., 2022). Such collaboration would improve conditions in rural primary schools and keep learners in school, increasing their chances of obtaining employment.

#### **4.2.2 The role played by parents and teachers in the provision of psychosocial support for learners' wellbeing**

The second theme that emerged from the one-on-one semi-structured interview and FGDs was the role parents and teachers play or should play in providing psychosocial support for the wellbeing of learners. The LO and LS teachers responded:

*I have a group here at school where if it is a learner's birthday we all contribute R2 for that learner who is in the group and we either give them the money or we buy something nice for them. I also talk to learners here at school and encourage them to give old clothes and shoes to poor learners. Learners are very happy and positive about this initiative. (LO teacher)*

*As you know we are in a rural area and there are no organisations here that could provide such support that could improve the wellbeing of the learners, so what the school does is that for Grade 7 learners that are leaving the school, they leave their uniforms for learners that are coming behind them and for food, if there are leftovers from the food handlers that cook in the kitchen, that food is given to children in need. So I think that is actually how we do support the wellbeing of learners. (LS teacher)*

The LO teacher added:

*Parents, teachers and learners need to work together so that they can help each other solve learners' problems and be able to support learners. (LO teacher)*

Similarly, the LS teacher remarked:

*As teachers we need to be more understanding and approachable with learners so that learners can feel safe to talk to us. We also need to try and leave our problems at home and not bring them to school as this can lead to us lashing out on a learner who has done nothing wrong. Parents need to be more involved and need to come to school when we call them and not postpone. As much as they ignore our calls, they do not realise that we are trying to help them and their children. As for learners, they need to learn to speak up and report any issues that they are going through, no matter how difficult it is. (LS teacher)*

The two teachers further explained what works for them when they are teaching learners suffering from psychosocial challenges:

*What works for me is that I listen to the learners and try to put myself in their shoes so that I can come up with good advice for them. I make sure that I am approachable to learners and I am also confidential and do not talk about what a learner has told me to other teachers and learners. This results in a learner trusting me with any advice I give them. Finally, what also works for me is knowing learners' strengths and weaknesses. This helps me know how to help learners use their strengths so that they are able to improve academically. (LO teacher)*

*What works for me in teaching these learners is having good relationships with them and their parents or guardian. This makes it easier for me to understand the learners more as I also have a relationship with their parents or guardian. What also works for me is having after school programmes for these learners so that they can improve their*

*school work as some of them tend to slack when they are going through challenges.*  
(LS teacher)

These findings suggest that teachers are involved in acts of charity and support by doing things for themselves. Asked about their involvement in providing psychosocial support for learners, teachers mentioned activities that they use or develop to shift learners' focus from their troubles:

*When I generally speak to learners in class, I normally see when they are well and when they are not well. If they are not well I usually make up activities that help them and speak about certain topics in general. So sometimes speaking about general things helps some learners instead of calling out the learner.* (LS teacher)

*I ask the principal permission that we invite the healthcare which are the nurses from our local clinic to talk about teenage pregnancy and to talk about HIV awareness. I also ask the principal that we invite the SAPS and they speak about drug abuse, and they give learners a number to report child abuse. We also invite social welfare to help the needy learners with food parcels. With the parents and the guardians who are illiterate and cannot help with homework and cannot check the exercise book, we also talk about ways in which the parents or the guardians can help.* (DH)

The teachers were asked how they work with the DH to promote psychosocial support for learners and if they have a good relationship with their DH. While the LS teacher stated that they do not have a good relationship with the DH, resulting in challenges in agreeing on how to help learners, the LO teacher stated the following:

*I do have a relationship with my departmental head and I am able to express myself when I need her help. We also have one-on-one meetings during some breaks where the departmental head and I go through learners in my class that we think need help and we are the ones who usually invite people to come and help our learners in any way possible. Our good relationship helps us work together to promote psychosocial support.* (LO teacher)

The above findings indicate that both teachers provide essentials for needy children in order for them to fit in and not feel excluded in school. This was supported by the DH who highlighted the need to involve experts in addressing different aspects of learner wellbeing. Other professionals and stakeholders including social workers, clinics and SAPS were mentioned. Schools also need to connect with other schools to work together to solve their problems (Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies, 2018).

Parents also shared their thoughts on the roles they play in providing psychosocial support to learners:

*Even though I am not quite sure, I tell him that school is very important. I try to make means to ensure that he has a uniform and I take him to the clinic when he is sick, even though it is quite far. I also tell him to stop smoking because I could tell that he had started smoking. I could tell because he was starting to be disrespectful to me. (Cedar, grandparent of learner)*

While this grandparent expressed concern about substance abuse leading to disrespect, she understood the value of education by communicating with her grandchild and the sacrifices she made for the benefit of the child.

Another parent, Willow, stressed the importance of communication between parents and their children in order to ensure their wellbeing:

*As a parent, I also make time to sit down with my daughter and just talk, just the two of us. I ask her about how school is going, and how things are in life so that she is not scared to come to me when she has a problem. (Willow, parent)*

SGB member, Rosewood, concurred:

*I normally sit my child down and ask him general questions and some about school. That is how I am able to assess the wellbeing of my child, by making time to just talk to him just to see if everything is okay. If I see that I am unable to do it well, I normally go to my neighbour who is a nurse and ask them to talk to my child like they do at the clinic, to find out if all is well with my child psychologically. (Rosewood, SGB member)*

This parent stressed the importance of working collaboratively and seeking assistance from experienced professionals to ensure that psychosocial needs are attended to and met. However, another parent shared a different understanding of what constitutes psychosocial needs, which leaned more towards academia:

*I usually make my child read books that he brings home just to see if his brain is functioning well and if he understands the things they study at school. That is how I assess him. And by giving him chores, to see if he can do things. (Jacaranda, parent of learner)*

This parent believed that ensuring that the child's mental capabilities are in line with what is expected in the grade would address his/her psychosocial needs. Jacaranda added that doing well academically is crucial for the child's psychosocial needs.

#### **4.2.2.1 Factors affecting teachers and parents in the provision of psychosocial support for learners**

Data generated from the one-on-one semi-structured interview and the FGDs revealed the factors that affect teachers and parents in seeking to provide support to learners. These include personal, educational, environmental and employment factors.

##### **4.2.2.1.1 Personal factors**

Some participants cited personal factors that affects parents in providing psychosocial support for learners:

*In this rural area, most parents are not working and they rely on government social grants. Parents or guardians fail to provide for their children's basic needs. Also, some learners report that parents fight in front of them and it affects them at school. There are child-headed households, and that robs learners of the experience of being a child as they do adult chores and take care of their siblings. (DH)*

Jacaranda pointed to abuse at home as a factor that prevents parents from providing psychosocial support to learners:

*I think as a parent you need to look at yourself and check if you are not the cause of the bad behaviour at school. Ask yourself if you are not the reason the child is abusing other kids at school. For instance, are you not beaten in front of the child? Do you not beat up your man in front of your child?*

Jacaranda added:

*As parents we need to be careful because how we present ourselves affects our children. For example, if parents argue in front of their children and call each other names, the children will think that it is okay to behave like that and they will do it at school. So our behaviour as parents has a big impact on a child's life and how they behave at school and anywhere in general.*

##### **4.2.2.1.2 Educational factors**

Teachers expressed the need for professional training to enable them to offer learners' psychosocial support:

*I do not have such qualifications and I think that is why it is very difficult to provide psychosocial support to learners. All teachers need this qualification. (LS teacher)*

*I do not have such a qualification and I don't know about other educators because we do not talk about qualifications or something like that but one day I need to have a qualification in psychology so that I can help children. One day I want to have this qualification. (LO teacher)*

Parent Cedar felt that parents' low level of education hinders them from providing psychosocial support for learners:

*In my opinion I am the same as someone who has never went to school. This is because I did not even finish school. I dropped out very early and as a result I cannot provide psychosocial support my grandchild needs.*

Cedar added:

*As a grandparent I am uneducated, I believe that being uneducated is a factor that is hampering me from accessing knowledge on the benefits of psychosocial support as I do not know how to read and write. For example, I cannot even read the pamphlets that I receive from the clinic. This means that if I were to access knowledge, someone would have to read to me or explain the benefits of psychosocial support in isiZulu as it is the only language I know.*

#### **4.2.2.1.3 Environmental or contextual factors**

The findings from the parents' FGD revealed that there are no social clubs or community activities to assist them in providing psychosocial support to learners:

The SGB member stated:

*I think one of our biggest challenges is the fact that we stay in the rural areas, there are no community clubs in our area and a lot of things happen in town, or the suburbs. So even those who are meant to assist us are unable to come to us, because we are in the outskirts, and they end up helping schools that are in the suburbs and townships areas close to town. So the fact that we stay far from town and that we are in the rural areas is our biggest challenge. (Rosewood, SGB member)*

Another parent agreed:

*I agree with the chairperson of the school governing body. It does become a challenge. There was a neighbour's child who was having challenges at school. Social workers came and teachers explained what was going on, but the matter was not resolved and the child never received help because that child lives far away from town and the parents could not afford to take that child back to the psychologist as they live far from town. When the psychologists do not come to school to assess learners, it becomes a problem because learners who need help are not placed in special schools that would help them. (Jacaranda, parent)*

