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An exploration of social challenges encountered by learners in Mohlakeng Schools in Rand-west municipality in Gauteng province of South Africa.

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An exploration of social challenges encountered by learners in Mohlakeng Schools in Rand-west municipality in Gauteng province of South Africa.

A dissertation on a research study presented to

The Department of Social Work

School of Human and Community Development

Faculty of Humanities

University of the Witwatersrand

In partial fulfilment of the requirements

for the

Master of Arts in the Field of Social Development

by

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Supervisor: Dr L Petersen

February 2023

DECLARATION

I Prudence Mokoena, declare hereby that this study is true reflection of my own research, and that this work or part thereof, has not been submitted for any degree in any other institution of higher education.

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ABSTRACT

There are countless social challenges in South African schools, such as poverty, violence, homeless, teen parenting, substance abuse, child abuse and youth suicide, which complicate learners' efforts to learning. This study explored and described the social challenges that affect selected learners and their academic performance in Mohlakeng School in Rand-west municipality, Gauteng, South Africa. The study was positioned within an interpretivist paradigm using the qualitative research approach. The sample was fifteen(15) grade 11 and 12 learners from School in Mohlakeng and they were selected using non-probability purposive sampling. Data was collected using semi-structured telephonic interviews via an interview guide and analysed using the thematic data analysis method. Key findings in relation to the social challenges that learners experience that have an impact on their academic performance included academic challenges at school and unpleasant home circumstances. In terms of the coping strategies that learners adopted, the study found that learners did not have the necessary resources to cope, while others adopted various coping mechanisms. The key findings in terms of the support needs of learners were that 8 out of 15 learners needed extra academic support, 2 out of 15 learners thought about future prospects to deal with their social challenges, while for one participant it was important to mend family relationships and receive support from family. In terms of support, 9 out of 15 learners received support from families, while the other six participants did not receive support. These findings have implications for social work practice, the department of education, policy formation as well as future research.

Keywords*:* *Experiences, learners, schools, social challenges*

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABET	Adult Basic Education and Training centre
DOE	Department of Education
DSD	Department of Social Development
ECD	Early Childhood Development Centre
GDE	Gauteng Department of Education
HDI	Human Development Index
NCHS	National centre of health statics
PIS	Participant Information Sheet
SBST	School-Based Support Team
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SIAS	Screening, identification, Assessment and support
UNESSCO	Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USA	United States of America

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCUTION

1.1 Introduction

Good quality education has been thought out to be a foundation or the root of society's social transformation and economic development (Bayat et al., 2014). It is also argued to be an essential factor and gauge of a society's overall wellbeing (Pretorius, 2020). There are countless social challenges in South African schools; for instance, homelessness, poverty, violence, teenage pregnancy and parenting, drug use, child abuse and adolescent suicide, which complicate learners' efforts to learning (Coblentz, 2021). It thus becomes important to explore the impact that social challenges faced by learners have on their learning and overall academic performance, which is the focus of this study.

1.2 Statement of the Problem and Rationale for Study

As stated by Pretorius (2020) and Bayat et al. (2014), education is perceived as an important factor in human development. Its importance is highlighted in the Human Development Index (HDI) as well as in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Reid (1999) also argued in this light, that those who do not attend formal education or have not attended one regularly, regardless of their reasons, have limited opportunities, be it socially, economically or professionally. In addition, the Department of Basic Education (2013) and Lee et al. (2021) point out that schools play a vital role in providing a safe environment for South Africa's youth. However, it cannot be ignored that children still face a lot of social challenges, and these may have a negative impact on their attendance, learning and academic performance. Issues such as teenage pregnancy, youth suicide, substance abuse, amongst others, continue to remain high in countries known as low- and middle-income countries, and particularly in South Africa (Jonas et al., 2016; Mokwena & Setshego, 2021; Shilubane et al., 2015; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 2017; Wills & Hofmeyr, 2019).

School dropout is one of the social issues perceived as a severe problem in South Africa (Mmutle, 2019). Le Roux (2020) point out that between 50% and 60% of learners who start Grade 1 in South Africa are statistically predicted to not complete their matric. In light of these numbers, Mmutle (2019) argues that there is a link

between school dropout and various adverse outcomes, such as lower employment rate due to poor level of education. Other negative consequences of school dropout include unemployment levels and poverty that are chronically high, low income, higher risks of mortality as well as poor health outcomes (Mmutle, 2019). With that said, Hartnack (2017) point out that the consequences for those learners who dropped out of school and were not able to obtain their matric certificate are therefore even more ominous. They have generally been documented to have far-reaching negative implications. Therefore, youth education can be argued to be a global priority and as such, school dropout ought to be an urgent concern in need of thorough research and problem-solving (Weybright et al., 2017). In addition, learners dropping out of school should not be understood separately but be perceived as resulting from a long process of disconnection of social factors and learners' opportunity to successfully complete school. Meaning that it is a snowballing, multidimensional process resulting from the merging of numerous factors, such as violence in school, socio-economic factors, etc., over time (Hartnack, 2017).

Violence is another social issue faced by learners that could potentially affect their performance at school. Ncontsa and Shumba (2013) point out that research has revealed a continuous growth of school violence regardless of the Department of Education (DoE) and schools themselves putting actions and measures to ensure that the problem is addressed and adequately dealt with. Various South African schools are perceived as environments of physical and emotional susceptibility and risk (Hochfeld et al., 2022). Unsafe schools interrupt both the education and overall development of individuals who are affected (Hochfeld et al., 2022). It is argued that in South Africa, for schools' safety is part of the main concerns. Furthermore, it is pointed out that about 22% of learners have reported having experienced violence in the school environment (Hochfeld et al., 2022). It is also postulated that school violence negatively impacts learners as it results in their schoolwork suffering because of reduced concentration and rises the rate of learners committing suicide and drooping out of school. In addition, the prevalence of violence that is school-based is a huge challenge continues to be a source distress to almost everyone across South Africa (Hendricks, 2019).

Teenage pregnancy is one social issue that is a major factor of distress in societies and high rates of teenage pregnancy are reported in both low-medium and high-

income societies (Jonas et al., 2016). They continue to argue that teenage pregnancy largely contributes to a never-ending cycle of poor-health and poverty, globally (Jonas et al., 2016). In their study, Shefer et al. (2012) argued that when teenage mothers had to go back to school, what was often affected was their academic performance. This was because many of them moved from attaining good marks in school to performing averagely or even underachieving, due to balancing motherhood and school. The study also showed that teenage pregnancy is increasing becoming an urgent concern in South African schools and it has effects that are detrimental on the education system as well as the future success of learners. Moreover, Nkosi and Pretorius (2019) have argued that inconsistent school attendance and poor academic performance during and after pregnancy usually results in increased dropout rate of school-going teenage mothers. This unavoidably has a negative impact on future work opportunities and careers, and further contributes to increased unemployment rates (Nkosi & Pretorius, 2019), which can be argued to contribute to poverty.

The frequency, timing, length, and complexity of poverty all impact a child's educational accomplishment, together with social networks and community characteristics (Ferguson et al., 2007). When children grow up disadvantaged and in poverty, they are argued to more often than not perform poorly in school (Hirsch, 2007). According to Omoniyi et al. (2019), the chances of educational accomplishment are limited by poverty while on the other hand, educational accomplishment is one of the major instruments for escaping poverty. Moreover, poverty has a bewildering impact on a child's academic achievements. To further add, Cuthrell, et al. (2010) argue that poverty is one of the key reasons of school dropout and truancy.

