

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

**CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY PRIMARY SCHOOL LEARNERS FROM
SINGLE-PARENT HOUSEHOLDS TO ATTAIN ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENTS**

By

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REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF EDUCATION (EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY)**

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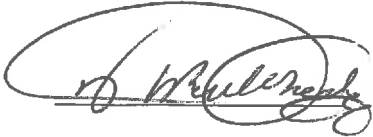
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DECLARATION

I, Ntokozo Mulovhedzi, hereby certify that this research project that was conducted under the supervision of Dr Visvaranie Jairam at the School of Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal, is my own work and has not been submitted in any form for the acquisition of any degree or diploma at another tertiary institution. Where use was made of the work of others, this has been duly acknowledged in the text.



Ntokozo Mulovhedzi

19/06/2019

Date

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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my three lovely daughters, Dimpo, Lerato and Anelisa. I was not there when they needed me the most, but the patience and the love they showered on me will never be forgotten. Thank you, my angels. May our loving God renew all of you.

ABSTRACT

Family is a powerful determinant of children's learning and when the school and the home have divergent approaches to life and learning, it is the children who are likely to suffer. The environment at home is a primary socialisation agent and influences children's progress at school and their aspirations for the future. Parents are mainly responsible for the educational and career development of their children, but divorce and separation for various reasons, or the death of one spouse, may leave multiple parental roles in the hands of a single parent, and it is often then when problems arise and children become victims of dissention and strife.

The aim of the study was to explore the challenges that learners from single-parent households encountered in achieving academically. The study was conducted in a primary school in Newlands West, Durban. The study objectives were to identify the challenges encountered by primary school learners from single-parent households in their efforts to attain academic success, to explore the impact of these challenges on these learners, and to determine what possible solutions could be offered to address these challenges.

The study was based on the economic hardship theory and the family systems theory. The study utilised a sample size of twelve participants; i.e., six learners from single-parent households, three educators, two single parents, and one school principal. Pseudonyms are used in this report to protect the identities of the participants and the school. The study employed an interpretivism research design. Semi-structured interviews, a focus group discussion and document analyses were used to collect the data that were analysed thematically. The results of the study showed that these learners from single-parent households experienced various challenges on their journey to attain academic success, which ranged from economic hardship, health problems, lack of parental care, and poor socialisation skills. In addition, their academic achievements were impacted by poor attendance, poor academic motivation, child abuse, bad behaviour, and lack of counselling. However, when schools make concerted efforts to introduce intervention strategies and address the academic needs of learners from single-parent families, the results may be positive, as this study was able to demonstrate.

Based on the findings, it is recommended that learners from single-parent household be afforded concerted support with regards to the challenges they encounter so that they may attain academic success. There is a need for the involvement of all stakeholders (teachers,

counsellors, parents, social workers) to assist these learners to overcome the many challenges that impact their attainment of academic success.

Key words: households, single parent, learners, educators, achievements, generation gap, child abuse, drug abuse, pulling out

ABBREVIATIONS

AIDS Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

CM Circuit Manager

HIV Human Immunodeficiency Virus

SBA School Based Assessment

SGB School Governing Body

SMT School Management Team

STI's Sexually Transmitted Infections

UIS United Institute of Statistics

US United States

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Orientation and Background

Single parenting is a major social problem that cuts across all societies and impacts a large proportion of the learners in schools. Action must therefore be taken to curb the escalating challenges that these children experience. This issue has become a source of concern for educators even in established countries such as the US, Denmark and Australia as well as in developing countries such South Africa, Kenya and Nigeria (Njoku, 2014). According to the South African Demographic Health Survey (2012), in 212 32% of children lived with both parents while 34% lived with their mothers or fathers only. Children are raised in different households which include families formed by marriage, in cohabiting unions, in lesbian or gay families, and in single parent families (Amoateng et al., 2004). There is significant evidence that these children are vulnerable and many suffer because of the dire financial situation of many single parents. Moreover, they are exposed to challenges that are difficult to handle and this impacts their academic achievement at school.

Single parenting caused by divorce, separation, and death and unmarried women manifests in various challenges that are experienced by single parent households. Specialists in child development have shown that children who live with one parent only may suffer trauma and many develop bad behaviour, and this may impact them for the rest of their lives (Tesda, 2011). Single parents experience various obstacles as they have to play the role of both mother and father to nurture their children. Circumstances may have forced them to be a single father or mother and it is a challenge to raise their children on their own. Moreover, in many cultures, parenting is impacted by a gender gap which means that male children often feel more comfortable when they are guided by their fathers, whereas girls may be more attached to their mothers (Mrinde, 2014). Hence, in the home where there is only a father, girls may find it difficult to relate personal issues to their fathers, and the fathers will be in a challenging position to advise their daughters how to behave, which is different between fathers and sons. In such instances, adherence to social and behavioural norms becomes unstable, and this may cause psychological problems such as stress and depression that may in turn impact children's academic achievement. This research project explored the problems encountered by primary

school learners from single-parent households and assessed the challenges that impacted their academic achievements.

1.2 Rationale for the Study

My motivation for embarking on this study was both professional and personal, as I am both a qualified teacher and a single parent with a passion for understanding the challenges encountered by the learners from single parent households. Single parenting is a major social problem that cuts across all societies and impacts a large proportion of the learners in schools. Action must therefore be taken to curb the escalating challenges that these children experience such as health problems, dropping out of school, getting involved in criminal activities, bad behaviour, poor attendance etc. This issue has become a source of concern for educators even in established countries such as the US, Denmark and Australia as well as in developing countries such South Africa, Kenya and Nigeria. According to the South African Demographic Health Survey (2012), in 212 32% of children lived with both parents while 34% lived with their mothers or fathers only. Children are raised in different households which include families formed by marriage, in cohabiting unions, in lesbian or gay families, and in single parent families (Amoateng et al., 2004). There is significant evidence that these children are vulnerable and many suffer because of the dire financial situation of many single parents. Moreover, they are exposed to challenges that are difficult to handle and this impacts their academic achievement at school.

Single parenting caused by divorce, separation, and death and unmarried women manifests in various challenges that are experienced by single parent households such as loneliness, poverty, insecurities about raising children alone without any help from the other partner (Njoku, 2014). Single parents experience various obstacles as they have to play the role of both mother and father to nurture their children. Circumstances may have forced them to be a single father or mother and it is a challenge to raise their children on their own. Hence, in the home where there is only a father, girls may find it difficult to relate personal issues to their fathers, and the fathers will be in a challenging position to advise their daughters how to behave, which is different between fathers and sons. In such instances, adherence to social and behavioural norms becomes unstable, and this may cause psychological problems such as stress and depression that may in turn impact children's academic achievement. This research project explored the problems encountered by primary school learners from single-parent households and assessed the challenges that impacted their academic achievements. Therefore, I was also peripherally

interested to discover what experiences my daughters might have had as a result of being raised by a single parent.

During my experiences as a teacher who had personal contact with learners in the school, I noticed that there was a large number of learners who hailed from single-parent households. Biographical records reflected various reasons for this: one of the parents had died, the parents had been divorced, a parent was a single parent by choice, and so forth. There was a lack of information about the other spouses' whereabouts and thus the enrolment process was flawed as this information is required upon enrolment. I was curious about the learners I could identify from single-parent households and observed informally that many behaved strangely in class. For example, many were aggressive; were often absent; sought attention in unacceptable ways; were unkempt; were hungry; bullied other learners; often came to school tired; and many had to walk long distances to school on foot because the single parent could not afford transport fees.

As an experienced teacher, I was aware that the learners I taught had mixed abilities and had different educational needs, but I was inspired to conduct this study in the belief that every learner can prosper and that learners should be given every opportunity to achieve their potential by developing at their own pace.

There is a common perception that single-parent households are unbalanced. However, single-headed households have existed from way back and therefore many scholars have argued that such households should not be regarded as dysfunctional or abnormal, but rather as another family structure (Courts, 2000).

1.3 Problem Statement

In a single-headed household, life can be challenging and stressful at times as all the responsibilities of a family unit are vested in only one parent. To be a single parent is not an easy task, as the parent has to prioritise the essential needs of the household and work single-handedly to achieve these goals. However, it is acknowledged that most of the problems that single parents experience concur with those that both parents may be faced with, but these problems seem harder to handle when the family is headed by only one adult. This is mainly because only one parent earns little money that often does not meet all the needs of the household. What makes it worse is that children often fail to understand why this is happening

to them. For example, all children feel hostile towards their parents as they are growing up and trying to be independent, and in a situation where this anger and rebellion are directed towards only one person, the situation often becomes untenable as there is no other adult to share the burden.

Some household problems are unique and are encountered only by single parents, such as bitterness towards the absent or non-existing spouse, loneliness, poverty, and insecurity about raising the children alone without help. For these and some other reasons, single parents sometimes are clingy or over indulge their children to cover for the loss of the other parent.

There is evidence in the literature that learners who live with continuously married parents are not faced with the same stressful experiences as those living with single parents (Stephen & Udisi, 2016). While different schools of thought define stress in various ways, stress is generally experienced “when external demands transcend people’s coping resources” (Stephen & Udisi, 2016, p .3). This results in feelings of emotional distress, reduced capacity to perform in school, challenging work and family roles, and an increase in physiological indicators of arousal. Children living in such an environment show behavioural responses like lying, stealing, and playing truant in school.

1.4 Research Objectives

The study was guided by the following objectives:

- To identify the challenges encountered by primary school learners from single-parent households;
- To explore the effects of these challenges on primary school learners from single-parent households in terms of their ability to attain academic success;
- To explore possible resolutions to address the identified challenges.

1.5 Critical Research Questions

In keeping with the topic of the study, I set out to answer the following critical research questions that were guided and informed by the purpose of the study:

- What are the challenges encountered by primary school learners from single-parent households?
- Why do effects do these challenges have on primary school learners from single-parent households experience in terms of their ability to attain academic success?
- How possible resolutions address the challenges that these learners experience in attaining academic success?

1.6 Definitions/Terms of Reference

The following terms are contextualised for the purposes of this research.

1.6.1 Primary school

In the South African context, a primary school is a school that offers education for learners in the first three levels/stages of elementary school; i.e., from grades 1-3 (Foundation Phase) and thereafter from grades 4 – 7 (Senior Primary Phase) (Dictionary of South African Education and Training, 2000).

1.6.2 Academic achievement

Academic achievement is the status of a learner's learning and refers to knowledge attained and skills developed during the academic career that are assessed by school authorities through teacher assessments and standardised tests. The achievement levels are expressed in levels ranging from 1 (lowest achievement) to 7 (highest achievement), and often in percentages (%) (Magara, 2017).

1.6.3 Learner

The definition of a learner is “an individual who is receiving formal or informal education or training in something” (Mayaba, 2008). A learner can be a child or an adult who needs support from a teacher to develop academically (Muribwathoho, 2015), but for the purpose of this study the term learner or learners refers to a child between the ages of 11 and 13 who were enrolled at a primary school.

1.6.4 Challenges

Challenges are also referred to as problems that are experienced in a certain setting. In terms of this research, the term ‘challenges’ refers to the problems that learners from single-parent households faced and that may have had an effect on their academic achievement (Webster’s Universal Dictionary, 2009a).

1.6.5 Single-parent households

A household headed by one mother/one father/an older sibling/aunt/uncle/grandmother/grandfather/foster parent/extended relative who acts as the primary caregiver and guardian of a child (Ferrell, 2009).

1.6.6 Principal

The term ‘principal’ refers to the educator who was appointed as the head of the primary school where the study was conducted (Dictionary of South African Education and Training, 2000).

1.6.7 Educator

An educator is a person who teaches, instructs, trains, or imparts knowledge in an education institution and provides education services for others (Dictionary of South African Education and Training, 2000; Webster’s Universal English, Dictionary, 2009b). An educator can further be referred to as someone who is trained and qualified to teach or someone who carries out teaching duties and is remunerated for doing so (Muribwathoho, 2015).

1.7 Value of the Study

Once the findings of this study have been appropriately disseminated by means of workshops, information sessions, cluster and district meetings, and articles in academic journals, it will be useful to all stakeholders (the Department of Basic Education, school management teams, SGBs, and teachers), but particularly those who work in the uMlazi and Pietermaritzburg districts in KwaZulu-Natal. The findings will generate a deep understanding of the challenges encountered by learners from single-parent households. The study will thus benefit relevant support structures as it will elucidate possible solutions that may inform strategies to deal with the challenges that learners from single-parent households face. It is envisaged that cognisance will be taken of the suggested solutions and that officials and educators in the uMlazi and

Pietermaritzburg districts will be inspired to render effective support to learners from single-parent households in their endeavours to help them attain high academic results.

1.8 Focus of the Study

The focus of this study was to investigate the challenges encountered by learners from single-parent households and to determine how these challenges impacted their attainment of academic success. It was conducted in a primary school in the uMlazi district in KwaZulu-Natal in the Republic of South Africa.

1.9 Research Design and Methodology

The methodology that was employed is explained in detail in Chapter Three. I provide a brief overview of the methodology here.

1.9.1 Research approach

This study employed a qualitative approach. As is stipulated by Kothari (2004), this research approach is about a review of the attitudes, opinions and behaviour of individuals in a particular setting. Mertens (1998) asserts that this approach encourages people to explain the difficulties and challenges of situations they find themselves in so as to provide the reader with scientific information for assessing researchers' interpretation of the events.

1.9.2 Research paradigm

This study employed a qualitative research paradigm that facilitated exploration and understanding of the challenges encountered by learners from single-parent households and how this impacted their attainment of academic success. Information was gleaned from learners from single-parent households, single parents, educators, a school principal, and relevant documents for triangulation purposes. Creswell (2009, p. 4) states that "qualitative research is a way for investigating and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem". The interpretivism paradigm was used in this study as I pursued an in-depth understanding of the challenges that primary school learners from single-parent households encountered and how these impacted their attainment of academic success. This paradigm requires the use of a relevant methodology and, by selecting the qualitative research approach, I could gather appropriate information relating to the study topic. Scotland (2012, p. 9) states that "a paradigm is made up of ontology, epistemology, methodology and method".

According to Crotty (1998), ontology is the study of being. Scotland (2012, p. 9) adds that ontology is concerned with “what is”. Epistemology on the other hand is defined by Scotland (2012, p. 9) as “how knowledge is created, acquired and communicated”.

Methodology on the other hand is defined by Crotty (1998, p. 3) as “the strategy or plan of action which lies behind the choice and the use of particular methods. In addition, methodology is concerned with why, what, from where, when and how the information is collected and analysed. Guba and Lincoln (1994, p. 108) further explain that methodology asks the question: “How can the inquirer go about finding out whatever they believe can be known?”

The ontology of interpretivism is said to be ‘relativism’ and varies among individuals (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). People are said to relate differently and develop meanings uniquely, therefore each person’s realities differ, making them unique as individuals. The epistemology of interpretivism is that the world and humans interact and don’t exist without one another (Scotland, 2012, p. 9). Meanings are thus constructed through association; thus without association no meaning can exist.

1.9.3 Qualitative design

The qualitative design was used to find explore the academic challenges encountered by learners from single parent-households. Creswell (2003, p. 13) states that qualitative research is a method of inquiry that aims to gather in-depth understanding of human behaviour and to investigate the why and how questions. A qualitative design was also used because I wanted to understand the experiences of the learners under study first hand, so the optimum was personal involvement (engagement) from within the setting (Bialek, 1994). I thus did not use a quantitative approach as I would not have been able to use follow-up questions to direct the responses of the participants and I was able to use open-ended instead of closed-ended questions. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), through the qualitative approach the researcher is able to produce results (findings) beyond the immediate boundaries of the study, and this was what I intended to do.

1.9.4 Sampling techniques

According Kombo and Tromp (2006, p. 168), sampling is “a process of choosing relevant participants [that possess] the characteristics of the entire population”. This research report employed both simple random and purposive sampling techniques.

1.9.4.1 *Simple random sampling*

The simple random sampling technique is also known as chance sampling or probability sampling where each item has an equal chance to take part in a study (Huberman & Miles, 2014). The technique was used to enable each individual in the targeted population to have an equal chance of being included in the sample. The technique was deployed to obtain a representative sample of the targeted learners and adults in the primary school under investigation.

1.9.4.2 *Purposive sampling*

Purposive sampling, deliberate sampling or judgemental sampling involves “the deliberate or purposive selection of particular units of the universe for constituting a sample which represents the universe” (Kothari, 2004, p. 15). The purposive sampling method was used in this study resulting in a sample comprising of six learners, two parents, one principal, and three educators (i.e., teachers responsible for discipline).

1.9.5 Data analysis

The analysis of qualitative data within the interpretative paradigm includes the composition of ideas and theories about what was studied. Dey (1993, cited in Henning, 2005, p. 30) defines this process as when the researcher “identifies substantive connections by linking data”. The connections and associations among data were studied to assist in constructing a clear image of the topic under investigation. The information was to help me structure my thinking in terms of what I recognised. When I analysed the information, I listened to the transcripts of the audio recordings of the interviews more than six times to avoid misrepresentations and ambiguity. After reading the transcripts numerous times, I highlighted a group of words and arranged them into codes of connotations. Comparable codes were aligned to form categories and themes.

1.10 Limitations of the Study and Challenges Experienced

With reference to Cohen et al. (2000), it is acknowledged that generalisability was a limitation of this study because of the small sample size and the fact that only one school was investigated.

It is also acknowledged that the sensitive nature of the topic was a limitation, as some questions evoked emotions that had long been buried, and this may have impacted the extent of the responses some participants were prepared to offer. However, every effort was made to make the participants feel at ease and to assure them that their responses would be regarded as confidential.

Using children, particularly primary school children, in a study of this nature was deemed essential, but their participation was naturally fraught with pitfalls. One particular challenge was that they might be aware of the position of myself as an adult and that they would offer answers that they assumed I expected from them as children. Suffice it say at this point that every effort was made to authorise their participation, to protect their safety and comfort, and to elicit answers that addressed the research objections and questions as far as possible. No harm came to any of the children during the study and, because I was able to forge a relationship of trust with these learner participants, I was confident that their responses reflected their honest perceptions and true experiences of their lives in single-parent households.

In terms of the document analysis, it is acknowledged that the findings pertaining to the academic achievement and school attendance records of the learner participants were not compared with those of two-parent learners. My focus was on the reality experienced by learners from single-parent contexts and this qualitative study thus did not have a comparative motive. Any gaps in this regard should therefore be addressed by future studies.

The fact that only girls could be recruited to participate in the study may also be viewed as a limitation, particularly because the literature review made reference to the impact of the absence of the father figure on boys. However, although I had approached some boys to participate in the study, none volunteered. The absence of boys' voices in this study thus created a gap in the findings that should be filled by future research studies.

Various challenges were also experienced. For example, it was not easy to arrange times to interview the participants because of their busy work routines. Another challenge that hampered the study was that children from very poor families could not be involved due to transport issues. Appointments with the interviewees (teachers) were scheduled when it suited them as well as the researcher, while the children were interviewed in a safe location at times that were most suitable for all.