#### **4.2.2.1.4 The influence of parental unemployment**

Rural schools face severe challenges that are unique to their environment, including a lack of parental interest in their children's education, insufficient funding from the state, a lack of resources and underqualified teachers, which are barriers to effective education. During the parents' FGD, they were asked their employment status, and how this influences their provision or non-provision of psychosocial support to learners in a rural primary school. They responded as follows:

*I am very old my child. I am unemployed and rely on the old age grant from the government which is sometimes not enough. Being old, unemployed and raising a child is sometimes difficult. This is because sometimes I cannot help my grandchild if they need money for something. A few months ago my grandchild needed new school shoes and a school jersey and because I am not working, I could not provide these things in time. There are a lot of grandparents who are like me, who look after their grandchildren and are unemployed. It is very difficult my child. (Cedar, Grandparent of learner)*

The SGB member testified:

*I was unemployed before, but due to my loyalty to the school as an SGB member the school employed me and I am now a cleaner at this school. My job requires me to make sure that the school is clean. This job helps me provide support for my child by making it possible for me to buy necessary things that my child needs, for example, I am able to buy her school uniform, extra stationery and also I am able to have ... daughter and mother time by taking her out so that we can spend some time together. The level of unemployment in this area is very high and this has contributed to learners' psychosocial challenges. This is because parents or guardians who are unemployed*

*sometimes fail to buy things their children need as they also rely on the child support grant. This is why you sometimes see learners go to school wearing jerseys or shoes that are not part of the school uniform. (Rosewood, SGB member)*

Similarly, Willow, a parent who is employed, observed:

*I am also employed as a cleaner at another school. Getting this job has helped me a lot as it is not nice to be unemployed. I now can buy things for myself and my child whenever I want and not wait for the child support grant. Getting this job has made things easier as I can provide for my child and I am now able to take her to hospitals that are far away if she needs better care. The level of unemployment in this area is shocking and this has resulted in high criminal activities in the area and this has made it hard for the community to gather together and find ways collectively to help learners in the area. (Willow, parent)*

Unlike the two employed parents, another parent indicated that he was temporarily employed but appreciated the opportunity:

*I also have a job, but it is not permanent. I look after the garden and make sure that plants and vegetables planted in the school by the school and the community are not stolen. Even though I have a job, due to it being seasonal there are months I do not work. It is sometimes hard for me to provide adequate psychosocial support that my children need as I do not have a permanent stable job. (Jacaranda, parent)*

The findings thus revealed that having a job helps parents to provide support for their children to promote their wellbeing. For instance, Willow stated that as a result of being employed, she was able to buy things for herself and her child and not only rely on the child support grant. She could also take her child to hospitals far from home for better care and not only rely on the local clinic.

The findings also revealed that having 'relationships' and being an active parent within the school has its own advantages and can lead to job opportunities. This was evident when the SGB member and a parent stated that they are employed at one of the schools in the community because they were always available to assist on a voluntary basis. According to the PERMA Theory, a positive attitude makes it easier to form relationships, and engage with others. The SGB member went on to talk about 'loyalty' which could be a useful trait to teach their children for their wellbeing and to have a positive attitude about school. The findings also suggest that having a job results in more quality time between a parent and their child. For example, the SGB member explained that since having a job, she was able to support her

daughter by taking her out for lunch and spending quality time with her. Moyo (2019) explains that providing emotional and psychological support to learners is vital as learners as young as those in primary school sometimes deal with issues like depression and anxiety.

Thus, poverty, unemployment and a poor background affect not only learners, but also their parents' ability to provide psychosocial support for their children. The findings showed that most parents in this rural community relied on social grants and old age pensions. Cedar stressed the importance of education so that her grandchild does not end up unemployed like her. The high unemployment rate due to the geographical location of the area makes it difficult for the community to work together in promoting and providing psychosocial support for learners. This finding is in line with Graves (2021) who states that rural areas have a less diversified economy with few or no job opportunities.

The Draft Policy on Rural Education (2017) notes that rural schools are not only characterised by their geographical location, but also by social and economic deprivation, poverty, poor service delivery and the physical and cultural environment of the school and the area. While Gebre (2019) and Vasile et al. (2019) state that rural areas suffer economic stagnation which leads to poverty, if parents and rural communities could work together and follow the elements of the PERMA Theory, schools in rural contexts could improve their performance. In addition, connections between parents and learners improve their relationship and learners' academic performance, resulting in positive emotions on both sides.

The importance of connections and relationships was highlighted by Cedar, Willow and Rosewood. Communication between learners and learners, learners and parents and teachers and parents makes learners in a primary school feel noticed and encourages them to value themselves and their school and feel a sense of belonging (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2018; Seligman, 2011; Lee et al., 2017). Seligman (2012) notes that this does not only benefit the individual, but also teaches other learners skills such as saving, giving, and group participation.

From the FGDs with teachers, it was evident that a good working relationship between teachers and parents is key. Munje and Mncube (2018) state that one of the challenges confronting rural schools is parents' lack of interest in their children's school work, resulting in poor teacher-parent relationships; hence, the need for more engagement with parents. Seligman (2018) maintains that working hard, mastering an endeavour and achieving one's goals lead to a sense of accomplishment which contributes to wellbeing. Thus, while the school is already devoting attention to these issues, this study and the theory employed

opened the participants' eyes and my eyes in identifying new ways to enhance learners' wellbeing.

#### **4.2.3 Parents and teachers' understanding of educational policies or frameworks that help to promote psychosocial support for the wellbeing of learners**

The findings from this theme emerged from the one-on-one semi-structured interview with the DH and the FGDs with teachers and parents. The participants shared their level of understanding of school policies or frameworks and debated whether what they do aligns with these policies or is relevant to their rural context's need to provide psychosocial support to learners to enhance their wellbeing. The teachers and the DH showed some understanding of policies related to psychosocial support and wellbeing:

*I do have an understanding of some policies. The first policy I know is the school safety policy which makes sure that all schools are safe from drugs, weapons, bullying and any kind of assault, theft and robbery. The second one is the SASA admission policy which states that no child can be refused admission to the school on the basis of their race or religion and that children between the ages 5-15 must attend school. Thirdly, I also know the SIAS policy. This policy talks about how teachers must be able to identify learning barriers that affect learners and how to support these learners. (DH)*

*There are only two policies that I fully know that help me when trying to help my learners in class. The first one is the National Curriculum Statement which is known as the NCS. This policy equips learners with knowledge meaningful for participation in the community. This means that learners must be able to apply what they learn from school in the community. This policy helps learners be able to participate meaningfully in the society. The second policy is actually a programme and it is the National School Nutrition Programme. This programme deals with providing one meal a day to learners in quintile 1, 2 and 3 schools. This programme aims to improve learners' learning ability by providing these meals as there are learners who come to school without any lunch and this programme also promotes the development of school vegetable gardens, hence why the school has allowed some community members to plant vegetables here at school (LS teacher).*

*There are two policies that I know. These policies are the inclusive education policy from the education White Paper 6 which states that teachers should identify and*

*provide support to address learners' barriers. The second policy I know is actually a framework that emerged from the education White Paper 6. It is the District Based Support Teams, also known as the DBST. The DBST in my understanding are teams that were established to represent the district or different units in the district such as Adult Basic Education and Training and Inclusive Education. The DBST amongst others has a role of assisting schools and pre-primary schools to identify barriers to learning and support learners. This framework also establishes support needed by [the] SBST in order for the SBST to be able to support learners in schools. (LO teacher)*

The parents were also asked whether they were familiar with educational policies and frameworks that could assist in providing psychosocial support to learners. The findings revealed that they had a rudimentary understanding of these policies, frameworks and programmes:

*I only know one policy and this policy is the Promotion and Progression Policy. The only thing I know about this policy is that a learner cannot be in the same phase for more than four years. By knowing this policy, I make sure that I always help my child with their homework so that they do not fail. (Willow, parent of learner)*

*There is only one school policy that I briefly know. This is the policy on learner attendance which force us to make sure learners always attend school and report if there is a problem so that teachers can help child or parent. (Jacaranda, parent of learner)*

*As I am uneducated, I do not know many educational policies. The only one I know is the no fee school policy, which says that we do not have to pay school fees if our children attend rural schools. (Cedar, grandparent of learner)*

Like Cedar, the SGB member was aware of the no fee policy and had an understanding of other educational policies:

*As an SGB member, there are some educational policies that I know. These policies are the no fee school policy, financial policy and the admission policy. The reason why I know these policies is because as a school governing body member, we are usually taken to the induction by the Department of Basic Education through the schools after we are elected by parents. (Rosewood, SGB Member)*

#### **4.2.3.1 The importance of teachers and parents understanding educational policies and frameworks**

The one-on-one semi-structured interview and FGDs explored if the participants were aware of the importance of and understood educational policies and how they help them and their children. The participants were asked why it is important for them to understand these policies.