Department of Basic Education further states many of these learners are vulnerable to issues such as abuse, and lack of appropriate adult supervision. According to Jensen (2009) and Philipsborn (2021), some of the common problems among that poor students experience include poverty in schools, health care, family care and nonattendance and unfortunately make nonattendance the issue most closely connected with the rates of school dropout. Poverty may be the main social challenge that leads to substance abuse, teen pregnancy and youth suicide as it seems to be a way out for the learner to cope or escape the social challenge face acting (Mireille, 2021). Legotlo (2014) and Mabena et al. (2021) listed learners' issues as follows: lack of discipline, problems related to learner's motivation, learners being under-pressure,

the use and abuse of substances, increasing rates of absenteeism, psychological factors, poor studying and life skills as well as socio-cultural influences. Meanwhile Mohlakeng schools have organisations such as the Department of Social Development (DSD), School-Based Support Team (SBST) and other stakeholders who offer support to the learners. The purpose of this study was to explore and analyse the social challenges that learners faced that contribute to them not coping at school.

Moreover, the researcher is a school social worker and through her experience, she observed and found that majority of her clients (being learners at the school the study was conducted), experienced various social challenges that affected them academically. She noticed that what mostly came up during her interventions were social challenges that, to some learners, made them want to drop out of school. Some of these social challenges included teenage pregnancy, poverty, violence and substance abuse.

The researcher also observed that the school understudy is located in Mohlakeng, which is a township in West Rand district municipality. According to a Profile and Analysis District Development Model (2020), a community survey done in 2016 revealed that there were over 1000 homes headed by children younger than 18; where 38.5 of these children lived in informal dwellings. What also caught the researcher's attention was the poverty dimension, which, according to Profile and Analysis District Development Model (2020), there was 48% of individuals living in poverty in 2018 in the West Rand. This information, together with specific reports from learners at the school, propelled the researcher to want to explore more on the problem, particularly how these social challenges contribute to school drop-out. The researcher believed that the research would also help in informing her intervention strategies.

The various social issues faced by school-going learners are interrelated and may have adverse consequence on their academic performance. It thus becomes necessary to explore and describe the social challenges (i.e., teenage pregnancy, poverty, violence and substance abuse) that affect learners and their academic performance at Mohlakeng School and how this impacts their academic performance, which can be argued to ultimately threaten their overall development. The study's overall objective was to explore and describe the social challenges that affect learners and their academic performance at Mohlakeng School in Rand-west municipality,

Gauteng, South Africa. By understanding the experiences and coping strategies it was believed that the government may establish interventions that can respond to the challenges. It is also believed that the findings of the study will inform non-governmental agencies to develop support for learners and their families.

1.3 Aims(s) and Objectives of the study

Aim:

The aim of this study was to explore and describe the social challenges that affect selected learners and their academic performance at Mohlakeng School in Rand-west municipality, Gauteng, South Africa.

Objectives:

In addressing the overall aim of the study, the following objective were identified:

- To explore the social challenges that learners at Mohlakeng School in Rand-west municipality experience that have an impact on their academic performance.
- To understand the coping strategies adopted by learners at Mohlakeng School in dealing with social challenges and balancing school.
- To describe the support needs of learners Mohlakeng School who face social challenges that impact their academic performance

1.4 Research Question

The main question for the study was: What social challenges encountered by selected learners have an impact on their academic performance Mohlakeng School in Rand-west municipality, Gauteng, South Africa?

1.4.1 Secondary Research Questions

To ensure that the aim and objectives of the study were met, the researcher sought to answer the following secondary questions:

- What are the social challenges that learners at Mohlakeng School in Rand-west municipality experience that have an impact on their academic performance?
- What are the coping strategies adopted by learners at Mohlakeng School in dealing with social challenges and balancing school?

- What are the support needs of learners at Mohlakeng School who face social challenges that impact their academic performance?

1.5 Definition of Concepts

This section offers definition of key concepts that are pertinent to the study**:**

Academic Performance

Academic performance or achievement refers to the extent in which a learner, educator, or organisation has achieved their short or long-term educational objectives and is measured either by ongoing assessment or collective grade score average (Tadese et al. 2022). Lamas (2015) continues to say that academic performance includes factors such as an individual's intellectual level, their character, drive, abilities. It can also be argued that factors that contribute to academic performance include external factors that may have an impact on what Lamas (2015) mentioned.

Social Challenges

Social problems or challenges are "the definitional activities of people around conditions and conduct they find troublesome, including others' definitional activities" (Schneider, 1985, p. 209). It is described as any problem or behaviour that does not have positive results for a person or a group of individuals and it is often recognised a needing to be addressed (Loseke, 2003). According to Glicken (2010) a social challenge is problem within society that makes it a challenge for individuals to attain their full potential. Issues such as racism, unemployment, poverty and substance abuse (Glicken, 2010), are some of the various social challenges a community or society may experience.

Learners

Biesta (2015) states that a learner refers to an individual who is the subjects of education. A learner is a person who attends an Early Childhood Development Centre (ECD), school, or Adult Basic Education and Training centre (ABET) (Education Information Standards, 2010).

School

A school is defined as "an education institution which enrols learners in one or more grades from Grade R to Grade 12" (Education Information Standards, 2010, p.101). a

school is “an institution where formal learning or education is conducted” (Nyatuka, 2020, p. 148).

1.6 The Theoretical Framework(s) underpinning the study

The two theories/models that were seen to be applicable for this study are Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs and the person-in-environment theoretical framework. The person-in-environment perspective in social work is a principle that guides practice by highlighting the importance of understanding a person and their behaviour in relation to the environmental contexts in which that person lives and acts (Kondrat, 2013). It is said that a person-in-environment viewpoint offers a more suitable context for evaluating an individual not only on their current challenges and strengths but also considering the environmental factors (Amadasun, 2020). This theory is therefore important in framing this study in that the different social challenges that are a part of the environment have an impact in how they perform academically.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs is another theory that was seen to be important in framing this study. It is a motivational theory in psychology that comprise of a five-tier model of human needs, often represented in a pyramid as hierarchical levels. In this theory, before a person can attend to needs higher up, their needs lower down in the hierarchy have to be fulfilled first (McLeod, 2007). In order to get to self-actualisation, the needs from the lower part of the hierarchy upwards, are: “physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem and self-actualisation” (McLeod, 2007). Thus, with regards to this study, social challenges faced by learners such as violence and poverty, can be argued to threaten a child’s physiological and safety needs. This in return make it difficult to allow the child an opportunity to achieve their full potential, with ultimately becomes evident in their academic performance.

1.7 Methodology

The overall aim of the study was to explore and describe the social challenges that affect selected learners and their academic performance at Mohlakeng School in Rand-west municipality, Gauteng, South Africa. The research approach was qualitative and the study was located within an interpretivist paradigm. The problem being studied and the aim of the research meant that the design be explorative, to allow the researcher the opportunity to have a deeper understanding of the impact of social issues faced by these learners on their academic performance. The sample

comprised of fifteen (15) grade 11 and 12 learners from Mohlakeng School and the type of sampling technique used was non-probability purposive sampling. Data were collected using individual phone interviews. A semi-structured interview schedule was used by the researcher made use of that comprised both closed-ended and open-ended questions. Thematic data analysis was the method of data analysis that was employed in this study. This chapter provides a summary of the key findings that emerged in from the research, draws conclusions and recommends solutions and future research.