1.11 Chapter Outline

Chapter One: Introduction and background

The focus in this chapter is on matters such as background, rationale for the study, problem statement, research objectives, research questions, concepts, and the value of the study. The limitations that impacted the study findings and some challenges that were experienced are also pointed out.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The chapter provides a detailed discussion of the literature that was reviewed in terms of the challenges encountered by primary school learners from single-parent households. The review spanned information from both developed and developing countries. The theories that underpinned this study are also elucidated.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

This chapter illuminates the methods that were used in collecting the data. The focus was the challenges encountered by learners from single-parent households and how these challenges impacted their academic achievements.

Chapter Four: Data Presentation

This chapter presents and discusses the data that were obtained by means of the data collection instruments; i.e., semi-structured interviews, a focus group discussion, and document analysis.

Chapter Five: Data Interpretation, Summary and Recommendations

In this chapter the data are interpreted and analysed in terms of the findings that were discussed in Chapter Four. The chapter is concluded with a brief summary of the findings and relevant recommendations.

1.12 Conclusion

Chapter One provided an introduction to and discussed the background of the study. It presented the problem statement, objectives and research questions and elucidated the research

paradigm that was utilised. The limitations that impacted the finding and some challenges that I encountered were also briefly referred to.

The following chapter focuses on the literature review and illuminates the challenges that are encountered by learners from single-parent households and the impact of these challenges on them. Both international and national perspectives are explored. The discourse refers to these challenges in general but special reference is also made to the ability – or inability – of learners from single-parent households who are in the Senior Primary Phase of schooling to attain high academic achievements. The next chapter present the literature review.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter was on the matters such as background, rationale of the study, problem statement, research objectives, research questions, critical questions, definition of concepts and the value of the study.

This chapter provides an overview of relevant literature as it focuses on other scholars' work that related to this research. The literature review is structured as follows: concepts of the family and single-parent families, single-parent learners in developed and developing countries, causes of single-parenting problems experienced by learners, and the impact of these problems on learners' ability to excel academically.

According to Hart (2009), the literature review is fundamental to the accomplishment of academic research and it ensures that the researcher's topic is researchable. He further postulates that the importance of reviewing literature is that it helps the researcher to understand the topics in terms of what has already been discovered about the topic, how it has been done (researched), and what the key issues are. Therefore, the literature that I reviewed informed my reasoning about the challenges encountered by learners from single-headed households and how these challenges impacted their academic achievements.

First, I concentrate on countries such as the United States of America (US), Australia, Denmark and Canada, and then my attention shifts to developing countries such as Kenya, Nigeria, Ethiopia, South Africa, Ghana, and Tanzania.

2.2 The Family Structure

The concept of a family has been defined in many different ways, yet all agree that a family is a powerful environment where children's learning and experiences of life are moulded. Schools and the home have different approaches to the lives and learning of children, and some children

are likely to suffer if the family environment is dysfunctional (Marjoribanks, 1986). The environment at home is a primary socialisation agent and influences the child's interest in school and aspirations for the future. Actually, it is the parents who are primarily responsible for the educational and career development of their children, but divorce and separation or the death of one spouse may leave parenting roles in the hands of a single parent, and that is when various problems arise for some unwitting victims (Mrinde, 2014). It is acknowledged that single parents may also be victims due to certain challenges, but an investigation into this phenomenon was beyond the scope of this study.

The concept of family refers to a group of two or more persons related by birth, marriage, or adoption and who are residing together in a household. According to the US Bureau of Census (2000b), family includes all members in a household. In addition, conventional Wisdom (2012) holds that family is a group of people who love and care for one another. A family is also two or more persons who share resources, the responsibility for decisions, values and goals, and have a commitment to one another over time (American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences, 2004). Families give emotional, psychological as well as financial support to one another. According to New York State Administrative Regulations (1995, p. 3), the definition of family "should not rest on fictitious legal distinctions or genetic history", but should instead be based on "the functional and psychological qualities of the relationship; the exclusivity and longevity of the relationship, the level of emotional and financial commitment, the reliance placed upon one another for daily family services, and how the members conduct their everyday lives and hold themselves out to society". Throughout history, no society has been discovered that does not have a family system, and various readings seem to suggest that the term generally refers to a group of people related to one another by birth, marriage, or adoption. Additionally, in contemporary society, the term is commonly used for any group of people that feels a sense of kinship or family relationship (Irving, 2003).

A family is a construct of meanings and relationships, whereas a household is a residential and economic unit (Osmond & Thorne, 1993; Rapp, 1982). To put it another way, "a household is a residence group that carries out domestic functions, whereas a family is a kinship group" (Holstein & Gubrium, 1999, p. 21). Furthermore, researchers describe family as a group of people who share similar qualities and beliefs that are implanted in them in their babyhood and that last their entire lives.

However, the shifting nature of the family in modern society has generated and given new meanings to the family unit and various descendants have to be classified (Olson & DeFrain, 2003). Therefore, “any definition of family should be comprehensive enough to involve a variety of family structures, dynamics, and functions” (p. 5). It thus seems that the term has developed various new meanings in recent years and will continue to evolve in our society.

Furthermore, family arrangements tend to be more difficult to define as a result of divorce, remarriage, and numerous other conditions. Also, new meanings for the family unit are necessary to define difficulty in relationships, and it seems that little development has been made in clarifying or effectively outlining these new formations. Olson and DeFrain (2003, p. 5) state that to describe modern family dynamics is difficult. The following aspects highlight the evolution of different family formations in the US:

- In 2002, 69% of children lived in a nuclear family with mothers and fathers. Figures showed that children from two-parent families differed according to ethnic/cultural groupings: 80% of white children; 70% of Latinos; and 47% of African American children lived in two-parent homes (Fields, 2003).
- The number of single-parent families with children under the age of 18 increased. In 1970, only 12% of children resided in one-parent homes, but in 1980 this number had increased to 22%, and by 1990 to 28%. The most recent information gathered showed that, in 2002, the number of children in single-parent families remained unchanged at 28% (Fields, 2003). “About half (48%) of all African American families were headed by a single mother, while 25% of Latino families and 16% of White families were headed by a single mother” (Fields, 2003, p. 5). Additionally, by 2003, “4%–5% of families across ethnic/cultural groups were headed by single mothers” (Fields, 2003, p. 5). Some social scientists at the time predicted that 60% of children in the US would reside in single-parent homes by the time they were 18 years old if current divorce and remarriage rates held (Olson & DeFrain, 2003).

A review of the literature thus seemed to show that single-parent families are on the rise in developed and developing countries. With reference to Demo and Cox (2001), more than one-fourth of all US children lived with just one parent in 2000, which was up from 12% in 1970,

and half of all children spent some of their childhood in single-parent families while one in five children spent his or her life as a child in one-parent homes (p.86)

Martin, Emery and Peris (2004) noted that approximately 85% of one-parent homes was headed by a woman who was also living in poverty and that single mothers on average spent a total of about nine years raising children without a partner being present. Bianchi and Casper (2000, p. 22) found that in 2000, 49% of African American children lived with mothers only, compared with 25% of Latino children and 16% of Caucasian children. The research report seems to suggest a growing trend of one-parent households and that this phenomenon may continue to rise.

The main child-rearing person in a household is difficult to determine because there are numerous variations. To name a few:

- The number of parents in the household (including guardians, grandparents or foster parents);
- The gender roles of the single-parent in the household;
- The presence or lack of an extended family;
- The parents' marital status; and
- The sexual orientation of the parents (Demo & Cox, 2001).

Each of these variables may have various impacts on children depending on their age (Demo & Cox, 2001). Additionally, a study of African American children in the Woodlawn community in Chicago distinguished 86 different mixtures of adults residing in families with first graders (Hunter & Ensminger, 1992). Following this are the timing and sequencing of transformation in children's living arrangements.

According to Demo and Cox (2001), the following are research-based generalisations concerning these variations.

- The absence of a same-sex parent for daughters of solo fathers and for sons of solo mothers tends to have a negative impact on the child.

- The presence of two adults, even if the second adult is not a legal parent, has been found to diminish adolescent behaviour problems.
- Growing up in non-traditional gender role families does not have adverse effects on the children.
- Children of lesbian and gay parents have normal relationships with their peers, and their relationships with adults of both sexes are satisfactory.
- Children do better in stable living arrangements than in transitory ones, even if the stability involves living with a single parent. For example, “Children experiencing multiple transitions (e.g., from two parents to a single parent to a parent and a stepparent) and experiencing them later in childhood fare poorly compared to those living their entire childhood in stable single-parent families” (p. 105).

Researchers suggest that a constant family has more positive results for kids than kids raised outside the family home. A theory that illustrates the family as a collective unit is the family system theory. The family system theory states that everything that happens to any family member has an impact on everyone else in the family (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2003). Because family members are interconnected and operate as a group, the group is called a family system. Furthermore, “describing the family as a system has become common in both theory and practice; also mainly [among] family psychologists [who] work with couples’ problems and family relationship problems” (Olsen & DeFrain, 2003, p. 64). The researchers cited above generally describe the family as intricate pieces of a collective whole, where each part has a role and responsibility in relation to the others.

In 1992, Whitaker, a pioneer family therapist, was fond of saying that, in a figurative sense, “there are no individuals in the world, only fragments of families” (cited in Olson & DeFrain, 2003, p. 64). This suggests that individuals are attached to and bonded with their families, which reminds one of the adage that charity begins at home.

It is also a general concept that a family is a group of people who are socially intertwined and that they have similar beliefs. With regard to the African American community, research has shown that families in this context have a high rate of single-parent households.

2.3 Single-Parent Families and Divorce

It is generally a sweeping statement that households comprising of one-parent families are mainly found in urban areas, and this assumption requires in-depth research. Be that as it may, my study was based in an urban area, and I found that the majority of learners in the school in this context (300 of 1 200 learners, or 25%) came from single-parent households. What was disturbing was that it appeared at face value that it was mainly these children who showed inadequate academic progress, and I could only surmise that it was due to a lack of resources such as stationery, a full school uniform, available and affordable transport, and parental encouragement and support at home. What was most disturbing was that most staff members reported that these children were the ones who generally displayed negative behaviour and they generally did not have enough support from home when the issue was addressed.

In putting the single-parent household under the loop, one is reminded that such households are defined as families headed either by a mother, father, an older sibling, aunt, uncle, grandmother, grandfather, foster parent, or extended relative who acts as the primary caregiver and guardian of the child. Secondly, as this study was conducted in an urban environment, a link between single-parent families and urban environments, poor academic performance, behavioural problems, and low parental support at school was assumed. In this context, many authors have shown a link between divorce and children's academic challenges. However, Ahrons (2004) prefers the term binuclear family to single-parent family because the former term acknowledges the sometimes positive outcomes that result from divorce. Olson and DeFrain (2003) agree to an extent, as they argue that divorce is a process that results in family restructuring rather than break-up of the family system. This presents the argument that a family restructuring affected by divorce is seemingly not perfect, but it also has a convincing explanation of divorce as it relates to single-parent families. Olson and DeFrain (2003) state that restructuring of the nuclear family after divorce causes the new formation of families. Once a husband or wife decides not to move out of the family after divorce, then the two partners continue to connect with each other, and another type called "a binuclear family" develops (p. 457). Erstwhile spouses both tend to fully nurture the children albeit from different homes. Children may thus benefit from a binuclear family in which both parents are actively involved in child rearing, even though they are divorced and living in separate households. However, divorce and its effect of children was not a central focus of the study; rather, all causes of single-parent families were considered.

McLanahan and Booth (1991) and Ferrel (2009) argue that kids who live with their single mothers only are underprivileged, unlike children who live with both parents at home and who have the benefit of a divorced but nucleus family structure. It seems that mothers in such family structures play an important role as the primary parent in raising the children and also as the person who supports the family, while fathers appear to not take full responsibility for the support of their children after divorce. Therefore, this will affect the children's lives socially, spiritually and psychologically.

McLanahan and Booth (1991, p. 406) note the comparison between children living with one parent and those who live in two-parent families. They state the following with regard to children from mother-only families:

- They tend to show poorer academic achievement, and the relationship is more negative for boys than for girls;
- They are more likely to have higher absentee rates at school;
- They are more likely to drop out of school;
- They are more likely to have lower earnings in young adulthood and are more likely to be poor;
- They are more likely to marry early and to have children early, both in and out of wedlock;
- They are more likely to divorce if they marry;
- They are more likely to commit delinquent acts and to engage in drug and alcohol use.

However, the authors who are cited below all paint a relatively positive picture of children from single-parent households.

Zinn, Eitzen and Wells (2008) found that although children from single-parent families are more at risk than children from two-parent families, “most [eventually] adjust normally” (p. 346), as they found that “most children who experience living in a single-parent family do not get pregnant, drop out of school, or require treatment from a mental health professional” (p. 346). Such evidence is an important reminder that many children from single-parent families

seem to be able to cope. Martin et al. (2004) state: “It seems clear that the majority of children from single-parent families proceed along a relatively healthy child development trajectory as measured by key indicators of their academic, social and psychological adjustment” (p. 285), although 85% of one-parent families are headed by a woman.

However, Marsiglio, Amato, Day and Lamb (2001) state that the absence of a father figure in the child’s life has a negative impact that clarifies the pathologies found among the children of single-parent households. Furthermore, the latter authors argue that the presence of both mother and father contributes to the healthier development of the child, as both parents are working hand in hand in stimulating the child positively. However, the non-existence of a father figure in the home has effects especially for male children as they sometimes feel that mothers do not understand what they are going through. This usually occurs in the adolescent stage, as at this time they feel the need that only a father or male figure can understand what they are going through and that a mother cannot relate to their challenges due to the fact that she is a female.

In short, learners from single-parent families encounter more problems in their lives than their counterparts who live with both parents as they do not have the support of both parents. Parental support plays a significant psychological and emotional role in children’s lives, yet still many seem to adapt well under the circumstances. In today’s society, the phenomenon of single parenthood is escalating due to the fact that some girls give birth as early as 12 years of age because even children engage in unprotected sexual intercourse. The majority of these babies are raised by their mothers or grandmothers only, and these women appear to battle to support the family as they live in poverty. Also, single parents may not have as much time to engage fully in their children’s education, and this may contribute to the challenges that children of single-parent households experience.

2.4 An International Perspective: Developed Countries

The literature revealed that the number of children living with a single parent is increasing in countries abroad, even in developed countries. In the United States, children being brought up in two-parent families decreased from 85% in 1968 to 70% in 2003, while the proportion of those living in single-parent homes nearly multiplied (Centre for Marriage and Families, 2005).

In a study that explored single-parent families in the US, Martin, Emery and Peris (2004) noted that approximately 85% of homes were headed by a woman and almost half of these households

were living in poverty. Clearly, such a state of affairs has an impact on children's participation in education and many challenges arise due to economic hardship. In addition, households with both parents have a positive impact on the child because they are financially and emotionally supported and both boys and girls have the opportunity to choose which parents they can talk to in times of need. When two parents work hand in hand to meet the family's needs is positive, whereas the absence of one parent, usually the father, is a big disadvantage, mainly for male children, as at times they need a role model of the same gender. They idolise their absent fathers and it is a natural thing for them to assume that fathers know best as they are males and they can relate to the transition of what they are going through at the puberty stage and they may feel ashamed to talk to their mothers (Vassar, 2000).

Children from single-parent families are also more likely to face poor health conditions as many are compelled to do everything for themselves at home (such as bathing, washing, doing homework), as the mothers come home tired and only manage to cook food and then go straight to bed. This means that there is no communication between the mother and her children, which leads to health issues going unnoticed as they cannot take themselves to the doctor. Their needs now become neglected, which has health implications.

The literature revealed that children from both developed and underdeveloped countries experience these challenges. Ponzetti (2003) explains that the number of single parent families in 2000 was 22% in Canada, 20% in Australia, and 19% in Denmark. These high numbers of single-parent families suggest that problems may be experienced in these countries as so many children are the 'victims' of single-parent households. Many of these children are likely to experience health-related problems as a result of a decline in their living standards, which may include a lack of health insurance (Mauldin, 1990). The phenomenon of children from single-parent households is growing more common across the US, and new research has revealed that such children in developed countries worldwide encounter various problems in their development, both psychologically and educationally. Their plight results in the following:

- Economic hardship
- Lack of guidance and counselling
- Lack of parental care

- Poor academic performance
- Poverty
- Early marriage
- High rate of school dropout and absenteeism
- Ill-discipline in schools
- Low level of education.

According to Ferrel (2009), research that was conducted in the US revealed the impact of one-parent households on academic success, ascribing low academic performance to the number of times a learner was absent and the type of household. Furthermore, single parents multiplied three times in American household's in 1996.

In a study that was conducted in Russia by (Ferrell, 2009), it was discovered that there was no correlation between the number of days a learner was suspended and the type of household in which the learner lived. However, it was found that the number of one-parent homes was also multiplying and that children from these families became a societal problem because of the circumstances that those families lived in.

According to the United States Census Bureau of 2016, out of almost 12 million single-parent families with children:

- 27% of children under 18 lived in single-parent households in the US.
- 80% of these households were headed by mothers.
- More than 23% of American children was raised without a father.
- Only 4% of children was raised without their mothers.

2.4.1 Canada

According to a 2016 census, 19.2% of all Canadian children lived with single parents at the time. Of these, 81.3% lived with their biological mothers and 18.7% lived with their biological fathers.

Statistics suggested that the likelihood of living in a single-parent family increased with the child's age, as:

- 12.1% of children younger than 1 year of age were living in a single-parent family, and 87.1% were living with their mothers;
- 22.8% of children aged 10-14 years were living with a single parent. Among this older group of children, 79.4% were living with their mothers and 20.6% lived with their fathers.

2.4.2 Developing Countries

In these countries the challenges single-parent children experience are similar to those of developed countries regardless of their cultural background or traditional practices. Literature that was reviewed related to Kenya, Nigeria and Ethiopia and also focused on South Africa where there has been a marked increase in the children born in single-parent households (Statistics SA, 2018). The main cause of this increase is teenage pregnancy in single-parent headed households.

2.4.2.1 Kenya

In Kenya there has been an increase in the rate of single parenting, yet this type of parenthood is viewed negatively in this country (Njau, 2017). This negative perception of single parenting by the Kenyan society implies that children brought up in such family structures may not be socially accepted and they may thus be denied support and recognition by teachers, other learners and the society at large, compared to children brought up in two-parent households. About 30% of children live in single-parent households in Kenya (Kenya demographic Health Survey).

2.4.2.2 Nigeria

There are widespread cases of single parenthood across all regions and tribes in Nigeria, and this has become a major source of concern in terms of socio-economic and socio-cultural development. The high number of single-parent households appears to be influenced by the deaths of the other partner, divorce, and separation. Kibel and Wagtaff (2006) state that the majority of single mothers in Kenya live without their husbands because of cruelty, adultery and desertion. Salam and Alawode (1998), who conducted research in Nigeria on the influence of single parenting on the academic achievement of learners in schools, found that single-parent children had poor academic achievement, a high rate of absenteeism, low self-esteem, and low tolerance, which led them to be ill-disciplined. These results are corroborated by the findings of researchers such as Bichley (1976), Akinade (1994) and Agbo (1997), who all found that the single parent who raised the children was most likely a mother.

