



UNIVERSITY OF TM
KWAZULU-NATAL

INYUVESI
YAKWAZULU-NATALI

**ENHANCING THE PROVISION OF LEARNERS' PSYCHOSOCIAL
SUPPORT SERVICES IN SELECTED PUBLIC SCHOOLS
IN UMLAZI DISTRICT**

LUNGISA DLUDLA

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL, SOUTH AFRICA



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SUPPORT SERVICES IN SELECTED PUBLIC SCHOOLS
IN UMLAZI DISTRICT**

BY

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STUDENT NUMBER: 203514000

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Master in Education (Educational Psychology) in the**

**COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES, SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL, SOUTH AFRICA**

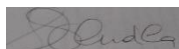
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SUBMISSION DATE: 26 JANUARY 2024

DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, **Lungisa Dlodla**, student number **203514000**, declare that the dissertation entitled **Enhancing the provision of learners' psychosocial support services in selected public primary schools in Umlazi district** submitted in fulfilment of a Master of Education in Educational Psychology abides by the following rules:

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- III. This dissertation has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.
- IV. This dissertation does not contain other persons' data, pictures, graphs, or additional information unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.
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Student Signature

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Date

SUPERVISOR'S STATEMENT

This Thesis is submitted with my approval.



Dr Ncamisile P. Mkhize-Mthiyane

26 JANUARY 2024

Date: -----

DEDICATION

- I dedicate this study to God, my Heavenly Father, His Son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. I thank You, Almighty God, for giving me the revelation that I can do all things through Christ who strengthens us, and that nothing is impossible if we believe in You, O God. Thank you for the grace of life and your blessings over my life and those near me. To God Be the Glory in Jesus' Name, Amen.
- A special dedication to my late grandmother, ugogo uMaMchunu Loloza Constance Zibuyile Dlodla, who never despised my small beginnings. I remember you celebrated an award of 'my certificate,' which did not make sense to others. Thank you for believing in me, gogo, when no one was. May you rest in eternal peace and in the bosom of Jesus Christ, Amen.

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ABSTRACT

The high prevalence of psychosocial challenges among learners in public schools negatively impacts their psychosocial well-being. Given that the South African Department of Education provides relevant policies on support services, the teachers' lack of effective intervention strategies and skills to effectively implement relevant psychosocial support services is concerning. Thus, it is imperative to understand the forms of psychosocial support services provided for learners and how these are facilitated in public primary schools in the Umlazi district. This qualitative case study sought to understand the forms of psychosocial support services provided to learners in two selected public primary schools in the Umlazi district. The study was underpinned by an interpretive paradigm and framed by the theory of Community of Practice, drawing also on the concept of 'assets' from the Asset-Based Approach. The data generation methods comprised semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with six (6) selected teachers, including class teachers, Life Orientation teachers, and Departmental Heads. A thematic analysis method and procedures were used to analyse data.

Findings indicated a need for psychosocial support interventions from interdisciplinary stakeholders in the school community to address many learners' contextual challenges in public primary schools. These include but are not limited to professional psychosocial support for learners, formal capacitation of in-service teachers, developing communities of practice (CoPs), and networking with other professionals who work with those from DBE. The study concludes that such interventions should be a collaborative effort with all stakeholders in the community and that communities should be capacitated to identify and mobilise available and relevant assets to their school and the needs of the school and learners. Therefore, the study concludes that enhancing the psychosocial support services and addressing the psychosocial challenges learners face in public schools is necessary and can be achieved.

Keywords

Asset-Based Approach, enhance, psychosocial challenges, psychosocial support services, public schools, well-being.

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ABA	Asset-Based Approach
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hypertension Disorder
APA	American Psychological Association
CAPS	Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement
CoPs	Communities of Practice
CSTL	Care and Support for Teaching and Learning
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DBST	District Based Support Team
DH	Departmental Head
DoE	Department of Education
DoH	Department of Health
DSD	Department of Social Development
EAP	Employee Assistance Programme
ELRC	Education Labour Relations Council
EMIS	Education Management Information Systems
EPW6	Education White Paper six
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
ISHP	Integrated School Health Policy
KZN	KwaZulu-Natal
LER	Learner Educator Ratio
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
NGO	Non-governmental organizations
NRF	National Research Council

PAM	Personnel Administrative Measures
PL1	Post Level 1
PLS	Professional Learning Communities
PSS	Psychosocial Support Services
QMS	Quality Management Systems
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SADTU	South African Democratic Teachers' Union
SAPS	South Africa Police Services
SASA	South African Schools Act
SBST	School-Based Support Team
SES	Socio-economic status
SIAS	Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support
SGB	School Governing Body
SMT	School Management Team
SNES	Special Needs Education Services
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
USA	United States of America

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CHAPTER ONE

ORIENTATION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the background to the study, the purpose of the study, the study motivation, and the problem statement, followed by the objectives and the critical research questions, which are the pillars that directed the study. Furthermore, frequently used concepts are explained and theorized in detail, as well as the significance of the study. Delimitations of the study are presented, and the structure of the study is outlined, followed by the summary of the chapter.

1.2 Background to the study

Research notes that there is a high prevalence of psychosocial challenges among learners in South African public schools (Department of Basic Education [DBE] & Department of Health [DoH], 2012; Care and Support for Teaching and Learning [CSTL], 2014; Van Der Elst et al., 2012; Menziwa, 2019). Such challenges negatively impact learners' academic progress and psychosocial well-being (Patel et al., 2021; Namome et al., 2021). Amongst these challenges experienced by learners includes a range of emotions throughout the school day (Valiente et al., 2020), while others go through traumatic experiences that trigger psychosocial challenges (Zulu et al., 2020). This is due to varying challenging experiences at home, school, and in communities where they live.

Psychosocial challenges experienced by many learners range from but are not limited to trauma left unattended after losing close family members, bullying that causes victims to avoid school, disruptive behaviour in class and at school, poverty, exposure to domestic violence, learning difficulties, and abuse. Learners are also reported to be at a stage of experimentation and at high risk of being exposed to risky behaviours (Francis & Meyers et al., 2019). Additionally, West and Meier (2020) contend that overcrowded classrooms and a shortage of teachers, where many classes still have a learner-educator ratio value of 50:1 and higher, lead to high noise levels and a lack of concentration and attention. Some learners are reported to have stress, which is associated with poor academic achievement (Deng et al., 2022; Murray-Harvey,

2010), learning difficulties and laziness in school work, truancy, absenteeism, and many more psychosocial issues (Segalo & Rambuda, 2018; Rappaport & Thomas, 2004; Nene, 2013; Francis & Meyers et al., 2019) including physical fighting using weapons and verbal threats of harm to others.

The government of South Africa recognizes that the majority of learners in public schools confront psychosocial challenges (DoE & DoH, 2012) and has adopted several initiatives, including, among others, the Integrated School Health Policy (ISHP) (2012), Care and Support for Teaching and Learning (CSTL) (2014) and the Education White Paper six: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System (EWP6) (DOE, 2001) to ensure that the provision of learners' psychosocial support services (PSS) addresses these psychosocial challenges without discrimination and is based on equal opportunities to all learners (Twinamatsiko, 2021; Menziwa, 2019; Van Der Elst et al., 2012). There are, however, inequalities in the delivery of PSS in many public schools in South Africa, which have been described as a contributing factor to many psychosocial challenges faced by learners (Twinamatsiko, 2021; Menziwa, 2019). Equal distribution of PSS to all learners is a need. This can assist in addressing learners' psychosocial needs and developing interventions that could enhance the well-being of learners and their academic performance (Borman et al., 2019; Bodvin et al., 2018).

Suppose these psychosocial challenges facing learners remain unaddressed or do not get PSS; we should expect significant consequences that could affect the development and progress of all those learners involved, negatively impacting teaching and learning in schools.

Rappaport and Thomas (2004) state that assessing children and adolescents for potential behaviour requires an organized approach that draws on clinical knowledge, a thorough diagnostic interview, and familiarity with relevant risk and protective factors. Therefore, specialized professionals in public schools should be accessible to provide psychosocial interventions to learners facing psychosocial challenges. For this reason, a study on providing and enhancing learners' PSS is critical. Equally, the substantial unequal access to PSS services, with resources maintained by those in powerful positions (Bodvin et al., 2018; Dover & Belon, 2019); Hanley et al., 2020) and infrequent visits (Malehlanye, 2021; Melander et al., 2021; Ali et al., 2023) by PSS

officials to schools make it difficult for teachers to cater to learners' diverse psychosocial needs. This calls for teachers, parents, and school management teams to receive training to address learners' health and psychosocial problems that may originate in the home or at school (Zulu et al., 2020; Beteille et al., 2020). Against this background, the study aimed to understand the forms of PSS provided to learners facing psychosocial challenges and to enhance such services.

1.3 The focus and purpose of the study

This study focuses on enhancing the provision of learners' PSS in selected public schools in the Umlazi District. Its purpose is mainly to understand the forms of PSS provided to learners in selected public schools in the Umlazi District and to enhance such support for learner well-being.

1.4 Motivation for the study

The study was initiated because of my life experiences during adolescence. Growing up amongst privileged peers raised by parents who were emotionally, spiritually, financially, and socially present, the absence of such support within my family during my teenage years became apparent. Despite the lack of my family support, the resultant independence was channeled towards being available for others. This dedication extended to providing counselling and spiritual support to disadvantaged youth and individuals facing distress across various age groups. A seven-year occupation as a Regional Administrator for the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU) was followed by a role as a Personal Assistant to a Senior General Manager in the Department of Education (DoE). Subsequently, I was employed as an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) practitioner within the DoE which exposed me to professional psychologists, social workers, and rehabilitation centres. In this capacity, I referred teaching and non-teaching staff dealing with psychosocial issues to these specialists.

Professionally, as a departmental head for the Inter-Senior Phase (Grades 4-7) who has taught in the same school for the past seven years, I have observed the lack of psychosocial support for both teachers and learners in public primary schools. During the interaction with professional teachers and in Professional Learning Communities

(PLCs), such as workshops and training, conversations often revolve around the psychosocial challenges observed in schools and the lack of and inaccessibility of PSS in schools in Umlazi District. Teachers have also cited a lack of capability and are ill-equipped to deal with the diverse psychosocial challenges confronting learners, as most learners in many public schools are experiencing psychosocial challenges. Such current challenges observed arise from trauma left unattended, the loss of parents and siblings during the COVID-19 pandemic, adverse living conditions that were exacerbated by the recent floods in Umlazi, behavioural problems such as bullying, gangsters, truancy, several incidents of physical violence, all kinds of abuse, overcrowded classrooms, learning difficulties, a shortage of teachers, inadequate resources, security, and infrastructure, the effects of poverty and many other issues.

Many of these challenges negatively affect learners academically, socially, and personally. Nene (2013) concurs that many public schools in South Africa have more learners facing psycho-social challenges and further reports that teachers from primary or secondary and public or private schools, as well as learners from rich or poor backgrounds, are all affected where most learners are currently presenting unruly and less respectful behaviours than they used to be in the past.

In the teaching experience within the same school, it is confirmed that both teachers and non-teaching staff have not received any training on psychosocial interventions. Additionally, the Umlazi District-Based Support Team (DBST) has never visited the school to help in the establishment of School-Based Support Teams (SBST). Thorough training or workshops for these teams could enhance their capability to tackle the learners' psychosocial challenges.

The theoretical motivation for this study is drawn from the context of three education frameworks, namely, the ISHP (2012), the CSTL (2014), and the EWP6 (DOE, 2001). These policies respond to the diverse psychosocial challenges facing many public primary school learners and share some common goals. They acknowledge that children in public schools confront many psychosocial challenges that arise from the school, home, and community environments. In addition, these three policies and frameworks recognize that all learners need support and have taken a step to put 'children first,' thereby giving their needs the highest priority (Ntshuntshe & Mathwasa, 2022; DBE & DoH, 2014). Therefore, it is necessary to give special attention to children

by providing them with psychosocial support services while they are still in their formative years. The provision of special attention to learners' psychosocial support at school, at home, and in communities will improve learners' learning outcomes and the emotional, psychological, physical, and all other aspects of learners. Shuro and Waggie (2021) raise a different perspective about providing learners' psychosocial support services, noting that teachers at the frontline in dealing with vulnerable learners are not adequately equipped to respond effectively to learners' psychosocial challenges. Menziwa (2019) raises concerns that PSS are not fully integrated into public schools. Duma (2019), on the other hand, stresses the need for supportive structures at all levels of learners' development. Hence, this study intends to understand the forms of PSS provided to learners and how these different forms of learners' PSS can be enhanced in selected public primary schools in the Umlazi district.

1.5 Problem statement

There is inadequate distribution of PSS and resources in public schools in South Africa. Inequalities in the provision of interventions and infrequent visits by DBST in many schools render it difficult for teachers to meet learners' diverse needs (DBE, 2012; Bedi, 2018; Ryan et al., 2018). Psychosocial challenges negatively impact learners' academic progress and psychosocial well-being and that of teachers and parents (Patel et al., 2021; Namome et al., 2021). The South African Government has adopted initiatives to respond to such psychosocial challenges, including the ISHP (2012), the CSTL (2008), and the EWP6 (DOE, 2001). However, these policies have not been effectively implemented in all public schools. South Africa and, in particular, public schools are characterised by substantial social inequalities focusing not only on learners' academic competence but also their social-emotional competence and a positive classroom environment (Menziwa, 2019; Namome, 2021).

Conversations with colleagues often revolve around learners who experience trauma due to unforeseen circumstances. Counselling, trauma debriefing, and psychosocial support are required to ensure that such challenges do not negatively impact learners' academic performance and that they can cope independently. For example, in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), the devastating floods in April/May 2022 in Durban and Umlazi

District resulted in schools and learners' families losing property and belongings, while some children lost their parents, extended family members, and siblings. Both learners and teachers need multiple forms of support to deal with unpredictable circumstances effectively. While Madzivhandila and Maserumule (2022), Shokane and Nel (2020), and Tiernan et al. (2020) propose the need for a specialised counselling unit to address teachers' and learners' psychosocial needs, school principals and management teams are not effectively able with inclusive and responsive approaches to address crises and to guide teachers, learners, and parents to cope in schools and within communities. In order to promote sustainable learning, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) should formulate interventions that address psychosocial well-being and support for children and teachers. Thus, the proposed study seeks to enhance the provision of learners' psychosocial support services in selected public schools in the Umlazi District.

1.6 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are:

- 1.6.1 To understand the forms of psychosocial support services provided to learners in selected public schools in the Umlazi District.
- 1.6.2 To enhance the different psychosocial support services provided to learners in selected public schools in Umlazi District.

1.7 Key research questions

The research questions were as follows:

- 1.7.1 What psychosocial support services are provided to learners in selected public schools in Umlazi District?
- 1.7.2 How could different forms of psychosocial support services provided for learners be enhanced in selected public schools in the Umlazi District?

1.8 The significance of the study

In order to address the diverse psychosocial challenges confronting learners in public schools, it is vital to explore ways to enhance psychosocial support services. There

is a scarcity of research on PSS offered to learners in public schools in South Africa. The service providers for the ISHP (2012) and CSTL (2014) policies that are meant to provide care and support to all vulnerable learners in public schools do not seem to be active and visible to all equally (Menziwa, 2019; Pillay et al., 2021). The study thus aimed to close these gaps by exploring short- and long-term context-appropriate strategies to capacitate teachers in selected public schools in Umlazi District to provide PSS in schools without having to wait for visits by the DBE - DBST.

This study also sought to close the methodological gaps by engaging teachers in reviewing the content and implementation of existing policies and interventions to provide PSS in public schools assisted by the ideas provided in both conceptual and theoretical frameworks Communities of Practice (CoPs) and concepts from the Asset-Based Approach (ABA) that underpinned this study. These frameworks assisted in understanding how teachers and schools, in general, could form partnerships with communities and other professional services. The study and results encourage the DBE to employ more psychologists, social workers, school counsellors, and other professional service providers to provide psychosocial support for vulnerable learners and learners faced with psychosocial challenges. This could thus promote the active engagement of the district-based support team (DBST) responsible for PSS so that they become visible at the school level.

1.9 Clarification of key concepts

This part of the study clarified the concepts of Care and Support for Teaching and Learning (CSTL), Integrated School Health Policy (ISHP), psychosocial challenges, psychosocial interventions, psychosocial support, psychosocial support services, social support, and vulnerability. It was essential to understand the concepts as they are used frequently in the study.

1.9.1 Care and Support for Teaching and Learning

The Care and Support for Teaching and Learning (CSTL) (2008) is a Southern African Development Community (SADC) initiative developed by the region's Ministries of Education to ensure care and support for vulnerable children and youth in public schools (Van der Elst et al., 2012; Menziwa, 2019; Mthimkhulu, 2019). Its broad approach aims to address health and socio-economic barriers in the education sector,

and it also provides care and support to learners with diverse psychosocial challenges emanating from families.

1.9.2 Integrated School Health Policy of 2012

The Integrated School Health Policy (ISHP) (2012) is a joint initiative by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and the Department of Health (DoH). Through this policy, the DBE is mandated to provide psychological support to schools, the Department of Social Development is mandated to assist with providing social workers, and the DoH is mandated to provide free health check-ups and vaccinations at the school level (ISHP, 2012). In addition, this policy focuses on addressing the immediate health problems of learners (including those that constitute barriers to learning) and implementing interventions that can promote their health and well-being during childhood and adulthood (ISHP, 2012; Menziwa, 2019). The ISHP (2012) further emphasized that learners remain a priority by ensuring its coverage is progressively extended to all schools and learners in the most disadvantaged schools.

1.9.3 Psychosocial challenges

Psychosocial challenges are events or disruptions in a person's life, such as housing concerns, financial matters, domestic abuse, grief and loss, isolation, and other factors specifically related to mental health, depression, anxiety and adjustment (Chu et al., 2018).

1.9.4 Psychosocial interventions

The Institute of Medicine defines psychosocial interventions as interpersonal or informational activities, techniques, or strategies that target biological, behavioural, cognitive, emotional, interpersonal, social, or environmental factors to improve health and well-being (Burkey et al., 2018). In addition, psychosocial interventions combine psychosocial support services to ensure learners' physical, psychological, mental, and social well-being to maximize their learning capacity (Mwoma & Pillay, 2016).

1.9.5 Psychosocial support

Psychosocial support is defined in the American Psychological Association (APA, 2007) dictionary as a broad term describing a range of services offered by mental health professionals, including psychologists, social workers, and pastoral counsellors, among others, to those in pressing need. In addition, psychosocial support is designed to help individuals cope with a severe illness or to alleviate distress in whole communities following a disaster. Such services range from mental health counselling, psychoeducation, and group support to spiritual support and other assistance (APA, 2007).

1.9.6 Psychosocial support services

Psychosocial support services (PSS) refer to interventions that create a conducive environment for children's cognitive, emotional, and social development (Ntshuntshe & Mathwasa, 2022). The CSTL (2014) defines PSS as the care provided to children and teachers who have additional mental and social needs as a result of having experienced trauma in their lives, such as extreme poverty, the loss of a parent or caregiver, illness, or death of a close family member, or exposure to violence. It also refers to the range of care and support that addresses learners' and teachers' social, emotional, spiritual, and psychological well-being (Van der Elst et al., 2012).

1.9.7 Social support

Social support is defined in APA (2007) as the provision of assistance or comfort to others, typically to help them cope with biological, psychological, and social stressors. Support may arise from any interpersonal relationship in an individual's social network involving family members, friends, neighbours, religious institutions, colleagues, caregivers, or support groups. According to APA (2007), this may take the form of practical help such as doing chores, offering advice, tangible support that involves giving money or other direct material assistance, and emotional support that allows the individuals to feel valued, accepted, and understood.

1.9.8 Vulnerability

Vulnerability implies a measure of risk associated with the physical, social and economic aspects and implications resulting from the system's ability to cope with the resulting event (Proag, 2014). Chinyama et al. (2021) describe vulnerable learners as those with limited access to basic needs, including sufficient and nutritious food, shelter, adequate clothing, and a safe home and community environment. The DBE has adopted the Department of Social Development's definition of a vulnerable child as one whose survival, care, protection, or development may be compromised due to a particular condition, situation, or circumstance that prevents the fulfilment of their rights (Kosher & Ben-Arieh, 2020; Chinyama et al., 2021). Similarly, children and youth are also defined as vulnerable when there is a higher chance that they will lose or not be able to access essential services (Dzirikure & Allen, 2014) or are exposed to an expected welfare loss above a socially accepted norm, which results in risky/uncertain events, or lack of appropriate risk management instrument. Being vulnerable also means that the immediate care and support system for the children and youth, often the households or family units, can no longer cope. So, they require external support to fulfil their basic needs (Van der Elst et al., 2012).

1.10 Delimitations of the study

The study focused only on two public primary schools in KwaZulu-Natal, in Umlazi district. Participants in this study were teachers who had fully functional lives outside of the study. They were, therefore, anticipated to miss appointments, which could have delayed the completion of the study. The task was to ensure that they understood the value of their contribution and were encouraged to honour scheduled meetings. Furthermore, the expected dates for meetings were discussed with the participants.

Since participants were expected to be cautious of interacting with an unfamiliar outside researcher and a lack of trust could have negatively affected the study's outcomes, icebreaker activities and games that made the participants feel comfortable were used.

1.11 Outline of the study

The study is organized into five chapters.

Chapter One discusses the background of the study. In addition, it looks at the problem statement, motivation for the study, objectives, key research questions, and the significance of the study. Relevant terms and key concepts used in the study are clarified. Delimitations of the study are explained in detail, followed by the chapter summary.

Chapter Two reviews related literature relevant to this study, which examines learners' psychosocial challenges in public primary schools using the South African, SADC and international literature. Literature on contributing factors affecting learners' psychosocial challenges, the nature of psychosocial support services in public schools and challenges related to providing psychosocial support services in public primary schools were also interrogated. The theory of Communities of Practice, the concept of assets drawn from the Asset-Based Approach, and the integration of these two frameworks were discussed as theoretical and conceptual frameworks guiding this study. Finally, the chapter summary concludes this chapter.

Chapter Three outlines the research design and methodology adopted in this study. It begins with the chapter's introduction and research design, methodology, and paradigm inherent in this study. It further explained the context of the study, using a purposive selection approach and procedures, profiling of participants, and looking at the selected public primary school teachers—data generation methods and procedures included semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The data analysis approach and procedural steps were discussed, followed by an explanation of how the issues of trustworthiness were ensured in the study. Ethical considerations that were adhered to, including informed consent and voluntary participation, anonymity, and confidentiality, were explained and justified. This chapter concludes by giving the chapter summary.

Chapter Four presents' data captured from the field and a discussion of findings generated in the study. Analyses and interpretations of data collected from the discussions were produced by applying the interpretivism paradigm, the theory of Communities of Practice (CoPs), and the concept of assets drawn from the Asset-Based Approach (ABA), supported by the literature.

Chapter Five pulled the different parts of the study to completion after viewing and analyzing the data generated. Data was interpreted and discussed, depicting the

themes and sub-themes that emerged. The summary of the study, conclusions, and recommendations were also underlined.

1.12 Chapter summary

The introduction and the background of this chapter have displayed that PSS are crucial to addressing the psychosocial challenges many learners face in public primary schools and have given us an understanding of the forms of psychosocial support services available in public schools and how such services could be enhanced. This chapter also displayed how the psychosocial interventions recommended in this study could play a crucial role in providing PSS to learners affected. The following chapter discusses the literature reviewed and the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that supported the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided a brief outline and orientation of the study. This chapter deliberates on the relevant literature, where choices of diverse but connected studies that deal with the phenomenon are incorporated. The concept of the literature review is defined. The sub-Saharan African and International literature present a brief debate about the psychosocial challenges faced by learners in public primary schools. The factors contributing to learners' psychosocial challenges in public primary schools are discussed. The nature of PSS in public primary schools is reviewed and argued further. The challenges related to providing learners' PSS in public schools are presented and discussed, along with the possible effective PSS interventions for addressing psychosocial challenges learners face. This chapter also presents the theoretical framework of Communities of Practice (COPs), the conceptual construct of Assets drawn from the Asset-Based Approach, which underpins the study, and how these are rooted in the study. The chapter concludes with a review summary that points to the research direction.

2.2 Literature review

Paul and Criado (2020) define a literature review as critically evaluating prior studies. Additionally, Wright et al. (2023) explain that literature reviews aim to draw academics from a critical perspective and allow them to engage with the bodies of literature they encounter. Concerning the above explanations, the literature review would bring the reader to the latest and previous investigations in the study area. Therefore, this study aims to understand the forms of psychosocial support services provided to learners in public primary schools and to enhance such services.

2.3 Psychosocial challenges faced by learners in public school contexts

Psychosocial challenges remain a problem among learners in public schools regardless of the efforts by governments, non-government organizations (NGOs) and

communities. These psychosocial challenges faced by learners in public schools result in learners dropping out of school, performing poorly in their academic work and teaching and learning negatively impacted (Sethlare et al., 2016; Lloyd, 2018; Zeb et al., 2023; Shuro & Waggie, 2021). The review has detailed the sub-Saharan African and international literature on psychosocial challenges experienced in its public schools.