1.8 Limitations of the Study

Simon and Goes (2013) explain that limitations are events and factors that happen throughout a study that the researcher is not able to manipulate or control. Communication researchers have an opportunity to discuss the main challenges of the study in the "limitations of research" section. The researchers can use this to not only show peer reviewers that they know of the study's shortcomings but also to describe how they overcame those shortcomings in their writing (Allen, 2017). Below, is a structural discussion of this study's limitations in accordance to the reviewed literature, methodology, telephonic interviews, COVID-19 regulations as well as the rules and regulations of the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE):

- **Telephonic Interviews**

Farooq and De Villiers (2017) state that telephonic interviews make it challenge to achieve certain goals or advantages that are less overt. This means that there are lower levels of rapport, and this may affect the quality of data collected. Moreover, to deal with this, the researcher visited Mohlakeng School and got to know the management, build rapport and also have a brief meeting with the prospective research participants before conducting the interviews. As mentioned in the trustworthiness section, this allowed the researcher to gain an understanding of the participants' context of the discussion and to educate them about the research including its aims and objectives.

- **COVID-19**

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2021) COVID-19 is a virus that "primarily spreads among people who are in close contact with each other". It is further stated that it spreads through an infected person's nose or mouth from small particles

of liquid when they “sneeze, cough, speak, sing, or breathe” (WHO, 2021). This thus made it a challenge to conduct interviews face-to-face, as they would increase the chance of it spreading. To address this limitation, the researcher conducted telephonic interviews with participants.

- **Rules of GDE**

Moreover, when recruiting participants, the researcher had to be cognizant of the fact that some of her participants were minors who are in school. Thus, recruiting participants meant that the researcher did not distract them from their school responsibilities. The researcher ensured that interviews did not happen during school hours, and consent was given by both the learners and their parents/guardians.

1.8 Chapter Outline

Chapter 1: Introduction: This chapter serves as the study's general road map. It consists of the study's introduction and historical context. It also comprises the study's theoretical framework, which details the purpose and objectives of the investigation.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework and Literature review - this chapter consists of an overview of the social challenges experienced by learners in schools, that are have an impact on their learning from global perspective, narrowed down to a South African context.

Chapter 3: Research strategy and methodology: provided in this chapter is the methodology that was employed for the study. The chapter outlines the ethical issues and provides details on the data analysis process.

Chapter 4: Results and discussions – the chapter presents data in-depth using a thematic analysis. This strengthens the connections between the findings and the study's objectives.

Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusions and recommendations – the chapter consists of summary, conclusion and recommendations for the study.

CHAPTER TWO:

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter of the report reviews relevant literature in relation to the research question posed. The section first discusses the theory that framed the study. Then the literature reviewed looks at various social challenges affecting learners and their academic performance, from a global perspective, narrowed down to South Africa.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

The two theories/models that were seen to be applicable for this study are the person-in-environment theoretical framework and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs:

2.2.1 Person-in-Environment

Person-in-environment begins with the assumption that phenomena are interdependent in influencing, transforming, and preserving human life (Green & McDermott, 2010). It is further claimed that these phenomena are conceptualised as though they arise and act on distinct "levels" in an effort to categorize and account for the complexity that social and human life lives within and to which social and human life contributes, known as micro, mezzo, and macro environment. Moreover, Weiss-Gal (2008) cites Hare (2004) who states that the person-in-environment approach perceives the individual and their multiple environments (micro, mezzo, and macro) as a system that is dynamic and interactive. In this system, each component concurrently influences and is influenced by the other. Therefore, it can be argued that the different social challenges faced by learners have an impact on their performance while at the same time, their academic performance may contribute towards their overall academic success. The implicit message in this perspective is that is that behaviour is more than a result or consequence of the micro environment (Weick, 1981). This further adds on the argument that learner academic performance may be impacted by the various social problems they experience.

The environment is commonly thought of as something external to the individual (Weick, 1981). The external-social environment takes into account factors including culture, structure of society, innovation, as well as political and economic systems. One may also argue that social problems (such as poverty, violence, teenage

pregnancy, etc.) form part of this environment. These elements - often classified as the macro environment - signify important opportunities and limitations for the evolution of behavioural patterns (Weick, 1981). These limitations may be said to be the negative impact that is caused by social challenges on learner academic performance. The person-in-environment concept has its roots in both the internal and external social settings (Weick, 1981).

This perspective was important for this study in that, as argued by Usman and Madudili (2019), the process of teaching and learning cannot only occur in a vacuum in schools. Meaning that the impact of different social challenges that are faced by learners may limit them from effectively learning and ultimately performing well. Effective learning and teaching, occurs as an outcome of interaction between different components their environment. Once a learner feels affected by social challenges, they may as a result, turn to change their attitude, lose interest in school or find comfort in substance abuse, further affecting their academic performance.

Moreover, this study has also shown the application of the person-in-environment perspective. It has been noted that learners are affected by their social challenges, this then negatively has an impact on their academic performance. In addition, Omoniyi et al. (2019) further shows the application of the person-in-environment perspective by arguing that millions of poor South Africans' lives are being improved by education, which has long been recognised as the most significant force in social progress, if not the only one. However, even with this case, the impact of poverty delays their progress as argued that poverty becomes a trap to many disadvantaged learners who want to improve their lives through education. This can then be argued to show the argument made by this theory, in that the interconnectedness of the environment and the individual are clearly stated.

2.2.2 Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow’s hierarchy of needs as stated by Lester (2013), is another theory that served as the lens through which the researcher conducted the study. According to Lester (2013), a five-category taxonomy of fundamental requirements was proposed. These were physiological, safety and security, belongingness, esteem, as well as self-actualisation. Lester (2013) points out that the lower needs are argued to be more powerful than those in higher levels of the pyramid. The more the basic needs are

satisfied, the more beneficial it is for the overall wellbeing of the individual (Lester, 2013).

Putting focus on safety and security needs, this theory becomes important in understanding the issue of social problems that threaten the learner's need of safety. As an example, Thompson et al. (2001) contend that learning may be impacted for some time after a violent occurrence in a school and that learners may be in need of counselling before everything is settled. When there are genuine dangers to children's safety at school and overall order of a school, the need for safety might become extremely urgent, which potentially affects their academic performance. Therefore, learning and teaching, as higher functions, may not be successful or accomplished if the need to be safe and secure is not met. In addition, with regards to other social problems such as poverty, one may argue that the most basic needs, which are physiological, are thus threatened. This then makes it a challenge to effectively learn. The study became important in this as it sheds light on the importance of the various environments and needs being in alignment with a child's learning to ensure academic achievement.

Moreover, with regards to the study's findings, poverty and unemployment had a great impact on the learners' academic performance. Unemployment was seen to be a challenge, which to some had negative consequences such as stress. A theme arose from the findings (Unemployment in the family) helped shed light on the study's first objective, as unemployment was evidently a challenge that could potentially affect learners' academic performance. As can be applicable in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, the learners' basic needs contributed to their stress, which further had an impact on how they performed academically.

2.3 Literature Review

Literature in relation to the research question is reviewed in this section to see how other scholars have said about the impact of social challenges that learners face on their academic performance.