2.4.2.3 Ethiopia

A Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) of Ethiopia revealed that more than one household in every four (26%) had a mother only. Centre for the study for Adolescence in Central Statistical Agency (CSA) International classification functioning, Disability and health (2012) state that, in 2005, there was an increase of 23% in single-parent households at the time. The DHS also indicated that, in 2011, 17% of children in Ethiopia lived in the custody of single parents (either their mother or their father). Tilso and Larson (2000, p.1) discovered that the custom of getting married at a young age was extensive in Ethiopia, especially in rural parts, and that it was the main cause of an increasing number of divorce cases. Serkalem (2006) also found that, compared to intact marriage, divorced parents were married at an early age. Marriages based on traditional cultural practices (such as abduction which is still practised although it is believed to be declining) are highly likely to end in divorce or abandonment. Getachew (2006) also notes that pregnancy before marriage increases the number of single mothers and fathers in Ethiopia. According to Weldegabreal (2014), empirical studies before 2014 showed that the number of one-parent households had increased in Ethiopia.

2.4.2.4 South Africa

In the South African context, an analysis of single parents in urban areas showed certain trends. In 2007, some 44% of all urban parents was single, of which 52% was urban African, 30% was Coloured, 7% was Indian, and 24% was White parents.

Information captured from the South African Demographic Health Survey (2016) indicates that, in 2016, 40% of children lived with both mothers and fathers, whereas 45, 6% lived with one parent.

In South Africa, children are raised in dissimilar households where their care givers may be married, cohabiting, lesbian or gay, or single parents (Amoateng et al., 2004). Moreover, more and more children are raised in single-parent families where they face problems because such a family life has never been simple to adapt to.

The reasons for the proliferation of single-parent homes are death, divorce, separation, and so forth. The most common reason is that children are born out of wedlock. This often leads to only one parent (usually the mother) supporting the family (by providing food, shelter, clothing, etc.) and neglecting other issues such as education because they seem unimportant due to financial constraints. Most single parents disregard the emotional support of their child, yet it is very important that children are supported and nourished emotionally and physically. Parents should also be a role model and should monitor, supervise, guide, counsel and support their children's academic progress (White, 2004).

2.5 Reasons for the Single-Parent Phenomenon

The reasons why single-parent households exist vary across nations. These reasons may be personal choice or a situation beyond the control of the single parent (Lauer & Lauer, 2012, p. 122). Generally, single-parent families exist mainly because of the following reasons: premarital sexual intercourse and pregnancy; the generation gap; divorce; separation by choice; and the death of a spouse or life partner.

2.5.1 Premarital sex resulting in pregnancy

Having sexual intercourse before marriage is a factor that causes girls/women to become single mothers. This occurs mainly among young people who no longer believe that celibacy before marriage is a value and who believe that premarital abstinence from sex is outdated and not 'cool'. This has caused a major increase in children engaging in and exploring unsafe sexual activities, which in turn has led to numerous unplanned pregnancies and will continue to do so. Thus family crises are broadened while history repeats itself as young mothers who are also children have an extra mouth to feed on the limited income that a single mother of the household generally earns. Research has shown that, in South Africa, 50% of young, unmarried

women (age 15-40) and 40% of young men (age 15-24) had premarital sex (Mashau 2011). Kalakola (2010) states that society's uncritical acceptance of premarital sex has led to an increase in premarital sexual activities, and thus an increase in single-parent families.

2.5.2 Generation gap

The generation gap is another factor that causes single-parent families. Beliefs and customs that were cherished in 'the olden days' are not appreciated by the youth of modern society, and people are living and doing things differently. Historically, in South Africa and other African societies such as in Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria and Uganda, young females were not permitted to bear children before marriage (Mrinde, 2014). Now having a child out of wedlock has become the norm rather than the exception, probably because of a decline in moral standards and advancements in science and technology. Today it is not an abomination for the new generation to cohabit without getting married. However, this has and will undeniably lead to an escalation in single parenthood where, in the end, one partner will be out of the picture while the other partner will remain to raise the children, in many instances without financial support.

2.5.3 Divorce

This is another factor that leaves children with a single parent which really challenges the children, as they have no voice in the matter as it is mainly the parents who decide to divorce and often the children's wellbeing is not considered at all. The impact divorce will have on the children is marginalised in bitter divorce battles that lead to children being emotionally drained and very angry for most of their lives. Often parents fail to see the damage they have done until it is too late (Burke *et al*, 2009). It is undeniable that divorce, particularly acrimonious ones, has a damaging impact on the lives of parents and children. However, some women prefer a legal divorce because it includes sharing/splitting assets obtained when they were together as husband and wife. As Hughes (2009) asserts, divorce creates a crisis in the family life-cycle and distorts the equilibrium experienced by all members in the nuclear and extended family. Cohen et al. (2000) assert that over millions of children worldwide have to adapt to living in separated or divorced families each year.

2.5.4 Separation

Many couples practise unofficial separation by living apart while solving their marriage differences. Married couples may decide to separate unofficially without going to court to file

for a divorce. Separation occurs when one, especially the female, moves out of the house willingly or by force. Burke et al. (2009) note that separation and divorce are common phenomena in the community today and that they signify a fundamental stress in the lives of the individuals involved. Divorce has undesirable potentialities and impact the mental and physical health of all members of the family especially that of the children who will be confused and not know which side they belong to.

Furthermore, published evidence of the devastating conflicts in marriages has discouraged some women from getting married, and therefore they decide to have children without getting married in order to avoid complications. Weisnsel (2008) asserts that some women may decide to be self-governing. They have decent jobs and earn decent salaries, and this motivates them to become single parents, otherwise they decide for adoption.

2.5.5 Death

Sinisaar and Tammpuu (2009) note that single parenting may also occur as a consequence of the death of one parent and the remaining parent is then left alone to continue nurturing the children. Mothers and fathers are vital in the lives of children, so when one parent passes away, the connection between the child and the deceased parent comes to an end. Therefore, the remaining parent will be left to deal with the tasks of the one who passed away. In any instance, losing one parent affects the financial status of the household as well as the living conditions. Moreover, the passing of a father or mother impacts the child psychologically and sometimes leads to a change in behaviour and academic performance. The majority of fatalities amongst parents, especially in Africa, is caused by HIV/AIDS, accidents, civil wars and other calamities like floods and earthquakes.

2.6 Challenges Experienced by Single-Parent Households and the Effects on Learners' Academic Achievements

The number of female-headed families has escalated dramatically in the last half of the twentieth century and this phenomenon has continued unabated to this day (Mrinde, 2014). This has caused some people to argue that the family structure is collapsing and that it has negative effects on children, households and the community (Popenoe, 1996). Others suggest that single-parent families have been present in all societies over time and should not be seen as problematic but rather as another family structure (Coontz, 2008). However, regardless of

what people perceive about the existence of homes headed by one parent, it impacts all spheres of family life. Children from such homes in particular face many challenges throughout their lives, and therefore the challenges they encounter and the effects thereof on their education are discussed below.

2.6.1 Family background

Family background is key to a learner's life inside and beyond learning institutions. Social and monetary prestige remain dynamics that sway learners' education. Eamon (2005) and Hochschild (2003) note that many learners coming from underprivileged social economic backgrounds get low marks and drop out of school. Many single-parent homes have limited income and the parents are often unable to provide their children with school necessities such as school fees, textbooks, exercise books, and new school uniforms. A minority of single parents are wealthy, whereas the majority are financially constrained.

Single-parent family situations manifest in other obstacles such as inadequate school attendance, children's inability to perform scholastically, and psychological and intellectual problems. Pong and Ju (2000) note that the majority of children from single-parent families with limited income encounter scholastic problems and this is circuitously allied to underprivileged families and not just to parental style. These hardships directly minimise these children's access to relevant support services. Fraser (2004) strongly supports the notion that poverty has an impact on the capability of fathers or mothers to do regular supervision and monitoring, enough family executive practices, and a range of social as well as learning demotivating experiences.

Another problem is disciplinary delinquency. Behaviour that demonstrates suitable values and attitudes in children are shaped by parents as role models. Children who grow up with one parent lack the most important motivators – a mother or a father. Secondly, because a second parent's income is often non-existent, the remaining parent is forced to ensure that the children's basic needs are provided for; if this does not happen, the children will engage in delinquent behaviour, often to procure money to purchase items that other children have. Wendy and Kathleen (2003) witness that children from unbroken families generally show no sign of behaviour related problems and become high achievers, unlike children from broken homes. It is often these latter children who are suspended or expelled from school, who engage

in delinquent activities, who have problems getting along with their teachers, and who do no homework or pay no attention in class.

Children growing up in single-parent households are likely to experience emotional breakdown such as depression which will manifest in chronic illnesses, unhappiness, sexual promiscuity, and delinquent behaviour. These learners cannot pay attention to their school work. Mandara and Murray (2009) note that learners from single-parent households are more likely to use drugs and alcohol with boys raised by single fathers being more likely to be affected. Additionally, single parents have to divide their time and attention among their children and therefore they have less time to pay attention to individual children. Domina (2005) states that lack of parental involvement, supervision and motoring of children is associated with both negative and positive impacts. Parental involvement prevents behavioural problems, so whenever a parent is not involved in his/her children's lives, the children will usually engage in the use of alcohol and in smoking cigarettes or marijuana in order to relieve anxiety and forget their problems.

As a consequence of a lack of discipline, single-parent children end up committing crime and abusing alcohol and/or drugs. Therefore, mothers who have no partner to assist in raising the children have less time to supervise the family, and this opens opportunities for their children to be involved in mischievous behaviour. Also, children who are raised in homes with marital difficulties are aggressive and quarrelsome or become aloof and withdrawn, and many commit unlawful acts and manifest antisocial behaviour. According to Demo and Adcock (1996) cited in Paulo (2017), children from single-parent homes manifest short- and long-term economic and psychological problems: they are often absent from school, show low levels of learning, have a high dropout rate, and engage in delinquent activities. This is due to a lack of supervision by parents at home.

2.6.2 Health problems

It has also been demonstrated that children from single-parent families are more inclined to experience health problems because of the shortage of proper care as a result of financial constraints. Their single parents often cannot afford to give them healthy food and they are susceptible to diseases. In addition, these children lack psychological support which can easily expose them to health and mental problems. McLanahan and Booth (1989) cited in Mrinde (2014) state that children from single-parent homes are more likely to experience health-related

problems as a result of unbalanced meals, poor shelter, and a lack of health insurance for medication. As a result, when they become grownups, such children will get married at an early age, give birth at an early age, and get divorced when they are still very young. Moreover, young females are in danger of becoming infertile for life (McLanahan & Booth, 1991, p. 406)

The Centre for Marriage and Families (2005) state that children who grow up in single-parent households are susceptible to stress, depression, anxiety and low self-esteem during their teenage years, and they have problems that can significantly reduce their ability to focus on school work and perform well academically. Research has shown that divorce has lasting negative emotional effects throughout childhood, adolescence and adulthood. Amato (2015) notes that when one parent is absent from the family home, the remaining one has to deal with this vast problem, and the children have to find ways to cope, which is often difficult.

About 40-50% of children from single-parent families suffer depression, compared to 5-10% who live in a home where there are a mother and a father (Henslin, 1993). A single parent may only address this problem when he/she notes inadequate academic achievement, disturbance in social relations, and disorder in eating and sleeping patterns. Moreover, violent behaviour and sicknesses may increase if a child is psychologically disturbed by the absence of one parent in the home.

2.6.3 Sexual activities and teenage pregnancy

Another challenge that is common among children from single-parent households (although it is acknowledged that all children are susceptible to temptation) is that they engage in sexual activities and unprotected intercourse more often than not leads to teenage pregnancy. Scholars have argued that young people engage in promiscuous sexual activities to make up for a lack of motherly or fatherly love and joy in the family, and by acting this way they believe that they are loved and accepted. However, they are exposed to unplanned pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections (STIs) such as HIV/AIDS (Dlamini, 2015). Some girls get involved in sexual activities to earn a living and to feed themselves and their families. Working single parents have insufficient time to monitor their children's academic progress and social behaviour and many have little time to engage in conversations with their children. Poor school reports are blamed on the teachers, yet these parents took no time to check exercise books, school attendance and social associations and, as a result children's academic progress is stunted (Mrinde, 2014).

2.6.4 Economic hardships

Single parents and their children encounter economic challenges and materials for school such as stationery, a school uniform, money for transport, and other school requirements are not available. Economic hardship spirals into other obstacles such as poor nutrition and health problems, leading to failure to attend school regularly. Financial situations make some learners work part time, which in turn results in increased levels of absenteeism, fatigue and truancy. There are many factors at school and at home that contribute to the poor academic performance of learners from single-parent families, such as non-attendance, health problems related to poor nourishment/diet, poor focus in class, and likely a poor image and bullying at school. These children also lack guidance and direction from parents, because many single parents have little time as they need to attend to so many needs (Weldegabreal, 2014).

Besides poor attendance and poor academic achievements, the majority of learners from single-parent households tend to drop out of school because the parent struggles financially. Additionally, the majority of single parents are unable to pay school fees, buy uniforms, pay for transport, textbooks (although the DBE endeavours to provide textbooks for all children), stationery, and other school necessities. Such learners are often compelled to run away from school and try other means of making money such as selling drugs, stealing, and prostitution to assist themselves and their families.

It may seem that the discussion above is one-sided, but as was discussed earlier, various authors have argued learners from single-parent families achieve excellent results and live meaningful and happy lives (often because an abusive parent may have left the home). However, it seems undeniable that many more learners from single-parent families face numerous challenges that delay their development and preclude them from attaining high academic standards.

2.7 The Attainment of High Academic Results

The literature suggests that many children from single-parent families battle to attain high academic results, generally as a result of one or more of the following:

- Poverty and economic hardship in the family;
- Poor school attendance;
- Poor academic motivation and dropping out of school;

- Lack of guidance and counselling;
- Delinquent behaviour;
- Drug and alcohol abuse; and
- Criminal activities.

Findings by McLanahan and Booth (1991), Wendy and Kathleen (2003) and Ferrell (2009) reveal that children from single-parent families tend to have poor academic results and are likely to have the highest absenteeism rate at school. They drop out of school, marry early and have children at a tender age, and they commit delinquent acts such as drug and alcohol usage.

2.7.1 Poverty and economic hardship in the families of learners from single-parent households

Poverty is a serious issue and it needs to be addressed as the number of learners from single-parent households is increasing annually. The provision of textbooks by the DBE is a step in the right direction, but the many children in rural and poverty-stricken areas who annually have to wait for the delivery of these books are seriously disadvantaged. Additionally, as the days go by, the way of doing things changes, and challenges are becoming more difficult to address.

2.7.2 Poor school attendance

This is also a major concern as it negatively affects all learners, but particularly learners from single-parent households as they are already disadvantaged due to many other factors (Mboweni, 2014).

2.7.3 Poor academic performance and dropping out of school

Learners from single-parent households encounter financial problems at home and many are involved in petty crimes to earn a living; this results in poor performance or dropping out of school due to poor attendance. While their fellow learners are in class, these learners are conducting ‘business’ somewhere and sometimes these children are absent minded in school as they think of problems that are waiting for them at home, which means they are not fully involved in class. The US Department of Justice and Delinquency (2001) explains that learners who do not attend school regularly often end up dropping out of school and put themselves at

another long-term disadvantage as they are often rejected by society as adults (Rothmans, 2002); US Department of Justice, 2001; Davidson, 2002; Applegate, 2003).

2.7.4 Lack of guidance and counselling

Economic hardship causes that learners from single-parent households lack guidance and counselling, monitoring, supervision, role modelling and parental care. The absence of one parent who is no longer a part of the family causes the remaining parent to make use of his or her time to attend to basic domestic needs, and this forces learners to find ways of providing for themselves. If a child in poor circumstances is dependent on him- /herself and has no one to monitor and supervise his/her academic progress and behaviour, the result is almost without exception delinquency (Mrinde, 2014).

2.7.5 Delinquent behaviour

Learners get involved in misbehaving because there is no adequate monitoring. They then start misbehaving at home and at school. Additionally, they don't go to school daily; are abusive towards teachers; and bully other learners and even the single parent. Their peers or dealers introduce them to alcohol and drugs that endanger their lives. Learners with good behaviour are shaped by parents as they are the role models of their children. Hence, if parents fail to properly care for these learners, they misbehave and drop out of school or are expelled; therefore they cannot achieve academically (Dlamini, 2015).

Many young learners behave badly, not because of the effect of financial constraints, but because they miss the absent parent, love and socialisation. They feel rejected and that it 'was their fault', which makes them unhappy and unable to pay attention. This indicates that learners need strong supportive relationships that motivate them to work hard to succeed.

2.7.6 Drug and alcohol abuse

Apart from delinquent behaviour, many learners from single-parent households engage in drug use so that they will overcome the hardships that they encounter. Mandara and Murray (2006) assert that single-parent children are more likely to use drugs and alcohol with boys raised by single fathers being most affected. However, Wendy and Kathleen (2003) assert that boys who are raised by single mothers are more affected. The findings of the latter study revealed that both groups were affected, irrespective of the gender of the single parent who was raising the child. These children engaged in smoking marijuana, coke, grass, whoonga and other

dangerous drugs. This was due to a lack of adequate adult supervision, peer pressure, and a lack of monitoring and supervision by their parents.

2.7.7 Criminal activities

Some learners get involved in criminal activities because of the effect of economic hardship on the household. They end up stealing from other learners and pilfer things such as lunch, schoolbooks, uniforms, cell phones, and other personal possessions. They also steal from their teachers and commit house robberies in order to get money to cater for their needs because their parents cannot afford to purchase things that are essential for them. So, the solution is to get involved in criminal activities to quench their desires.

Generally, learners from single-parent households are likely to encounter problems that will affect their academic achievement. Economic hardship is the main challenge that causes other challenges to manifest such as poor attendance, poor academic achievement, engaging in drugs and alcohol abuse, and criminal behaviour. Also, the absence of monitoring, supervision and parental care, a lack of guidance and counselling, and a lack of positive socialisation cause delinquency. These learners get involved in negative behaviour which may destroy their lives and make them fail repeatedly, and this puts their future in danger (Mrinde, 2014).

2.8 Single Parents and Society

According to Michelle (2010), various factors cause a parent to become a single such as death, abandonment, infidelity, and may more.

2.8.1 Economic struggles

A household with only one parent earning a meagre income is fraught with problems and such parents are often forced to work longer hours if they are employed, or they revert to begging or crime. The academic achievement of children is also affected depending on the social class of single-parent families. According to Murkerjee (1978, cited in Abbas, 2004), it is believed that many single parents invest as much as they can in their children in order to provide schooling for them.

African society is still conservative, and thus most single parents are restricted in their ability to explore and utilize community resources. Even earlier studies such as those by Henderson (1987), Miller (1971) and Bronfenbenner (1974, cited in Njoku, 2015), showed that a large

proportion of children who failed in school were from disadvantaged families. However, Curry (1980) introduced another dimension to the nature of this problem. In his conclusion of the study, he asserted that when learners are of high intellectual ability and have gone high in their academic grade level, the influence of social background is minimized, if not completely eradicated.

2.8.2 Medical obligations

Social stratification arising from social inequality sets unjust limits to individual parental aspirations in terms of work, medical issues, education and lifestyles (Njoku, 2014, p. 39). Most single parents put the nutritional needs of their children before their own nutritional and medical needs. Paying medical bills is often beyond the reach of the average single parent in our modern society. The National Health Plan that was presented to parliament in 1996 seeks to finance health care within the framework of a health policy which, among other things, ensures that users pay for curative services while preventive services are subsidised. Public assistance is provided to the socially and economically disadvantaged segments of the population (James, 2003), which means that basic health care is within the reach of poor single-parent families, but it is well known that the system is clogged with bureaucratic delays, long queues, and limited hospital space.

