SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES

An investigation into the educational experiences of learners from low socio-economic backgrounds in a secondary school in the uThukela District

Shafia Sukram

(218064727)

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the academic requirements for the degree of Master of Education, Discipline of Social Justice

Supervisor: Dr Melanie Martin

SEPTEMBER 2024

DECLARATION

I, **Shafia Sukram**, declare that:

I. The research reported in this dissertation, except where otherwise indicated, is my original work.

II. This dissertation has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.

III. This dissertation does not contain any other person's data, pictures, graphs, or other information unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from those persons.

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   a. Their words have been rewritten, but general information attributed to them has been referenced.

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Shafia Sukram

Student Name

Signature

30 September 2024

Date

Dr Melanie Martin

Name of Supervisor

STATEMENT BY SUPERVISOR

This dissertation has been submitted with my approval.

SIGNATURE **DATE :30 September 2024**

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Prethum, who has been my unwavering pillar of strength throughout this journey. His steadfast support and encouragement have been invaluable. To my son, Mikaelan, for his remarkable patience and understanding during the many hours I have devoted to this work. To my parents, Bridgenath and Gadija Sookdeo, who have instilled in me the values of hard work and perseverance, shaping the person I am today. Lastly, to my siblings, Fawzia, Shamim, Shabeer, and in loving memory of my late brother Faizel, whose presence is always felt.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to extend my sincere gratitude to the following people:

To my husband, Prethum, whose unwavering support and encouragement have been my constant source of strength.

To the learners who participated and contributed to this study. Your willingness to share your experiences made this study possible.

To Marilyn Jordan-Donnelly, my school principal, for encouraging me to pursue my master's degree. Your support, encouragement, and belief in me have been invaluable.

To my colleagues and friends for always being there for me and encouraging me. A special thank you to Aresh Woodraj and Nicolette Singh for their invaluable support, advice, and friendship throughout this journey.

I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to Jabulani Ngcobo for editing and proofreading this paper.

Finally, and most importantly, I want to thank my supervisor, Dr. Melanie Martin, for her continued guidance, encouragement, constructive feedback, and patience throughout this journey.

ETHICAL CLEARANCE

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

14 April 2023

Shafia Sukram (218064727)
School Of Education
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear S Sukram,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00005372/2023
Project title: An investigation into the educational experiences of learners' from low socio-economic backgrounds.
Degree: Masters

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 16 March 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 14 April 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 (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,

[redacted]

Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

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ABSTRACT

Various policies have been introduced in the South African education system, ending segregation to provide quality education for all. However, the imperatives within these policies have not been realised and effectively implemented. Instead, racial and social inequalities and discrimination still prevail in schools. This study sought to investigate the educational experiences of learners from low socio-economic backgrounds in a secondary school. The study set out to understand the inclusionary and exclusionary factors a sample of learners encountered and the strategies they used to navigate the exclusionary factors. The study explored how complexities and struggles from the learners' social lives influenced their experiences and academic achievements.

This was a qualitative study, located within the critical research paradigm, which allowed for the critical understanding of the complexities and struggles, stemming from the learners' educational and social lives. Semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and participatory photovoice were used to generate data to understand and obtain insights into learners' lives. Bourdieu's notions of field, habitus and capital were used to understand and make sense of the participants' experiences.

The findings of the study revealed that learners from low socio-economic backgrounds experienced marginalisation and discrimination in the field of the school. For example, English, as the school's language of learning and teaching, was a significant barrier to learning, severely undermining the learners' access to their constitutional right to education. Factors contributing to the learners' struggles were often associated with their social lives, constraining their abilities to navigate the maze of their academic lives. This study also found that the participants often challenged their circumstances, showing resilience and agency in navigating and negotiating barriers to learning and development. This included, for example, forging relationships with their teachers and peers to ensure that they accessed education. The findings suggest that the learners valued and fought for education, as a mechanism to expand their opportunities for social mobility within a class-based field. In this regard, the findings debunk deficit constructions of learners from socioeconomically deprived contexts.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

The policy of apartheid, implemented by the National Party government in 1948, was instrumental in creating and reproducing inequalities in South Africa with the introduction of several discriminatory laws (Ndimande, 2016). An example of inequalities stemming from this was the Bantu Education Act (1953), which created different education systems for blacks and whites, resulting in the subjugation of the black majority to inferior education (Tomlin, 2016; Arends et al., 2021). With the advent of democracy in 1994, it was envisaged that the new Constitution of the Republic of South Africa would afford everyone equal and quality education, free from discrimination. However, according to Arends et al. (2021), this has not materialised as the needs of the disadvantaged and marginalised continue to be disregarded and unmet.

With the segregation of education, in response to the advent of democracy, learners from different race groups were allowed to attend schools of their choice. However, the current bimodal education system shows that inequalities persist, with race and socio-economic status often determining the quality of education (Spaull, 2015). In addition, severe constraints exist regarding the choice of schools, with many learners' socioeconomic and other circumstances often determining which schools they must attend (Abenawe, 2022). For those learners who can access multi-racial schools, race and class anomalies have led to learners from low socio-economic backgrounds experiencing racial and social exclusion, often leaving them disempowered and alienated (Kanyopa & Hlalele, 2021; Arendse, 2020).

This study sought to investigate how learners from low socio-economic backgrounds experienced education at a former 'coloured' school. The study explores how the complexities and tensions from the learners' social lives influenced their experiences of schooling and educational achievements. Given this study's ontological and epistemological underpinnings, every effort was made to elevate, centralise and foreground the participants' voices. Thus, it was essential to understand how learners

deployed and exercised their agency to navigate the challenges they experienced to ensure they did not impede their journey towards academic success and achievement.

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce and contextualise the study. To this end, an outline of the explored problem is presented, followed by the focus, rationale, aims and objectives. This is followed by the key research questions that underpinned the study. A brief synopsis of the theoretical framework and methodology used in the study is also presented. Finally, an outline and summary of the chapters contained in the dissertation are provided.

1.2 Background of the study

The international and national literature reviewed revealed several challenges learners from low socio-economic backgrounds experience that influence their educational experiences (see, for example, Kanyopa & Hlalele, 2021; Schlebusch et al., 2022). The literature suggests that the challenges learners face often arise within their schooling, family and community environments. Within the South African post-apartheid context, it was envisaged that the education system would redress past inequalities and ensure uninhibited access to education for all. However, Arends et al. (2021) assert that the democratic government inherited the economic and social structures of apartheid and, with it, profound and persistent inequality, which continue to colour the experiences of many learners, especially those from socioeconomically depressed contexts.

Spaull (2019, p. 4) provides insight into socio-economic class and race anomalies and asserts that "poverty and privilege [still live] side by side [in South Africa]". Spaull (2019, p. 5) argues that, for instance, Coloured and Black learners "make up 60% of those attending former White-only-fee charging schools". He explains that when it comes to learning achievement, the two systems of education (bimodal) follow the same pattern, where there is a stark contrast in learning outcomes between the wealthiest and the rest of the schools. With underperformance prevalent in rural and township schools, often due to inadequate resources and underqualified teachers, many learners and parents from low socio-economic communities believe that 'town' or urban schools provide access to quality education, and so seek admission there (du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). This idea concurs with Arends et al.'s (2021) study, which reported that learners who attend fee-

paying schools are often academically more successful than those who attend no-fee-paying schools. This is despite allocating a significant portion of the education budget to the schools that serve socioeconomically disadvantaged children (Abenawe, 2022). According to Spaull (2015; 2019), schools that were dysfunctional during apartheid are the ones that are still primarily dysfunctional today. These dysfunctional schools are situated in predominantly Black communities, showing that the democratic government, despite policies and legislation, has struggled to turn these schools around.

Children from low socioeconomic contexts seeking quality education are oblivious to the structural and institutional inequalities that may impede or hinder their attempts to access their desired education (Kanyopa & Hlalele, 2021; Arendse, 2020). Spaull (2013; 2019) and Vally (2019) contend that inequalities in the current education system are still evident, as are race and socioeconomic drivers regarding the quality of education a child receives. The disparity in cultural resource distribution in the education system often means that learners enter the school field unequally and inequitably positioned (Arends et al., 2021).

Whilst many factors influence learners' learning experiences, one persistent factor has been English as a medium of instruction, especially in middle-class schools. Madhadaze (2019) contends that parents from townships and rural areas make substantial financial sacrifices to send their children to predominantly White, Indian and Coloured schools so that their children can become proficient in English. However, there seems to be a lack of support, leading to inequalities as the learners find it challenging to access content and knowledge through English, their second language (Saneka & De Witt, 2019). Being unable to access learning opportunities has implications for the future, as learners may be excluded from the job market, reproducing and perpetuating existing socio-economic inequalities and inequities.

Apart from experiencing linguistic challenges, learners must contend with discrimination, exclusion and prejudice from peers, often resulting in isolation and a sense of not belonging, severely undermining access to education (Kanyopa & Hlalele, 2021). Kanyopa and Hlalele (2021) have indicated this is an under-researched phenomenon. Thus, this study aimed to understand these challenges and how learners deal with them to ensure they succeed academically. Socio-economic status often results in dire financial

consequences for learners from low socio-economic backgrounds, leading to significant challenges and barriers to finding socially valued life trajectories (Alanen et al., 2015). For instance, being forced to walk long distances to school, the dangers encountered on the way to schools, ill-equipped home environments, hunger and cultural responsibilities that undermine educational access lead to differential educational experiences (Shuaibu et al., 2019; Arendse, 2020). Bayat, Louw & Rena (2014) and Kapur (2018) have described how the lack of access to necessities, such as electricity, can limit academic achievement, especially for learners from low socio-economic contexts. In this regard, the literature suggests the experiences of children from low socio-economic backgrounds are a significant factor in educational access.

The literature reviewed also reveals that there are, however, learners from disadvantaged contexts who come to the school with some agency and resiliency to succeed in education and breaking the cycle of poverty and underdevelopment to attain upward social mobility (Spaull, 2015; Hempel-Jorgensen, 2015; Sandoval-Hernandez & Bialowolski, 2016). However, the literature suggests that research into the resilience and agency of children from socioeconomically deprived contexts is often limited; in this regard, they call for more consistent research to demonstrate learner resilience and agency. This is the call this study intends to heed.

Learners from low socio-economic backgrounds often demonstrate agency by building relationships with teachers, peers, and friends that positively influence and enhance their cultural capital (Loh & Sun, 2020). This means that these learners are assisted and supported in developing an agentic character and taking responsibility for their learning to ensure they succeed academically and in life. Osman et al. (2020) and Kong (2020) assert that learners' decisions to seek emotional assistance from social networks are invaluable for facing challenges through the active exercise of agency and resilience.

Resilience is critical for learners from low socio-economic backgrounds to overcome barriers and challenges they may face in education. Sandoval-Hernandez & Bialowolski (2016) and Wills and Hofmeyr (2019) state that learners often show academic resilience through positive attitudes, hard work and determination in their quest for academic success. In this regard, Ozden and Otagog (2020) contend that schools have a significant

role in developing academic and social resilience, especially among disadvantaged learners.

The literature reviewed focuses on the agency and resilience of learners from low-socioeconomic backgrounds. However, the research regarding agency in the field of schools has been limited (see, for example, Hempel-Jorgensen, 2015; Sandoval-Hernandez & Bialowolski, 2016; Wills & Hofmeyr, 2019). In this regard, researchers have called for more research to understand this phenomenon, which is why I undertook this study.

1.3 Problem statement

Nkomo, Chisolm and McKinney (2004) define school integration as school making changes to adapt to learners needs resulting in meaningful interaction being fostered. Desegregation after the fall of apartheid led to the education system which was based on race to be dismantled (Vally & Dalamba, 1997) allowing learners from all races to access schools previously denied to them. This allowed learners from all race and class categories freedom of choice in choosing the school they want to attend. However, for participants in this study their race and class did not allow them to fully experience integration. For example, participants' cultural capital was incompatible with that of the school affecting their educational experience. In their quest for quality education and equal opportunities, learners from low socio-economic backgrounds face many challenges and barriers that significantly impact their educational experiences (Ndimande, 2016; Abenawe, 2022). Abenawe's (2022) study has pointed out that the performance of South African learners from socioeconomically disadvantaged contexts in literacy and numeracy is far below that of their equally poor counterparts in other African countries. In addition, complexities and tension from their social context also significantly hinder their educational attainments.

Agasisti et al. (2021) and Vadivel et al. (2023) argue that these complexities and tensions regarding comprising learners' ability to negotiate the education field requires further research. Research by Naidoo et al. (2018) has revealed little about the challenges learners face concerning their socio-economic status in schools. These are some of the gaps this study seeks to fill. Pillay (2021) has recommended further research on the effect of

inequalities as an essential factor regarding access to education. This study also hopes to obtain more insights and understanding of the exclusionary and inclusionary factors that influence learners' academic experiences and how they navigate the challenges they encounter in this regard.

1.4 Rationale and purpose of the study

This study aimed to investigate the educational experiences of learners from low socio-economic backgrounds in a secondary school. The study sought to investigate the inclusionary and exclusionary factors learners encountered to understand how they navigated them to access education. Learners from low socio-economic backgrounds enter the field of education with some agency; thus, through this study, I aimed to understand how learners use their agency to make their educational experience successful and positive.

The rationale for conducting this study are personal and professional. My experiences in relation to my race, ethnicity and class with my education during apartheid was that I was not afforded the same quality of education as white children due to racial inequality. Less money was spent on resourcing the Indian school I attended resulting in inadequate supply of textbooks and facilities. My ethnicity was not an issue as all ethnicities, for example, Tamil, Hindu and Muslim children attended the Indian school and we were all from different socio-economic classes. This meant that I did not experience socio-economic inequality because apartheid was based on race classification of learners in the school I attended rather than socio-economic classification. Upon reflection, I have recognised the various ways in which my racial classification disempowered me regarding the kind and quality of education I received, which often failed to consider my needs. As a professional teacher now, I reflected on how learners in my school experience inequality. This reflection has made me realise that the bimodal system of education is discriminating against learners based on both class and socio-economic backgrounds in post-apartheid South Africa, depriving them of an equal and equitable education. Inequalities in education persist now based on socioeconomic status and past racial classifications (Spaull, 2015; Naidoo et al., 2018; Pillay, 2021). I have observed this over the years as a teacher in a secondary school, where I have become more aware of the challenges and barriers encountered by learners from low socio-economic backgrounds.

Du Plessis and Mestry (2019) assert that one of the key ways parents and learners from low socio-economic backgrounds, especially those from rural areas, attempt to provide opportunities for their children based on their perceptions that education standards are better in urban schools. However, I have seen that their perceptions, dreams and hopes of a better educational experience have often not been realised. Poor academic performance, late coming, absenteeism, and general behaviour problems have often been regarded to be the worst among learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. This normative understanding has tended to filter through many areas of school life, and given my experience and education, I frequently questioned such construction. I feel the need to challenge this pervasive deficit in understanding learners. However, I understand that I need to empirically base my arguments if I want to truly understand and explain, even on an individual level, the intricate and complex way learners from low socio-economic backgrounds experience education. Not only would this help and shed some light on why this is the case, but it could also inform my practices and beliefs, making me a more socially just and responsive teacher.

In literature that I reviewed for this study; I noticed a lack of studies on the educational experiences of learners from low socio-economic backgrounds. Most of the literature I could access focused on the experiences of students from low socio-economic backgrounds in higher education. Studies conducted by Abenawe (2022) in the school context had limited information on how learners navigated the challenges and obstacles they faced. This study's significance is that it will potentially contribute to current knowledge on the educational experiences of learners from low socio-economic backgrounds, especially how they navigate and negotiate the educational field. Furthermore, I believe it will contribute to a broadening understanding of how socioeconomic circumstances can influence learners' education and their agency and resilience to navigate these spaces and circumstances.

1.5 Aims and objectives

The main aim of the study was to investigate how learners from low socio-economic backgrounds experienced schooling. The intention was to understand the challenges and

barriers in their educational and social lives and how they navigate them to achieve academic success.

The objectives of the study were to:

- Explore the educational experiences of learners from low socio-economic backgrounds at a school in KwaZulu-Natal.
- Understand the inclusionary and exclusionary factors that influence the learning and social experiences of learners.
- Understand how learners from low socio-economic backgrounds navigate the exclusionary factors they encounter.

1.6 Key research questions

To gain a rich, in-depth understanding of the educational experiences of learners from low socio-economic backgrounds, the following research questions guide the investigation:

- What are the educational experiences of learners from low socio-economic backgrounds at a school in KwaZulu-Natal?
- What are the inclusionary and exclusionary factors that influence the learning and social experiences of learners?
- How do learners navigate the exclusionary factors they encounter?

1.7 Contextualising the notion of social class

For this study, it is essential to explain how socioeconomic class or social class is understood in this study. Durant and Fiske (2017, p.1) define social class as a stratification system that positions people according to "their differential access to material, social and cultural resources". They add that access to these resources significantly shapes their lives. Critical factors in determining socioeconomic status include occupation, income level and education, one contributing to the other (Abenawe, 2022). Social class in South Africa is intertwined with the country's historical, economic and social context. This means that apartheid influenced social classes in significant ways. For instance, the apartheid regime implemented laws that enforced racial segregation (Ndimande, 2016).

This resulted in the dictation of a person's social and economic status. In this regard, the apartheid government afforded white South Africans privileges and opportunities while marginalising black South Africans (this included Indians, Coloured and Africans). This means that the majority of the country's citizens, who were most black African, were forced into low socio-economic status through institutionalised oppression. This means that the government deliberately denied black South Africans access to quality education and job opportunities (Ndimande, 2016).

Rehbein (2018, p. 2) adds to the definition of social class "as a tradition line that reproduces itself from generation to generation by passing on relevant resources". Most of the country's marginalised (Africans) did not have access to economic and cultural resources they could pass on to the next generations, resulting in the intergenerational perpetuation of inequalities and limiting life chances (Cole, 2019). Thus, social class mobility is constrained by, for instance, intergenerational wealth, education and occupation. For example, children from middle-class and low-class categories may be able to attend the same school. However, children from the lower class may encounter challenges due to a lack of access to required capital, ultimately impacting how they perform academically and in life in general (Abenawe, 2022).

Khunou (2017) alludes to the construction of class by which I am influenced and have adopted in this study. For Khunou (2017), social class is not homogenous and is influenced by contextual and historical realities. In a country like South Africa, it is essential to recognise the influence of history where colonialism and apartheid impacted the lives of black South Africans, resulting in their marginalisation. One can therefore see the intersection of race and socio-economic class that needs to be understood in the context of South Africa. The apartheid government institutionalised racial segregation by implementing laws which segregated people based on race; this included education (Frank et al., 2018). With schools in black communities being segregated and under-resourced, black children could not access quality education because of their skin colour (Ndimande, 2016).

Participants in this study are from rural and township communities with educational inequalities such as lack of access to required resources and underqualified teachers still prevalent in many areas (Ndimande, 2016). The participants for this study sought

admission to a former 'Coloured' school to access what their parents perceived as quality education. The participants' responses suggest that acquiring quality education and proficiency in English would lead to employment opportunities and upward social mobility. For this study, quality education means, having access to textbooks, qualified teachers, technology and facilities. This study seeks to contribute to understanding how learners from a low socio-economic status experience education in a school where policies and practices are designed around the dominant group's culture (Chisholm, 2021). What is also significant is understanding their value of education as a means for upward social mobility and change in status.

1.8 Theoretical framework

This study used Bourdieu's theoretical framework to investigate and understand the educational experiences of secondary school learners from low socio-economic backgrounds. Bourdieu's trilogy of habitus, field and different forms of capitals, namely, economic, cultural, social, symbolic and linguistic capital, were used to understand learners' experiences within this school setting. The assumption is that policies and practices of schools favour middle-class or elite students as they enter the field of school possessing the required habitus, values and affirmed forms of capital (Chisholm, 2021). Conversely, their counterparts from lower social classes enter the field deficient in these accoutrements and risk leaving the education system empty-handed (Reay, 2004; Chisholm,2021). Education capital is an invaluable resource imbued with power (Ngubane, 2021). For learners from lower social classes, this is a resource that is kept out of reach for them, often resulting in their discrimination, isolation and marginalisation while they are physically included.

My ontological positioning was influenced by Bourdieu's (1991) concepts of capital, field and habitus. This was based on the idea that no universal truth exists and subjective realities are revealed in experiences. Thus, the understanding is that the participants in this study responded to different influences and contextual realities in negotiating their spaces. Often, they were agential and used their social identities to find power in an education field where unequal power distribution prevailed. This was their attempt to level the playing field to access education. However, systemic barriers significantly affected the participants' agency, making it challenging to negotiate their contexts to

become successful. What emerges is an understanding of truth as they reveal and experience it.

My epistemological position assumed I needed to have a particular relationship with participants to generate knowledge. For instance, I needed to centralise their voices if I wanted to understand their subjective truths. This study was necessary to understand how reality and knowledge are understood within the critical paradigm (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Centralising the participants' voices for the study was significant as it helped them to reflect and acknowledge that they had agency through the process of self-reflection. Further, the relationship built in the research process led them to allow me to enter their world, unveiling the complexities and tensions they experienced in accessing education. For example, the idea that the participants' social lives were intertwined with their educational lives suggests that they carried their social class wherever they were and whatever they did. Within the school context, they could not shake off their social class identity as it continued to influence how they were 'seen' and thus valued.

1.9 Methodological approach

I adopted a case study design to investigate the educational experiences of learners from low socio-economic backgrounds. This is because case studies use empirical enquiry to examine real-life situations (Cohen et al., 2018), which is the aim of this study. For this study, the case study approach allowed for an in-depth investigation of the experiences of disadvantaged learners and how they navigated the barriers and challenges they faced. Qualitative methods allowed for understanding and interpreting the participants' experiences and how they made sense of them (Cohen et al. 2018) within a particular context where various contextual factors influenced those experiences. By centralising the participants' voices and prioritising their experiences and understandings, their perspectives provided rich, in-depth views of their social realities (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Thus, the study contributed to existing knowledge by providing a nuanced understanding of the challenges and enablers the participants experienced. Their experiences were captured qualitatively using semi-structured interviews, photovoice and focus group discussions.

1.10 Overview of the dissertation

This study comprises five chapters, the contents of which are summarised in the section below.

Chapter 1: This chapter presents an overview of the study. I begin by introducing the study's focus, background, purpose, rationale, and critical research questions underpinning the study. The chapter also briefly explains the theoretical framework, methodological approach, and design used in the study.

Chapter 2: The first part presents empirical international and national literature that delves into the experiences of schooling for learners from low socio-economic backgrounds. Various factors that influence how they experience their schools are discussed. The second part of the chapter presents the theoretical framework that frames the study, namely Bourdieu's (1998) theory of practice, where his fundamental concepts of habitus, capital and field are explained.

Chapter 3: This chapter presents methodological and design choices made in the study. The discussion includes the research strategies and methods used to produce data and the study's limitations and ethical considerations.

Chapter 4: This chapter presents the key findings of the study. Herein, I discuss the themes that emerged from the initial data analysis that shows the schooling experiences of learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds. The analysis is guided by the theory and essential literature that helped in the critical analysis of the data.

Chapter 5: This chapter concludes the study by consolidating the key findings that emerged from the study. It reflects on the design choices and theory and presents the key findings. Recommendations for future research into learners' schooling experiences from low socio-economic backgrounds are also presented.

1.11 Conclusion

In this chapter, I present an overview of the study. The focus, background, purpose and rationale, theoretical framework, methodological design approach and structure of the dissertation were presented.

In the following chapter, I discuss and analyse the literature reviewed about the research topic.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the reviewed national and international literature on the educational experience of learners from low socio-economic backgrounds. The chapter begins by providing an understanding of global and national education policies. Aligned with this, the chapter reviews how disadvantaged learners experience education in a democratic country with policies to ensure equitable education. After that, the exclusionary and inclusionary factors influencing educational experiences are discussed. The chapter attempts to elevate the challenges that learners face within schools and social lives and how they navigate and negotiate some negative schooling experiences. The chapter concludes with a discussion of Bourdieu's theoretical constructs, namely, habitus, field and capitals, adopted as this study's theoretical framework.

2.2 International and national policies on education

Globally, the right to education is considered a fundamental human rights issue, with countries supported by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2018) adopting specific strategies to ensure equitable access to education. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) supports this stance by declaring that all children have a right to education and that the state ensures primary education is free and compulsory. The Convention further indicates that parents must provide access to education for their children as their primary responsibility of raising children, with the state discharging their obligation to enable and support them. Africa has developed its policies in this regard, namely, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (African Union, 1999), which enjoins member states to improve children's socio-economic conditions and ensure they can access education (African Union Commission, 2016). The assumption is that better education improves the socio-economic conditions of children. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, influenced by international and national legislation discussed above, thus protects the right to quality education free from discrimination (Republic of South Africa, 1996a).

Education, essential goods and services, health care and social security are part of a person's socio-economic rights (Republic of South Africa, 1996a). Education White Paper 6 outlines actions the education system needs to take to prevent dropout and ensure inclusion (Department of Education, 2001). Education White Paper 6 contends that the socioeconomic needs of learners should not be a barrier to access and participation (Department of Education, 2001). The South African Schools Act (84 0f 1996) was promulgated to repeal the oppressive apartheid legal architecture, ensuring all learners have access to quality education without discrimination (Republic of South Africa, 1996b). However, the literature discussed below shows that this only exists on paper and that many children, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, are not receiving their deserved education.

2.3 From- apartheid South Africa to democratic South Africa

The policy of apartheid, introduced by the National Party government in 1948, introduced a system of racial segregation and discrimination. This legal architecture pivoted on separate development as a base for entrenching the ideology of racial discrimination (Frank et al., 2018). This administrative stance resulted in creating and reproducing inequalities (Ndimande, 2016). For example, inequalities were evident in housing, education, and health sectors, the effects of which are still felt today. The introduction of racial categories further entrenched segregation as people were categorised into unequal social groups, namely, Whites, Indians, Coloured and Blacks, creating an unequal racial hierarchy (Frank et al., 2018). Privileges and rights were awarded racially, with laws prescribing where specific categories of people could live and work. This prescription not only sustained white dominance and control but institutionalised the subjugation of Indian, Coloured and Black South Africans, condemning them to socioeconomic and cultural inferiority (Frank et al., 2018)

Education played a crucial role in the creation of social inequalities. To ensure the subjugation of black South Africans, in particular, the apartheid government implemented the Bantu Education Act in 1953, which resulted in different education systems for blacks and whites (Tomlin, 2016). This law resulted in Black schools receiving inferior funding and being deprived of resources and a poor curriculum, which mainly saw black children being taught inferior practical skills rather than those that would include them in the

economy, the intention of which was to position them as a supply for the cheap labour market (Ndimande, 2016; Tomlin, 2016). The education of black South Africans entrenched and institutionalised racial dominance by whites, relegating them to subserviency and inferiority to whites. This argument is supported by Ndimande's (2016) study, which argues that Bantu education was a repressive system, leading to the subjugation of black South Africans to sustain the ideology of apartheid. This institutional machinery resulted in black South Africans being denied social mobility as their education deprived them of better job prospects and socioeconomic opportunities.