A teacher stated:

*It is important to know policies because policies are established to guide us teachers so that we can teach learners to the best of our ability. (LO teacher)*

The departmental head commented:

*For us teachers it is important for us to know educational policies. This is because these policies influence how safe learners feel in their learning environment. So, if a learner feels safe at school, they will feel comfortable and be eager to learn and perform better resulting in a high academic performance. (DH)*

Similarly, the LS teacher responded:

*In my opinion it is crucial to know educational policies because these policies help schools to establish rules and procedures that help create quality teaching and learning and normal functioning of the school. If there were no educational policies, schools would be very chaotic and teachers and principals would not know what to do. (LS teacher)*

The parents responded to this question as follows:

*It is important for us governing body members to know these policies because they help us assist in school governance. (Rosewood, SGB member)*

*I think it is important to know them so that I can know how to help my child at home if they are going through psychosocial challenges. (Willow, parent of learner)*

*It is important to know educational policies because these policies encourage parental involvement in schools, for example, the policy on learner attendance which monitors learners' attendance and this can also be monitored by parents when they inform the school if their child is unable to attend school for any reasons. (Jacaranda, parent of learner)*

The grandparent exhibited a positive attitude towards education and its benefits:

*It is important for us to know educational policies as these policies help us know our roles and responsibilities in our children's education. (Cedar, grandparent of learner)*

These findings indicate that teachers and parents had an understanding of educational policies, the South African Constitution and the Bill of Rights as well as the school policies and the role they play. Knowledge of the Constitution was demonstrated by the fact that they were aware of the no fee school policy and that they were eligible for government social grants as well as the school nutrition and homework programmes. While it is not necessary for them to understand all policies, as some are aimed at teachers and DBE officials, schools need to make them aware that they have the power to change their lives and those of their children as well as that of the school.

Thus, the findings suggest that parents should be informed of their right to engage with the DBE through the SGB and the SMT. This is particularly important when it comes to support for psychosocial challenges. The findings suggest that parents are aware that policies are in place, but they lack sufficient knowledge of their content. Teachers have a duty to establish relationships with parents and to inform them about policies with regard to psychosocial support and how they can assist in addressing learners' needs. Making the content of policies more accessible would make parents aware of the official stance on how matters should be dealt with in school and the role they could play as parents and communities. The PERMA Theory (Seligman, 2011) suggests that this would enhance learners' performance and inculcate a positive attitude towards school.

The teacher participants demonstrated that they are aware of psychosocial policies that aim to promote learners' wellbeing. For example, Education White Paper 6 on Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System (2001) encourages teachers to develop inclusive learning activities in class so that no learner feels excluded, while the Screening Identification Assessment and Support (2014) policy provides a framework for them to identify learning challenges and how to support learners that experience them. District Based Support Teams and SBSTs (2014), which are the bridge between schools and district offices, should assist schools and district offices to identify and address learning barriers. However, it would seem that teachers lack knowledge on how to implement these and other policies. They also complained about the DBE's non-visibility in this rural school and others.

The South African Schools Act Admission Policy (1996) states that no child can be refused entry to a school on the basis of race or religion, while the National Curriculum Statement

Policy (2002) aims to equip learners with knowledge for meaningful participation in society. Lastly, the No Fee School Policy (2007) states that learners who attend quintile 1 to 3 schools are not required to pay school fees.

The findings also suggest that schools require support to implement the Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Policy (MHPSS) (2019) due to the increase in mental health issues among teachers and learners. Mental health literacy needs to be fostered among learners, teachers and parents by the DBE's Psychological Services. This is confirmed by the PERMA Theory of Wellbeing's *accomplishment building block*. Seligman (2018) states that people who accomplish something tend to feel proud of themselves and confident in their abilities, and have a sense of achievement. Such feelings make a positive contribution to one's wellbeing, leading to positive emotions.

In terms of improving the quality of teaching and learning, the responses from the LO teacher and the DH suggest that knowledge of relevant policies helps them to teach better so that learners' academic achievement is enhanced, and to ensure that the school is a safe environment. Encouraging parents to collaborate and to volunteer to assist at school represents the *relationships building block*. A good relationship between parents, teachers and learners will enable teachers and parents to assist learners who are confronted by challenges. Parents and teachers will feel a sense of *accomplishment* from providing such assistance, resulting in positive emotions like happiness in all three parties. This would address du Plessis and Mestry's (2019) assertion that schools are not fulfilling the expectation that they will provide psychosocial support for learners' wellbeing.

While most of the participants acknowledged the importance of educational policies based on the need to enhance learners' wellbeing, the LS teacher and the SGB member also noted that such policies are developed to promote knowledge of the relevant rules and procedures and to encourage different stakeholders to take responsibility to ensure sound governance of the school.

#### **4.2.4 The Department of Basic Education and the school's role in promoting learners' wellbeing**

The fourth theme that emerged from the one-on-one semi-structured interview and FGDs with teachers and parents from the rural school was the role played by the DBE and the school to ensure the wellbeing of learners. The teachers cited some projects that aim to assist the school in this regard. The DH said:

*We have a 'help me' box, in each class where learners write their problems and not their names, and they remain anonymous and we address them. We also involve people outside like businessmen or business women to donate uniforms. With learners who are going to high school, we encourage them to donate uniforms for other learners who are needy. Life Skills and Life Orientation subject educators report that after some lessons, learners do come to them to tell them their problems and they help them. There is also a government nutrition programme where food that is left is given to needy learners.*

The DH added:

*For the girls here at school, we give them sanitary towels that are provided by the government, and our school was fenced by the Department of Education as you saw when you came here, so we allow parents or guardians to grow vegetables inside the school. This means that they can provide vegetables for their families, thus alleviating poverty, and they can even sell these vegetables to other people to make money and reduce the unemployment rate in the community.*

The teachers noted that the school was involved in a few support initiatives aimed at enhancing learners' wellbeing. Asked if there were any psychosocial support projects, the LO teacher responded:

*Yes, we do have support services that the school offers to learners. The first one is the shoe campaign where the school asks local businessmen and women and some learners for school shoes even if they are second hand and donate them to learners that need the shoes, as some learners come to school wearing sandals even in winter as they do not have school shoes. The school also has food parcels where the school gives leftover food to learners who need food.*

The LS teacher touched on school work by stating:

*The school has what we call "homework clubs" where learners gather together in classrooms and help each other with homework. This is because there are learners who live with their grandparents and cannot be helped with their homework.*

Most of the parents expressed dissatisfaction with the level of support provided by the DBE to promote learners' wellbeing. They noted that schools located closer to the district office receive more support than those that are further away. The absence and non-visibility of departmental officials in rural primary schools was of concern. A parent stated:

*We are located in the outskirts, therefore there are no benefits. I sometimes see the cars going to schools when I go to the municipality. They tell me that they are visiting other schools, but they never come here. This breaks my heart as this means that our children will not receive benefits at their school just because they live far away. It is unfair and heart-breaking. (Rosewood, SGB member)*

Rosewood's sentiments were echoed by another parent:

*In my opinion, we are not benefiting anything from the office since it is in Port Shepstone and we are a rural school. I have never seen people from the district office visiting our school. I have never even heard at the school meetings that they came. So I do not think learners benefit in any way. I think it is because we are too far away. Maybe they do visit schools that are in town. (Willow, parent)*

The grandparent concurred:

*I think since the offices are in Port Shepstone, schools that are closer to the district office benefit better than us who are far from the office. (Cedar, grandparent)*

Jacaranda identified some of the reasons for this neglect:

*In our area, the gravel road is so bad and dangerous that during rainy days it is not easy for cars to use the road and this leads to teachers and learners not coming to school. I think that our biggest problem is the poor road infrastructure. The district office people think about our roads and decide, no, they will not come here. Even if they wanted to, they would rather go to schools that have tar roads than come to us because of the very bad gravel roads. (Jacaranda, parent)*

The above findings point to parents' frustration at the DBE failing to provide learners from this rural school with psychosocial support. They were of the view that the department should provide equal treatment to rural and urban schools as stated by policies and the Constitution. Indeed, they felt that they were in more need of assistance as the rural context presents many disadvantages. They also expressed their frustration with the municipality which ignores their community when it comes to provision of services like improving roads and bridges. The findings from the teachers and the DH show that, while the school has minimal resources, it does offer psychosocial support services for learners. It was interesting that the school utilised the resources at its disposal such as gardens and the DBE nutrition programme. While the parents were not clear on what they could do to promote psychosocial support for the school and learners, they ultimately came to realise that they were promoting such support. This was also evident when the LS and LO teachers and the DH spoke about the homework clubs, the school shoes campaign, the vegetable garden and the *help me box* which are provided for

learners. It is obvious that the teachers in this rural school have a purpose and that they engage. This can only be achieved if they build strong relationships with parents and the community and if education has meaning for them. The elements of *Engagement, Relationships, and Meaning* in the PERMA Theory (Seligman, 2012) suggest that parents and teachers should strengthen and expand their relationships.

Being part of homework clubs gives learners a sense of meaning. Lee et al. (2017) and Seligman (2011) state that being part of any societal institution like after-school programmes gives one a sense of purpose and belonging. When the learners come together in homework clubs, they are able to engage, establish relationships and help one another with their homework, resulting in a sense of accomplishment and sometimes improving their academic performance. Therefore, the psychosocial challenges cited in the FGDs as well as those that were not mentioned appeared to be challenges that could be addressed collaboratively for the wellbeing of learners.