2.3.1 Social Challenges

Social challenges or problems are "the definitional activities of people around conditions and conduct they find troublesome, including others' definitional activities" (Schneider, 1985, p. 209). Loseke (2003) continues to define a social problem as any

condition or behaviour that has detrimental effects on an individual or a significant group of individuals and is frequently acknowledged as having to be addressed. A social challenge, according to Glicken (2010), is a social issue that hinders people from realizing their full potential. Racism, unemployment, poverty, and drug misuse are just a few of the many social issues that a community or civilization could face. Social issues include things like crime and drug addiction. Social issues not only directly touch a large number of individuals, but also indirectly impact all of us.

Social problems are structured socially, both in terms of the specific behaviours and interactions that problem participants engage in and in terms of how these behaviours develop over time (Schneider, 1985). A condition or behaviour that many people perceive as harmful is referred to be a social problem. Some circumstances, like not having enough money to purchase necessities like food, clothing, and shelter, or having trouble finding work, can be deemed as a social challenge.

To further elaborate, Jamrozik and Nocella (1998) state that the term social problem can be applied to commonly perceived to be undesirable social conditions, developments, societal measures or attitudes. They further state that conditions that are negative and those that threaten people's values or interest such as social interconnection, maintenance or law and order, ethics, constancy or social institutions, as well as economic success or the freedoms of individual (Jamrozik & Nocella, 1998). It is crucial to recognise how the environment people live in affects them. There is little doubt that a person's environment plays a role in their development because individuals from different backgrounds have varied levels of welfare (Whylken et al., 2022). There are various social challenges or problems that individuals face, and these are not only exclusive to adult, children also experience problems, and these may affect their academic performance. It is therefore important to discuss and understand social challenges that children face at school or externally but could affect their overall development and school performance.

2.3.2 Social Challenges in Schools: Global Perspective

Students experience a variety of difficulties within the school environment, which have been acknowledged as influencing how they adjust in schools (Anyamene et al., 2019). These issues cause the students to become emotionally and socially unbalanced, which drives them to develop further issues like drug misuse, prostitution,

and other unhealthy behaviours that tend to lower the likelihood that they will become socially adjusted (Anyamene et al., 2019). These social issues may also include bullying (Reynolds, 2022), child suicide (Shilubane et al., 2015), poverty, educational inequalities (Ellis et al., 2019) amongst others. The impact of these social challenges can also be seen in the academic performance of some learners.

It is well accepted and contested worldwide that poverty and inequality have a significant negative impact on education (Pretorius, 2020). Research indicates that educational inequalities in the United Kingdom (UK), arguably one of the most unequal societies in the developed world, first appear in the preschool years but then intensify in primary (elementary) and secondary (high) school (Ellis et al., 2019). Child poverty rates in the United Kingdom remain shocking despite significant increases in productivity brought on by computer technologies and a boom period for the extremely wealthy (Wrigley, 2012). However, Ellis et al. (2019) cites two studies (Cummings et al. 2012; Gorski 2012) which argued that not all children from disadvantaged homes struggle academically.

In the United States (USA) on the other hand, there are substantial gaps in achievement between students from poor and advantaged backgrounds respectively (Misty & Laura, 2011). They further point out that the U.S. Department of Education has reported findings from numerous studies that distinctly showed that school poverty has a negative impact on student academic achievement (Misty & Laura, 2011). Less institutional support for mental health is more common in underprivileged neighbourhoods, which has an impact on children's emotional and behavioural health and raises the chance of behavioural issues, academic challenges, school dropout, as well as dysfunctional coping methods from becoming externalised (Garo et al., 2018).

According to Chen (2022), there are a number of significant issues that public schools are currently dealing with. Such issues may include, but are not limited to, poverty, family factors, bullying, amongst others. Chen (2022) further argues that students who do not get enough food or sleep are less likely to achieve to their full academic ability and have higher dropout rates than those who do. In addition to family factors, Chen (2022) points out that what is going on at home does negatively affect a learner's propensity to learn, and family issues may include being exposed to violence, parental divorce, or other issues that may affect a learner's ability to attend school regularly.

Nortje (2017) cites Epstein and Yutas (2012) who point out that in various developing countries, there is a small fraction of children who complete primary school and there is an even lesser number of children who finish high school. Various reasons or challenges contribute to learners not being able to complete school or even stay in school. Nortje (2017) states that in some countries, these reasons could be challenges in reaching schools as well as parents not being able to afford good quality education. For many developing countries this is perceived to be a crisis. To build up on this, Brende (2015) argues that when poverty denies a child their right to education, that child is also being denied many other opportunities, that would result in them being able to support their families and contribute towards the development of their communities.

Moreover, it is important to highlight the fact that some of the issues that contribute to learners dropping out of school include bullying and violence. In the past two decades, educators and policymakers have come to realize the importance of a safe learning environment in enhancing children's academic achievement (Ponzo, 2013). Bullying has a significant negative effect on many learners' ability to learn nowadays, and technology has given bullies more power through social networking, texting, and other virtual connections. Cyberbullying has grown significantly as a result of an increase in fatalities. According to Reynolds (2022), there has been a concerning rise in teen suicide rates in the past. The National Centre for Health Statistics (NCHS) stated that in 2020, suicide was the second top cause of death for those living in the United States.

To further add on the impact of bullying, what is of particular concern according to Glew et al. (2005) is the frequency bullying as this may have a hostile effect on victims' academic performance, their desire to go to school, as well as their self-esteem. It is also argued that there are past studies stating that bullying negatively affects a child's concentration and subsequent academic performance in victims (Glew et al., 2005).

According to Kibaara and Kabura (2015), a variety of factors affect high school learners' social issues, which may have an impact on how well they perform academically. The problems of developing nations, such as Kenya, India, and South Africa, are very different from those in developed nations. Kibaara and Kabura (2015), further state that socioeconomic problems in Kenya include the lack of electricity and access to good healthcare at home, child labour, parents not being able to afford their

children's education, and a shortage of food at home. For India, the main issues include poverty and not having enough secondary schools in comparison to primary schools. Similar societal problems, like parental unemployment, food insecurity, poverty, and teenage pregnancy, exist in South Africa (Whylken et al., 2022). The information above has shown that social challenges in school manifest themselves differently in different countries. It has also been highlighted that social challenges may affect a child's abilities and performances. South Africa as a developing country, has been seen to not being immune to these challenges.

2.3.2 Social Challenges in South African Schools

Many people are concerned about the status of South African education (Bayat et al., 2014). These concerns have grown since democracy was established in 1994 (Bayat et al., 2014). Housing, education, and health were three sectors where the government committed to working to address the effects of apartheid (Bayat et al., 2014). Due to the strong apartheid history and the resulting relationship between education and income, poorer pupils typically perform worse academically (Bayat et al., 2014). This is supported by Spaull (2011, p. 36) who states that "falling behind at school is strongly correlated with socioeconomic status and school quality in South Africa".

South Africa faces complex and numerous social and developmental issues. These problems influence everyone's social environments and wellness, but children's welfare is especially adversely affected (Pretorius, 2020). The educational system in South Africa is suspect, as is widely known. It is alarming that many South African youngsters are unable to reach their full potential as competent, independent people because of various complicated socioeconomic concerns, including drug misuse, poverty, violence, HIV/AIDS, and insufficient education (Pretorius, 2016; Pretorius, 2020).