As stated above, education afforded to different race groups during apartheid was primarily based on race, with separate schools and curricula for each race group, the quality of which depended on their place in the racial hierarchy. For instance, schools for white children were allocated the most resources, while those serving black children were under-resourced, leading to significant disparities (Ndimande, 2016; Tomlin, 2016). With the fall of apartheid and the advent of democracy, the democratic government implemented policies and legislation to address inequalities; however, inequalities persist in the education sector (Ndimande, 2016; Schlebusch et al., 2022). Inequalities are so entrenched that it is often difficult and unfathomable for learners from socioeconomically deprived contexts to access quality education, resulting in their exclusion from the mainstream of society (Ndimande, 2016; Pillay, 2021). Vally (2019) asserts in post-apartheid South Africa, social class has become a critical driver of inequality, and race and social class still influence education experience. For instance, Schlebusch et al. (2022) have discussed the intersections of race and social class, where black learners, especially those from low socio-economic classes, must, for example, walk long distances to access education. Chisholm (2021) has reported that these learners are often locked out of the school premises as punishment for not playing by the school rules.

Being black and poor continues to make it challenging for many learners to access quality education, further disadvantaging them because of their lack of the required form of capital. Often, socioeconomically disadvantaged learners enter the field (school) with a deficit in social and economic capital required to level the playing field with their middle-class counterparts who have acquired the necessary forms of capital due to their social class status (Chisholm, 2021). This disparity tends to afford learners from middle-class and affluent contexts an unfair advantage regarding access to education. This disparity

means their future employment prospects are much higher than their peers from marginalised contexts.

Studies by Spaull (2013; 2019) and, recently, Vally (2019) reveal that parents' race and wealth often determine children's educational opportunities. Spaull (2015) has argued that post-apartheid schools that were dysfunctional during apartheid are mostly still dysfunctional today. These schools are often situated in predominantly black communities, which constitute a significant proportion of the country's population. This argument is supported by Pillay (2021), who asserts that the democratic government has failed to improve the quality of education provided by schools in predominantly disadvantaged communities. Spaull (2013), Ndimande (2016) and Pillay (2021) posit that even though segregation has been abolished on paper, these schools are still racially homogenous, serving only black children in comparison to historically White, Indian and Coloured schools, where racial desegregation has taken place.

Parents from socioeconomically deprived contexts are also victims of a poor education system, primarily employed in unskilled labour, depriving them of economic capital to invest in their child's education (Vally, 2019). This sustained status quo means that parents from low socioeconomic backgrounds are often forced to send their children to generally dysfunctional, no-fee-paying schools with inferior resource provisioning, further compromising their educational prospects and entrenching intergenerational inequality (Spaull, 2015; Vally, 2019). In contrast, learners from privileged backgrounds, regardless of race, can enrol in schools in more affluent, well-resourced areas, thus generating better educational opportunities for them (Naicker et al., 2020). In this regard, the bimodal education system in South Africa continues to favour the privileged, leaving the disadvantaged with little or no prospects for social and economic advancement, which flies in the face of the dreams of many who hoped that things would improve with democracy.

Abenawe (2022) contends that stark inequalities exist in learners' performance from historically disadvantaged schools in South Africa. For instance, despite a significant proportion of government educational resources being spent on schools serving socioeconomically deprived contexts, learners' academic performance in these contexts is relatively low compared to that of children who are equally poor from other parts of

Africa (Abenawe, 2022). However, on a positive note, Abenawe (2022) adds that the education system in South Africa has somewhat bridged the inter-racial education gap. This means that learners regardless of race can attended their school of choice as racial categorising of schools has been abolished however, socio-economic class is now a determining factor. Moses et al. (2017), supported by Abenawe (2022), who contends that education inequalities are evident in the performance of children attending historically disadvantaged schools in marginalised communities, argue that the difference in the quality of education may be due to income disparities. This means that even though the government has implemented policies to bridge the gap between the standard of education afforded to the rich and poor, the education system still favours the privileged (Moses et al., 2017).

Hunter (2015) contends that barriers exist between learners from disadvantaged backgrounds and those from middle-class or privileged backgrounds, as they have inequitable access to different forms of capital: economic, cultural, symbolic, and social. These are critical in the educational choices parent must make for their children. This disparity means the middle class can pass on their cultural advantage, allowing their children to navigate obstacles and prosper easily. This fact was evident in the study by Ngobeni et al. (2023), who reported that advantaged learners can easily adjust to teachers' expectations as they possess the required social currencies. On the contrary, their disadvantaged counterparts, whose parents lack the necessary cultural capital, will experience challenges, resulting in poor academic outcomes. This implies that if teachers fail to realise that both groups cannot perform at the same level and to support those experiencing difficulties, many learners will drop out or perform poorly, limiting their chances of social mobility (Ngobeni et al., 2023).

Bourdieu states that the field (school) is a power-laden space that produces and reproduces inequalities. This argument is supported by Vally (2015), who asserts that education is ingrained in social relations and essentially reinforces and reproduces inequalities. For example, educational institutions' policies, norms and values often replicate those of dominant social groups. The consequence of this on learners from the target group is that they may find school disempowering, which, as Ngobeni et al. (2023) assert, may reinforce apartheid-inherited inequalities. Teachers transmit the norms and values of the hidden curriculum so that children can fit into society (Christie, 2008). This

results in schools reproducing society's dominant values, thus reproducing and giving life to societal inequalities (Le Grange, 2017).

Du Plessis and Mestry (2019) and Schlebusch et al. (2022) have argued that learners who attend historically disadvantaged schools, often in townships and rural areas, are marginalised due to a lack of resources. Often, these schools have little or no textbooks, lack stationery, and have no library or computer and science laboratories, impacting the quality of education and learners' academic outcomes. The remnants of the apartheid system have led to the divide between well-resourced and under-resourced schools (Spaull & Kotze, 2015), suggesting that the democratic government may have failed to redress past inequities and provide quality education to all, as promised in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Tomlin, 2016). As quality education is only accessible to the privileged, learners from low socio-economic backgrounds attending inferior-quality schools are forced to work harder to bridge the gap between them and their advantaged counterparts. The lack of resources is also an issue in other African countries, as evidenced in the findings of Adhanja et al.'s (2016) study in Kenya.

Historically disadvantaged are groups that have been denied access to resources and opportunities thus placing them on the margins of the social and economic hierarchy (Cross & Atinde, 2015). Other barriers within the school context that have exacerbated inequalities are inadequate infrastructure and sanitation facilities, often resulting in unsafe and adverse learning environments that hinder effective learning and teaching (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). These realities, and more, are primarily prevalent in historically disadvantaged communities and present systemic barriers that prevent learners from fulfilling their educational aspirations. Ndimande (2016) assert that there exists a relationship between economic and educational inequalities, being poor and marginalised are critical contributors to educational disparities. This results in disadvantaged learners internalising disparities as a normal and accepted part of their lives (Ngobeni et al., 2023). Normalising their situation, they cannot challenge the oppression they are subjected to, allowing it to be perpetuated.

2.4 The intersection of race and social class experiences in schooling

Racial integration which means the ending of systematic racial segregation resulting in schools becoming integrated (Skuy & Vice, 1996) has been highlighted as a critical factor disadvantaged learners face in schools. Several scholars from South Africa, such as Du Plessis and Mestry (2019) and Hunter (2015), assert that learners from disadvantaged groups, mainly from rural and informal settlements, have sought admission to urban schools based on perceptions that the quality of education and teachers is better. However, Arendse (2020) points out that school integration has not happened without problems. The persistence of racism and racial segregation has been revealed in studies such as those by Naidoo et al. (2018) and Kanyopa and Hlalele (2021). For instance, the study by Naidoo et al. (2018) reported that race has contributed to strained communication between learners of different races. Naidoo et al. (2018) highlighted that, for example, the humiliation experienced by learners was mainly about their skin, hair and dialect. This highlights that racial classification took precedence as learners could not see beyond the colour of their peers skin. Kanyopa and Hlalele (2021) assert that learners from rural areas and townships often experience difficulties with learners and teachers from different races, resulting in negative educational experiences. Over the years, the Department of Education has failed to facilitate racial integration in schools, as reported by Dieltiens and Meny-Gilbert (2012, pg.138) that learners from informal settlements were often labelled "poor" and "dirty", humiliating, disempowering and rendering them unable to participate in the school's social life. This discrimination has often resulted in 'a sense of not belonging' and exclusion due to their inferior racial and social class status highlighting the interconnection between race and class in schools. Learners' experiences of pain, humiliation and anger have also been reported by Naidoo et al. (2018). These were further illustrated in instances where teachers often adopted laissez-faire dispositions toward racial incidents, ignoring them and hoping they would disappear (Naidoo et al., 2018).

The limited interaction with learners from advantaged backgrounds means learners from disadvantaged contexts may be denied access to crucial social networks to help them acquire the required cultural and social capital. This implies that over the years, integration in schools may still be inadequate, with black learners from, for example, rural or township schools, finding it difficult to socialise with children from dominant groups, rendering them unable to flourish in their new environment, impacting their educational

experiences (Kanyopa & Hlalele, 2021). For these reasons, Dieltiens and Meny-Gilbert (2012) suggest a controversial and contestable idea of having a classless educational system where learners are equal in socio-economic status, thus making social exclusion less likely to occur. This assertion is contestable and controversial as it colludes with oppression instead of suggesting how teachers and peers can be taught about inclusivity.

Teachers in schools are also guilty of race and class discrimination. Studies by Makoelle (2014) and, more recently, Naidoo et al. (2018) have revealed racial discrimination by teachers. Shocking revelations have been reported by Naidoo et al. (2018) for example, that teachers and school management have also been culprits, racially abusing learners. This situation is concerning and suggests that teachers, as agents of power in the school, may be abusing their power by undermining and demeaning black learners, depriving them of a sense of belonging (Naidoo et al., 2018; Pillay, 2021.) Naidoo et al. (2018) and Pillay (2021) have also highlighted biases as teachers favoured children from their racial and social class groups, adversely affecting black learners' educational outcomes. This assertion has been supported by Motlalepula et al. (2022), who have argued that the unequal treatment of learners can render teaching and learning less successful. The consequences of such racial segregation not only point to the difficulties of integration without support for teachers and schools but also the inability of schools and teachers to meet the needs of learners (Nortje, 2017). This problem is not unique to South Africa, as reported by Diamond and Posey-Maddox (2020) in the United States of America, revealing racial discrimination towards minority groups in predominately white schools. Consequently, this may impact negatively on the mental well-being of poor black learners, contributing negatively to their educational experiences.

2.5 Support and commitment in the school environment

Schlebusch et al. (2022) argue that disadvantaged learners require support from their teachers as they spend considerable time with them. The South African Schools Act (84 of 1996) states that teachers should provide pastoral care and act in *loco parentis*. Teachers must provide for children's emotional, psychological and physical well-being (Republic of South Africa, 1996b). This fact has been emphasised in Schlebusch et al.'s (2022) study, which asserts that schools must identify learners who require additional support, provide necessary support, ensure they are cared for and strive to improve their

lives. Based on the discussion above, this may mean that teachers may be contravening the terms of the constitutional compact, subjecting learners to racial discrimination and oppression instead of liberating them from the shackles of underdevelopment and social disadvantage.

Another key factor contributing to the challenges black learners face in rural and township schools has been the lack of commitment from teachers (Spaull, 2013). This lack of commitment has been evident from high absentee rates among teachers, which disadvantages learners, increasing the gap between them and their counterparts in well-to-do contexts. Statistics from a study done by UNICEF (2020) in nineteen countries in Southern and Eastern Africa revealed that teacher absenteeism ranged from between 15-45%. Lack of commitment may be due to teachers in rural areas being forced to teach multigrade classes, often leading to frustration due to skills deficiencies (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). When losing teaching time, teachers may short-change learners, rushing through or unofficially abridging the curriculum, leading to poor outcomes for learners. Moreover, studies by Du Plessis and Mestry (2019), Mlachila and Moeletsi (2019) and Van der Berg et al. (2016) concur that teachers often lacked content knowledge and pedagogical skills, which impeded the quality of teaching and learning in some schools. According to Van der Berg et al. (2016), teachers lacking in content and pedagogical skills were primarily found in schools in predominantly disadvantaged communities, thus perpetuating the cycle of poverty and underdevelopment through poor academic achievements. Often, teachers do not take the initiative to improve their professional competence, exacerbated by the continued lack of accountability in the education system (Mlachila & Moeletsi, 2019).

Furthermore, Vally's (2019) study in South Africa has revealed that Quintiles 4 and 5 schools are often socioeconomically advantaged areas and can attract qualified, experienced teachers, ensure smaller class sizes, access required resources and procure required services. South African schools are categorised into quintiles. Quintile 1 to 3 are schools in the lower quintiles declared no-fee schools receiving the majority of funding, while 4 and 5 receive a smaller amount of funding allowing them to charge school fees (Dyk & White, 2019). This disparity results in unqualified and inexperienced teachers being funnelled to rural and township schools, exacerbated by disparities among schools (Ndimande, 2016). Mlachila and Moeletsi (2019) have reported that learners from

disadvantaged contexts rely on 75-80% of dysfunctional schools with poor outcomes for their education, while their counterparts receive their education from well-to-do contexts in 20-25% of independent schools. Disparities in teacher knowledge between the different tiers of schools fuel the inequalities already prevalent within the education sector (Vally, 2019). Van den Berg et al. (2016) assert that teachers are crucial for the education system's success. This situation implies that it is likely that schools in rural areas and township schools will continue to struggle to attract qualified teachers as they are unwilling to work in areas where access to professional opportunities is inadequate (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). The issue of qualified teachers preferring affluent schools with children from advantaged contexts has also been reported by Shaw et al. (2017) in a study conducted in London.

School governing bodies are crucial for the effective functioning of schools. Arendse (2020) and Mlachila and Moeletsi (2019) assert that school governing bodies in historically advantaged schools often have more decision-making currency regarding education matters. These governing bodies generally have parents with high levels of education and status, affording them the currency to demand quality education provisioning for their children and holding teachers accountable. Mlachila and Moeletsi (2019) argue that this is, however, not the case for parents in communities served by historically disadvantaged schools, mainly in rural and townships, as parents in these governing bodies often have low education levels, which erodes their currency to influence decisions regarding the education of their children. The lack of ability to hold schools and teachers accountable is primarily because they lack the academic and cultural capital required to understand the laws and policies governing the operation of schools (Ngubane, 2021). In addition, the low levels of education that parents from rural areas and townships often have makes them feel less able to challenge the authority of teachers and teachers, even though this may be working against the educational interests of their children (Mlachila & Moeletsi, 2019).

2.6 Poverty as an impeding factor to learners' educational experience

Poverty is one of the main challenges faced by learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds, as many learners cannot afford necessities such as educational resources and uniforms. In addition, transport costs and school fees limit access for learners from

marginalised backgrounds to quality education, condemning them to an endless defeat to poverty and underdevelopment (Nortje, 2017). This section discusses the experiences of poor learners concerning access to school and participation in education.

2.6.1 Cost of journeying to school

Mahlaba's (2014) study in KwaZulu-Natal and a more recent study by Schlebusch et al. (2022), conducted in the Lejweleputswa District, South Africa, have provided insights into the challenges learners from socioeconomically depressed contexts encounter, such as walking long distances to school. Mboweni (2014), cited in Pillay (2021), reported that learners from rural and low socioeconomic contexts must walk an average of 16km to and from school daily. For many, walking is the only mode of transport, making it challenging to face the demands of the school day. Learners cannot concentrate and effectively engage in teaching and learning (Schlebusch et al., 2022). Moreover, tiredness may compromise their cognitive functioning, making it challenging to process and retain information, impacting their academic performance (Pillay, 2021). Transport costs have been cited by Mahlaba (2014) as an exclusionary factor affecting learners' learning opportunities and performance. This factor is not unique to South Africa, as a study by Adhanja et al. (2016) in Kenya revealed similar results.

Furthermore, according to Dieltins and Meny-Gilberts (2012), scholar transport is crucial for education equality. Given that many well-performing schools are situated in middle-class areas, access to these schools is often challenging due to the distances from the socioeconomically deprived communities. Many parents cannot afford transport fees, compelling children to hitchhike or be absent from school (Arendse, 2020). Inclement weather conditions can also lead to learners staying absent for days, resulting in them falling behind and struggling to catch up. Absenteeism contributes to the high failure rate, causing teachers to stereotype learners as lazy and disinterested (Marongwe et al., 2016). Similarly, Adhanja et al.'s (2016) and Shaw et al.'s (2017) studies in Kenya and the UK reported that despite other reasons for being absent from school, for learners from low-income contexts, poor progress is almost always associated with absenteeism and lack of interest. Naidoo et al. (2018) contend that this can lead to conflict and misunderstanding, as teachers do not respond professionally to the learning needs of learners.

Research conducted by Morojele and Muthukrishna (2016) and a more recent study by Schlebusch et al. (2022) have reported that, over the years, many children have continued travelling long distances to access quality education. These studies have highlighted the risks and dangers that learners encounter and how the legal imperative of attending school forces them to make decisions about their health and education needs. For instance, flooded rivers have become a death trap for may learners, with many having to negotiate fears and emotions associated with these realities. Nevertheless, Morojele and Muthukrishna (2016) reported that, despite these challenging circumstances, learners have displayed the agency and will to succeed and lift themselves from poverty, with education often providing a means to develop and grow.

2.6.2 Lack of parental involvement at home and school

The first socialisation of a child is at home, and the parent is often a child's first teacher. Parents from low socio-economic backgrounds did not play an active role in their child's life, Kong (2020) and Shaw et al. (2017) argue that parental involvement in their child's education is crucial for learning and development. Parental involvement potentially ensures that a child is educated at home and school. Failure of parental involvement may undermine a child's education and development. Postma and Postma (2011) and Njuguna (2021) argue that without supervision, parental support and encouragement, learners fall behind with their schoolwork and are not inspired to achieve higher educational goals.

Emotional resources, such as support and encouragement, provided by parents and families can influence learners' educational experiences (Zembylas, 2003). Spaull (2015; 2019) argues that children may drop out, fall behind or struggle to catch up with the curriculum if they are not supported and encouraged. Dropping out with a low-quality education will likely perpetuate socioeconomic disadvantage as learners are forced into the unskilled labour market or remain unemployed (Spaull, 2015). Bayat et al. (2014) and Sengonul (2022) argue that learner's lives may be impacted negatively by the lack of parental involvement and when general interest in their lives is missing. For instance, the child's needs may not be met if parents, as Njuguna (2021) pointed out, fail to attend meetings or communicate with schools regarding their education. A busy life or lack of interest may lead to parents failing to realise things are going wrong with their children (Njuguna, 2021).

A study by Yasmeen et al. (2022) conducted in Pakistan revealed that children from households actively involved in their education were often successful in many walks of life. Because of their households' interest in their education, the children worked hard to produce excellent results. In South Africa, many learners are often left in the care of grandparents, who may not regard education as necessary and fail to motivate, discipline and support their grandchildren in their educational journey (Njuguna, 2021). This argument has been supported by Munje and Mncube (2018), who state that grandparents may struggle to be actively involved in their grandchildren's education for various reasons, including attaching less value to education and placing more value on household chores and responsibilities. This may make children demotivated and disinterested in their education (Munje & Mncube, 2018).

2.6.3 Illiteracy and low levels of education

Njuguna (2021) and Sengonul (2022) argue that learners with one or both parents at home may be disadvantaged as parents from low socio-economic backgrounds are often illiterate or have had inadequate education and can thus not assist their children with their schoolwork. In this regard, Yasmeen et al. (2022) contend that parents who cannot provide academic support, as they do not possess the necessary cultural capital, may impact their academic achievement. Vadivel et al.'s (2023) study with participants from Germany, India, and Nigeria revealed that children whose parents were employed in semi-skilled or unskilled labour were often less motivated to further their studies. Sengonul (2022) attributes this to parents' lack of guidance and encouragement and the lack of economic capital required to succeed in education.

Furthermore, Njuguna (2021) adds that most low-income parents have low regard for education due to a lack of confidence in the education system, mainly due to negative educational experiences. It is important to remember that many parents and grandparents were learners in the Bantu Education system. The consequences for these parents as children were dire as they were compelled or opted to drop out of school to contribute to the family income. Vadivel et al. (2023) support this, highlighting it as a common problem among children from low socioeconomic backgrounds nationally and internationally.

Low education and status may lead to feelings of inadequacy, resulting in parents being ashamed and less confident to consult and interact with teachers regarding their child's educational progress (Mlachila & Moeletsi, 2019). Apathy from parents may stem from various factors, including the cultural disconnect (Bajaj, 2009; Langenkamp & Hoyt, 2019) between the home and the school, where parents feel unwelcome, and their ideas are often disregarded. The cultural disconnect is not unique to South Africa. As Sengonul (2022) shows, it is a significant issue among disadvantaged groups. Sengonul (2022) asserts that parental involvement differs depending on their habitus. For instance, based on their habitus, parents may be less or more likely to be involved in their child's education. Lack of involvement in a child's education may be a barrier for children from disadvantaged backgrounds (Shaw et al., 2017). Teachers may struggle to understand the parent's perspective and feel they have a 'don't care attitude' towards their child's education.

2.6.4 Influence of socioeconomic issues on learner achievement

Low-income parents can barely afford necessities for their households, leaving no income for resources children may need for school. The lack of educational resources and learning space leads to learners performing poorly academically (Njuguna, 2021; Schlebusch et al., 2022). In some schools, learners who cannot pay school fees or afford the required uniform are often denied access (Dieltiens & Meny-Gilbert, 2012). Essential resources, such as books, are not available for children in their homes, leading to poor reading skills, affecting their engagement with the curriculum and causing them to fall behind (Spaull, 2019). A recent study by Schlebusch et al. (2022) in South Africa showed that academic performance was linked to a lack of affordability and level of income in the home. On the same note, Adhanja et al. (2016) state that as household income increases, the odds of children from the households performing better in school also increase. Higher-income households can often afford educational resources and high-end technologies, allowing their children to access the latest educational materials. These economic and social capital elements can enhance learners' academic performance, as Sengonul (2022) argued. An example of the effect of a lack of resources in the home has been highlighted in a study by Dube (2020), which revealed that disadvantaged learners could not continue with teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. This

situation has resulted in them being left behind while their privileged peers continue with their education.

An international study by Burdick-Will (2016) in Chicago pointed out the social impact of learners living in socio-economically disadvantaged areas lacking social and economic resources to thrive. Instead, these areas are places where crime and violence are rife. Living in unsafe and crime-ridden areas negatively influences learner's academic performance in schools. This finding corroborates Njuguna's (2021) argument, stating that a learner's socio-economic background and concomitant living areas directly affect their academic achievements in Nigeria. This reality is relevant to the South African context, where poverty, crime and violence are prevalent in marginalised communities.

Netshitangani (2018) study in South Africa concurs as it shows that learners from low-income areas are exposed to and forced to commit criminal acts and are prone to drug and alcohol abuse. Lobi and Kheswa (2017) and Nortje (2017) contend that one of the key ways through which learners from impoverished backgrounds confront their lived experiences of poverty in the home and community is by taking drugs. Netshitangani (2018) states that a community that does not value education may inculcate in a learner an attitude of giving up on education. This may be exacerbated when there are too few good examples in their community for them to appreciate how academic achievement may be relevant to their personal lives.

2.6.5 Childheaded households

Lobi and Kheswa (2017) define child-headed households as homes that function without adult supervision and are often led by the eldest sibling. Usually, the eldest female child takes on the parental role and responsibility for her younger siblings. Pillay (2021) concurs with Lobi and Kheswa (2017), adding that this is an injustice to a girl as it may perpetuate her subordinate position in society.

An earlier study in South Africa by Mturi (2012) maintains that traditionally orphaned children were taken in by family members. However, Schlebusch et al. (2022) study states that the African proverb 'it takes a village to raise a child' no longer applies in society, forcing elder siblings, usually the eldest female, to provide for and take care of the family.

This situation contravenes the Children's Act (38 of 2005), which states that child-headed households should be under the function of an adult (Republic of South Africa, 2005). Lobi and Kheswa (2017) and Schlebusch et al. (2022) cite similar attributes, such as low self-esteem, depression, and poor academic performance, which develop due to responsibilities and challenges faced by learners in child-headed households.

These challenges experienced by learners are further exacerbated by the challenges they encounter in schools. For example, Marongwe et al.'s (2016) study in South Africa revealed that children from child-headed households could not complete assignments and homework due to a lack of adult guidance and supervision in the home. This resulted in teachers shouting at learners and labelling them as dumb and lazy, further demoralising them (Marongwe et al. 2016). This suggests that learners' habitus is incompatible with the expectations of the school showing the interconnectedness race and class on their educational experience. Schlebusch et al. (2022) and Marongwe et al. (2016) point out that some teachers have negative attitudes towards and do not treat them equally to their peers. This marginalisation may lead to feelings of inferiority, heavily impacting their social class participation and academic performance. Both studies contend that more needs to be done in terms of support for learners from child-headed households.

The challenges and responsibilities thrust upon elder siblings consequently impact om their schooling as they are prone to stay absent frequently, and exhaustion affects their academic performance and, in many instances, leads to them dropping out (Lobi and Kheswa, 2017; Schlebush et al., 2022). Similar findings were reported in a study by Chinyoka and Naidu (2014) in Zimbabwe, highlighting that exhaustion inevitably affected learners' concentration, resulting in them being unable to gain the much-needed cultural capital required to negotiate their schooling. Failure and repetition of a grade led to these learners lacking self-esteem and confidence. This and embarrassment may lead many to drop out (Chinyoka & Naidu, 2014). The burden placed on these children to source food and take care of their siblings often takes precedence over education, and the thought of a career is the last thing on their minds, thus perpetuating the cycle of poverty (Pillay, 2021). These learners' numerous challenges, often accompanied by high stress levels, leave them feeling disempowered (Pillay, 2021; Schlebusch, 2022).