The LO teacher and the DH praised the school's contribution. The examples they cited such as the school donating food left over from the nutrition programme to learners who need food at home, suggest sound management of the resources they have access to. Kotler (2017) of the United States Department of Agriculture states that schools in rural areas not only tackle issues within the school premises but also play a significant role in confronting social issues like poverty in different communities. However, the findings suggest that this rural community should work with the school to collaborate with the municipality to improve the infrastructure in the area for the benefit of all.

#### **4.2.4.1 The relationship between the school and the Department of Basic Education**

The findings also revealed the participants' perceptions of the relationship between the school and the DBE. During the FGD, the teachers were asked whether or not the school received help from the district office to understand and promote psychosocial support for the wellbeing of learners. The LS teacher stated:

*Other than learners' stationery and school workbooks that are always not enough, we do not get any support from the district to understand and promote psychosocial support for the wellbeing of learners at this school. This is because since I have started working here, we have never been invited or heard of any psychosocial support workshops that we teachers must attend by the district office. Maybe those in urban areas or towns do get workshops from the district because they are close to the office, but we never get them as we are located on the outskirts.*

The LO teacher agreed:

*There is no help from the district office concerning psychosocial support. I say this because there have been cases where some of our learners need the help of the district psychologists, but no matter how much we call and sometimes drive all the way to the district office to notify them and ask for them to visit our schools because there are learners who need them, they never come and I think it is because this school is more than an hour and a half drive from the district office. This is why I say there is no help and there is no relationship between this school and the Department of Education when it comes to psychosocial support.*

These teachers felt that the department had failed or neglected the school because of its location. Asked if they thought learners in their school received the same support as those in urban schools, the LO teacher said:

*I think those in urban schools receive good support because of their location and they are close to offices and they do not have the problem of bad roads like us.*

The LS teacher echoed this view:

*There is a big difference in the support that is received by rural area learners and those in urban areas. So for the fact that it is located in such an area, they usually get sponsors very easily. Their schools are well-developed and well-equipped. For us, we may try and raise some donations like allowing learners to wear casual clothes during cultural day instead of the uniform so that they will pay such an amount. So for kids that are located in urban area schools, their parents are also rich compared to us but here in rural areas, we are still developing. Most of the parents have to rely on the grant. For that, I think there is much difference.*

To further understand the relationship between the school and the DBE, teachers were asked how often the district psychologist visited the school and if the visits are beneficial. They responded as follows:

*They never visit us. Since I have started working here I have never seen a psychologist visit our school. I do not even know if that psychologist is a male or a female. (LO teacher)*

*I agree with my colleague. This is a dream we are hoping that one day it comes true. We have never had a district psychologist visit our school even when we make the plea for them to come, they never come. That is why sometimes we turn to nurses and*

*social welfare to help us. I cannot even tell you one name of a district psychologist.*  
(LS teacher)

Parents felt that there is a minimal relationship between the DBE and the school and that not much was done by the DBE to ensure the wellbeing of their children since officials never visited the school, nor did district psychologists. They attributed this to their socio-economic status as a community and their geographical location. More frequent visits from department officials would restore hope to the community and seemingly, teachers. The DBE has programmes like the DBSTs and SBSTs that were established in 2005, partly aimed at providing psychologists to assist learners with psychological challenges. However, according to Booth (2017), they have not been implemented or are not functional in primary schools, particularly in rural areas. While the discussion on the previous themes showed that teachers and parents try to engage and intervene for effective teaching and learning in this school and to instill positive emotions among learners, collaboration with social services was seen as a source of assistance, especially when there is abuse at home.

#### **4.3 Chapter summary**

Chapter four presented and discussed the data generated through the semi-structured interview and FGDs. The following main themes emerged: teachers and parents' understanding of psychosocial support and learner wellbeing; the role played by parents and teachers in providing psychosocial support for the wellbeing of learners; challenges that affect provision of psychosocial support to learners; and lastly, the role played by the DBE and the school in promoting psychosocial support for the wellbeing of learners. The data were analysed and consolidated with the literature that formed part of the study based on the research questions.

The following chapter presents the study's conclusions and recommendations in response to the research questions.

# **CHAPTER FIVE**

## **SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter presented the findings on promoting psychosocial support for the wellbeing of learners in a rural school context. This chapter concludes the study by summarising the findings presented in Chapter four and presenting an outline of Chapters one to four. Conclusions derived from the interpretation, analysis and evaluation of data in relation to the research questions outlined in Chapter one are also presented. This is followed by recommendations and a discussion on the limitations encountered in conducting this study.

### **5.2 Summary**

The purpose of this study was to explore psychosocial support that could be provided for the promotion of learners' wellbeing in a rural school context.

#### **5.2.1 Chapter One**

This chapter comprised an introduction and background to the study as well as the purpose of the study. It discussed the motivation for the study, the problem statement, the study's significance, and the research objectives and questions. The key concepts were defined, followed by the delimitations of the study. The chapter concluded with an outline of the structure of the study.

#### **5.2.2 Chapter Two**

Chapter two reviewed the relevant international, sub-Saharan African and local literature. It examined the conceptualisation of psychosocial challenges, psychosocial support, a rural school context and wellbeing, the psychosocial needs of learners in a rural school context and parental engagement in such a context. The theoretical framework utilised, Seligman's PERMA Theory of Wellbeing (2011) was discussed, as well as its advantages and relevance to the study.

### **5.2.3 Chapter Three**

Chapter three outlined the research design and methodology employed to conduct the study. It explained the interpretive paradigm that guided the study and the research approach, namely, a qualitative research approach. A case study research design was employed and the study focused on a rural primary school in Ugu District in KZN. Purposive sampling was employed to select the participants comprising an LO teacher, a LS teacher, a DH, and three parents as well as a member of the SGB. The data generation methods, including a one-on-one semi-structured interview and two FGDs and procedures were explained in detail as well as the thematic analysis. Chapter three also discussed issues of trustworthiness, ethical considerations and the study's limitations.

### **5.2.4 Chapter Four**

This chapter presented, analysed and discussed the data generated from the semi-structured interview and FGDs to produce the research findings. The findings were presented in line with the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data analysis to answer the research questions. Verbatim quotations from the participants were presented and the findings were then discussed in relation to the literature reviewed and the theoretical framework.

## **5.3 Conclusions**

The conclusions are presented and explained in line with the research questions.

### **5.3.1 Understanding of psychosocial support and learner wellbeing**

The findings revealed that not all participants had a full understanding of psychosocial support and the wellbeing of learners. However, the teachers' responses indicated some understanding and what this means for teachers and learners for effective teaching and learners' wellbeing. The building block of positive emotions in the PERMA Theory of Wellbeing states that meaningful psychosocial support, be it mental or physical support from learners' families, friends, school or the community at large should cause teachers and learners to become more hopeful and optimistic even when they are experiencing psychosocial challenges (Ackerman, 2019; Ching & Chan, 2020; Hill, 2020). Generally, positive emotions trigger reward pathways in the brain, contributing to lower levels of stress and improved wellbeing, resulting in learners feeling happy, loved, and glad to be at school.

Examples of psychosocial support cited by the participants included showing interest in learners' education and individuals and groups in the community assisting teachers with learners. These could include, but not be limited to, donations of school uniforms by learners to learners in need and sharing food parcels especially during the holidays when the school nutrition programme does not operate.

These findings are in line with Thomas et al.'s (2020) description of psychosocial support as mental and social support. Parents expressed their willingness to learn more about what could be done jointly to better understand learners' challenges and how their wellbeing can be promoted in a rural school context.

Teachers and parents' participation in the study appears to have raised awareness of what they could achieve by collaborating to promote psychosocial support. They learnt that this should have meaning to themselves, the school and the wider community. Lee et al. (2017) and Seligman (2011) note that the building block of meaning in the PERMA Theory rests on the notion that being part of societal institutions like the school, family, the community or a social class gives learners a sense of meaning as well as purpose, thus improving their wellbeing and academic performance and resulting in fewer learners dropping out of school. This could also foster the development of positive emotions and relationships through teamwork.

In terms of how learners' wellbeing in a rural school could be promoted, most participants highlighted mental and emotional health as factors that contribute to one's wellbeing. However, some alluded to physical health as a component of wellbeing. The OECD (2017) Sun and Shek (2017) describe learner wellbeing as overall development in school and social, mental and emotional state. Holistic development is thus important, particularly for primary school learners in a rural context.

While the teachers offered a more theoretical explanation of wellbeing, the parents focused on learners' ability to do things such as chores and homework as determinants of their children's wellbeing in that they can do things for themselves. All the participants expressed their willingness to learn from one another and to learn more about how to enhance learners' wellbeing through working together to promote psychosocial support.

### **5.3.2 The need to promote psychosocial support**

Learners' wellbeing is important as it promotes efficiency and effectiveness in academic performance. The study's findings showed that the participants were aware of the need to promote psychosocial support for the wellbeing of learners. This is in line with Davis (2019)

and Hargreaves and Shirley (2018) who argue that wellbeing is very important in primary schools that play a critical role in supporting and guiding learners to deal with psychosocial challenges. However, such endeavours are compromised when parents and teachers do not know how to help a learner experiencing psychosocial challenges. This can result in learners misbehaving, becoming bullies and not performing well at school. However, there seemed to be a lack of knowledge of how to support learners psychosocially.