2.3.1 Sub-Saharan Africa

In South Africa, many studies have established that learners come to school with diverse psychosocial challenges (Hasan & Bao, 2020; Dubey et al., 2020; Hendricks & Tanga, 2019). Eloff and Ebersöhn (2001) indicated that six million school-children are living in under-resourced areas and can, therefore, be defined as being at risk regarding optimal early development. These scholars report that adequate support for children is negatively impacted in South Africa due to the prevalence of socio-economic factors such as poverty, unemployment and high levels of illiteracy. Chinyama et al. (2021) concurred that South African public schools have an increasing number of learners who face psychosocial challenges which are related to poverty, low-quality housing, street crime, and violence.

According to the Department of Basic Education (DBE) (2012), in South Africa, all children require care and support to thrive and learn. However, inequitable access to resources and poverty continue to play a significant role in contributing to the psychosocial challenges faced by many learners in South African public schools that negatively affect their wellness. Contextual psychosocial challenges relevant to this study include poor living conditions, poor parenting, dysfunctional families (Thwala et al., 2021; Sethlare et al., 2016; Segalo & Rambuda, 2018); children who are sexually abused and some engaging in risky behaviours (Myers et al., 2019); poverty, exposure to domestic violence, substance abuse, children who experience bereavements and the prolonged exposure to trauma of death such as loss of a parent or a sibling and many other issues all has far-reaching consequences for children's lives and may have immediate and lifelong impact (Ntshuntshe & Mathwasa, 2022; Blodget & Lanigan, 2018). Evans et al. (2020), Prime et al. (2020), and Drane et al. (2020) established that the loss of a parent disrupts the child's social structure and social ties, which have detrimental effects on their development and mental health.

Hasan and Bao (2020), Dubey et al. (2020) and Hendricks and Tanga (2019) affirm that psychosocial challenges faced by learners in South Africa range from, but are not limited to, lack of discipline and bullying that cause victims to avoid school, disruptive behaviour, and learning difficulties. The study by Setlhare et al. (2016) revealed that learners at under-resourced schools in South Africa still face significant psychosocial challenges that negatively affect their well-being, resulting in lower quality of teaching and learning.

A study performed in the Western Cape Province, South Africa, among learners aged 10 -14 years in public primary schools was aimed to determine the prevalence of risky behaviours among this age group (Francis & Meyers et al., 2019) and discovered that these learners were likely to engage in risky behaviours as they undergo a period of experimentation which heightened the risk of engaging in risky behaviours. Their findings also showed the prevalence of psychosocial challenges learners face in these public schools, which are likely to occur to and from home, school, and the community. In the study conducted in a rural context that faced poverty-related psychosocial challenges in the Western Cape, it became evident that the challenging context negatively impacted learners due to their economic background (Setlhare et al., 2017).

A study by Dunge (2022) conducted in an under-resourced public school in South Africa explored the collaborative support provided to learners with mental health challenges. The study reported the high rates of learners with mental health difficulties escalating from the incidences in schools, homes, and communities where learners fight with their peers, educators, and families. Mental ill health is understood as depression, anxiety, aggressive behaviour, and feeling down, seen chiefly among young individuals and society as a whole (Crenna-Jennings, 2021; Dunge, 2022). Their findings affirm that specialist support is scarce within the Department of Education, with insufficient training to equip teachers with skills to identify and support learners with mental health problems, and teachers acquire means to work collaboratively to benefit learners with mental health challenges. The above-indicated reviews explored the psychosocial challenges most learners face in public schools in South Africa, necessitating the provision of PSS.

In rural Zimbabwe, Marongedza et al. (2023) pointed out that learners walk long distances to schools, and during heavy rains, most rivers and streams get flooded,

making it difficult for children to access schools. Jaure (2021) views psychosocial challenges from the lens of learners in child and youth-headed households (CYHH) in the context of parental labour migration from Zimbabwe to South Africa. The study stressed the growing number of learners in parent-child separation households in Zimbabwean and South African schools and pointed out the deterioration of family structure. In her overview, Mthimkhulu (2019) draws attention to orphaned learners who have lost one or both parents, live in impoverished households where no adults are working, and some learners carry the burden of looking after parents who are chronically ill. Such cases are understood in this study as elements of psychosocial challenges faced by many public school learners who demand PSS.

Unlike in Zimbabwe, Bakare and James (2019) conducted a study in Nigeria which drew attention to the alarming rate of aggressive behaviours among teenagers in and out of school. These scholars believed that these behaviours arise due to, among other factors, domestic violence, the violence portrayed on television, and the social tendency to resort to physical aggression. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Nigeria (2019), originally known as the United Nations International Emergency Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) Nigeria (2019), reported that children affected by conflict in the north-east demonstrating high levels of psychosocial distress that manifested in 'thinking too much' and 'worrying all the time,' pointing to high levels of anxiety. This perspective was confirmed by teachers who participated in the study, who affirmed that learners displayed anger and aggressiveness in the school environment, while learners reported sleep-related difficulties such as nightmares, flashbacks, and difficulty concentrating (Chukwuere et al., 2020). More recent evidence (Madubuike & Dimnajiego, 2023) indicates that the Nigerian youth is hit hard by unemployment, leading to poverty and crime. Correspondingly, they claim the psychological pressure of unemployment causes the Nigerian youth to suffer stress, leading to psychological problems that include depression, frustration and criminal behaviour. In South Africa, the majority of unemployed youth who are single parents to learners in public primary schools experience poverty. Therefore, public schools should be enhanced as institutions and resources for providing PSS to these learners.

A growing body of literature has investigated learners' psychosocial challenges in eSwatini, formerly known as Swaziland. Thwala et al. (2021) studied adolescent girls from child-headed families (CHFs) in five rural schools in eSwatini. They found that adolescent girls in CHFs experience poverty, are marginalized in certain aspects of their lives, in strained extended family relations and are relatively more deprived of opportunities and needed basic survival necessities like candles, clothing and general parental guidance from the community and teachers to assist them in developing well academically. Cases of this nature are common in South African literature and in public schools where most learners are raised in CHFs, a psychosocial challenge which necessitates PSS provided to these learners. Studies have found a lack of PSS provided to these learners.

More recent evidence (Bimha & Sibiyi, 2023) revealed an increasing number of orphans and vulnerable learners in public primary schools in eSwatini due to HIV/AIDS, which demands psychosocial support services. While the study indicates that orphans and vulnerable learners are offered material support such as food, sanitary towels and spiritual support, they found these learners were rarely referred for PSS as there were no proper counselling facilities available to support these learners. As a result, several scholars have expressed problems and a major crisis associated with providing PSS delivery and unequal distribution of such services in public schools. Therefore, this study aims to understand the forms of PSS provided to learners and to enhance such services. Psychosocial challenges faced by learners in public schools in eSwatini seemed similar to the psychosocial challenges many learners in South Africa faced.

In her review, Motsa (2021) investigated the school violence demonstrated in public schools in eSwatini and found it to express negative emotions. Hence, her analysis has received general acceptance from other scholars as they suggested strategies educators and policymakers could employ to address learners' socio-emotional needs, thereby preventing future emotional outbursts and violent behaviours. Concerning this study, in the past years, it was common in public schools in South Africa to observe learners expressing their frustrations and disagreements towards teachers, opting for school protest, which disrupted the process of teaching and learning. However, such occurrences do not often happen anymore, except for outraged members of the public who are still found demanding public services through

mass mobilization to protest against the lack of services, which impacts learners who end up unable to go to school due to public protests. This occurrence is one of the psychosocial challenges still experienced in some township areas in South Africa, where most public schools are situated.

As mentioned by Thwala et al. (2021) and Bimha and Sibiya (2023), Nsibande (2022) argument relied on the lived-social experiences of orphaned and vulnerable children in eSwatini education. Her research interests revealed that children who lose a parent experience a significant sense of loss, fear and despair and undergo numerous challenges, including a lack of resources, stigmatization and bullying, poor school attendance and negative social development that hinder their well-being and are likely to miss out on educational opportunities. Orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) are common psychosocial challenges faced by most learners in public schools in sub-Saharan Africa, which necessitate the provision of PSS. This is why this study attempted to understand the forms of PSS and enhance such services.

An increasing number of studies have found that orphaned and vulnerable children (OVC) in Zambia face multiple physical, emotional, social and psychological challenges, which often negatively affect their opportunities for educational attainment (Kaljee et al., 2017). These scholars found learners who have been orphaned and vulnerable as a result of the death of their parents to HIV/AIDS, social and economic challenges, natural disasters, forced migration, civil unrest and wars. According to this study, the OVC experiences poverty, stigma and discrimination, abuse, psychological distress, and an increased risk of chronic and infectious diseases. In Zambia, the Diploma, a 15-month long-distance PSS learning program course for teachers, benefitted teachers and improved how teachers dealt with learners, as teachers avoided corporal punishment after training, and the course helped teachers become approachable (Zulu et al., 2020). Hence, psychosocial challenges faced by public school learners demand that PSS address such issues.

Forty et al. (2022) showed in their study that suicide behaviours were a big challenge in Botswana among primary school-going adolescents aged 10-19 years due to peer bullying. Substance use among adolescent learners has been studied and is rising in Africa (Ekwoke et al., 2023). Most of these psychosocial challenges experienced by learners in sub-Saharan Africa share the same commonalities, and nothing is

surprising about them as most schools have learners who experience the same psychosocial issues.

2.3.2 International Literature

In order to understand the nature of psychosocial challenges emanating in different contexts, the international literature has been reviewed, as discussed in this section.

According to Garcia et al. (2020), in the United States of America (USA), some learners' psychosocial challenges emanate from different parenting styles, resulting in behavioural problems. They argue that some parents offer their children support, praise, affection, and reasoning while other children suffer criticism, corporal punishment, control, and verbal abuse from their parents. These parenting styles impact the psychosocial life of learners in school, at home, and in the community. Research has found that the majority of learners with psychosocial challenges were raised in homes with strict rules.

On the other hand, Gershoff and Bitensky (2007) and Skelton and Veriavaa (2019) indicate that corporal punishment causes significant psychosocial challenges among children in US households. This form of punishment is associated with physical abuse that increases children's levels of aggression. According to these scholars, the Children's Convention (1989) and other treaties have condemned corporal punishment of children and rejected it as a human rights violation. Armstrong-Carter et al. (2021) studied adolescents under 18 in the USA who are caregivers for their parents, grandparents, siblings and or other family members who are ageing or have a chronic illness, disability or other health conditions that require assistance. The study examined how caregiving affects learners' academic, social, and emotional well-being. Their study revealed that the caregiving youth carry complicated daily tasks of providing personal care, bathing, feeding, toileting, dressing, shopping, transporting, administering medication and ongoing emotional support. More recent evidence (Phoeun et al., 2022) reveals that caregiving youth experience mental and physical health problems and reported challenges of frustration, anxiety, and depression associated with balancing multiple conflicting responsibilities. The study recommended that schools, school counsellors, social workers, and health workers

identify and support the well-being of caregiving youth by empowering and educating school staff about caregiving youth.

Rappaport and Thomas (2004) point out that aggressive and violent behaviour which involved physical fighting, bullying, using weapons, and verbal threats of harm to others is another psychosocial challenge facing children, adolescents and youth in the USA. These scholars believe that the aetiology of aggressive violence emanates from exposure to violence, easy access to guns, community deprivation and biological vulnerability. The preventive interventions applied in their study focused on defining the problem and generating alternative solutions. As a result, this study aimed to enhance the provision of learners' PSS in selected public schools.

Sin Ki Luk et al. (2022) reported the separation of school-going-age children from parents due to parental incarceration in the USA and found this kind of psychosocial challenge to have a detrimental effect on learners' well-being and development. Findings revealed that these learners were experiencing significant changes and disruptions in their family structure, adversely affecting their behaviours, academic success, and health, regardless of age or gender.

Kearney et al. (2022) studied the causes of school absenteeism concerning school discipline and other barriers to school attendance. These scholars found that public schools that apply severe punitive consequences to behaviour hinder school attendance and learning opportunities when teachers remove learners from the classroom for detention, suspension and expulsion, which is applied in particular to African American learners. The same study found that African American learners tend to be referred for discipline due to disrespect or excessive noise, whereas White American learners tend to be referred for discipline due to vandalism or smoking, which is common in South Africa.

Other barriers to school absence problems (SAPs) are a result of children living in poverty and in crowded living spaces, which are also common psychosocial challenges noted in South African literature. The review suggested different interventions to prevent SAPs and school dropouts, and these involved clinical and mentoring options and specialized care by school psychologists to re-engage students via group counselling sessions, conflict resolution, problem-solving, time management and academic skills; family-school-community-research partnerships (Kearney et al.,

2022, p.144). Absenteeism, dropouts and truancy are common psychosocial issues facing many learners in public schools, and these are a result of various reasons ranging from poverty, being unsupervised at home and or ill behaviour.

The main challenge facing learners in public schools in South Africa compared to international schools is the lack of school psychologists to assist in addressing the psychosocial challenges faced by learners, making it a challenge to address the psychosocial challenges teachers face. In addition, when comparing public schools in South Africa to public schools in the USA, teachers in South Africa, particularly those who have been culturally exposed to corporal punishment and other forms of violence, continue to use corporal punishment in schools, and this is still a challenge for some of them to abandon corporal punishment as a disciplinary practice despite its legal abolition decades ago (South African Schools Act (SASA) 1996; Constitution of South Africa, Act. 108, Section 12, 1996; Mayisela, 2017). Corporal punishment is one of the psychosocial challenges faced by learners in South Africa, and it negatively impacts the well-being and academic performance of learners as some opt to drop out of school and absent themselves from school in fear of getting corporal punishment from teachers.

In an overview of Yosep et al. (2023), many psychosocial cases of adolescent learners who experience bullying in public schools in the United Kingdom were investigated. Learners who experienced bullying were reported being teased, ridiculed, beaten, kicked, spreading gossip, given nicknames and physically attacked. Findings revealed psychological problems such as depression leading to the idea of committing suicide, and the victims of bullying were found to have difficulty communicating and concentrating on learning; hence, this affected their physical and mental health. Bullying is a common psychosocial challenge in public schools in South Africa, with few interventions made available to prevent such occurrences in learners. The literature on cases of suicide in South Africa is scarce in public schools. This study aims to understand the forms of PSS provided to learners and to enhance the provision of PSS in public schools.

Rea (2022) studied social relationships and well-being through experiences of homelessness in the United Kingdom (UK). Learners who experience homelessness spoke of their relationship difficulties and social isolation linked to feelings of

depression, anxiety and a loss of confidence both prior to and throughout their experiences of homelessness. Unlike in South Africa, there are infrequent psychosocial challenges for learners who are homeless since the government is ensuring with the Department of Social Development (DSD) that all children, including learners, are sheltered in institutionalized homes.

More recent evidence (Dare et al., 2023) in the United Kingdom showed the mental health challenges encountered by African and Caribbean ethnicity learners who feel constrained in social spaces when enduring social inequalities and racism. Some learners in various public schools in South Africa still experience elements of social inequalities and racism despite the effort by the government to eradicate these elements through various legislative policies. Örucü et al. (2021) noted a rapid increase in globalization with the migration of adults and school children in Europe, notably the United Kingdom, who had been forced to flee their homes to seek refuge due to the outcome of wars, disasters, and violence in their home countries. Children and unaccompanied minors were reported as the most vulnerable group who are at risk of rape, abduction and trafficking (Jack et al., 2018). Comparing these psychosocial challenges faced by minors and learners in the UK, South Africa has accommodated most of the learners from outside South Africa who came to South Africa for various reasons.

Arslan and Coskun (2023) examined the psychological need for belongingness in the school setting in a city in Turkey. These scholars asserted that schools were the rest of learners' lives. Therefore, learners needed to feel related to school, and they needed to feel appreciated and counted by others in school. However, isolation worsens psychological distress and mental health problems. The study's findings revealed that school belongingness was a school-based contributor to fulfilling a basic psychological need, which is crucially important for learners' personal and academic development. As a result, the psychosocial support increases the psychological and emotional well-being.

In relating to learners in selected public schools under study who face psychosocial challenges, it is imperative to support learners so that they feel a sense of belonging in their schools to enhance their well-being. Parker et al. (2023) analyzed bullying toward sexual and gender minority learners in Australian schools and found that this

kind of psychosocial challenge was causing the victims of bullying to feel unsafe at school and report a lack of support from teachers. According to their study, teacher interventions in bullying were perceived as social support, and their professional capacity to address bullying depended on their beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge. Adama et al. (2023) studied the psychosocial impact of medical conditions among children and adolescents attending mainstream schools in Western Australia. These scholars specified that the medical conditions were associated with sensitive risk for mental health and psychosocial difficulties. Findings discovered that learners with medical conditions had unique psychological and social issues, which highlighted the need for more significant efforts to meet the diverse psychosocial, physical and emotional needs of children diagnosed with medical conditions who attend mainstream schools in Western Australia. It is prevalent in public schools in South Africa to have learners diagnosed with medical conditions. While teachers monitor them during school hours, these learners are primarily the responsibility of their families, who ensure that they take their medication as prescribed by their medical doctors.

2.4. Contributing factors to psychosocial challenges faced by learners

A growing body of literature related to contributing factors of psychosocial challenges faced by learners in public schools has been carried out by CSTL (2014) and Van der Elst et al. (2012). However, other scholars note other contributing factors to psychosocial challenges faced by learners in public schools.

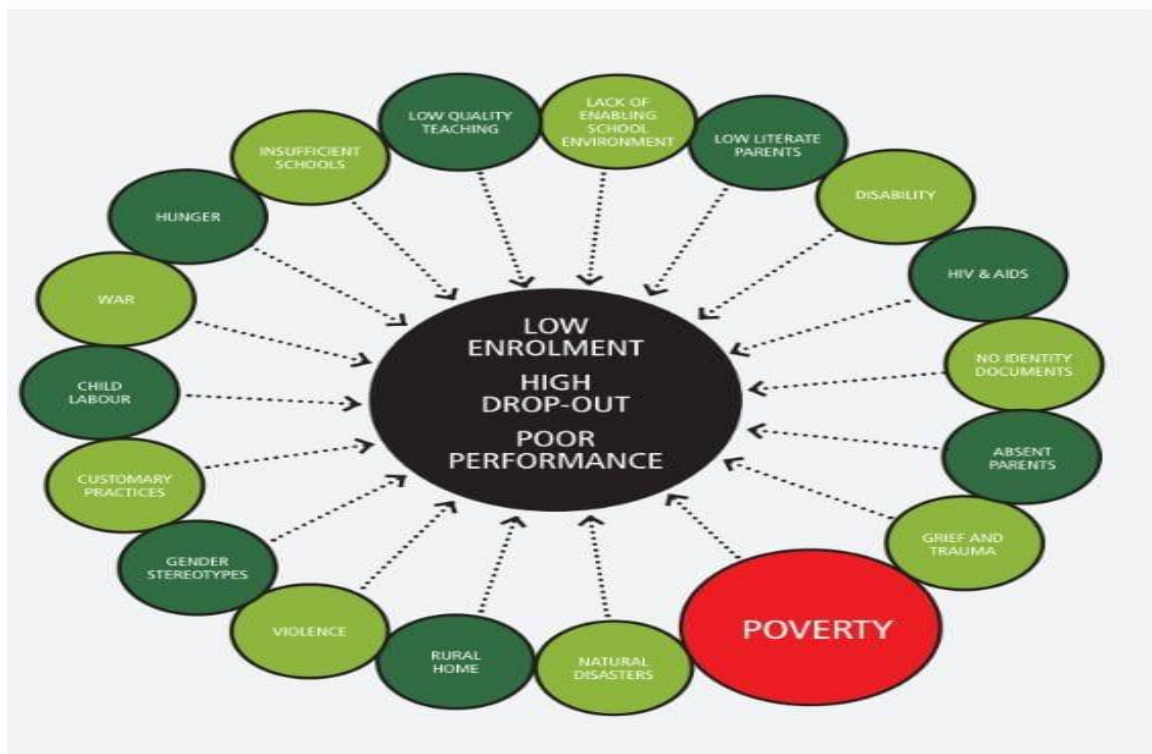


Figure 2.1: Integrated Package of Care and Support for Learners in South African Schools (DBE, 2014)

The above illustration points to the contributing factors of psychosocial challenges faced by learners, resulting in low enrolment, high dropout, poor academic performance, poor educational attendance, poor participation, and poor achievements in public schools. As shown in the table above, these contributing factors occur in different contexts. For example, in South Africa, the contributing factor to psychosocial challenges is poverty since the youngest parents are unemployed and rely on government social grants, which is not enough to raise more than one child in the household. Natural disasters are very prone in South Africa as they come in the form of heavy floods, causing damage to households and preventing learners from going to school. Natural disasters in South Africa usually occur during the summer seasons, in December and January.

The review by Khan (2023) in Pakistan cited the psychological, social, and environmental factors as contributing to psychosocial challenges faced by learners. Three factors and other reviews on individual, family, school, and community factors to psychosocial challenges are summarized below.

2.4.1 School factors

A school can serve as a caring or threat factor for learners. School-related stressors, such as recovering from missed academic work, can contribute to psychosocial challenges for a learner. Schools should play a significant role in addressing learners' psychosocial challenges, which can negatively impact their academic performance if left unattended. Cases of violence and bullying happening in schools among learners should be reported to school authorities as they demand early intervention (Khan, 2023).

School factors have also been reviewed by West and Meier (2020) and Francis and Meyers (2019) through overcrowded classrooms in several public schools in South Africa. The Learner-Educator Ratio (LER) is 1:45, where one teacher manages 45 or more learners in one classroom. This factor has been reported to negatively affect teaching, learning, and learners' academic performance. The noise level from these overcrowded classrooms results in some learners avoiding the subject or teacher and even becoming aggressive towards the issues, or sometimes this results in poor concentration, poor listening, and poor focus in class, and sometimes some learners drop out of school altogether (Sethlare et al., 2016).

More recent evidence (Ngonyani & Komando, 2023) in Tanzania proposed that educational institutions such as schools are expected to provide learning environments that meet the educational needs of learners of both sexes. This includes facilitating girls' access to adequate sanitary and hygiene facilities, adequate physical infrastructure with appropriate water and sanitation facilities, teaching and learning practices responsive to gender considerations, and enhancing learners' comfort within the school environment. Hence, the environment /schools contribute to psychosocial challenges learners face in public schools, similar to the abovementioned factors.

2.4.2 Psychological factors

Psychological factors such as depression, stress, poor concentration in class, anxiety, impulsivity, a history of trauma of abuse, low self-esteem, anger, and hindrance due to violence are more likely to harm academic performance (Ansari & Pianta, 2019). For example, learners who are victims of impulsiveness are more likely to act out in

ways that are damaging to others, bearing the consequences of their actions, which can lead to disciplinary actions and expulsions at school. For these individual factors, learners with depression are more likely to be involved in physical fighting, bullying, using weapons, verbal threats of harm to others, and aggressive behaviour (Rappaport & Thomas, 2004). Khan (2023) affirms that assessing children and adolescents for potentially violent behaviour requires an organized approach that draws on clinical knowledge, a thorough interview, and familiarity with relevant risk and protective factors. Hence, this study aims to understand the forms of psychosocial support provided to learners and to enhance such services.

Studies have found that teenage learners with chronic illnesses are at increased risk of internalizing symptoms of anxiety, depression, and social withdrawal (Blodgett & Lanigan, 2018; Arakelyan & Ager, 2021; Moinolnolki & Han, 2017) including mental health disorders such as anxiety and depression which negatively impact on learners' academic achievement. One study found that children from financially disadvantaged backgrounds risk experiencing social, emotional, and behavioural problems (Aracely & Age, 2021), negatively impacting their school performance when interacting with others. Therefore, learners who face a myriad of psychosocial challenges are more likely to have poor school attendance, academic problems, and behavioural issues due to their adverse childhood experiences and upbringing.

2.4.3 Social factors

A recent review of the literature on this topic (Khan, 2023) found that social factors where learners are situated contribute to psychosocial challenges faced by most learners. To illustrate, bullying and violence occurring amongst learners in public schools are more likely to result in poor academic performance, absenteeism, and dropouts, as victims of bullying may fear going to school. Family dynamics play a significant role in shaping learners' behaviour; in particular, learners from households characterized by high levels of conflict, abuse, neglect, and dysfunction are regarded as more prone to engaging in violent acts (Solimannejad et al., 2022 & Fagan, 2020). On the other hand, peer relationships could play a crucial role in promoting peace or contributing to violence (Kearney et al., 2022).

The lack of parental involvement in the school work of learners and the lack of capacity building given to parents (Bernard,1991 & Finn,1998) is reported as one of the community factors contributing to psychosocial challenges many learners face in public schools. Therefore, a well-informed community can collectively support and encourage the active participation and collaboration of its families and schools.

2.5 The nature of psychosocial support services in public schools

Psychosocial support services (PSS) emphasize meeting learners' psychological, emotional, social, mental, and spiritual needs, considered essential for their well-being (Hlalele, 2012). Therefore, the section of this study looked at the nature of PSS in public primary schools. A review by Mattingly (2017) asserts that PSS are based on combined biological, emotional, spiritual, cultural, social, mental, and material aspects of experience.