2.6.6 Home environment

The home environment emerged as a critical factor in poor academic performance in a study conducted by Bayat et al. (2014) and Njuguna (2021), as many poor learners live in informal dwellings without essential services such as water and electricity. Apart from these basic services required for a decent living, learners must have access to these to ensure their schooling is not interrupted. For example, without electricity, learners will experience difficulties in completing daily homework and studying (Bayat et al., 2014; Njuguna, 2021). Literature has also revealed that children are desperate to ensure that their education is not interrupted by candlelight, but the reality is that some parents cannot even afford candles, leaving them feeling helpless. With learners constantly not completing homework and assignments, teachers are labelling and questioning learners' motivation (Marongwe et al., 2016). Marongwe et al. (2016) argue that when teachers fail to communicate with learners, they never know the child's social circumstances and continue to think negatively about learners.

Overcrowding is also common in informal settlements, making children unable to study or do homework (Bayat et al., 2014). Many people living in small dwellings often lead to unconducive learning conditions. Bayat et al. (2014) and Njuguna (2021) agree that children find studying and doing homework challenging in overcrowded households, undermining their needs. An example given by Bayat et al. (2014) is that family members may want to watch television or sleep without considering the needs of the school-going children in the household. Children who do not have the power to voice how they feel will be forced to comply, resulting in their schoolwork being neglected. This inevitably leads to them performing poorly academically. These findings were supported by a study done in India by Kapur (2018), showing that nationally and internationally, a child's socioeconomic background can impede on their education.

2.7 The power of English as a language

The South African education system has, since the country's democracy, not integrated African indigenous knowledge and languages into the education system, implying that Western knowledge systems still occupy a superior place (Zembylas, 2018). Children usually communicate in an African language at home, while their language of learning and teaching (LoLT) is English. Consequently, Postma and Postma (2011) and Mphahlele

et al. (2022) argue that this has led to inequalities in education as learners experience difficulties in accessing knowledge and content in a language that is not their first language. Teachers find it difficult to find ways of effectively teaching these learners to enable them to access the curriculum. This means these learners are present in the class but are passive learners as they are not actively participating (Madhadaze, 2019).

A recent study by Mphahlele et al. (2022) supports findings from Madhadaze (2019) and Postma and Postma (2011), affirming that English is well established as LOLT while African languages are excluded, forcing learners to learn in the language of colonisers, resulting in high failure rates. Education White Paper 6 highlights the LoLT as a significant barrier to learning and suggests enhanced support mechanisms (Department of Education, 2001). Bantwini and Feza (2017) argue that teachers need support in developing these mechanisms to respond to learners' different learning needs and abilities.

Saneka and De Witt's (2019) study in South Africa argues that competence in English is associated with power and privilege, equating to possessing symbolic capital; proficiency in English benefits the labour market (Hunter, 2015). This implies that these learners will have better job opportunities and getting an income (economic capital) will boost their status through symbolic capital. Parents with higher socioeconomic aspirations for their children feel that competence in English will help them achieve these aspirations (Saneka & De Witt, 2019).

Research by Saneka and De Witt (2019) suggests that high socio-economic classes can support their children in developing English reading and writing skills as they possess these elements of cultural capital, of which children from low socioeconomic classes are deprived; consequently, these learners find teaching and learning in English a challenge. Postma and Postma (2011, p. 44) argue that language practice in school has the effect of "converting pupils to use African languages at home to a dominant Western culture". Inevitably, this largely contributes to learner's poor academic performance. However, the literature reviewed has suggested that many black parents prefer that their children be taught in English as they regard it as a predictor for success and a much-desired form of symbolic capital (Hunter, 2015).

2.8 Social mobility

Over the years, research has shown that education plays a vital role in achieving upward social mobility. Moses et al. (2017) contend that education is essential for children to overcome socioeconomic disadvantages and give them equitable access to opportunities in the labour market. However, Schlebush et al. (2022) point out that socioeconomic inequalities are evident in schools due to the interrelated aspects of family and society. Furthermore, the economic statuses of children's families influence their educational achievements. Moses et al. (2017) argue that instead of transforming inequalities in education, the system may be reproducing inequalities, thus diminishing the hopes of upward mobility for many of the children from socioeconomically marginalised communities.

Moses et al.'s (2017) study in South Africa highlights the wide gap in educational attainment between learners from different socio-economic backgrounds. Moses et al. (2017) pointed out that the relationship between socioeconomic status and academic achievements is strongly linked in South Africa. Pascoe (2019) argues that learners from advantaged socioeconomic backgrounds enter the education system with an advantage over their marginalised counterparts, as they have already acquired the cultural capital, contributing to a successful educational experience. Moses et al. (2017) argue that South African education has failed to diminish the link between learner's socioeconomic backgrounds and school performance, entrenching existing inequalities and limiting social mobility for the less fortunate. The inequitable provisioning in the two strands of the education system leads to different outcomes and affects social mobility. The poor-quality education to which the majority of marginalised and disadvantaged are subjected often leads to inadequate employment opportunities, resulting in the next generation only being able to access poor-quality education (Moses et al., 2017). Subsequently, the cycle continues. Apart from inequalities disadvantaged learners face, there are also physical and psychological stressors they face because of poverty, which consequently affects how learners experience education (Schlebusch et al., 2022).

2.9 Factors that facilitate educational experiences:

2.9.1 Learner related factors

2.9.1.1 Academic and Emotional assistance

Even though learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds experience challenges that they have little or no control over, as these are systemic challenges, some factors allow them to make their educational experience positive. An international study by Kong in Ireland (2020) found that disadvantaged learners with positive educational experiences are not afraid to reach out for help, academically or emotionally. Yasmeen et al. (2022) and Kong (2020) add that emotional assistance, sought from friends or peers when learners experience challenges in school or have parents who cannot help them, is invaluable.

Similarly, a study by Pascoe (2019) showed that disadvantaged learners forge relationships with peers for extra help and support. Forging relationships in halls and clubs with peers from the same value systems would give disadvantaged learners a sense of belonging acquiring cultural capital, and a support system (Pascoe, 2019). These relationships also allowed disadvantaged students to explore the norms and expectations of the dominant culture (Pascoe, 2019). As the education system is based on the culture of dominant groups, forging these relationships will help disadvantaged learners negotiate the school environment and further shore up their cultural and social capital.

2.9.1.2 Educational Aspirations

Morales (2014) and Kong (2020) cite self-efficacy as a significant attribute that learners from low socio-economic backgrounds possess, which is crucial for overcoming adversities. Learners believed they could change their lives and be successful (Kong, 2020). Wills and Hofmeyr (2019) add that educational aspirations encourage learners to overcome challenges to succeed. Learners from low socio-economic backgrounds believe that attaining a certain level of education will provide economic security in the future and is an essential factor for resilience (Wills & Hofmeyr, 2019). Sandoval-Hernandez and Bialowolski (2016) contend that there are learners from low socio-economic backgrounds who perform well academically despite the barriers they face.

2.9.1.3 Agency and Resilience

Resilience is the term Sandoval-Hernandez and Bialowolski (2016), and Wills and Hofmeyr (2019) describe learners who refuse to allow their disadvantaged status to impede their educational aspirations. Learners showed academic resilience by having positive attitudes, being responsible, and being hardworking to succeed academically (Wills & Hofmeyr, 2019). Ozden and Atasog's (2020) study in Turkey correlated with that of Romero et al.'s (2018) study in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. Here they reported that socioeconomically disadvantaged learners cited teachers' positive attitudes and support as key to resilience. According to Ozden and Otagog (2020), academic and social resilience can be developed and suggest that schools are crucial to promoting resilience in disadvantaged socioeconomic learners. Friendship among peers and good teacher/learner relationships are a powerful form of support for learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds, making them resilient. This could also be attributed to them being more socially competent (Hempel-Jorgensen, 2015; Ozden & Atasog, 2020).

2.9.1.4 Emotionality and Motivation

Emotional factors play an important role in how learners from low socio-economic backgrounds experience education (Kopershoek, Canrinus, Fokkens-Bruinsma & de Boer, 2020). For example, low self-esteem can be a barrier to their academic success. In this regard Koperschoek et al. (2020) states that motivation and support from peers and teachers can stimulate learner self-esteem. Feeling a sense of inferiority compared to peers can result in pain and humiliation affecting how learners engage in the learning process (Naidoo, Pillay & Conley, 2018). Zembylas (2003) suggests emotional resources such as hope to encourage and motivate learners towards self-transformation and academic success. This would help to develop emotional capital also.

Pascoe's (2019) study at a wealthy university in the USA revealed that learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds were able to exercise agency within the walls of the university. These learners are cited as being responsible, coming prepared to class, hardworking and independent, as they are keen for upward social mobility to break the cycle of poverty (Pascoe, 2019). This leads to learners acquiring the necessary cultural capital in the form of skills, knowledge and values required to achieve upward social mobility (Spaull, 2015).

2.9.2 Institutional factors

2.9.2.1 Creating a Culture of Hope

Williams et al. (2019) study shows that schools can contribute to learners from low-income backgrounds academic success. Creating a culture of hope amongst disadvantaged learners is essential as this will make them believe their futures will be promising (Gibson & Barr, 2017; Williams et al., 2019). Gibson and Barr (2017, p.1) define a culture of hope "as a blueprint for schools wanting to meet the social/ emotional needs of youth at risk". They further emphasise that learners from disadvantaged backgrounds need more than an academic record to succeed. By creating this hope, schools will lead learners to be interested and motivated to do well academically and find their path to a positive future and opportunities. To achieve this, schools must surround learners with a positive educational environment, thus replacing despair with hope (Gibson & Barr, 2017). Gibson and Barr (2017) assert this can be achieved through the four seeds of hope: place and belonging, optimism, purpose and passion, pride and self-esteem. To plant the seeds of hope and ensure success, Bashant (2016) states that teachers must spend quality time with these learners. This hope can ensure life-long learning for disadvantaged children facing adversities. Bashant's (2016) findings corroborate an earlier study by Shaw et al. (2017), which states that schools must develop a culture whereby staff encourages low-income learners to believe in themselves and be capable of progressing academically.

2.9.2.2 Sense of Belonging

Learners enrolling in schools where the culture and values reflect the middle class need to feel a sense of belonging. Teachers and other staff are critical in ensuring the disadvantaged feel included and part of that schooling community. Gibson and Barr (2017) contend that this can be achieved by encouraging building relationships with other learners and teacher-learner relationships, which Gibson and Barr (2017) claim will boost their self-confidence, motivation, and success. Williams et al. (2019) extend this argument, stating that peer relationships can provide disadvantaged learners with the required forms of social capital: mentoring and access to culturally relevant information. This can only be achieved if schools encourage fostering relationships across different

cultures (Williams et al., 2019). A sense of belonging is crucial amongst learners. The support they can give each other can make disadvantaged learners feel included and connected to the school (Williams et al., 2019; Yasmeen et al., 2022).

Lack of motivation and confidence for the disadvantaged stems from "learned helplessness", whereby children from socioeconomically underprivileged contexts internalise discourses purporting that it is pointless to work hard as there are no prospects of upward mobility for them (Gibson & Barr 2017, p. 25). These feelings often lead to learners feeling despondent, stopping working hard, and eventually dropping out of school. Children with internalised helplessness require a culture of hope to invigorate them (Gibson & Barr, 2017), transforming learners' helplessness into optimism (Gibson & Barr, 2017). For instance, Gibson and Barr (2017) state this can be achieved by developing disadvantaged learners' interests and talents. In this regard, Gibson and Barr (2017) argue that for learners from underprivileged contexts to succeed academically, schools must do more than focus on transferring academic knowledge and skills to break the cycle of helplessness.

2.9.2.3 Cultivating and Nurturing high expectations

A key aspect to ensuring this for learners from underprivileged contexts is that schools must cultivate and nurture an ethos of high expectations for all learners. This was a significant finding in Williams et al.'s (2019) study, which revealed that the teachers had high expectations of the learners. They displayed it by how they teach, relate to learners, and motivate them to achieve their goals. They further point out that schools should demand learners have high aspirations and ensure that they support the learners in realising these aspirations. Walker and Mathebula (2020) contend that learners have hope and aspirations as they are determined to succeed despite the uncertainties and challenges they may encounter. In support of this argument, Shaw et al. (2017) state that schools should minimise the challenges disadvantaged learners face by providing support programmes for learners to help them achieve their goals. Shaw et al. (2017) study maintains that low-income learners perform well academically in schools with a culture of high expectations.

This argument is supported by Erberber et al. (2015), highlighting school factors as significant predictors of high academic achievement for socioeconomically disadvantaged learners. This study showed that teachers are crucial for instilling academic resilience in learners to assist them to succeed. Compared to the study by Erberber et al. (2015), findings in a study conducted by Motlapula et al. (2022) suggest that the school environment and low teacher expectations resulted in poor academic performance. Both studies agreed that socioeconomic circumstances, income level and parental support are critical factors to a learner's low academic performance that mitigate against becoming resilient.

2.9.2.4 Teacher Trust

Trust between teachers and learners is crucial and can create opportunities for all learners regardless of their socio-economic status. Romero et al. (2018) contend that if teachers become more accepting and trusting of socioeconomically disadvantaged learners, more significant effort is put into making them feel part of the teaching and learning process, leading to learners from socioeconomically disadvantaged contexts developing self-efficacy and becoming more resilient. For example, teachers taking time to discuss learners' results and areas that need improvement, as well as working with students to identify skills they possess that may help them achieve their academic goals successfully (Yasmeen et al., 2022) will inevitably lead to building of trust.

This section provided insight into the educational and social experiences of learners from low socio-economic backgrounds. Here the various ways in which they experienced schooling suggests that schooling for learners from low socio-economic context is a complex, tension filled and multi-varied. The next section discusses the theoretical framework for this study.

2.10 Theoretical framework

Bourdieu's theory of habitus, field and capitals will be used in my study to understand the educational experiences of learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

2.10.1 Habitus

Bourdieu (1990, p.53) defines habitus as "transposable dispositions" and a "structuring structure". This means our habitus is shaped and moulded by dominant attitudes, norms and values acquired through socialisation. In this regard, our learned behaviour influences our actions and choices. These dispositions become ingrained and unconsciously influence perceptions, behaviours and attitudes. Habitus is rooted in social structures, thus reflecting one's social position. Consequently, social circumstances like poverty give disadvantaged children a particular world view of themselves and their place in the world, resulting in them acquiring certain dispositions and habitus (Laery, 2018). This means learners from disadvantaged backgrounds' habitus within the school context would differ from those from privileged backgrounds. The incompatibility of home and school habitus may lead to marginalisation or exclusion in the institution, as reported in Ngobeni et al.'s (2023) study, where learners from disadvantaged contexts were encouraged to leave or pushed out of school.

Bourdieu (1990) explains that habitus is based on one's disposition and attitudes. Subsequently, learners from disadvantaged contexts with negative dispositions and attitudes towards school will often perform poorly. In this regard, their habitus will potentially influence their aspirations and dreams. Yasmeen et al. (2022) study has argued for habitus as an essential factor in influencing disadvantaged learners' goals and career paths. In this study, many felt disillusioned by their circumstances, believing further education was an unachievable dream for them (Yasmeen et al., 2022).

Historical and social conditions have set limits as habitus stems from the relationships we develop with people in our environment during socialisation (Hart, 2019). Our ways of being are determined by the home and community environment in which we are socialised. Habitus is a product of socialisation and influences one's perceptions and actions based on social positions (Hart, 2019). For example, a child who belongs to a low socio-economic class may be taught values, norms and ideas about their place in society that could reproduce inequality and oppression. Habitus and practices learned may be difficult to unlearn. However, Bourdieu (1980) also argues that individuals can challenge their limitations in their habitus because they possess agency. With continued exposure to new experiences and supportive networks, they can develop new ways of thinking to

overcome the constraints they experience and have successful educational outcomes. This was evident in the study by Osman et al. (2020) and Yasmeen et al. (2022), where supportive teachers motivated and inspired learners, helping them to rethink their previous ingrained dispositions that made them believe they lacked value.

The literature revealed (see, for example, Arendse, 2020 and Chisholm, 2021) that policies and practices in educational institutions are based on the norms and values of the dominant group in society, leading to poor learners feeling disempowered in the space. Even though the space is power-laden, disadvantaged learners are not entirely powerless and have some agency to negotiate the challenges they are experiencing to ensure their educational experience is successful (Pascoe, 2019; Wills & Hofmeyer, 2019). To understand poor learners' agency and how they use it to navigate the field, their habitus is crucial for me to understand.

Furthermore, our habitus is influenced by possible advantages and disadvantages because of where we are located on the social hierarchy (Loh & Sun, 2020). Habitus allows one to analyse the dominance of agent groups in society and their power over target groups, leading to behaviour and attitudes differing between the advantaged and disadvantaged during social interactions (Reay, 2004). Pascoe (2019) adds that actions can potentially contribute to social stratification in the field. The superiority of advantaged groups may create an unpleasant educational environment for learners deemed inferior due to their socio-economic positioning (Reay, 2004). This could be in the form of the school's ethos, schooling practices and rules that do not consider the needs of learners from low socio-economic backgrounds.

The social position of learners from disadvantaged backgrounds leads to their marginalisation in institutions like schools (Bantwini & Feza, 2017). Learners are forced to adapt to a different habitus that the school requires, which does not value their working-class habitus. Thus, to achieve some power, learners from low socio-economic classes constantly navigate challenges, experiences, and requirements to fit in and feel a sense of belonging. Habitus acquired by poor learners may be useless in the educational field as educational institutions' norms and values are designed around those in power (Reay, 2004). This exclusionary factor may lead to a negative educational experience for poor learners. Gibson and Barr (2017) argue that the lack of academic achievements of learners

from disadvantaged contexts can be perceived as laziness or lack of effort by teachers when, according to Hart (2019), a mismatch of habitus exists between the learner, school and teachers. On the contrary, peers of disadvantaged learners' who have acquired a better socioeconomic habitus have an advantage in the field and can be academically successful, thus perpetuating social class privilege (Ramrathan & Singh, 2017)

2.10.2 Field

Field, according to Pascoe (2019), does not move, but people move to different fields. Bourdieu (1990) uses the concept field to understand the social domain that compromises institutions and people. Field can be determined by the status of an individual's social identity, which in this study is the educational institution where learners from disadvantaged and advantaged backgrounds are enrolled. Education institutions like schools act as fields with rules to play by for success (Chisholm, 2021). Apart from providing learners with an educational experience, this social space also allows social interaction.

The field is controlled by rules and regulations that learners are forced to follow, which may lead to inequalities and marginalisation. It is a power-laden space. Learners from disadvantaged backgrounds' habitus and cultural capital differ from that of their privileged counterparts, which may lead to them experiencing challenges in the field. This is because they do not have access to the rules and regulations associated with the field of school (Ngubane, 2021). A learner who knows the rules and possesses the 'correct' and valued capital will be able to profit in the field (Larey, 2018). Bourdieu (1990) states that those who do not have resources, namely, capital and information, face severe consequences as they always remain at the margins of the field of schools, often invisible and forgotten. For this study, the idea of the field enabled me to understand how learners from socioeconomically disadvantaged contexts adapted to and negotiated in a field that was predominantly aligned and functioned following the cultural capital of the middle class. Institutions like schools are fields with policies, procedures and rules for success (Chisholm, 2021). This indicates that for learners to be successful in the field, they must understand and play by the 'rules of the game', which, according to Bourdieu (1990), is associated with the norms and values of a field. Failure to be able to compete and comply with the rules may lead to learners facing isolation and exclusion.

For this reason, learners who lack the necessary capital forge a relationship with peers and teachers who possess the required capital (Kapur, 2018; Pascoe, 2019). For instance, Larey's (2018) study of disadvantaged rural learners revealed learners relied heavily on their teachers' capital to guide, motivate and inspire them. This concurs with Yasmeen et al.'s (2022) study in Pakistan, which highlighted initiatives taken by teachers to promote disadvantaged learners' cultural capital and strategies to motivate and inspire learners. This points to the importance of social networks for accessing different forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986). It also shows that schooling as a field is a power-laden space dependent on support from those with power, like teachers or peers.

Social marginalisation occurs when learners from poor homes are discriminated against due to their socio-economic status (Bantwini & Feza, 2017; Schlebusch et al., 2022). Factors such as inappropriate uniforms, lack of educational resources, vital social good within the school field, hunger and poor hygiene may lead to poor learners being ostracised by their advantaged peers (Smith & Todd, 2019; Schlebusch et al., 2022), as reported in the study conducted by Bayat et al. (2014) and Schlebusch et al. (2022), which highlighted the marginalisation and discrimination of learners from disadvantaged socioeconomic contexts, leading them having a negative social experience in the field of school due to their lack of economic capital.

In addition, it is evident from the literature reviewed that poor and marginalised learner experience institutional discrimination, which is embedded in policies, rules and regulations in the field (school), resulting in barriers that impact how they experience their education. The literature reviewed argues that teachers have the potential to be agents of change in the field. For example, Ozden and Atasog (2020) assert that teacher beliefs, confidence and high academic aspirations displayed toward learners from low socio-economic contexts can significantly influence learners' academic performance and resilience to challenges they may experience. Learners from advantaged contexts come from a field (home) where they have acquired the valued cultural capital and habitus, giving them the power to use their cultural capital to navigate the field and its challenges efficiently (Pascoe, 2019; Osman et al., 2020). However, learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds often arrive in the field lacking the valued cultural capital

and habitus, leading to challenges in the new field that may be difficult to navigate (Pascoe, 2019).

Thus, the concept of the field would allow me first to understand poor learners' experiences in a field that does not affirm them, what learners do to negotiate the school field to gain some form of power and challenge the inequality they experience, to achieve academic success.

2.10.3 Bourdieu's forms of capital

Bourdieu has four forms of capital that I will draw on in this study. These are economic capital, cultural capital, social capital and symbolic capital. Bourdieu's work has been extended to include linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1991) and emotional capital (Zembylas, 2003), which will also be used in this study. Hunter (2015) contends that capital must be understood as resources people acquire and exchange to ensure their power and privilege in any field. For example, the ability of the middle-class learner to use their resources to gain power and privilege.

Bourdieu (1986) defines **economic capital** as having wealth or resources that can be converted into cash. Having economic capital allows certain socio-economic classes and race groups access quality education because they have the economic capital to pay high school fees in South Africa. Arends et al. (2021) assert that the more economic capital a learner's family possesses, the better their access to educational resources and opportunities, leading to better academic performance. For example, economic capital allows advantaged learners access to private tutoring and resources such as technology or the latest educational material, which can broaden perspectives and foster development. For instance, a learner from a socioeconomically disadvantaged context facing financial constraints will be restricted in the opportunities they can access. The consequence of this can create disparities in the classroom and hinder educational success. In South Africa, the bimodal education system has led to learners from disadvantaged contexts being forced to receive a low-quality education due to their economic position, thus leading to negative educational experiences and a lack of opportunities (Spaull, 2015).

Economic capital, which is representative of the structural properties of families, is crucial for a learner's academic attitude and behaviour (Arends et al., 2021). Lack of economic capital is a critical factor in poverty, leading to poor learners experiencing challenges in school. The literature argues that poor nutrition, lack of resources, and lack of necessities infringe on poor learners' educational experiences (Bayat et al., 2014; Schlebusch et al., 2022). Educational inequality stems from a lack of economic and cultural capital, which then allows for poverty to be perpetuated. In this study, I explored how exclusionary factors related to poverty, in particular, impeded education and how they can navigate these challenges. Bourdieu asserts that economic capital and other forms, such as cultural and social, influence a person's position, as cultural and social capital hold value in education (Loh & Sun, 2020).

According to Bourdieu (1986), **social capital** is based on the power people have due to the network of connections they have developed, giving access to resources and influence. Social interactions allow a person to access these resources and influences. He extends this argument by stating that social capital deals with the issue of the production and reproduction of social inequality. Lee and Bowen (2006) show how resources are stored within a social class structure and that access to social capital is restricted to middle- and upper-class backgrounds. In the study by Osman et al. (2020) and Yasmeen et al. (2022), learners could develop relationships with their middle-class peers and teachers, allowing them to acquire social capital, often in the form of knowledge and information that allowed them to succeed academically.

On the other hand, dependent on the individuals, they might internalise negative opportunities and resign themselves to accepting the limited opportunities and resources available to them to succeed academically (Behtoui, 2017). For this study, knowing how learners find their places in and influence networks through how they interact in school allowed me to see how and if learners from low socioeconomic classes can gain social capital.

DiGiorgio (2009, p. 182) states that **cultural capital** "encompasses language, communication, appearance and educational backgrounds". Yasmeen et al. (2022) point out that cultural capital should be understood as a currency in educational institutions. Bias exists between the amount of cultural capital learners from different socio-economic

and racial statuses have amassed. As middle-class learners have this currency, they have an educational and social advantage, unlike their peers from disadvantaged backgrounds. This possession gives them a head start in the field. As they continue their journey, they accumulate more capital, positively influencing their social positioning as more capital signifies rewards (Pascoe, 2019). Low-income learners may not be familiar with the dominant culture (capital), a potential barrier to upward mobility (Pascoe, 2019).

The culture of power manifests in school policies and rules, which are designed around the dominant group's culture (Delpit, 1988). Yasmeen et al. (2022) assert educational institutions aim at transmitting the culture of the middle class, giving learners from these backgrounds an advantage in the field over their disadvantaged counterparts whose cultural capital is not compatible with the school, and Laery (2018) asserts that this can be seen as a liability. This means that for disadvantaged learners, limited exposure and possession of cultural resources and experiences that hold value in the education institutions may hinder their navigating the school environment and infringe on their academic performance.

An example is the language of learning and teaching in schools, English. English, the dominant language and medium of instruction in most schools, severely impedes teaching and learning for most black learners as it is not their mother tongue (Ngobeni, Chibambo & Divala 2023). The linguistic rules differ from home and school (Ngobeni et al., 2023), which may significantly hinder black learners' academic potential as they are taught and assessed in their second language. Moreover, a lack of proficiency in English may lead to social exclusion, as learners may feel embarrassed when communicating with their peers from the dominant group. However, some learners from disadvantaged contexts lack power based on their cultural or social capital. They may socialise with their privileged peers, allowing them to gain the required cultural or social capital (Pascoe, 2019), which is crucial to upward social mobility. Most of the marginalised do not acquire the necessary linguistic capital required for the field of school, which results in them feeling excluded (Arends et al., 2021). According to Bourdieu (1991), English is a power broker in this field. Those deficient in this capital are powerless because their language is not valued as the language of success.