The parents that participated in this study did not have high levels of education, raising the possibility of them doubting their ability to provide psychosocial support (Angullia, 2021; Bireda & Pillay, 2018; Brookes Blog, 2020). Furthermore, there appeared to be a lack of communication between parents and learners and parents and teachers. Building such relationships could assist in the promotion of psychosocial wellbeing. The findings highlighted the need for openness between learners and their parents in navigating the psychosocial challenges they face.

The findings further suggest that psychosocial support should begin at home. Some participants noted that learners who witness or suffer abuse at home become bullies at school. It was suggested that such issues should be addressed to avoid learners lacking a sense of belonging and purpose, and thus minimise school rates drop-outs. *Engagement*, which is one of the building blocks of the PERMA Theory builds people's skills and strengths to resolve challenges as a team. Therefore, engaging learners in various tasks in class might assist them to feel a sense of belonging and dedication to their school work (Heynderickx, 2020; Kovich et al., 2023; Niwlkair, 2020) and prevent negative feelings and anxiety which result in stress and depression

### **5.3.3 The Department of Basic Education and the school's role in promoting psychosocial support**

The study's findings indicated that the school extends its roles beyond teaching, providing school uniforms to needy learners and food from the school kitchen and vegetable garden. However, support services such as those provided by the DBE, including the deployment of psychologists through DBSTs provide minimal psychosocial support in rural primary schools. Hlongoane (2019) and Meshack (2019) assert that the DBE is failing to provide psychological support in such schools not only due to a lack of funds, but also to mismanagement of funds and irregular expenditure exacerbated by a lack of accountability and sound leadership from department officials.

The participants all agreed that the DBE failed to promote psychosocial support in rural primary schools. While initiatives like the Care and Support for Teaching and Learning Programme, the Early Grade Reading Programme, the School Safety Programme, deployment of psychologists through the DBSTs and the Integrated School Health Programme have been adopted, implementation remains a challenge. These programmes have not reached many rural primary schools due to factors such as a school being far from the district office and poor roads (Wilson, 2019).

It was clear that there is only a limited relationship between the school and the DBE that undermines the provision of psychosocial services as teachers are not well trained to provide psychosocial support. Thus, there is a need for DBE to do more.

#### **5.4 Importance of psychosocial support**

The participants agreed that it is important for teachers and parents to provide psychosocial support to learners and to work collaboratively in doing so.

##### **5.4.1 Importance of psychosocial support provided by teachers and parents for the wellbeing of learners in a rural school context**

The study's findings revealed that, despite challenges they face, parents and teachers provide some sort of psychosocial support to learners. This ranges from providing for their basic needs, to communication between learners and their parents and seeking assistance from clinic staff or others to assist a learner. Such efforts positively impact learners' wellbeing and thus their academic performance (Heltne et al., 2020; Sekhu, 2019). Teachers and parents support learners in the best way they can. The positive emotions this evokes among learners makes them more eager to attend school. As asserted by Seligman (2012), positive emotions enable learners to deal with their past and present and to be able to think about the future in a positive way. Seligman (2012) also holds that relationships between teachers and parents are fundamental to learners' wellbeing. This is confirmed by Malinga (2021) who explains that the involvement of parents and the community in cooperation with teachers results in effective approaches to assist learners who face psychosocial challenges.

## **5.5 Recommendations**

The recommendations that follow are informed by the study's findings. They include the need for teachers and parents to receive training to understand psychosocial support; networking with other departments; the importance of parent-teacher collaboration to provide psychosocial support; an inclusive environment as a support system for learners; and lastly, parents working together to promote psychosocial support for the wellbeing of learners.

### **5.5.1 Teachers and parents' need for training to understand psychosocial support**

There is a dire need for *workshops and seminars on psychosocial support* for parents and teachers in rural communities. Teachers and parents also need to ensure that other community members are made aware of the importance of psychosocial support and how to assist their children when they experience psychosocial challenges. The DBE through the DBSTs should not only provide psychologists for schools but collaborate with the DoH and the DSD to formulate strategies to educate teachers, parents and community members on the benefits of psychosocial support.

### **5.5.2 Networking with other departments**

The DSD and the DoH should work alongside the DBE to promote understanding of psychosocial support to enhance learners' wellbeing and how they need to be supported in rural primary schools. The DBE should invite these departments to attend when they conduct psychosocial support workshops in schools. Department officials can also learn from professionals in these departments such as educational psychologists. In partnership with the local municipality, the DSD, the DoH and SAPS, the DBE should develop social clubs and community activities that promote psychosocial support and offer workshops in rural communities where community members learn about such support and its importance.

### **5.5.3 Parent-teacher collaboration to provide psychosocial support**

Teachers need to be taught how to forge relationships with parents for the benefit of learners since parental involvement is paramount for learners' wellbeing. Teachers and parents need to work together, especially when learners are facing psychosocial challenges. The school management team should develop an effective school policy to encourage teacher-parent collaboration to promote psychosocial support. Schools also need to educate parents on the importance of their involvement. Apart from meetings at school, teachers should consider

home visits to gain a sense of learners' backgrounds and how best to assist them. Parents need to prioritise their children's education by communicating with teachers and attending parent-teacher meetings. Parents and teachers should thus regard themselves as partners in promoting psychosocial support. Workshops should also be held to promote such collaboration.

#### **5.5.4 An inclusive environment as a support system for learners**

All learners, regardless of any learning barriers or disabilities, should be supported by both teachers and parents to achieve their goals. They require guidance on how to help themselves or their peers when facing psychosocial challenges. This will empower and encourage learners and also teach them different strategies to improve their performance in class. Confidence and improved wellbeing lead to a sense of belonging and love for oneself (Lee et al., 2017; Seligman, 2011). As posited by the PERMA Theory, this leaves one feeling capacitated and happy about changes in one's life no matter how small.

The study's findings confirmed that learners in a rural primary school context confront challenges at home, in school, and in the community. Its recommendations have the potential to improve the lives of teachers, parents, learners and the community at large, especially in rural areas. The PERMA Theory of Wellbeing rests on a positive attitude and the formation of relationships through engagement with stakeholders. Workshops between learners and parents, teachers and learners and parents alone as well as parents and community members and the school, and networking with other professionals besides the DBE could provide a platform to explore other ways to address barriers to learning, the challenges teachers confront in handling learners who are experiencing psychosocial challenges and how to use their strengths to their advantage. Learners should be invited to some parent-teacher meetings and be given the opportunity to express their opinions and thoughts so that teachers and parents know how to help them.

#### **5.5.5 Parents working together to promote psychosocial support for the wellbeing of learners**

Parents should work together to exchange information on psychosocial support so as to ensure that learners receive the necessary support regardless of their household situation or economic circumstances. Social clubs and community activities should be established where parents share information with the community at large on the benefits of psychosocial support and how to help those facing psychosocial challenges.

## **5.6 Limitations of the study**

Unlike the teachers, the parents were initially shy to express their views in the FGD. In order to establish strong rapport, I provided a clear explanation of the aims of the study and asked general questions to put them at ease and promote equal participation. Unlike the parents, all the teachers were not available outside school hours. This meant that the FGD had to be held during school breaks that are only 45 minutes and they needed to have lunch before participating. To resolve this issue, the FGD was conducted over two days.

The DH attends to a number of issues and our meetings would thus be interrupted or have to be rescheduled.

While the study involved fewer than ten participants, making the findings not generalizable to all rural primary schools in the province, it still provided in-depth, relevant, and sufficient information appropriate for a qualitative study of this kind. For more diverse findings, future studies could benefit from including a wider sample by incorporating neighboring primary schools

## **5.7 Chapter summary**

This chapter concluded the study by emphasizing that promoting psychosocial support for the wellbeing of learners in a rural school setting is a collective responsibility of all stakeholders. Through discussions with participants, it highlighted the role of psychosocial support in enhancing learners' academic performance and reducing dropout rates. The chapter provided a summary of the findings related to the research questions, as discussed in Chapter Four, and briefly recapped Chapters One to Four. It presented the overall conclusions, comparing them with existing literature. The findings were analyzed using the PERMA Theory of Wellbeing, which served as the study's theoretical framework. Recommendations were offered based on the findings, along with suggestions for future research. The chapter concluded with a discussion on the study's limitations, noting that despite these, the research objectives were met.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**UKZN ETHICAL CLEARANCE**



07 June 2023

Nonhlanhla Nester Mthalane (982231040)  
School Of Education  
Edgewood Campus

Dear NN Mthalane,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/10005552/2023  
Project title: Promoting psychosocial support for the wellbeing of learners in a rural school context.  
Degree: Masters

**Approval Notification – Expedited Application**

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 26 May 2023 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

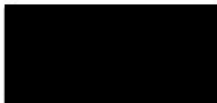
Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

This approval is valid until 07 June 2024.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Health Research Ethics Council (JHEC-04/414-1140).