2.3.2.1 Poverty

Inequality and poverty are complex, multifaceted issues that pose significant challenges in South African (Francis & Webster, 2019; Pretorius, 2020). Pretorius (2020) continues to point out the fact that many South Africans endure poverty and inequality on a daily basis, particularly in the country's rural and remote areas. Millions of poor South Africans' lives are being improved by education, which has long been

recognised as the most significant force in social progress, if not the only one (Omoniyi et al., 2019).

According to Pretorius (2020), education is the cornerstone of both human and socioeconomic growth and a key determinant of a society's well-being. To support this, Pretorius (2020) quotes Fleisch (2008), who posited that good education is seen as the sole significant steppingstone and means of escaping poverty globally. Education is an instrument of development. According to Bhat, Joshi and Wani (2016), education broadens brains, discerns right from wrong, teaches individuals to separate good from bad, and best utilises the environment for the growth of an individual as well as the collective. Moreover, Mmutle (2019) concurs by stating that education is perceived as one of the major socio-economic developments that allow populations to sustain development in their country.

Moreover, with education being a development tool, it is argued that learners who are poverty stricken tend to be aggressive and have less interest in learning, as such learner often show their frustration by bullying and assaulting others. According to Genesis Admin (2020) in South Africa poverty affects millions of households which it impacts children's ability to learn and perform well at school. In this regard, Spaull (2011) points out that poor school performance reinforces social inequality and creates a scenario in which children inherit their parents' social status, regardless of their ambition or aptitude. With that said the fact that the majority of learners in South Africa are affected makes the situation all the more concerning (Spaull, 2011). To further add on this, Omoniyi et al. (2019) assert that a child who is socially disadvantaged is trapped, predestined to stagnation and potential failure. Bayat et al. (2014) concur by citing Lee and Madyun (2009) who found that that learners who live in neighbourhoods where crime and poverty rates are low, displayed higher academic achievement compared to learners disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

2.3.2.2 Dropping out of School

Dropping out of school is another social challenge that impacts learner performance and is also simultaneously caused by poor academic performance. According to UNESCO (2016), a school dropout is defined as child of official school-going age who is not enrolled in school. To elaborate, Mmutle (2019) cites Masitsa (2006) who defines a school dropout as a child who left school without finishing their academic

programmes. The student group 14 to 18 years old, notably pupils in grades 8 to 12, has the greatest dropout rates in South Africa (Mmutle, 2019). According to Nortje (2017), in many developing nations, only a small proportion of kids finish primary school, and an even lesser number is able to finish high school. Due to factors including irregular school attendance, teacher absenteeism, teenage pregnancy, and school violence, many South African pupils have unsuccessful schooling careers (UNICEF, 2017; Nortje, 2017). In one study, Spaull (2011) notes that home-based surveys found that when teenagers were asked why they left secondary school, the four most common responses were financial hardship, the desire to find employment, poor academic achievement, and, for female learners, pregnancy.

2.3.2.3 Teenage Pregnancy

Teenage pregnancy is a global social and educational problem affecting countries in all levels of development (Nkosi & Pretorius, 2019; Jonas et al., 2016). Nkosi and Pretorius (2019) cite Panday et al. (2009) who further elaborates that the increasing numbers of teenage pregnancy statistics has become a major societal and educational challenge, as it seems to perpetuate low levels of education and as a result, preserve poverty. To concur, Nkala-Dlamini (2021) states that the high rate of teenage pregnancy poses a threat to the futures of many South African teenage girls as well as within the Southern African Development Region. It is stated that “they risk serious health, socio-economic and educational challenges, including the early termination of schooling due to policy, social norms or material conditions” (Nkala-Dlamini (2021, p. 2). In this light, Maemeko et al. (2018) also affirm that teenage mothers are unlikely to complete high school education. They further assert that not being able to complete din their lives and overall communities (Maemeko et al., 2018). Based on these arguments, one may also raise the fact that teenage pregnancy affects learners academically, not only by forcing them to drop out of school, but those who end up staying perform poorly (Shefer et al., 2012).

2.3.2.4 School Violence

School violence is another major challenge affecting school learners. Prinsloo and Neser (2007, p.47) state that “school violence is regarded as any intentional physical or non-physical (verbal) condition or act resulting in physical or non-physical pain being inflicted on the recipient of that act while the recipient is under the school’s

supervision". Due to fights and attacks on the victims, these physical and non-physical acts of school violence have a severe impact on teaching and learning. Those living in South Africa are well aware that violence is a big concern in all of the country's primary and secondary schools (Hendricks, 2019). Physical and psychological violence at school may overlap. Psychological violence leaves no physical wounds or signs of violation, but the acts and repercussions of physical violation are frequently obvious (Hendricks, 2019). With that said, one may argue that such problems contribute to a learner's performance in that they may either drop out of school (Ponzo, 2013; UNESCO, 2017) or produce poor results (Glew et al., 2005), or better yet, commit suicide. There is clear evidence that school violence and bullying have a negative impact on the academic performance, physical and mental health and emotional well-being of those who are victimised (UNESCO, 2017).

2.3.2.5 Suicide

Suicide remains a significant social and public health problem (Shilubane et al., 2015). According to Mathews et al. (2018), even though it is preventable, suicide is the second leading cause of death amongst adolescents globally. According to Woolf, Bantjes and Kagee (2015, p. 21), "a review of National Injury Mortality Surveillance System (NIMSS) data over an eight-year period indicated that suicide fatalities are highest amongst the 15-29, year-old group and suicide deaths in those younger than 21 constitute approximately 8% of all suicides in SA". In their South African-based study, Khuzwayo et al. (2018) found that the risk factors associated with suicide or suicide plans included physical violence and substance abuse. Their study further acknowledged societal violence as a crucial red-flag that was notably connected with suicide attempts (Khuzwayo et al., 2018). Sörberg Wallin et al. (2018) further pointed out that a learner's academic performance, which measured grade point average, at age 16, was a vigorous and solid predictor of suicide attempts.

2.3.2.6 Family Characteristics

Le Roux (2020) cites Battin-Pearson et al. (2000) who states that family socialisation makes available crucial foundations for a child, and a learner eventually dropping of school can as a result be traced back to early familial experiences. It is further stated that parental style and control, family stress and divorce are some of the factors that could have an impact on a child's later capability to finish school (Le Roux, 2020).

Another point in this regard is stated by Andrew and Segun (2019) who mentions that the academic performance of a child from parental divorce becomes negatively affected. In addition, family factors also play a role in an educator's ability to teach. Chen (2020) mentions that what is going on at home, such as divorce, exposure to family violence, poverty, and many other issues, may affect a learner's inclination to learn.

In South Africa, there has been a lot of research done on the multifaceted effects of family poverty on school attendance and academic development (Romero et al., 2018). Romero et al. (2018) cites studies by Branson et al. (2013), Fleisch et al. (2012) as well as Strassburg (2010), who pointed out that dropouts and overaged children who still attend school often live in family homes that are overcrowded, informal settlements and households with low parental educational attainment. Additionally, these children are more likely to endure financial stress, food insecurity, and poor access to electricity (Branson et al., 2013; Romero et al., 2018). To further elaborate, Ferguson et al. (2007) state that educational results are one of the main parts impacted by one's family income.