Symbolic capital can be defined as a sense of being validated through acknowledgement and access to social status (Bourdieu, 1986). Symbolic capital is an intangible asset that offers recognition, attention, and a sense of belonging (Wacquant & Bourdieu, 1992). In the school context, it is what learners yearn for. Given the importance of social recognition in society, certain types of capital are precious (Bourdieu, 1986). An example by Hunter (2015) is English, which is recognised as a form of symbolic capital that leads to the recognition of better employment opportunities. After apartheid, it became increasingly important to acquire a qualification and symbolic capital, especially the English language (Ngobeni et al. 2023). For learners from low socio-economic backgrounds, English was essential to entering the labour market (Hunter, 2015). The benefits of getting a job and receiving an income (economic capital) boost their status (symbolic capital) in their community. To achieve symbolic capital within the school, learners from low socio-economic backgrounds may work hard to excel academically to earn recognition and respect from teachers and peers (Ngobeni & Chibambo, 2023).

Symbolic violence is a concept use by Bourdieu (1990) to show a form of non-physical violence that exists in the education system involving the imposition of norms, values and expectations of the dominant group onto a subordinate group. For example, cultural capital such as language or behaviour of learners from low socio-economic backgrounds may not be recognised by the school. He further argues that symbolic violence is powerful because it is not visible and is embedded in everyday practices and interactions.

2.11 Conclusion

In summary, I examined policies concerning the rights of children to access education. In addition, I reviewed international and national literature and provided an overview of the educational experiences of learners from low socio-economic backgrounds. The literature reviewed outlines that poverty and factors linked to poverty contribute to learners' negative experiences of education and poor academic attainments. Teachers and the school environment all emerged as potential contributors to learners' educational aspirations and resilience, which resulted in disadvantaged learners' poor academic performance. The chapter also discussed the theoretical framework used in this study. For this study, Bourdieu's (1991) concepts of habitus, fields, and forms of capital were

discussed and applied. These concepts were used as a lens to analyse and understand the findings of this study.

CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides insight into the research design and methodological decisions to generate and interpret data collected to understand the phenomena and respond to the research question. I, therefore, begin the chapter with a discussion of the critical research paradigm and the qualitative methodological approach used in the study. This is followed by the case study approach, which allows for collecting in-depth information on real-life experiences, which is critical to this study. Next, the various data-generating methods and techniques will be discussed, followed by sampling strategies, trustworthiness and ethical considerations.

3.2 Critical paradigm

A research paradigm, according to Bertram and Christiansen (2020, p. 24), "represents a particular worldview" as well as a lens to use to guide a researcher (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). For a researcher, this would mean that reflecting and thinking deeply about one's worldview and that of the participants is critical to gaining authentic ideas. For this reason, Creswell and Creswell (2018) state that a paradigm encompasses the researcher's assumptions about the nature of knowledge and the methods a researcher may use to generate the knowledge. The different paradigms compromise ontological and epistemological elements. Epistemology is the study of knowledge justified with evidence and how others may perceive this knowledge (Ryan, 2018). While attempting to generate knowledge, the researcher must remember that the knowledge should be based on what participants are saying and not what the researcher counts as knowledge (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

This study is underpinned by the critical paradigm, which focuses on people's perceptions of reality and how it is experienced (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). It becomes essential then to understand ontology within the critical paradigm. Ontology is defined by Scotland (2012) as the nature of reality studied and what is known about it. However, social reality is shaped by and through power (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Therefore, in trying to

understand the social realities of participants, I worked with the concept of subjective truth, mainly because ontologically, there is no universal truth.

Furthermore, it allowed for the reflection of participants' beliefs, experiences, thoughts and ideologies, which informed their worldviews and how they describe their experiences within contexts. This study explores the reality of the lived experiences of disadvantaged learners in their educational environment and how they navigate the challenges they experience. This exploration focuses on a crucial element of the critical paradigm: to recognise and understand that learners learning in disadvantaged contexts constantly face inequalities and discrimination (Cohen et al., 2017; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Inequality within the critical paradigm is seen as systemic and structural, not because of a person's shortcomings (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). This paradigm highlights the systemic injustices perpetuating inequality, which is why the paradigm aims to address social disparities and challenge power dynamics (Kumar, 2011). To do this effectively, one must focus on how power and inequalities shape social structures and institutions (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). Through the critical paradigm, I could better understand power differentials with the educational institution and how the school policies and practices disempower and exclude the marginalised. For this study, this was achieved by using semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, of which reflections were an essential part of the research process.

Participants in this study could reflect on how their educational experiences were inclusionary or exclusionary. Their reflection also allowed them to recognise that they possess agency and could find ways to overcome barriers they faced (Scotland, 2012). This ontological worldview works with my epistemological understanding that each participant's reality is unique and different and must be foregrounded. This had implications for the relationships built during the research process, where I sought to capture their experiences as they revealed them. I attempted to achieve this by sharing the research space with participants so that they could play a part as co-constructors of knowledge. For instance, after the interviews were transcribed, participants were allowed to verify the transcribed data to ensure their experiences had been appropriately captured.

The literature review has provided research showing the social and economic inequalities that poor learners in the educational setting have experienced, ultimately leading to discrimination and social marginalisation. The critical paradigm is appropriate for this study as it aims to critically understand the educational experiences of learners from low socio-economic backgrounds to unearth how power and inequality operate to influence how learners experience their education. In keeping with the paradigm and my epistemology and ontology, the study also centralises the participants' voices. It recognises them as people with power who can explain their experiences and navigate their challenges.

Moreover, the critical paradigm aims to empower, change, or accommodate marginalised or excluded groups (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). However, this study is small, and systemic-level change may be challenging. It is therefore hoped that through the data production process, participants could critically think and reflect on their social and educational world and change even on an individual level.

3.3 Qualitative research

The study used a qualitative research approach to gather and analyse data. Qualitative research is described as a method that allows for the understanding and interpreting of social phenomena, allowing a researcher to gain deeper insight into a person's experiences (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2020). For this reason, qualitative research was the most appropriate choice for this study as it allowed me to gain an in-depth and critical understanding of how learners experience their schooling and the factors that influence their experience. By interacting and engaging with the participants, I gained insight and knowledge of their social world and how they made sense of their experiences (Rahman, 2016).

Cohen et al. (2017) note that methodological assumptions within qualitative research are characterised by rich, thick descriptions, with research done in natural settings. Natural settings allow for the generation of rich contextual data. In the same vein, Paton (as cited in Merriam, 2009) claims it will enable the researcher to understand the natural setting better and what it means for participants and their lives. This means a researcher can understand the events and participants' experiences in that context. In this study, using a

qualitative case study, I could explore how events and experiences were influenced not only by the school setting but also by their homes, communities and broader society. Thus, I could not see their lives isolated from the school, community or the social world.

Rahman (2016, p.103) states qualitative research refers to a "person's life, lived experiences, behaviours, emotions and feelings". This indicates that participants within the qualitative approach could share their personal stories, highlighting their lived experiences of education based on their disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. This then allowed me, as the researcher, to better understand their lived realities, both social and educational and how participants made sense of their experiences. This was achievable as qualitative research allowed me to use several methods such as interviews, photovoice and focus group discussions to generate data (Cohen et al., 2017).

This study investigates learners from low socio-economic backgrounds and educational experiences, and therefore, it was fitting that the study be positioned within a qualitative research style. In this regard, qualitative research helped me understand participants' experiences and their agency in overcoming their challenges. This was possible as qualitative research allowed me to use different methods such as semi-structured interviews, focus group discussion and photovoice to gather data. These methods allowed me to collect in-depth data about participants' experiences, which was necessary for the study.

3.4 Research approach: Case Study

A case study is a research approach that allows for the generation of in-depth data focusing on contemporary phenomena in a real-life context (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), which Schoch (2020) adds may compromise a single person, an organisation, a community, event, or other social phenomenon. Schoch (2020) and Creswell and Creswell (2018) point out that boundaries between phenomenon and context may be blurred and that placing boundaries will prevent the researcher from going too broad and losing focus. Rowley (2002) views a case as a problem or phenomenon that needs to be investigated.

This study entails a single case study based on learners from low socio-economic backgrounds. The phenomenon being explored is the educational experiences of learners' from low socio-economic backgrounds. The aim of the case study was to understand the inclusionary and exclusionary factors their learning and social experiences and how they navigated the exclusionary factors they encountered. Cohen et al. (2017, p. 376) argue that case studies "provide a unique example of real people in real situations", and Rowley (2002) asserts that case studies are robust on reality. Therefore, case studies allowed me, the researcher, to gain knowledge and a better understanding of the lived reality learners' educational and social experiences, the inclusionary and exclusionary factors that influence their education and how they can navigate the exclusionary factors they encounter.

I have adopted a case study as my research approach based on the above. This is because case studies use empirical enquiry to investigate real-life situations, which is the aim of this study (Merriam, 2009). As case studies focus on how a person experiences a situation, they also allow in-depth data to be collected from participants (Bertram & Christiansen, 2020) which I was able to achieve. This was achievable by generating data using semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, and it was further enhanced by the participatory method of photovoice, which shed light on the case from the position of the participants (Rule & John, 2011). Case studies allow for a better understanding of the phenomena being studied. They are unique because they can reveal much about the phenomena under investigation and bring knowledge that would otherwise be inaccessible (Kumar, 2011).

3.5 Location of the study

The study was conducted at a secondary school, with learners from Grades 8 to 12, in the Wembezi Circuit, uThukela District. The school was a former Coloured school located in the town, compromising 38 staff members, including support staff and 966 learners. The School Management Team (SMT) comprises six members: the Principal, Deputy Principal, Departmental Head Languages, Humanities, Mathematics and Sciences, and Commerce. The staff complement is made up of male and female teachers from three racial groups, namely, Indian, Coloured and African. Racial classification in South Africa

has been a complex issue. The apartheid regime placed people into categories to ensure the system of separation. The four main categories of racial segregation and discrimination were White, Indian, Coloured and African with the latter three been referred to as Blacks during apartheid. This was also seen as the hierarchy of race in the country during apartheid. The school comprises learners from low- and middle-income backgrounds. This was determined from the School's SA SAMS EMIS data system. The medium of instruction at the school is English, with isiZulu and Afrikaans offered as First Additional Languages.

Most learners are of African descent, with a small number of Coloured learners according to the racial classification system that South Africa uses, as mentioned above. African learners come from the surrounding rural areas or townships seeking a better-quality education, which they believe they can access in town schools. Geographically, under-resourced schools are found in predominantly disadvantaged areas, namely, rural areas and townships. This study sought to investigate the extent to which learners who are from marginalised groups access quality education.

3.6 Selecting participants

Purposive sampling was adopted to select learners to be part of this study. For this study, participants needed to be chosen based on specific criteria or characteristics decided upon in line with the research questions (Creswell, 2014). Correspondingly, Creswell and Creswell (2018) and Merriam (2009) advise researchers to consider the purpose of their research when choosing a sample method, as this will ensure that individuals with knowledge and experience of what is being studied are identified and selected. Given that this study aimed to investigate the educational experiences of disadvantaged learners only, learners from low socio-economic status were chosen as participants. Therefore, the inclusion criteria were that learners had to be from low socio-economic backgrounds in order to answer the research questions. To determine learners from low socio-economic backgrounds, I used the Social Assistance Act (No.13, 2004) and Statistics South Africa (2020), which identified these learners as having limited economic resources and were beneficiaries of the country's social security system through social grants. The criterion for accessing social grants is when the household income is insufficient to meet basic

needs (Statistics South Africa, 2020). In seeking volunteers for the study, I conducted a survey conducted with Grade 10 and 11 learners in the Further Education and training Phase (FET). These survey forms showed which learners' parents were unemployed or underemployed and living off social grants. I purposely chose to exclude grade 12 learners due to because of demands and responsibilities they face in matric.

The surveys were then sifted to find learners who fit the characteristics of the study. From both grades there were 72 forms appropriate for use in the selection process. The forms were then placed into two separate boxes (one for girls and the other for boys), and I randomly chose five from each box. The reason for the separation was to ensure I had participants from both genders. This would ensure that data collected would give me a more complete picture on various factors that affect learners educational experience, getting an equal representation and also to prevent exclusion of a group. I met with the selected learners to explain the purpose of my study and enquired whether they were willing to participate. Six of the ten learners willingly agreed to participate in the study. These learners who fit the criteria possessed the knowledge, insight and experiences required to generate data to answer the research questions, as pointed out by Creswell and Creswell (2018). Four females and two males were the purposefully selected learners who agreed to participate in the study. Of these 6 participants, one was Coloured, and five were Black. The participants were from single-parent families or lived with a grandparent; one lived with both unemployed parents.

Learners who agreed to participate in the study were given consent forms for parental approval. Table 3-1 below shows the participants who agreed to participate in the study.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT	GRADE	AGE	GENDERED CATEGORY	RACIAL CATEGORY
Moses	10	16	Male	Black
Snegugu	11	17	Female	Black
Suzanne	11	17	Female	Coloured
Nolan	11	17	Male	Black
Ziyanda	11	18	Female	Black
Akhona	11	17	Female	Black

Table 0-1: Participants who agreed to participate in the study

Due to accessibility and learners meeting the criteria required for the study, this school was chosen as a research site. This is in line with Creswell and Creswell's (2018) criteria, which states that the researcher must be able to access participants, and participants must be willing to participate in the study and provide the required information.

3.7 Researcher positionality

Researcher positionality refers to the views and position adopted during the study (Holmes, 2020). Holmes (2020) adds that reflexivity is essential for researchers to acknowledge and disclose themselves. As a teacher at the school, it afforded me an insider's understanding of the school culture and the challenges and barriers faced by learners from low socio-economic backgrounds. This also meant interrogating my agent status with regards to race and socio-economic class. However, this understanding could have also resulted in biases arising during the collection and interpretation of data. To negotiate this, I ensured I was transparent with my participants about my research, which also helped me gain their trust.

To alleviate bias, I sought feedback from my supervisor to ensure my interpretations of the data were that of the realities of my participants. As a teacher, I know the power dynamics between me and the participants, who are learners in the same school where I teach. Furthermore, there had to be reflection on how race and socio-economic class continue to be felt by learners and thus my privileged status needed to be consistently checked. To do this I made critical notes which were discussed with my supervisor. Before collecting data, I explained that during the process, the participants had to consider me as a researcher and not a teacher. I emphasised research ethics, assuring them of the confidentiality of their information, which will only be used for the benefit of this study and protection by using pseudonyms. However, I also acknowledge the possibility of bias as participants may have responded in ways they thought would suit me.

3.8 Methods of data collection

Data was collected using the following data collection methods and techniques.

3.8.1 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used as a critical instrument to generate in-depth data (See Appendix F). Kapur (2011) asserts that semi-structured interviews are face-to-face conversations between the participant and researcher about a phenomenon under investigation. The advantage of face-to-face interviews is that participants can express their viewpoints, which is challenging in virtual interviews (Du Plooy et al., 2020). Cohen et al. (2018) contend that interviews are a flexible instrument for collecting data. This flexibility allowed me to probe further and better understand the participants' perspectives and experiences.

Semi-structured interviews allowed the participants and researcher to converse, although pre-determined questions guided it (Cohen et al., 2018). This allowed the participants to discuss and explain their experiences in school and home contexts. For this study, this interaction allowed me to focus intently as my participants reflected on their educational experiences and social lives. I could probe for clarity and explanations where necessary because there was mutual communication between the participants and myself. In doing so, consideration was taken not unethically to intrude into their private lives. Open-ended questions allowed me to collect rich data from respondents on how they perceive and make sense of their lived realities.

Before the interview, I met with each participant individually to confirm the time and date of the interview. I ensured that the meeting was convenient for each participant. I chose a classroom in an isolated area for privacy and free from disruptions for the interview process. Rahman (2016) points out that a good interview allows for privacy and makes participants comfortable. Interviews were held after school on days convenient for each participant; thus, there was minimal noise and distractions. Before the interview commenced, I explained what was required of the participants and reminded them of the purpose of the study. I assured the participants that the information they shared would be kept confidential and their identities protected using pseudonyms (Cohen et al., 2018).

I was concerned about my positionality as a teacher at the school and was aware of possible bias. However, I was quite surprised during the interview as participants were comfortable, laughing and joking with me and spoke freely about their experiences during

this one-on-one interview. Interviews were conducted in English, as the participants had indicated they were comfortable using it. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes. The interview was recorded with the participants' permission, allowing for more effective data capture. These recordings also allowed me to generate verbatim transcripts of the individual interviews. I started the interview with icebreaker questions before engaging with the formal interview process. Starting each interview with an icebreaker may have helped ensure that participants were comfortable with me and trusted me throughout the research process.

Sometimes, the participants did not understand the question and asked for clarity, showing trust had been built during the research process. When this happened, I used alternative ways of assisting them to understand the question. For instance, I rephrased the questions using words and terms the participants could understand. I also afforded participants sufficient time to think about the questions before answering. Affording them time to consider each question was fruitful as the participants gave me the responses they had thought deeply about. Often, their responses were rhetorical: "Don't you think so, Mam?" These kinds of questions, I believed, showed the depth of their thoughts almost as if they were 'bouncing' off their ideas on me. As the participants related their experiences, thoughts and feelings, I found it an eye-opener for me as a researcher and a teacher. I have gained a much more intricate understanding of how the participants experienced schooling and social lives.

I concluded each interview by thanking the participants for agreeing to participate in the study. As mentioned, the recordings were transcribed and shared with the participants for checking and review. I also informed them that should the need arise, I would be requesting follow-up sessions. I also told each participant that we would meet as a group for a focus group discussion. After my supervisor had checked the transcription of one of the participants, she suggested I probe further as details were missing. I then contacted the relevant participants, and follow-up sessions were conducted. The participants were more relaxed during the follow-up interview and provided more information. Again, this is indicative of the process of relationship building.

3.8.2 Photovoice

Photovoice is a form of participatory research that lets participants take photos of their lived reality (Cohen et al., 2018). Kumar (2011) and Creswell and Creswell (2018) state that photo voice allows participants to take photos of things of relevance and importance to them concerning the study. Participants were asked to take photographs of aspects that influenced their experiences of school, home, and community life, which they would be comfortable discussing as a group. This was to respond to research question two, which sought to understand the various factors influencing their experiences. These photographs were sent to me, printed and used during the focus group discussion. All participants had access to phones to take pictures. The photographs taken by participants gave the researcher valuable insight into disadvantaged learners' experiences and perspectives (Rahman, 2016).

Ebrahimpour et al. (2015) assert that photovoice is an innovative method of collecting data and claim that it can provide deep and rich information about critical societal issues. For instance, some participants took photographs highlighting the lack of service delivery for marginalised communities and its impact on learners' lives. As participants critically reflected on their lived experiences, it also made them critically aware of their lives, the inequalities they experienced and who they believed was responsible for this (Tsang, 2020). The critical reflection process made participants more aware of disparities shaping their lives. Their decisions to take kinds of photographs indicate their critical capacity to understand their worlds and the existing inequality. One could argue that this is an empowering process that challenged participants to think about how to resist oppressive systems. For example, some participants indicated that they felt the need to do well at school to get out of poverty in the future.

The visual images produced by participants allowed a stimulating sharing of experiences and knowledge (Wang & Burris, 1997). This was achieved by taking photos of issues and things that participants perceived impacted their social lives and educational experiences, which may not be achieved through other data collection methods. Tsang (2020) argues that interviews may not be able to reflect and express participants' lived experiences meaningfully. In contrast, photovoice achieved this by allowing the participants to express their thoughts, feelings, and views as visual images.

Photovoice was a relevant and valuable method of data collection for this study. It allowed the participants to decide what was important to them as challenges and pertinent enablers for discussion. It made them more comfortable as they reflected and discussed their experiences. This participatory method reflects how participants became co-constructors of knowledge (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In some cases, participants were amazed that they shared similar challenges and the agency they possessed to overcome them. In sharing their experiences, ideas on dealing with challenges were also shared. The photographs also provided validity to data collected during the interview process (Cohen et al., 2018) and constituted a form of triangulation.

3.8.3 Focus group interviews

Before commencing the focus group discussion, I sought permission from the Deputy Principal to use the hostel. The focus group discussion was held at the school hostel dining room, which allowed the group privacy and no distractions as the hostel was not being used. Before starting the discussion, I reiterated that everything disclosed during the meeting was to be confidential. The focus group discussion was held during the sports time, which is an hour. Fortunately, all participants were free due to non-participation in any sporting fixtures. Participants who had provided me with photos consented to display them and allow for discussion around them. I started the discussion by introducing each participant by their pseudonyms and asking that these names be used during the discussion. Due to limited time, I could not begin with icebreaker questions and was forced to delve straight into my interview questions. This, however, did not disadvantage the data collection process, as the participants could still speak freely. The discussion was recorded with the consent of the participants.

According to Cohen et al. (2018), focus groups comprise individuals who interact to discuss a particular issue. As a result, Cyr (2015) highlights that it allows the researcher to collect multiple individual reactions simultaneously. According to Du Plooy-Cilliers et al. (2020), this interaction is the main advantage of a focus group, as interaction is purposefully used to generate data. Creswell and Creswell (2018) and Cohen et al. (2018) contend that focus groups allow for the collection of rich collective data instead of individual responses.

This was achieved during the focus group session as participants contributed and built on views expressed by others (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Cyr, 2015). Apart from the two participants who contributed little to the discussion, the others were comfortable and spoke freely. The two participants became more relaxed as the discussion progressed, contributing more effectively. The questions were based on all three research questions; however, photos taken by some participants were only part of my second research question, which was based on the effects of socio-economic challenges on their education. Once I displayed the photos and centred the conversation around them, these participants were eager to share their perspectives and experiences. It was enlightening and allowed me to gather rich data. Cyr (2015) contends that focus groups allow for debating differences that may arise from the evidence. The conversation and debate led to rich information being generated during the process. This researcher also indicates in this way that participants' views and ideas generate in-depth data unattainable from individual interview sessions, which was noticeable in this study.

Furthermore, Creswell and Creswell (2014) add that this data collection strategy allows for interaction and a wide range of responses with participants' memories activated to remember forgotten details relevant to their experiences and provides for releasing inhibitions. In most instances, participants shared similar experiences, agreeing and adding to each other's viewpoints. During the session, participants were respectful and considerate of each other's views, and the process went smoothly. The one limitation I experienced with the focus group discussion was that there was not enough time, as the discussion was rich and detailed. However, I had to make pragmatic decisions as I had gathered sufficient data to reveal participants' experiences, the factors that influenced their experiences and what they did to overcome the challenges they encountered.

3.9 Data Analysis

Kumar (2011) and Cohen et al. (2017) note that a large amount of data is produced in qualitative research and suggest that data collected must be reduced for patterns, categories and themes to emerge. This data reduction process allows the researcher to make sense of the data. I translated the data verbatim once the interview and focus group process were complete. For this study, inductive analysis was appropriate as it allowed

themes and categories to emerge, and patterns were detected, leading to interpretations (Cohen et al., 2017).

As the data collected has little meaning in its raw form, the data analysis process is essential in understanding the textual and visual data collected in this study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I transcribed the data from the recorded interviews verbatim to begin the data analysis. I then read the transcripts repeatedly to familiarise myself with the data and to give me an idea of the content. This is because "text data are dense data, and it takes a long time to go through them and make sense of them" (Creswell, 2014, p. 152). Thematic data analysis is used to analyse qualitative data and involves systematically identifying, analysing and deducing themes (Clarke & Braun, 2017). After familiarising myself with the data, I attached codes to phrases across the data to find meanings and make sense of the data (Kumar, 2011).

Here, I coded data into manageable chunks and provided a list of codes for these chunks. From the list of codes generated, codes that displayed similar meanings were grouped to form categories. These categories were examined to identify connections and further reduced using the same process of what was similar and different. This eventually resulted in the formation of themes. Themes were reviewed to ensure they aligned with the critical research questions about the study. The deductive approach was then used, and this involves researchers having a theoretical framework or concepts beforehand and using this together with literature to analyse data (Kumar, 2011). During the data analysis process, concepts from Bourdieu's theoretical framework and literature reviewed were used to analyse and make sense of the data.

3.10 Trustworthiness of the data

Trustworthiness in qualitative research comprises credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2020).

Du Plooy-Cilliers et al. (2020) and Cohen et al. (2018) define credibility as how accurately the researcher interprets the data provided by participants and accurately reflects the way the study investigated what it intended to do. The data collected was not tampered with during the presentation to ensure credibility in this study. Data collected

was stored on my personal laptop ensuring that I was the only one that could access the data. Credibility was achieved by recording the interviews and producing verbatim transcripts of individual and focus group interviews, which were returned to participants to check and verify. Furthermore, credibility ensures that the original data collected are shown in the findings and that the research reflects the reality and lived experiences of the participants. Du Plooy-Cilliers et al. (2020) suggest that triangulation be used to increase the study's credibility. Triangulation, as defined by Rule and John (2011), involves using multiple methods to collect data. Therefore, this study employed three data-generating methods to increase its credibility: semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews and photovoice.

Dependability refers "to the quality of the process of integration between the data collection method, data analysis and theory generated from the data" (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2020, p. 259). This means there should be rigour in analysing the data that links with the methodology used. I achieved this by thoroughly explaining the research process. In addition, dependability was achieved through triangulation by using multiple sources of data collection and participants checking and verifying transcribed data.

Confirmability refers to the confidence one has in the data collected and how this supports the findings and interpretations of the study (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2020). This is also a way to ensure that the researcher's bias may have been alleviated (Rule & John, 2011). According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), confirmability shows that findings from data collected are shaped by the participants and not by the researcher. To confirm the quality of the study, participants were given copies of the transcripts of their interviews to check that information was accurately interpreted, review and edit any responses and verify the data. Further, the fact that I was a teacher in the school meant that I had to reflect on my own biases constantly. This was done through the journaling process I used to discuss with my supervisor. In this way, issues of bias were reduced.

Transferability focuses on whether the findings of a study can be generalised. Transferability allows evidence from the research to be applied to similar situations, producing comparable results (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2020). This was difficult to achieve in this study as it was a small group of only six participants. Creswell and Creswell (2018) assert that with qualitative research, generalisation is rejected but

suggests that a connection between elements of one study and one's own experience can be made. I hope the descriptions of the research process and the data findings will help future researchers in this area.

3.11 Ethical considerations

Creswell and Creswell (2018) assert that ethical issues must be considered during each step of the research process. Likewise, Kumar (2011) states that ethical considerations are essential to research. The dignity and rights of research participants must be acknowledged and respected. Three ethical principles, namely, autonomy, non-maleficence and beneficence, were adhered to in this study (Kumar, 2011). Autonomy entails getting consent from participants of the study. Non-maleficence implies that the research should not harm anyone in any respect, and beneficence is how the research will benefit the research participants (Kumar, 2011).

The critical paradigm offered participants ways of examining their beliefs and ideologies, which informed their worldviews and how they described their experiences. The interview process allowed participants to reflect on their experiences and recognise, for example, that they possessed agency despite their challenges (Scotland, 2012).