This means that learners from poor single-parent families are the worst hit when the issue of medical attention arises. Their parents can barely afford the medical expenses or the costs of travelling to clinics and hospitals some children are expected to visit hospitals once every six months for medical check-ups to improve their health status and make them free from any medical ailment in or out of school. However, most children from poor single-parent homes have not been equipped with health information pertaining to their medical background. In the event of any calamity, their parent cannot be reached as a result of economic burdens. Thus, if the lives of these learners are at risk, the single parent will be the last to know. Illiterate parents are most guilty of putting the safety of their children at risk as they may not inform the school of the health status of their children (Goldstein, 1999).

In some instances an absent partner may be required to come for a medical examination to understand the child's medical history. If such a partner cannot be traced, the situation may become dire. The issue of child development often distorts single-parenting such as when the woman died or the man does not have paid employment. Access to proper medical treatment

as the learner grows up may be beyond the reach of the surviving parent. A poor parent can often not even afford a school where clinical assistance is provided when the need arises. Therefore, this parent's children are left at the mercy of others (Gomes, 1984).

Families in which school children are raised by only one parent are now more common around the world. Women are the worst hit as many have never been married or live without a partner; and this also accounts for an increasing proportion of single-parent families.

2.8.3 Family conflict

Regardless of the circumstances, family conflict often occurs which usually leads to unexpected changes, and is often the source of loss and grief. Traumatic experiences such as broken homes and family dysfunction result in symptoms of depression. Moreover, studies have also associated broken homes and family dysfunction with mental and physical health issues. In a few cases, family unity was shattered by conflict resulting in separation and the problem of whose care the children should be under (Michelle, 2010).

Litigation that is filed in courts of law subject children to media harassment and emotional instability. This often breeds hatred and lack of trust in the child. Such children could only regain their freedom when counselling services are available, but this is often not the case.

2.9 Theoretical Framework

The focus of my research was to explore the challenges encountered by learners from single-parent households and to determine how this impacted their ability to attain high academic achievements. Mennemeyer and Senf (2006) state that even controlling factors such as household income and remedies such as better enforcement of child support or enhancement of the single-parent's income will not suffice to counter the negative outcomes for children. I therefore decided to base my study on two theories in consideration of their applicability to the South African context and to the topic.

2.9.1 Economic hardship theory

This perspective assumes that economic hardships faced by single parents are primarily responsible for the behavioural problems that manifest in children from such households. Single-parent households are often poorer than other households. Using the South African 2002 General Household survey, Dlamini (2016) found that partnered parents showed better

education levels (up to tertiary level) and higher proportions in professional occupations compared to single parents who showed high proportions in low education levels (less than secondary education) and that the latter group dominated elementary occupations.

Duo-parent households with fathers present are better off than single-mother households, partly because the couple can pool their financial and support resources. Men generally bring more income into the household than women when they are employed, and they may also be able to access other resources from the community that can benefit their children's cognitive and social development through their status as men (Richter, 2007). Single-parent families also have more limited networks compared to two-parent households (Richter, 2007).

Children who live apart from their fathers face a number of economic and social difficulties that seem to increase the risk of sexual behaviour problems compared to those who live with both parents (Hawkins, 2007). The advantage of being in a two-parent household is that married mothers may decide to spend less time out of the home at work and to care for the children, although this action may be detrimental in the long run because it creates economic dependence on husbands, and wives are less likely to be economically self-sufficient than men when a marriage ends (Cherlin, 1999). After divorce, the family income may drop substantially and rise again when the mother remarries (Amato, 1993; Hill, Yeung, & Grey, 2001). .

A decline in the standard of living may compel learners to leave school in order to take a job to contribute economically to the household (Amato, 1993; Geronimus & Korenman, 1992). Children from disadvantaged single-mother households are more likely to assume adult responsibilities at an early age and they are more likely to be working and not attending school (Moser, 1993). School enrolment has been found to protect learners against early pregnancy because young women are less likely to be sexually active, less likely to start child bearing or marry early, and are more likely to use contraceptives compared to those who are not in school (Grant & Hallman, 2008).

Children from poor families are more likely to drop out of school because of lack of money and this limits their chances of getting a better paying job and living a better life, which may perpetuate intergenerational poverty (Panday et al., 2009). Research conducted in South Africa and abroad has shown that children from financially struggling families are likely to have lower educational and economic achievements when they reach adulthood because they may have

been brought up in poor families in areas that offer fewer opportunities (Panday et al., 2009; Richards & Schmiede, 1993).

2.9.2 The family systems theory

This theory views the family from an interactive and systemic perspective, as it argues that a change in one part of the system will result in a change in other parts (Bhengu, 2016). Bhengu (2016) further stipulates that the family systems theory provides a primary context for understanding how individuals function in relationships to others and how they behave. “Children always enter the world as part of pre-existing systems, with the family being the most common and central one” (Bhengu, 2016). According to the family systems theory perspective, children from single-parent households are associated with worse outcomes compared to those from two-parent families (Sugarman, 2003). According to this theory, the family is seen as a whole or unit and, if one parent is absent, it disturbs its balance. The involvement of the father is as important as the involvement of the mother and when there is a lack of paternal involvement, it has significant effects on children. According to Cherlin (1992), fathers demonstrate to their children how male adults can take responsibility; they provide a daily example of how to deal with life outside the home; and they demonstrate the importance of achievement and productivity.

Children learn a range of choices from their fathers about everything: from clothing and food to devotion and serving a worthy cause. This promotes positive moral values and the development of conscience. Paternal involvement seems to encourage children's exploration of the world around them (Cherlin, 1992). Moreover, the emotional support a father gives to the child enhances the overall quality of the mother-child relationship; for example, Dad eases Mom's workload by being involved with the child's homework. Highly involved fathers also contribute to increased mental health in children such as increased empathy and greater self-control in their behaviour.

Children who have experienced high paternal involvement show an increase in curiosity and in problem-solving capacity, which are skills that are very important for academic performance (Cherlin, 1992). Recent educational policy and legislation in South Africa specifically encourages the role of parents in their children's education. However, many parents do not realise that their involvement in their children's learning experiences not only improves

academic achievement, but also has a profound effect on the child's general behaviour (Department of Education, 2002).

2.10 Conclusion

The literature review and theoretical framework that supported the study were unpacked in this chapter. Literature related to the study was reviewed by defining family and explaining what single parenting means. I highlighted the challenges encountered by learners from single-parent households and discussed previous authors' views of how this impacts learners' ability to attain high academic results. Furthermore, I reviewed literature pertaining to these challenges and looked at different research findings in developing and underdeveloped countries. The section was concluded with a review of the theoretical framework that directed the study. The next chapter will discuss the research methodology that was employed in the execution of this study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the methodology that was used in the execution of this research study. It focuses specifically on the research design, selection of the study site, sampling techniques and sample size, and the data collection instruments that were used. The validity and reliability of the instruments are also elucidated while the manner in which the data were collected and recorded is explained. I present a brief discussion on how trustworthiness was ensured and state how all ethical issues were rigorously adhered to. The limitations of the study are briefly reiterated

The study employed a qualitative approach that was most suitable for the exploratory nature of this research. Qualitative research generally uses a combination of interviews, documents and observed data to understand and explain social phenomena (Myers, 1997). Myers (1997) adds that qualitative research techniques are designed to assist researchers understand people and the social and cultural contexts within which they live. Rubi and Babbie (1989) argue that a qualitative approach is an inductive approach which determines the hidden meaning of experiences of human beings and provides a rich description of the realities of a specific phenomenon under study.

3.2 Research Design

The qualitative research design was employed to comprehend and explore the challenges encountered by learners from single-parent households and how these challenges impacted their attainment of academic success. Qualitative research is a method of inquiry which aims to gather in-depth understanding of human behaviour as it investigates the why and how questions (Creswell, 2003). A qualitative design was used because I wanted to gain insight into the experiences of learners from single parents first-hand; so the optimum approach was my personal involvement (or engagement) with the participants within the setting (Bialek, 1994). I thus did not use a quantitative approach as I needed to probe and use follow-up questions to direct the responses of the participants without influencing their perception in any way. I thus used open-ended and not closed-ended questions during the interviews and focus group

discussion. The qualitative approach thus produced results (findings) beyond the immediate boundaries of the study (Denzil & Lincoln, 2000).

A case study was done as a basis for identifying and understanding the challenges encountered by learners (Creswell, 2003; Clark, 2007); in this case focusing on learners from single-parent households being schooled in a primary school in an education district in KwaZulu-Natal. According to Thomas (2011, p. 512), case studies involve the analysis of persons, events, decisions, periods, projects, institutions or other systems that are studied holistically by one or more methods”. Case studies elucidate an understanding of why the instance happened as it did and what might be important to look at more intensively in the future. According to Cohen (2000, p. 181), case studies “provide a unique example of real people in real situations, allowing readers to understand ideas more clearly than simply presenting them with abstract theories”. A case study was thus used to explore and deeply understand the experiences of learners from single-parent households as individuals and as a group of participants and to explore the challenges and the effects of these challenges on their academic achievements.

3.3 Research Methodology

Methodology is the strategy or plan of action that structures the choice and the use of particular methods (Crotty, 1998, p. 3). Thus methodology is concerned collecting data to address the why, what, from, when and how questions. These data are collected using suitable instruments and then analysed and evaluated. Guba and Lincoln (1994, p. 108) explain that methodology asks the question: *How can the inquirer go about finding out whatever they believe can be known?*

In qualitative research, designs are flexible rather than fixed. This allowed me as a researcher to be creative and to make changes to the way the research was carried out as required (Maxwell, 2012). It has been argued that the phenomenon of interest in qualitative research unfolds naturally because there is no predetermined or established course (Patton, 2002).

Kirk and Miller (1986) state that a qualitative approach is a particular tradition in social science that fundamentally depends on watching people in their own territory and interacting with them in their own language and on their own terms. I thus made use of this approach because I was interested in exploring educational issues, especially the challenges encountered by and the impact of these challenges on children from single-parent households.

3.3.1 Research approach

A qualitative research approach was adopted for this project. According to Kothari (2004, p. 15), qualitative research is concerned with subjective assessment of attitudes, opinions and behaviour. The qualitative approach appeals for in-depth data and gives detailed descriptions of events or people needed to deliver the complexity of situations so as to equip the reader with enough information for judging the researcher's interpretation of a phenomenon (Martens, 1998).

3.3.2 Rationale for using the qualitative approach

The qualitative approach was used to collect comprehensive and elaborate in-depth information on the challenges that learners from single-parent households were facing in primary schools. This approach enabled me as the researcher to obtain first-hand information about the challenges faced by learners from single-parent households that hindered them from learning. Triangulation was used to increase the credibility of the findings; this means that I relied on multiple data collection methods to check the authenticity of the results (Otlaca, 2010). Although the qualitative approach is flexible, it has its weaknesses and therefore the use of triangulation minimised these weaknesses.

3.3.3 Research site/location of the study

The study was conducted in a primary school that is located in Newlands West in Durban. At the time of the study, the learner population was about 1 200 learners from different racial groups. The school had 44 educators from various racial groups which was representative of the South African demographics. According to the school admission policy, learners were admitted according to their academic performance. The quality of teaching and learning was of a high standard and the school management system appeared to be well organised and structured because good results had been achieved generally at the end of the previous year. I chose to conduct my research in this particular school because the demographics suited my study objectives and also for reasons of economy. Challenges such as clashing activities were easily identified and visits and interviews could be rescheduled at no cost and without time delays.

3.4 Sampling Techniques

According to Kombo and Tromp (2006), sampling is the method of choosing a relevant participant who has the desired characteristics that are representative of the whole population. The study adopted simple random and purposive sampling methods.

According to Huberman and Miles (2002), random sampling is also termed ‘probability sampling’ according to which every member of the population has an equal opportunity to be sampled and to take part in a study. As qualitative research is concerned with the views of representative voices of the population and not the number of these representatives, it was therefore deemed appropriate to select a manageable representative sample. Thus, after authorisation, six learners from single-parent households were identified and recruited with the help of knowledgeable educators, and appropriate educator representatives were selected with the approval of the principal, who also agreed to participate in the study.

In this process, purposive sampling was employed, which means that I engaged in the selection of particular parts of the world (i.e., the school in this case) for composing the sample which was representative of single-parent households (learners), knowledgeable educators, single parents, and a principal. All the participants were associated with the school (Kothari, 2004).

3.5 Selection of Participants

Below is the information about each group that was selected by means of either purposive or simple random sampling.

3.5.1 Learners

It was deemed important to involve learners in the study as they could provide authentic data on the challenges/problems they encountered in the school as a result of their family circumstances. Purposive sampling was used to choose one Grade 6 and five Grade 7 learners. These were purposive selected from a list of learners from single-parent households that had been provided by school management. The learner data were collected during one-on-one interviews from these selected learners who were all aged 11 and above. Using one-on-one semi-structured interviews, each learner was asked to describe and narrate his/her life experiences of being a child in a single-parent household. I also had one-on-one interviews with two single mothers and the Principal, and I conducted a focus group discussion with the teachers. The focus of the data collection process was to obtain critical and insightful

descriptions of the challenges single-parent children experienced from their personal perspectives, and how these children made sense of their experiences.

3.5.2 Parents

To extend the data obtained from the learners, single parents' perspectives were also sought. The single parents who participated in this study were selected if their children also participated in the study. In total, two single parents (25 and 46 years old) agreed to participate in the study. They resided in Newlands West and voluntarily shared their experiences of being single parents.

3.5.3 Teachers

Two teachers were purposively included because they were involved with the learners in teaching and learning processes and I regarded them as implementers of educational objectives at the school. They spent most of their time at school teaching these learners, hence they were in an ideal position to understand these learners' behaviour, comment on their attendance, and illuminate other problems these children might have encountered at the school.

3.5.4 Principal

The purposive sampling technique was used to sample the principal of the school. As the implementer of departmental policies and the primary supervisor of the school, it was deemed appropriate to include his views in the study. As a management professional, he played a major role in making sure that the school was functional and he possessed vital knowledge of his duties as a leader in the school community. He provided vital information on how the school should resolve the challenges encountered by learners from single-parent families. Also talked about intervention programmes for poor academic progress.

3.6 Data Collection

According Cohen, Manion and Marrison (2000), data collection refers to the process of acquiring information/evidence in a systematic way to answer the research questions. There are different methods of gathering data based on the nature of the study. This research used a mixture of data collection techniques to produce the required information.

3.6.1 Primary data

Such data are first-hand information and responses collected by the investigator from real or authentic sources. Such data are usually collected using different techniques such as interviews and questionnaires (Cohen et al., 2000). In this research study, primary information was gathered from the field as fresh information using interviews and a focus group discussion.

3.6.2 Secondary data

Such data pertain to evidence that has already been assembled and put together through the use of newspaper articles, encyclopaedias, books, periodicals, and academic journals. Secondary data may not have directly observed the event, object or condition (Cohen et al., 2000). In this research, such sources included student attendance registers, examination results, school records and statistics, staff meeting minutes, log books and class record books which were obtained with the permission of the DBE who approved the study and the principal. The secondary data were thus gathered by means of document analyses that was preceded by a literature review.

3.7 Data Collection Techniques

3.7.1 Triangulation

Triangulation was used in the evaluation of the data as a practical checking method to judge the credibility of what the researcher was told by the participants and what was found in the school records. Burns and Grove (2001) define triangulation as the collection of data from multiple sources maintaining the same foci. The main source of data was semi-structured interviews. The findings from the interviews were triangulated with the data that were generated by means of a focus group discussion (teachers), and interview with the principal, and document analyses. Generally it is questionable whether respondents tell the whole truth during an interview, particularly when semi-structured interviews concern sensitive issues such as the feelings, emotions and experiences of the participants. There is no perfect way of correcting what someone tells about his or her thoughts and feelings and researchers are not mind readers. However, regardless of the fact that it is difficult, there are some practical investigations researchers can conduct to judge the trustworthiness of what was said, and therefore triangulation was used.

3.7.2 Semi-structured one-on-one interviews

According to Kothari (2004), an interview is a scheduled set of questions administered through verbal communication in face-to-face relationships between a researcher and the respondents (Kothari, 2004). An interview utilises a schedule containing semi-structured questions that are asked in a face-to-face situation with a respondent. The researcher also gets a chance to probe deeper and ask the ‘why’ and ‘how’ questions.

In this research, semi-structured interviews were employed in order to permit the gathering of rich qualitative data. The interviews were flexible, focused, and time effective. Semi-structured interviews were utilised to obtain learners participants’ views and perceptions of the challenges they experienced as children in single-parent households and how these challenges affected their marks and their coping strategies to counter the challenges they identified. The major strength of the semi-structured interviews was that they assisted me as a researcher to make use of the limited time available for interviewing different people systematically. The semi-structured interviews utilised open-ended questions and this provided me with opportunities to ask broad questions. The interview guide was developed in English and then translated into isiZulu and back into English to ensure proper understanding of the questions and the data.

Because the use of children as participants in a study is a sensitive matter and has legal implications, special authorisation was obtained and their parents were also requested to authorise their participation in writing.

3.7.3 Focus group discussion - teachers

Kombo and Tromp (2006) define a focus group discussion as a special group discussion with a particular purpose, size, composition and procedures. A focus group is usually composed of 6-12 participants. The identified teachers were therefore engaged in a focus group discussion during which they could share their views and experiences about the challenges that they encountered in teaching the learners from single-parent households.

3.7.4 One-on-one semi-structured interviews with parents

I met each parent separately for a one-on-one interview. The interviews were voice recorded with their permission and manually transcribed.

3.7.5 Interview with the principal

Met the principal in his office for a one-on-one interview. The interview was voice recorded and manually transcribed.

3.7.6 Document analysis

According to Bowen (2009), documentary analysis is a form of qualitative research in which documents are interpreted by the researcher to give voice and meaning around the researched topic”. Analysing documents incorporates coding the content into topics based on how a focus group or interview transcripts are analysed (Bowen, 2009). In this study, document analysis was expended together with interviews in order to generate data and supplement the data that could not be obtained through interviews only. As an investigator, I made use of data from the school’s attendance registers (learners’ and educators’ registers), staff minutes, annual examination records, and class assessment records. These documents were used to collect all the information concerning the challenges the learners from the single-parent households encountered in achieving academically, to determine the effects of those challenges, and also to find solutions/resolutions to address the challenges for learners from single-parent households.

I reiterate that the use of these confidential records was authorised by the DBE and the principal on condition that the names of the learners be kept confidential.

3.8 Recording of Data

It was vital that the information that I gathered during the research process was recorded correctly.

3.8.1 Semi-structured interviews

Before the interview sessions began, I asked each participant’s permission to make use of a tape recorder and a cell phone to record our conversations. I clarified that recording the conversation was only meant for exactness of the content of our conversations, and that it was not for any other purpose. All the interviews were recorded by making use of a cell phone and a tape-recorder for back-up. I also wrote notes whilst the interviews were in progress. During the recording of the interviews I could focus on the discussion. Terre-Blanche and Durkheim (2002) highlight that tape recorders are useful in allowing researchers to focus on the discussion

and also keep record of the interviews without any distractions. Using a tape-recorder helped me to concentrate on the participants' narratives.