2.3.3 Available Interventions in South Africa

In South Africa, as in many other nations, education continues to rank among the most crucial basic human rights and requirements (Whylken et al., 2022). The Apartheid regime significantly contributed to the segregation of students of colour, who now live in communities plagued by a variety of social problems, including socioeconomic status, environmental issues, and psychological factors, all of which are major contributors to the recognised social issues faced by students (Kibaara & Kabura, 2015; Whylken et al., 2022). However, the government has allotted funding and developed policies and intervention strategies to eradicate inequality and segregation as a result of the oppression from the Apartheid era since the country attained democracy in 1994 (Whylken et al., 2022).

An intervention is a combination of programs and strategies that are created to deal with social issues or improve services (Goodwill, 2011). Interventions can be educational programs, health campaigns, and rehabilitation centres. The Department of Basic Education (2014) introduced the screening, identification, assessment and support (SIAS) policy with the aim of providing programmes for all learners who are in

need of additional support to improve their school participation and overall performance.

There are school-based support teams (SBST) in school which are teachers that have been identified by the school's principal to support and access learners in need of support (Inclusive Education South Africa, 2018). The Department of Basic Education (2014) listed external source of support in school is health practitioners as they play a role where schools may require the support of health professionals such as psychologist, speech therapists and occupational therapist to conduct assessment to learners when needed.

Moreover, the Department of Social Development (DSD) offers social worker services to support learners, family and community. National association of social workers (Agresta, 2004) states the roles of school social workers as conducting psychosocial support, assessing student for substance use, support system, emotional functions peer issues, suicidal and similar issues, develop and implement treatment plans that support self-determination, provide crisis management services, provide therapeutic services, conduct home visits for further investigations, as well as to provide training to learners, teachers and parents.

Therefore, the role of school social worker is to play a vital role to addressing various needs to learners in educational settings. Pretorius (2020) states that in many countries, education and social work are seen as professions that complement each other.

Non-profit organisations that are also helping school with donations of sanitary pads, school uniform which Department of Social development also have a programme of distribution of school uniform (Department of Social Development, 2019). The National School Nutrition programme is a programme by the South African government in order to provide one basic and nourishing meal to every learner in primary and secondary schools in low economic levels (Department of Basic Education, 2021). Some of their objectives include providing nutritious food to learners so that their ability to learn is improved. Per its 2013/14 annual report, the programme has reached more than 9 million learners (Department of Basic Education, 2021). The challenge with these interventions above is to focus more social challenges that learners are still facing.

Therefore, with the information provided about South African schools as a developing country that is affected by social challenges that learners experiencing the reasons for this might be border systems that are not controlled thoroughly. This can lead to broken and uneducated upcoming adults in the future.

2.4 Conclusion

There are various social problems surrounding the education system. It is important that they are understood in order to try and solve them at the same time. The next chapter will focus on the methodology of the study, which includes the study approach and design, sample, instrumentation and research process.

CHAPTER THREE:

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The research design and methodology that guided this study are discussed in this chapter. The chapter will first explain the research paradigm that was appropriate for this study, as well as the research approach. The sample and data collection used for this study are also discussed. The trustworthiness of the study as well as ethical considerations that were adhered to are also discussed on this chapter.

3.2 Research Paradigm

A community of researchers employs a collection of ideas or worldviews known as a paradigm to develop knowledge in the context of research (Fossey et al., 2002). It is a set of assumptions, research strategies and criteria for rigour that are shared, even taken for granted, by that community (Fossey et al., 2002). The positivist, interpretative or constructive, and critical research paradigms are the three main types of research approaches.

For the purpose of this study, the interpretivist/constructivists paradigm was deemed appropriate. Believers of this paradigm hold that there are numerous realities rather than a single reality or truth (Adom et al., 2016). The focus and concern of this paradigm as stated by Alharahsheh and Pius (2020), is in depth factors and variables linked with context. Human beings are considered as different from physical phenomena (as studied in positivism) as they are capable of creating further depth in meanings while also holding that humans cannot be studies in the same way as physical phenomena in other scientific studies (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020, p.41). This paradigm was appropriate in that the aim of the study was to explore and describe the social challenges that affect selected learners and their academic performance. Therefore, in order to understand the different challenges that learners face, it was important for the researcher to be cognizant of the fact that learners experienced these challenges differently. To further elaborate, Thanh and Thanh (2015), state that the interpretive paradigm enables researchers to view and comprehend the world through the perspectives of their research subjects. To understand the impact of the social challenges on these learners, it was important for the researcher to be aware of what

Rahi (2017) states, that interpretivists want to explore the understanding of the world in which participants live in.

3.3 Research Approach and Design

A research approach is a set of guidelines and procedures for carrying out investigations that can range from broad hypotheses to particular methods for collecting, analysing, and interpreting data (Creswell, 2014). The three main approaches are quantitative research, qualitative research, and mixed approach, according to Mohajan (2018:28). Creswell and Poth (2016:307) state that the type of study done, the knowledge collected, whether it is objective or subjective, the methods and strategy used to obtain the knowledge, such as through a questionnaire or observations, all affect the choice of the research approach. This research study followed a qualitative research approach. One objective of qualitative research is to comprehend the meaning and experience components of people's lives and social settings (Fossey et al., 2002). The primary concern of this approach is whether the study participants' subjective meanings, actions, and social circumstances are clarified (Fossey et al., 2002). Alharahsheh and Pius (2020) also note out that the goal of qualitative research is to develop a thorough understanding of a particular case through in-depth exploratory research that enable discovering quality responses throughout the study. The study allowed the researcher an opportunity to explore through theoretical feedback on analysing the problem at hand regarding the various challenges faced by adolescents.

Moreover, one of the objectives of the study was to explore the social challenges that adolescents experience that have an impact on their academic performance. Doing so, meant that the researcher did not need to quantify the results, but rather, seek to fully understand how these challenges affect learner performance. Therefore, this study adopted an explorative research design, which according to Swedberg (2020) is an effort to discover and explore a new and interesting issue. It is further stated that exploratory research is valuable when it comes to attempting to understand what is happening, search for new perceptions, asking questions as well as assessing topics in a new light (Swaraj, 2019).

In addition, as an interpretivist study, it was deemed appropriate that the approach be qualitative and the design be explorative. This is because Mohajan (2018) states that

qualitative data helps the researcher in understanding and explaining the “why” behind what is revealed by the study findings.

3.4 Population and Sample

The collective or entirety of all subjects, objects, or individuals that adjust to a set of rules and conditions is referred to as a population (Gentles et al., 2015). Neuman and Robson (2014) elaborate by stating that a population refers to the entire pool of individuals with particular set of characteristics required for a study. The population for this particular study included all learners from Phahama High School in Mohlakeng, and those targeted were learners who were in grade 11 and 12, whose age was above 17 years. Based on the school’s data base that the researcher had access to, there was a total of 50 learners that the researcher could select a sample from. These learners were selected because according to Piaget’s stages of intellectual/cognitive development, they are in the formal operational stage. This means that they are capable of thinking about hypothetical and abstract notions that have the potential of leading to more than one solution or possible outcomes (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958). Therefore, these learners were believed to be able to shed light on their experiences with the different challenges they experienced. They were able to provide the researcher with the needed information, in a way that was easy and clear.

However, since it is not always feasible to study the entire population, we need to take a sample. A sample refers to a portion of a population (Etikan et al., 2016). Acharya et al. (2013) further states that a ‘sample’ is a subgroup of the population that is carefully chosen so that it represents the bigger population. A particular sampling technique was used select the sample and this is discussed in the sampling method.