As indicated above, autonomy is the valuable process of obtaining consent from various gatekeepers and participants to conduct the study (Bertram & Christiansen, 2020). Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Kwa-Zulu Natal Department of Education (DoE) (see Appendix A). The University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) Ethics Committee, the school principal (See Appendix B) where the study will be conducted, was also asked to provide permission as this was a necessary means to ensure ethical research is conducted. Further consent was sought from the parents or guardians of the participants as these were school-going learners (See Appendix C). Finally, consent was also obtained from each participant, who must sign a consent form indicating their willingness to participate in the study (See Appendix D). In social research, consent and cooperation of the subjects assisting in the investigation must be obtained (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Informed consent, according to Cohen et al. (2018), allows the participants to choose whether they want to be part of the study.

Additionally, according to Kumar (2011), informed consent means that participants must be told what is expected of them from participation and that participation is voluntary. After individually explaining the purpose of the study and receiving consent, each participant was given a participant and parent consent form to take home and discuss with their parents before agreeing to be part of the study. Both consent letters explained the study's nature, purpose, focus and expectations.

Cohen et al. (2018) suggest that confidentiality is one way of protecting the rights of participants. This is one of the first steps in ensuring that no harm is done to participants. Researchers refer to this as the process of non-maleficence (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The participants were allowed to remain anonymous and chose pseudonyms to protect their identities. They were made aware that all information would be treated with confidentiality. The reason for anonymity is that information provided by participants would in no way reveal their identity, and the data generated will not be disclosed (Cohen et al., 2018). This research topic and questions are sensitive; therefore, anonymity is essential. The participants were consequently assured that they had ownership of themselves and, in keeping with the critical paradigm, withdrew or refused to answer any questions that made them uncomfortable. Furthermore, permission was obtained to record the interviews and use the participant's photos. Semi-structured interviews and the focus group interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Creswell and Creswell (2018) assert that it is also essential for respondents to know the benefits of a study. Participants will be made aware that even though the study will not bring about change, it will create awareness and knowledge regarding the educational experiences of disadvantaged learners. As the study could trigger emotions in recalling experiences, I sought the assistance of a registered social worker from the local hospital to be available should the need arise (See Appendix F). However, none of the participants made use of the counselling services offered. This, I believe, can be attributed to the relationship-building process and how participants and I conducted ourselves to ensure that respect, trust and accountability for the wellbeing of one another was assured.

3.12 Limitations

Kumar (2011) defines limitations as constraints within a study over which the researcher has no control. Since the study is a single case study with only six participants from low socio-economic backgrounds, findings from this study cannot be generalised. However, it must be stated that I wish to provide a contextual understanding of learners' experiences to contribute to knowledge in this area of interest. Another issue relates to my positionality as a researcher to the participants so that they do not confuse this with my position as a teacher in the school. Before the research started, I explained that I was a researcher and not a teacher during the research process. I also explained that they had control of the research process as they could choose what to reveal to me. To alleviate bias, my supervisor and peers were my critical friends to ensure my position was not biased. However, I also acknowledge the possibility of bias as participants may have responded in ways they thought would suit me.

3.13 Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the research design and methodology used to address the study's key research questions and justified why these were appropriate for my study. In addition, the chapter discussed the research context, data generation methods and sampling procedures. This was followed by a discussion of how trustworthiness and ethical considerations were ensured.

The following chapter presents, analyses, discusses and interprets the findings of the study.

CHAPTER 4
DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter delved into the research methodology and design choices underpinning this study. In this chapter, I present and interpret data generated during the study. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews and photovoice, as discussed in the previous chapter. Bourdieu's (1998) theory of practice was used to analyse the learning experiences of learners from low socio-economic contexts in relation to the key research questions of the study. The following research questions guide the analysis:

- What are the educational experiences of learners from low socio-economic backgrounds?
- What are the inclusionary and exclusionary factors that influence the learning and social experiences of learners?
- How do learners navigate the exclusionary factors they encounter?

The chapter is divided into three sections, each responding to the research questions.

The first section (section 4.2) addresses the first research question. I focus on how learners from low socio-economic backgrounds experience education under the theme of the *Influence of socioeconomic status on learners' experiences of school*. I discuss this concerning their experiences of learning in English, the physical costs of walking to school and feelings of inferiority. This is based on their experiences at the individual and social level.

The second section (section 4.3) addresses the second research question. It must be noted, however, that the factors also illuminate their experiences. This is because the various factors influenced how they experienced schooling and their social lives at the institution or field of schooling and social level, under the theme *Effects of socio-economic challenges on learners.* I discuss factors related to their poor quality of life and their effect on the participants. These factors are time-demanding household chores, water and

electricity supply disruption, and dangers that learners face when walking to school. However, data also suggests that despite facing many adversities, participants did not allow it to overwhelm them and wallow in self-pity. It is also important to note that home and community life are intertwined with the educational life of learners.

The third section (section 4.4) responds to the final research question. Under the theme of *Learners' support structures and strategies to navigate and negotiate education, I* discuss various ways in which the learners in this study navigated and negotiated their educational and social lives. Data suggests supportive families, friends, teachers, and education were imperative for academic success and potential social mobility.

4.2 Influences of socioeconomic status on learners' experiences of school

This section addresses the first research question. This theme focuses on learners' schooling experiences and their feelings and emotions regarding their experiences.

4.2.1 Experiences of learning in English: "*I am struggling to learn in English".*

The language issue loomed large in the participants' lives, and participants constantly referred to it. The power and dominance associated with the English language alienated participants, as Madhadaze (2019) argued, due to their lack of linguistic capital. The consequences of not being fluent in the dominant English language left them feeling disempowered and unprepared for school expectations. The challenges black learners experience with teaching and learning in English are expressed in the excerpts below.

> Nolan: "*It comes as a challenge to me. Learning English is fine even though I sometimes battle because it is not my mother tongue*". (SSI)

> Moses: "*Somethings I hear, something I do not hear. I need someone to translate for me in Zulu. It is easy for me to write to talk; it is hard".* (FG)
> *"Because the English words Miss sometimes, they are tough".* (SSI)

> Akhona: *"Sometimes I understand, sometimes I feel it is almost weird*" ……
> "*Sometimes we go out to the class, then I will ask my classmates what the teacher is talking about; when I am alone, I don't understand everything".*

When questioned on how she completes her work, Akhona responded:

> *"I find ways the teacher will not see. I'm scared when the teacher is going to shout, I copy someone."* (SSI)

> Snegugu: "*I am struggling to learn in English; it is difficult.*" (SSI)

> Ziyanda: "*As she was saying, they correct us, but if you want them to help you if there is an assessment, you go to a girl or boy that you know is sharp in that language, so they check your assessment and tell you maybe it is right*". (FG)

Learners' utterances suggest a disconnect with the dominant culture's language. Their inability to understand and speak the language makes it "*weird*". Participant*s* "*struggle*" and "*battle*" and find the English language "*difficult*" because it is "*not my mother tongue*". These words used by Nolan, Snegugu and Akhona show that they have not acquired the linguistic habitus and capital necessary for the field of school (DiGiorgio, 2009). The disconnect with the dominant language that is "*tough*" is so disempowering for Moses that "*sometimes I hear, somethings I do not hear*" and where communication in English is "*hard*". In the field of school, the rules and expectations of the school have already been set both consciously and unconsciously. According to Bourdieu (1991), English is a power broker in this field. The learners above are powerless because their language is not valued or prized as the language of success. The participants face a field where language inequalities exist and one that they find difficult to negotiate.

However, some attempt to negotiate this disempowering field of the classroom and school. They turn to their classmates who possess the necessary linguistic and cultural capital for assistance in understanding content, thus ensuring they are not 'left behind'. Moses recognises this language deficit and "*needs someone to translate for me*". The words, however, show his discomfort and desperation of relying on someone else to "*hear"* through translating the content in his language. He does not even speak about profoundly understanding and engaging with the content.

Akhona, however, negotiates the difficulty she experiences by turning to her "*classmates*", who help her understand what the teacher has said. Like Moses, the

difficulty of English is confusing because when she is on her own, she cannot "*understand everything*". Thus, her sense of agency in going to her classmates helps her grasp the content. This shows that Akhona, like Moses, has internalised their agency and has taken ownership of their learning by taking the initiative to approach classmates who possess knowledge. Her classmates are the resources and align with Bourdieu's (1986) understanding of the importance of social networks in accessing social capital. Moses and Akhona's excerpts show similar experiences and are reminiscent of a study by Romero-Morena and Vargas-Urpi (2022). Romero-Moreno and Vargas-Urpi (2022, p. 428) refer to children helping others with language as 'child language brokering'. For them, it occurs as part of a relational act and is a 'language gift'. Similar to their study, the rewards for helping are based on caring and selfless helping.

Forging relationships with peers who came from advantaged backgrounds and were fluent in English was common among five of the participants. According to Pascoe (2019), establishing networks is essential for disadvantaged learners to gain social and cultural capital they lack and support as they navigate the field. For Ziyanda, peers were willing to help check her assessments as they were "*sharp on that language*" and able to "*check her assessments and tell if is right*". This decision to forge relationships with those with linguistic and socioeconomic capital can be seen as one where there is genuine forging of relationships based on caring and helping, or it could be seen as one where relationships have value. In attempting to gain the 'stock' or 'currency' (Bourdieu, 1984, pp. 128-129) that is English, these participants develop relationships for particular reasons, mainly to gain cultural and linguistic capital. The support peers offer will help them develop the academic disposition and habitus valued by the school.

Attempting to acquire the linguistic capital that English brings also shows the length to which people must go to survive in a world that English dominates. Akhona embarrassingly admitted that she could not complete her homework because she did not understand. To avoid punishment, she "*finds ways to copy someone*" because she is "*afraid the teacher is going to shout*". Language is a dominant language that holds symbolic values and power (Bourdieu, 1991) and being deficient in this linguistic capital results in punishment, as experienced by participants in this study. The punishment being meted out by the teacher is not to correct and help him understand the language but rather punitive, resulting in the distancing between teacher and learner.

Moreover, the punitive act of shouting stems from the expectations of the field that govern the teacher's behaviour (Flynn, 2015) and reproduces the understanding that English is not for everyone. Bourdieu (1991) argues that the field quite unconsciously forms the habitus of those within it. For the teacher, the idea that learners cannot play the rules of the English game becomes a means for them to disempower and marginalise the most vulnerable learners.

Add to the understanding of teachers as sources of disempowerment, another critical aspect that emerged from the data is a sense of exclusion and a lack of support from teachers in the school. Naidoo et al. (2018) have shown in their study how the influence of teachers' cultural and racial backgrounds was a source of isolation and alienation for learners. Hunter (2015) also brings in the concept of socio-economic status, which influences how teachers relate to learners who do not possess the accoutrements associated with being middle class. Being deficient in the economic, linguistic, cultural, social and symbolic capital results in the following:

> Suzanne: "*It's just that they teach and expect higher marks from you because they grew up studying like that. They do not understand when you come from the rural area [where] education is not a top class, you know. So, when we come here, that's the whole problem because we all grew up speaking different languages, most of us get confused*". (FG)

> Nolan: "*Sometimes when you completely fail, you lose interest, and you feel you are not going to make it, and you know certain subjects, maybe English, History, you are disinterested now because you know that you are going to fail anyway".* (SSI)

> Akhona: "*I am scared to talk to the teachers; maybe they will laugh at me [teachers]; sometimes they don't want to talk to us; they think you are lying if you ask too many questions*". (SSI)

> Ziyanda: "*Some teachers don't see if the learners don't understand".* (SSI)

These excerpts suggest that the field of school and the classroom, in particular, renders learners powerless. According to Bourdieu (1986), this may be due to learners from low-income backgrounds unable to access and acquire cultural capital associated with knowing and learning English. This is seen, for example, in Suzanne's utterances, where one can see a habitus-field incongruence as her dispositions are not in line with the school's (Hart, 2019). Lack of perception in this regard fails to be responsive to the needs of all their learners. This exclusionary practice is seen by the "*high expectations*" where everyone is expected to meet the expectations and rules within the grasp of first language speakers.

Here, one could argue that the English language is being used as a tool of symbolic violence by having the same expectations for all the learners. Seemingly, to "play by the rules of the game", learners are expected to possess this linguistic capital for academic success (Chisholm, 2021). The question is how learners are meant to "play the game" when they do not have access to the rules of the games in the form of much-needed support that would level the playing field. However, the pressure exerted by teachers of high expectations could be based on pedagogical decisions as teachers are aware of the expectations of higher education and the curriculum demands of a high school and English as a language of empowerment. This is similar to the study conducted by Martin (2016), who found that having high expectations of learners was a way to empower learners and support and build their confidence. In this way, teachers are finding ways for learners to acquire a new habitus that supports a brighter future.

The lack of support from teachers is found in other ways. Ziyanda speaks of the blindness of teachers to their needs where "*some of the teachers don't see if the learners don't understand*". This implies that teachers fail to recognise that learners lack cultural resources, which affects how they experience being taught in English. White paper 6 (2001) highlights the language of instruction as a significant barrier to learning. This blindness, where the pain of learners' inability to access learning and support is made invisible as teachers "*don't see*", results in them unconsciously failing to address the

diverse needs of their learners. This invisibility results in learners perceiving this as a lack of support and understanding.

Suzanne extends the invisibility metaphor as she points to the lack of teacher knowledge about the learning backgrounds of the learners in their classes. She critically comments that the teachers do not understand what they were exposed to in rural area education. She raises a particularly concerning aspect surrounding the quality of "*rural area education*" where the education they were exposed to was "*not top class*". This understanding is in keeping with studies conducted by van den Berg (2016) and du Plessis and Mestry (2019) that show the lack of quality education in rural primary schools where learners do not get a good grounding in the language. In this regard, parents from townships and rural areas make financial sacrifices to send their children to predominantly White, Indian and Coloured schools so that their children can become proficient in the dominant language (Madhadaze, 2019). However, the decision of her and her parents to go to an English medium school does not allow her to gain knowledge because there are no supporting learning blocks. Speaking "*different languages*" is not a resource but instead shows a deficiency because the field of school reproduces the hegemony of English and reinforces that "*different languages*" is problematic. Because of the continued support for English results in her and others like her to be "*confused*".

For this reason, Postma and Postma (2011) and Madhadaze (2019) argue that the lack of support has led to inequalities in education as learners experience difficulties in accessing knowledge and content in a language that is not their first language. Teachers find it difficult to find ways to effectively teach these learners to enable them to access the curriculum. This means these learners are present in the class but are passive learners as they are not actively accessing knowledge (Madhadaze, 2019). According to Janks (2004), English as a means of empowerment and dominance can result in the exclusion of marginalised learners who lack proficiency in the language, resulting in what she refers to as the "access paradox". This access paradox is evident in the data above, where learners are exposed to the dominant language. The failure to provide access to support

means that learners are denied substantive access, and thus, their marginalisation is assured. Ultimately, the result is the naturalisation of the hegemony and dominance of the English language (Berminghman et al., 2022).

The consequences of exposure to poor quality education in primary school and a lack of support from teachers in their high school have consequences. Participants like Nolan and Akhona show they cannot acquire the habitus compatible with the school's expectations. Being unable to access the linguistic habitus causes Nolan to "*lose interest*" and be disinterested. For him, inevitable failure lurks: "*You are going to fail anyway*". Social justice theorist Tatum (2000) argues such sentiments have two consequences. Firstly, in situations of such unequal power relationships and where teachers' prejudice is evident in disinterest and a lack of support, Nolan loses interest and gives up. This can be seen as an act of defiance to protect themselves from further disappointment and failure. Secondly, however, and more dangerous, according to Tatum (2000), is the collusion with one's oppression as giving up and not trying results in Nolan not getting the valued skills needed to negotiate the field of English learning. Akhona acknowledges that she does not have the required habitus because of his fear of ridicule from his teachers, "*who don't want to talk to us' or who think 'you are lying if you ask too many questions*". The teacher and Akhona's vertical relationship suggests teachers' power as agents. The teachers' denial of rights and support may be unconscious or conscious (Hardiman & Jackson, 1997). Either way, it results in participants being disempowered and marginalised based on age and language.

4.2.2 Physical cost of walking to school*: "I sleep in class".*

Data from the focus group and individual interviews revealed that the participants travelled long distances to access education. For some, walking was the only transport mode, leaving them exhausted even before the commencement of the school day. Exhaustion may reduce learners' concentration during lessons and hinder their learning ability, affecting their academic performance (Schlebusch et al., 2022). This was evident from the participants' experiences below:

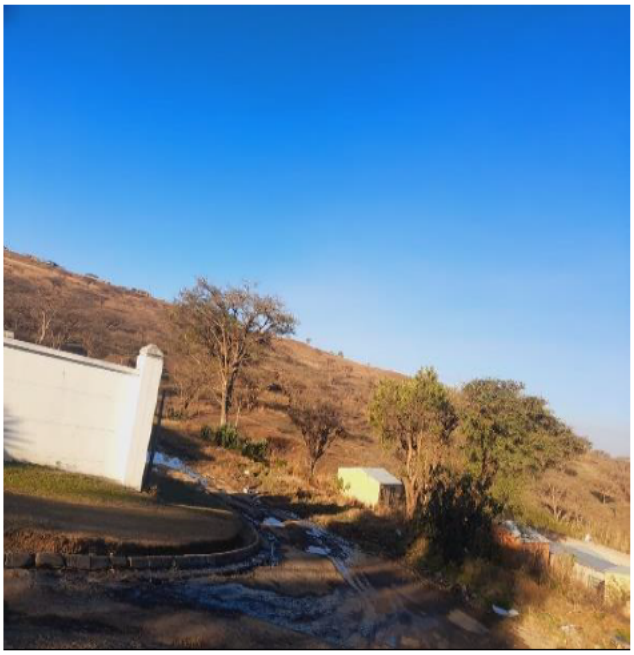

Figure 4-1: Moses' route over the hills

Figure 4-2: Route to school for Ziyanda and Akhona

Suzanne: "*It takes half an hour to get to school. When there is a free period, I sleep or relax and drink water. It affects my concentration a lot. I can't listen; it's like I am listening, but I am not there. That's how tired I get*". (SSI)

Nolan: "*I walk to school, and sometimes when it's raining, my books get wet, and you know your energy is gone coming to school here already. You are exhausted because it is very far from where the school is. Sometimes you nap, maybe for a few minutes, before you get ready for the whole process*". (FG)

Moses: "*It's hard for me to walk to school. It takes maybe one to two hours. The school closes the gate, and I miss the first period because I come late every morning*". (FG*)*

When questioned how this affects him, he responded:

"*I usually sleep in class because I am tired. It affects me because I don't know much about schoolwork when I am writing exams. I need to know more information, but I got little information*".

Ziyanda: "*I may get tired, maybe in period 1 or 2. I might miss the first period and catch up using my friends' notes or ask my classmate*s". (SSI)

The experiences of participants in Mahlaba's (2014) and Pillay's (2021) study are similar to those of the participants in this study regarding the distance they had to travel to and from school. Most of the participants in this study were forced to walk long distances to school as their parents did not have the economic means to pay for transport. Schlebush et al.'s (2022) study revealed that walking was the only mode of transport for some learners, which concurs with some of the participants' experiences in this study.

It can be discerned from the responses that walking to school was a barrier to learning; as Nolan asserts before his school day began, his "*energy is gone*", and he is "*exhausted".* This exhaustion results in him taking "*a nap*", while Moses admits that he "*sleep*[s] *in class*". The participants' responses illustrate the impact of walking long distances on their abilities to participate effectively in their learning. Suzanne claims to only "*sleep or relax*" when she has a free period. Even though Suzanne does not sleep during lessons, she is still disadvantaged as exhaustion hinders her "*concentration*", resulting in her being inattentive and disengaged during lessons, as reported in Schlebusch et al.'s study (2022).

From Nolan, Suzanne, and Moses' responses, it can be concluded that walking a long distance does affect learners' concentration during lessons, as corroborated in Schlebusch et al.'s (2022) study. Moreover, research by Shah (2023) in the United States shows that having to travel long distances tends to impact those with the intersecting identities of race, socio-economic status and age, representing systemic or structural inequality. For the participants in this study, this is compounded by historical inequality associated with apartheid in South Africa that zoned people into particular areas without access to quality schooling. These learners, who are participants in this study, are attempting to acquire the privileges of the middle class by commuting long distances to school. However, this aspiration has dire consequences for the learners, which is evident in the lack of concentration during lessons, impeding their learning and academic achievement. Moses gave an example: when writing exams, he "*needs to know more information, but* [he] *has small information*". He acknowledges that the little information he has grasped in class is insufficient for him to write his exams successfully, and this will ultimately affect his academic results and could result in his failing. He loses out on the much-needed cultural capital needed to negotiate schooling.

Ziyanda is often late because of her long route to school (see Figure 4-2). However, she demonstrates agency by ensuring she is not left behind by accessing her support network of "*friends or classmates*". Moses' chronic late arrival due to his arduous path to school (see Figure 4-1) results in him being locked out of school and often late for "*the first*

period". Similarly, the participants in the study by Schlebusch et al. (2022) also missed class in the morning due to late arrival. For learners such as Moses, this can be construed as a form of institutional inequality as he is prevented from accessing education because of the inefficiencies in the education system (Hardiman & Jackson, 1997). The participants are powerless and cannot challenge the status quo (Bell, 1997). According to Bourdieu (1991), there is evidence of symbolic violence as the dominant practices of the school impose symbolic violence on Moses, who fails to conform. Instead, Moses is punished and blamed for arriving late to school despite the effort he displays by walking two hours to get to school. This navigational capital, the act of negotiating long-distance constraints imposed by systemic inequality and displaying his sense of agency and independence (Shah, 2023), is, however, ignored by the school, only focuses on the idea that he has arrived late, and this goes against school rules, and thus he should be punished. Thus, his efforts to get to school result in him missing out on knowledge he cannot afford, as he missed the first period. What this means for disadvantaged groups is that to be a member of a particular field, they must accept and play by the rules (Wacquant & Bourdieu, 1992); if they do not comply, then they are punished.

4.2.3 Feelings of inferiority*: "We feel discouraged".*

In this study, children from disadvantaged backgrounds experienced various emotions when comparing themselves to their wealthier peers. For some, feelings of inferiority emerged that impacted their ability to develop their educational and social relationships with peers. The following experiences are from focus group and individual interviews.

> Akhona: "*I don't care about what they [other learners] are doing because we don't come from those families. Our parents are not working; their parents are working, and they can manage. I don't care about that*". *(SSI)*

> Moses: "*It makes me sad because there is no money; I cannot just say [to my parents] but how give me money, when there is no money*".

When asked if having no money is a problem in school, Moses indicated:

"*Someone [other learners] say that I don't have money to eat, so that's really hurting*". (SSI)

Ziyanda: "*I feel so bad, and sometimes I even wish to quit school and look for a job, but I don't even know where to start because I don't even have a matric certificate. I feel so frustrated and don't understand; sometimes I ask those questions: why me? Why do these things happen to me? But I hope one day I will be able to change the situation.*

"*You know what, Miss, all these things happen to us; it makes me feel strong*". (FG)

Nolan*:* "*I really feel tired most of the time. I feel that I should I was not meant to be happy. I am not enjoying life; even the education teachers give me, I feel it isn't very helpful. Nothing is progressing in my life…sometimes I feel it is a heavy burden*".

"*Some of us feel like nothing will work in our lives; we feel discouraged thinking you must go through all these challenges to go to school is a big challenge*". (FG)

"*One of the challenges I experience at school is being discriminated against, such as saying that, oh! It is this child who usually asks teachers, you know, for food parcels because most of the time, I usually carry my packets. When I go out of school, it makes me feel like a beggar or something like that. So, the children started to laugh at me, saying Nolan is a beggar and two discriminations from my background because some of the children know*

where I stay. So, they say Nolan stays in an informal settlement and judges me". (SSI)

Suzanne: "*I feel like my situation can change, but I have to be patient about it. It does make me sad at some point, but I face it*". (SSI)

Bourdieu (1990) argues that the habitus provides a window into people's lives. Here, the window presented is that the participants' daily social and economic lives are steeped in abject poverty, where unemployment, "*our parents are not working*", is normalised and "*there is no money*" for everyday life. There is conscious knowing from Ziyanda, Moses, Nolan and Akhona that their world is an unequal one and that their poverty is a "product of history" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 54-56.).

Poverty also informs of the relationship between the participants' habitus and their relationships with their peers, as social circumstances like poverty inform social relationships. For Akhona, Moses and Nolan, one can see a fractured relationship with their peers. Within the field of the school, learners from low socio-economic backgrounds are positioned as unworthy and within the hierarchy of power, they are ranked at the bottom because "*their parents are working, and they can manage*". Having economic and cultural capital allows the learners who are richer to influence relationships. Akhona reiterates that "[she] *doesn't care*". She recognises a difference in social class status between her and her peers, accepting that their parents have the economic capital to support their children. In contrast, her unemployed parents lack the means to do so.

The narratives also signal a profoundly emotional response to their circumstances of poverty. For example, Akhona's repeated utterances of "*I don't care*" signals an emotional reaction from anger that belies the pain and insensitivity of her classmates. Anger here becomes an emotional resource to hide the pain. Ahmed, cited in Zembylas (2003), indicates this is because of relations that signal differences. Moses also feels "*sad*" because of his family's lack of economic capital, which is the reason his advantaged or

more affluent peer humiliates him for not having "*money to eat*", which is "*hurting*" him. This could also be seen as an example of symbolic violence because his low social class status is a constant reminder amongst his peers. This could result in feelings of pain and humiliation. These feelings of inferiority were also expressed in the study by Naidoo, Pillay and Conley (2018). The perpetrators may be unaware of the fact that their behaviour is emotionally damaging and may lead to them disconnecting and isolating themselves socially. What is also significant is that the persistent inequality has honed his habitus where he is sensitive to the situation at home, knowing that "*I cannot just say but how, give me money when there is no money*". One can see his attempt to discipline his emotions of hurt and pain as he knows that his home circumstances do not allow him to access money freely. Zembylas (2003) asserts that disciplining emotions is a way to cope.

A study by Lobi and Kheswa (2017) shows that children from low socio-economic backgrounds often drop out of school to supplement their family income. This holds because Ziyanda has also considered "*quitting school*" to find "*jobs".* She realises this may be futile as she does not possess a "*matric certificate*". This certificate is a form of institutionalised capital (Bourdieu, 1991) that holds value, particularly for a learner living in a rural area. However, having this certificate causes her to believe that it will open possibilities for her. She further expresses her "*frustration*" at her social class status, questioning, "*Why me*". This questioning of her life could be due to the visible disparities in the distribution of resources and opportunities that she is deprived of while her middle-class counterparts have this in abundance.