An investigation carried out by Pillay et al. (2021) in five under-resourced primary schools in the Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality on school staff's awareness of psychosocial support as per the Integrated School Health Policy (ISHP) in South Africa revealed that while the teachers who participated in the study were aware of the psychosocial challenges learners face, they were not sufficiently equipped to address their learners' psychosocial challenges. Participant teachers had little knowledge of the interventions provided by the DBE to address these challenges. Hence, it needed to be capacitated on the ISHP regulations and the involvement of various stakeholders. In addition, school principals and management who participated believed that learners and teachers need psychosocial support and that a lack of such support leads to learners, educators, and non-teaching staff struggling with teaching and learning post-COVID-19.

More recent evidence (Namome et al., 2021) highlighted the existing policy on PSS as disorganized and needed a review. Studies also reported the gap in DBE policies on psychosocial support and well-being in school settings and suggested a need for review to incorporate interventions for social and emotional well-being to improve learners' social functioning, including school performance (Namome et al., 2021; Cheon et al., 2020). In under-resourced township schools in South Africa, it has been revealed that workshops are conducted occasionally to improve the support skills of

in-service teachers (Setlhare, Wood, & Meyer, 2016). However, these are found inadequate to capacitate teachers to support learners in these townships since psychosocial structures in place are very few, if not available at all, to the point where teachers end up using their resources to provide support to learners, which places financial and psychosocial pressure on teachers' own and their families. Therefore, engaging teachers in educational policies for psychosocial support and interventions can promote learners' engagement and achievement and create a healthier learning environment (Valiente et al., 2020).

Correspondingly, the legislative policies which suggest a commitment to the provision of psychosocial support services in public schools are discussed below:

2.5.1 The Care and Support for Teaching and Learning (CSTL)

The Care and Support for Teaching and Learning (CSTL, 2014) is a framework intended to guide and strengthen the implementation of the Care and Support for Teaching and Learning (CSTL) Program in schools. The DBE (2012) adopted the CSTL (2014) to lessen the impact of the various barriers to learning faced by learners in public schools. The CSTL has ten priority action areas shown in the table below, which include psychosocial support (DBE, 2014, p.12)



The ten Priority Action Areas of the CSTL SA Programme

Figure 2.2: Integrated Package of Care and Support for Learners in South African Schools (DBE, 2014)

The above table illustrates the CSTL (2014) framework, which identifies nine priority areas that influence learners' well-being. One of these priority areas is psychosocial support. Psychosocial support provides care and support in response to learners' and educators' emotional, mental and social needs (Mothamaha, 2021). Department of Basic Education (DBE) through CSTL (2014) has committed to supporting the implementation of these ten priority areas in every public school in South Africa and ensuring that these ten priorities are active and functional for the well-being of learners. The focus of this study aimed to understand the provision of psychosocial support services provided to learners in public schools and to enhance such support. Hence, understanding the forms of PSS provided to learners in this study is drawn from CSTL and other educational and legislative policies, as indicated in this section. However, many studies have raised concerns regarding the provision of psychosocial support services in many public schools (Menziwa, 2019; Dunge, 2022; Malehlanye, 2021; Melander et al., 2021) which include the unequal distribution of PSS resources, the non-visits of PSS specialists and incapacitation of teachers on PSS in public schools.

2.5.2 Constitution of South Africa (1996)

The Constitution of South Africa, Act Number 108 (1996) enshrines the values of human dignity. Chapter Two of this constitution lays down the Bill of Rights (Act 108, 1996, p.1247), which emphasizes the protection of the rights of all people in our country, including the right to respect and protect human dignity. It further adds that every child has the right to family care or parental care and to be protected from maltreatment, neglect, abuse and degradation. For learners who experience psychosocial challenges at home, in the community or at school, the school, as the public institution of government, should be a shelter for protecting learners from all forms of abuse and maltreatment.

Equally, learners spend most of their days and time at school; therefore, the school should offer all the resources and facilities, including PSS, to ensure learners reach their full potential. Thus, the forms of PSS provided to learners in public schools should be made accessible, available and provided to all learners in public schools, as the Constitution of SA, Act No. 108 (1996) stipulates that children have the right to be

provided with primary health care services and social services. Myende (2014 & 2015) also pointed out that expecting the State to invest more in education is correct. Since this study is drawn from different legislative frameworks prioritizing school-going-age children, the government is responsible for ensuring that all learners in public schools are provided with PSS to thrive in life.

2.5.3 Education White Paper 6: Building an Inclusive Education (2001)

The issue of where to teach learners with special educational needs and disabilities has been a great concern (Gyimah et al., 2009). Inclusion has been understood differently by many people. Some perceived inclusion as concerned with disability, inclusion as being about all groups vulnerable to exclusion, inclusion as a response to disciplinary exclusions, inclusion as the promotion of a school for all, inclusion as Education for All (Botha & Kourkoutas, 2015). However, the Education White Paper six (EWP6) (DOE, 2001) has pledged to strengthen special schools rather than abolish them. It has promised to keep learners with severe disabilities accommodated in these vastly improved special schools as part of an inclusive system. The government has determined to create special needs education as a non-racial and integrated component of our education system (DoE, 2001). The government has convinced thousands of mothers and fathers of some 280,000 disabled children – who are younger than 18 years and are not in schools or colleges, that the place of these children is not in isolated dark backrooms and sheds. Through the EWP6 (DOE, 2001), the South African government aimed to nurture people with disabilities to experience the full excitement and joy of learning and provide them and the nation with a solid foundation for lifelong learning and development.

What is familiar about this study and the EWP6 (DOE, 2001) is that they both acknowledge that some learners experience barriers to learning and require support. In this case, this study aims to understand different forms of PSS provided to learners who face several psychosocial challenges, including, among others, lack of concentration in class and learning difficulties due to physical, social, emotional, or mental challenges. This study focuses on psychosocial challenges that result in emotional, social and behavioural difficulties if not dealt with early.

2.5.4 The Integrated School Health Policy

The Integrated School Health Policy (ISHP, 2012) has pledged to prioritize children's needs. This policy focuses on addressing the immediate health problems of learners, including those that constitute barriers to learning, and implementing interventions that can promote their health and well-being during childhood and adulthood. The ISHP (2012) is devoted to collaboration between these three role players, the Department of Health (DoH), Basic Education (DBE), and Social Development (DSD), taking joint responsibility for ensuring that the ISHP reaches all learners in all schools. However, not all public schools are familiar with this policy. Many studies have revealed that not all teachers are knowledgeable about this policy and other PSS policies and programs and have cited having not been trained on PSS and learners not receiving any professional PSS (Twinamatsiko, 2021; Boding et al., 2018; Dover et al., 2019; Hanley et al., 2020; Malehlanye, 2021; Melander et al., 2021 & Ali et al., 2023) from PSS officials which makes it difficult for teachers to cater for learners' diverse psychosocial needs). Hence, since this study is drawn from the principles and values of various education legislative frameworks, including CSTL (2014), ISHP (2012), SA Constitution Act 108 (1996) and EWP6 (DOE, 2001) as indicated above to understand the forms of psychosocial support services provided to learners and to enhance such services.

2.6 Challenges related to the provision of learners' psychosocial support services in public schools

Mwoma and Pillay (2016) and Patel et al. (2021) claim that providing psychosocial support services (PSS) in many public primary schools is lacking. They argue that without proper counselling structures for children in public schools, learners facing psychosocial challenges in public primary schools are unlikely to handle the pressure and challenges they encounter, which can negatively affect their academic performance and well-being. As a result, this compels the provision of PSS and the frequent visits of PSS specialists in public primary schools to address these growing psychosocial challenges facing learners.

The shortage of resources such as PSS counsellors, PSS specialists, and counselling rooms, time for counselling, training for teachers, PSS programs for learners, and cooperation of parents hamper the progress of PSS in public primary schools. Furthermore, teachers have always cited difficulty identifying learners with psychosocial challenges and implementing programs due to a lack of capacity in PSS (Babedi, 2013). A recent review of the literature on this topic (Dunge, 2022) found the lack of dedicated officials to provide psychosocial support to learners, the lack of understanding of PSS policies, unqualified providers for PSS and non-visits of DBE psychologists in public primary schools. The lack of appropriate skills and knowledge for teachers to offer therapeutic services to learners affected poses a challenge for teachers to meet the diverse needs of all learners (Bedi, 2018; Ryan et al., 2018; Phuong et al., 2021)

The limited training of teachers to enable them to provide psychosocial support to children faced with psychosocial challenges in their schools is noted with concern, and this has the potential of increasing the number of poor academic performances, absenteeism, dropouts, and destructive behaviours in classrooms (Fitzgerald et al., 2021; Hove & Phasha, 2023; Lebona, 2023 & Nembambula et al., 2023).

A growing body of literature has studied and found PSS proper when provided by specialists such as social workers and psychologists (Madzivhandila & Maserumule, 2022; Shokane & Nel, 2020; Tiernan et al., 2020). These scholars emphasised needing a specialised counselling unit to address learners' psychosocial needs. Grant et al. (2022) argue that developed countries have a higher regard for the importance of professional psychologists because these countries have more stable economies and emancipated worldviews. According to this review, South Africa is viewed as a developing country. Hence, access to professional psychologists in schools might be considered less necessary in light of economic barriers. However, some literature proposes that teachers are a well-positioned resource that could be utilised to provide school-based psychosocial support (Dunge, 2022; Mahwai, 2020).

2.7 Possible Effective Psychosocial Support Interventions

To enhance PSS in public schools, various intervention programs suggested in the literature can be adopted and applied in public primary schools in South Africa.

2.7.1 Professional Psychosocial Support Services for learners

A piece of recent evidence (Mothamaha, 2021) revealed that many school-going-age children live in challenging conditions due to unemployment, poverty, drinking problems of their parents or siblings, emotional and physical abuse from child-headed families and many other psychosocial issues they face. As a result, learners desire to confide their psychosocial challenges to people they trust. In addition, since learners spend most of their time at school, which is an ideal site for providing PSS, learners need to feel supported and cared for in their schools. For that reason, the provision of DBE, DoH and DSD professional PSS in all public primary schools is significant. The Integrated School Health Policy (ISHP) (2012) stated clearly what the DBE is delegated to do, which is to provide psychological support to schools; the DSD is assigned to assist with the provision of social workers, and the DoH is directed to provide free health check-ups and vaccinations at school level. Sitienei and Pillay (2019) claim that learners need professional PSS offered by school psychologists, social workers and professional counsellors, who are necessary in public schools in South Africa due to the diverse psychosocial challenges many learners face. The USA and UK studies have published various bodies of literature based on PSS intervention programs provided by school psychologists, school counsellors and social workers who specialize in providing PSS programs, which consist of coping skills enhancement, relaxation techniques, social support, psycho-education, psychological first aid, normalization of stress reactions and parent involvement to meet learners' unique social, emotional, and academic needs (Vega et al., 2022; Forsberg & Schultz, 2023). Psycho-education and Psychological First Aid (PFA) are interventions applied to help gain skills, cope with the difficulties related to a particular event, calm the ongoing distress, and increase functioning (Yildiz et al., 2023).

Current solutions for professional PSS to learners in public schools have been discussed in various literature, including the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) (Anderson & Mendenhall, 2006), an open global network for people affected by severe psychosocial challenges. Anderson and Mendenhall (2006) concluded that clinical cases such as depression, hopelessness, and signs of mental disorders necessitate a treatment which should be carried out by psychologists,

psychiatrists, and professional counsellors who are specialized in treating cases of trauma, anxiety, stress, and depression as such can result in emotional, social and behavioural difficulties if not addressed. According to these scholars, teachers are encouraged not to engage in such psychological issues of children due to the risk of mistreatment and a lack of competence. Therefore, a professional PSS is suggested since teachers have been trained to teach learners.

2.7.2 Peer support and prevention programs

Peer support and prevention programs are great strategies for supporting the victims of children who are bullied at school (Tzani-Pepelasi et al., 2019; Muller et al., 2019). Studies in the United Kingdom (Biswas et al., 2020) pointed out that learners prefer to seek assistance from friends/peers for an improved supportive environment. Peer support increases levels of interactions with peers, and the formation of new friendships through peer-led programs could be seen to support learners who experience bullying and trauma. These programs create opportunities for children and young people to challenge bullying when they observe it proactively. It is also reported that peer supporters can play a part in this process by monitoring social interactions during break times to support victims reporting abusive behaviour (Downes & Cefai, 2019).

Therefore, to enhance PSS in public schools, peer-led programs in schools can serve as anti-bullying programs, defend victims and prevent bullying incidents from occurring. A buddy approach is also an early prevention and intervention strategy for the school in supporting learners to promote a sense of friendship, safety, belonging and protection while also building a sense of responsibility, satisfaction, and pride (Tzani-Pepelasi et al., 2019; Chinyama et al., 2021). These programs can empower learners to become responsible and help others. Teachers can ensure that these programs are sustained and active and serve their purpose.

2.7.3 Psychosocial Support Services Training for Teachers

Many studies have found teachers' pastoral role to be limited in addressing learners' psychosocial challenges. As a result, several studies, for instance, Mothamaha (2021) and Zulu et al. (2020), suggested the training of teachers in PSS intervention

programs. Intervention programs, such as in-service training PSS programs for teachers to empower and enable them to address the psychosocial challenges learners face in public schools, could play an essential role in education (El-Khodary et al., 2021). Specialized training for teachers on PSS could equip teachers with relevant knowledge to support learners. Saka (2021) described the quality of teachers in many underdeveloped countries as discouraging due to inadequate capacity-building of teachers. Therefore, the DBE can adopt various PSS programs, such as the 15-month long-distance learning program implemented in Zambia to enhance PSS for learners. Several institutions worldwide train teachers on psychosocial support interventions to assist teachers in responding appropriately to the unique psychosocial challenges faced by children in their countries (Ntshuntsha & Mathwasa, 2022; Zulu et al., 2020).

2.7.4 Parental Engagement on Psychosocial Support Services

Parental engagement is about engaging families to become partners with the school and listening to what parents think, dream, and worry about (Baker et al., 2016). Parental engagement can build a foundation of trust and respect and be enhanced to reach out to parents beyond the school. Parenting support programs are noted in the literature as proper interventions for providing PSS to children (Finn, 1998). Shaw et al. (2022) suggested that parental engagement is possible face-to-face or through social networks, such as having regular meetings and or meetings on Facebook and WhatsApp to communicate a particular issue and develop knowledge, skills, and information without the limitations imposed by geography, cost, and organizational boundaries. Parents could connect with their learners through the resources offered by the schools. Through parent-teacher meetings, school homework and other activities can be discussed in their children's extracurricular activities. Parents can learn to spend time with their children meaningfully while helping them with school work and participating in their children's extracurricular activities. Therefore, the forms of psychosocial support services provided to learners can be enhanced through parental engagements, as discussed.

2.7.5 Teacher Collaborations

In this study, teacher collaboration refers to teachers' experiences exchanging ideas and information with their colleagues and opportunities for learning from each other (Coban et al., 2023). A recent review on this topic found that learning dialogues and various activities in teacher collaborations enable teachers to slow down and critically reflect on their work and thus inquire and learn (De Jong et al., 2022). Therefore, teacher collaborations need to be enhanced and supported. Saka (2021) stated that for teacher collaboration to be effective, school authorities should restructure the school hours to cater for teacher collaboration as professional development. The South African Schools Act (SASA) (1996) also acknowledges the role of all stakeholders in the education of learners. As a result, teacher collaborations can enhance the provision of PSS for learners so that teachers can address the diverse psychosocial challenges faced by learners in public schools.

2.8. Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

Qualitative research studies are framed through the lenses of various theoretical frameworks. A theoretical framework is a reasonably developed and interconnected set of concepts and principles developed from one or more theories that a researcher creates to scaffold a study (Varpio et al., 2020). A review by Casanave and Li (2015) and Babale and Lawal (2021) state that a sound theory tells an informative story about a particular phenomenon and explains why and how the study is being conducted. Babale and Lawal (2021) believe that a theory assists researchers in supporting and interpreting their findings and connecting them to other works and more significant ideas about the study. According to Sitwala (2014), a conceptual framework is a result of bringing together several related concepts to explain or guess a given event or give a broader understanding of the phenomenon of interest or, simply, of a research problem and, in this case, could be a provision of PSS in public schools. Thus, Setwala (2014) further distinguishes that a conceptual framework is derived from concepts in so far as a theoretical framework is derived from a theory.

Therefore, this study was underpinned by the theory of Communities of Practice (CoPs) and the concept of 'assets' as a construct from the Asset-Based Approach (ABA).

2.8.1 The Theory of Communities of Practice

The term communities of practice (CoPs) was first coined by Lave and Wenger (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Lave & Wenger, 2004), who used it to describe a type of learning based on an internship model that enables people to engage in a process of collective learning in a shared field of human effort. Patel et al. (2021) defined CoPs as a multi-sectoral and interdisciplinary collaboration between academic researchers, practitioners, and governmental and non-governmental agencies. McDonald and Mercieca (2021) describe CoPs as voluntary groups who, sharing a common concern or passion, come together, learn from one another, explore these concerns and ideas, and grow their practice.

Krzywoszynska (2019) and Delgado et al. (2021) add that within the CoPs, practices are shared, and groups jointly negotiate the meaning of and assign value to these practices to understand their common interest and pursue their desire to learn. Their learning emphasizes social interactions that support learning within a community of those who practice similar professions or are involved in similar fields. For example, in the case of public schools, teachers, psychologists, nurses, social workers, mental health practitioners, police officers, professional counsellors and nurses who share a common passion or concern and who have a desire to learn can come together, contribute to the community in sharing experiences.

The choice of the theory of CoPs for this study aimed to capacitate participants to understand the usefulness of forming CoPs in solving challenges faced in public schools. For example, McLoughlin et al. (2018) proclaim that being part of a community of people with whom one shares common interests and experiences encourages active participation in a comfortable sharing environment. Hence, understanding CoPs theory could enable teachers to build relationships where they could learn from one another and other stakeholders.

Lave and Wenger (2004) point out that groups of people sharing a concern or engaging in a topic of passion in CoPs should interact regularly to guide each other through their understanding of a mutually recognized real-life problem. The theory of CoPs in this study brought teachers who shared a common interest regarding how PSS should be provided to learners when addressing psychosocial challenges in public schools.

2.8.1.1 The relevance of CoPs and limitations to this study

The relevance of CoPs in this study has common elements applicable to any field of study, and Delgado et al. (2021) suggest that including the following characteristics that arise from a shared practice helps to establish professional identity, have a common goal or purpose, have no geographical professional and or organizational limits. Both the group and the focus group may vary from time to time, and the exchange of knowledge in these meetings is done through formal and informal processes where social interaction, both face-to-face and virtually, is of great importance. Wenger (1998) indicates that the origin and establishment of CoPs can be spontaneous with self-selected membership, including externally appointed members. Regular communication and interaction between members are essential, and infrastructure is needed to support them (Wenger, 1998).

In relating this study to the features of the CoPs, first of all, the CoPs members collaborated with a common goal: enhance PSS in selected public primary schools and enable teachers and other professionals involved to address the psychosocial challenges learners face. Secondly, using the CoPs theory would have allowed participants to understand and see the importance of forming a multidisciplinary and intersectoral group of members including not only teachers but also psychologists, social workers, mental health practitioners, medical practitioners, professional counsellors and professional health nurses and not depend on the government or DBE. These specialists could collaborate as CoPs to enhance PSS in public primary schools and address learners' psychosocial challenges. This was evident from teacher participants' discussions (Dei & Van der Walt, 2020; Patel et al., 2021)

In addition, members of the participants in this study shared the same features of CoPs and helped each other to establish their professional identity, as some specialized in PSS and, therefore, provided their PSS expertise on issues that affect learners in public primary schools. In other words, members of this study were experts in their associated fields. Therefore, they used their unique expertise in this study to provide professional /specialized PSS to learners in public primary schools. Interestingly, this study had no geographical, professional, or organizational limits (Smith, 2022). This means that their existence or services are not limited by their location. They could still

interact, communicate, and discuss issues of PSS with each other and or with beneficiaries, no matter where they were located. Members of this study communicated regularly, and some members met face-to-face others virtually using different social media platforms such as Zoom, their website, emails and other social networks, including Instagram, Twitter, Facebook or even WhatsApp, which was easily accessible to learners who needed assistance about the psychosocial issues they faced.

Members of this study exchanged knowledge through formal and informal processes (Bonanomi et al., 2020). In this study, the nature of meetings the members held depended on discussion issues on that particular day. Members interacted socially in an informal setting and sometimes met formally face to face or virtually for formal PSS matters. For example, through WhatsApp groups or other media platforms received assistance immediately on the possible intervention of that particular situation. The membership is voluntary and not based on appointment (Cruess & Cruess, 2020), meaning these specialists chose to join the CoPs. No job opportunities are open, and no salary is earned. It was voluntary.

While CoPs are beneficial, they sometimes come with challenges ranging from when the CoPs were established and operational to the language used during the CoPs meetings and interactions. Some members may still feel intimidated to express themselves in English since the language is not their mother tongue, and they may end up not engaging in essential issues of PSS (King, 2019; Mupepi, 2021). However, the dedication and willingness of members of CoPs may overcome such challenges and barriers. Other limitations of CoPs as a theory were noted as the lack of formal structures or the fact that it could take time to establish the CoPs as a formal structure (Admiral et al., 2021). In addition, some members of the CoPs may also not be available when needed as they might be engaged in some of their professional activities (de Carvalho-Filho et al., 2020)

However, all these identified limitations were acknowledged when the choice of CoPs as a theory was seen fit for this study, and thus, selected participants included teachers, psychologists, social workers, physiotherapists, mental health practitioners, professional counsellors, medical practitioners and nurses. Acknowledging that the language used to communicate with other members can be a barrier to some

members who are not fluent if communication is through English medium. Therefore, using the language individuals are comfortable with allows for authentic and free expression. Having knowledge of this limitation for CoPs in this study, the researcher ensured that participants were free to express themselves in the language they were comfortable with because the aim was to solve challenges as teachers and public schools to benefit learners.

Another limitation could be that meetings of CoPs are face-to-face; some CoPs can avail themselves of scheduled meetings, while some could be at a disadvantage if they are not local and live far from the allocated venue. Thus, using virtual meetings for CoPs could add an advantage to all members; hence, the possibility of a blended kind of CoPs meeting could be an advantage to all members if the availability of data is sourced. Currently, in SA, we have power/electricity challenges where scheduled load-shedding can limit such meetings, but utilizing available sources could assist in ensuring that effective meetings take place.

According to Akinyemi et al. (2019), giving sufficient time for teachers to collaborate and learn is essential to enhancing their professional development, in this case, enhancing the PSS provided to learners in public schools. However, the time allocated to teachers for CoPs is one of the challenges. It is limited and does not enable teachers to have opportunities to learn as a team and engage in collaborative learning activities. Therefore, for proper engagement within CoPs, it is recommended that teachers should spend adequate time learning PSS and other educational activities in communities of practice (Akinyemi et al., 2019).

McLoughlin et al.'s (2018) perspective on CoPs is that for growth, the utilization of online technology brings a quick rise to virtual communities of practice (VCoPs). The use of the internet has grown globally in sharing information and communication, as seen via social media. As a result of this growth, information and communication technology (ICT) has increasingly been used to overcome social and professional loneliness and facilitate professionals working together (Abatayo, 2023; Mai et al., 2020). Social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram were identified as assets for this study that could assist in conveying information and sharing ideas about the psychosocial support programs available and the PSS for addressing learners' psychosocial challenges.

Shaw et al. (2022) concurs that virtual communities of practice consist of individuals who use a common online platform to share professional expertise and experiences. According to the review by Shaw et al. (2020), CoPs are networks of individuals who interact regularly to share their interests and develop their knowledge, skills, and capabilities concerning a particular issue. Hence, utilizing CoPs and 'assets' in this study was going to be possible to organize meetings virtually for sharing expertise even with psychologists and Social Workers, who are currently difficult to get hold of to discuss a particular psychosocial challenge presented by a learner and address that particular psychosocial issue using their expertise. One of the benefits of using VCoPs is that members of CoPs can stay connected and informed (Hajian, 2019).

It is also acknowledged that public libraries are necessary partners in community development, and this is evidenced in that public computers and free Wi-Fi in libraries today are freely available but monitored for sharing for certain minutes for public consumption (Mersand et al., 2019). This study aimed to understand the forms of PSS provided to learners and to enhance such services. The use of CoPs guiding this study provided opportunities to learners who could, in the future, become beneficiaries of these CoPs who collaborated with libraries and created partnerships with schools.

Furthermore, Botha and Kourkoutas (2015) suggested that CoPs as a model that could support children with social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties (SEBD). Their study found that many school children who experience such difficulties did not receive the support they needed. Therefore, for this study, it was relevant to adopt a CoPs as a complete theory to support learners faced with psychosocial challenges in public schools and to find ways to provide and enhance PSS. This was believed to have strengthened constructive partnerships with schools and individuals within local communities, providing learners with opportunities to acquire the social capital they need to engage meaningfully at school and in their future lives.