Yours sincerely,



Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

**Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee**

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4001, South Africa

Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 8350/4557/3587 Email: hssrec@ukzn.ac.za Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics>

Founding Campuses: Edgewood Howard College Medical School Pietermaritzburg Westville

**INSPIRING GREATNESS**

## APPENDIX B

### REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH

P.O Box 1345, Scottburgh

4180

22 November 2022

The Ugu District Director: KwaZulu- Natal Department of Basic Education

No.3 Jan Smut Avenue, Port Shepstone, 4240

#### REQUESTING PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH AT A SCHOOL

My name is Nonhlanhla Nestar Mthlane (982231040). I am a student at the University of KwaZulu Natal, Edgewood Campus. In fulfilment of the Master's degree qualification I am required to conduct a research. This research is entitled: '**Promoting psychosocial support for the wellbeing of learners in a rural school context**'. I hereby request permission to conduct my research in one of the schools from Department of Basic Education in the South Coast Ugu District.

The proposed study aims to explore psychosocial support that could be provided by teachers for the promotion of learners' wellbeing in a rural school context. Selected participants consist of one Life orientation teacher, one Life Skills teacher, one Head of the Department (HOD), three parents and one school governing body (SGB) member. Data will be generated utilizing one-on-one semi-structured interview with the Head of Department only. There will be two focus group discussions where one will be conducted with teachers only and another one with parents only. All interviews will be voice-recorded with the participants' permission. The daily programmes of the school will not be interrupted as data generation schedules will be planned prior.

There will be no financial benefits that participants will accrue as a result of their participation in this project since data generated shall solely be used for the study purposes. Participants' identities and that of the selected school will not be disclosed under any circumstances, before, during and after the reporting process, but instead, pseudonyms will be used to represent the names. Participation is voluntary, therefore, participants will be made aware that they are permitted to withdraw at any time should they so wish without incurring any undesirable consequences on their part. All the participants will be contacted on time for scheduled interviews. Information generated will not be divulged thus upholding confidentiality and anonymity of participants. All other ethical issues will also be adhered to.

Feel free to contact me on: 0736300378 or E-mail: [98221040@stu.ukzn.ac.za](mailto:98221040@stu.ukzn.ac.za) / [manhla004@gmail.com](mailto:manhla004@gmail.com) for further information about this research project, please contact my supervisor Dr N.P. Mthiyane at 031-260 3424. E-mail: [mthiyane1@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:mthiyane1@ukzn.ac.za). If you have questions or concerns about the rights of participants or if you are concerned about any aspects of the study or the researcher, then you may contact the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Administration Research Office, Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building Private Bag X 54001 Durban, 4000; KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA Tel: +2731-2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609 Email: [HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za)

Yours sincerely

Miss N. N. Mthlane

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## APPENDIX C

### PERMISSION FROM KWAZULU- NATAL DEPARTMENT OF BASIC EDUCATION



**KWAZULU-NATAL PROVINCE**  
EDUCATION  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

OFFICE OF THE HEAD OF DEPARTMENT

Private Bag X9137, PIETERMARITZBURG, 3200  
Anton Lembede Building, 247 Burger Street, Pietermaritzburg, 3201  
Tel: 033 392 1051

Email: Phindile.duma@kzndoe.gov.za

Enquiries: Mrs B.T. Ntuli

Ref.:2/4/8/7443

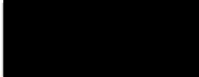
Miss Nonhlanhla Nester Mthalane  
P.O. Box 1345  
SCOTTBURGH  
4180

Dear Miss Mthalane

#### PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: “PROMOTING PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT FOR THE WELLBEING OF LEARNERS IN A RURAL SCHOOL CONTEXT.”, in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the Intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from 20<sup>th</sup> March 2023 to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2025.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Mrs Buyi Ntuli at the contact numbers above.
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report/dissertation/thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Office of the HOD, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education.

  
Mr GN Ngcobo  
Head of Department: Education  
Date: 20<sup>th</sup> March 2023

GROWING KWAZULU-NATAL TOGETHER

**APPENDIX D**  
**PERMISSION LETTER AND CONSENT FORM FOR THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL**

P.O Box 1345, Scottburgh

4180

22 November 2022

Attention: The Principal

**REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT SCHOOL.**

My name is Nonhlanhla Nestar Mthlale (982231040) and I am a student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal Edgewood campus. In fulfillment of the Master's degree qualification I am required to conduct research. The research is entitled: '**Promoting psychosocial support for the wellbeing of learners in a rural school context**'. I hereby request permission to use the school as my research site as well as teachers, learners and parents for selected learners as participants in this study.

The proposed study aims to explore psychosocial support that could be provided by teachers for the promotion of learners' wellbeing in a rural school context. Selected participants consist of one Life orientation teacher, one Life Skills teacher, one Head of the Department (HOD), three parents and one school governing body (SGB) member. Data will be generated utilizing one-on-one semi-structured interview with the Head of Department only. There will be two focus group discussions where one will be conducted with teachers only and another one with parents only. All interviews will be voice-recorded with the participants' permission. The daily programmes of the school will not be interrupted as data generation schedules will be planned prior.

There will be no financial benefits that participants will accrue as a result of their participation in this project since data generated shall solely be used for the study purposes. Participants' identities and that of the selected school will not be disclosed under any circumstances, before, during and after the reporting process, but instead, pseudonyms will be used to represent the names. Participation is voluntary, therefore, participants will be made aware that they are permitted to withdraw at any time should they so wish without incurring any undesirable consequences on their part. All the participants will be contacted on time for scheduled interviews. Information generated will not be divulged thus upholding confidentiality and anonymity of participants and your school. All other ethical issues will also be adhered to.

Feel free to contact me on: 0736300378 or E-mail: [98221040@stu.ukzn.ac.za](mailto:98221040@stu.ukzn.ac.za) / [manhla004@gmail.com](mailto:manhla004@gmail.com). For further information about this research project, please contact my supervisor Dr N. P. Mthiyane at 031-260 3424. E-mail: [mthiyane1@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:mthiyane1@ukzn.ac.za). If you have questions or concerns about the rights of participants or if you are concerned about any aspects of the study or the researcher, then you may contact the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Administration Research Office, Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building Private Bag X 54001 Durban, 4000; KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA Tel: +2731-2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609 Email: [HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za).

Yours sincerely

Miss N. N. Mthlale

## DECLARATION/ CONSENT LETTER

I ..... (Full name of the Principal) hereby confirm that I have been informed about the nature, purpose and procedures for the study: **Promoting psychosocial support for the wellbeing of learners in a rural school context**. I have received, read and understood the written information about the study objectives and research processes. I understand that participation is voluntary and that the participants are at liberty to withdraw from the research project any time, or should they so desire. I also understand the intended significance of the findings of this research.

I therefore, **CONSENT** or **NOT CONSENT** that the research be conducted with teachers and learners from this school.

**Signature of Principal:** -----

**Date:** -----

**Signature of Witness:** -----

**Date:** -----

**SCHOOL STAMP:**

## APPENDIX E

### PERMISSION LETTER AND CONSENT FORM FOR DEPARTMENTAL HEAD

P.O. Box 1345

Scottburgh

4180

22 November 2022

#### TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Dear Sir/Madam

#### REQUEST FOR THE HEAD OF DEPARTMENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT

My name is Nonhlanhla Nestar Mthlane (982231040) and I am a student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal Edgewood campus. In fulfilment of the Master's degree qualification I am required to conduct research. The research is entitled: ***'Promoting psychosocial support for the wellbeing of learners in a rural school context'***. I hereby request you to participate in this study.

The proposed study aims to explore psychosocial support that could be provided by teachers for the promotion of learners' wellbeing in a rural school context. Selected participants consist of one Life orientation teacher, one Life Skills teacher, one Head of the Department (HOD), three parents and one school governing body (SGB) member. Data will be generated utilizing one-on-one semi-structured interview with the Head of Department only. There will be two focus group discussions where one will be conducted with teachers only and another one with parents only. All interviews will be voice-recorded with the participants' permission. The daily programmes of the school will not be interrupted as data generation schedules will be planned prior.

There will be no financial benefits that you will accrue as a result of your participation in this research project. Your identity will not be divulged under any circumstance(s), before, during and after the reporting process but instead, pseudonyms will be used to represent your names. All responses in the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions will be treated with strict confidentiality. Participation is voluntary; therefore, participants will be free to withdraw at any time without incurring any undesirable consequence on your part.

Feel free to contact me on: 0736300378 or E-mail: [98221040@stu.ukzn.ac.za](mailto:98221040@stu.ukzn.ac.za) / [manhla004@gmail.com](mailto:manhla004@gmail.com) for further information about this research project, please contact my supervisor Dr N.P. Mthiyane at 031-260 3424. E-mail: [mthiyane1@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:mthiyane1@ukzn.ac.za). If you have questions or concerns about the rights of participants or if you are concerned about any aspects of the study or the researcher, then you may contact the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Administration Research Office, Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building Private Bag X 54001 Durban, 4000; KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA Tel: +2731-2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609 Email: [HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za)

Yours sincerely

Miss N. N. Mthlane

**DECLARATION**

I..... (Full names of the participant) hereby confirm that I have been informed about the nature, purpose and objectives of the study titled: ***“Promoting psychosocial support for the wellbeing of learners in a rural school context”***.

I have also received, read and understood the written information about the study. I understand everything that has been explained to me and I consent voluntarily to take part in the study while permitting the researcher to audio- record our interview session.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the research project any time should I so desire.