Her utter despair surrounds her frustration as she knows that having social, economic and cultural capital enables her advantaged peers to navigate the education field without any challenges contributing to their academic success. However, Ziyanda displays resilience as she has "*hope*" and is confident that her situation will "*change*". Hope is the emotional resource that helps her build her emotional capital (Zembylas, 2003; 2007) so that she can continue in the future. She has embraced the emotion of "*hope*", which, according to Zembylas (2003), encourages and motivates individuals to work towards self-

transformation to achieve success. She holds onto this hope, believing that her future will be brighter. For Ziyanda, the difficulties and challenges she is experiencing have helped build resilience as she navigates these adversities, asserting that they "*make her strong*". These difficulties and challenges she faces are due to unjust practices that reproduce and sustain cycles of inequalities in society (Zembylas & Chubbuck, 2009).

Suzanne expressed similar sentiments, believing her "*situation*" is not permanent and "*can change*". She realises this "*change*" will not happen overnight as she acknowledges she must be "*patient*". Patience and aspiration are the 'stock' resources to build her emotional capital. Suzanne can achieve this by having hope and working hard towards achieving social mobility. Zembylas and Chubbuck (2009) assert that emotions can be used to challenge societal norms on injustices and inequalities. Learners from low socio-economic backgrounds believe that achieving a certain level of education will provide economic security in the future and is an essential factor for resilience (Agasisti et al., 2021). Thus, participants recognised that investing in education is necessary to gain 'existing stock' (Bourdieu, 1989) and cultural capital. Suzanne is oblivious that structural impediments, such as poverty (Spaull, 2015; 2019), may impede her efforts.

Nolan's experience of discrimination is like the findings of Pillay (2021), which showed that learners from informal settlements were humiliated and discriminated against based on the home environment. Out of concern for his well-being, his teachers provide him with groceries. Unfortunately, this has a negative effect as it makes his poverty visible, with some learners insensitive to his hardships, calling him a "*beggar*". Consequently, Nolan starts to "*feel like a beggar*", showing he has internalised the stereotype that all poor people are "*beggar*[s]". This labelling serves two functions: firstly, to isolate and dehumanise him. Secondly, making his poverty visible turns a selfless act on the part of the teacher into one of punishment and pain. Carrying the plastic bags out of the school meant he was visible to the entire school's gaze, reinforcing his difference. In the field of school, middle-class status is valued and affirmed, whilst being poor is marked as

'wrong'. Such stigmatisation, especially from peers from one's race group, may lead to disadvantaged learners feeling like outcasts.

In addition, Nolan seems to have internalised his low-class status and accepted this as permanent. The disempowering, unequal relationship with his peers has additional consequences: Nolan cannot see the immediate value of education, feeling it is "*worthless*". Lack of motivation and confidence for the disadvantaged stems from "learned helplessness", whereby children from poverty think it is pointless to work hard as they have no chance of upward mobility (Gibson & Barr 2017, p. 25). This could be due to his inability to adapt to the habitus of the school, as he lacks the necessary capital to make his educational experience positive. Not being able to meet the standards of the education system, which is structured around the middle-class culture, makes it "*a heavy burden*" for him. The reproduction of social inequalities in the education field, compounded by emotional trauma that they feel, is disconcerting for the target group, leaving them feeling "*discouraged*", as expressed by Nolan in the focus group interview.

Consequently, these feelings make learners sad, so they stop working hard and eventually leave school. This concurs with Zembylas' (2007) stance on emotional capital when he argues that it can perpetuate social inequalities as learners from low socio-economic backgrounds may have emotional difficulties that can influence how they experience schooling, which inevitably negatively affects their academic success.

4.3 Effects of socio-economic challenges on learners

This section responds to the second research question. I discuss factors that relate to and influence how learners experience their learning and social interactions and how this shaped and constructed their experiences as learners from low socio-economic backgrounds. For the most part, the participants related negative experiences; however, intertwined within the data, the participants' strength and resilience in navigating the challenges is evident.

4.3.1 Time-demanding household chores: "*I have to clean; I have to cook.*"

A study by Nkosi and Farhangpour (2017) shows that chores and responsibilities are prioritised in many homes over schoolwork. These demanding chores and responsibilities deprive learners of the time and energy required to focus on schoolwork. The data gathered shows the struggles and tensions participants experience in the home environment.

Figure 4-3: Ziyanda doing household chores

Nolan*:* "*Coming to school early in the morning, I have to wake up really, really early because I am the only old child in the house. I have to start a fire and cook for my grandmother, who is ill. So, I have to wake up very early to prepare everything, iron my clothes, and do everything. Sometimes, our electricity goes off and comes back on at night, and I usually sleep at that time, so I wake up early in the morning to do that. Sometimes, I get late for school because of all the hassles at home. Also, going back, I walk all the time*".

"*I had responsibilities even as a small child. I never had the freedom to go out and play with other children because I was responsible for staying at home, looking after my grandmother, washing the dishes, doing everything, and washing the clothes, which had a negative impact*". (SSI)

Suzanne: *"When I get home from school, I have to clean, and then I have to cook. Because my mother is trying like how I put this trying to like. How do I put this? Get Some income, you know, so I have to see my cousins and help my mother in the house when she's back. I don't get to do homework, and sometimes, even at school, I have to come and do my homework. Sometimes, I sleep late because I must study and do my chores. I have to multitask. I get angry most of the time, and my mother shouts at me. It's not easy".* (SSI)

Ziyanda: "*I have to deal with my child; I have to help my sisters with some homework even when I have my own because my mum is not educated, so I have to. It's so much work as we are writing our exams. When I come home, maybe my sister has some kind of work that they are writing tomorrow; I have to teach them first before I maybe it will happen if I have to deal with my work maybe now I am tired yah*". (SSI)

Akhona: "*When I am at my home in Hlathikhulu* [the rural area where Akhona lives], *I don't have time for many jobs. She's putting me under pressure to do this, and when I open the books, she ensures she finds jobs. I must do and take the child even when the child is quiet…so I must look after the child the whole day. I'm cleaning the house by myself like I am alone, I'm cooking, I'm doing everything*". (SSI)

Moses: "*I clean the house and cook; sometimes I'm looking after my grandfather's cows. I have little time to do my schoolwork. I'm tired, and I love sleeping*". (SSI)

Nkosi and Farhangpour (2017) study indicates that children often come late to school because of household chores they must complete in the morning. This is supported by Nolan, who contends that he is "*late for school because of hassle at home*". The "*hassle*s" he refers to are morning chores and taking care of his sick grandmother. He expresses his distress about being deprived of his childhood because he was given "*responsibilities at home*", which was a burden for him at such a young age. Nolan seems to resent that the responsibilities thrust onto him at such a young age have deprived him of his childhood. Dispositions and practices suggest a socialised way of life with responsibilities becoming part of the habitus (Hart, 2015). Part of his habitus is the yearning for a 'normal' childhood where he could play with other children.

Both genders were subjected to numerous household chores, inevitably leading to exhaustion and, as Moses asserts, "*little time for schoolwork*". Nkosi and Farhangpour (2017) assert that stress at home can affect academic performance, which is in line with Suzanne's utterances that she must "*multitask*" and is forced to sleep late to "*study*", so her education is not neglected. Household chores are a priority in these participants' households and are seen as instilling social and cultural responsibilities (Bajaj, 2009). Multi-tasking between chores and schoolwork shows agency and resilience on Suzanne's part, as she is aware of the importance of a good education to change her social class status. Her becoming "a*ngry*" can be attributed to her being socialised to accept that her mother holds the position of authority and control, which she cannot challenge and thus hides her anger (Vadivel et al., 2023).

Secondly, her anger could stem from her mother's lack of appreciation for her efforts, as she is not given time to focus on her schoolwork when her mother is at home, which shows that her mother fails to reciprocate her efforts. Chores taking precedence over schoolwork also shows children that more value is placed on social

responsibilities than on school (Nkosi & Farhangpour, 2017). Bajaj (2009) states that prioritising household chores is a way of instilling social and cultural responsibilities. In the field of the home, children are obliged to attend to chores and, after that, schoolwork. In the field of home, these are the 'rules of the game' which participants must adhere to. The problem is that it makes it difficult for children to value education devalued in their family context (Vadivel et al., 2023).

Ziyanda has been responsible for helping her siblings with their homework "*because her mom is not educated*" and cannot provide the necessary educational support. According to Adhanja et al. (2016), educated parents may have access to information and social networks to help their children. These learners, in turn, may possess tools of cultural capital that will contribute to their academic success (Chisholm, 2021). Reay (2004) asserts that one of the critical factors of cultural capital is educational knowledge and information that gives a mother confidence and a sense of empowerment to be involved in her child's education. However, Ziyanda's mother's lack of cultural capital has the opposite effect. In taking on the role usually reserved for a parent, she denies herself much-needed rest and time to do her work. One could also see the pressure on Ziyanda by her mother's illiteracy. She believes she has the resources and capital to allow her siblings to know the "rules of the game" in their school (Chisholm, 2021) and thus negotiate school more successfully. However, it is a catch-22 situation for her as the role she is asked to play to help her siblings in the future results in her inability to manage her academic life as she is "*tired*".

In addition to household chores, Akhona is subjected to verbal abuse by her mother, who is "*putting pressure*" on her to do household chores. It is concerning to note that Akhona's mother "*finds jobs*" when she "*opens her books*". While Akhona values and prioritises her education, her pursuit of it is consciously disrupted by her mother, who seems not to value it. Seemingly, her mother lacks the required knowledge about the education system and the demands and expectations of the

system on children (Njuguna, 2021). Thus, Akhona does not see her mother as a resource on which to depend.

Moreover, Njuguna (2021) asserts that most low-income parents have a low regard for education due to a lack of confidence in the education system stemming from negative educational experiences. Her mother's behaviour and attitudes could also stem from the fact that Akhona had a child at such a young age. Teenage mothers are viewed as social deviants, and parents are seen as failures (Mgbokwere et al.,2015). This could be the reason Akhona's mother is abusive, as she may be angry and disappointed in Akhona's choices.

4.3.2 Disruption in water and electricity supply: "*I borrow a phone or candles to study".*

The following data was extracted from focus group and individual interviews. Discussion in the focus group revolved around photos that participants took that detailed a lack of access to essential services like electricity and water, showing the municipality's invisibility of the needs of people experiencing poverty. In this regard, the participants' responses were as follows:

Figure 4-4: Ziyanda collecting firewood

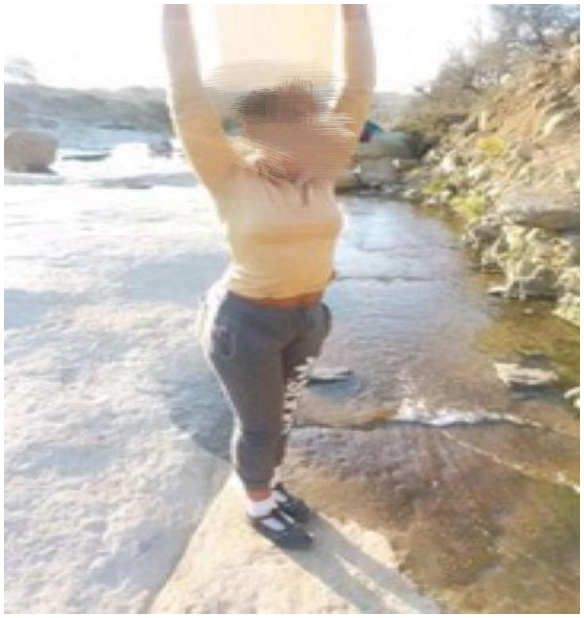

Figure 4-5: Ziyanda fetching water

Ziyanda: "*It affects us because we can't even study properly without electricity. We have to wait for the electricity; if there is loadshedding, it may come at 10 pm, so we must wait and study. Sometimes, we can afford to buy electricity, but sometimes we can't. If there's homework or some assessments, I go to my neighbour. I borrow a phone to study or a candle*".

When questioned about the difficulties she experiences, she responded:

"*Yes, very difficult because if you can afford the electricity, then obviously the candle also, we can't afford it, so I have to ask for some help. I sometimes don't understand what I am writing or reading because of this candle. We use wood for cooking when there is no electricity. So, we don't waste the electricity we so go in the forest to fetch wood"*. (FG) *"Miss, we always fetch water from the river, which is not too far. So, we fetch from the river like that, Miss, as you see the picture*". (SSI)

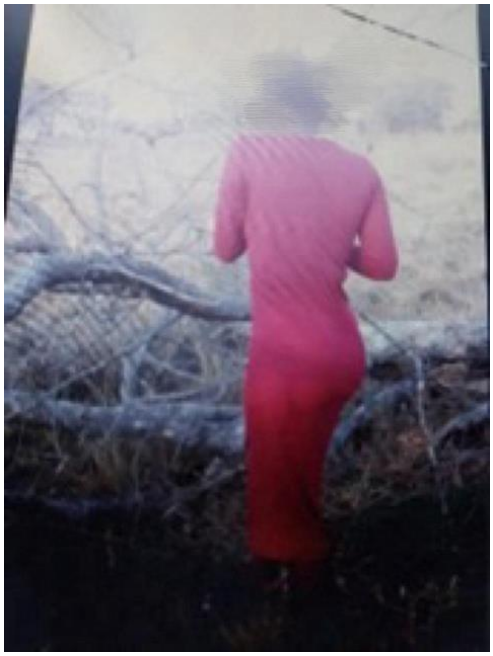

Figure 4-6: Snegugu collecting firewood

Figure 4-7:Snegugu collecting water

Nolan: "*Concerning electricity, it is very hard at home to afford, so sometimes I use a candle. We buy a lot of candles every month, so when we do not have electricity, we use the candles. There is a problem with water as well. The issue of water is very difficult there where I stay. Now we have to maybe when it rains, we take (what's it called) so we collect the water from the roof for washing and stuff*". (FG) "*As previously reiterated, electricity is also a struggle for us sometimes we don't have sufficient money to buy electricity sometimes the electricity goes off so from school, go back home start to put on the fire and start to cook and usually the food we cook outside not as fast as stove so I light up the fire or if we have money I buy the candles and I put the candles on the table and I can study for tests and do my homework and all of that and so it really has a negative impact*". (SSI)

Snegugu: "*Miss ah, before I came to school, sometimes, I had to look for wood to make fire and cook food for my mum's children; yes, Miss, there are two waking up and going to fetch the wood is draining". We do have electricity; sometimes you can't afford it, sometimes you can. I use candles when I want to do my homework or my assignment, I'm using candles.* "*I will do better if there are all these resources for me to study. If I can afford electricity, I can do better*". (FG)

The data above shows how the participants' home environment and systemic oppression concerning social class contributed to the hardships they encountered, especially when trying to study and learn. Ziyanda shows how water and electricity are essential resources required to enhance and ensure learning at home, as without these resources, it is "*affecting us because we can't study*" (see Figure 4-6). This is like what Snegugu experiences, but she believes she "*can do better*" academically if she has access to electricity (see Figure 4-7). These findings concur with those of studies conducted by Bayat et al. (2014), Kapur (2018), and Njuguna (2021), who all found that a lack of essential services complicates access to and participation in education. According to

Arendse (2020), the assumption in society is that the more economic capital a family possesses helps ensure better physical conditions in the home. For Ziyanda, Snegugu, and Nolan, the opposite is evident. The lack of this economic capital means that the family "cannot afford electricity" most of the time, and both are forced to study and complete homework using "*candles*". The data offers alternative ways to think about this. Firstly, learners still studying by candlelight show their determination and agency to ensure that a lack of necessities does not disrupt their education. It shows how the participants positioned themselves to negotiate the structural challenges they encountered (Kapur, 2018). Secondly, a lack of rights to essential services enshrined in the Constitution prohibits participants from acquiring important capital necessary for their future. This systemic inequality that participants try to navigate by candlelight is sometimes ineffective. Ziyanda sometimes finds it difficult to "*understand what* [she] *is writing and reading*". Consequently, this will lead to Ziyanda being deprived of accumulating cultural capital in the form of knowledge and impacting her academic achievements. To some degree, there is certainty and acceptance that their lives are a struggle for resources meant to be their fundamental rights under a democracy.

The photos participants took show Ziyanda and Snegugu collecting wood (see Figures 4-6 and 4-7) from the forest, which they use for "*cooking when there's no electricity*". For Ziyanda, electricity is a scarce and expensive resource. To save this resource, when necessary, firewood is often used so they "*don't waste electricity*". To negotiate not having electricity, Snegugu's school day starts early as she must "*look for firewood to make fire and cook*" before coming to school. According to Vadivel et al. (2023), parents are in authority when delegating household chores. The field, which is the home's social space, is where children like Snegugu and Ziyanda learn the dynamics of authority and find ways to navigate their position (Alanen et al., 2015). Seemingly, Snegugu and Ziyanda have been socialised into a habitus that does not challenge authority. The responsibility of chores has become embodied and is now part of their everyday dispositions and practices (Hart, 2015). What is also absent is the participants' failure to realise how their circumstances and hardships are because of oppression at the societal level (Tatum, 2000).

Regarding cultural capital, the accumulation of norms and practices may hold value within their social context (Alanen et al., 2015). For a school-going child, these times demanding household chores lead to them being "*drain*[ed]" before they begin the school day, negatively affecting their schooling. Bourdieu (1990) and Hart (2015) argue that inadequate access to these basic amenities will result in a habitus that is not conducive to learning and will negatively affect academic achievements further reproducing educational disadvantage. This will consequently lead to what Spaull (2015) recognises as perpetuating intergenerational poverty.

4.3.3 Dangers faced by learners walking to school: "*They took all my studying material*".

Participants walking long distances to access quality education has resulted in them facing challenges such as dangerous situations on the route. Despite this daily threat to their lives, they demonstrate resilience as they negotiate to ensure their education is not disrupted. Their experiences are detailed below from focus group discussions:

Figure 4-8: The small forest Nolan passes en route to school

Figure 4-9: The bridge Suzanne must cross en route to school

Nolan: "*I have once been mugged from home; you go past the forest to get to my home thereby Sgodloweni; there is a small forest there, and it is really dangerous for me; sometimes I have to go a long distance, and I have once been mugged there. They took all my studying material and my phone, which was very disheartening for me because I couldn't carry on catching up with my schoolwork. So, it is very challenging, and the thugs are out there, and you know*". (FG)

Moses: "*It is dangerous out there because of the thugs they call you, and when you come, they hit you with something dangerous. I am always running. The thing is that I know them miss them from the same place I stay*". (FG)

Ziyanda: "*Okay, Miss, as Snegugu says, when it's been raining so many days, the bus doesn't come as well as you see in this picture; ah, on that side of the road, there is some forest it is very dangerous and the things that make very dangerous if there is no bus you have to wake up early so you can catch up to school so if you wake up early, nobody is walking there. People started walking at 6.30 am*". (FG)

> Suzanne: "*There are people that stand by the bridge; the bridge is my worst fear because when you walk each day, they wait for us to pass like my friend had an experience yesterday and they held a knife on him and told him to take out your phone take out what you have, give me your money and he ran and this was in the day after school*". (SSI)

Participants expressed their experience of danger they encounter en route to school daily. Ebrahim (2019) highlighted in her article that one of the risks of walking for learners is violent crime. This concurs with Nolan's experience of being "*mugged*" near a small forest (see Figure 4-8), leading to the loss of his "*study material and phone*". Suzanne revealed a similar experience of her friend being mugged at knifepoint near the "*bridge*" and Ziyanda near the forest, which they consider "*very dangerous*" (see Figure 4-9). These 'power marginalised spaces' (Fataar, 2018) show the socio-spatial relationships between thieves and learners who are in a subordinate group and are at the mercy of dangerous criminals who prey on the weak. However, like the study by Fataar (2018), these power-marginalised spaces signify a fluidity where some participants, like Ziyanda, find ways to solve a problem they encounter. Despite the risks of walking, she displays agency and resilience as she "*wakes up early*" to ensure she meets "*people*" to walk, showing commitment to her education. This "margin of freedom" (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 235) of waking up early marks a space for creative ingenuity because it allows her to meet people who give her a sense of belonging, safety and security. The participants' experiences in this study also concur with Morojele and Muthukrishna (2016) and Schlebusch et al. (2022) on dangers learners encounter in their attempt to access quality education.

These learners must undergo intense habitus negotiation (Fataar, 2018) by overcoming their fears and emotions when confronted with such dangers, which put their lives at risk. Seemingly, walking has been normalised for these participants due to their consistent lack of transport. Thus, this understanding has become ingrained into their habitus, normalising inequality. Participants also displayed resilience during daily adversities on

their school journey. An example of resilience is Moses, who is "*always running*" and shows that he encounters the "*thugs*" regularly, as they are from his community. However, he persists on this journey despite the danger in his quest for education. This spatial dissonance (Fataar, 2018) between his community context and his journey to school forces him to encounter known members of the community as '*thugs*' who cause him to run for his life. For these participants, the daily trek to school and the high chances of encountering criminals do not deter them from their pursuit of changing their habitus and life trajectories (Alanen et al. 2015). Similarly, findings in Morojele and Muthukrishna (2016) and Fataar (2018) study showed that learners had agency and the will to succeed primarily because they wanted to lift themselves from poverty, which education is seen as the social and cultural resource or means to do so.

4.4 Learners support structures and strategies to navigate and negotiate education

This section addresses the third research question. Here, I discuss the various ways participants tried to negotiate the challenges they experienced. The data details the struggles and tensions experienced by participants and the strategies used to overcome challenges to achieve academically.

4.4.1 Supportive families: "*My mother … is my motivation*".

The South African Schools Act 84 of (1996) requires parents to fulfil a crucial role in their children's education. Apart from governing the school, parents are asked to support teachers and members of management in this endeavour. The empirical literature consistently shows positive relationships between the school, parents, and the broader community, resulting in better achievement (Ozden & Atasog, 2020; Motlapula, 2022). The participants' responses point to the complexity surrounding parental involvement for learners from low socio-economic backgrounds. Below are their experiences taken from individual interviews and focus groups:

> Nolan: "*My family supports me with my schooling because they do. My grandmother motivates me, too.* [She] *tells me to go to school- this is your*

future. I cannot be not going to school; she wishes for me to be someone someday and to be able to provide for my family as well. So, she does motivate me from time to time". (SSI)

"*Our parents think that we can help them. It is in our culture to make sure that they are well taken care of to improve their lives*" (FG).

Moses: "*My mother…she is my motivation; she always tells me the same things that I should learn for her. Just do it for her and for us to live in rich status*". (SSI)

Akhona: "*Many of them (my family) don't even know my life. They don't even care, especially my father's family. They don't even know what I'm wearing. They don't even know what I'm eating. They don't know anything, and they don't give a damn about me, so I don't want to talk about them. I stay at my house, lock that door, have fun, and encourage myself. There are, yeah, times I will do better, and I will grow up and become a strong woman. I will never be depending on anyone. I want to be independent, as you will see. My sister encouraged me to study to make our future bright, and my mother encouraged me to tell me that education is important. Miss, I don't know how to explain. I must not live the life she lived because she left the school to find a housekeeper job; after that, the boss, the manager, told her she must leave because she is not good at working*". (SSI)

Suzanne: "*If there is a donation form, they support it, or if there is an event at school, they support it. No, they are just full of Negative energy. I start stressing, and then I get anxious when they say that I will not pass, I'm not focusing enough*".

When asked who motivated her, she said:

"*My friends and cousins motivate me*". (FG)

Snegugu: "*No one supports or motivates me. My grandmother…she said education is important and helpful. So that I can take us out of the poor because you have to move up, and you don't want to continue living in that situation*". (SSI)

Families are supposed to be the first line of support for children; however, the data above reveals the complexity and tension of parental support for children from low socio-economic backgrounds.

Both Moses and Nolan's family provide emotional support and have high aspirations for them. For example, Nolan's grandmother encourages him to go to school, showing she values education as she posits it is his "*future*". By encouraging him to go to school, there is a chance he will grow up to be 'someone' in the future to provide for the family and challenge intergenerational poverty (Spaull & Kotze, 2015). The grandmother's economic, social, and cultural capital deficiency cannot transmit any social inheritance required to navigate the school field and achieve success (Bourdieu, 1990). However, she uses "*motivation*" and support as cultural resources to circumnavigate what she cannot give him in the form of capital. The granny's motivation could also stem from her expectation that Nolan will financially "*provide for [his] family*" per 'Black Tax'. Black Tax is a form of obligatory financial support for immediate family members and is uniquely experienced by Black South Africans (Mangoma & Wilson-Prangley, 2019). However, one can also see that the encouragement to go to school is not for academic fulfilment or growth and development but is future-orientated. Nolan feels his responsibility is to support and "*improve their lives*" as it is part of their "*culture*".

Similarly, Moses's mother believes that if he "*learns*", this can change their low socio-economic background to "*rich status*", indicating her desire for a new habitus. Cultural

capital encompassing education can be seen as a tool to obtain symbols of wealth (Bourdieu, 1977), showing society the success Moses has attained. Educational qualification is seen as institutionalised capital for Moses's mother, who has an internalised belief that education is critical to ending intergenerational poverty (Spaull, 2013). Both family members perceive education as social mobility, and education is seen as a form of 'currency' holding value and inevitably gaining much-needed cultural and economic capital for the future (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu (1986) argues that different forms of capital are available resources but are constantly fought over. In this way, achieving this capital for people is a resource, especially for people living in poverty is essential.

However, the data also shows that support does not always exist for some of the participants. Akhona's father and his family's lack of financial and emotional support has had a significant impact on her; she exclaimed she "*didn't give a damn*" about her family reciprocating their feelings towards her. Bourdieu (1986) uses the term habitus to describe familial roots from which a person grows and learns, and sadly, Akhona has been disconnected from these roots (Hart, 2019). What she has learned and has become inscribed and embodied within her habitus is that she lacks value in the eyes of her father's family. The hurt and pain she feels have led to her distancing herself and not wanting to even "*talk about them*". The consequences are isolating herself from that family, where she "*locks that door*" and has "*fun*" alone. Locking that door can be understood in two ways. First, she locks the door to present any future relationships with her father's family, and second, she locks the door to the outside world, so she does not feel hurt. Consequently, she lacks the social and cultural capital children require for educational success.