3.8.2 Document analysis

Document analysis was a techniques that I used to collect secondary data. I relied not only on semi-structured interviews but also on data from documents in order to address the topic under investigation. I was authorised to refer to school attendance registers, staff minutes, annual examination records, and class assessment records.

3.9 Data Analysis

Analysis of qualitative data within the interpretative paradigm includes the composition of ideas and theories about what is studied. Dey (1993, cited in Henning, 2005, p. 30) defines this process as when the researcher identifies substantive connections by linking data. The connection and association of the data assisted me in the construction and elucidation of a certain clear image in terms of what I recognised. When I analysed the information, I listened to the transcripts more than six times because I wanted to be certain of what the participants declared. After reading the transcripts numerous times, I highlighted a group of words and arranged them into codes of connotations. Comparable codes were aligned with others to form categories and themes.

3.10 Validation of Instruments

3.10.1 Validity

According to Soman (2006), validity is the extent to which what is supposed to be measured is actually measured. In a qualitative study, validity means that the researcher checks the accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures. Before conducting the study I did a pilot study in one of the primary schools in Newlands West in order to test the validity of the instrument developed for the research. In trying out this exercise, the interview questions were administered to similar primary school learners from single-parent households, school teachers, and the principal of the school. This was to allow me to revise/change the instruments in order to make them suitable for collecting valid and reliable data. Afterwards, the instruments were presented to the research supervisor for further remarks and development/corrections. Hence the necessary alterations were made before the instruments were used on the participants.

Furthermore, in order to improve the validity of the gathered data, I used triangulation, which was referred to earlier. I thus relied on several data collection instruments, namely semi-structured interviews, document analysis and a focus group discussion. The data that were gathered using the semi-structured interviews were thus counter-checked by means of document reviews and a focus group discussion, and vice versa. In this manner the validity of the gathered information from the field work was improved.

To ensure that all the data were accurately captured, an audiotape was used to record the interviews. The participants were asked to read their transcripts in order to verify whether what had been written in the transcripts was exactly what they had said. Cohen et al. (2011) maintain that, for research to be reliable, it must demonstrate that, in the same group of respondents, in a similar context, similar results must be found. This was done in the process of exploring the challenges encountered by primary school learners from single-parent households.

3.10.2 Reliability

“Reliability is the extent to which the data collection method will yield consistent findings if replicated” (Neville, 2007, p. 26). Transcripts and recordings of data provide transparency to the reader showing them how the data was collected and analysed.

In order to foster reliability, I prepared the instruments and pretested them on selected primary school participants in the uMlazi District in Newlands West. Pre-testing was followed by making some alterations before using the instrument in the data collection exercises. The instruments were reviewed by one of the isiZulu teachers from the language panel who restructured the same questions in isiZulu. This was to make sure that the participants understood what was asked. I retested the interview guide again to check its reliability before conducting the main interview with the targeted participants. In addition, during the field research, reliability was enhanced by a clear explanation of the aim of the study to the participants and assuring them of the ultimate degree of confidentiality.

3.10.3 Pilot study

A pilot study is a small-scale experiment that is designed to test the logistics and gather information prior to a larger study in order to improve the latter’s quality and efficiency. It is a miniature study or a small-scale version of the full study that will be performed later (Wheeler,

2010). A pilot study can reveal deficiencies in the design of a proposed experiment or procedure and these can then be addressed before time and resources are expended on large scale studies.

A pilot study can also be termed as a small study which helps design a further confirmatory study and may have various purposes such as testing study procedures, validity of tools, estimation of the recruitment rate, and estimation of parameters such as the variance of the outcome variable to calculate sample size (Arian, Campbell, Cooper & Lancaster, 2010). It was necessary that a pilot study be conducted before the full research project so that I would know whether or not the study was valid and whether the design would capture the required data.

A pilot study was done before the actual formal interviews with the learners from single-parent households. During piloting, if the interviewee experienced problems in understanding the questions asked in English, I translated the questions into isiZulu. IsiZulu is the predominant language used in KwaZulu-Natal, followed by English. It is also the language that is commonly used by the people of the coastal region where the research was located.

3.11 Ensuring Trustworthiness

According to Guba and Lincoln (1985), the four criteria for trustworthiness are credibility, dependability, transferability and conformability. I made use of this paradigm especially because it seemed to be more comprehensive than other models cited by other authors. The investigators who prepare written reports have compulsions to make their investigations dependable and sincere.

- **Credibility** means that researchers acknowledge the difficulties they may encounter in the study and learn how to deal with them.
- **Dependability** is how reliable the information is.
- **Transferability** is when you collect the information and offer a description of it.
- **Conformability** is achieved through triangulation without using any assumptions (Milles, 2007, p. 85). This was done by making use of more than one type of collection technique.

According to Guba and Lincoln (1985), a model is an emphasis on using these criteria. Yin (2004) emphasises that it is vital that the researcher ensures trustworthiness in a study. One of

the ways of ensuring trustworthiness of the results is to use multiple data sources. In this study multiple data sources were referred to, and there various participants provided information that helped in answering the research questions. These data sources were learners, single parents, educators and the principal of the school under study.

In order to confirm trustworthiness in this study, I went back to the sites with the interview transcripts to ensure that what I had recorded was what the participants had stated. The records were given back to the participants and I requested them to authenticate it. The participants agreed that what had been transcribed was what they had said during the interviews. Single parents who wished to change their responses were able to do so, but the changes were merely semantic.

3.12 Ethical Considerations

Adhering to ethical conduct was also one of the ways that enhanced the credibility and dependability of my study. Mertens and McLaughlin (2004) declare that trustworthiness can be ensured by using member-checking techniques to ascertain whether the participants agree with the recorded version of the interviews. This I did, and I also made use of triangulation: semi-structured interviews, participants' observations and document analyses.

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), ethical adherence is about defending the constitutional rights and the wellbeing of participants in a study.

3.12.1 Authorisation

Louw and Louw (2007) suggest that, before the researcher can collect any data, it is important to follow the correct channels. For instance, they must negotiate for permission to collect data with the person in charge of the institution or settings where he/she wants to collect the data.

I was very careful when socialising with the participants and used my words carefully when addressing issues related to the participants. I was conscious that the study adhered to human rights considerations throughout. The participants were asked to sign the informed consent form to declare their willingness to participate in this study, and I made sure that participation was voluntary. I also made sure that the participants' right to privacy was respected (Neuman, 2006). Furthermore, I ensured that, under no circumstances, would the data be presented in a

manner damaging to the participants. All the participants in the study had the right to withdraw from the study or to ask that the data that they provided would not be used.

As was stated earlier, the participation of learners had legal implications, and I therefore obtained all relevant gatekeepers' permission (the DBE's and the principal's) to involve learners in the study. I also obtained the written permission of all the parents to involve their children in the study. As the nature of the questions might be sensitive, I also ensured that a trained social worker could be contacted in case any of the learners showed signs of distress, or requested assistance. However, the latter was not necessary.

3.12.2 Research clearance

I obtained research clearance from the Director of Research Publication and Postgraduate Studies of the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Appendix A). It was hence taken to the District Manager of the uMlazi District who forwarded permission to the Circuit Manager (CM) who forwarded permission to the principal of the primary school where the study was conducted. The principal also gave permission for the study to be conducted in the school using the identified learners, teachers and parents.

3.12.3 Informed participants

The participants were made aware of the aim of the study, the way in which the study would be conducted, and the importance of the data that would be generated during the field phase of the study. I obtained informed consent from each participant to ensure that they had complete understanding of the purpose and the methods that would be used and the demands of the study (Best & Kahn, 2006).

Obtaining the informed consent of the participants was an ongoing process. For example, before switching on the tape recorder during interviews, I asked each individual if I had their permission to tape-record the discussion. Sometimes, during the interviews when a participant showed uneasiness in answering some questions by their body language, I told them again of their rights and that they were not forced to answer or give information that they were not happy to give or if they felt they didn't wish to do so.

Therefore, during the study, all the participants (learners from single-parent households, the principal of the primary school, single parents and teachers) were informed about the purpose

and objectives of the study, the way in which the study would be conducted, and the significance of the study. Therefore, every participant that participated in the study did so willingly.

3.12.4 Privacy and confidentiality

The participants were guaranteed that the information they provided would be stored safely and that their participation was confidentially and for research purposes only. I observed their right to privacy and anonymity throughout, which accounts for the uses of codes/pseudonyms in this report. I treated the data that was collected, the setting, and the information with sensitivity. The raw data will be stored safely and no unauthorised person will have access to the set until it is destroyed after five years. I also made it known to each participant that they were free to ask any questions and seek clarity. A high degree of trust was maintained that no information that could link them to the study was to be given out and this was moderated concerns on the part of the participants. Their dignity was maintained and this was to make the participants feel respected and to give them autonomy and control.

3.13 Conclusion

This chapter discussed and described the research methodology. The research paradigm, approach and data collection tools were unpacked. The sample size and procedures were also discussed. Lastly, the data analysis, trustworthiness, ethical considerations and limitations were presented. The next chapter presents the data and discusses the findings that emerged from these data.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

The major focus of my research was to explore the challenges encountered by learners from single-parent households and to determine how these challenges impacted their attainment of academic results in a primary school in Newlands West in the uMlazi District. There was therefore no intention to compare the data that I obtained with data from learners from two-parent households. The study used three data collection instruments, namely semi-structured interviews, a focus group discussion, and document analysis to address the three specific objectives, which were to:

- determine the major challenges encountered by single-parent learners;
- explore the effects of these challenges on learners' academic achievements; and
- explore possible resolutions to the challenges identified by the participants.

The results were analysed with reference to the research objectives,

This chapter concentrates on the presentation, analysis and discussion of the findings. The data from the learner and principal interviews and the focus group discussion with the teachers are merged and discussed in order to gain insight into the challenges encountered by learners from single-parent households. In addition, I collected data from class attendance registers, staff meetings, academic record sheets, and learner welfare records in order to establish the reliability of the primary data that I obtained.

The presentation of the data is selective and thematic. It must be noted that the real names of the learners, the single parents, the teachers, the school principal and the school are not used in order to protect the identities of the participants.

4.2 Data Analysis

The qualitative data were analysed from the interpretative paradigm perspective and the findings are underpinned by the two theories that gave direction to study. Dey (1993, cited in Henning, 2005, p. 30) defines this as “the process whereby the researcher identifies substantive connections by linking data”. The connections/associations among the data were studied and this assisted me in constructing a clear image of the topic under investigation. When I analysed the information, I listened to a voice-recorder and read the transcripts more than six times because I wanted to be certain what the participants had stated. I highlighted a group of words and arranged them into codes of connotations. Comparable codes were aligned with others to form categories and themes.

4.3 Data Presentation and Discussion

The data presentation and discussion will be based on what was discovered about the challenges encountered by children from single-parent households and how these challenges impacted their academic achievements. I commence by providing the biographical data of the participants. This study identified two domains that developed as topics (see sections 2.6 and 2.7 in Chapter Two:

- Challenges encountered by learners from single-parent households in a selected school in Newlands West;
- The effects of these challenges on their academic achievements.

The topics were further divided into sub-topics as follows:

- Family background and the personal well-being of the learners;
- Health problems;
- Economic hardship;
- Lack of parental care and involvement; and
- Socialisation issues.

The effects of the challenges on their academic achievements were categorised and are presented as follows:

- Poor school attendance;
- Poor academic performance;
- Lack of counselling;
- Child abuse;
- Criminal activities; and
- Delinquent behaviour.

4.4 Biographical Data of the Participants

A total of twelve participants contributed to the study (six learners, three educators, two parents and one principal). All the participants were identified and recruited from the same school, as reflected in the tables (Table 4.1, Table 4.2, and Table 4.3) on the next pages.

Table 4.1: Biographical data of the learner participants

Learner participants (pseudonyms)	Grade	Gender	Age (years)	Race
Mazo	6	Female	11	Black
Mbali	7	Female	13	Black
Nomvula	7	Female	13	Black
Zama	7	Female	12	Black
Zandi	7	Female	12	Black
Zazi	7	Female	12	Black

Table 4.2: Biographical data of the parent participants

Parent participant (pseudonyms)	Gender	Age (Years)	Work place	Qualification Highest Grade
Thoko	Female	45	Community worker	10
Wendy	Female	52	Unemployed	5

Table 4.3: Biographical data of the teacher participants

Educator participants (pseudonyms)	Gender	Years of teaching	Age (years)	Capacity
Lulu	Female	5	33	Form educator
Fezeka	Female	20	46	Form educator
Mandy	Female	17	43	Form educator

Table 4.4: Biographical details of the Principal

Principal participant (pseudonym)	Gender	Age	Working experience (years)	Race
Principal A	Male	60	38	Black

Of the twelve participants, eleven were female and one was a male.

4.5 Challenges Encountered by Learners from Single-Parent Households

4.5.1 Family background

The family system theory views the family as a whole or unit and, if one parent is absent from the household regardless of the reason, it disturbs the balance in the family. Bhengu (2016) asserts that a change in one part of the family system will result in a change in other parts of the family system.

The learner participants were asked who they lived with and why.

Zazi stated that:

I am living with my mother and grandmother because my parents were not married. We live in small shack. My mother is unemployed and we depended on a child support grant.

Mazo stated that:

I lived with my mother and other siblings but she could not provide no reason why we did not live with her and father. My mother is working but had a low income which did not cover all the expenses of their households.

Mbali stated that:

I am living with my mother, grandmother and uncle. My father requested my mother to terminate the pregnancy, but then my mother ran away and lived with the grandmother.

This suggests that rather than terminate the pregnancy, the mother was prepared to raise the child alone. The mother was doing contractual jobs for a living.

Zama stated that:

I am living with my mother and the mother's siblings because my father had passed away when I was six months old. We all depended on a child support grant which is R400 that was not enough for the needs of the family as my mother was unemployed.

Also, my mother needed to find contract jobs in order to put the food on the table and to provide other necessities for her family.

Nomvula stated that:

I am living with my mother, eight siblings and her grandfather because my father passed away also my mother is unemployed.

The family system theory proposes that every child needs a stable family where both parents are available. In this instance, the absence of a father may have impacted the academic achievement of the learners.

The single parents of all of the above participants were economically challenged, which means that it was hard for them to buy lunches, textbooks, exercise books and school uniforms. If the family were complete with a working father who provided in the needs of the children, the situation might have been different. Various authors and the ... theory propose that poverty is a challenge that affects learners' ability to learn.

The finding of poverty as a condition of the single-parent families is corroborated by Eamon (2005) and Hochschild (2003), who also found that students from disadvantaged families were impacted by poverty. Both these authors found that such children performed poorly academically as they scored low marks. They also found that some had decided not to attend school anymore, which contributed to the drop-out rates at the schools where they conducted the studies...

4.5.2 Economic hardships

When the learner participants were asked who was supporting them financially, they all stated that their mothers supported them although they did not have stable jobs. They also got money from a child support grant. The income that their parents received did not cover all the school requirements such as school fees, transport money, stationary, etc. Although these learners had not been expelled from school, the parents were in arrears of a large amount of school fees which they needed to pay at the end of the year. This financial burden, which should not have been a matter of concern for these learners, seemed to impact their emotional well-being as they looked embarrassed when this point was raised. At this point it was assumed that the financial burden of their families would also impact their academic achievements negatively.

In terms of the family's financial situation, Zazi stated:

In the beginning of the year I stayed at home because my mother did not have the money for registration that was required at school. Although my mother is working she does not have a stable job. She works three days a week. We are eight children depending on her for everything: school fees, feeding, clothing, transport fees... Sometimes she finds it difficult without our father's assistance. I remember when she informed us that she gave up on life. Now things are worse than before.

This comment indicates that the learner and her siblings suffered a lot because, due to financial constraints, she thought that “*things were getting worse*”. It was acknowledged that her single parent was unable to support, feed and pay school fees for eight children. It was therefore surmised that the learner would have poor academic results. However, when the records were perused, her attendance record reflected that she had been absent from school for only four days in total in Terms 1-3, and her academic records reflected that some of her results had improved from Term 1 to Term 3. In fact, she had achieved some exceptional results in some of the learning areas such as Natural Sciences, Mathematics and the languages in Term 3.

This suggests that, even when she came to school hungry, she must have paid attention in class.

Food is very important for our bodies to function properly. Without food a learner won't have the strength to concentrate in class. The Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) supports the notion that the health of learners is vital, not only for their own well-being, but also for the economic growth of the nation (FAO, 2004). In this context, the principal referred to the ‘Lunch Club’ at the school, which is a feeding scheme that focuses on the needs of poor learners and their nutritional needs. I therefore argue that that concerted efforts that the management team of the school made contributed to the physical well-being of poor learners as learners like Zazi, who often suffered from a lack of food and poor nutrition, was fed at school. This means that she could concentrate in class and do her best, as was reflected in her academic records for Terms 1 – 3.

Mbali also referred to the financial hardships that her family experienced:

I am living with my mother, grandmother and my uncle. My father left my mother after she told him that she was pregnant and he requested my mother to terminate the

pregnancy. If she didn't he would kill her. My mother ran away from him and came to live with my grandmother until today. My mother is unemployed. The situation is very difficult although sometimes my grandmother comes to our rescue. I don't absent myself from school, but I don't have all the school requirements such as stationary, transport fee, school fees and school contributions. My mother is trying her level best but she fails. Recently she got a part-time job as a community worker but the income does not cover all our expenses at home. I would not like to be a problem to teachers or to other learners.

I noted that, as a result of the economic hardship in her family, this girl and other learners saw themselves as troublesome if they sought assistance from their peers and teachers. Mbali was resolute to be at school and this was reflected in her attendance records. She was absent for 10 days in Term 1, but thereafter her absentee rate improved markedly and she was only absent for two days in Term 2 and she was never absent from school in Term 3.

The two teacher participants admitted that they had learners from single-parent households who had severe financial constraints.

Teacher Fezeka stated:

Every child needs to grow in a family where there is a mother and a father. The children from single-parent households always come to school dirty, hungry and aggressive, and they don't bring lunch to school, don't have the necessary equipment, don't pay school fees, and they bully other learners by taking their lunches, swearing at teachers and other learners, and they are always fighting in class. They suffer from emotional problems. Three months ago there was a big fight in class when the learners accused Thandi (alias) of stealing their money, lunches, pens and exercise books. Also, the same learner was seen taking money from my bag. I was so shocked because money had always been missing after break when I had checked my purse. Then I confronted the learner about all the allegations. She did not show any remorse about her behaviour. Then I contacted the mother and I informed her about her child's behaviour. It was hurting to hear the mother crying over the phone and telling me that the father had deserted them when Thandi was 2 years old and they had no place to stay. They stay in a small shack with one window and no furniture. She worked as a hustler selling cardboard in order to earn

a living. Sometimes she managed to get some money if she sold the cardboard and then they did not go to bed on an empty stomach.

A poor economic background can hamper the academic performance of learners from one-parent households. Life for many of these households is not child's play; they have many problems that impact the learners' lives. Poor attendance, health problems, ill-discipline, fighting and aggressive behaviour manifest in many of these children and these issues cause learning problems.