2.8.2 Understanding the concept of 'assets' from the Assets-Based Approach

The conceptual framework that guided this study was drawn from the Asset-Based Approach (ABA), and therefore, understanding 'assets' and 'mobilization of assets' in the context of ABA are discussed in detail and how these are applied in this study. Kretzmann and McKnight developed ABA in the USA in the 1990s and were

enthusiastic about spreading community-building success stories (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993).

2.8.2.1 What is an Asset-Based Approach and the concept of ‘assets’ in this study?

Astbury et al. (2021) understand the Asset – Based Approach (ABA) as working with local people in different ways that seek to recognize and nurture the strengths of individuals, families, and communities by helping them build independence and self-reliance rather than waiting for unfulfilled promises of government. An ABA is also understood as a potential way of enabling the community to become more linked in and able to contribute to existing community services and resources (Eloff & Ebersöhn, 2001). According to Myende (2015, p.34), an asset-based approach is an outcome of the downfall of the needs-based approach, which was top-down. The needs-based approach compared to ABA concentrated on communities who were unable to acknowledge their strengths but paid attention to their deficiencies instead of utilizing the opportunities for organizing their assets (Kretzmann and McKnight, 1993; Eloff & Ebersöhn, 2001; Burke et al., 2009).

An asset-based perspective, an alternative to the needs-based approach, focuses on appreciating and recognizing the strengths of individuals and communities rather than emphasizing challenges and disadvantages (Ladson-Billings, 2007). It explores the unique skills and strengths of everyone involved. In the case of the provision of PSS, it could be teachers themselves, parents, community members, DBE and different officials and sectors in education, Social Services Department, Health Department, law enforcement personnel, learners themselves and many other stakeholders concerned with the education of learners in a public school. Within the traditional needs-based approach, people or school communities remained helpless when external donors or service providers left any resources for support and sometimes diminished because of the lack of capacity to address their needs. Thus, an ABA, according to Chidakwa (2021), is seen as a shift from the mentality of professional dominance to collaboration, partnerships, and participation and is considered a bottom-up approach that shifts the emphasis from a services perspective to an empowerment perspective to identify, mobilize and utilize such ‘assets’. Therefore,

this study, drawing from the ABA assisted in changing the mindset of what Chidakwa (2021) refers to as a dependency syndrome', where people expect to be provided with what is lacking without recognizing and utilizing their skills, capabilities, and strengths, talents, and social resources available at their disposal.

The understanding of 'assets' from the ABA perspective allowed participants to identify the first assets and explore how they intended to utilize them to enhance the PSS provided to learners in public schools working together in their future upcoming CoPs to develop. Myende (2017) and Myende (2014) allude that individuals and groups in the community have the capacity and strength to address their societal challenges. Therefore, assets from ABA in this study were utilized to identify more than just the strengths, talents, abilities and resources available at the disposal of all stakeholders involved in the school community to provide and enhance the different forms of PSS for learners in public schools but with the aim of addressing the psychosocial challenges that most learners face in the context where the study was conducted and to capacitate and empower school communities as well. Flint and Jagers (2021) view teachers and learners as assets in a school setting to work together, be responsible for each other, and not depend on anyone to solve their problems but value the contributions of everyone.

While Myende (2015, p.31) states that the government has a role to play in meeting the educational needs of learners, what seemed to be a losing battle for some communities and schools is that they believe so much in the government as the only one who should address their educational and psychosocial challenges. However, the government is not the only one responsible for addressing the educational challenges, such as the challenges experienced by teachers in providing PSS to learners in public schools. Instead, drawing from ABA, the concept of "assets" allowed participants to understand who and what assets public schools could utilize to provide PSS. Understanding assets in the context of ABA capacitated participants to understand that local people, for example, could be assets to capitalize on as public schools faced with psychosocial challenges because they have individual strengths and talents and could have a favorable distribution of many learners' well-being.

Teachers also discovered that they could invest in themselves and the resources they have at their disposal as they shared their experiences about PSS provided to learners in public schools and spoke openly during conversations to feel a sense of ownership. This opportunity and strategy could empower and capacitate all role players in the school community of selected school contexts.

Myende and Chikoko (2014) and Myende (2015) suggest several assets in public schools, which they categorize as three tiers of community assets, including primary, secondary and outside tiers. They classify the primary tier as consisting of those assets found and primarily located inside the school premises. In the context of this study, these may include teachers, learners, departmental heads, deputy principals, school principals and their skills, talents, capabilities, knowledge and schools themselves; members of the local community involved in the governance of the school, for example, parents' representatives', that is, the school governing bodies(SGB), security personnel and cleaners and nutrition programme personnel. Myende (2015, p.36) indicates that the above assets imply that teachers can do more to address different situations in their schools beyond teaching. The secondary tier consists of assets located within the neighbourhoods but not controlled by the schools (Chikoko & Khanare, 2012; Myende, 2015; Myende & Chikoko, 2014). These include charity organizations, community members, faith-based organizations, local businesses, local government agencies, parents and families and other organizations.

As described by the ABA, internal and external 'assets' are necessary for the school's survival and form a crucial component of school community assets. Thus, including 'assets' as a conceptual framework in this study was seen as contributing to exploring strategies to enhance the provision of learners' PSS in selected public schools. Finally, the outside tier was described as those assets outside the community both in location and ownership. Chikoko and Khanare (2012), Benenson and Stagg (2016), Myende and Chikoko (2014), and Myende (2015) assert that these 'assets' include private businesses, non-governmental organizations, national corporations, universities and research institutions. In this research, from this outside tier, the public schools can analyze and identify relevant local assets to address the psychosocial challenges faced within the school context.

Benenson and Stagg (2016) identified non-financial assets that benefit individuals and communities, including 'volunteering', which was also viewed as one of the assets in this study. Its relevance was viewed as necessary in building and controlling assets through volunteering as this could have given the public schools, learners, and other connections to attract more internal, external and outside tiers for the practical function of the school and not only provision of PSS. The South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996 (SASA, 1996), Section 34 also stipulates that the state cannot provide public schools with all the necessary resources. Hence, it is in support of the fundraising initiatives led by the school governing bodies (SGBs) and involves a joint responsibility of more stakeholders, including the school, parents and members of the community such as government, non-governmental, religious and business organizations to supplement state-provided resources (Myende, 2015).

Further explaining 'assets', Khanare and Chikoko (2012) and Myende (2017) refer to '*tangible assets*' as including vacant land, buildings, and property and indicate that these can be people and the organizations found in the community and their material possessions that schools can use for improvement and in this case access for the provision of PSS. On the other hand, '*intangible assets*' include human skills, service talents, and capacities of individuals both in and outside these organizations. Therefore, in this study, for example, both tangible and intangible assets, including but not limited to teachers, schools, parents, learners, and community members, could have had an opportunity to collectively utilize their capacities, abilities, skills, talents, and strengths (Setlhare et al., 2016) as assets including utilization of departmental policies and programs in their communities and also to take advantage of collaborating with organizations found in the community and their material possessions.

This could be done through asset mapping and asset mobilization (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; Scott et al., 2020; Astbury et al., 2021; Cassetti & Powell, 2020), which is making connections and building relationships with, for example, individuals, citizens, associations, business leaders and local institutions and to facilitate relationships and to exchange information.

2.8.3. Integrating the Communities of Practice theory and the concept of 'assets' from the Asset-Based Approach

Integrating Communities of Practice (CoPs), the meaning and value of 'assets' from the Asset Based Approach (ABA) share several features which are essential in guiding this study and which assisted the participants in finding ways to enhance psychosocial support services in public schools, in particular, the selected ones for this study. This was achieved through collaborative partnership and identifying available and available assets at the disposal of school community members. Both the CoPs and the 'assets' from ABA work hand in hand to find ways to utilize the skills, talents, resources, and strengths of the school community members, especially teachers who were participants in this study. Internal and external assets were employed to address issues of concern, such as psychosocial challenges facing learners, which has a ripple effect on the public schools. Both approaches promised to play a significant role in collaborating with all stakeholders and using several assets (Mudhumo & Mthiyane, 2022) to enhance the PSS provided to learners and address the psychosocial challenges.

Integrating the CoPs and assets from ABA allowed all participants to identify what Myende (2017) explained as internal assets, including what individual participants have within themselves in their schools' context. In addition, external assets such as opportunities and outside resources that could be accessed by individuals and those that are there, including but not limited to the local institutions and venues, could be negotiated with owners to conduct programs or meetings of psychosocial support services in the form of community of practice. Moreover, while identifying assets, participants felt the need and importance of engaging learners in various activities such as the provision of various life skills and intervention strategies like counselling, coping skills, provision of sanitary towels, finding ways of assisting learners with homework, food packs, recreational and many other activities to learners especially those in dire need.

Utilizing both the theoretical and conceptual frameworks allowed participants to see that not only face-to-face meetings are the source of working together but that a lot could be accomplished as well if engagement and sharing ideas and concerns and

learning from one another could be done virtually using available gadgets like cellphones and computers. Internal assets discovered by participating members from selected schools significantly improved learners' well-being and academic performance as the psychosocial challenges faced were addressed.

2.9 Chapter summary

This chapter concludes a literature review that integrated different but interrelated studies that dealt with local, SADC and international literature on psychosocial challenges faced by learners in public schools. Contributing factors to psychosocial challenges learners face, the nature of PSS in public schools, challenges related to providing learners' PSS in public schools and possible effective PSS interventions were discussed. The theory that framed the study, Communities of Practice (COPs) and the conceptual construct of 'assets' drawn from the Asset-Based Approach was also presented and integrated to show their relevance to the study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter explored the literature reviewed regarding psychosocial support services provided to learners who face psychosocial challenges in public schools. Theoretical and conceptual frameworks for the study were provided. This chapter begins by examining the research methodology presented under the following sub-headings: research paradigm, research design, research approach, research context, selection of participants and procedures, data generation methods and procedures. Data analysis, issues of trustworthiness and ethical considerations such as informed consent, voluntary participation, anonymity and confidentiality were discussed. The limitations of the study are also presented. This chapter concludes by giving the chapter summary.

3.2 Research paradigm

The term research paradigm is generally understood as a worldview that guides the researcher on what is suitable for research and how this should be conducted (Ugwu & Ekere, 2021). A research paradigm influences what should be studied, how it should be studied, and how the results should be interpreted (Tomaszewski et al., 2020; Muzarri et al., 2021 & Dunge, 2022). Applying the research paradigm in this study enabled the researcher to strategize and decide on the research method for this study. Hence, in conducting this study, I decided to take the stance of an interpretivist paradigm that engaged the participants in discourse and dialogue to make sense of their world and the context around them.

According to Ikram and Kenayathulla (2022), an interpretivist researcher focuses on deeply understanding participants' lived experiences (the humans) in their social context and conducts the research in their natural setting using qualitative methodologies such as the case study. These scholars further state that the primary purpose of interpretivism is to construct meaning by understanding the world and

human behaviour. Since the experiences of the participants were the focus of this study, adopting the interpretive paradigm allowed me as the researcher to build trust with the participants, which led to participants expressing themselves freely and openly as they shared their experiences regarding the provision of learners' PSS and on how they could enhance such services. As the researcher, I explored participants' experiences, which led to valuable findings and insights.

The three philosophical assumptions, ontology, epistemology, and methodology, were carefully considered. As Alharahsheh and Pius (2020) explain, '*ontology*' raises the question of what is reality. An '*epistemology*' seeks to answer how we construct knowledge. At the same time, a *methodology* asks how to generate information from the construct and share such knowledge. As a result, due to this study, an understanding of the phenomenon under study was gained.

Furthermore, knowledge was constructed from understanding participants' unique viewpoints and the meaning attached to those viewpoints. Participants' views about the phenomenon were interpreted using data generation methods selected for the study, including interviews and focus group discussions. By using an interpretive paradigm, I, as the researcher managed to interpret what participants understood as the forms of psychosocial support services provided to learners in selected public schools and how such services could be enhanced, knowing that this is qualitative research and, therefore, methods that should be used should engage participants in a discussion so that their voice is heard.

3.3 Research design

A research design is described as a well-planned outline directed at what the research intends to do (Dubey & Kothari, 2020). Equally, Ansari et al. (2022) use the term research design. Furthermore, formulating a research design helps the researcher make correct decisions in each step of the study. According to Mothamaha (2021), a research design is a general plan of what one intends to do to answer the research questions. It includes how data is generated, what instruments are employed, how they are used, and the intended means for analyzing the data. Various types of research designs, including case studies, are used in this study.

In the context of this research, the case study was chosen as suitable to enable the participants to answer the research questions and to assist in completing the study plan in a given period. Muzari et al. (2022) describe a case study as an in-depth study of a particular research problem that is carried out to analyze people, events, decisions, institutional or other social systems. Mathamaha (2021) states that to be fully able to answer the posed research questions, the overall aim of the study should determine the choice of the research design, and the design should be able to answer questions of what, when, where, and how, to generate new knowledge. Through this case study design, participants were engaged to understand their perceptions regarding the psychosocial support provided to learners in selected public schools and how such services could be enhanced.

3.4 Research approach

This study adopted a qualitative approach. Pitney and Parker (2009) state that qualitative researchers focus on people and are interested in how people perceive their experiences and the meaning they attach to everyday situations while gathering information, talking directly to people and observing their behaviour. As a result, the qualitative approach was appropriate for this study since the researcher was attentive to understanding how the participants interpreted their experiences and how they constructed their world. Qualitative research produces findings not arrived at by statistical procedures (Johnson et al., 2020; Fischer & Guzel, 2022; Nassaji, 2020). Instead, the qualitative research approach produces a result that looks into social life's meaning, interpretations and relationships. Qualitative research is a process where the research problem is studied in its natural setting rather than having participants studied in a laboratory (Muzari et al., 2022). Thus, this study focused on generating data based on the lived experiences of selected teachers (Departmental Heads, Life Orientation teachers and Class teachers) conveyed in their own words regarding the forms of PSS provided to learners in selected public schools.

In qualitative research, participants' meanings and experiences are always described verbally, giving meaning that is naturally occurring and not a frequently occurring phenomenon. It involves getting closer to the phenomenon studied by observing, participating, and talking to people in real-world contexts (Aspers & Corte, 2021; Dzogovic & Bejrami, 2023). This qualitative approach allowed the research

participants to answer the research questions through one-on-one semi-structured interviews and focus-group discussions (FGDs) since it studied participants in their natural settings to make sense of the meanings participants assigned to it. Using a qualitative research approach to answer the research questions became interesting to observe relative answers generated to this research study as participants were comfortable interacting in their context and freely code-switching in their language.

3.5 Research context

The study was conducted in two selected primary schools in Umlazi township, Durban, KZN. The schools are public schools under the KZN DBE in Umlazi District. Umlazi township is 20 km from the Durban city centre. It offers amenities like shopping malls, businesses, libraries, swimming pools, stadiums, and many government and business institutions, even in some townships. However, not all school-going-age children have easy access to these facilities due to the limited financial resources of many families. This is the case with many learners enrolled in the two selected schools under study.

Pseudonyms are assigned to the two schools under study, SQS and SVS. The SQS is situated west of Umlazi township, near low-cost housing. The area is home to many unemployed young adults who are the parents of most learners enrolled in this school. The majority of households in the community rely on government social grants. The school offers Grades R to 7, with a Foundation Phase (Grades R – 3) and Intermediate and Senior Phases combined as Grades 4 – 7. At the time of the research study, the school had an Acting School Principal, Deputy Principal, two Departmental Heads, 17 teachers, 575 learners, one administrative clerk, and three support staff.

The school is not far from the district office, which could assist inspectors and the district-based support team in visiting it and attending to the psychosocial challenges facing learners, teachers, and the school. The SQS has a large tract of land that could be utilized for vegetable gardens, sports fields, and other activities that are part of psychosocial interventions. There is a poor road infrastructure for easy access to school, and some teachers rely on public transport. Some families lost their livelihoods during the COVID-19 pandemic and KZN floods, which hit the area hard. Some learners come to school hungry and depend on the school feeding scheme, while others look after their younger siblings. Teachers themselves expressed being

emotionally exhausted and requested to get psychotherapy as well to cope with the pressures within the school.

The SVS is situated south of Umlazi near the hostel, a male-dominated hostel in Umlazi for rural migrants who work in Durban. During the study, the school offered Grades R to 7 and had a Principal, Deputy Principal, +/-3 Departmental Heads, 30 teachers, and 1 050 learners. The school is built of stones; some learners live in the hostel, some with their fathers and siblings. Some were born and raised in the hostel, while their parents brought others from rural areas to obtain a better education in Durban. Some learners face psychosocial challenges at home, school and in the community. There is a need for professional support due to the nature of the cases described by teachers. A hospital in the area could be utilized to provide the school with free health care education and health programs for teenagers. However, it is not easily accessible to pedestrians due to the busy highway road leading to the hospital. The lack of recreational facilities is a psychosocial challenge on its own. Psychosocial programs are required to enable learners to reach their full potential. The school's lack of psychologists and social workers to engage teenage girls and boys is a significant concern.

3.6 Selection of participants and selection procedures

Sampling is described as selecting a group of participants representing the entire study target population (Stratton, 2023, p.147). In line with this, Nelly et al. (2019) use the term sampling to refer to selecting or searching for situations, a context, and participants who provide rich data on the phenomenon of interest. Purposeful selection was used in the selection of participants in the study. Martinez-Linares et al. (2019) and Muzari et al. (2022) explain that purposive selection is based entirely on the researcher's judgment to select participants who show interest in the study and share knowledge and experience on the phenomenon under study. For this reason, teacher participants in the study were selected with the understanding that they were possibly knowledgeable and informative about the phenomenon.

The teacher participants in the study represented the targeted population. A small sample of this study consisted of six teachers in Grade 4 to Grade 7 from the two public primary schools in the Umlazi District, KwaZulu-Natal (KZN). These grades

accommodate learners between ten (10) and thirteen (13). This age group is perceived as more vulnerable to psychosocial challenges and more exposed to the psychosocial ills emanating from school, home, and the community. The target sample of participants consisted of two (2) class teachers, two (2) Life Orientation (LO) teachers, and two (2) Departmental Heads from both selected public primary schools. As much as the study intended to maintain gender equality regarding the participants, targeted primary public schools had only one male teacher per school.

3.6.1 Profiling of Participants

This section describes the participants in detail: departmental heads, life orientation teachers, and class teachers:

Table 3.1: Summary of profiled teacher participants

Participants by rank	Name of school	Grades	Teaching experience	Gender
Departmental Head (<i>DH</i>)	<i>School Q Section (SQS)</i>	Grades 4-7	25	Female
Departmental Head (<i>DH</i>)	<i>School V Section (SVS)</i>	Grades 4-7	20	Female
Life Orientation Teacher (LOT)	<i>School V Section (SVS)</i>	Grade 7	23	Female
Life Orientation Teacher (LOT)	<i>School Q Section (SQS)</i>	Grade 7	03	Male
Class Teacher	<i>School Q Section (SQS)</i>	Grade 4	15	Female
Class Teacher	<i>School V Section (SVS)</i>	Grade 5	25	Female
Total number of participants=6				

Table 3.1 indicates the ranks each participant held in their respective schools, the name of the school where they taught, their grades, their individual teaching experience in their current school, and their gender. While most teacher participants

resided outside of the vicinity of the school's context (area), most had taught in both schools for many years and had varying teaching experiences. The alphabet represented pseudonyms for identifying research sites; for example, SQS stands for School Q Section, and SVS stands for School V Section. Pseudonyms for participants are indicated as DH, which stands for Departmental Head; LOT, which stands for Life Orientation Teacher; and class teacher, who remained as is.

3.6.1.1. Departmental Heads

Departmental Heads (DHs) in primary schools are responsible, among other things, for monitoring the work of educators and learners in their phases and implementing new programs relating to the school curriculum (PAM, DBE, 2016). Therefore, the DHs were chosen because they are in the School Management Team (SMT) and deal daily with learners' psychosocial challenges and ill-discipline problems.

The DH from SQS was a 64-year-old female teacher who was about to retire by the end of the current year of this study. She had taught at the same school for 25 years. She was looking forward to retiring as she complained about her ill health and the ill behaviour of many learners who added to her stressors. She trained at the College of Education with a Teachers' Diploma and spoke proudly of the quality of training they received at colleges of education. The DH from SVS was a 53-year-old female teacher who had taught at the same school for 20 years. She talked proudly about her teaching experience as a teacher. She had a good stature, was warm, and expressed herself well. She mentioned that she holds a teaching qualification degree from a particular university.

3.6.1.2 Life Orientation Teachers

The Life Orientation teachers (LOTs) are Post Level One (PL1) teachers who are responsible, among other things, for engaging with learners in class, including the teaching and learning, administrative, educational, and disciplinary aspects (PAM, DBE, 2016). The LOTs were chosen because they experience more challenges of learner misbehaviour in the classroom, which include bullying, verbal abuse, disruptive and aggressive behaviour, and swearing. The LOTs were selected since LO is a subject that focuses on helping learners develop social interactions, such as

respecting others' rights and values (CAPS, 2011). For this reason, LO teachers were familiar with the phenomenon under this study.

The LOT from SVS was a 59-year-old female teacher who had taught at the school for 23 years and was about to retire at the end of the year of this study. She had taught in other schools previously. Currently, she is involved in various co-curricular activities with learners at the school. The LOT from SQS was the only male teacher who participated in the study. He was 33 years of age and had been recently employed by the DBE, who placed him at the school three years ago. He was concerned about the psychosocial challenges most learners face.

3.6.1.3 Class Teachers

Class teachers' rank is Post Level One (PL1). Their responsibilities include, among other things, engaging in class and fostering a purposeful progression in learning that is consistent with the learning areas and programs of subjects and grades as determined (PAM, DBE, 2016). They are also a point of contact with parents to discuss disruptive behaviour and ill-discipline shown by a learner in class. The class teacher from SVS was a 55-year-old female who had taught at the school for 25 years. The Class teacher from SQS was a 56-year-old female who had been at the school for 25 years. She was co-opted by her colleagues as the chairperson of the School-Based Support Team (SBST) and understood the psychosocial support cases referred to her by teachers.

3.7 Data generation methods and procedures

Data generation methods refer to how data are collected, analyzed, and interpreted (Ikram & Kenayathulla, 2022). Qualitative data-generated methods which can be used in studies include interviews, observations, document analysis, and focus group discussion (Nassaji, 2020; Muzari et al., 2022). Data generation methods used in this study were semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). Six participants were engaged in one-on-one semi-structured interviews and two FGDs in both selected public schools on different dates per the arranged schedules.

These methods enabled the researcher to gain in-depth, detailed data through open-ended questions. Participants shared their experiences and perceptions about the phenomenon without boundaries. The semi-structured interviews and FGDs were conducted in a relaxed and conducive atmosphere in school staff rooms. Audio recordings to capture data during interviews and FGDs were highly dependent on. The views expressed through personal interaction rather than the responses collected from anonymous questionnaires served great value in the context of this study. The following data generation methods and procedures used in this study are outlined below.

3.7.1 Semi-structured interviews

An interview is a two-person dialogue initiated by an interviewer to obtain research-relevant information (Muzari et al., 2022). According to Dunwoodie et al. (2022), interviews enable participants to express their feelings, prejudices, opinions, desires, and attitudes towards various phenomena experienced in workplace contexts. Various interview types exist, such as structured, semi-structured, and unstructured. For this study, one-on-one semi-structured interviews were employed. These interviews consist of open-ended questions based on the topic area the researcher aimed to cover, facilitating detailed discussions on various topics (Magaldi & Berler, 2020). The designed open-ended interview schedules encouraged participants to discuss the studied phenomenon openly. An environment fostering participants' ease was established, with constant attentiveness and politeness. Empathetic listening to participants' fears and concerns was maintained. The semi-structured interviews involved individual DHs, LOTs, and Class teachers from the selected schools, each lasting 30 to 45 minutes.

Consideration was given to audio recording the interviews with participants' permission. According to Dunwoodie et al. (2022), audio recording is a standard method that allows researchers to focus and be present in the conversation without distraction from note-taking. The interview sessions were permitted to be audio recorded, and the recordings were transcribed later. Participants were reminded of ethical principles, including consent forms, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and anonymity. The one-on-one semi-structured interviews assisted in comprehending the

meanings participants attributed to their experiences in providing psychosocial support services to learners, negatively impacting teaching and learning in public schools.

3.7.2 Focus group discussions

A focus group discussion (FGD) is a meeting planned for small groups of individuals who are unrelated, formed by the researcher and led in a group discussion on some challenging topics (Muzari et al., 2022). Pitney and Parker (2009) explain FGDs as enabling data generation that draws on divergent views over a short period. This study used FGDs as another second method to generate data. Colom (2021) notes that FGDs usually consist of not more than ten participants who share their experiences within a group setting by responding to a series of planned questions. The FGD in this study consisted of three members from each school, and it was conducted in two selected schools on the week of 19-23 June 2023. Therefore, a DH, LOT, and class teacher from the two selected public schools were accommodated within the FGD and encouraged to engage each other in the discussion about the phenomenon. The researcher had an opportunity to initiate the platform and allowed the group to interact with and with each other on the phenomenon (on a given topic). The FGDs took three hours of a relaxed, informative session, each lasting for one hour, which was not intimidating but friendly and supportive. These sessions were held in a suitable and quiet environment, in the staff rooms of participating schools, held after school hours as this time had been scheduled before data generation.