Emotional capital, as explained by Zembylas (2007), is emotional resources such as support and encouragement, which are resources provided by family and can positively influence a learner's educational experience. In this instance, being deprived of this emotional capital can negatively influence Akhona's educational experience. However,

she does not allow the lack of support to weigh her down and exercises agency by "*encouraging [her]self*". Resilience is the term Sandoval-Hernandez and Bialowolski (2016), and Wills and Hofmeyer (2019) describe learners who refuse to allow their disadvantaged status and experiences to impede their educational aspirations. This initiative to take control of her life and education is to realise her future vision of being a "*strong woman*" who will have the capacity to be "*independent*". Akhona struggles to recognise that the current challenges she is dealing with and navigating show she is already potent and acting independently. She is forced to make decisions independently as she lives independently and alone in the hostel. Akhona has been forced to develop a new habitus that has already made her "*independent*". However, she has her mother and sister who "*encourage*" and motivate her to complete her education. Her mother's poor education left her jobless, and she wants to prevent Akhona from experiencing the same thing. Firstly, regarding education, her mother may be afraid that the family history of not completing school may result in Akhona's conceiving dispositions and dropping out in line with familial tradition (Hart, 2019). Secondly, like Moses and Nolan's family members, Akhona's mother views education as an essential currency to escape the quagmire of poverty. This is also seen by Snegugu, whose family does not support or motivate her but expects her to take them out of poverty. If anything, the pressure to move up is immense because she knows that living in the 'situation' is not viable for the future. In this regard, the anticipation from family members is that these learners have a sense of responsibility to support them financially and that they cannot refuse to do so.

Suzanne lives with her family but seems to be disconnected from them as they cause her emotional distress with the "*negative energy*" they transmit. Consequently, this energy is demoralising as they break her self-confidence and self-esteem by telling her she is "*not going to pass*". Her only source of motivation from family comes from her extended family in the form of "*cousins*", showing that she cannot rely on her inner circle for support in any way. This lack of positive parental engagement is demotivating and demoralising for Suzanne, resulting in her getting "*stressed*" and taking care of herself. One can see the tensions, stress and negativity that she is experiencing at home and how

it affects Suzanne psychologically and emotionally, subsequently affecting her academic achievements. Secondly, without supervision, parental support and encouragement, there is always the possibility that that school and education will lose their value, and she will not be inspired to achieve higher educational goals (Postma & Postma, 2011; Njuguna, 2021).

4.4.2 Support from friends and peers: "*My friends do motivate me.*"

Friends and peers are seen as sources from which disadvantaged learners can gain the cultural capital they lack. In addition to educational support, friends and peers provide invaluable emotional support (Kong, 2020) when navigating the school field. This was evident in the excerpts below:

> Nolan: "*Yes, I have a few whose backgrounds are similar. We usually talk through all this stuff, and we can come up with strategies for dealing with these kinds of things. You know I can talk to them because they can understand me the most*". (SSI)

> Nolan: "*My friends do motivate me. Obviously, I am not alone. I don't associate myself with people who are comfortable* [rich] *because they made it clear they don't want someone like that. So, I normally work with people who understand me and are going through the same phase as me. Also, I am not alone; there are other people*". (SSI)

> Ziyanda: "*Yes, If I don't have any electricity at home, she explains everything that was happening even when we have some work on WhatsApp, she tells me. If I don't have the data. And my neighbours don't have any data; she explained everything and gave me some advice and hope*". (SSI)

> Suzanne: "*They help me in every decision I make. For example, if something bad happens to me, I go to them and tell them, and they help me; they will*

stop what they are doing to help. My classmates make me feel like I'm their friend because they are very friendly, and we are all the same in the class".

When questioned about how classmates help her, she indicated:

"*We learn new lessons when I am absent, and so when the teacher is explaining, I don't understand, and my friends try explaining to me, but I don't understand properly, so I get a bit of information but not much from them*". (SSI)

Akhona: "*Sometimes my friend gives me food to eat. There is someone I speak to, but she does not normally live in the hostel; she comes when she goes to FET, so she comes when she needs to come and study. And she asks me if I'm okay, and I tell her everything, even when I am suffering. I only have one friend, but I don't want to have many friends because when you have many friends, when you talk to them, they will pretend they understand your situation, but when they sometimes fight, they will laugh at you and complain*".

When questioned if classmates help her in any way, Akhona further responded:

"*When there are bombastic words, I have to ask other learners what it means. I ask those children who are clever I ask them to explain to me*". (SSI)

Moses, when asked about the social class of friends, responded that he socialises with learners from:

"*The poor background because I don't like rich children because they treat us badly, they know that their parents have money you are just a thing, a paper if you don't have money. I stay with the poor children. After all, they*

don't judge because they think they know too much, Miss and they have that pride. I do not walk with poor children in stuff like that; they think they are at the top. You don't ask them for help in any way". (SSI)

Pascoe (2019) contends that disadvantaged learners forging relationships with middle-class learners will allow them to explore the norms and expectations of the dominant culture. As the education system is based on the culture of dominant groups in society, forging these relationships will help disadvantaged learners negotiate the school environment and further supplement their cultural and social capital. However, the views in this study point to socioeconomic class as a determinant of who one socialised with. For example, Nolan befriends peers whose habitus he can relate to as their "*backgrounds were similar*". Similarly, Moses stated that he "*does not like rich children*". This is not out of choice but societal prejudices that have resulted in middle-class learners who "*made it clear'* to Nolan that they did not want to associate with someone from a lower class. This target-to-target discrimination of Nolan based on social class suggests that Nolan has internalised notions about his middle-class peers and plays it safe by only associating and socialising with those "*going through the same phase*" as him. He gravitates towards learners who share the same habitus and dispositions because they "*understand*" him, allowing them to devise "s*trategies*" to negotiate the school space (Alanen et al., 2015).

For Moses, choosing to be friends with children from a "*poor background*" is his choice as he is "not judged" by those in a similar social class. Their utterances depict that the field (school) is a power-laden space (Bourdieu, 1990) and where power exists, it may result in isolation and marginalisation. Moses feels marginalised and isolated from interacting socially with his peers because of his family's lack of economic capital; for this reason, he claims his middle-class peers disregard him as a "*thing*". Firstly, being called a '*thing*' means he is not seen as an object that lacks value and ultimately has a dehumanising effect perpetuating the oppression of the marginalised (Cesaire,1972). Secondly, coming from a low-class status, this dehumanising act is a form of symbolic

violence that reinforces his subordinate position, showing that social structures perpetuate inequality (Bourdieu,1990). Moses being objectified has negative consequences, such as feeling socially devalued; thus, he tends to gravitate to learners in the same socio-economic sphere as him, where he will not feel dehumanised.

Osman et al. (2020) and Pascoe (2019) show that low-income learners forging friendships with middle-class learners can be beneficial as they possess the cultural and social capital that disadvantaged learners lack. This means that for the disadvantaged, forming social networks with advantaged peers will help accumulate cultural and social capital to navigate social space, but for Moses, this idea is inconceivable as he strongly asserts that you do not ask them for "*help in any way*". On the contrary, Suzanne has good relations with "*classmates*" as she realises the importance of friends in navigating the school environment. Regarding this, she enters the field with dispositions and habitus of agency and resilience. For this reason, she is not afraid to approach peers for help, whether with her schoolwork or if "*something bad*" has happened to her, showing she trusts them. Kong (2020) add that emotional assistance sought from friends or peers when learners experience challenges in school or have parents who cannot help them is invaluable. Ziyanda can negotiate her struggle of not accessing schoolwork on "*WhatsApp*" when she cannot afford "*data*" by relying on her supportive friend to relate the work. What is notable about from Ziyanda's excerpt is that peer support is not limited to schoolwork (Osman et al., 2020) but also the provision of emotional support in the form of giving her "*hope*" and "*advice*" which will help her navigate her struggles be it in the school or home context.

Unlike Suzanne, who is not afraid to confide in her classmate and ask for help, Akhona has trust issues and only has "*one friend*" who not only provides "*food*" but is her confidant as she "*tells her everything*". It seems like Akhona's class status is why she does not have "*many friends*". She prefers being cautious about friends as she believes when friends have a disagreement or "*fight*", as she expresses it, they betray your trust and "*laugh*" at you. This seems to be the main reason she isolates herself for fear of further

humiliation. However, when she experiences difficulties with "*bombastic*" words, she demonstrates agency by asking "*clever*" peers to explain. Hart (2015) argues that the language of instruction favours the dominant group working to their advantage in education.

In contrast, the marginalised, such as Akhona, are disadvantaged. Taking this initiative means she is finding a way to navigate the challenges she is experiencing with this dominant language. Evidence presented in this section supports Christie's (2008) and Ngobeni and Chibambo's (2023) argument that even though schools provide equal opportunities for all, they do not reproduce class inequalities.

4.4.3 Support from teachers: "*They are caring to us".*

Teachers are crucial for ensuring learners do not feel alienated or isolated in schools. Teachers going the extra mile for disadvantaged learners gives them a sense of hope and belonging, making their educational experience a positive one. The following excerpts express the role teachers played in their lives.

> Nolan: "*Teachers have helped me when we have had financial constraints at home. They usually help me with food donations, and you know, whenever I am hungry, the teachers usually buy some food because it is not nice to come to school with an empty stomach sometimes. So, they have a huge role to play in my life. Yes, they are supportive. Yes, they are supportive. You know you, regardless of who and where you come from, they do not judge you. Additionally, they only teach the content and ensure everyone is on the right track. You know they don't, they are caring to us*". (SSI)

> Ziyanda: "*Oh, they support us with everything that we need. They do shame. This is a good school. I can find a lot of help; even teachers take some time during breaks to help us with something. Teachers tell us that education will change our situation and that we must focus on schoolwork. They even keep*

our secrets if there's something wrong. They give us extra lessons if we go to the teacher and tell them we don't understand even break time or after school by providing us with some food parcel". (SSI)

Akhona: "*Actually, sometimes I go to the teacher and find them busy. They say I must return, and then I'm scared to return to the teachers. No teacher is supporting me because they don't know about me. The teachers try to teach us, make us understand, and give us extra time to understand as some of us don't understand English because it is not our home language, so the teachers do their best to help us*". (SSI)

Snegugu: "*No, Miss, the teacher, don't help; I am scared to go to the teachers*". (SSI)

South African researchers such as Schlebusch et al. (2022) argue that disadvantaged learners need support from their teachers as they spend considerable time with them. Correspondingly, the South African Schools Act (84 of 1996) affirms that teachers should provide pastoral care and act in loco parentis while schoolteachers are responsible for children's emotional, psychological and physical well-being, for Ziyanda and Nolan's teachers played a crucial role in shaping their habitus within the educational field. Both these learners display agency as they are not afraid to seek help. Nolan and Ziyanda's teachers go the extra mile to ensure their physical well-being is not compromised by giving them "food donations" or "food parcels" and buying them food in school when they are "*hungry*". Ziyanda's teachers encourage her to "*focus on* [her]*schoolwork*". They have inculcated in her a sense of hope that her *"situation will change*". Studies by Gibson & Barr (2017) and Williams et al. (2019) highlight creating a culture of hope amongst the disadvantaged is essential as this will make them believe that their future will be promising. This will motivate learners to do well academically and find their path to a positive future. The provision of "*extra lessons*" and "*care*" demonstrated by teachers

will positively influence learners and serve as a source of cultural and social capital for learners (Osman et al., 2020).

Trust plays an essential role between teachers and learners. Romero et al. (2018) assert that trust can make disadvantaged learners feel part of the teaching and learning process, leading to them developing self-efficacy and becoming more resilient. An example is Ziyanda confiding in her teacher, who "*keeps her secrets*", showing that she trusts her teacher by sharing her vulnerabilities without fear of being judged or ridiculed. Nolan affirms that teachers at the school "*do not judge you*" and are "*caring*". This suggests that Nolan and Ziyanda teachers comply with the school act by providing pastoral care and going the extra mile for their learners.

However, seeking support or help was difficult for Snegugu and Akhona. Both expressed fear as they confessed to being "*scared*" to seek support from their teacher, which showed a disconnection between teachers and learners. Akhona knows she needs help but is reluctant to return to teachers after being told they are "*busy*". She confesses that they give them "extra time" in class to explain content because of the language barrier, which helps them "*understand*" better. Firstly, being scared could be based on dispositions from their habitus where teachers are accorded positions of power and control, which could be intimidating. This gives the impression that teachers, as agents of power in the class, may consciously or unconsciously (Hardiman & Jackson, 1997) be transmitting discriminatory attitudes and behaviours, giving low-income learners a sense of marginalisation. This concurs with Bourdieu (1990) that schools are power-laden spaces where marginalisation exists. Secondly, fear and uncertainty about approaching teachers could be based on learners' culture and traditions, which have been ingrained in elders to be respected, regardless of why teachers may unconsciously be agents of inequality (Reay, 2020).

4.4.4 Education as a means to social mobility: "*Education is the key to success*".

Participants believed that education served the purpose of creating opportunities for economic stability and social mobility. These learners have been socialised to the

dominant norms and values that education holds in society. The following are some of the views of the participants on the purpose of education:

> Moses: "*Education is the key to success; as you said, Miss, it will help you to help your family sometimes*".

When asked why education was important to him, Moses further responded*:*

> "*I think education is the key to success because education will bring hope to your parents, and you can also be hopeful. I can get a job and matric certificate and try to learn more at the university. I'm not a jealous person; I just wait for my time. I think my time will come*". (SSI)

> Ziyanda: "*I think I would be nothing without education, Miss; some people say that not all people that have matric are rich, so that makes me lose hope. Sometimes it is not worth it*". (FG)

> Snegugu: "*Miss, you have to be educated to get jobs so that you can help your family with things they need*". (FG)

> Akhona: "*There's no way you can find a job without matric. Without education nowadays, you need to have a matric and be educated to find a job. So, if I leave school, what am I going to do? I will stay at home. That's why I always encourage myself to come to school*". (SSI*)*

> Suzanne: "*I value it very much because I have this vision of my future, my career, what I want to do with myself and also make my family happier than the situation they are living in now; education is going to help me because the university is looking for those children who are educated and committed*

to what they are doing and also there are more job opportunities for us because education is the key to success". (SSI)

Data reveals that all participants believe that education played a significant role in changing their life trajectories as it held value and currency. This can be achieved by acquiring knowledge, skills and values (Spaull, 2015; Abenawe, 2022). Education is regarded as a means to empower disadvantaged learners who lack cultural capital to navigate and transcend social inequalities.

For all the participants, education was crucial for escaping their poverty. Participants strongly believed that "*without matric*", finding "*a job*" would be impossible. An example is Akhona, who "encourages" herself to attend school as she recognises the importance of education and acquiring much to acquire much-needed cultural capital. Bourdieu (1990) argues that dominant societal discourses and norms inform attitudes and behaviours regarding the importance of education in society. The matric certificate represents institutionalised capital for these participants, which they deem valuable and a means for social stratification. Ziyanda strongly argues that she would "be nothing without an education". For Ziyanda, as Hunter (2015) suggested, education is associated with prestige and recognition, while her disadvantaged status brings disregard. Schools, according to Christie (2008) and Dewan and Sarkar (2017), prepare learners for the "world of work", allowing them to attain their goals of social advancement, which participants in this study related to. What participants in this study are blind to is that school education is not enough to secure a job, as South Africa is currently facing an unemployment crisis affecting mainly the youth and less educated (Davie, 2024). This means a matric certificate is insufficient to secure employment or be forced to work in the unskilled labour market. Dewan and Sarkar (2017) assert that there exists a misalignment between education and the labour market, leaving many school leavers struggling to find work.

Ziyanda is somewhat conscious of prevailing thought as she does express doubts about education as not all people possessing "*matric*" are "*rich*". Bourdieu (1986) asserts that certain types of capital hold value to receive recognition in society. Ziyanda is disillusioned when she is told that not all people who have an education have symbolic and economic capital, which enhances their status. This results in her being disillusioned about her aspirations, making her "*lose hope*" and questioning the "*worth*" of education.

While participant Ziyanda contemplates the "*worth*" of education, Suzanne, on the other hand, asserts she *"value[s] it very much*". Placing value on education for disadvantaged learners can be linked to self-efficacy, which Kong (2020) cites as a significant attribute for disadvantaged learners. Suzanne is confident that "*education is going to help her*" succeed and achieve her "*vision of [her]future career*". She must be "*committed*" to succeed in "*university*" to reach this goal. She also seems familiar with the rules associated with the game of school. She is conscious that she lacks the necessary cultural capital and habitus, which can limit her chances of getting into higher education (Bourdieu, 1986). Being "*committed*" means she is prepared to accumulate cultural capital, improving her chances of accessing university. She contends this will "*make her family happier*" and improve their "*situation*". Her education is going to provide independence, self-reliance, and open opportunities. Thus, one can understand that Suzanne understands the culture of power (Delpit, 1997) implicit in schools and is committed to achieving this power, indicating that she has mastered the rules of the game quite successfully.

Similarly, Snegugu has put her faith in the education system to get "*job*s" and help her family with "*things they need*". It is important to note that she uses the word "need" to mean a lack of necessities such as food and other essentials that will improve the quality of life they lead. The quote "*education is the key to success*" holds for these participants as they believe that the knowledge and skills (cultural capital) viewed as a dominant 'currency' will result in "*more job opportunities*" and resultant economic capital (Hart, 2019). Their thoughts and ideas are future-oriented and have the potential to access

cultural capital, which Bourdieu (1986) indicates will level the playing field, presenting more chances of upward mobility.

However, accessing this capital can be challenging for disadvantaged learners as the education field treats all learners the same, not considering the different mixes of capital (Reay, 2020), thus favouring the capital of the advantaged in society (Hart, 2015). In this regard, Moses expresses that he is not "*jealous*" of his advantaged peers but is patiently waiting for his opportunities as he strongly asserts "[his] *time will come*". Here, he displays resilience and hope, having faith in himself to alter his life's path. This means that learners such as Moses and Suzanne must be resilient, take control of their lives, and navigate and negotiate challenges to achieve their goals for a brighter future.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter presented, analysed, discussed and interpreted findings from the data generated. The findings provide insight into learners' educational experiences from low socio-economic backgrounds. The data reveals the complexity surrounding learners' experiences and how this influenced their experiences of the educational terrain. Their experiences were fraught with a catalogue of challenges that affected them socially, culturally, emotionally and psychologically. The data also reveals that relationships with friends, family members, and teachers, as well as deep-seated determination ingrained in their habitus, proved to be sources of resilience and agency. The participants displayed agency and resilience in their quest for quality education to improve their social standings. In the next chapter, I present reflections on the study and the findings.

CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSIONS AND REFLECTIONS

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the analysis and discussion of findings related to the experiences of education of learners from low socio-economic backgrounds. Findings revealed that their experiences were multi-faceted, influencing how they experienced schooling. In this chapter, I present reflections on the study, highlighting the most important findings that emerged. To begin, I provide an overview of the purpose and significance of the study. After that, I reflect on the theoretical and methodological issues that emerged while conducting the study. A summary of key findings follows this. Finally, I discuss limitations and conclude with implications and recommendations for future studies.

5.2 Purpose and significance of the study

This study aimed to investigate the educational experiences of learners from low socio-economic backgrounds. The study aimed to understand the inclusionary and exclusionary factors influencing learning and social experiences. Further, the study aimed to ascertain how they navigated and negotiated their experiences to achieve academic success. It is hoped that the findings from this study will contribute to the body of knowledge on the experiences of learners from low-income backgrounds and the agency they possess in overcoming the challenges they face.

The study sought to address its objectives, guided by the following research questions:

- What are the educational experiences of learners from low socio-economic backgrounds at a school in KwaZulu-Natal?
- What are the inclusionary and exclusionary factors that influence the learning and social experiences of learners?

- How do learners navigate the exclusionary factors they encounter?

Findings from this study contribute to knowledge about how learners from low socio-economic backgrounds experienced education and factors that impeded their educational experiences concerning schooling and social lives. One of the critical outcomes that emerged and was significant was that the learners' voices were foregrounded in this study. Foregrounding their voices meant that, as the researcher, I could enter their realities and understand the world from their perspective. In this way, awareness about their lives was created. This study contributed to understanding various challenges that learners encountered but could overcome through their agency and resilience.

Research conducted by Kong (2020) and Schlebusch et al. (2022) suggest that limited research studies focus on the schooling experiences of learners from low socio-economic backgrounds and how they navigate the challenges they encounter in their search for positive educational experiences. Pillay (2021) prompted further research in this area, citing that it is essential for education. Further, Ngubane (2021) has also called for research into an underexplored phenomenon of socio-economic class and lived experiences. This study responds to the call for more research to be carried out in this area. This study revealed, for example, that learners encountered numerous challenges in how they experienced schooling and navigated and negotiated their challenges to have a positive educational experience. This study highlighted class, age and language intersections, resulting in participants experiencing challenges and disadvantages. In this regard, participants were forced to build support networks to help navigate and negotiate these issues.

Another significant aspect is that the research data production methods of semi-structured interviews, photovoice and focus groups using participatory methods, particularly photovoice, allowed me to understand the world of participants. The photos gave me some insight into their daily troubles and trauma and, most significantly, allowed me to understand how they negotiated their challenges. In this way, their emotions, thoughts

and deep insight into their school experiences and home life were brought to the fore. This allowed me to add to the literature around the understanding that young adults have the critical capacity to understand the inequality by which they are surrounded. Moreover, the study helped the participants recognise that they possessed agency that they could use to navigate the field of school and home.

The study also contributed to knowledge of socioeconomic factors that affect learners' education. Findings in this study revealed that social factors stemming from the participants' social lives impacted how they experienced schooling. However, intertwined in this participant's sense of agency and resilience emerged as they found a way to navigate and negotiate these challenges to ensure that their quest for education was not disrupted.

Findings also accentuated the importance of support structures within the home and the school for the academic development of learners. Data reveals that the support given by teachers, peers, and family is critically important in providing learners with access to various forms of capital required by society for the success of learners from low socio-economic backgrounds. This corresponds to participants' understanding of the value of education as a route out of poverty and a resource for social mobility in the hope of acquiring a new habitus.

5.3 Reflections on the theoretical framework and methodological design

In this section, I reflect on the theoretical framework and research methods used in the study. The theory used in this study was Bourdieu's (1998) Theory of Practice. The theory was used to understand and analyse learners' educational experiences from low socio-economic backgrounds. Bourdieu's theory provided insight into participants' lives, revealing how social structures and inadequate cultural capital shaped their educational experiences. The lack of valued forms of capital in the field of education showed the perpetuation of inequalities in the school system. Bourdieu's (1986) concept of habitus highlighted how participants faced marginalisation and exclusion and encountered

various challenges in navigating and adapting to the norms of the school, resulting in disparities that ultimately led to unequal opportunities and outcomes.

The critical paradigm focuses on people's perceptions of reality and how it is experienced (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). These researchers also indicate that the critical paradigm is not only about changing society and situations but also about critically understanding the inequalities that people encounter. Using the critical paradigm, I explored the lived experiences of disadvantaged learners in their educational environment and critically understood their realities. It helped me as the researcher to critically reflect on the various strategies participants used to overcome challenges both in the field of education and their social field and why they felt that these were challenges and had to be overcome. I could then reflect on the structural barriers that prevented their access to and participation in social and educational life, rendering a different understanding of learners from low socio-economic backgrounds.

Moreover, the various platforms used to generate data allowed participants to critically reflect on the barriers and challenges often due to educational and social inequalities prevalent in society. In the focus group, they could discuss how and why these inequalities existed and what they could do about this. This opportunity for them to reflect on their experiences of inclusionary and exclusionary factors had the benefit of helping them to recognise their agency as well.

Using a qualitative approach in this study also enabled a particular kind of relationship with participants to emerge, which was informed by my epistemological and ontological positioning. I positioned learners' voices as central to the study; thus, their daily experiences as told and understood by them are vital. I could build a relationship based on respect and trust, which determined the relationship throughout the research process. This is because both qualitative research and case studies seek to understand and interpret people's experiences and how they make sense of this (Cohen et al., 2018). This approach was useful as it allowed the study to generate rich, in-depth accounts of the participants'

educational experiences and the various contextual factors influencing their experiences and navigating challenges.

Case studies allow for a better understanding of the phenomena being studied. They are unique in that they can reveal a lot about the phenomena under investigation and bring to light knowledge which would otherwise be inaccessible (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The case study allowed for in-depth information on the real-life experiences of disadvantaged learners in the school setting and how they can overcome barriers and challenges as they navigate their educational experiences. Within the school context, various factors were investigated, which allowed for a rich depiction of the reality of participants and is a crucial characteristic of a case study (Cohen et al., 2018).

Data was generated from semi-structured interviews, photovoice and focus group discussions. Participants were selected for a particular purpose and who could fit in with the specific research questions for the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I first surveyed Grade 10 and 11 learners to get the required participants. The survey revealed that some learners were recipients of social grants, and these learners were approached individually and asked if they would volunteer to be part of the study. Eventually, the names of volunteers were put into a box, and the first ten names were chosen for the study. After consulting with the learners, six agreed to participate in the study. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect rich data and allow the participants to freely express their experiences and perspectives regarding the phenomenon (Kapur, 2011). Focus group discussion allowed for the collection of rich data as participants could build on each other's views, allowing for a stimulating discussion with photographs taken by participants.

5.4 Summary of findings

This section summarises the key findings and how they responded to the research questions.

5.4.1 **Research Question 1:** ***What are the educational experiences of learners from low socio-economic backgrounds?***

Madhadaze (2019) contends that parents from townships and rural areas make substantial financial sacrifices to send their children to predominantly White, Indian and Coloured schools for their children to become proficient in the dominant language. However, there seems to be a lack of support, leading to inequalities as these learners experience difficulties accessing content and knowledge in a second language (Ngobese & Chibambo, 2023). This was revealed in the findings of this study, which showed that participants struggled and found learning in English particularly disempowering and challenging. This study highlighted language as the power broker in the field, making participants feel powerless as they struggled to negotiate with English as the dominant linguistic capital. What was significant in this study that was limited in the literature reviewed was the display of agency by participants by forming relationships with peers, allowing them to access the 'gift of language' owing to their peers' altruistic actions.

In addition, findings revealed a lack of support from teachers when participants struggled with English; instead of support, teachers meted out punishment. The punitive actions of teachers reproduce the understanding that English serves a gatekeeping function, pushing those who cannot 'play and know the rules of the game' to the periphery. This suggests that learners who cannot acquire the habitus of the school and the linguistic capital vital for success lack value and thus do not belong. Findings show a habitus-field incongruence as no matter how hard these participants tried to play the game, they were unsuccessful, and teachers could not provide the scaffolding to help them succeed. The invisibility metaphor also emerged regarding teachers not being knowledgeable about learners' backgrounds, resulting in a disconnect between teacher expectations and learners' abilities. Without the necessary support, learners would inevitably be unsuccessful, reminiscent of similar ideas by Du Plessis and Mestry (2019).