The learners said that they could not get all the school requirements when needed, and this resulted in ruining their self-confidence and self-image. In addition, their financial disadvantaged position had a negative impact on their academic performance due to poor school attendance.

As stipulated by the economic hardship theory, children who have absent fathers have economic and social difficulties which result in behavioural problems that normally do not manifest among learners who live with both parents (Hawkins, 2007). Being in a two-parent home is generally more nurturing because the children get the love and support from both parents. There is also economic independence in such homes if both parents are working and earning an income (Cherlin, 1992).

Learner participant Zama indicated the following:

We like to be at school every day just like our fellow learners but our parents are unable to pay money for transport. We walk long distances to and from school every day and we come to school tired, sweating and becoming a laughing stock to other learners. Sometimes we wake up early in the mornings so that we can start walking in order not to miss any lessons. The teachers scold us in front of the other learners when we arrive late at school without asking the main cause of coming to school late every day. Our lives are exposed to dangerous situations, like child abuse, child trafficking and health problems. We don't get money to spend at school and it is embarrassing because no learner wants to associate with someone who doesn't carry lunch and money for spending.

The implication here is that single parents cannot afford to provide their children with the requirements needed for school because of their financial constraints, and this hampers their

academic achievement and also affects them emotionally. However, although these learners experienced economic hardship, they did not admit to ever being involved in any criminal activities such as child labour and prostitution in order to earn money for their needs. It is undeniable that the families' financial constraints caused major problems for these learners. Another obstacle was health problems.

4.5.3 Health problems

Irrespective of the details, most of the learners who faced economic problems were also exposed to abnormal health risks. For example, a few of these learners did not have their parents who could shelter them properly. The poverty-stricken learners told me that they were experiencing health problems because their single parents could not afford to take them to expensive hospitals. They lacked a balanced diet and were easy targets of diseases such as flu and colds.

Learner participant Mazo stated:

Several times I was absent from school because I was having sores on my body, buttocks, hands and feet. I was unable to walk, wear shoes and even sit. My mother told me to go to school even though I was sick. Learners in class they did not want to sit next to me because there was pus that was coming out in my sores. I was sent to the sick room at school to have some rest. My mother was contacted and was informed about my condition. She promised to take me to the clinic the following day but she did not.

Zazi had the same experience:

I was sick. My foot was sore, and I could not walk properly. I had to stay away from school for two days. My mother was unable to take me to the doctor.

The above accounts reveal that learners from single-parent households face a lot of ailments and illnesses because of financial problems. Medical services are available to poor people at various clinics, but transport costs to get there are high, which may account for the mother's failure to take the learner to a clinic. Also, a mother stated that the medication that is provided is not helping them.

In addition, if these learners are not exposed to clinics or doctors they will always lack proper advice that can prevent them from being exposed to health problems. According to McLanahan and Booth (1989), learners from one-parent families are prone to health issues as a result of a decline in their living standards. In addition, those who are not living with both parents are associated with high levels of psychological problems as stipulated in by Centre for Marriage and Families (2005). In one-parent families, 40% of the learners lived in misery compared to 10% living with both parents. When one parent is no longer a part of the family, the residual parent has to deal with this big problem and the children also find it difficult to deal with.

Concerning the above challenge, teacher Fezeka echoed the same sentiment by stating the following:

Learners living in single-parent families are prone to emotional problems. Children from broken homes are almost five times more expected to develop emotional problems than those living with both parents.

This suggests that teachers are also concerned about the health situation of these learners because this has an impact on their academic achievement. According to Martin Beckford (2008), a social affairs report stated that pastors should counsel both learners and parents from single-parent households.

4.5.4 Lack of parental care

The learners experienced a major problem in terms of parental care because they lacked guidance and counselling, a father figure at home, a role model, and supervision. According to the learner participants, although their mothers were trying their best to provide them with some of the school requirements, they missed a father's love.

Mbali stated:

At times I feel sad when other learners are talking about their fathers and what they have done for them. They come to school with the things that their fathers bought them to show others. When they talk about their fathers, it hurts me a lot because I want to experience that fatherly love, chat with him, going shopping and bond with him.

When Mbali narrated this to me I saw tears in her eyes. I was also emotionally touched about this because when one parent is missing or is not a part of a child's life there is a lack of proper supervision and nurturing. Sometimes the children need the other parent so that if the other one is not at home, they can talk to the one who is at home; that someone who is going to listen to their problems and be able to give advice. In addition, parental love plays a major role in each child's life. When children receive gifts from their parents they value them. Furthermore, if a single parent spends most of the day at work and comes home late and tired, this results in poor supervision and poor monitoring of the learners' work and this impacts learners' progress at school. However, when the academic records were perused, Mbali had produced excellent academic results and was also very seldom absent from school.

In line with the family systems theory, a father's involvement is as important as the involvement of mothers; when there is a lack of the father's involvement, it has significant effects on the children, and thus scholars and educators persistently encourage fathers to be more involved in their children's upbringing (Cherlin, 1992). The emotional support a father gives to the child improves the relationship between the mother and child as well. A father's involvement supports a child's mental health and good behaviour. Children who are well taken care of develop problem-solving skills and these skills are very important for academic performance (Cherlin, 1992).

The teacher participants and the principal commented on this issue by saying that it was a major problem at school that some children lacked the support of a father. These learners didn't do homework and also came to school untidy or dirty.

The principal stated:

I have noticed that the learners from single-parent households come to school dirty. Teachers come to my office with a lot of complaints about these learners' work that is not up to standard because of poor supervision and monitoring by their parent. They don't do homework. When parents are called to come to school for parents' meetings or a parent-teacher interview concerning their learners, they don't pitch up because of their busy schedule. He also added that intervention programmes need to be implemented in order to improve poor academic performance.

This comment shows that parental care plays a major role in a child's life. If the parents fail to play their roles, they can destroy their children's chances of academic success because they lack proper monitoring, supervision, and moulding to become better people in the future. Amato (2015) also shows that when one parent is no longer a part of the family, the residual parent has to deal with this big problem and the children find it difficult as well.

However, Thoko, one of the single parents, offered the following comment:

I supervise and monitor my child's school work every time after school and I also spend time with her. We talk, do homework together and I also go to church with her. I also give advice to her as a girl on how she should behave.

This indicates that not all single parents are unable to supervise and monitor their children's work. In addition, this parent made it clear that being a single parent does not mean neglecting the children, no matter what. This is an indication that all parents, regardless of their circumstances, must try their best to make time to monitor and supervise their children's work and be there for the physical and spiritual needs as well.

4.5.5 Socialisation

It was found that the learners found it difficult to associate with other learners because of their family background. Learners from single-parent households felt uncomfortable and unwanted among their peers in the school.

Mazo, a learner participant, narrated her story as follows:

In the classroom the learners hate me. If my teacher says that I must sit next to the other learners in class, the learners move away from me because they say I don't bath and say lot of things to make me a laughing stock in class. I always try my level best to be friendly to them but this does not help. During break times I also experience the same problem: they don't want to play with me. This makes me sad and I ask myself lot of questions some of which I am unable to answer. I told myself one thing that one day I will overcome this problem.

This comment suggests that some learners from single-parent households may be treated unfairly by other learners inside the classroom and during recess. Seemingly these learners

become outcasts and the laughing stock among those who live with both parents. This will affect their academic achievement because they are affected cognitively and psychologically. Being rejected by fellow learners is not easy to accept and it also lowers a child's self-esteem, dents their self-image, and impacts their self-confidence. According to Lylah, Lerner, and Leventhat (2008), teen academic success could be associated with acceptance by peers and positive or negative socialisation.

Learners who feel rejected and lack self-confidence find it difficult to progress academically because they miss some stages of development.

Nomvula, a learner participant, commented as follows:

Other learners treat us nicely, but sometimes the treatment is bad which makes us feel unwanted by other learners in the group. There is nothing that we can do if they don't want us in their group. Then we decide not to socialise with them and form our own group.

This learner had a more positive and assertive attitude towards rejection as she indicated that she and others like her would not give up; they would just form their own group where they will be able to socialise. This shows that all learners are also human beings and need to be treated with respect. However, Mazo was impacted by her circumstances and the feeling of rejection as she showed exceptionally high absentee rates in Term 1. It improved in Term 3, but her academic achievement was extremely poor, to the point that she failed in Term 3.

4.5.6 Conclusion: challenges that learners from single-parent families experience

The analysis of the data pertaining to the challenges that learners from single-parent families experience elucidated fresh understanding of the challenges they experienced. The findings undeniably suggest that these learners experienced feelings of rejection not only at school, but particularly at home where their mother's nurturing capacity was hampered and where the absence of a father figure was a barrier to their emotional development. These negative feelings were seemingly intensified by a lack of spending money, susceptibility to illness, and poor self-love.

4.6 The Impact of Challenges on Single-Parent Learners' Academic Achievements

This section focuses on the impact of the challenges encountered by learners from single-parent households on their academic achievements. I sought to gain in-depth understanding of the effects of these challenges and to explore ways to help these learners. The data revealed that the challenges impacted the learners in terms of the following:

- Poor school attendance;
- Poor academic achievements;
- Child abuse;
- Lack of counselling.

However, none of these children had been involved in criminal activities.

4.6.1 Poor school attendance

Attending school is an integral requirement for good performance and achievement. Absenteeism is therefore a major concern, particularly when it becomes a trend among learners from single-parent households. When the learner participants were asked how often they came to school, their responses were as follows:

Zandi stated:

I was absent from school when I was sick having sores on my foot, a running stomach, and not having transport money.

Mazo said:

Many times I was absent because of sores, other sicknesses and a rape case that I was attending. This affects me academically because I missed a lot of school work. When I am absent from school I get worried because I disregard my school work which will affect my academic achievements. After completing my matric I want to become a lawyer.

Teacher Fezile said:

Most of the learners from single-parent households don't attend school on a regular basis. Some of these learners told me that when they were not at school they were looking

after their young brothers and sisters. When parents were asked about this they denied everything.

Teacher Mandy offered the following comment:

The parents are not aware that their kids don't attend school regularly. They go to work at early hours leaving their kids at home in the hope that they will go to school. Because of a lack of supervision and monitoring, the kids do as they please. I remember one instance when Thabo's mother contacted me to know if he had come to school and I told her that he was absent. She was so shocked and angry about Thabo's behaviour. These learners are missing a lot of school work because they are absent about twice every week.

Poor learner attendance will of necessity have a negative impact on learning. Attending school on a daily basis is vital for learners to improve academically. Furthermore, "absent learners are at great risk of dropping out and they are unable to achieve good results" (Bond, 2004, p. 123). Proof of poor school attendance was revealed when I analysed school attendance record, but I noted great improvement in Mazo's school attendance in Term 2 and Term 3 compared with Term 1. This suggests that, although she experienced some challenges that hampered her school attendance, she tried her level best to be at school in the second part of the year. Furthermore, Zandi also had good attendance in Term 3 compared to Term1 and Term 2.

4.6.2 Poor academic achievements

Poor academic performance was experienced by the majority of the learners from single-parent households. The academic performance of the six participants showed variations from Term 1 to Term 3, although Mazo, Zazi and Zandi had only slight variations in their academic achievement. Various factors at home and at school contribute to poor and particularly to declining performance rates such as reduced attentiveness in class due to unmet needs, a poor self-image, and rejection at school and at home. Such children fail to pay attention and their academic backlog is exacerbated by a lack of guidance and counselling. Of the six participants, three stated that they were not happy about their academic performance but that they had health problems and thus their poor school attendance hampered their academic performance.

Mazo stated:

In Term 2, I did not perform well and I failed. This was due to health problems, and I don't attend school regularly. I got low marks even in the subjects that I always get good marks in. I have a lack of concentration because of many things that I have experienced in my life as young as I am. Most of the time I think about my home situation and about my siblings. Sometimes I sell sweets and pens in the class.

This comment corroborated the notion that, when learners come from financially unstable single-parent households, their academic progress is negatively impacted. The principal and the two teacher participants (Fezeka and Lulu) supported this notion as well.

Fezeka said:

In my grade four class some of the learners from single-parent households performed below average, whereas others were trying their level best to perform. Most of the times they disrupt other learners, and they even sell things to other learners during teaching and learning processes. There is one boy, Senzo, in my class who became a debt collector, demanding his money if learners didn't pay for the stuff that he was selling.

Economic hardship and lack of motivation cause poor academic achievement, as was pointed out by the teacher whose learners performed below the average. Classes are disrupted by learners who try to sell things and thus a lot of work is missed. This of necessity affects the academic performance of these learners and, when other learners excel, they lag behind. The poor academic achievement was revealed in the documents that I perused. Generally, single parents have little time to follow up on their children's academic progress. Mboweni (2014), Mrinde (2014), and Wendy and Kathleen (2003) assert that most single parents do not have time to look after their children and monitor them, as they use most of their time to take care of their domestic needs. As a result, the children start to misbehave at school and at home and some do not even attend school.

However, the academic records for the six participants indicated that two participants, i.e., Zandi and Zazi, produced good results, whereas Mbali and Zama produced excellent results. This suggests some resilience in these learners and that they did not allow their domestic situation and the challenges that they encountered to hamper their academic performance. It may also be argued that the intervention strategies rendered by their teachers impacted in their academic performance positively (see the fact that intervention strategies were discussed as

reflected in the staff Minutes of the Meetings. Although Nomvula produced poor results in all three terms, there was a slight improvement in Term 3. It is suggested that, if she had not been absent so often from school, she might have attained the same good results as her single-parent counterparts who had improved their school attendance. Mazo produced satisfactory results in Term 1, but in Terms 2 and 3 her results declined, possibly because poor school attendance impacted her academic achievements.

These findings suggest that poor school attendance, and not necessarily the challenges associated with single-parent households, may be a stronger driver of poor academic achievement than was previously surmised. It is also important to note that the school's drive towards intervention strategies for all poor achievers, particularly in terms of learners from single-parent households, may have been a powerful foundation to ensure the academic advancement of the four participants who demonstrated well to excellent academic results, particularly in the last part of the academic year.

It is deemed necessary to point out at this juncture that the family systems theory advocates that learners who stay with their fathers are able to cope with school work and are interested in and capable of problem-solving. However, as boys were not involved in the study, this notion could not be corroborated or refuted.

4.6.3 Dropping out of school

Dropping out of school is a major concern associated with learners from single-parent households as many become victims of mockery and abuse and leaving school prematurely. The learner participants were thus asked: *Do you know of any learners who dropped out of school?*

Five of the six participants did not know of anyone who had dropped out of school. Only Mbali stated:

Yes, it was my friend. She did not have a school uniform and other school requirements.

The data that I obtained did not reveal any information about the rate of single-parent learners who dropped out of school. I may be argued that even learners who live with both parents drop out of school. I had a chat with other parents who were also single parents but who were not participants in this study. One lady shared the following insight with me:

Yes, we are single parents. We ensure that we provide our kids with everything they need for school, we do proper supervision and monitoring, offer proper parental care and proper guidance to our children. This gives them enthusiasm to go to school and they feel wanted by their peers and teachers.

These ladies stated that their own children had told them about learners from two-parent families who had dropped out of school, but that their children would never so that as they were keen to study and to succeed academically.

It is therefore a fallacy to believe that it is only single-parent learners who drop out of school or who have no academic ambition.

A teacher corroborated this argument:

Although these learners face many challenges in life, they don't pull out from school because some of them accepted their home situations.

Learners who drop out of school early run the risk of being trapped in poverty or lured into criminal activities. Such learners are likely to depend on welfare and limited social grants for survival. They also run the risk of being involved in crime and gangsterism, which will in turn impact negatively on the justice system as it is costly to maintain an inmate (Bonzo, 2005; Mboweni, 2014). Mboweni (2014) and the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS) (2012) conducted a survey in Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia and Nigeria on the traits of learners who dropped out of school and found that such children were often over-aged learners from primary schools.

According to the economic hardship theory, children from poor families are more likely to drop out of school because of a lack of money; however, this limits their chances of getting well paid jobs and living a better life, which may perpetuate intergenerational poverty (Panday et al., 2009). However, this study found that dropping out of school was not a fundamental consequence of learners' poor school attendance as the learners who were frequently absent from school did not drop out.

4.6.4 Child abuse

Of the six learner respondents, one girl admitted to having been sexually abused by an “old man”. According to the teacher participants, the performance of learners who had been or were exposed to sexual exploitation worsened significantly. The educators also stated that these students tended to arrive late for school and ultimately failed to make it to school on numerous days.

Mazo, who was a victim of child abuse, reported the following:

I could not come to school last year for about two weeks because I was raped by an old man. He asked me not to tell anyone because he would kill me. After what this old man did to me, I felt that I did not want to go to school anymore.

The learner was scared to report the abuser to her mother, teachers or the police. The teachers admitted that they were not trained to deal with the problem of sexual abuse. The teacher participants (Mandy and Fezile) stated:

For us as teachers, it is challenging to notice if a pupil has been molested unless the learner tells me. Furthermore, they find it hard to open up. Even if we suspect that a learner is being mistreated, most victims do not want to talk about it as they were threatened by their abusers.

Educators have a duty to identify and support learners who suffered some form of abuse. At the very least they should report such incidences, and even their suspicions, to school management who should refer the matter to appropriate authorities and counsellors. However, lack of support for educators, limited time and deficiency of resources, teachers have to pursue other methods of resolving cases of abuse. When learners are abused, be it sexually, physically or emotionally, they should be identified and referred for therapy (Buser & Buser, 2013). If not, their existing trauma will deepen and this will impact their academic achievement even more severely.

The principal commented on this matter as follows:

It's very difficult to handle cases of child abuse because I am not trained to deal with problem of child abuse. Sometimes I discover that the learner was sexually abused by a

close family member. It becomes difficult to solve the problem of child abuse because family members are informed about the matter only to find out it is swept under the carpet.

This comment revealed a situation that causes major concern because the lives of abused learners from single-parent households – in fact any household – are at stake. But if single parents are not always at home, abused children will find it difficult to report the matter. They keep the information to themselves because they don't know whether their parents will believe them or not. Many children from single-parent households become victims of child abuse, and this experience affects their academic achievement and social development.

The family systems theory advocates that children who have been subjected to high father engagement show an increase in problem-solving aptitude, which is a skill that is very important for academic performance (Cherlin, 1992). Recent education policy and legislation in South Africa (South African's Schools Acts, Date) specifically encourages the participation of mothers in their children's education. However, many parents do not realise that their participation in their children's learning experiences not only improves academic achievement, but also has a profound positive impact on the child's general behaviour (Department of Education, 2002).

In addition, the economic theory posits that a deterioration in the level of affluence might induce learners to leave school in order to take a job to contribute economically to the household (Amato, 1993; Geronimus & Korenman, 1992). However, this notion could not be corroborated by the current study as it did not determine a drop-out trend.

4.6.5 Lack of counselling

The teacher participants pointed out that the learners from single-parent households needed counselling by psycho-social services in order to overcome the challenges they encountered. Being a child and going through all these challenges is not easy. It is traumatising because even adults cannot cope if they are constantly under pressure financially, socially and psychologically.

Teacher Lulu commented:

I believe these learners need help, especially from social development services such as social workers, health services and psychologists to render counselling sessions with them. The pastors in the church are also able to counsel them spiritually.