Conducting these FGDs in the staff room after school hours avoided disturbances and inconveniences during teaching and learning. All participants were encouraged to express their views while the researcher asked probing questions and re-phrased some (Martinez-Linares, 2019). All participants in the FGDs were allowed to comment, ask questions, and respond to comments made by the participants and the researcher. A focus group was small enough to allow all participants to have the opportunity to share insights understandably and logically to facilitate the natural, spontaneous discussion of experiences by the participants (Chinyama et al., 2021).

Participants were more comfortable using two languages of their choice, IsiZulu, their home language, or English, the first additional language to code switch in both languages. The permission to audio record was granted, which enabled the researcher

to reflect repeatedly on the original data long after the data had been generated. Transcriptions were completed after listening to the audio recordings and transcribing the participants' responses verbatim.

Table 3.2: Elements guiding this study

Source: Ugwu & Ekere (2021, p.122), revised by the author of this study

Methodological choices	Elements	Justification
Research Paradigm Choice	Interpretivism	Understands human experiences and their interpretation of the world surrounding them.
Philosophical Assumptions	Ontology	Concerns the nature of a social phenomenon being investigated. There is a belief that realities are multiple.
	Epistemology	Refers to how we come to know the truth or reality
	Methodology	Refers to research approaches, designs, methods, and procedures used in an investigation.
Research Approach	Qualitative Approach	It relies on data from words or pictures and uses small samples and interviews.
Research Design	Case Study	Seeks to offer solutions to problems raised in order to meet the research objectives
Research Methods	Semi-structured interview	The researcher engages in one-on-one interaction with individual participants.

(cont...) Table 3.2: Elements guiding this study

	Focused-Group Discussion	The researcher engages with participants in dialogue, discourse, listening, and questioning to generate research data.
Selecting Samples/selection of participants	Purposive Sampling	The researcher used her unique knowledge or expertise to select participants who represented the population. A small sample size of six teacher participants from two selected public primary schools in Umlazi district, Intermediate and Senior Phases (Grades 4-7), assisted to answer the research question (Kothari (2004); Shaheen et al., (2019)
Data Analysis	Thematic Analysis	The researcher analyzed data from participants using the six steps of thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006) to identify, analyse, and report patterns (themes) within data.
Research Instruments	Audio Recorder, Notes, Interview, and FGD schedules.	Generated data occurred using one-on-one semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions through audio recordings and field notes.

3.8 Data analysis method and procedures

Data analysis is explained by Muzari et al. (2022) as the reasoning strategy to split a complex whole into its parts to understand the relationship of the parts. Data analysis is also an interpretive event where researchers generate and analyze data concurrently (Rose & Johnson, 2020). Data analysis was used in this qualitative study to describe what was being studied. As a result, thematic analysis was employed to analyze data gathered during data generation in this study. Thematic analysis is explained by Silbert et al. (2019) as a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within data. Data generated from participants was systematically

analyzed following the six steps of thematic analysis outlined by Martinez-Linares (2019): familiarization, generating initial codes, searching for themes, generating and reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and compiling the final formal report.

Phase 1: Familiarizing with the data

During this phase, the data's content was familiarised through repeated reading and reviewing. The goal was to comprehend the expected type of interpretation for credibility assurance, and the transcripts were read to immerse in the data. Additionally, the verbatim transcriptions of each participant were converted into text form for better manageability. The data, derived from semi-structured interviews and FGDs, provided a deeper insight into the information generated from the participants' verbatim.

Phase 2: Generating initial codes

The second phase entailed generating initial codes, the primary and interesting features identified from the participants' transcripts, by labelling them and simply highlighting them with different colours (Lester et al., 2020). Each colour had to correspond with a particular research question.

Phase 3: Searching for themes

The third phase focused on identifying the themes from the text. Each theme was coded with different colours to identify clusters. The following themes were identified:

Theme 1: *teachers' understanding of psychosocial challenges*; **theme 2:** *the nature of psychosocial support services in primary schools*; **theme 3:** *challenging factors in the provision of psychosocial support services in public primary schools* and **theme 4:** *possible effective psychosocial support interventions to address learners' psychosocial challenges*.

Phase 4: Generating and reviewing themes

The fourth phase involved generating and reviewing themes and grouping patterns or themes as obtained. Ensuring that the themes generated are appropriate and sufficient to achieve the research objectives (Tomaszweski et al., 2020). To further understand the data, more sub-themes were required, and these included *1.1: possible causes for psychosocial challenges encountered by learners*; *sub-theme 1.2: the effect of psychosocial challenges on teaching and learning*; *sub-theme 2 .1 : the*

provision of psychosocial support services (PSS) in selected schools; sub-theme 4.1: professional psychosocial support required for learners; sub-theme 4.2: psychosocial support training for teachers; sub-theme 4.3: parental engagement and other stakeholders; sub-theme 4.4 : teacher collaborations or communities of practices (CoPs).

Phase 5: Naming and defining themes

The fifth phase was naming and defining themes to set boundaries and distinguish between the data (Martinez-Linares, 2019). This phase helped organize the analysis and avoid confusion between themes and data. The themes that emerged during data analysis developed into findings and were confirmed in the literature as findings.

Phase 6: Compiling the final formal report

The sixth phase was the last phase for compiling the final formal report, a step called interpretation and checking data according to themes and sub-themes. It involved the written account of the interpretations and findings of the data obtained, as elaborated further in Chapter 4 and conclusions in Chapter 5. Practically speaking, the final formal report reflects a reflection of this dissertation.

3.9 Issues of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness allows for quality checking and examining the accuracy of the information generated by the participants (Muzari et al., 2022). The amount of trustworthiness of qualitative research can be measured by ensuring the credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability of study findings, as credited by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and confirmed by Riaz et al. (2023) and Haq et al. (2023). According to Rose and Johnson (2020), trustworthiness in qualitative research refers to the organized rigour of the research design, the researcher's credibility, the believability of the findings, and the application of the research methods and understanding of trustworthiness as a question posed by qualitative researchers on whether the findings can be trusted (Peels & Bouter, 2023).

In this study, the four recognized criteria of trustworthiness presented by Haq et al. (2023) have been chosen to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings generated and

transcribed from data-generated methods. Issues of trustworthiness were obtained through triangulation, a method whereby the researcher seeks out several sources that can provide insights about the same events. It mainly describes multiple data generation methods to measure a single construct (Lune & Berg, 2012). It is used to identify convergence of data obtained through multiple data sources (Johnson et al., 2020).

I used data transcripts and recorded voice notes as data that was generated through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. Credibility was ensured through multiple data-generation methods, including semi-structured interviews and FGDs. Theoretical triangulation involved the application of CoPs theory and 'assets from the ABA approach. For dependability, emphasis was placed on ensuring that the data faithfully represented the participants' expressions during transcription. Transferability pertains to how the findings can be applied to other settings (Muzzari et al., 2022). Confirmability instils confidence that the research findings are grounded in the generated data (Haq et al., 2023). The interpretations of the findings in this study are not products of the researcher's imagination but are connected to data generated through semi-structured interviews and focus-group discussions.

3.9.1 Credibility

Credibility indicates that the research process was conducted with integrity and that the study's final results can be relied upon (Johnson et al., 2020). Throughout this study, confidence existed in the authenticity and believability of the results as a researcher. A strategy employed involved prolonged engagement between the researcher and the participants, facilitated by two briefing meetings in their respective schools, where data generation was planned. Before initiating data collection, the goal was to establish comfort and familiarity with the participants. Persistent observation played a crucial role, with continued participation in school meetings preceding data generation. Triangulation, achieved through semi-structured interviews and focus-group discussions, was utilized for data collection. Peer debriefing was employed to present findings to participants, mitigating biases, and member checks were conducted.

In simpler terms, credibility pertains to the researchers' confidence in the findings. When applying these credibility criteria to this study, confidence is expressed in endorsing the analysis presented. This endorsement signifies confidence that the findings accurately reflect the data generated from participants, ensuring that the results authentically represent what occurred during data collection through adherence to appropriate research procedures.

3.9.2 Confirmability

Confirmability assures that the research findings are derived from verifiable data (Enworo, 2023). Consequently, there is a confident affirmation that the study's findings remain unbiased. The assurance extends to confirming that the interpretations of the study's findings are not products of personal imagination as a researcher but are instead grounded in data generated through semi-structured interviews and focus-group discussions. The belief persists that fellow researchers would validate the study's results. Striving for impartiality, efforts were made to maintain transparency in presenting the original responses of the study participants and to ensure the absence of biases in the findings. Consequently, the study affirms the findings' impartiality, as confirmed through member checks, with the added measure of securely storing interview dates and times records. Techniques employed to achieve this encompass triangulation and the audit trail (Riaz et al., 2023).

3.9.3 Dependability

Dependability demonstrates that the research is solid in all aspects and that favourable results can be expected upon replication (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It involves the capacity, under identical conditions, to yield consistent outcomes if the study were conducted again (Adler, 2022). Thus, the research process must be logical and transparent, facilitating traceability of the procedures and ensuring coherence across methods and findings. Consequently, confidence exists that fellow scholars would encounter similar results and consistency across comparable contexts if the findings of one study were virtually replicated in a similar population, condition, or context. The study's findings are reliable. Throughout this study, diligence has been applied to align

the findings, interpretations, and recommendations with the data provided by study participants. Consequently, these findings can offer assistance in other settings.

3.9.4 Transferability

Transferability shows that findings from the study can be transferred to other contexts or settings (Muzzari et al., 2022). Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings can be transferred to other settings. Transferability shows the degree of application of the research findings in the exact nature of context, people, groups, and settings. It asks about the degree to which the findings from the particular qualitative study can be applied to other contexts/ settings (McGinley et al., 2020). The qualitative study results will be considered applicable when one who was not part of the study or the readers can associate it with their own experiences. It can be argued that even though the study's findings cannot be generalised to other situations due to the small sample selected, the findings can apply to similar settings (Amin et al., 2020; Haq et al., 2023).

3.10 Ethical considerations

The ethical considerations uphold the values of providing privacy by giving protection and the dignity of respecting the participants' views, which, at most, are sensitive to some discussions (Muzari et al., 2022). Bergonia et al. (2022) point out that research ethics refer to norms of conduct that distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. The ethical considerations were adhered to, and the Ethics Review Committee of the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) approved this study. Permission was obtained to conduct research from the school principals of the selected schools and the (DBE) in KZN Province. Participants had been well-informed prior regarding the aim to participate in the study. The principles that symbolized the ethics of the study regarding the participants included informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity and voluntary participation, as stated by Zapata-Marrero and Yalaz (2020).

3.10.1 Informed consent

Informed consent is described as an essential ethical and legal obligation in human subject research, striving for informed consent that serves two primary objectives: one, respecting and supporting the participants' autonomy, and two, ensuring protection from potential harm (Godskesen et al., 2023). The principle of informed consent necessitates that the research participants be advised of all relevant aspects of the research (Khan & MacEachen, 2022). Participants were adequately informed in advance about the research objectives and the procedure to be followed so they could decide whether to participate. Before conducting this study, permission was sought from the school principal as a gatekeeper to research, and then all participants signed informed consent forms declaring their will to participate.

3.10.2 Voluntary participation

Participants adhered to voluntary participation by making their own free decision to participate without anyone putting pressure on them. Participants were informed that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time should they feel uncomfortable during data generation (Zapata-Marrero & Yalaz, 2020).

3.10.3 Anonymity

Anonymity is achieved when researchers do not know the identities of the research participants (Roth & von Unger, 2018). The most common practice related to anonymity is using pseudonyms, where particulars in the data that might allow readers to identify the person or institution are deleted. The ethical principle of anonymity was considered by assigning pseudonyms to the participating schools, and all participants as SQS and SVS stand for name of schools, DH, LOT and class teacher stand for teacher participants.

3.10.4 Confidentiality

Confidentiality refers to the fact that researchers know the participant's identity but commit to not revealing the person's participation and identity (Ngozwana, 2018). The principle of confidentiality was maintained, and it ensured that the information shared

and provided during one-on-one semi-structured interviews and the FGD was kept confidential.

3.11 Limitations of the study

The study concentrated on the views of two class teachers, two DHs, and two LTOs concerned regarding providing learners' psychosocial support services.

The findings could not be generalized since data generation was for a qualitative study with few participants in two schools (Dzogovic & Bajrami, 2023). However, they could be of assistance to others in their contexts. Also, this study's participants are teachers with fully functional lives outside the study. They could, therefore, be expected to miss appointments, which could delay the completion of the study. The task was to ensure that they understood the value of their contribution and were encouraged to honour scheduled meetings.

For future research, a larger sample of participants, government departments, learners, schools, and the broader community of rural, township, and suburban areas could be included to gather more information on the topic.

3.12 Chapter summary

This chapter detailed the interpretive research paradigm and qualitative research approach that informed the study. The study context, purposeful sampling approach, procedure, and profiling of participants were discussed. The data generation methods and procedures, which included semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, were discussed. Procedures for data analysis, trustworthiness issues, and ethical considerations were also outlined. The next chapter will present the research findings and interpret the qualitative data generated.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This qualitative study aims to find ways to enhance the provision of learners' psychosocial support services in selected public schools in the Umlazi District. As documented in the previous chapter, data was generated using one-on-one semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with six teachers of two participating public primary schools from the Intermediate and Senior Phases (Grades 4-7). The gaps left open during one-on-one semi-structured interviews were closed during focus group discussions to elicit more responses from the participants and to address the research questions. Details of adherence to ethical issues and limitations of the study are also explained. The findings of this study are grounded on the following research questions:

1. What forms of psychosocial support services are provided to learners in selected public schools in Umlazi District?
2. How could different forms of psychosocial support services for learners be enhanced in selected public schools in the Umlazi District?

It is prudent to provide a brief overview of the participants in the study so that the emerging themes are kept from the contexts in which they were generated. The background information on participants below includes their teaching experience, gender, and the ranks they hold from their respective schools.

Table 4.1: Profiling of participants

Rank		Name of school	Grades	Teaching experience	Gender
Departmental (DH)	Head	School Q Section (SQS)	Grades 4-7	25	Female
Departmental (DH)	Head	School V Section (SVS)	Grades 4-7	20	Female

Life Orientation Teacher (LOT)	School V Section (SVS)	Grade 7	23	Female
Life Orientation Teacher (LOT)	School Q Section (SQS)	Grade 7	03	Male
Class Teacher	School Q Section (SQS)	Grade 4	15	Female
Class Teacher	School V Section (SVS)	Grade 5	25	Female
Total number of participants=6				

Table 4.1 indicates that while most teacher participants resided outside of the vicinity of the school's context (area), most had taught in both schools for many years and had varying teaching experiences. All interviews and focused group discussions were held in a conducive and supportive school environment. The English language was used to communicate with all participating teachers, who were comfortable expressing themselves in English. However, code-switching to IsiZulu was sometimes catered to for translation during transcription. Pseudonyms were used to ensure confidentiality and anonymity and to avoid disclosing the original names of participants and sites where research was conducted. The alphabet represents pseudonyms for identifying research sites; for example, SQS stands for School Q Section, and SVS stands for School V Section. Pseudonyms for participants are indicated as DH, which stands for Departmental Head; LOT, which stands for Life Orientation Teacher; and class teacher, who remains as is. Themes are presented using verbatim quotations that support the discussion to ensure that the 'voices' of participants remain original in the study.

During the transcribing phase, every utterance from the audio-recorded data was accurate. Spelling and grammar in the quotations appear as in the original data and have not been edited. Data from participants was systematically analyzed following the six steps of thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006). These phases included familiarizing with the data by reading and reviewing it several times. This involved transcribing the recording; coding, where the researcher coded the foremost and exciting features to identify the text in the form of labelling and simply highlighting with

different colours; searching for themes; reviewing themes to ensure that they were appropriate and sufficient to achieve the research objectives; defining and naming themes to set boundaries and distinguishing between the data; and producing these findings (this report). Thematic analysis is explained by Braun and Clarke (2006) as a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It was easy to produce broad descriptive statements reflecting the overall understanding of this study's data and research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Transcripts for each participant were presented verbatim. Short, descriptive words and phrases were highlighted during coding to assign meaning to the data related to analytic interests (Lester et al., 2020). Through coding, the process developed into categories and later the production of themes, leading to broader interpretations of these themes. Finally, the generated data organized into these themes was associated with the literature reviewed, theoretical framework, and specific research design and methodology aspects as deliberated in Chapters Two and Three of this study to strengthen and support participants' findings. The number of the themes that emerged are grouped and detailed below:

4.2.1 Teachers 'understanding of psychosocial challenges

4.2.2 The nature of psychosocial support services in primary schools

4.2.3 Challenging factors in the provision of psychosocial support services in public primary schools

4.2.4 Psychosocial interventions to address psychosocial challenges faced by learners

4.2 Data presentation of findings

This section deals with the empirical findings derived from the study. The findings are divided into four themes and sub-themes that emerged during one-on-one semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions.

4.2.1 Teachers' understanding of psychosocial challenges

The data from all participants' one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions revealed that most teachers had a diverse understanding of psychosocial challenges. According to the Integrated School Health Policy (ISHP) (2012), psychosocial

challenges are mostly related to poverty, hunger, and various forms of abuse, resulting in poor academic performance, absenteeism, and school dropouts. Participants' description of their understanding of a concept, the analysis, and interpretation revolved around harsh living conditions, poverty, and abuse, including domestic and community violence. However, they did not provide full details in their explanation of the concept as was anticipated except to align it to challenges and negative experiences that learners from their schools face. One Life Orientation Teacher (LOT) from School V Section (SVS) expressed their understanding this way:

Psychosocial challenges are problems happening from home, where a person lives. It is also a social living for our learners. It means a threatening living environment for some young girls and boys. For example, some children live in overcrowded homes which lack privacy.

Similarly, one class teacher's understanding was:

For me, psychosocial challenges are harsh conditions experienced where children live. It can be a situation that does not seem normal but dysfunctional. She added that many learners experience these in their communities and family backgrounds (Class teacher, SVS).

While this LOT saw psychosocial challenges as more contextual and impacting on human rights for young children, psychosocial challenges were also viewed as experiencing harsh conditions in one's environment. The DH explained further and said:

Psychosocial challenges could include children being raised in poverty due to unemployment at home and in the community. For example, some of our learners in this area live with a single mother and a stepfather, which sometimes exposes a child to the possibility of abuse by a young stepfather (DH, SVS).

The above view on poverty was mainly supported by departmental heads from both schools, who perceived the psychosocial challenges caused by a lack of financial income leading to poverty, precisely experienced by many children from these

communities and households. They explained this way:

People in this area face unemployment. Many households in this community have financial difficulties when it comes to supporting their children in school (DH, SQS).

To concur, most of the families in this community rely on the Social Support Child Grant, which is insufficient to maintain the household needs of the individual child (DH, SVS).

Similarly, a class teacher viewed the issue around psychosocial challenges as a chaotic situation often created by community members engaging in irresponsible actions in the name of requesting social services. She expressed in this way:

I can associate psychosocial challenges with the chaos that community members often create in this area. Sometimes, community members would demand essential services by blocking streets, throwing waste, or burning tires on the roads, resulting in poor school attendance by learners (Class teacher, SQS).

On the other hand, the DHs associated these challenges with actions of neglect by parents, which is negatively felt by learners and said:

Some children feel neglected and unsupported. For example, here at school, some children come to school sick and have not done the homework. So, as DHs or SMTs, we are forced to take the learner immediately to the local clinic (DH, SQS).

We find our contact time with learners wasted in local clinics intervening to what should be done by parents. Parents sometimes do this purposely, knowing we will use our cars to take their children to the clinic (DH, SVS).

Correspondingly, the LOT from SVS shared the same sentiments but emphasized parents' lack of emotional support at home and school as what can be conceptualized

as psychosocial challenges. She stated the following:

A psychosocial challenge is the lack of relative care and love from home due to absent parents caused by divorce, separation, or death of parents. Sometimes, a child lives with relatives or people who are not their biological parents. That is when we notice a child who comes to school without a proper school uniform and who may be hungry, having no one in the family who ensures that s/he is wearing a clean school uniform and has a lunchbox or eats at home every morning.

The DH from SQS and one LOT from SVS highlighted something unique. They used the lens of the effects of natural disasters in this school community as part of psychosocial challenges that negatively impact learners and schools. They stated the following:

I take psychosocial challenges as a poor living standard of children in society. I will make an example of what our learners here at school experience during heavy rains and floods. Learners do not come to school because a bridge gets flooded with heavy rains. The situation is life-threatening as most people have lost lives on that bridge (umhoshha). To take you back on what happened during the storm and flood in 2022 in this area is very sad, even when I think about it. I still remember that some children in this school lost family members, and other families lost their properties and belongings (DH, SQS).

Natural disasters have a significant impact on some of our learners who live in informal settlements that are within walking distance of school. Their homes get flooded with water, and learners end up not coming to school, waiting for the rain to stop. The more time they are away from school, the more they get behind with schoolwork and do not cope at school (LOT, SVS).

In addition to activities in these school communities, criminal activities experienced by learners in the neighbourhood were highlighted as part of psychosocial challenges.

I can relate psychosocial challenges to situations similar to those of some learners living in the hostel and informal settlements. This kind of living

environment exposes children to traumatic situations. Most of these senseless killings and rape happening in these areas are due to criminal activities (DH, SVS).

I consider crime as part of psychosocial challenges. In the hostel and informal settlements where most of our learners live, crime has become a daily habit, and children are modelling some of these criminal activities and applying these bad behaviours to other learners. These neighbouring areas are no longer safe places for children to be raised. Both the nearby hostel and informal settlement have lots of criminal activities taking place there. Drug use, rape cases, and many other cases are reported by our learners who live in that area (Class teacher, SVS).

Participants' understanding of psychosocial challenges and the participants' responses seemed to be expected in these communities and both schools. The experience that all teachers in their roles suggested was that they were aware of the psychosocial challenges that learners mainly experienced. Surprisingly, teachers explained what psychosocial challenges meant; however, they focused primarily on the conditions in their learners' homes and what they were exposed to on their way to and from school. This, in a sense, indicates how caring these teachers are and how they feel about how all of these affect their learners in school. In other words, what happens in the community and home affects what happens in school and its learners as badly affected minors. Therefore, interventions should be a collaborative effort, as evidenced in Pillay (2019), that the school, home, and community should work collaboratively for the well-being of learners. Equally important is that most teachers who participated in the study had taught in this community for over twenty-five to thirty years and had found ways to ensure effective teaching and learning besides psychosocial challenges. They did not realize that they are assets to the school, learners, parents, and community and that there is a possibility to enhance sustainable learning in the community (Ebersöhn et al., 2015) if they work together to find solutions. This suggests that some of the challenges mentioned by participants, including the safety of learners and community violence, such as gender-based violence, are psychosocial challenges that could be prevented if community members and parents understand their role as assets that schools and their children depend on

to secure their wellbeing and to improve education (Patel et al., 2021; Chidakwa, 2021; Scott et al., 2020; Krzywoszynska, 2019). Thus, for participants to identify problems experienced in that particular context seemed insufficient, but understanding what the Asset-based approach (ABA) (1993) suggests was going to be critical, and in particular, to understand and know how to utilize assets, abilities, and resources in their setting to overcome the psychosocial challenges.

Drawing on the principles of the theory of Communities of Practice (CoPs) (1998), which states that its members engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other share information, and also build relationships that enable them to learn from each other. I felt that it was not enough for teachers to list psychosocial challenges and live with them; mentioning their understanding and the steps that have been taken should have indicated that they are doing something to assist themselves as teachers, learners, parents, and community members. The possibility of overcoming these challenges seemed possible, as explained in the theory of Communities of Practice (CoPs), if both schools had to take the initiative and see the urgency in working collaboratively with DBE psychologists and other stakeholders to address the challenges. Providing psychosocial support services for learners should not be left to teachers only, and teachers felt that they should not accept challenges as a norm for so many years. The participants' responses, though, indicated that they are aware of and that these current psychosocial challenges experienced by many learners in the schools are genuine, necessitated enhancing the provision of learners' psychosocial support.

From the findings, the LOT and class teacher of SVS felt that the home background, including poor living conditions, is what is adding to the cause of dysfunctional families, lack of privacy, and overcrowded spaces where many children are raised, amongst other conditions, which are common in informal settlements. From teachers' responses, this has a bearing on the violation of children's rights, compromising their safety as described in Kosher and Ben-Arieh (2020), which is a cause of learning barriers for many learners in public primary schools. In addition, most teachers in both schools indicated that they take learners to local clinics when sick. The local clinic is one of the available assets that can be accessed, and schools can network with it to provide health and well-being of learners and PSS. This is confirmed by the DBE

(2012), which states that the DoH is mandated to provide free health check-ups and vaccinations at the school level, a right for children (ISHP, 2012) to promote their health and well-being. To support the above view, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 27 (Pais et al., 2006) states that the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral, and social development be recognized. In the view of many, no child should be deprived of their human rights and dignity, and every child should feel safe and protected at home, school, and in the community. Hence, the DBE (2012) should close this gap by bringing together all relevant stakeholders in providing PSS to learners.