	<b>Willing</b>	<b>Not willing</b>
Audio Equipment		

Signature of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Witness: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX F

### PERMISSION LETTER AND CONSENT FORM FOR LIFE ORIENTATION TEACHER

P.O. Box 1345

Scottburgh

4180

22 November 2022

#### REQUEST FOR THE LIFE ORIENTATION TEACHER TO PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT

My name is Nonhlanhla Nestar Mthalande (982231040) and I am a student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal Edgewood campus. In fulfilment of the Master's degree qualification I am required to conduct research. The research is entitled: ***'Promoting psychosocial support for the wellbeing of learners in a rural school context'***. I hereby request you to participate in this study.

The proposed study aims to explore psychosocial support that could be provided by teachers for the promotion of learners' wellbeing in a rural school context. Selected participants consist of one Life orientation teacher, one Life Skills teacher, one Head of the Department (HOD), three parents and one school governing body (SGB) member. Data will be generated utilizing one-on-one semi-structured interview with the Head of Department only. There will be two focus group discussions where one will be conducted with teachers only and another one with parents only. All interviews will be voice-recorded with the participants' permission. The daily programmes of the school will not be interrupted as data generation schedules will be planned prior.

There will be no financial benefits that you will accrue as a result of your participation in this research project. Your identity will not be divulged under any circumstance(s), before, during and after the reporting process but instead, pseudonyms will be used to represent your names. All responses in the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions will be treated with strict confidentiality. Participation is voluntary; therefore, participants will be free to withdraw at any time without incurring any undesirable consequence on your part.

Feel free to contact me on: 0736300378 or E-mail: [98221040@stu.ukzn.ac.za](mailto:98221040@stu.ukzn.ac.za) / [manhla004@gmail.com](mailto:manhla004@gmail.com) for further information about this research project, please contact my supervisor Dr N.P. Mthiyane at 031-260 3424. E-mail: [mthiyane1@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:mthiyane1@ukzn.ac.za). If you have questions or concerns about the rights of participants or if you are concerned about any aspects of the study or the researcher, then you may contact the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Administration Research Office, Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building Private Bag X 54001 Durban, 4000; KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA Tel: +2731-2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609 Email: [HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za)

Yours sincerely

Miss N.N. Mthalande

---

## DECLARATION

I..... (Full names) hereby confirm that I have been informed about the nature, purpose and objectives of the study titled: ***“Promoting psychosocial support for the wellbeing of learners in a rural school context”***.

I have also received, read and understood the written information about the study. I understand everything that has been explained to me regarding my availability and provision of counselling service in this research project.

	<b>Willing</b>	<b>Not willing</b>
Audio Equipment		

Signature of Life Orientation teacher: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Witness: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX G

### PERMISSION LETTER AND CONSENT FORM FOR LIFE SKILLS TEACHER

P.O. Box 1345

Scottburgh

4180

22 November 2022

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Dear Sir/Madam

#### REQUEST FOR THE LIFE SKILLS TEACHER TO PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT

My name is Nonhlanhla Nestar Mthlale (982231040) and I am a student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal Edgewood campus. In fulfilment of the Master's degree qualification I am required to conduct research. The research is entitled: ***'Promoting psychosocial support for the wellbeing of learners in a rural school context'***. I hereby request you to participate in this study.

The proposed study aims to explore psychosocial support that could be provided by teachers for the promotion of learners' wellbeing in a rural school context. Selected participants consist of one Life orientation teacher, one Life Skills teacher, one Head of the Department (HOD), three parents and one school governing body (SGB) member. Data will be generated utilizing one-on-one semi-structured interview with the Head of Department only. There will be two focus group discussions where one will be conducted with teachers only and another one with parents only. All interviews will be voice-recorded with the participants' permission. The daily programmes of the school will not be interrupted as data generation schedules will be planned prior.

There will be no financial benefits that you will accrue as a result of your participation in this research project. Your identity will not be divulged under any circumstance(s), before, during and after the reporting process but instead, pseudonyms will be used to represent your names. All responses in the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions will be treated with strict confidentiality. Participation is voluntary; therefore, participants will be free to withdraw at any time without incurring any undesirable consequence on your part.

Feel free to contact me on: 0736300378 or E-mail: [98221040@stu.ukzn.ac.za](mailto:98221040@stu.ukzn.ac.za) / [manhla004@gmail.com](mailto:manhla004@gmail.com) for further information about this research project, please contact my supervisor Dr N.P. Mthiyane at 031-260 3424. E-mail: [mthiyane1@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:mthiyane1@ukzn.ac.za). If you have questions or concerns about the rights of participants or if you are concerned about any aspects of the study or the researcher, then you may contact the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Administration Research Office, Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building Private Bag X 54001 Durban, 4000; KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA Tel: +2731-2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609 Email: [HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za)

Yours sincerely

Miss N. N. Mthlale

**DECLARATION**

I..... (Full names of the participant)  
hereby confirm that I have been informed about the nature, purpose and objectives of the study titled:  
***“Promoting psychosocial support for the wellbeing of learners in a rural school context”***.

I have also received, read and understood the written information about the study. I understand everything that has been explained to me and I consent voluntarily to take part in the study while permitting the researcher to audio- record our interview session.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the research project any time should I so desire.

	<b>Willing</b>	<b>Not willing</b>
Audio Equipment		

Signature of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Witness: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX H**  
**PERMISSION LETTER AND CONSENT FORM FOR PARENT**

P.O. Box 1345  
Scottburgh  
4180  
22 November2022

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Dear Sir/Madam

**REQUEST FOR THE PARENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT**

My name is Nonhlanhla Nestar Mthlane (982231040) and I am a student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal Edgewood campus. In fulfilment of the Master's degree qualification I am required to conduct research. The research is entitled: ***'Promoting psychosocial support for the wellbeing of learners in a rural school context'***. I hereby request you to participate in this study.

The proposed study aims to explore psychosocial support that could be provided by teachers for the promotion of learners' wellbeing in a rural school context. Selected participants consist of one Life orientation teacher, one Life Skills teacher, one Head of the Department (HOD), three parents and one school governing body (SGB) member. Data will be generated utilizing one-on-one semi-structured interview with the Head of Department only. There will be two focus group discussions where one will be conducted with teachers only and another one with parents only. All interviews will be voice-recorded with the participants' permission. The daily programmes of the school will not be interrupted as data generation schedules will be planned prior.

There will be no financial benefits that you will accrue as a result of your participation in this research project. Your identity will not be divulged under any circumstance(s), before, during and after the reporting process but instead, pseudonyms will be used to represent your names. All responses in the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions will be treated with strict confidentiality. Participation is voluntary; therefore, participants will be free to withdraw at any time without incurring any undesirable consequence on your part.

Feel free to contact me on: 0736300378 or E-mail: [98221040@stu.ukzn.ac.za](mailto:98221040@stu.ukzn.ac.za) / [manhla004@gmail.com](mailto:manhla004@gmail.com) for further information about this research project, please contact my supervisor Dr N.P. Mthiyane at 031-260 3424. E-mail: [mthiyane1@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:mthiyane1@ukzn.ac.za). If you have questions or concerns about the rights of participants or if you are concerned about any aspects of the study or the researcher, then you may contact the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Administration Research Office, Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building Private Bag X 54001 Durban, 4000; KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA Tel: +2731-2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609 Email: [HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za)

Yours sincerely

Miss N. N. Mthlane

**DECLARATION**

I..... (Full names of the participant)  
hereby confirm that I have been informed about the nature, purpose and objectives of the study titled:  
***“Promoting psychosocial support for the wellbeing of learners in a rural school context”***.

I have also received, read and understood the written information about the study. I understand everything that has been explained to me and I consent voluntarily to take part in the study while permitting the researcher to audio- record our interview session.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the research project any time should I so desire.

	<b>Willing</b>	<b>Not willing</b>
Audio Equipment		

Signature of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Witness: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX I

### PERMISSION LETTER AND CONSENT FORM FOR SCHOOL GOVERNING BODY MEMBER

P.O. Box 1345

Scottburgh

4180

22 November 2022

#### TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Dear Sir/Madam

#### REQUEST FOR THE SCHOOL GOVERNING BODY MEMBER TO PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT

My name is Nonhlanhla Nestar Mthalande (982231040) and I am a student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal Edgewood campus. In fulfilment of the Master's degree qualification I am required to conduct research. The research is entitled: '**Promoting psychosocial support for the wellbeing of learners in a rural school context**'. I hereby request you to participate in this study.

The proposed study aims to explore psychosocial support that could be provided by teachers for the promotion of learners' wellbeing in a rural school context. Selected participants consist of one Life orientation teacher, one Life Skills teacher, one Head of the Department (HOD), three parents and one school governing body (SGB) member. Data will be generated utilizing one-on-one semi-structured interview with the Head of Department only. There will be two focus group discussions where one will be conducted with teachers only and another one with parents only. All interviews will be voice-recorded with the participants' permission. The daily programmes of the school will not be interrupted as data generation schedules will be planned prior.

There will be no financial benefits that you will accrue as a result of your participation in this research project. Your identity will not be divulged under any circumstance(s), before, during and after the reporting process but instead, pseudonyms will be used to represent your names. All responses in the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions will be treated with strict confidentiality. Participation is voluntary; therefore, participants will be free to withdraw at any time without incurring any undesirable consequence on your part.