A lack of counselling and support hampers the academic achievement of learners from single-parent households. The learner participants echoed the same sentiment, and one learner stated:

We would like to see social workers, health workers and psychologists come to help us in school because we cannot cope with the challenges that we are encountering at home and in school. The school needs to ensure that we are visited twice a month by these people from social services.

4.6.6 Criminal activities

When I asked the participants if they engaged in criminal activities to get money in order to make a living, all the learners answered assertively that they did not.

It may therefore be concluded that, although these learners and their families suffered financially, they did not get involved in criminal activities. Although it is a well-known fact that the learners from poverty-stricken and single-parent households engage in criminal activities, this study could not corroborate this. In fact, the learners were unanimous in their rejection of crime because they felt that if they had a criminal record it would hamper their lives in the future. This suggests that these learners accepted economic hardship. In my view there is hope for these learners, and when they grow up they may excel academically to show that coming from a single-parent household and struggling financially is not the end of the world. Furthermore, they may become worthy citizens in the future and their testimonies of the challenges they encountered when they were learners may encourage others around them who may find themselves in a dire financial situation.

4.6.7 Drug and alcohol use

Drug and alcohol use is a major problem among children living in single-parent households. Mandara and Murray (2006) assert that children living with one parent may probably get involved in substance abuse by using drugs and alcohol (p.74). However, this study found that the learner participants did not engage in drugs or alcohol abuse. It may thus be concluded that not all primary school learners from single-parent households will engage in substance abuse.

However, at the risk of sounding negative, one must acknowledge that these were very young children at primary school level, and as a researcher I did not hold a crystal ball to tell what the future might hold. The very poor school attendance records of some learners that will be presented later were perhaps a predictor that even more severe challenges would await some of these learners in the future.

4.7 Analysis of school records

In an effort to produce statistical evidence in response to the study's interrogations, I analysed the following related school records:

- Attendance registers (these registers had been filled in on a daily basis by register teachers);
- Academic achievement records per term and for a year (2018);
- School based assessments (SBA) records; and
- Staff minutes of meetings.

4.7.1 Registers

School attendance registers remain one of the most vital records in a school and these were used as a measure to establish the participating learners' attendance rates. The registers also reflect the marks, school enrolment numbers the number of days a learner was absent per week/month/term/year. In addition, the records reflect details of the parents, physical address, and phone numbers for parents, learners' names, date of birth, and gender. I acknowledge that these records are highly confidential and sensitive and therefore, after authorisation, I present only the attendance records of the participating learners in Grade 6 and Grade 7 for the first, second and third terms.

When I perused the class registers, it revealed that many learners came from single-parent households and that these learners were mostly absent on Mondays and Fridays. The reaction of the teacher participants pertaining to the attendance registers revealed that challenges existed in the way that these records were kept.

Teacher Lulu stated:

The class attendance register has a lot of challenges. If I am absent from school, I find out that the register was not marked properly ending up having wrong numbers of days absent for learners.

Class registers are official documents that need to be recorded daily by the form teacher to establish patterns of absenteeism. If a teacher is absent, a substitute teacher should complete the register, and never the children. This finding suggests that sloppy practices were employed when registers were completed, resulting in records that were not trustworthy. However, the records are presented below and, regardless of being untrustworthy, they reflect a disconcerting tendency of absenteeism.

Tables 4.6, 4.7 and 4.8 indicate the total number of days per term, the total number of days attended by the six participants, and the total number of days the six participants were absent.

Nomvula and Mazo seemed to be the two learners most at risk of academic failure as they were absent for 35 and 45 days of the 60 days of Term 1 respectively. This trend was continued in the second and the third terms (Table 4.7 and Table 4.8), although better attendance may be noted in the third term:

Table 4.5: Attendance records for Term 1 in 2018 of the six learner participants

#	Name of the participants	Grade	Total number of school days Term 1	Total number of days ABSENT	Total number of days PRESENT
1	Mbali	7	60	10	50
2	Nomvula	7	60	35	25
3	Zama	7	60	06	54
4	Zandi	7	60	06	54
5	Zazi	7	60	04	56
6	Mazo	6	60	45	15

Table 4.6: Attendance records of the six learner participants in Term 2 in 2018.

#	Name of the participants	Grade	Total number of school days Term 2	Total number of days ABSENT Term 2	Total number of days PRESENT Term2
1	Mbali	7	55	2	53
2	Nomvula	7	55	15	40
3	Zama	7	55	-	55
4	Zandi	7	55	3	52
5	Zazi	7	55	-	55
6	Mazo	6	55	30	25

Table 4.7 presents the attendance records for Term 2 of the six participants in the study. In this term, Mbali and Mazo did not attend school regularly. However, Zama and Zazi were never absent and attended school regularly, which was a trend that resulted in good academic achievements.

Table 4.7: Attendance records for the six participants in Term 3 in 2018

#	Name of the participant	Grade	Total number of school days Term3	Total number of school days ABSENT Term 3	Number of school PRESENT Term3
1	Mbali	7	48	-	48
2	Nomvula	7	48	11	37
3	Zama	7	48	-	48
4	Zandi	7	48	-	48
5	Zazi	7	48	-	48
6	Mazo	6	48	18	30

The above table indicates the attendance records for Term 3. It reveals that four learners (Mbali, Zama, Zandi and Zazi) attended school regularly, while the high (albeit slightly better) absentee trend for Nomvula and Mazo continued.

4.7.2 Conclusion: attendance records

Although the records of all the learners – also the two-family learners in Grades 6 and 7 – are not reflected in this report, I found that there was not much difference in the absentee rates for learners from single-parent households and learners from two-parent households. I compared the data for three school terms and it was clear that Nomvula and Mazo did not attend school regularly. The review revealed that, in general, the participating learners had a high absentee rate in the first term of the school year, but that their attendance improved in the third term, with the exception of that of Nomvula en Mazo, who admittedly showed a slightly better attendance rate than in the first term. It was evident that learners from single-parent families were often absent, but this trend was evident for learners from all families. The data were procured from the attendance registers, and it must be noted that I observed poor record keeping in some of these registers.

4.7.3 Quarterly schedules/term results

The academic results that were perused for the first three terms of the year revealed that the learners from single-parent households did not do well. One reason for this may be attributed to their habitual absenteeism which may have been due to lack of parental supervision and monitoring. The drop in performance that put particularly Nomvula and Mazo at risk of failing at the end of the year is noticeable.

Table 4.8: Participants' Term 1 to Term 3 academic results for 2018 (units in %)

#	Name of participants	Age	Gender	Grade	Term	English(Home Language)	Isizulu (FAL)	Mathematics	Life Orientation	Technology	Social sciences	Natural Sciences	Creative Arts	Economics and Management Sciences	Life Skills	Results
1	Mbali	13	F	7	1	79	86	78	92	77	80	78	95	90	-	P
					2	98	84	78	77	96	77	96	99	77	-	P
					3	96	91	93	90	86	87	90	100	90	-	P
2	Nomvula	13	F	7	1	86	79	51	53	68	60	54	95	91	-	P
					2	34	50	30	60	40	43	33	55	35	-	NP
					3	40	40	38	61	33	20	50	34	24	-	NP
3	Zama	12	F	7	1	84	54	55	73	63	58	73	63	68	-	P
					2	85	61	48	71	63	60	73	85	61	-	P
					3	86	71	66	94	89	81	70	100	72	-	P
4	Zandi	12	F	7	1	100	81	69	93	46	76	60	80	82	-	P
					2	99	80	61	86	67	61	90	85	77	-	P
					3	87	91	84	88	60	85	82	98	72	-	P

5	Zazi	12	F	7	1	76	76	40	78	59	54	44	66	69	-	P
					2	80	75	43	56	73	48	75	56	58	-	P
					3	76	82	43	88	84	59	74	78	69	-	P
6	Mazo	12	F	6	1	63	76	40	-	-	43	57	-	-	70	P
					2	58	40	38	-	-	36	44	-	-	33	NP
					3	56	62	30	-	-	35	36	-	-	34	NP

Source: Assessment documents (SASAMS) reviewed

(Note: Grade 6 learners do not have the same learning areas as the Grade 7 learners, hence the blank spaces for the Grade 6 learner in some columns.)

Key: P: Progress; NP: Not ready to Progress

Table 4.9 above indicates the academic achievements of the six learner participants. Five participants were in Grade 7 (Senior Phase) and one participant was in Grade 6 (Intermediate Phase). It was necessary for me to understand the academic performance of these participants by comparing Term 1, Term 2 and Term 3 marks.

In Term 1, all the learners showed good progress despite being learners from single-parent households. In fact, some achieved exceptionally well. In Term 2, four participants achieved good results but Nomvula and Mazo did not perform well, which suggests that their situation at home had not improved in any way, or even declined. When these results were compared with their attendance records, a correlation was evident as their absentee rates were abnormally high. Furthermore, in Term 3 Mazo's and Nomvula's academic results declined in conjunction with a continued trend of poor school attendance. However, Mbali, Zama, Zandi and Zazi obtained good marks in all three terms and their progress was very promising with sterling results in some subjects. Their school attendance also improved from Term 1 to Term 3.

These findings were therefore inconclusive in assessing the assumption that a single-parent household is a driver of poor academic results. What was established, however, is that poor

school attendance may be associated with poor academic results. Due to the limited sample size, this finding may also not be regarded as conclusive, hence further research involving a much larger sample size is required.

4.7.4 School Based Assessments (SBA)

When I traced evidence of the assessment tasks the learners had done, most of the required SBA tasks had not been handed in by Mazo and Nomvula. For instance, instead of task one, a form was found in the learners' file stating the reason why the task had not been completed. There was no evidence that the educator in question had afforded the learners additional opportunities to complete and hand in the task, which confirmed comments by both learners from single-parent households and educator participants that no support was provided to these learners from single-parent households by the educators. However, this seems an anomaly as there was evidence in the Minutes of a staff meeting that intervention programmes to assist poor achievers had been discussed. Admittedly, I did not pursue this information to determine if these programmes included the two learners from the single-parent households who were identified as poor performers in this study, but it was evident in the results of the other four learners that they were able to achieve well, and even exceptionally well, in most of their learning areas.

4.7.5 Staff Minutes

When I perused the Minutes of staff meetings with permission from the principal, I found that the learners' results for Term 1 to Term 3 had been analysed and that the staff had reflected on how best to address poor results. The school management team (SMT) and staff discussed what interventions could be implemented to best assist poor performers. The statistics revealed that most of the learners who did not do well were learners from single-parent households. Furthermore, I obtained teacher interview information that informed me that there was a trend in the abuse of children from single-parent households, absenteeism of these learners, progress reports not being collected by the single parents, ill-discipline among these learners, and a trend of late coming among these learners. However, there was also evidence in the Minutes of intervention programmes by teachers to assist these learners.

The literature suggests that hardships encountered by learners from single-parent households such as poverty, lack of parental care, health problems, and socialisation issues tend to affect

poor attendance, poor performance, child abuse, bad behaviour, criminal activities, and drug and alcohol abuse, to name a few. According to the economic hardship theory, everything that happens to any family member has an impact on everyone who is in the family (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2003). This was supported by five of the learner participants who stated that their parents were not working and were unable to buy stationery, pay school fees, transport, and other school requirements. Furthermore, one participant stated that her mother was doing contractual jobs and her income was not enough to afford school requirements.

The Minutes/teachers also referred to a school feeding scheme to support the nutrition of learners from poor families, although this scheme targeted all learners and not only single-parent learners.

According to Bhengu (2016), the family system theory explains how individuals function in relationship to others and how they behave. Family background is key to a learner's life in and outside the home and the school. This theory was supported by the findings from two learner participants (Nomvula and Mazo) who stated that they lived with their mothers and with other siblings only because they didn't know why they didn't live with their fathers. This separation disturbed the balance in these two families in particular and the family background thus played an important role in these children's lives, particularly as it impacted their academic performance and school attendance negatively.

4.8 Principal's Comments

The principal stated that intervention programmes such remedial work, parental involvement, and morning classes had been implemented to assist poor performers. Another intervention strategy was that he insisted that all staff members networked with other schools to find out about their intervention programmes and to enrich current programmes in the school to improve the academic achievement of poor performers. Furthermore, he elaborated that the teachers were encouraged to do their level best to help learners who had poor academic results in the first and second terms as this was a feeder school and it was vital that the learners who were promoted to high school had adequate academic records.

The principal's comments were corroborated by the Minutes of Meetings that reflected the staff's commitment to intervention strategies for poor achievers.

4.9 Conclusion

This chapter provided a breakdown of the data and discussed the results that emerged. Six learners from single-parent households, teachers, parents and the principal of the primary school under study provided their insights into the challenges encountered by learners from single-parent households and how these challenges impacted their academic achievements. An analysis of the data generated understanding of the challenges encountered by learners from single-parent households. Some of the challenges mentioned by the participants were financial adversity, health problems, deficiency in maternal support, and poor socialisation opportunities and skills. The data were interpreted and analysed with reference to the family systems theory and the economic hardship theory that illuminated that the challenges experienced by single-parent families were associated with diverse family circumstances. The results showed that learners from single-parent households encountered several challenges; however, not all the participants in this study were adversely affected in terms of their scholastic achievements although they all admitted that they experienced various domestic and emotional challenges.

There was evidence in the Minutes of Meetings that the staff, in an attempt to help these learners overcome their trials, considered the implementation of intervention strategies, particularly in terms of academic support and a school feeding scheme. However, it could not be ascertained if these interventions targeted and impacted the performance of particular learners such as those from single-parent families.

The findings clearly revealed that domestic challenges had a negative impact on the school attendance and academic achievement of some single-parent learners, particularly in the case of two of the six learners from such families. It was ascertained that these learners' single mothers never visited the school and thus showed limited involvement in their daughters' academic progress, and it may thus be argued that lack of counselling, forms of child abuse (such as emotional neglect), and financial constraints were drivers of their poor academic performance and limited school attendance.

The next chapter will present the conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The purpose and the objectives of the study as outlined in Chapter One are reiterated, followed by a summary of the key findings that emerged from the data that were obtained by means of interviews, a focus group discussion and document review. Furthermore, the discourse in this chapter will acknowledge some limitations while the implications will be discussed and recommendations will be offered. Some thought-provoking remarks will conclude this chapter.

5.2 Summary of the Key Findings

In brief, the aim of this study was to explore the challenges encountered by 11 – 13-year-old (Grade 6 and Grade 7) learners from single-parent households and to determine the impact of their domestic and social experiences on their academic achievements.

The study was conducted in a primary school in Newlands West in Durban, KZN. The interpretivism model was the selected structure that directed this investigation, as I wanted to gain understanding of the challenges encountered by learners from single-parent households. I engaged with various selected participants to increase my admission into the realities that they encountered and to understand the challenges they experienced and the effects of these challenges on their attainment of academic results.

In line with my intention to understand the challenges encountered by learners from single-parent households, the qualitative design was selected as the designated guide for my study as its techniques produced rich data that informed this study. This approach was used because I wanted to understand the experiences of learners from single-parent families first-hand, and therefore I engaged in personal involvements within the real-life setting (the school) of the involved participants (Bialek, 1994). The research was guided by three research objectives, which were to:

- identify the major challenges encountered by primary school learners from single-parent households;

- examine the effects of these encounters on the academic achievements of these learners; and
- explore possible resolutions to address these identified challenges.

The literature that was reviewed related to the above mentioned objectives and highlighted the findings of earlier researchers who explored the challenges encountered by learners from single-parent households and who determined how these challenges affected their academic achievements. The theoretical framework that underpinned the study was anchored in the economic hardship and the family systems theories.

The study site was a primary school in Newlands West in KZN and it involved six learners from single-parent households, three experienced teachers, two single parents, and the principal of the school. The purposive sampling technique was used to select the study sample. Semi-structured interviews, a focus group discussion and school records were used to elicit information for this study. The qualitative data were analysed according to the thematic approach.

5.3 Summary of the Main Findings with Recommendations

5.3.1 Economic hardship

It was found that economic hardship impacted all the learners who were from the single-parent families and who participated in the study, particularly in terms of limited funds for commodities such as school uniforms, access to transport, school stationary, and spending money to afford snacks that could be bought at the tuck shop. However, the assumption that children from single-parent families generally achieve poor academic results was negated by the findings, as it was found that four of the six learners had achieved very good to excellent academic results in the three terms that were reviewed. These satisfactory academic results were achieved regardless of the domestic hardships that they experienced. Conversely, it was found that two of these learners really struggled, and their lack of academic progress was undoubtedly associated with their poor school attendance, which in turn could be associated with the domestic challenges and hardships that they experienced as members of single-parent households where their mothers struggled to make ends meet. General economic challenges were: failure to pay bills, a lack of money for basic necessities for school, a lack of money to pay transport fees, and limited funds to ensure that the children in a single-parent household

enjoyed high medical attention and care. It was the latter two factors (limited access to transport and illness) that caused some learners not to attend school regularly. Transport is relatively expensive and the mothers would rather put food on the table for a hungry family than pay transport fees. The economic hardship theory proposes that children with absent fathers experience more adverse economic and social difficulties than their two-parent peers, and this makes them prone to risky sexual behaviour (Hawkins, 2007). However, none of the 11 – 13-year-old participants admitted to any criminal or sexual deviancy, and none of the teachers pointed these children out as particularly at risk for delinquency or sexual promiscuity.

The economic hardship that was admittedly experienced by all the learner participants, and that was corroborated by the teachers, the mothers and the principal, is a matter of concern as any economic challenge has a negative impact on learner attendance and academic performance. Therefore, to improve the economic hardships experienced by single-parent families, the following interventions are recommended:

- Parents of learners in the school should be encouraged to start a vegetable garden which will produce food for needy learners and even their families. Surplus food from the vegetable garden can be sold to raise funds that can be used to help learners buy uniforms and other school requirements.
- A social worker should be appointed by the DBE, in conjunction with the Department of Social Development, to conduct home visits and provide food parcels for needy families.
- The school should establish a fundraising committee that works in consultation with the parents to raise funds to buy basic foodstuff for needy learners.

5.3.2 Health problems

Economic hardship is a cause of health problems because learners from single-parent households are often unable to access health services as their parents cannot afford to take them to hospital or a doctor. Clinics are relatively easily accessible, but it was commented that there were no doctors and that the medication that was provided was often inadequate and ineffective. For example, two learner participants stated that their single mothers had been unable to take them to hospital when they were seriously ill, and hence they were taken to

clinics where there were inadequate facilities to treat their illnesses. They were only given pain killers and they were not seen by a doctor; instead, they were sent back home in pain. This finding suggests that poor health is a challenge that may have a negative impact on single-parent learners' academic achievement, particularly if they are absent for extensive periods. The following interventions are recommended:

- Teachers should keep a health register and regularly inspect learners for signs of poor health to detect early signs of afflictions such as scabies, measles, chicken-pox, mumps, and malnutrition.
- The school should invite social workers and nurses to conduct information sessions involving learners, parents and teachers.
- Teachers should monitor the eating habits of the learners and guide them on how to eat a healthy, balanced diet although it may be inexpensive. Such programmes could be linked with the Life Orientation learning area.
- The feeding scheme at the school could be extended.