However, the mandate by the DBE at the district level to provide psychological support to schools and the DSD to assist with the provision of social workers was highlighted by the participants as not existing, which is also confirmed in the literature (Menziwa, 2019). In consequence, selected concepts used by teachers to explain their understanding of psychosocial challenges are supported by Drane and O'Shea (2020) and Mthimkhulu (2019), pointing out that poor living conditions harm the academic performance of many learners, including absentia from school, late coming, hunger, and uncompleted homework which is what was mentioned by some participants.

Teacher participants were all concerned about criminal activities, which can lead to hopelessness and are not conducive to raising primary school-going children in an unsafe and inhumane society (Drane & O'Shea, 2020). It can be claimed that these criminal activities can potentially expose children to illegal behavioural habits and substance use, resulting in poor academic performance. In addressing these psychosocial challenges faced by learners, collaborative provision of PSS could emphasize the value of humanity which prevails among Africans, which says, 'umuntu umuntu ngabantu.' We need one another to better our challenging situations and share our troubles as a collective.

4.2.1.1 Possible causes for psychosocial challenges encountered by learners

Possible causes of psychosocial challenges faced by many learners in selected public schools in the Umlazi district were highlighted from the one-on-one semi-structured interview conducted with participants from both schools, who were guided to speak

openly on the matter. What emerged from this sub-theme revealed a lack of emotional support from parents and school, the socio-economic challenges facing the family and community where children reside, the lack of infrastructural and financial resources by SMT to support extra-curriculum activities, and the lack of professional psychosocial support for learners. One participant responded this way:

One of the causes of psychosocial challenges many children in our school face is the lack of emotional support from home, community, and even at school. Our learners have much to discuss but need a platform or formal structure to be listened to. Children can sense emotional neglect, a challenge in their learning process (DH, SQS).

A similar response was shared by another teacher who mentioned the issue of socio-economic challenges from the family and community backgrounds of where children reside and said:

Many children in this community face socio-economic realities where they are raised. For example, many parents of the children we teach in this area are unemployed. Teachers take full responsibility for using their resources and time to support learners facing poverty-related challenges and many other issues (Class teacher, SQS).

Contrary to the DH from SVS, one teacher revealed a lack of infrastructural and financial resources from the school management team to support learners in extracurricular activities indicated as the cause. This is how the teacher expressed this:

The possible cause for psychosocial challenges faced by many children is the lack of infrastructure, financial resources, and facilities available to engage and transport children to network and explore their skills and talents in extracurricular activity events. The School Management Team (SMT) does not take extracurricular activities seriously. Hence, many children get involved in violent behaviours because they do not have other things to do except to be fed with a curriculum even when they are not coping (Class Teacher, SVS).

However, one participant blamed the DBE for not strengthening the support structures intended to assist learners who pose significant challenges. She highlighted the lack of professional psychosocial support for learners and said:

The DBE should take the blame for the psychosocial challenges learners face in the schools since the affected learners are not attended to. The DBE does not care about the psychosocial concerns of children here at school; psychosocial specialists are far from learners and the schools. They do not make things simple. The DBE is more concerned about the curriculum and coverage, while children's emotional, psychological, mental, and social well-being are neglected. (DH, SVS).

In analyzing the participants' views regarding the possible causes of psychosocial challenges faced by learners, from the responses, this was a clear sign that the lack of emotional support from home, as the primary context, was the leading cause that needed some intervention as a priority. The schools' teachers and SMTs indicated that they see themselves isolated and left to deal with much more than teaching the curriculum, which to them seemed impossible without the interventions of other stakeholders. However, while teachers were given the freedom to talk about the problems, deficiencies, and needs experienced in their schools, the positionality of this study was in no way shifting away from the concept of assets taken from the Asset-Based Approach, which is capacity-focused. According to Leaf and Ebersöhn (2001), professionals differ significantly when addressing a challenging issue, as some focus on problems, deficiencies, and needs, which is seen as a tendency of problematizing in the helping professions. On the other hand, in the same way as this study, some professionals adopt an approach focused on identifying and enhancing capacities, skills, and assets within the social systems (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993).

To add to the findings of this study, teachers confirmed an awareness of support structures for psychosocial support at the district and school level (ISHP, 2012; CSTL, 2008); however, they felt that these are not strengthened to benefit them, learners and schools, hence challenges faced. Furthermore, the lack of DBE involvement and the implementation of possible psychosocial support policies to ensure school visibility by

the Department of Education officials were cited by Patel et al. (2021) and Mwoma and Pillay (2016) as the biggest challenge. Thus, teacher participants see themselves not acting as teachers but as if they work together, recognize themselves as assets, and form CoPs. At the same time, there was the realization that schools, working together with other relevant structures, such as violent behaviours presented by learners, could be engaged in sustainable education. These findings sensitize all concerned that the assets from asset-based approaches guiding this study are bottom-up and an empowerment perspective that focuses on collaboration, dynamic partnerships, and participation (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1997). In addition, while the concept of assets in ABA partly agrees on the identification of problems, solving problems in this study focuses on creating and rebuilding relationships between individuals, associations, and institutions, as alluded by Kretzmann and McKnight (1997) and Eloff and Ebersöhn (2001). Hence, the role of PSS professionals and stakeholders within government and non-government agencies is hoped to involve helping affected teachers and learners realize, appreciate, and utilize their talents and assets. In other words, the role of professionals, in this case, the SMTs together with the DBE PSS specialists and other relevant stakeholders in this study, will provide leadership and guidance in supporting the process; as confirmed by Wenger (1998) that Communities of Practice (CoPs) are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.

4.2.1.2 The effect of psychosocial challenges on teaching and learning

Tang (2021) describes school burnout as being exhausted, unmotivated, and disengaged from school work and associated with numerous school maladjustment and mental health problems. Similarly, this sub-theme emerged during one-on-one interviews with participants. Findings were, however, concerning as they reported that the recurrence of psychosocial challenges negatively impacts teaching and learning. Participants confirmed poor performance, negative attitude towards school work, lack of concentration, learners not taking their studies seriously, and not being supervised at home as the course for concern for improved learners' academic performance. The DH said:

Part of my responsibilities as a DH is to monitor the work of teachers and learners. I do this by making regular class visits to follow up on teachers' and learners' exercise books and workbooks. It becomes clear that some learners forget about schoolwork when they get home. It has become worse now that we have load-shedding. Some have found this load-shedding issue as an excuse for doing nothing at home. Some parents come to parent meetings to discuss the progress and conduct of learners, but most parents do not come. I still do not see most parents helping us get their children involved with schoolwork at home. As a result, this impacts negatively on teaching and learning, as noted in learners' poor academic performance (DH, SVS).

The DH of SQS concurred with the DH of SVS as she further reported her point of view on this matter. She said:

:

As DH, teachers refer to me cases of ill-discipline where learners are reported misbehaving, not paying attention to teachers, being disruptive in class, not doing homework, and sometimes taking advantage of teachers as they know corporal punishment is not permitted. I see a lack of motivation from many learners. We encourage and motivate them, give pastoral support, and give them detention, but most children we teach nowadays are not on board. Also, in most cases, when I monitor classes in the morning to see if all teachers have arrived or are present at school, I get to a situation where I have to beg, calm learners down during the first class period, or remind learners to take their books and read or to do their class work (DH, SQS).

To add, most schools here in the Umlazi area have morning remedial classes before the regular school day begins, an hour for reading, and to assist learners identified as underperforming. However, when I monitor these morning classes, I find teachers have few learners as most learners do not attend school to join the early or extra reading classes in the morning. The question is, what do we do with the situation? (DH, SVS).

Findings in this study indicated that teachers cited many psychosocial challenges on learners they teach, affecting teaching and learning. The findings confirmed a lack of

supervision at home, ill-discipline, and a lack of motivation at school. This is confirmed by Otu et al. (2023), who state that psychosocial challenges leading to poor academic performance and disruptive behaviours affect teaching and learning. The findings indicated that some teachers, especially in SMT, have exhausted all avenues to stay on point with the curriculum. The Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM) (2016), a policy document issued by DBE, stipulates teachers' employment terms and conditions according to their ranking. In addition, the performance standards of teachers, according to the PAM (2016) document, are monitored and evaluated quarterly by the Quality Management Systems (QMS) (2020) to ensure teachers' accountability and quality teaching. As a result, teachers always keep up with their teaching standards as a set. Namome et al. (2021) believe that teachers should not only be expected to stay up-to-date with the curriculum but also be empowered to help learners deal with psychosocial challenges as they strive to complete the academic curriculum, hence the need for and understand ways to provide PSS and visibility in all public schools.

4.2.3 The nature of psychosocial support services in public schools

Findings that arose from this theme were from interviews and FGDs with all participants. The findings indicate that all participants fully understood PSS as a concept. The literature defines psychosocial support as the care provided to children and teachers who have additional mental and social needs as a result of having experienced trauma in their lives, such as extreme poverty, the loss of a parent or caregiver, illness or death of a close family member, or exposure to violence (DBE, 2008). Correspondingly, some participants understood the nature of PSS as professional support rendered to an emotionally, spiritually, psychologically, financially, and physically challenged person. Teachers from SVS and SQS explained the following:

Psychosocial support service is professional support rendered to a person who is emotionally, spiritually, psychologically, financially, and physically challenged (LOT, SVS).

I understand PSS as a service for preventing stress, depression, and anxiety. For example, when people go through a harsh experience, they become stressed and depressed and can be assisted by PSS to feel better (LOT, SQS).

One of the class teachers expressed the qualities of a person who could provide PSS and said:

PSS can be provided by patient, kind, passionate, and caring people. In my understanding, people who provide this service do not share what you share with others unless you permit them to do that. Instead, PSS specialists are comforting and motivating (Class Teacher, SVS).

Equally, the LOT shared similar views about who should provide PSS. She shared that:

PSS can be provided by trained people, such as a psychologist, counsellor, social worker, and other professionals, who can keep issues discussed in counselling sessions confidential (LOT, SQS).

In contrast, the DHs explained PSS as a service directed to someone to make that individual feel different in a better way than before said:

Psychosocial support is a service that makes other people feel supported and cared for, where they encourage people to feel good about themselves despite whatever problem they face (DH, SQS).

PSS require a person who will give attention and time to support those needing this support and counselling. We provide limited support at school because we have to teach most of the day (DH, SVS).

Similarly, some participants felt that providing PSS is a specialized service, which, as teachers, they lack. They responded thus:

PSS is the best fit for people who are passionate about what they do. For example, we give pastoral support to our learners, but it is not enough because

we do not have time dedicated since counselling is a specialized service. We teach and are expected to teach and finish the curriculum on time. Psychosocial support needs a dedicated person for this work, like trained psychologists (DH, SQS).

Psychosocial specialists such as psychologists, counsellors, and social workers should use schools as practical sites for their profession to reach children or learners who need support. They should not be far from the schools; a lot is happening that needs their attention. Them being in schools could assist in improving the behaviour of learners and prevent behavioural problems and dysfunctions of many learners (Class Teacher, SQS).

I see PSS as a specialized service that should not engage teachers with issues of children due to their lack of competence and the risk of mistreatment. Specialists should be available in schools and make frequent visits. Teachers can only help with referrals where needed (Class Teacher, SVS).

In analyzing participants' understanding of and views on providing PSS, participants were closely related to how they understood it as a concept. The participants from both SVS and SQS appeared interested in the matter and clearly understood the concept and what it entails. This is evidenced by how some participants responded in their understanding of psychosocial support, which they viewed as a professional support service provided by trained people such as psychologists, counsellors, social workers, and other professionals. The American Psychological Association's (APA) (2007) definition of psychosocial support confirms the participants' responses in their views as it explains the term as describing a range of services offered by mental health professionals, including psychologists, social workers, and pastoral counsellors, among others, to those in pressing need. This explanation of psychosocial support services by APA (2007) confirms that this kind of service can be effective when provided by the proper specialists in this field. Participants also had suggestions on what PSS will do to an individual, including preventing stress, depression, and anxiety emanating from contextual factors. This tells us that PSS are designed to help individuals cope with a severe illness or alleviate distress in communities affected by a disaster, and such services may range from mental health counselling, psycho-

education, and group support to spiritual support and other assistance (APA, 2007; El-Khodary et al., 2021 & Twinamatsiko, 2021).

On the other hand, participant teachers saw themselves as potential assets that could be developed and capacitated to provide psychosocial support to learners. One teacher even confirmed that they do some pastoral care, which is insufficient because they are not trained (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). El-Khodary et al. (2021) confirm this finding in their study that teachers need more knowledge and training in psychosocial support. They currently see their skills as limited. However, they could recognize their talents, skills, capacities, and resources available by providing psychosocial support. On the other hand, the theoretical framework guiding this study, the theory of Communities of Practice coined by Lave and Wenger (2004), as emphasized in COPs, community members, including the schools, should engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information. Participants' understanding of psychosocial challenges, psychosocial support services (PSS), and the need meant that the schools should be at the centre of minimizing these psychosocial challenges (Eloff & Ebersöhn, 2001; Wenger, 1998).

The findings suggest that there is a need for intervention but that schools should not wait for professionals (Ntshuntshe & Mathwasa, 2022; Valiente et al., 2020) but work on creating a conducive environment for children's cognitive, emotional, and social development.

4.2.2.1 The provision of psychosocial support services in selected schools

The following findings were generated from FGD. Participants shared various views regarding the nature and the provision of learners' psychosocial support services (PSS) in both selected schools. One participant expressed their experiences of PSS in this way:

In my long years of service and teaching in this school, there has never been a visit by a psychologist or even one specialist from DoE PSS. Our learners do not receive any professional psychosocial support service, be it screening or counselling (DH, SVS).

The DBE should ensure that formal structures for PSS are active in all public schools; instead, the DBE Special Needs Education Services (SNES) is more focused on the learning barriers of children who are mostly already accommodated in special schools (LSEN) and capacitate the majority of teachers who are in LSEN (DH, SVS).

Sometimes, once in a while or twice a year, SNES would invite DHs to attend workshops that last only four (4) hours based on SIAS, focusing on identifying learners with learning barriers at the Foundation Phase level (DH, SVS).

In support of the views above, the class teacher indicated the nature of interventions they give as teachers. She said:

As teachers, one of the conditions of our job is to provide pastoral support to learners. We pray together every morning, hoping children learn what is morally correct because most are getting out of the line. Sometimes, we rarely invite church leaders and NGOs to talk to learners (Class teacher, SQS).

When a need arises, we briefly talk to those who misbehave. Unfortunately, the behaviour does not change instantly, and problems continue. Moreover, we are left hanging as our support system is not sustainable (Class teacher, SVS).

On the other hand, the LOT expressed the importance of psychosocial support services, relating her explanation from the perspective of the LO curriculum:

As a LOT and a Life Skills teacher in both phases here at school, the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) document on Life Orientation and Life Skills does not emphasize the psychosocial support available for learners. However, we engage children through various sports activities despite lacking recreational facilities as part of psychosocial support (LOT, SQS).

She added how engaging learners in sports is supposed to be according to the LO curriculum:

We involve them in netball, athletics, soccer, cultural dance, and music to boost their self-confidence and keep them motivated, engaged, and emotionally balanced. Other learners are members of the scout movement, where they are groomed to develop self-confidence and leadership skills (LOT, SVS).

In addition, the same teacher cited other activities that they do to engage learners in the school as part of the intervention:

We also encourage learners to do poems, story writing, and story-telling to develop public speaking skills, help them find a lesson from that story, and teach others. Our learners also sing and enter music competitions to showcase and discover their talents. We engage learners in these activities to keep them occupied and away from trouble (LOT, SVS).

Equally, teachers confirmed their understanding of the provision to provide psychosocial support to learners, which is something they sometimes do out of concern and good heart. The class teacher expressed herself this way:

Sometimes, we play a parental role in learning. We buy school uniforms, shoes, and clothes. Occasionally, we request them to spend the weekend in our homes with our children. (Class teacher, SQS).

Similarly, school-based committees (SBCs) also play a part in providing psychosocial support services. She explained their initiatives to intervene in this way:

We do not have experts, but we have established school-based committees. These include a school governing body, a safety committee, a disciplinary committee, an Orphaned and Vulnerable Children (OVC) committee, and the School Based Support Team (SBST) committee, which deals with basic counselling and assisting parents to enrol their children identified as having learning barriers such as a slow learner and those with ADHD to Special (LSEN) schools or a neighboring Full Service School (DH, SQS).

The LOT shared how listening to children as one of the provisions of the PPS is essential and was supported by DH, who explained how this could be possible if there were support from DBE. They expressed this:

We take care of and support children by listening to them. However, it could be better to have counselling personnel stationed in schools or at the circuit office who will visit all schools frequently and talk to learners (LOT, SQS).

Recently, the DBE appointed Educator Assistants (EAs) in public schools. The DBE also allocated our school with EAs on a one-year contract. Some of the EAs placed for psychosocial support in schools are not qualified as psychologists and counsellors to the point that we, as teachers, guide them using our own experience (DH, SQS).

The children's rights are enshrined in the Republic of South Africa Constitution, Chapter 2, Bill of Rights (1996), and guaranteed care and social assistance. Participants in all levels indicated that they do something to support learners but felt they lacked capacity. It was interesting to notice what and how the LO and Life Skills teachers have become assets in these two skills. Their knowledge of the curriculum keeps teaching, learning, and support for parents and learners going. Findings also revealed the involvement of teachers in school-based committees established as part of psychosocial interventions; however, these committees have been working in isolation from each other. The South African Schools Act (SASA) (1996) supports school-based committees and stipulates that the governance of a public school is vested in its governing body.

Participants indicated the school governing body as one of the school-based structures assisting the school's affairs. Thus, to enhance, revive, and channel these structures in the right direction, collaborating these school-based structures with relevant PSS stakeholders to address the psychosocial challenges learners face is advisable (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Ciampa & Wolfe, 2023; Mthimkhulu, 2019). However, findings also highlighted some complaints about the treatment of mainstream public schools and those for learners with special needs taking

precedence. Participants felt that education and psychosocial support should be provided to all learners and all schools 'equally' by DBE (Fitzgerald et al., 2021; Phuong et al., 2021; Hove & Phasha, 2023; Lebona, 2023; Nembambula et al., 2023) as they do not seem to be reaching all public primary schools to help teachers deal with many learners' psychosocial challenges. In addition, their service is more focused on Special Education Needs schools (LSEN schools) and Full-Service Schools (FSS), leaving the mainstream public primary schools burdened by the psychosocial challenges faced by many learners.

4.2.3 Challenging factors experienced in the provision of learners' psychosocial support services

Literature defines psychosocial support as an ongoing process of meeting emotional, social, mental, and spiritual needs, all considered essential elements of meaningful and positive human development (Hlalele et al., 2020 & Hlalele, 2012). The findings below indicate that most participants expressed different views on this issue. However, some of the participants revealed that the challenges experienced in the provision of learners' PSS were the non-visits of DBE PSS psychologists in selected public primary schools, the non-training of teachers on matters of PSS, the lack of recreational resources and facilities that can engage and occupy learners as well as the lack of teacher –learner-parent relationships. This was confirmed by one teacher who said:

One day I took a learner to the clinic, was immediately referred to the hospital, and the doctor confirmed the child to have been raped on several occasions. I phoned a parent to join me at the hospital, but that mother never came. I was asked to open the case to SAPS and started attending a Court Case. I used my petrol. It became my responsibility and my time. One day, that mother came to school with her skirts up, insulting me for interfering with her child. I stopped going to court. I left that case like that (Class Teacher, SVS).

While the Class Teachers perceived the challenges experienced in the provision of learners' PSS as a struggle, they expressed their frustration like this:

There is a lack of teacher-learner-parent relationships. Most parents do not want to be involved in their children's learning. They leave all responsibilities to us. We have many learners in classes, and it is not easy to give attention and meet the individual needs of each learner (Class Teacher, SQS).

One big challenge we experience is the non-visits of the DBE psychologists in our schools to provide talks and counselling to learners. The challenge around PSS is that this service is inequitable because not all public schools are provided with this service (LO, SVS).

We have never been trained on psychosocial support interventions. The issues facing our learners are deep-rooted. Our learners need ongoing professional psychosocial support to deal with their problems. If we were trained, knowing what to do would be much easier (LO, SQS).

Highlighting his role, the DHs highlighted their concern about the lack of resources in schools and said:

As much as I know what is expected of me as a DH, one, among other things, is to support teachers and learners; however, the biggest challenge is that our school has no facilities such as libraries and computer labs to engage and prevent our learners from being influenced by bad habits (DH, SQS).

We need recreational facilities such as sports grounds here at school to keep our learners from getting into trouble. Sometimes, teachers walk with learners to community sports grounds, a distance from our school, for Physical Education (sports) and when preparing for school sports competitions (DH, SVS).

The findings exposed the need for more human and physical resources to provide PSS in selected public schools. This is evidenced in their responses, where most participants highlighted the non-visit of DBE PSS psychologists in both schools. This finding is confirmed by Mwoma and Pillay (2016), who stated that without proper counselling structures for children in public primary schools, vulnerable children are

unlikely to handle the challenges they encounter, which affect their academic performance. This finding necessitates an urgent need for the visibility of DBE psychologists responsible for PSS in selected and other public primary schools in the Umlazi district.

Furthermore, findings noted concerns regarding the non-training to empower teachers on PSS. This finding is supported by Zulu et al. (2020), who suggested that teachers should be trained on PSS before providing PSS to learners because they are immediate supervisors during school hours. The study conducted by Zulu et al. (2020) illustrates how a Teachers' Diploma on Psychosocial Care and Support for teachers, which aimed to assist teachers in counselling learners who experienced psychosocial challenges, improved learners' well-being and school performance. They stated that three years after implementing this program, the results showed that the training yielded significant positive changes among teachers. Teachers were reported to have improved how they dealt with learners as they became more approachable and committed and avoided corporal punishment. Children who received PSS said it benefitted them tremendously, reducing bullying and absenteeism, and increasing enrollment. Hence, it is the basis of teacher capacity through which the myriads of these psychosocial challenges can be addressed. With the lack of training of teachers on PSS, we may see a growing number of poor academic performances, absenteeism, dropouts, and increasing destructive behaviours in classrooms caused by learners.

The underlying propositions in the Community of Practice Theory by Wenger and Lave (2004), guiding this study stipulate that the collaboration of all stakeholders could bring all sectors together where they can work together to provide what is needed. Participants suggested that the DBE psychologists be at the forefront to drive several interventions such as home visits, which can address the lack of teacher-learner-parent relationships, community education, information exchange, referral networks with all stakeholders to support learners, the family, the school, and the wider community (Patel et al., 2021). Community of Practices (CoPs) can be done virtually for learning, support, continuing professional education, knowledge, and information sharing (McLoughlin et al., 2018), which could be a proper channel to train teachers online on PSS. On the other hand, the concept of assets drawn from the conceptual framework in Asset Based Approach framing this study could employ tangible assets

such as vacant land, buildings, properties and tangible assets such as human skills and services (Chidakwa, 2021) to address the psychosocial challenges under this study. While findings suggested that the DBE psychologists should be involved and be visible, their absence in many public primary schools contradicts their roles stated in various legislations and policies, which include CSTL (2014) and ISHP (2012), and the EWP6 (DOE, 2001)) which highlight the importance of PSS to be provided by the DBE and other stakeholders such as the DoH, the DSD and the DSAC, to name the few.

4.2.4 Possible effective psychosocial support interventions to address learners' psychosocial challenges

Theme four evolved from the FGD, where psychosocial interventions needed to address psychosocial challenges faced by learners were discussed. The generated data showed participants indicating a dire need for emotional, spiritual, mental, and social support for learners in mainstream public primary schools and appropriate skills by teachers to address these psychosocial challenges learners face. To confirm these opinions, the sub-themes below are displayed:

4.2.4.1 Professional psychosocial support required for learners

Most participants highlighted a need for various psychosocial support programs for learners affected by psychosocial challenges in their schools. One participant stated as follows:

The DBE must employ or allocate more psychologists, professional counsellors, social workers, and therapists for mainstream public primary schools to develop their programs and provide counselling to address the psychosocial challenges faced by children in our schools. Learners need the presence of psychosocial support specialists in public schools (Class teacher, SVS).

Stakeholders such as the SAPS, Community Safety Forums, Ward Councilors, and Police Forums in the area should be visible and join the PSS team in helping learners in our schools. The SAPS can assist with safety issues

affecting learners, such as how learners can defend themselves from attacks and gangsters formed by some of the learners in Grades 5-7 these days. We have cases of learners who have dropped out of school in fear of these young gangsters who wait for them outside school after school and sometimes during school hours (LOT, SQS).