Feel free to contact me on: 0736300378 or E-mail: [98221040@stu.ukzn.ac.za](mailto:98221040@stu.ukzn.ac.za) / [manhla004@gmail.com](mailto:manhla004@gmail.com) for further information about this research project, please contact my supervisor Dr N.P. Mthiyane at 031-260 3424. E-mail: [mthiyane1@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:mthiyane1@ukzn.ac.za). If you have questions or concerns about the rights of participants or if you are concerned about any aspects of the study or the researcher, then you may contact the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Administration Research Office, Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building Private Bag X 54001 Durban, 4000; KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA Tel: +2731-2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609 Email: [HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za)

Yours sincerely

Miss N. N. Mthalande

**DECLARATION**

I..... (Full names of the participant)  
hereby confirm that I have been informed about the nature, purpose and objectives of the study titled:  
***“Promoting psychosocial support for the wellbeing of learners in a rural school context”***.

I have also received, read and understood the written information about the study. I understand everything that has been explained to me and I consent voluntarily to take part in the study while permitting the researcher to audio- record our interview session.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the research project any time should I so desire.

	<b>Willing</b>	<b>Not willing</b>
Audio Equipment		

Signature of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Witness: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix J

### ONE-ON-ONE SEMI – STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR DEPARTMENT HEAD

**Study Topic: Promoting psychosocial support for the wellbeing of learners in a rural school context**

#### **Part A: Biographical Information**

Gender :

Age :

Qualifications :

Experience in this institution :

1. Please tell me about yourself. Who are you? How old are you?
2. Why did you choose this school?
3. For how long have you been teaching in this school?

#### **Part B: One-on-one Semi Structured Interview Questions for Department Head**

**Objective 1: To explore psychosocial support that is provided for the wellbeing of learners in a rural school context.**

1. What has your experience of working with learners from this rural school context been like?
2. In what way has that experience broadened your understanding of dynamics surrounding psychosocial support for learners in this rural school context?
3. Would you say your training as a teacher prepared you adequately to teach learners with different psychosocial challenges? If yes, how? If not why do you say so?
4. Would you recommend further training in psychosocial support to other teachers, why do you say so?
5. What challenges are faced by learners that affect their wellbeing?
6. Would you like to share one or two of your experiences with learners who have faced psychosocial challenges, and how you provided support?
7. What do you think could be done to help improve learners' wellbeing?
8. How does other teachers' behaviour in this school contribute towards you providing effective support to learners?
9. What are the challenges that you face when trying to provide psychosocial support for learners?
10. In your opinion, is your school in a position to provide psychosocial support for the wellbeing of learners? Why / Why not?

**Objective 2: To understand how psychosocial support for the wellbeing of learners can be promoted in a rural school context and the reasons to do it that way.**

1. In your understanding, what is psychosocial support?
2. In your understanding, what is psychosocial challenge?
3. In your understanding, what is wellbeing?
4. How does wellbeing affect learners' psychosocial support?
5. What do you do to promote psychosocial support for the wellbeing of learners?
6. What would you describe as challenges to parental involvement in learners' school work?
7. How are you coping with learners' psychosocial needs that remain unaddressed?
8. What strategies have you found useful in promoting the wellbeing of learners in this rural primary school?
9. Are there any policies you know concerning understanding how psychosocial support can be promoted in rural schools? If yes, how did you know about these policies? If not, would you like to know about these policies, why or why not?
10. How do you identify vulnerable learners in this rural primary school? Is there any support that the school offer to these learners? If yes, what is the support? If not, why are they not supported?

**Appendix K**  
**INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR TEACHERS**

**Study Topic: Promoting psychosocial support for the wellbeing of learners in a rural school context**

**Part A: Biographical Information**

Gender :

Age :

Qualifications :

Experience in this institution :

4. Please tell me about yourself. Who are you? How old are you?
5. Why did you choose this school?
6. For how long have you been teaching in this school?

**Part B: Focus Group Discussion for Teachers**

**Objective 1: To explore psychosocial support that is provided for the wellbeing of learners in a rural school context.**

1. What is your understanding of:
  - 1.1. Psychosocial challenges?
  - 1.2. Psychosocial support?
  - 1.3. Wellbeing and learner wellbeing?
2. Do you take time to talk to your learners about their psychosocial needs?
3. Being a teacher in this school, how do you provide the support learners need that contributes to their wellbeing?
4. Name any government policy that you know which relates to psychosocial support for the wellbeing of learners.
5. What are the challenges of teaching a learner that has or is suffering from a psychosocial challenge?
6. Are there any psychosocial support services that this school offers? If yes, are they helpful? If not, what could be done to improve them?
7. How do you provide psychosocial support for the wellbeing of learners?
8. Do you or other teachers in this school have qualifications in psychology or counselling? If yes, how does it add value to the wellbeing of learners? If not, would you like to have this qualification and why?

9. What kind of psychosocial support do you think learners in this rural primary school need the most?

**Objective 2: To understand how psychosocial support for the wellbeing of learners can be promoted in a rural school context and the reasons to do it that way**

1. What help are you getting from your district office to understand and promote psychosocial support for the wellbeing of learners at this school?
2. Do you think learners in this rural school get the same support as learners in an urban school? If yes, why? If not, why is that so?
3. In what way do the education department and sister departments like the health department and social welfare department provide psychosocial support for the wellbeing of learners?
4. What challenges do you face when trying to provide psychosocial support to learners?
5. Why is the involvement of stakeholders like the Department of education, psychologists, and parents important in promoting psychosocial support?
6. How does the parent-teacher relationship help you to understand the wellbeing of learners?
7. As department head and teachers, how do work together to promote psychosocial support in this rural school?
8. How often does the district psychologist visit the school? Do you think these visitations are beneficial? Why do you say so?
9. What works for you in teaching learners that are suffering from psychosocial challenges that you can advise other teachers to apply
10. What needs to be done by teachers/ parents/ learners themselves to improve wellbeing of learners as a way to support them psychologically?

**Appendix L**  
**INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR PARENTS**

**Study Topic: Promoting psychosocial support for the wellbeing of learners in a rural school context**

**Part A: Biographical Information**

Gender :

Age :

1. Please tell me about yourself. Who are you? How old are you?
2. What is your employment status?
3. What is your level of education?
4. How many children attend this school in your household?

**Part C: Focus Group Discussion for Parents**

**Objective 1: To explore psychosocial support that is provided for the wellbeing of learners in a rural school context.**

1. Why did you choose this school for your child?
2. What do you do to address your child's psychosocial needs at home?
3. Have you ever helped other parents who needed support with their children? If yes, how? If not, why?
4. Let us say you are currently facing personal challenges that need your attention, do these personal challenges affect the wellbeing of your children? How do you support them?
5. How often do you attend school meetings?
6. Do you think school meetings are necessary? Why do you say so?
7. What are the benefits and challenges in psychosocial support for learners between schools that are closer to the district office and schools that are further away from the district office?
8. Do you monitor your child's homework so that you can help them if they need assistance? If so, how do you do it?
9. What do you do if you are unable to help your child with their school work? Do you seek additional assistance? Why or why not?

**Objective 2: To understand how psychosocial support for the wellbeing of learners can be promoted in a rural school context and the reasons to do it that way.**

1. How would you address the situation if your child comes to you and inform you that he/she is being bullied at school?
2. What would you do if you were called to school to be notified that your child is a bully?
3. Are there any social clubs or community activities for parents in the community which help in understanding how psychosocial support for the wellbeing of learners can be promoted?
4. Do you think it is important for this rural school to promote parental involvement in relation to understanding how psychosocial support can improve learners' academic performances?
5. What are the factors hampering you from accessing more knowledge on the benefits of psychosocial support for your child?
6. If given the chance, would you be part of a psychosocial support awareness programme that helps promote assistance to learners? Why or why not?
7. How do local social services like SAPS, clinics, and social welfare provide the necessary support for the wellbeing of children in this area?
8. How does the lack of support for stressed learners contribute to a low pass rate?
9. How does the lack of psychosocial support information hinder you in supporting your child?

**APPENDIX M**  
**EDITOR'S CERTIFICATE**

62 Ferguson Road  
Glenwood  
DURBAN 4001  
Tel: 072 442 7896  
Email: [deanne.collins30@gmail.com](mailto:deanne.collins30@gmail.com)

28 January 2024

This serves to confirm that I have edited the dissertation, "Promoting psychosocial support for the wellbeing of learners in a rural school context", by Nonhlanhla Mthahane, excluding the List of References.

**DISCLAIMER: The editor cannot be held responsible for any errors introduced due to changes being made to the document after the editing is complete.**

Yours sincerely,



(Ms) Deanne Collins (MA)

**APPENDIX N**  
**TRUNITIN CERTIFICATE**

18 JAN

ORIGINALITY REPORT

**6%**

SIMILARITY INDEX

**5%**

INTERNET SOURCES

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PUBLICATIONS

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<b>6</b>	<b>Mncedisi Christian Maphalala, Ramashego Shila Mphahlele. "Towards Innovative Ways of Managing Curriculum in Rural Secondary Schools in the Twenty-First Century", Brill, 2023</b> Publication	<b>&lt;1%</b>
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