5.3.3 Poor performance

The six participating learners were raised by single parents who were economically challenged. The participating teachers affirmed that, to make ends meet, some of these mothers sold sweets or fruit outside the school just to earn a living and purchase school requirements. Sometimes learners got temporary jobs to support their parents, which of necessity led to absenteeism and/or poor academic performance. Such children were so tired in class that they could not concentrate during lessons. In this context, the US Department of Justice and Delinquency (2001) explains that learners with poor attendance end up being drop-outs who become non-productive adults. However, this study that was conducted among 11 to 13-year-old primary school learners found that drop-out rates at this level and in this school were minimal. It was established that some single-parent learners performed better than their counterparts while those who were consistently absent performed poorly and were at risk of dropping out because they might not be promoted to the next grade. To improve learner performance in relation to poor attendance, the following interventions are recommended:

- Remedial work must be given to poor performers.

- Learners' parents should be updated about their progress, or lack of progress.
- Teachers should network with other schools to discover what other strategies could be employed to assist poor performers.
- Analyses of academic results should be done every term and subject improvement plans should be introduced and operationalized based on the findings.
- School attendance records should be monitored regularly and absenteeism should be addressed rigorously.

5.3.4 Parental guidance and supervision

Economic constraints cause learners from single-parent households to lack full parental guidance, counselling, monitoring and supervision as they do not have both a father and a mother as role models. In modern times, most parents work to sustain the family, and thus the absence of one parent's income puts a strain on the available funds of the single parent who has to raise the children, particularly when the absent parent does not adhere to alimony requirements. This causes financial constraints that take a toll on the children and the challenges that arise become particularly evident when the children manifest delinquent behaviour because the family structure is dysfunctional and discipline suffers due to a lack of parental guidance and supervision. Unfortunately, this impacts the academic progress of many children from such households. The following interventions are suggested to address the lack of guidance and counselling in single-parent families:

- Teachers should invite motivational speakers to address both learners and single parents and to make them aware of the pitfalls that they should avoid.
- A school psychologist should be invited on a regular basis to counsel learners and guide them towards adhering to strong values and positive personal choices. Teachers should also take a leading role in helping learners build a positive value system.

5.3.5 Undisciplined and delinquent behaviour

Because there is often no adequate monitoring of learners from single-parent households, they misbehave at school and at home. Many absent themselves from school and may bully other learners and even their own parents. Good behaviour in children is the responsibility of parents

as they are the role models of their children. However, when this role model is absent or flawed, some learners seek love and attention through delinquent behaviour as they feel unappreciated and rejected and many end up performing poorly academically. Thus not only unrequited material needs, but dysfunctional paternal and maternal relationships demotivate learners from working hard and wanting to achieve success.

Thus lack of monitoring, supervision, parental care, guidance, counselling and age-appropriate socialization opportunities can cause learners from single-parent households to feel unwanted and out of their depth. Gender-related issues also arise because it is difficult for some learners from single-parent families to relate to older people of a different gender than their single parent.

The following interventions are suggested to address and improve undisciplined and delinquent behaviour:

- Teachers, parents and the SMT should record every incident and thus trace behavioural patterns in order to detect early signs of delinquent behaviour.
- Teachers must recognise every learner's efforts and reward good behaviour when it is displayed by learners who generally behave badly.
- Learners who show a tendency of bad behaviour should be given class tasks to keep them occupied and feel important so that they won't disrupt classes. It is often a good idea to make such a learner a class monitor, although care should be taken that bullying does not occur.

5.4 General Recommendations

The results indicated that some learners from single-parent families encountered difficulties in their academic achievement, but that some were able to rise above their circumstances and excel, particularly when school intervention programmes valued and encouraged these children. The literature suggests that an average of 30% of children from single-parent families become the victims of child abuse and health problems and that these issues manifest in bad behaviour. One solution that was clearly highlighted by this study is early identification and intervention. This research should thus be helpful to the stakeholders mentioned below.

5.4.1 Policy makers

Policy makers must ensure that guidelines relating to learners from single-parent households are incorporated appropriately in schools' management plans. Workshops should be conducted involving management teams, teachers and parents to prepare them to turn the school into an environment that is conducive for the education and progress of *all* learners.

5.4.2 Learners from single-parent households

Learners from single-parent households should be motivated to do the best they can to embrace their education in spite of the difficulties they face at home and in life in general. The success that was achieved in terms of the academic achievement and school attendance of four of the six learners who participated in this study is a case in point.

5.4.3 Parents

Parents should be advised so that they in turn can advise and support their children on how to perform better and be successful academically. Parents should prioritise the vital issues that will encourage their children to attend school regularly. This can be done through networking with parents through workshops, small cluster and class meetings, and social media.

5.4.4 Teachers

Teachers need to monitor learners from single-parent households and be aware of their challenges so that they can devise timely interventions to support them academically. These learners need love and teachers should try to understand their problems and advise them on how to deal with their problems. This will make them feel happy and important, and they will feel at ease and not rejected.

5.4.5 Minister of Education

Regardless of the dire financial constraints that the country experiences, the government, through the Minister of Basic Education, should allocate additional funds to subsidise the expenses, particularly the transport costs, of learners from single-parent households who experience financial problems. Their names should be submitted to the DBE so that bursaries can be allocated to these learners to ensure that their school attendance is not compromised.

5.4.6 School counsellors

School counselling units should prioritise services to learners from single-parent households who need constant motivation and guidance to do their best to brighten their future.

5.5 Recommendations for Future Studies

This study could be used as a threshold for future studies as the value and application of intervention strategies to assist learners from single-parent households need to be explored in more depth across a much larger scope. The research adopted a qualitative approach with a small sample of only twelve participants in one school; hence, for generalizability, a large number of participants and a wide range of schools from different socio-economic contexts should be included in future studies.

Many learners from single-parent households face ever increasing challenges worldwide, and therefore role-players from all spheres of life will have to be made aware of the plight of these children. Future studies should look at these challenges from learners' perspective and not merely from the perspective of single-parents and teachers, because learners are predominantly affected by this family structure, particularly if it is severely compromised and dysfunctional due to financial constraints.

5.6 Contribution of the Study

This research will give every reader a better understanding of the challenges encountered by learners from single-parent households and the effects of these challenges on their academic achievement. In particular, the finding that intervention strategies may be effective in encouraging financially constrained learners from single-parent families to rise above their challenges and to excel academically is encouraging.

5.7 Conclusion

The findings revealed that learners from single-parent households encountered many challenges such as economic hardship, health problems, and lack of parental care and socialisation issues. Although these findings were corroborated by the literature review that also revealed that children from single-parent households often experience challenges such as poor school attendance, poor health care and poor academic performance, this study found that dropping out of school, child abuse and criminal activities did not yet manifest in the 11 to 13-

year-old participants of this study. For example, four of the six participants achieved high to excellent academic results and attended school regularly, while only two had poor school attendance and were at risk of failing their grade at the end of the year. The problem that seemed to be causing a number of other problems was the financial struggle the families had to endure, yet four of the six learners seemingly overcame this drawback and managed to cope well with the academic demands of the school. In this context, the school management team and the teachers seemed to be instrumental in the successes of these four learners, as there was evidence that concerted efforts had been made to devise intervention strategies to support poor academic performers. It was this finding in particular that was encouraging and that needs to be explored in more depth by future studies.

However, the emotional strain of a lack of financial support for learners from single-parent families was also evident, as the struggle to make ends meet seemed to impact the relationship between the single parents and their children. Clearly, the learner participants were not comfortable with the situation in their families as they felt that their single parents failed to provide the emotional and psychological support that they needed so much.

Moreover, the embarrassment and a sense of 'otherness' that these learners felt in the school were evident, as they could generally not afford necessities such as school uniforms, stationery, lunch and transport, and being mocked by their peers was a wound that cut deeply. This finding raises a red flag, because this study was restricted to relatively young learners in the primary school and it did not explore the deep emotional impact of poverty and rejection on teenagers and the impact that these will have on them in the high school. Parents and teachers therefore need to be aware of the challenges children from single-parent families experience in the primary school, and they should associate these challenges with the difficulties they may face later as they grow into their adolescent phase. This suggests that strategies should be devised to ensure closer contact between primary feeder schools and the high schools these children may one day attend.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH FROM UKZN



13 July 2018

Ms Ntokozo Mulovhedzi (215082058)
School of Education
Edgewood Campus

Dear Ms Mulovhedzi,

Protocol reference number: HSS/0446/018M

Project Title: Challenges encountered by Primary School learners from single parent household to attain academic achievements

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

In response to your application received on 14 May 2018, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application 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.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

Dr Shamila Naidoo (Deputy Chair)

/ms

Cc Supervisor: Dr V Jairam
Cc Academic Leader Research: Dr SB Khoza
Cc School Administrator: Ms Tyzer Khumalo

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Professor Shenuka Singh (Chair)

Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building

Postal Address: Private Bag 904031, Durban 4000

Telephone: +27 (0) 31 260 3567/312004057 Facsimile: +27 (0) 31 260 4809 Email: ethics@ukzn.ac.za / ethics@ukzn.ac.za / ethics@ukzn.ac.za
Website: www.ukzn.ac.za



100 YEARS OF ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

Founding Campuses = Edgewood = Howard College = Medical School = Pietermaritzburg = Westville

APPENDIX B: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT SCHOOLS



education

Department
Education
PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

Enquiries: Phindile Duma

Tel: 033 392 1063

Ref: 24/8/1537

Ms Mulovhedzi

113 Castlehill Drive
Newlands West
Durban
4037

Dear Ms Mulovhedzi

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: **"CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY SCHOOL PRIMARY LEARNERS FROM SINGLE PARENT HOUSEHOLDS TO ATTAIN ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENTS"**, 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 23 May 2018 to 09 July 2020.
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 below
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.


Dr. EV Nzama
Head of Department: Education
Date: 23 May 2018

KWAZULU-NATAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Postal Address: Private Bag X9137 • Pietermaritzburg • 3200 • Republic of South Africa
Physical Address: 247 Burger Street • Anton Lembede Building • Pietermaritzburg • 3201
Tel.: +27 33 382 1063 • Fax.: +27 33 392 1200 • Email: Phindile.Duma@kzndoe.gov.za • Web: www.kzndoe.gov.za
Facebook: KZNDOE... Twitter: @KDE_KZN... Instagram: kzn_education... YouTube: kzn_doe

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APPENDIX C: GATEKEEPER PERMISSION LETTER

113 Castlehill Drive
Newlands West
Durban
4037
April 2018

The Principal and SGB
Castlehill Primary School
113 Jackcastle Avenue
Newlands West
Durban
4037

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT CASTLEHILL PRIMARY SCHOOL

I am doing a Master's degree at University of KwaZulu Natal (Edgewood Campus) in Educational Psychology. I am currently doing a research study titled: "The challenges encountered by school primary learners from single parent households to attain academic achievements"

I kindly request permission to conduct my research at your school. I understand this is the critical for learners as they will soon have to prepare their Half – yearly examination. I will make sure that my research I done after school hours so that I will not interfere with teaching and learning hours. The research study will involve only 6 participants, voluntary. I will also protect their rights and identity by using pseudonyms instead of their real names.

This research also aims at helping the school in terms in understanding what are these challenges encountered by learners from single parent households? How does single parenting impact on learners well-being and academic performance? Learners will get relevant support from psychological services where possible.

I will highly appreciate it if my request in this regard is permitted.

Thank you

Yours faithfully

Miss N. Mulovhedzi

You may also contact the research office through:

P. Mohun

HSSREC Research Office

Tel: 031 260 4557

Email: mohunop@ukzn.ac.za

CONSENT

I, the principal of _____ School, give permission to Ntokozo Mulovhedzi to conduct the study entitled” **The challenges encountered by school Primary learners from single households to attain academic achievements**. I hereby confirm that I understand the nature of the research project, and I consent to the school participating in the research project.

Principal Name

Principal Signature

____/____/____

Date

**APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR LEARNERS FROM SINGLE
PARENT HOUSEHOLDS**

1. Whom do you live with? Why?
2. Is your parent able to provide you with all school requirements?
3. Have you ever engaged in any criminal activities so that you can get money in order to make a living? Do you remember those kinds of activities?
4. Have you failed to attend school this year? How many times have you failed to attend school? Why?
5. What you think should be done to assist other learners from single parent households?
6. Do you know any fellow learners from single parent households who pull- out from school?
7. How are the other learner's treatment/behaviour towards you?
8. Do you carry lunch to school daily?

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR TEACHERS

1. How many learners do you have who are from single parent households?
2. Do you think learners from single parent households require any special services? If yes what services should be given to them?
3. In your experience at this school do learners from single parents encounter any severe challenges compared to those from two parent households ?If yes what are those challenges?
4. Suggest some other means that the community, schools and government can assist to solve the challenges identified.
5. Is the academic performance being affected in any way? Give reasons...

**APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR THE PRINCIPAL OF THE
PRIMARY SCHOOL**

1. How many learners do you have in total in your school?
2. Do you have any learners who are from single parent households? If yes what is the statistics?
3. Is the statistic decreasing or increasing?
4. Do learners from single parent households in school face any severe challenges compared to those from two parent households? If yes what are those challenges?
5. What is the academic performance of learners from single parent household in school?
6. Do individual teachers, SGB members and school administration help learners from single parent households to overcome the challenges that they encounter? If yes how?
7. What can be done to guarantee that these learners' challenges are minimized?

APPENDIX G: DOCUMENT SEARCH GUIDE

	Documents to be checked
1	Class attendance registers
2	Quarterly and annual examination reports
3	Staff minutes
4	Teacher on duty report
5	School based support team minutes/reports
6	Learners' welfare book
7	Parent communication book

APPENDIX H: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR SINGLE PARENTS

1. Do you encounter any challenges as a single parent? If yes what are those challenges?
2. How often does your child attend school?
3. Have you receive any reports from school about your child bad behaviour?
4. How often do you supervise and monitor your child school work?
5. Do you spend enough time with your child at home? If yes how?
6. Are there any services offered to you by people from the community, teachers and social development to overcome the challenges identified? If yes how?

APPENDIX I: LETTER OF REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION OF TEACHERS AND LEARNERS

Dear Teacher/ Parent

My name is Ntokozo Mulovhedzi, a Master's student at University of Natal (Edgewood Campus), Student number **215082058**.

I am conducting research on: **The challenges encountered by school primary learners from single parent households to attain academic achievements.**

The purpose of this study is to explore the challenges encountered by school primary learners from single parent households to attain their academic achievements. Data will be collected using semi-structured interviews, focus group and documentary analysis. The participants may ask questions before or after partaking in the interview. The participants have a right to withdraw from the study anytime they feel .There are no known risk associated with the study. If you agree to be part of the interview please complete the consent form below by your parent / guardian if under the age of 18 years.

I promise that:

-The participants' confidentiality and anonymity will be respected and will not be divulged to other parents, teachers, school managers or learner's .No names will be used, however pseudonyms will be used instead. The only person who will have access to information will be Dr .Jairam (Masters Supervisor) and I.

-All written reports and accounts of this study will not identify the school or person involved.

-The information gathering process will not harm you or anybody involved in the study.

- The information gathering process will not disturbed teaching and learning situation.

Should you need any further explanation about the study, please feel free to contact me at 073 266 3432.

3. Declaration

APPENDIX J: CONSENT FORM

,..... (Full names) parents / guardian
of (Name of child) consent to his
/her participation in the research project. I hereby consent / do not consent to have this
interview recorded.

Signature of Parent/ guardian

____/____/____

Date

APPENDIX K: INFORMED CONSENT FOR LEARNER

1. Nature of the research project

Researcher	Name: Ntokozo Mulovhedzi Qualification: Masters in Education (Educational Psychology) Cell no: 073 266 3432 E-mail: mulovhedzintokozo@gmail.com
Supervisor	Name: Dr. Jairam Qualification: PhD(Educational Psychology) Tel.no: 031- 260 1438 E-mail: jairam@ukzn.ac.za
Purpose	To explore the challenges encountered by primary school learners from single parents households to attain academic achievements.

2. What is required of participants?

I understand that:

-The research is about the challenges encountered by school primary learners.

-My child's /ward's participation in the research is voluntary and subject to informed consent.

-My child/ ward can withdraw from the research process at any time without any negative consequences.

-My child's/ ward's participation in the research will not affect his/ her position as learner or their relationship with other teachers/ parents at school.

-Participants rights will be respected.

- The information obtained will be used with strictest confidentiality.

-My child/ ward can refuse to answer any questions asked to him / her.

-The researcher will use information from my child/ ward in a way that will assure my child's / ward's continued respect amongst other learners, teachers and the wider fraternity.

-My child's /ward's identity will not be disclose in this research.

-The research interview will not impact on my child/ ward class time

3. Declaration

I _____ (name of parent) the parent/ guardian of _____ have been approached to request permission for participation of my child/ ward in the research entitled: **The challenges encountered by school primary learners from single parent households to attain academic achievements.** I hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to my child/ ward participating in the research project. I understand that my child /ward is at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, so he/she should desire.

I agree to my **child/ ward** _____ participating in a study that Ntokozo Mulovhedzi is conducting.

Name (of parent) _____ Signature _____ Date __/____

APPENDIX L: INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR TEACHERS

1. Nature of the research project

Researcher	Name: Ntokozo Mulovhedzi Qualification: Masters in Education (Educational Psychology) Cell no: 073 266 3432 E-mail: mulovhedzintokozo@gmail.com
Supervisor	Name: Dr. Jairam Qualification: PhD(Educational Psychology) Tel.no: 031- 260 1438 E-mail: jairam@ukzn.ac.za
Purpose	To explore challenges encountered by primary school learners from single households to attain academic achievements.

2. What is required of participants?

I understand that:

- The research is about the challenges encountered by school primary learners.
- My participation in the research is voluntary and subject to informed consent.
- I can withdraw from the research process at any time without any negative consequences.

-My participation in the research will not affect my position as teacher/learner or my relationship with other teachers/learner at school.

-Participants' rights will be respected.

- The information obtained will be used with strictest confidentiality.

-I can refuse to answer any questions asked to me.

-The researcher will use information from me in a way that will assure my continued respect amongst other learners, colleagues and the wider fraternity.

-My identity will not be disclosed in this research.

-The research interview will not impact on my working time

Declaration

I _____ (name of participant have been approached to participating the research entitled: **The challenges encountered by school primary learners from single parent households to attain academic achievements.** I hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project. I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, so I should desire. I also give permission for the use audio recording in the research.

I **agree** to participate in a study that Ntokozo Mulovhedzi is conducting.

Name (of participant) _____ Signature _____ Date _____

**APPENDIX M: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH – DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION**

113 Castlehill Drive

Newlands West

Durban

4037

Ms Phindile Duma

Research Department

228 Pietermaritzburg Street

Pietermaritzburg

3200

Dear Sir

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH: DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

I hereby apply for permission to conduct research towards the completion of my Master's degree in Psychology of Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Edgewood Campus). The topic for research is on: **Challenges encountered by school primary learners from single parent households to attain academic achievements.**

The purpose of this study is to:

To explore the challenges encountered by primary school learners from single parent households in attaining their academic achievements.

The research will involve interviews of teachers and learners, thereafter followed by a questionnaire. Teachers will also participate in a focus group discussion. The interviews and focus group discussion with the participants will be conducted after school hours at times that are convenient for the participants.

Participants will be given consent forms and made aware that this is a voluntary participation.
I do assure no participant will be identified in any way from the research results.

Awaiting your approval.

Thank You

Miss N Mulovhedzi

Signature of Parent/ guardian

Date