The DH expressed the need for joint development of programs and said:

Relevant stakeholders from government departments and NGOs must be visible in our schools to assist learners and the school-based support team (SBST) in detecting the causes of these psychosocial challenges and give counselling and support where needed. The Department of Health (DoH) is on board; they come every week to immunize our learners, and the Department of Sports and Recreation (DSR) organizes school sports activities for learners (DH, SQS).

The LOT, understanding what LO focuses on, which is the development of an individual socially, culturally, emotionally, and spiritually, felt the need to include all these relevant stakeholders and said the following:

Church Pastors partly support children emotionally and spiritually. The best way to address these issues is to return to Religious Education. This could prevent cultural clashes due to diverse upbringings. The morals of many learners are lost, and learners do as they please (LO, SVS).

Participants noted that a lack of professional psychosocial support services for learners contributes to poor academic performance. The findings also revealed the allocation of DBE psychosocial support specialists in all public primary schools as a priority. These findings are supported by the Integrated School Health Policy (ISHP) (2012), which highlights the role of stakeholders like the DBE, which is mandated to provide psychological support to schools; the DSD is required to assist with the provision of social workers, and the DoH is mandated to provide free health check-ups and vaccinations at school level (ISHP, 2012). However, the DBE and DSD do not seem active in most mainstream public primary schools, as learners need more

professional psychosocial support (Sitienei & Pillay, 2019; Menziwa, 2019). The findings also revealed a need for public schools to return to Religious Education as participants noted morals on learners diminishing and do as they please, carrying the banner that corporal punishment is not an option for teachers to address them. To support this idea of teachers regarding religious education, the Constitution of South Africa, in the Bill of Rights (1996), stipulates that children should not be denied their right to form, join, and maintain cultural and religious associations.

The South African Schools Act (SASA) (1996) also emphasizes that religious observances may be conducted at a public school under rules issued by the governing body. However, due to cultural clashes between parents and SGBs, some schools are no longer observing or not approving religious observances in other public schools in the Umlazi district, which results in a lack of morals and cultural clashes among learners and teachers. The concept of assets drawn from Asset Based Approach in Barba et al. (2019) study proposes an ABA consultation model that combines instructional consultation and the cultural assets intervention framework tailored to support school psychologists as they consult with teachers on how to best address academic, social, and emotional and cultural needs of newcomer learners in an increasing diverse language landscape of Xhosa, Sotho, Zulu, English, Afrikaans languages in KZN, in particular is also adding on language barriers which result in poor performance of many learners.

4.2.4.2 Psychosocial support training for teachers

Intervention programs, such as training programs for teachers on psychosocial support for children in schools, play an essential role in education (El-Khodary et al., 2021). Findings revealed a need for specialized teacher training on psychosocial support services for learners. Furthermore, findings highlighted a need for long-term teacher training to equip them with relevant knowledge for supporting learners. Moreover, when teachers are skilled in these matters, learners may feel encouraged to talk about their psychosocial challenges to teachers. Some of the teachers shared their opinions and said:

A one-year training on PSS can equip teachers enough to address the psychosocial challenges learners face. Two-hour workshops seldom provided by SNES focusing on learning barriers and curriculum differentiation are not what we are presenting. Our concerns are about the psychosocial challenges learners face, which negatively impact learners' academic progress. These psychosocial challenges are on the rise. However, little is done to assist learners (Class teacher, SVS).

The DH had another opinion on this matter. She highlighted the following:

DBE PSS programs should form part of subsidizing professional development for in-service teachers (DH, SVS).

In contrast, the LOT shared her perspective and said:

Recruiting unemployed Social Workers in mainstream public schools could benefit children because social workers have a background in psychosocial issues (LOT, SVS).

Most participants pointed out the need for teachers to be capacitated on psychosocial support services (PSS) due to a lack of skills in addressing learners' psychosocial challenges. This is evidenced in the theory of Communities of Practice (CoPs) coined by Lave and Wenger (1991), which emphasizes a collective learning process. In this case, teachers can engage with policies and improve context-based interventions to provide adequate psychosocial support to learners. Participants also brought up the lack of opportunities for professional teacher development on PSS. These findings are confirmed by Saka (2021), who described the quality of teachers in many underdeveloped countries as discouraging due to inadequate capacity building of teachers by the DBE, which does not put enough effort into improving the situation to provide teachers with career-long professional development through a wide range of programs and multiple pathways to update their knowledge and skills. Hence, providing such could address the psychosocial challenges many learners face, negatively impacting teaching and learning. Findings also indicated a need for recruiting unemployed Social Workers in mainstream public schools because they

have a background knowledge of psychosocial issues. These findings are confirmed in the study by Buysse et al. (2003) titled Communities of Practice: 'Connecting What We Know with What We Do', which states that Communities of Practice is a framework for supporting professional growth.

4.2.4.3. Parental engagement and other stakeholders as assets for psychosocial support services

The Norms and Standard for Educators (DBE, 2000) stipulates that teachers must develop supportive relations with parents and other key persons and organizations based on a critical understanding of community and environmental development issues. Hence, participants strongly viewed parental engagement and other stakeholders as one of the interventions that could assist in addressing the psychosocial challenges learners face, which could result in the academic achievement and well-being of these learners. One participant said:

As DH, I think we need to be very independent and learn to mobilize community members and stakeholders and a group of volunteers of parents within the community who can engage children in the community after school hours with academic matters and help them with homework. This could result in learners' high academic performance. As teachers, we can produce proud learners (DH, SVS).

Similarly, another participant added:

Mobilizing parents and local people who can get involved in mentoring and monitoring learners during breaks could be a good idea because learners get scared during school breaks and end up getting into trouble (LTO, SVS).

This could also assist us as teachers in having disciplined and organized learners because parents would follow up on children even during school hours (Class teacher, SQS).

In addition to this issue, the DH shared her experience and said:

One of my responsibilities as a DH is meeting with parents quarterly. I think I need to encourage parents to get more involved since learners are getting out

of hand. Engaging parents on school matters could make things more progressive if we work together. (DH, SQS).

The LTO expressed the following:

I believe that this community has the resources that parents, community members, and other stakeholders can mobilize for extra-curricular activities. This could assist our learners to feel good about themselves and cope academically, mentally, and socially. All burdens can be lifted from our shoulders when we know that we are assisted by parents (LTO, SQS).

The DH said:

I can volunteer by using my time on weekends to meet parents and learners for various activities here at school. Maybe we can teach each other to knit or start our vegetable garden which is left abandoned because we do not find time during the week. We can also use our time to play soccer and run and read books to keep learners occupied. We can sit under the tree without going into classrooms (DH, SQS).

The LOT added:

I can also make time on weekends and bring a karate boys team from the community who can share and teach the young boys karate. I can take a group of learners for running or jogging around the school to keep them occupied because I am an athlete and I do not find time during the week, I teach until the last period (LOT, SQS).

Findings revealed that teachers were concerned about learners left unsupervised on weekends and exposed to abuse; as a result, teachers were tired of waiting for unfilled promises by the DBE. They had taken it upon themselves to mobilize community members and stakeholders and a group of volunteers of parents who could use their time, skills and talents to keep learners occupied on weekends. This finding is confirmed by Astbury et al. (2021), who encourage local people to recognize and nurture the strengths of individuals, families, and communities by helping them build independence and self-reliance rather than waiting for unfulfilled promises of government. The findings also found one participant willing to sacrifice his time and

volunteer on weekends to take a group of learners running or jogging around the school to keep them occupied. This finding is supported by Ladson-Billings (2007), who states that ABA focuses on appreciating and recognizing the strengths of individuals and communities rather than emphasizing challenges and disadvantages.

This finding also indicated that the community has the resources that parents, community members, and other stakeholders can mobilize for extra-curricular activities, and this could assist our learners to feel good about themselves. This finding is confirmed by (Eloff & Ebersöhn, 2001), who believed that the community become more linked and able to contribute to existing community services and resources. This finding is supported by Flint and Jagers (2021), who view teachers and learners as assets in a school setting to work together, to be responsible for each other, and not depend on anyone to solve their problems but value the contributions of everyone. Benenson and Stagg (2016) also viewed volunteering as a beneficial asset to be encouraged in public schools.

Parental engagement is not possible without the involvement of other stakeholders; hence, findings indicated that parental engagement and other stakeholders within the community could address learners' psychosocial challenges. Hence, participants' responses varied, as some teachers suggested volunteers of parents and other community members who could help children with extra-curricular activities after school, on weekends, and during school holidays. Myende (2017 & 2014) allude that individuals and groups in the community, regardless of their context, have capacities and strengths to address their societal challenges.

These findings are also confirmed in the performance standards of DHs in the ELRC Collective Agreement Number 2 of the Quality Management System (QMS) (2020), which emphasizes one of the DHs' responsibilities in Curriculum Management to include consulting stakeholders. Hence, parental engagement and other stakeholders are among the psychosocial interventions that can be enhanced to address learners' psychosocial challenges. The findings also revealed these views as doable mainly when integrating them with the theory of Community of Practice (CoPs) by Lave and Wenger (1998), which confirms the collaboration of stakeholders in various ways, including the use of virtual communities of practice (Shaw et al., 2022).

Findings found that participants emphasize that engaging parents and other stakeholders to involve learners in reading activities on weekends could assist in addressing poor performance, which is a contributing factor to psychosocial challenges faced by many learners. Chidakwa (2021) and Benson and Stagg (2016) confirm that public schools, teachers, learners and local people could be mobilized to become assets. Shokane and Nel (2020) confirm that communities recognize their strengths when they understand what they have rather than what they need. For that reason, findings noted that there is a need to engage parents and other stakeholders so that they can also contribute to addressing the psychosocial challenges many learners face in the school community.

The Asset-Based Approach (ABA) emphasizes that assets within the social systems can address the deficiencies by creating and building relationships between individuals, communities, associations, and institutions. Thus, for participants to recognize the engagement of parents and stakeholders as another form of psychosocial intervention, it was found legitimate in this study to address the psychosocial challenges faced by many learners, and it also confirms the objectives of this study.

4.2.4.3 Teacher collaborations or communities of practices

Teacher collaboration in education is referred to as teachers' experiences of exchanging ideas and information with their colleagues and their opportunities for learning from each other (Coban et al., 2023). On the other hand, Patel et al. (2021) defined CoPs as a multi-sectoral and inter-disciplinary collaboration between academic researchers, practitioners, and governmental and non-governmental agencies. The findings support what the literature confirms and what most participants understood as forming part of teacher collaborations from the perspective of Communities of Practice (CoPs). A few participants viewed church, parents, and SGBs as significant in forming part of teacher collaborations as an intervention for addressing learners' psychosocial challenges. Some of the teachers shared their opinions and said:

I wish to indicate a need for more awareness about the importance of teacher collaborations in our schools. We can learn a lot from each other by collaborating as teachers and adding stakeholders who are experts in PSS. We can extend our teacher collaboration to other teachers outside the schools and bring learners, parents, institutions and other assets available in the school community to serve as a community of practice. By doing that, we can learn how to address our learners' psychosocial challenges (Class teacher, SQS).

In addition, we can also collaborate as teachers to discuss and share remedial activities for addressing psychosocial challenges facing learners that negatively impact the academic performance of many learners. Doing so allows us to find a solution without waiting for PSS specialists to come to us. We can learn from each other's experiences how each deals with such cases successfully. I think community members, parents, SAPS, community safety forums, ward councilors, police forums and, church pastors, schools, churches, local libraries, community halls, local sports grounds, local clinics, local higher education institutions, local police stations, local government departments offices, local private sector and other community stakeholders can be brought in (LOT, SQS).

The DHs, because of their management experience, including teaching experience, highlighted some challenges but emphasized the need to enhance teacher collaborations. They highlighted the following:

Teacher collaborations have existed for a long time; it is just that they are focused on the curriculum, such as subject committees and cluster meetings. Most teachers have been working in isolation when dealing with cases of learners who face psychosocial challenges. So, I suggest teacher collaborations to address psychosocial challenges, and this should start with teachers of the same school who will involve professional stakeholders to help improve many learners' psychosocial well-being and academic performance (DH, SQS).

Moreover, in my observations, teacher collaborations have been that in these platforms, teachers do not go deep into sharing about the psychosocial challenges or the causes of poor academic performance of learners. Using Teachers' Resource centres, known as Education centers, teachers meet for one-time workshops, which is not enough. I would suggest topics of psychosocial support in teacher collaborations be enhanced at the school level by the teachers of that particular school (DH, SVS).

In contrast, the LOT shared her perspective and said:

I think teacher collaborations should include teachers, psychologists, nurses, social workers, mental health practitioners, police officers, professional counsellors and nurses (LOT, SVS)

The class teacher felt that conversations and open dialogues about psychosocial challenges and support are critical. She expressed herself this way:

The teacher dialogue on psychosocial support services and psychosocial challenges learners face needs to be improved. We can channel the discussion on psychosocial challenges faced by learners and the psychosocial support required. In that case, we can all speak the same language, avoid working in isolation, and learn from one another (Class teacher, SVS).

Most participants viewed teacher collaborations as possible if continued daily to empower teachers on psychosocial support for learners so that they cannot wait for DBE PSS specialists to come and solve the psychosocial problems. It was attractive that, at first, most teachers felt it was their responsibility to form these collaborations, and noticing commonalities, participants suggested that working in clusters as schools might assist them in learning from each other.

One participant suggested using open dialogues where people are encouraged to engage with issues such as PSS and not only curriculum issues, and these should be led by the School Management Teams (SMTs) and PSS specialists. Teachers saw the importance of structuring collaborations as beneficial if teachers are prepared to sacrifice their time for the benefit of learners and their schools and work as a collective

from the same school or outside the school, sharing organized activities about different situations (De Jong et al., 2022). One teacher highlighted bringing in other stakeholders in the community, including parents, as pivotal in understanding psychosocial challenges holistically; hence, PSS is to be rendered. This collaborative network emphasizes that a group of people come together to share certain practices and jointly negotiate the meaning of and ascribe value to these practices, come out with solutions to their problems, and become assets themselves (Wenger, 1998; Krzwoszynska, 2019).

One participant felt that teacher collaborations should include teachers, psychologists, nurses, social workers, mental health practitioners, police officers, professional counsellors and nurses because they share similar professions or are involved in similar fields. This finding is supported by Patel et al. (2021), who view CoPs as a multi-sectoral and inter-disciplinary collaboration between academic researchers, practitioners, and governmental and non-governmental agencies who share a common concern.

Saka (2021) emphasizes that teacher collaboration activities begin at the school level, where teachers can share knowledge and skills relevant to the learners and exchange ideas to assist one another in improving the quality of learners' psychosocial well-being and not working in isolation. Participants, especially DHs expressed that teacher collaborations had long been in existence; only the concern was that teachers worked in silos and focused more on curriculum. However, currently, times have changed at homes, schools, and communities, hence the need to include these topics as collaborations can take all kinds of situations, with or without colleagues, in and outside school, and in formal activities and work-based cases, leading to a change of cognition or behaviour in learners (De Jong et al., 2022).

It became clear to all participants' discussions that teacher collaborative activities such as one-time workshops, parent meetings, and teacher dialogues had in the past become ineffective because teachers need time to develop new knowledge by absorbing, discussing, and practicing. Interestingly, what was key is that participants suggested that they should not wait for DBE specialists even though their presence would capacitate them. They felt this would be the best opportunity for parents to meet with social workers and psychologists rather than engaging with teachers only. The

emphasis is on a school environment with a unique combination of assets and capacities based on the individuals' strengths, skills, and talents, not weaknesses and problems.

4.5 Chapter summary

Data presented, analyzed and interpreted in this chapter addressed the objectives based on teachers' understanding of the concept of psychosocial challenges, the nature of psychosocial support services in selected public schools, challenging factors in providing learners' psychosocial support services and possible effective PSS interventions. Therefore, findings from this review have also been discussed under the same main heading indicated above. The next chapter presents the study summary, conclusions, recommendations, and conclusions based on the research questions posed in chapter one and on the findings of the study.

CHAPTER FIVE

STUDY SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed and looked at the results of this study gained from one-on-one semi-structured interviews and focus-group discussions (FGDs). After carefully considering the data generated, firm and vital decisions were developed based on the questions in the introductory chapter. Based on the findings outlined in chapter four, this chapter summarizes and presents the conclusions and recommendations made after revisiting the findings from chapter four and the interpretations of the conclusions.

5.2 Study summary

This qualitative research aimed to understand the forms of psychosocial support services provided to learners in selected public schools in the Umlazi district and to enhance such services.

Chapter One operated as an introductory chapter and delivered the background and purpose of the study. The chapter also provided the details for undertaking the study through the presentation of the problem statement, rationale, and significance of the study. This research study aimed to provide the Intermediate and Senior Phase departmental heads, Life Orientation teachers, and class teachers the freedom to express themselves by answering questions and discussing their understanding of the forms of psychosocial support services provided to learners in public schools and to enhance such services. In chapter one, the following were also offered: the study's objectives, key research questions, delimitations, and key concepts used in the study, as well as the structure of the entire study.

Chapter Two presented a literature review, theoretical and conceptual frameworks, and the basis alongside which the results of this research were assessed. The literature review showed a piece of related information regarding an understanding of psychosocial challenges faced by learners in public primary schools contexts in

regional and global countries; the contributing factors to psychosocial challenges faced by learners, the nature of psychosocial support services in public schools, challenges related to the provision of learners' psychosocial support services to learners, possible effective psychosocial support interventions to address psychosocial challenges learners face. In addition, chapter two detailed the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that framed the study: the theory of Communities of Practice and the concept of assets drawn from the Asset -Based Approach.

Chapter Three clarified the research design and the approach of the research. This study was rooted within the interpretive paradigm. In this chapter, I implemented a qualitative research approach and engaged in a case study of two public primary schools in the Umlazi district, emphasizing the Intermediate and Senior Phases (grades 4-7). A purposive selection method was used to choose the participants, which employed qualitative data generation methods, including one-on-one structured interviews and focus-group discussions with two departmental heads, two Life Orientation teachers, and two class teachers from both schools. Relevant ethical considerations and issues of trustworthiness were also deliberated on in this chapter.

Chapter Four analysed and discussed the research findings obtained through the data generation methods outlined in Chapter Three. The organization of this chapter aligned with the themes and sub-themes identified from the data, aiming to address the research questions and objectives. The analysis revealed four key themes derived from the data generation process. These encompassed teachers' comprehension of psychosocial challenges, the characteristics of psychosocial support services in public primary schools, obstacles encountered in delivering psychosocial support services to learners in primary schools, and potential effective interventions to tackle learners' psychosocial challenges. Hence, these were interpreted in the light of the verbatim shown above, the literature reviews and through the theories guiding this study.

5.3 Conclusions

The following part of this chapter outlines the conclusions derived from the investigation of research questions in this study, phrased as, what types of psychosocial support services are offered to learners in selected public schools within

the Umlazi District? And how could different forms of psychosocial support services for learners be enhanced in selected public schools in the Umlazi District?

5.3.1. Teachers' understanding of psychosocial support

The findings revealed that most participants had a diverse understanding of psychosocial challenges. Most of their responses were aligned with the negative experiences that learners from their schools face. It emerged from the interviews and FGDs that some teacher participants had understood psychosocial challenges as predominantly associated with harsh and threatening living conditions, lack of privacy at home, dysfunctional families characterized by domestic violence and all various forms of abuse as confirmed by literature as well (Thwala et al., 2021; Setlhare et al., 2016; Segalo & Rambuda, 2018). However, unlike in the USA, the studies in SA and the Sub-Saharan cited mainly harsh conditions based on poverty which are the causes of the psychosocial challenges. It was evident from the findings of this study that psychosocial challenges are mainly context-based. This was also evident in USA studies that while in Africa we are more concerned about escaping poverty and residing in disadvantaged contexts, their challenges are mainly about the behaviour of their children and how they punish them and parenting styles (Gracia et al., 2020; Gershoff & Bitensky, 2007; Skelton & Veriavaa 2019).

Some participants perceived learners as potentially exposed to psychosocial challenges on their way to and from school and the community. In this way, participants viewed psychosocial challenges as associated with community violence, criminal activities, substance use, and natural disasters including heavy rains, floods, and thunderstorms. The lack of emotional, parental, and relative support, including neglect, lack of supervision, and lack of support due to some parents working far away, divorced, separated or deceased, were revealed as signs of psychosocial challenges which all are characteristic of underdeveloped societies and countries. Lastly, findings on teachers' understanding of psychosocial challenges indicated that psychosocial challenges negatively impact teaching and learning. However, solving individual schools' psychosocial challenges could only be conquered by learning to mobilise assets (Chidakwa, 2021; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; Scott et al., 2020) as proposed

by the ABA and to form interdisciplinary CoPs (Patel et al., 2021; McDonald & Mercieca, 2021).

5.3.2 The nature of psychosocial support services in selected public schools

Participants from both schools understood the nature of PSS as specialized professional support that should be rendered by a specialist to an emotionally, spiritually, psychologically, financially, and physically challenged person. However, acknowledgement of inequality in the provision of PSS was viewed by the majority of participants as prime in public schools and, if available only was found focusing on particular schools. Interestingly, some teacher participants indicated that they had taken this service upon their shoulders, which they found to be adding extra responsibilities on their side but added this voluntary work as a needed call for them as teachers. On top of that, their understanding that the government in the country and the DBE cannot provide for all schools, teachers and learners equally (Myende, 2015; Chikoko & Myende, 2014), they should mobilize assets that are at their disposal, like using pastors from nearby churches for counselling, networking with police services, social workers and clinics and also influential community members. The purpose is to enhance the wellbeing of learners such that they see themselves belonging, trusted and listened to and assure of availability of assistance from people they trust like other learners, teachers, and parents (Chikoko & Khanare, 2012).

5.3.3 Challenging factors experienced in the provision of learners' PSS

The findings indicated that the need for more visits by DBE specialists could assist in learning and interpreting psychosocial policies (Mwoma & Pillay, 2021) and their implementation in a correct way to benefit learner PSS in public schools. Furthermore, the concerns regarding teachers' non-training on PSS matters (Malehlanye, 2021; Melander et al., 2021; Ali et al., 2023), lack of recreational facilities to engage and occupy learners and the need for teacher-learner-parent relationships was viewed as adding to the failure of the provision of effective PSS to learners and to enhance their wellbeing. However, also suggested as important was the fact that a dire need for emotional, spiritual, mental, and social support to learners in schools cannot be a problem for teachers and learners only. This could be countered by identifying and mobilizing internal, external and outside assets and resources as stated in ABA (Flint

& Jagers, 2021; Myende, 2015) to enhance the provision of PSS in school communities.

Findings also found that teachers lacked appropriate skills to address learners' psychosocial challenges which they needed to be professional in the provision of PSS to learners. Most participants felt that the PSS specialists were more focused on other schools and suggested allocation of PSS equally in all schools can be possible if the DBE extends the PSS services to the private sector and other government departments, including NGOs and Higher Education institutions and various local and international stakeholders.

Findings supported by literature concluded that teachers needed to be capacitated on PSS policies and implementation as they cited a lack of skills to address learners' psychosocial challenges as what teachers experienced. Participants also commented on the number of workshops that DBE provides even for curriculum issues as not adequate and worse for engaging with psychosocial challenges. They also highlighted their concern about lack and inconsistency of teacher development programs and on how most of these workshops concentrate on learning barriers caused mainly by physical disabilities instead of how PSS could be provided for learners facing diverse psychosocial challenges.

The findings revealed that participants needed specialized PSS for learners in selected public schools and the training of in-service teachers. On the other hand, parental engagement with other stakeholders was seen as important to serve as assets for addressing psychosocial challenges faced by learners in public schools. Lastly, teachers suggested teacher collaborations that might involve professionals from other sectors, including teachers, psychologists, professional counsellors, social workers, nurses and other professionals who share a passion for education and a common goal. These findings are further confirmed by Patel et al. (2021) that such collaborations including that of CoPs, a multi-sectoral and inter-disciplinary collaboration between academic researchers, practitioners and governmental agencies are needed for restructuring the provision of PSS for learners in mainstream public primary schools.

Further findings suggested as important by teachers in this study indicated other stakeholders including teachers, school principal, deputy principal, learners, school administrators, cleaning staff, community members, parents, SAPS, community safety forums, ward councilors, local police forums and church pastors, schools, churches, local libraries, community halls, local sports grounds, local clinics, local higher education institutions, local police stations, local government departments offices, local private sector as valuable assets that are already available in and within the vicinity of the school who could serve as assets for the provision of PSS in public schools. In support of the findings above, the literature refers to these stakeholders as external assets which are described as necessary for the public schools' survival. These external assets suggest that beyond teaching, teachers can do more to address different situations in their schools (Myende, 2015). In relating these assets to the study's findings aimed to enhance psychosocial support services for learners in public schools, and as supported in the literature, findings reported that teachers indicated that collaborating with these stakeholders in their schools was necessary for enhancing and providing PSS to learners in public schools.