Findings also reveal the difficulty of high expectations, which are similar to findings by Martin (2016). Teachers unconsciously think that if they have high expectations of their

learners, they will work harder, but that is impossible without support like extra help in learning the dominant language of English. The teachers have struggled to consider that for these learners who came from rural areas and where the education they were exposed to was of poor quality, they were always forced to play 'catch up' so they are not left behind. According to Janks (2004), English as a means of empowerment and dominance can result in the exclusion of marginalised learners who lack proficiency in the language, resulting in what she refers to as the "access paradox". This access paradox is evident in the findings where learners are exposed to the dominant language. However, failure to provide access to support means that learners are denied access. This led to the dangerous reality of learning, losing interest and giving up.

Systemic inequalities of participants being forced to walk long distances to school as scholar transport is not available from certain areas showed dire consequences as participants come to school exhausted, impacting the learning process and, ultimately, academic achievements. The long, arduous trek to school also results in late arrivals, and learners are punished by being locked out. The school fails to consider the navigational capital, the act of negotiating long distances, the constraints imposed by systemic inequality and the display of agency and independence (Shah, 2023) made by learners to get to school. This reveals the intersection of race, socio-economic status and that age as learners, because of their target status, are powerless to challenge the status quo.

Participants in this study expressed they were made to feel inferior by peers from their ethnicity, showing that the discrimination was, to a greater extent, based on social class, which significantly impacted the development of their educational and social relationships, further marginalising them. The discrimination led to them socialising only with peers from the same socio-economic class as themselves. Emotionally, it led them to experience feelings of low self-esteem and alienation. Some participants expressed their emotions of hope, aspirations and patience. These emotional resources gave the participants a sense of upliftment as they believed a brighter future awaited them.

Findings also revealed acts of kindness and compassion from teachers who, out of concern for participants' physical wellbeing, provided them with groceries.

5.4.2 **Research question 2:** ***What are the inclusionary and exclusionary factors that influence the learning and social experiences of learners?***

Participants revealed the struggles and complexities they experienced in the field of home, with social and cultural responsibilities taking precedence over schoolwork, which resulted in exhaustion and deprived participants of much-needed academic time. Noteworthy is the understanding that schooling does not take place in a vacuum and that the social life of the learners spills over into the participants' educational experiences. Participants have been socialised into a habitus that does not challenge authority, and responsibilities have become embodied and are now part of their daily dispositions and practices (Hart, 2015). The findings of this study revealed that poverty significantly impacted the participants' lives. The hardships and systemic inequalities were evident in this study as participants had to collect water from rivers and firewood. The lack of electricity forced them to study by candlelight, which they found ineffective. Notably, the agentic character was displayed by participants in negotiating their habitus by using candles to overcome their constraints and ensure the continuation of their education. Importantly, Bourdieu (1990) and Hart (2015) argue that not having access to necessities will result in a habitus not conducive to learning and inevitably impact educational achievements.

What was significant in this study was that participants openly expressed anger and frustration towards their parents due to the lack of support and consideration for their academic needs. Furthermore, findings showed that due to illiteracy and inadequate cultural capital on the part of parents' participants were given the responsibility of assisting siblings with their schoolwork as they seemingly possessed the required tools of cultural capital to ensure their siblings meet the 'rules of the game' in their schools (Chisholm, 2021).

Findings show that some participants' family members did not value education as participants were consciously disrupted when focusing on schoolwork. This could result from the low regard parents of the participants have in the education system stemming from their own negative experiences (Njuguna, 2021).

Findings revealed that participants in their quest to access better education, walking long distances resulted in facing numerous dangers along the way. Participants have also fallen prey to criminals, an example of one being mugged at knifepoint, showing that participants must undergo intense habitus negotiations (Fataar, 2018) when confronted with such dangers. This is similar to findings by Morojele and Muthukrishna (2016) and Fataar (2018), whose studies showed the agency displayed by participants in finding ways to overcome the dangers and fears that ensure their education is not disrupted. It shows their daily struggles to access what should be regarded as a fundamental right.

5.4.3 Research question 3: *How do learners navigate the exclusionary factors they encounter?*

In response to the third research question, the theme focused on participants' different support structures. The study revealed that some participants had strong support systems in the form of family members who supported them by encouraging and motivating them to succeed academically despite lacking economic and cultural capital. Zembylas (2007) contends that family-provided emotional resources can positively influence learners' educational experiences. What was significant in this study was that some family members viewed education as a form of 'currency' and placed trust in their children's education to end their poverty and acquire a new habitus. For some participants, family support was non-existent, and participants were emotionally affected by this. The lack of familial support corresponds with findings from Ngubane's (2021) and Khuzwayo's (2021) studies.

This study's support from peers and teachers showed that participants depended strongly on peers for academic and emotional assistance. The participants did not lack agency as

they could form bonds with advantaged peers who possessed the cultural and social capital required in the field of education to help them navigate it. These findings were similar to studies by Pascoe (2019) and Kong (2020). In addition, teachers were an essential form of support as they possessed cultural, social and emotional capital, providing participants with academic and emotional support and taking care of their physical well-being.

Findings revealed that dominant normative understandings of the value of education influenced participants' understandings of the role of education. For participants in this study, education was understood as a valued and treasured form of currency that could provide the capital required to achieve academic success. Participants strongly believed that education was the key to success, leading to job opportunities and upward social mobility, ending their cycle of intergenerational poverty (Spaull, 2015).

5.5 Implications of the study

Findings from this study have implications for education in general and schooling in particular. The following are some of the implications that were revealed from the findings.

Findings reveal that learners from low socio-economic backgrounds experience marginalisation and exclusion in various forms, including in their experiences of learning through English. Schools at the institutional level must develop ways to improve the literacy levels of learners to equip them with the required linguistic capital needed for English learning. School management should have policies in place to ensure learners experiencing challenges with the medium of instruction in the school are given additional support. This then has implications for the Department of Education, which needs to provide teachers with professional development in this area so that teachers can help learners acquire this vital skill. Alternatively, constitutional provisions should be made so learners can learn in their mother tongue.

Whilst there was no direct correlation with libraries in the study, it would be prudent to include school libraries as spaces that provide learners with additional English reading and learning support. At the school level, the school libraries should have specific programmes and time allocations where reading in English is promoted. A significant implication for the Department of Education is the issue of transport. The findings in this study revealed that because of their socioeconomically deprived backgrounds, learners were forced to walk long distances to access quality education. The government should, therefore, provide consistent scholarly transport for all learners walking long distances to school to mitigate exhaustion, absenteeism and danger.

Findings reveal that learners require additional support that deals not only with academic and cognitive development but also with the emotional and physical well-being of learners. This is because the study revealed that learner was made to feel inferior by their more advantaged peers, further exacerbating feelings of isolation and marginalisation. Teachers, out of concern for participants' physical well-being, provided food parcels and emotional support. The school needs to consider applying for the school nutrition programme from the Department of Education and providing learners access to a social worker. Findings also revealed that participants face discrimination and marginalisation from peers. Thus, schools are crucial in promoting inclusive education and conscientising learners about difference, respect and diversity. This would create schooling spaces where all learners feel a sense of belonging.

Findings also revealed that parents did not value education and were disengaged from the participants' academic life. Therefore, schools need to pursue strategies to involve parents in their children's education and encourage support in more creative and vital ways so that education is seen as a valuable social good meant for the betterment of families and, inevitably, society.

5.6 Limitations of the study

All studies have limitations, which was also evident in this study. One of the limitations is that this study consisted of a small sample size of only six participants. Thus, the findings do not represent all learners from low socio-economic backgrounds, as the case study is informed by a particular context (Rule & John, 2011). The small sample size means the findings do not represent a larger population or different contexts. The study intended not to generalise findings but to get an in-depth understanding of the educational experiences of this sample of learners. In keeping with case studies and qualitative research, findings are situation- or context-specific; thus, it does not attempt to generalise to other contexts or people (Rule & John, 2011). The study intended to gain a contextually rich, in-depth understanding of learners' experiences of education as well as how their social realities affected their quest for education.

All the participants were from one secondary school and only Grades 10 and 11 learners participated in the study. This means that findings from the study cannot be applied to other schools, grades or educational contexts. Participants from one school may also share similar backgrounds and experiences, resulting in the sample not representing the wider population.

Focus group discussion allowed for the interaction of all participants. However, at first, some were reserved and hesitant to participate in the discussion, concurring with Cohen et al. (2018) argument that focus group interviews may result in less information being collected due to the non-participation of some members in the group. However, as the conversation flowed, the participants realised they shared similar experiences, and I encouraged everyone to add their perspectives to the discussion. As time progressed, learners could then draw on ideas from others and expand. Thus, this helped learners become more comfortable and could explain and contribute quite willingly, allowing me to collect rich data with all participating.

The participants were second-language speakers, and the study was conducted in English, which could have influenced how questions were understood. There were instances where participants indicated they did not understand the question. To navigate this challenge, I rephrased the question and explained it further using simpler language.

5.7 Recommendations for future research

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations have been made:

Based on the findings of the study, there are several areas which further research could explore. This study only investigated the experiences of learners from Grades 10 and 11. Future research should include learners from all grades in a high school to gain greater insight. For example, the grade 8 learners could provide different data given that this is their first year in high school, and they can compare their experiences at the primary school level. This could then provide insight into the different experiences of high school.

The study also focused on learners' experiences. A more holistic understanding of learners' experiences from low socio-economic backgrounds should include insights and perspectives from teachers who teach the learners. Teachers' insights and perspectives on learners from low socio-economic backgrounds and factors that influence their education may provide more understanding of learners' experiences.

This study only focused on a single school, with participants from the African and Coloured race groups. Future research involving learners from several schools, including all race groups, would provide more insight and understanding of learners' educational experiences from low socio-economic backgrounds. Here, more explorations of the intersections of race, gender class and other social identity categories could be explored. This would then provide a richer, broader understanding of socio-economic class within the South African context and would respond to calls from researchers such as Schlebusch et al. (2022) to explore this under-researched phenomenon.

5.8 Concluding thoughts

This study focused on the educational experiences of learners from low socio-economic backgrounds. The study revealed challenges learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds face, which affect their ability to access and participate effectively in learning. Socioeconomic class appears to be a significant obstacle to feelings of belonging and acceptance within the schooling space. However, despite the challenges or barriers stemming from the institution and structural inequality, the study also revealed the lengths learners will go to acquire the valuable credential of a matric certificate. The critical capacity of young learners is a tool to understand the needs required to support those most vulnerable in the education field. In this way, academic success and future social mobility are a possibility.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Permission to conduct research: Department of 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 1063
Email: Phindile.duma@kzndoe.gov.za

Enquiries: Phindile Duma **Ref.**:2/4/8/26

Mrs S Sukram
[redacted]
ESTCOURT
3310

Dear Mrs Sukram

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: **"AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF LEARNERS' FROM LOW SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUNDS"**, 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 06 March 2023 to 31 March 2026.
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 Miss Phindile Duma 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.

UTHUKELA DISTRICT

[redacted]
Mr GN Ngcobo
Head of Department: Education
Date: 06 March 2023

GROWING KWAZULU-NATAL TOGETHER

Appendix B: Permission to conduct research: Letter to Principal

[redacted]
Estcourt
3310

XXX Secondary School
100 xxx Street
XXX
xxx

Dear Madam

RE: Request for permission to conduct research at your school.

My name is Shafia Sukram. I am a Master of Education student (MEd) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg campus. I am from the Social Justice cluster, School of Education, College of Humanities. I am conducting research titled "*An investigation into the educational experiences of learners from low socio-economic backgrounds*". This study aims to investigate the inclusionary and exclusionary factors that influence learners' learning and social experiences and how they navigate the exclusionary factors they encounter. I need six participants to form part of the study to achieve this.

I hereby seek permission to conduct my research with Grades 10 and 11 learners at your school. Using various methods, I would like to generate data from Grades 10 and 11 learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. The participants of the study will be purposefully selected: three males and three females. The participants will be required to participate in face-to-face semi-structured and focus group interviews. Participants must also take photos of things relevant to the study. Interviews will be conducted during break, and the focus group interview will be after school. Teaching and learning will not be disturbed.

The significance of this study is to gain more insight and knowledge on the challenges learners from disadvantaged backgrounds experience and how they can navigate these to make their educational journey successful. Participants are not forced to take part in the study. Those who agree to be part of the study can decline to answer questions they are uncomfortable with and can withdraw from the study at any time.

Please note that:

- The findings from this study will only be used to write the master's dissertation.
- In addition, at the end of the research, the data collected will be stored and disposed of. This study will not cause any harm to the participants or your school.

- The identity of the school and the names of participants will be protected using pseudonyms.
- All information will be kept in confidence.
- Participation in this research is voluntary, and participants may withdraw at any point without negative consequences.
- A registered social worker will be available to provide counselling should the need arise.
- Data will be safely archived by the researcher with her supervisor's help for at least five years. Then it will be destroyed.

As a researcher, I will abide by all the rules and ethics that entail researching in an academic context. Should you have any queries, you can contact my supervisor, Dr Melanie Martin, who is based at the University of KwaZulu-Natal School of Education. Tel: 033-2606456 or email: Martinm@ukzn.ac.za

My contact details are Cell: [redacted]; email: 218064727@stu.ukzn.ac.za

You are also welcome to contact the Research Office.

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION

Research Office, Westville Campus
Govan Mbeki Building
Private Bag X 54001
Durban
KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA
Tel: 27 31 2604557 – Fax: 27 31 2604609
Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Your contribution to the study is highly appreciated.

Yours faithfully

Shafia Sukram

Acknowledgement by the Principal

I,……the Principal of……., hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the study. I further hereby grant permission to Shafia Sukram to conduct her research at the school. I understand that the participants are at liberty to withdraw at any time.

_____ _____

Signature of Principal Date

SCHOOL STAMP

Appendix C: Informed consent parent

Social Justice
School of Education,
College of Humanities,
University of KwaZulu-Natal,
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear Parent/Learner

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

I am Shafia Sukram, a Master's Degree student from the Social Justice Cluster, School of Education, College of Humanities, University of KwaZulu-Natal. I am conducting research titled **'An investigation into the educational experiences of learners from low socio-economic backgrounds.'**

International and national literature reviewed showed numerous challenges for learners from low socio-economic backgrounds that impede their educational experience. Their challenges arise within the school structures and external environment (Kanyopa & Hlalele, 2021). In the South African context, it was envisaged that the post-apartheid education system would redress past inequalities in education; however, this has not been achieved, with the needs of poor and marginalised learners not being considered (Arendse, 2020).

During apartheid, race was the determining factor as to the quality of education a child received. In the current education system, inequalities are still evident with race and socioeconomic status determinants as to the quality of education a child receives (Spaull, 2015). Race and class anomalies in multi-racial schools have led to learners from low socio-economic backgrounds experiencing race and social exclusion, leaving learners feeling disempowered (Kanyopa & Hlalele, 2021; Arendse, 2020).

However, the literature reviewed also shows that there are poor learners who do come to the school with some agency and are resilient in their attempt to achieve a good quality education, which they see to breaking their cycle of poverty and attaining upward social mobility (Spaull, 2015; Pascoe, 2019; Wills & Hofmeyer, 2019).

The objectives of the research are to determine:

1) What are the educational experiences of learners from low socio-economic backgrounds?
2) What are the inclusionary and exclusionary factors that influence the learning and social experiences of learners?

3) How do learners navigate the exclusionary factors that they encounter?
   You are invited to participate in the study because you are a suitable candidate. To gather the information, I request you to participate in this research by reflecting on your educational experiences as a learner from low socio-economic status. Should you be willing to participate, you will be interviewed individually and in one group session with other participants. The duration of the sessions will be 30 minutes each.

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (approval number_____).

Please note that:

- Your participation is voluntary. If you do not participate, you will not be penalised or disadvantaged.
- Your confidentiality is guaranteed as your input will not be attributed to you in person but will be reported only as a population member's opinion. To ensure confidentiality, you must choose a pseudonym for the study**.**
- The focus group and individual interviews (1 of each) will last 25-30 minutes and may be split depending on your preference.
- Any information you give cannot be used against you, and the collected data will be used for this research only.
- Data will be in the form of interview transcripts, completed diary entries, and completed portfolios. The data will be stored securely and destroyed by shredding after five years. Digitally recorded data will be deleted after five years.
- You can choose to participate, not participate or stop participating in the research. You will not be penalised for taking such an action. You can withdraw from the study at any stage and for any reason.
- Your involvement is purely for academic purposes only, and no financial benefits are involved. However, it is expected that insight and knowledge will be gained regarding the education experiences of disadvantaged learners.

Thank you
Yours faithfully
S. Sukram (Mrs)
My contact details are as follows:
Email: s[redacted]
Cell phone: [redacted]

My supervisor is Dr Melanie Martin. She is a Social Justice lecturer at the School of Education, College of Humanities, Pietermaritzburg Campus, University of KwaZulu-Natal.

My supervisor's contact details are:
Email: Martinm@ukzn.ac.za

Phone number: 033 2606456

You may also contact the Research Office at:
University of KwaZulu-Natal
Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics
Govan Mbeki Centre
Tel +27312604557
Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Thank you for reading this document about this research.

Appendix D: Informed consent: Learner

[redacted]venue
[redacted]
Estcourt
3310

Dear Learner

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

I am Shafia Sukram, a Master's Degree student from the Social Justice Cluster, School of Education, College of Humanities, University of KwaZulu-Natal. I am conducting research titled 'An investigation into the educational experiences of learners from low socio-economic backgrounds.'

International and national literature shows that learners from low socio-economic backgrounds tend to experience their education as primarily negative. Their challenges arise within the school structures and in their external environment (Kanyopa & Hlalele, 2021). Given this, this study that I intend to explore will attempt to find out the educational experiences of learners from low socio-economic backgrounds and, more importantly, what they do to ensure that schooling is not so challenging.

The objectives of the research are to:

- Explore the educational experiences of learners from low socio-economic backgrounds.
- To further explore the inclusionary and exclusionary factors influencing learners' learning and social experiences?
- To understand how learners navigate the exclusionary factors that they encounter.

You are invited to participate in the study because you are a suitable candidate. To gather the information, I request you to participate in this research by reflecting on your educational experiences as a learner at a particular school. I will ask you to participate in an individual interview that lasts about 30-45 minutes. I will also ask you to photograph your home, journey to school, and the school itself, which could provide more information on your educational experiences. Further, you will be asked to be part of a focus group interview, which should also take 30-45 minutes. These ways of getting information from you will occur for one to two months.

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (approval number_____).

Please note that:

- Your participation is voluntary. If you do not participate, you will not be penalised or disadvantaged. Your decision to not participate will not influence your schooling in any way.
- Your confidentiality is guaranteed, as your inputs will not be attributed to you. Instead, I shall invite you to provide another name that you wish to be referred to in the research.
- The focus group and individual interviews (1 of each) will last 30-45 minutes and may be split depending on your preference.
- Any information you give cannot be used against you, and the collected data will be used for this research only.
- Data will be in the form of interview transcripts, photographs, and focus group transcripts, which will be stored securely and destroyed by shredding after five years. Digitally recorded data will be deleted after five years.
- You can choose to participate, not participate or stop participating in the research. You will not be penalised for taking such an action. You can withdraw from the study at any stage and for any reason.
- Your involvement is purely for academic purposes only, and no financial benefits are involved. However, it is expected that insight and knowledge will be gained regarding the education experiences of disadvantaged learners that may lead to reflection on how best to support learners for the future in this school.

Thank you

Yours faithfully

S. Sukram (Mrs)
My contact details are as follows:
Email: [redacted]m
Cell phone: [redacted]

My supervisor is Dr Melanie Martin. She is a Social Justice lecturer at the School of Education, College of Humanities, Pietermaritzburg Campus, University of KwaZulu-Natal. My supervisor's contact details are:
Email: Martinm@ukzn.ac.za
Phone number: 033 2606456

You may also contact the Research Office at:
University of KwaZulu-Natal
Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics
Govan Mbeki Centre
Tel +27312604557
Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Appendix E: Consent from Social Worker

health
Department:
Health
PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

Physical Address: No 1 Old Main Road : Estcourt 3310
Postal Address : Private Bag X7058, Estcourt 3310
Tel: 036 3427000 Fax: 036 3427116 Email: neliswa.ntintili@kznhealth.gov.za
www.kznhealth.gov.za

SECTION:
SOCIAL WORK SERVICES

Reference: Miss S.N Ncwane

Ext.: 7156

07 November 2022

Attention: Sir/ Madam

RE: SHAFIA SUKRAM

This letter serves to confirm that as a Registered Social Worker I will be available for counselling of participants during the Research being conducted at Estcourt Secondary School by Shafia Sukram.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely

[redacted]

S.N. NCWANE
SOCIAL WORKER
10-25904

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
ESTCOURT HOSPITAL
SOCIAL SERVICES
07 NOV 2022
ISIFUNDAZWE SAKWAZULU-NATAL
EZIMPILO
PROVINCE OF KWAZULU NATAL

Appendix F: Semi-structured interview schedule

SECTION A

A. Main Research Questions

1. What are the educational experiences of learners from low socio-economic backgrounds?
2. What are the inclusionary and exclusionary factors that influence the learning and social experiences of learners?
3. How do learners 'navigate the exclusionary factors that they encounter?

Section A: Background Information

1. Please can you choose a pseudonym for this interview?
2. Please tell me briefly about yourself and your family.
3. Before I commence the interview, I want to remind you that you are not forced to answer any questions you are uncomfortable with and can withdraw at any time.

Section B

NO.	QUESTIONS	PROBING
Research Question 1	**What are the educational experiences of learners from low socio-economic backgrounds?**	
1.	Tell me about the area in which you live.	
2.	Do you enjoy living in this area?	Why? Why not?
	If you had a choice, would you remain in the area?	Why? Why not?
3.	b) Tell me a little about the school you attend.	
	c) how far is the school from where you live?	
	d) Tell me about your journey to school from your house.	
4.	Does your journey of getting to school affect your schooling or attendance?	How?
5.	What are some of the challenges you experience at school?	Tell me more about this.
6.	Are you able to make friends easily?	Why? Why not?
7.	Do you feel that you are treated differently from other learners?	Why? Why not?
8.	What do you do to make your school experience positive and happy?	
Research Question 2	**What are the inclusionary and exclusionary factors that influence the learning and social experiences of learners?**	
1.	Tell me a little about your home life.	
2.	How are you financially supported?	
3.	Do you also receive the child support grant?	
4.	a. In your home, do you have access to technology and social media?	

	b. If Yes, does having access make it easier for you to do schoolwork? c. If No, how do you complete your schoolwork?	
5.	Do you feel that a lack of money affects your educational experience?	Why? Why not?
6.	What about your community? What resources are available for learners?	Do people in the community support schooling – tell me about this
7.	How does your family support your schooling?	What effect does it have on you?
8.	Do you feel that you would perform better at school if you received more support from family?	
Research Question 3	**How do learners navigate the exclusionary factors they encounter?**	
1.	What challenges do you experience at home and in your community?	
2.	How do you try to ensure these challenges do not affect you?	
3.	Support is critical. Where do you seek support?	How are you assisted?
4.	What support would you like to receive?	
5.	Where do you get the motivation that makes you want to come to school to get educated?	
6.	Is there anything else you would like to tell me?	

Appendix G: Focus group interview schedule

TOPIC: Interview of educational experiences of learners from low socio-economic backgrounds.

Introduction

Welcome to this focus group discussion. Thank you all for volunteering to be part of my research. I will ask some questions about your educational experiences and factors that influence your learning and social experiences.

Before we start, I would like to go over some important points:

- This group interview aims to gather information and gain insight into your educational experiences as a group.
- This will allow you to interact, discuss the topic, and contribute and build on each other's views.
- Please note that participating in this discussion is voluntary, and you can withdraw anytime.
- Please respect each other's views. You do not have to agree with each other; experiences may differ. Feel free to talk to one another.
- With your permission, this interview will be recorded.
- Your names, identities and anything you say will be kept confidential.

Focus group interviews will:

a. Get participants to speak to the photographs that they have taken. Participants will be asked to share their photographs and indicate why they have taken them.
b. Based on their photographs, the focus group interview will get participants to talk about how they negotiate the negative things they experience in their homes and schools that can influence how they experience schooling.

We have come to the end of the interview. Thank you all for your participation, and I am grateful for all your contributions to the topic I am researching.

Appendix H: Photo voice schedule

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) state that photovoice is a form of participatory research that enables participants to take photos of their lived reality. Participants can take relevant and important photos in relation to the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). According to Cohen et al. (2018), this will allow the researcher to see the world through the participant's eyes.

GUIDELINES

1. Can you please take photos of your daily experiences?
2. Photos must be of things that are relevant to the study.
3. You may include photos of challenges to your schooling and home life.
4. You may also include photos of things that make you extremely happy and proud in school and your home.
5. Photos must be of things that you, as a participant, will be comfortable discussing in the group session as you reflect on your experiences.
6. Photographs will only be used for research purposes only and be kept confidential.

Thank you for photographing your experience and participating in this study. It is much appreciated.

Appendix I: Certificate from Language Editor

Ntwintwi

Proofreading and Editing Solutions

We Turn your Documents into a Work of Art!

Date: 04 July 2024

CERTIFICATE OF LANGUAGE EDITING

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to certify that the thesis bearing the provisional title ***An investigation into the educational experiences of learners from low socio-economic backgrounds in a secondary school in the uThukela District***, to be submitted by **Shafia Sukram** has been edited for language correctness and spelling, consistency, coherence, and completeness of the list of references and cited authors, by Ntwintwi Proofreading and Editing Solutions. Neither the research content and substance nor the author's intentions were altered in any way during the editing process.

Ntwintwi guarantees the quality of English language in this thesis, provided our editor's changes are accepted and further changes made to the thesis are checked by our editor.

Yours sincerely,

JABULANI NGCOBO
NTWINTWI PROOFREADING AND EDITING SOLUTIONS

Appendix J: Originality Report

final thesis S Sukram

ORIGINALITY REPORT

5%	5%	0%	0%
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

1	researchspace.ukzn.ac.za Internet Source	4%
2	scholar.sun.ac.za Internet Source	<1%
3	vital.seals.ac.za:8080 Internet Source	<1%
4	Gregory Houston, Modimowabarwa Kanyane, Yul Derek Davids. "Paradise Lost", Brill, 2022 Publication	<1%
5	uir.unisa.ac.za Internet Source	<1%
6	Nosisi Nellie Feza. "chapter 12 The Socioeconomic Status Label Associated With Mathematics", IGI Global, 2018 Publication	<1%
7	Submitted to University of KwaZulu-Natal Student Paper	<1%
8	dspace.nwu.ac.za Internet Source	<1%