3.4.1Sampling Method

Sampling techniques are generally classified into ‘probability’ and ‘non-probability’ sampling technique (Acharya et al., 2013). As a qualitative study, non-probability sampling was deemed appropriate. The study sought to explore and describe the social challenges that affect selected learners and their academic performance. It was thus important to ensure that the sampling technique used would yield rich information. According to Taherdoost (2016), non-probability sampling is used when a sample of participants does not need to be generalised, or random, but used when there is a clear rationale for including some individuals instead of others.

Purposeful sampling was thus chosen for the study. The purposeful sampling technique is also referred to as judgment sampling. It is the careful selection of participants based on the qualities they possess with regards to what is needed for a study (Etikan et al., 2016). This approach does not rely on chance, and it does not call on underlying assumptions or a set number of participants. To put it simply, the researcher decides what information is required to obtain before looking for people who can and are willing to provide it owing to their knowledge or experience (Etikan et al., 2016). It is frequently used in qualitative research to find and pick the instances with the most information so that the resources are used as effectively as possible (Etikan et al., 2016). As this study aimed to explore and describe the social challenges that affect learners and their academic performance, this sampling technique was important in that the researcher was able to select participants who fit the inclusion criteria.

Moreover, Acharya et al. (2013) states that in purposive sampling, the sample is also selected based on the convenience of the researcher. In this regard, the researcher obtained a data base of the school where she could be able to select learners who met the criteria. The researcher obtained the school's data base and identified learners who were understood to experience challenges that could potentially impact their learning. For the purposes of this study, a total of 15 participants were selected for data collection. The sample included learners from Mohlakeng School in Mohlakeng, who currently attended grade 11 and 12.

3.4.2 The Sample Inclusion Criteria

Participants who were selected for the study, had to possess the following characteristics:

- Learners from Mohlakeng School in Mohlakeng in Rand-west municipality, Gauteng with social challenges that were identified from the school database.
- Learners should be in grade 11 or 12 and aged between 18 and 21 years.
- The learners who dropped out or almost dropped out of school due to social challenges identified by the school.

The potential participants were recruited from the database that the school provided to the researcher. A letter of participation and the participant information sheet was provided to these learners and their parents or guardians.

3.5 Data Collection Method

Data collection is vital in research. This is because the collected data is intended to contribute to a better understanding of what is being studied and as well as the theoretical framework that the study was rooted in (Etikan et al., 2016). Below, is figure 3.1 compiled by the researcher to show the processes the researcher took at Mohlakeng School in Rand-west municipality, Gauteng, to collect data from participants with regards to the social challenges that affect them and their academic performance.

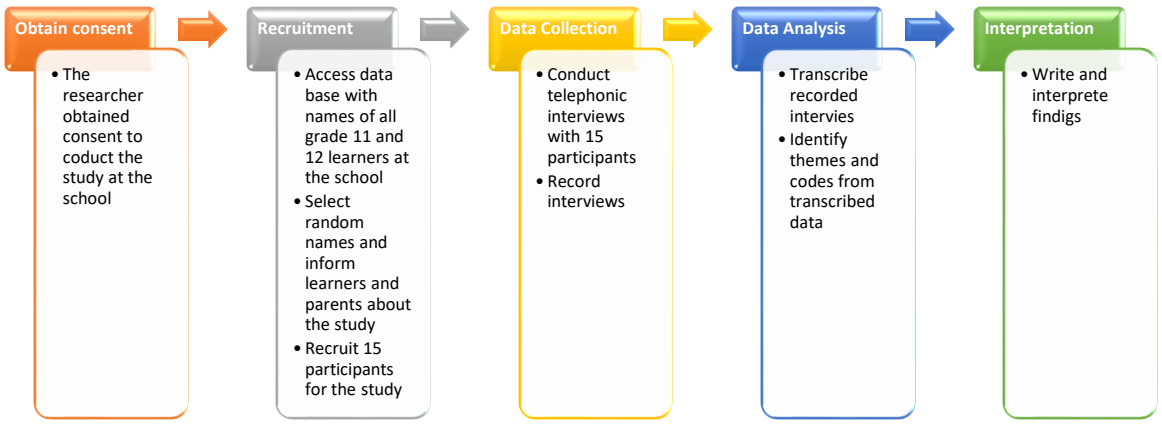


Figure 3.1: Data Collection Summary

Source: Author's own compilation sample

3.5.1 Data Collection Instrument

In order to explore and describe the social challenges that affect learners and their academic performance, the researcher made use of an interview guide. The data collection instrument that was utilised was an interview guide which consisted of open-ended interviews. This allowed the researcher to have a set of pre-determined open-ended questions that would guide the telephonic interviews, but also allow both the researcher and participants the opportunity to delve deeper into what was being studied. This is further elaborated by Reja et al. (2003) who mentioned that open-ended questions allow research participant a chance to entirely express their opinions

without the influence of the researcher or the researcher leading their responses. The interview guide had 7 questions that were pre-determined and standard for all participants. The Interview guide that was used is attached as Appendix F.

3.5.2 Pre-testing

According to Singh (2007) pre-testing give the researcher an opportunity to remove any insignificances and sources of bias and errors before they can formally start the data collection process for the study. The researcher conducted pre-test interviews with two learners from the same school, who met the inclusion criteria but were not included in the study. The pre-test interviews took about 30 minutes each and they were conducted through a phone-call to ensure that the researcher would know what to expect when collecting data. The pre-test participants did not suggest any additional changes or edit for the final interview guide.

3.5.3 Data Collection

The data collection method the researcher made use of is a semi-structured interview. According to Blee and Taylor (2002), research interviews may be structured, semi-structured or unstructured. Semi-structured interviews are mainly beneficial in studies where the aim is to discover, explore, and interpret phenomena. Reja et al. (2003) explains that in semi-structured interviews, the researcher prepares a few questions that are pre-set, while the rest of the questions come up when the researcher probes, based on the participants' responses. A semi-structured interview is conducted conversationally with one participant at a time, and employs a combination of open- and closed-ended questions. It usually goes with follow-up or probing questions (Newcomer et al., 2015). This allowed the researcher to give participants the opportunity to share their information from their own perspectives, while allowing the researcher an opportunity to ask further questions for in-depth data.

For data collection purposes, the study made use of telephonic interviews. These refer to conducting interviews via a phone. Numerous methodological studies highlight the practical benefits of conducting interviews over the phone, such as better access to geographically scattered interviewees, lower costs, more interviewer safety, and more schedule flexibility (Drabble et al., 2016). This is backed up by Knox and Burkard (2009), who claim that since phone interviews do not need travel, they allow researchers to include people from almost any location. Particularly, as compared to

face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews may be less intrusive and provide interviewees more power and control in terms of structuring interviews to fit their schedules and rescheduling, interrupting, or stopping the interview.

Phone interviews were perceived to be suitable for this study as not all learners lived closer to the school and some walked to school. Therefore, since the researcher was not able to get time to interview them during school hours, she had to do it after school. Phone interviews then allowed the researcher to be able to collect data without having to distract the learners from their school activities or have to keep them for long after school hours. The researcher was also able to conduct interviews with suitable participants even if they lived far from the school or the researcher. This method of data collection also allowed the participants the privacy to take part in interviews without other learners finding out at school. Facing social challenges may not be easy to talk about, and thus allowing participants to be interviewed without others finding out also meant that learners were free to share their experiences without any fear of being judged by peers. This is supported by Knox and Burkard (2009), as they pointed out that conducting interviews via a phone also affords participants an opportunity to be anonymous. This is because they may be able to use false names and thus not fully identify themselves (Knox & Burkard, 2009), share personal information without fear of being identified in future (Burke & Miller, 2001).