Furthermore, teachers in this study were willing to use their time, skills, talents, abilities and strengths to enhance and provide psychosocial support services to learners. From the findings, some teachers indicated volunteering their time during weekends to come and engage learners in extra-mural activities such as playing soccer and starting vegetable gardens with learners to keep them free from trouble. Teachers indicated that they plan to mobilize other stakeholders, like parents, to help learners with homework after school or on weekends, as this improves learners' academic performance. These findings are supported by Chidakwa (2021), who indicates that people should not expect to be provided with what is lacking without recognizing and utilizing their skills, capacities, talents, and social resources, also referred to as internal assets. This finding confirms that teachers had hope to interact with other members of the CoPs not on a face to face basis only but on social media platforms as well since they find WhatsApp groups convenient to share information. Teachers also acknowledged that being in the CoPs for enhancing PSS in public schools is voluntary and not limited by geographical area. All teachers were free to be members of the CoPs.

It is clear from the findings that introducing CoPs in public schools to enhance psychosocial support services was seen as possible and practical when assets already made available in the CoPs and within the vicinity of the school were recognized and utilized.

5.4 Recommendations

This section presents recommendations aimed to improve the well-being of learners holistically by enhancing PSS in public primary schools.

- To provide professional psychosocial support services (PSS) for learners in mainstream public primary schools (these are psychologists, social workers, and professional counsellors) who need to provide time for screening, counselling, psychotherapy, referrals and other PSS programs to learners.
- The DBST to assist the SBSTs establish on-site (school) counselling facilities for learners to confide about the psychosocial challenges faced at home and in communities affecting their academic performance. This is needed to give teachers time to focus on the curriculum without having to worry about attending to the psychosocial challenges faced by learners since these facilities will have specialists available full time for PSS.
- The DBE to train teachers on psychosocial support policies for CSTL / ISHP and other educational and legislative frameworks related to PSS annually to stay abreast and skilled with psychosocial issues facing learners. This is required because it has been proven that teachers are not capacitated on such.
- The DBE has to think about the importance of subsidizing teachers with a one-year specialized training for psychosocial support services to enable teachers to develop skills for addressing learners' psychosocial challenges. This could be a funded initiative conducted as a short course by DBE or at institutions of higher learning like universities.

- To establish Teacher Exchange Programs with the international school community for PSS whether online or practically to exchange views globally and experience what other countries do to deal with contextual psychosocial challenges faced by learners in public schools.
- To establish school libraries with free Wi-Fi in mainstream public primary schools for learners to network online on curriculum and mainly on PSS matters.
- Psychologists, professional counsellors and social workers placed for PSS should develop various psychosocial support programs for learners, which consist of coping skills enhancement, relaxation techniques, social support including peer support programs, anti-bullying programs, psycho-education, extracurricular activities, free counselling services to normalize stress reactions and to meet learners' unique social, emotional, and academic needs and to improve their wellbeing.
- The SBSTs once established and trained in schools to be able to identify resources available in the community, such as libraries, sports grounds, schools, and churches and mobilize these for skills and talent development. Work collectively in recognizing each other's strengths, skills and talents which could benefit learners' wellbeing.

5.5 Chapter summary

Chapter Five presented a study summary that indicated teachers' understanding of psychosocial challenges, the nature of PSS provided to learners in public schools, and the challenges experienced in providing PSS. Based on the study's findings, the conclusion revealed possible interventions for PSS that can be considered in public schools, and recommendations were offered.

6. References

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: UKZN ETHICAL CLEARANCE



18 May 2023

Lungisa Dladla (203514000)
School Of Education
Edgewood campus

Dear L Dladla,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00005542/2023

Project title: Enhancing the provision of learners' psychosocial support services in selected public schools in Umlazi District.

Degree: Masters

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 25 April 2023 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

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

This approval is valid until 18 May 2024.

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

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Health Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,



Professor Dipane Hialele (Chair)

/dd

Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa

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

Founding Campuses:  Edgewood  Howard College  Medical School  Pietermaritzburg  Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

APPENDIX B: PERMISSION LETTER TO HOD –KZNDDBE

Inkongozelo Primary School

G.1078 Nunu Shezi Road

Umlazi Township

4066

Email : 203514000@stu.ukzn.ac.za

Date: 10 March 2023

Attention: The Head of Department (Mr N. Ngcobo)

Department of Education - Province of KwaZulu – Natal

Private Bag x 9137

Pietermaritzburg

3201

Dear Sir

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

My name is Lungisa Dladla, a Masters' student (203514000) in Educational Psychology in the School of Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Edgewood campus in Pinetown, under the Supervision of Dr N.P. Mthiyane. As part of my degree requirement, I am required to conduct a research study in fulfilment of the Master's degree qualification. The title of my study is: **Enhancing the provision of learners' psychosocial support services in selected public schools in Umlazi District**. I therefore kindly seek permission to conduct research in two schools under your jurisdiction in Umlazi district. The schools are: Umlazi Primary School and Badelile Primary School

The study aims to understand the forms of psychosocial support services provided to learners in selected public schools in Umlazi District and to enhance such support. The findings of the study may help to contribute in various ways. Firstly, it may serve as a basis for future researchers who may venture into similar area of study especially in the provision of

Psychosocial Support Services for learners encountering a myriad of psychosocial challenges. Secondly, the study may also be utilized by policy makers, teachers and specialists as a basis for policy formulation which could enhance the provision of psychosocial support services in all public schools in Umlazi district. Lastly, it can assist by investigating short- and long-term context-appropriate strategies to capacitate teachers in selected public schools in Umlazi District to provide psychosocial support services in schools.

The planned study will focus on one Departmental Head, one Life Orientation Teacher and one Class Teacher in each of the selected schools. The study will use semi-structured interviews and focus-group discussion. Participants will be interviewed for approximately 45 minutes and each interview will be voice-recorded.

Responses will be treated with confidentiality and pseudonyms will be used instead of the actual names. Participants will be contacted well in advance for interviews and they will be purposively selected to participate in the study. Participation will always remain voluntary which means that participants may withdraw from the study for any reason, anytime if they so wish without incurring any penalties.

You can kindly contact me on: [0715041953](tel:0715041953) or E-mail: 203514000@stu.ukzn.ac.za or lungisa.dludla@yahoo.com. For further information about this research project, please contact my supervisor, Dr [N.P. Mthiyane](mailto:mthivanen1@ukzn.ac.za) at 031 260 3424, E-mail: mthivanen1@ukzn.ac.za. If you have questions or concerns about the rights of participants or if you are concerned about any aspects of the study or the researcher, then you may contact the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Administration Research Office, Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building Private Bag X 54001 Durban, 4000; KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA Tel: +2731-2604557 , Fax: 27 31 2604609 Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Research tools are attached herewith for your perusal.

Your positive response in this regard will be highly appreciated.

Thanking you in advance.

Yours sincerely

Ms L. Dludla

APPENDIX C: PERMISSION LETTER FROM HOD- KZNDBE



KWAZULU-NATAL PROVINCE

EDUCATION
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

OFFICE OF THE HEAD OF DEPARTMENT

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

Email: Phindle.duma@kzndoe.gov.za

Enquiries: Mrs B.T. Ntuli

Ref.:2/4/8/7442


Ms Lungida Dlodla
Inkongozelo Primary School
G1078
Nunu Shezi Road
Umlazi Township
DURBAN
4031

Dear MS Dlodla

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: "ENHANCING THE PROVISION OF LEARNERS' PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT SERVICES IN SELECTED PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN UMLAZI DISTRICT.", 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 **20th March 2023 to 31st December 2025**.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Mrs Buyi Ntuli at the contact numbers above.
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report/dissertation/thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Office of the HOD, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education.


Mr GN Ngcobo
Head of Department: Education
Date: 20th March 2023

GROWING KWAZULU-NATAL TOGETHER

APPENDIX D: PERMISSION LETTER TO THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

Appendix D
Permission Letter to the School Principal

School of Education
College of Humanities
University of KwaZulu-Natal
Edgewood campus
01 December 2022

To: The Principal
SQS Primary school

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH WITH SELECTED TEACHERS

I, Lungisa Djudla (203514000) a Masters' student in Educational Psychology in the School of Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Edgewood campus in Pinetown, under the Supervision of Dr N.P. Mthiyane, am required to conduct a research study in fulfillment of the Master's degree qualification. The research is entitled '**Enhancing the provision of learners' psychosocial support services in two selected public schools in Umlazi district**'. I hereby request permission to involve one Departmental Head, one Life Orientation teacher and one class teacher as participants in this study. Selected participants will be teachers based in the Intermediate and Senior Phases in your school.

The study focuses on enhancing the provision of learners' psychosocial support services. The aim of the study will be to understand the forms of psychosocial support services that are provided for learners and how these could be enhanced in selected primary public schools in Umlazi district. Data will be generated utilizing one-on-one semi-structured interviews and one focus group discussion with all the participants. All interviews will be voice-recorded with the participants' permission for later use in data analysis. The daily programmes of the school will not be interrupted as data generation schedules and meetings will be planned prior data generation processes.

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

You can kindly contact me on: [0715041953](tel:0715041953) or E-mail: 203514000@stu.ukzn.ac.za or lungisa.djudla@yahoo.com. For further information about this research project, please contact my supervisor, Dr N.P. Mthiyane at 031 260 3424. E-mail: mthiyane1@ukzn.ac.za. If you have

questions or concerns about the rights of participants or if you are concerned about any aspects of the study or the researcher, then you may contact the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Administration Research Office, Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building Private Bag X 54001 Durban, 4000; KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA Tel: +2731-2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609 Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Yours sincerely
Ms Lungisa Djudla

DECLARATION

I (Full name of the Principal) hereby confirm that I have been informed about the nature, purpose and procedures for the study: ***Enhancing the provision of learners' psychosocial support services in two selected public schools in Umlazi district***. I have received, read and understood the written information about the study objectives and research processes. I understand that participation is voluntary and that the participants are at liberty to withdraw from the research project any time, or should they so desire. I also understand the intended significance of the findings of this research.

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

Signature of Principal: Date:

Thanking you in advance

APPENDIX E: PERMISSION LETTER TO THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

Appendix E
Permission Letter to the School Principal

School of Education
College of Humanities
University of KwaZulu-Natal
Edgewood campus
01 December 2022

To: The Principal
SVS Primary school

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH WITH SELECTED TEACHERS

I, Lungisa Dlodla (203514000) a Masters' student in Educational Psychology in the School of Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Edgewood campus in Pinetown, under the Supervision of Dr N.P. Mthiyane, am required to conduct a research study in fulfillment of the Master's degree qualification. The research is entitled '*Enhancing the provision of learners' psychosocial support services in two selected public schools in Umlazi district*'. I hereby request permission to involve one Departmental Head, one Life Orientation teacher and one class teacher as participants in this study. Selected participants will be teachers based in the Intermediate and Senior Phases in your school.

The study focuses on enhancing the provision of learners' psychosocial support services. The aim of the study will be to understand the forms of psychosocial support services that are provided for learners and how these could be enhanced in selected primary public schools in Umlazi district. Data will be generated utilizing one-on-one semi-structured interviews and one focus group discussion with all the participants. All interviews will be voice-recorded with the participants' permission for later use in data analysis. The daily programmes of the school will not be interrupted as data generation schedules and meetings will be planned prior data generation processes.

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

You can kindly contact me on: [0715041953](tel:0715041953) or E-mail: 203514000@stu.ukzn.ac.za or lungisa.dlodla@yahoo.com. For further information about this research project, please contact my supervisor, Dr N.P. Mthiyane at 031 260 3424. E-mail: mthiyane1@ukzn.ac.za. If you have

questions or concerns about the rights of participants or if you are concerned about any aspects of the study or the researcher, then you may contact the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Administration Research Office, Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building Private Bag X 54001 Durban, 4000; KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA Tel: +2731-2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609 Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Yours sincerely
Ms Lungisa Dlodla

DECLARATION

I (Full name of the Principal) hereby confirm that I have been informed about the nature, purpose and procedures for the study: ***Enhancing the provision of learners' psychosocial support services in two selected public schools in Umlazi district***. I have received, read and understood the written information about the study objectives and research processes. I understand that participation is voluntary and that the participants are at liberty to withdraw from the research project any time, or should they so desire. I also understand the intended significance of the findings of this research.

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

Signature of Principal: Date:

Thanking you in advance

APPENDIX F: PERMISSION LETTER TO DEPARTMENTAL HEADS

APPENDIX F

PERMISSION LETTER TO THE DEPARTMENTAL HEADS

School of Education
College of Humanities
University of KwaZulu-Natal
Edgewood campus
01 December 2022

To whom it may concern

Dear Sir / Madam

REQUEST FOR THE DEPARTMENTAL HEAD TO PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT

I, Lungisa Dladla (203514000) a Masters' student in Educational Psychology in the School of Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Edgewood campus in Pinetown under the Supervision of Dr N.P. Mthiyane, am required to conduct a research study in fulfilment of the Master's degree qualification. The research is entitled 'Enhancing the provision of learners' psychosocial support services in two selected public schools in Umlazi district'. I am kindly requesting you to participate in this study in your capacity as the Departmental Head for Intermediate -Senior Phase (Grade 4-7).

The study focuses on enhancing the provision of learners' psychosocial support services. The aim of the study will be to understand the forms of psychosocial support services that are provided for learners and how these could be enhanced in selected primary public schools in Umlazi district. Data will be generated utilizing one-on-one semi-structured interviews and one focus group discussion with all the participants. All interviews will be voice-recorded with the participants' permission for later use in data analysis. The daily programmes of the school will not be interrupted as data generation schedules and meetings will be planned prior data generation processes.

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

You can kindly contact me on: [0715041953](tel:0715041953) or E-mail: 20003514000@stu.ukzn.ac.za or lungisa.dladla@yahoo.com. For further information about this research project, please contact my supervisor, Dr N.P. Mthiyane at 031 260 3424. E-mail: mthiyane1@ukzn.ac.za. If you have questions or concerns about the rights of participants or if you are concerned about any aspects of the study or the researcher, then you may contact the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Administration Research Office, Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building Private Bag X 54001 Durban, 4000; KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA Tel: +2731-2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609 Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Yours sincerely

Ms Lungisa Dladla

DECLARATION

I (Full name of the Departmental Head) hereby confirm that I have been informed about the nature, purpose and procedures for the study: **Enhancing the provision of learners' psychosocial support services in two selected public schools in Umlazi district**. I have received, read and understood the written information about the study objectives and research processes. I understand that participation is voluntary and that the participants are at liberty to withdraw from the research project any time, or should they so desire. I also understand the intended significance of the findings of this research.

Signature of Participant: Date:

Signature of Witness: Date:

	Agree	Disagree
Audio recording		

APPENDIX G: PERMISSION LETTER TO LIFE ORIENTATION TEACHERS

APPENDIX G

PERMISSION LETTER TO LIFE ORIENTATION TEACHERS

School of Education
College of Humanities
University of KwaZulu-Natal
Edgewood campus
01 December 2022

To whom it may concern

Dear Sir / Madam

REQUEST FOR THE LIFE ORIENTATION TEACHER TO PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH

I, Lungisa Dlodla (203514000) a Masters' student in Educational Psychology in the School of Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Edgewood campus in Pinetown under the Supervision of Dr N.P. Mthiyane, am required to conduct a research study in fulfilment of the Master's degree qualification. The research is entitled '**Enhancing the provision of learners' psychosocial support services in selected public schools in Umlazi district**'. I do hereby kindly seek permission for Life Orientation teacher to take part in the study.

The study focuses on enhancing the provision of learners' psychosocial support services. The aim of the study will be to understand the forms of psychosocial support services that are provided for learners and how these could be enhanced in selected primary public schools in Umlazi district. Data will be generated utilizing one-on-one semi-structured interviews and one focus group discussion with all the participants. All interviews will be voice-recorded with the participants' permission for later use in data analysis. The daily programmes of the school will not be interrupted as data generation schedules and meetings will be planned prior data generation processes.

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

You can kindly contact me on: [0715041953](tel:0715041953) or E-mail: 203514000@stu.ukzn.ac.za or lungisa.dlodla@yahoo.com. For further information about this research project, please contact my supervisor, Dr N.P. Mthiyane at 031 260 3424. E-mail: mthiyane1@ukzn.ac.za. If you have questions or concerns about the rights of participants or if you are concerned about any aspects of the study or the researcher, then you may contact the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Administration Research Office, Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building Private Bag X 54001 Durban, 4000; KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA Tel: +2731-2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609 Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Yours sincerely

Ms Lungisa Dlodla

DECLARATION

I (Full name of the Life Orientation teacher) hereby confirm that I have been informed about the nature, purpose and procedures for the study: **Enhancing the provision of learners' psychosocial support services in two selected public schools in Umlazi district**. I have received, read and understood the written information about the study objectives and research processes. I understand that participation is voluntary and that the participants are at liberty to withdraw from the research project any time, or should they so desire. I also understand the intended significance of the findings of this research.

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

Signature of Participant

Date:

Signature of Witness:

Date:

Thanking you in advance

	Agree	Disagree
Audio recording		

Thanking you in advance

APPENDIX H: PERMISSION LETTER TO CLASS TEACHERS

APPENDIX H
PERMISSION LETTER TO CLASS TEACHERS

School of Education
College of Humanities
University of KwaZulu-Natal
Edgewood campus
01 December 2022

To whom it may concern

Dear Sir / Madam

REQUEST FOR THE CLASS TEACHER TO PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT

I, Lungisa Dlodla (203514000) a Masters' student in Educational Psychology in the School of Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Edgewood campus in Pinetown under the Supervision of Dr N.P. Mthiyane, am required to conduct a research study in fulfillment of the Master's degree qualification. The research is entitled '**Enhancing the provision of learners' psychosocial support services in two selected public schools in Umlazi district**'. I do hereby kindly seek permission for one Class teacher from Intermediate Phase to take part in the study.

The study focuses on enhancing the provision of learners' psychosocial support services. The aim of the study will be to understand the forms of psychosocial support services that are provided for learners and how these could be enhanced in selected primary public schools in Umlazi district. Data will be generated utilizing one-on-one semi-structured interviews and one focus group discussion with all the participants. All interviews will be voice-recorded with the participants' permission for later use in data analysis. The daily programmes of the school will not be interrupted as data generation schedules and meetings will be planned prior data generation processes.

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

You can kindly contact me on: [0715041953](tel:0715041953) or E-mail: 203514000@stu.ukzn.ac.za or lungisa.dlodla@yahoo.com. For further information about this research project, please contact my supervisor, Dr N.P. Mthiyane at 031 260 3424. E-mail: mthiyane1@ukzn.ac.za. If you have questions or concerns about the rights of participants or if you are concerned about any aspects of the study or the researcher, then you may contact the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Administration Research Office, Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building Private Bag X 54001 Durban, 4000; KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA Tel: +2731-2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609 Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Yours sincerely

Ms Lungisa Dlodla

DECLARATION

I (Full name of the Class Teacher) hereby confirm that I have been informed about the nature, purpose and procedures for the study: ***Enhancing the provision of learners' psychosocial support services in two selected public schools in Umlazi district.*** I have received, read and understood the written information about the study objectives and research processes. I understand that participation is voluntary and that the participants are at liberty to withdraw from the research project any time, or should they so desire. I also understand the intended significance of the findings of this research.

Signature of Participant: Date:

Signature of Witness: Date:

	Agree	Disagree
Audio recording		

Thanking you in advance

APPENDIX I

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULES FOR DEPARTMENTAL HEADS

STUDY TOPIC: ENHANCING THE PROVISION OF LEARNERS' PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT SERVICES IN SELECTED PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN THE UMLAZI DISTRICT

Two discussion topics and probing questions will guide these interviews

OBJECTIVE 1: To understand the forms of psychosocial support services provided to learners in selected public schools in the Umlazi district.

- I. What do you understand about the following?
Psychosocial challenges
Psychosocial support services
- II. Are any psychosocial support services provided for learners at your school? If yes, what psychosocial support services are offered to learners at your school?
- III. Are any psychosocial challenges apparent to learners at your school? If yes, what psychosocial challenges are encountered by learners at your school?
- IV. What do you think are the reasons for psychosocial challenges encountered by learners at your school?
- V. Do psychosocial challenges encountered by learners have any effect on the teaching and learning process? Why do you think so? Please explain.

APPENDIX J

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULES FOR LIFE ORIENTATION TEACHERS

OBJECTIVE 1: To understand the forms of psychosocial support services provided to learners in selected public schools in Umlazi district.

- i. What do you understand about the following?
 - a) Psychosocial challenges?
 - b) Psychosocial support services?
- ii. What is your role as a Life Orientation teacher on learners confronted with psychosocial challenges at your school?
- iii. Engaging with learners' psychosocial support should be a collective effort for sustainable learning to be promoted, who are the role players in providing psychosocial support in your school?
- iv. Who forms the school support services structure and which policies guide them? How active and functional is the structure responsible for addressing psychosocial challenges encountered by learners at your school?
- v. What are the interventions provided by DBE to teachers, learners and parents in the provision of psychosocial support? How is the relationship of these stakeholders?

OBJECTIVE 2: To enhance the different forms of psychosocial support services provided to learners in selected public schools in Umlazi district.

- i. What psychosocial interventions are being used in the school to enhance the provision of psychosocial support for learners confronted with psychosocial challenges?

- ii. What are the successes and the challenges of these psychosocial interventions? (if any)

- iii. What other measures do you think can assist in providing psychosocial support services to address the psychosocial challenges encountered by learners.

- iv. How do you hope to enhance the provision of learners' psychosocial support services in your school?

- v. Have teachers ever been trained on psychosocial interventions equipping them to address the psychosocial challenges facing learners?

APPENDIX K

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULES FOR CLASS TEACHERS

OBJECTIVE 1: To understand the forms of psychosocial support services provided to learners in selected public schools in the Umlazi district.

- i. What psychosocial support services are available at your school?
- ii. How do you relate to learners confronted by psychosocial challenges at your school?
- iii. How often do you provide one-on-one counseling or pastoral support to learners who return from school after bereavement or experience difficult situations?

OBJECTIVE 2: To enhance the different psychosocial support services provided to learners in selected public schools in the Umlazi district.

- i. Who can be involved in enhancing the different forms of psychosocial support services to be provided to learners at your school?
- ii. What help or assistance are you getting from school to address the psychosocial challenges confronting learners?
- iii. How often do you review these psychosocial intervention policies as the school community?
- iv. What resources are available at your disposal which could assist in providing learners' psychosocial support services?

APPENDIX L

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION SCHEDULES FOR ALL PARTICIPANTS (DEPARTMENTAL HEADS, LIFE ORIENTATION TEACHERS AND CLASS TEACHERS)

OBJECTIVE 1: To understand the forms of psychosocial support services provided to learners in selected public schools in the Umlazi district.

- I. Do you have a policy for Psychosocial Support for learners who experience behavioral and emotional problems in your phases? If yes, how is it implemented? If not, what areas of psychosocial aspects would you like this policy to address?
- II. How often do teachers receive training on psychosocial interventions to address the presented concerns of learners who can be regarded as troublesome or in difficult situations? Elaborate.
- III. What psychosocial support services are provided to learners experiencing psychosocial challenges in your school?
- IV. Who provides psychosocial support services for learners who encounter psychosocial challenges in your school?
- V. What challenges are experienced in providing psychosocial support for learners who encounter psychosocial challenges?
- VI. How often do learners get professional counseling from the DBE psychologists at your school to address the psychosocial challenges they encounter?

OBJECTIVE 2: To enhance the different psychosocial support services provided to learners in selected public schools in the Umlazi district.

- I. What types of psychosocial support programs do you hope to provide learners affected by psychosocial challenges in your school? How can the Departmental services be involved in such initiatives?
- II. Has the District Based Support Team (DBST) ever assisted your school in establishing the School Based Support Team responsible for addressing the psychosocial challenges facing learners?

- III. If you were to decide on the resources to be provided in your school to address the psychosocial challenges facing learners, what could be those resources?
- IV. What support, intervention, training, or resources do you think learners may need to deal with psychosocial challenges they may be facing?
- V. Who do you think can form part of Communities of Practice to enhance the provision of learners' psychosocial support services in your school, and why do you think so?
- VI. What other psychosocial interventions can be undertaken to enhance the forms or provision of learners' psychosocial support?
- VII. How much specialization of training do you think is needed for teachers to provide psychosocial support services to learners?
- VIII. Would you like the DBE to employ full-time or psychosocial specialists in public schools? If yes, why?

ANNEXURE M: LETTER FROM EDITOR



**Centurion
Tshwane**
precision4edits@gmail.com

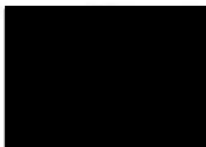
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13 January 2024

To Whom It May Concern

This letter is to confirm that the manuscript titled, **Enhancing the Provision of Learners' Psychosocial Support Services in Selected Public Schools in Umlazi District** by **LUNGISA DLUDLA** was edited by a professional language editor. As the language editor, the author was supplied with two versions: the first contained comments and edits [track changes], and the second was the accepted version with no track changes. As the language editor, I cannot be held responsible for the author or authors' decisions concerning the edits and comments supplied.

Sincerely,



M Moodley

Language Editor

PRECISION EDUCATION CONSULTANCY

ANNEXURE N: TURNITIN CERTIFICATE

Turnitin Originality Report

Dissertation 15 Jan by Lungisa Dlodla

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