3.6 Data Analysis

According to Thorne (2000), data for qualitative research can take many different forms, and there seems to be no restriction on what might be included in a qualitative database. The process of data analysis then becomes both crucial and complicated at the same time. Data analysis, according to Start (2006), is the act of cleansing, examining, demonstrating, and transforming data in order to find useful information, draw enlightened conclusions, and assist in decision-making. It involves processing, organising, and interpreting data, and is a technique to give the data that was gathered a meaningful order (Start, 2006).

As a qualitative study, the researcher made use of thematic analysis. Nowell, Norris, White and Moules (2017, p.3) cite Boyatzis (1998) who stated that “thematic analysis as a translator for those speaking the languages of qualitative and quantitative analysis, enabling researchers who use different research methods to communicate

with each other". According to Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysis and reporting which known as themes within data. This is a method which allows the researcher to identify, analyse and report patterns within data. The purpose of thematic analysis in this research is to describe patterns that came up from interview responses with participants.

3.6.1 Method of Data Analysis

The steps of thematic analysis as stated by Braun and Clarke (2006) were followed and are discussed in detail below:

Phase 1- Familiarising yourself with your data

This is the engaging phase where the researcher gets to understand more about the context of the study through the data that was collected. Essentially, coding should be developed and defined over the entire study (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this phase the researcher had all the information that was jotted down and through the audio tapes preparing to transcript. In doing so, the researcher adopts an interpretative act whereby the researcher generates significance from the interview transcript (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999). The researcher collected data and immersed herself with it by reading through every transcript and notes she made during each interview. This process was done by a researcher where she transcribed the data from the telephone record and notes into a written form.

Phase 2- Generating initial codes

Phase 2 starts with reading and familiarising yourself with the data and generating an initial list of ideas about what is in the data and what is interesting about it (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This phase involves producing initial data codes. The codes defined a function of the data that occurred important to the researcher and referred to the most specific section or aspect of the raw data that was evaluated in a meaningful manner with respect to the hypothesis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher listed all the initial ideas including the notes and the audio records and list the interesting ideas that was gathered. The researcher also used different colours to highlight similarities between the transcripts. For example, everything (verbatim quote) that related to the same theme, was highlighted using the same colour (for theme 1, everything was highlighted in green, theme 2 yellow, etc.). All quotes from participant responses that had similarities, were highlighted in the same colour.

Phase 3- Searching for themes

In this stage the researcher made use of the different colours she used to identify codes by grouping similar information together. This stage starts with the initial coding and compilation of all information and will include a list of the various codes found by the researcher in their data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Instead of codes, this step, which re-focuses the study at the broader level of themes, strategy provides the various codes into possible themes and integrating all the related coded data extracts inside the themes defined (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher also used arrows and table formats to group similar codes and colours together into themes that can be easily understood. For example, those with the same colour were allocated in the first column, then another colour in the second column, etc. Those that seemed to fit with another column instead, were then moved to another column or when the researcher was not sure, she used an arrow to point towards a potential column until she thoroughly thought about it.

Phase 4- Reviewing themes

This process starts when a collection of condition can lead has been developed by the researcher and includes the refining of those themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During this point, it may become clear that certain candidate topics are not really topics (e.g., if there is not enough proof to substantiate them, or the evidence is too expansive), whereas others dissolve into each other (e.g., one topic may be formed by two entirely different topics). Other subjects can need to be broken divided into various ones (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher also went back to the initial transcripts to check if there was any vital information lost and if identified themes made sense.

Phase 5- Defining and naming themes

The researcher identified and then further developed the themes she has provided for the study at this point and analyse the information within them. By describing and refining what each theme is about and deciding what element of the knowledge each theme collects (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Doing even more, or being too varied and nuanced, is crucial not to try to get a theme the researcher did so by returning to collected data extracts for each theme and arranging them with associated narrative into a cohesive and internally consistent account (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher then named each theme and documented it. There was a total of 10 themes, and these were: academic challenges, unpleasant home circumstances, not

having the necessary resources to cope, adopting coping mechanisms, extra academic effort, thinking about future prospects, mending family relationships, support from family, help is available and no help available.

Phase 6: Producing the report

Step 6 starts with a collection of thoroughly worked-out themes, which includes the report's final review. The purpose of writing a thematic analysis is to convey the complicated story of the data in a way which will convince the reader of the importance and relevance of your analysis, whether for publication or for research or thesis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is crucial that the study (writing it up, including data extracts) provided a succinct, descriptive, rational, no repetitive, and insightful account of the story that the data tells – within and across themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During this phase, the researcher engaged in the process of answering the research question to be able to produce the research report. The uniqueness of the research question and the responses provided by the participants be better reflected by the write-up.

3.7 Trustworthiness

Nowell et al. (2017, p.3) cites Lincoln and Guba (1985) to sat that “trustworthiness is one way in which researchers can persuade themselves and readers that their research findings are worthy of attention”. Pilot and Beck (2014) point out that trustworthiness refers to approaches that researchers make use of to reduce threats to truthfulness in qualitative research. In order to ensure and promote the trustworthiness of a study, factors such as credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability need to be applied.

Credibility

Credibility addresses the congruency between the findings and reality (Shenton, 2004). The confidence that can be placed in the veracity of the research findings is known as credibility (Anney, 2014). Credibility defines whether or not the research findings represent credible information acquired from the original data of the participants and are a valid interpretation of their initial perspectives (Anney, 2014). In this regard, the researcher transcribed audio recordings from the telephonic interviews as they were said by each participant. This further allowed the researcher to use direct quotes from participants’ responses in the findings chapter. Using direct verbatim

quotes ensures that the researcher indeed used information from what participants said, rather than the biases or formulations by the researcher.

Anney (2014) continues to say that prolonged engagement in the field of research site also helps with creditability. It is also claimed that in order to obtain qualitative research data, the researcher must fully immerse himself in the environment of the participants (Anney, 2014). This reduces information distortions that can occur as a result of the researcher's presence in the field by assisting the researcher in understanding the context of the study. The researcher visited Mohlakeng School and got to know the management, build rapport and also have a brief meeting with the prospective research participants before conducting the interviews. This allowed the researcher to gain an understanding of the participants' context of the discussion and to educate them about the research including its aims and objectives.

In addition, Shenton (2004) stated that to ensure credibility in a study, the researcher must have tactics to help guarantee that participants give honest responses. Each subject should have the option to decline participation in the study to ensure that the data collection sessions only include persons who are genuinely willing to participate and prepared to provide data voluntarily (Shenton, 2004). During the information session with participants and before each interview, the researcher made it clear that participating in the study was purely voluntary, and they would be allowed to leave the study at any point without any negative consequences.

Transferability

Transferability, which assesses how well qualitative research findings may be applied to various situations with different respondents, is the interpretive equivalent of generalisability (Anney, 2014). According to Shenton (2004), transferability refers to the extent to which the results of one study can be used in a new environment. Bitsch (2005, p.85) states that “the researcher facilitates the transferability judgment by a potential user through ‘thick description’ and purposeful sampling”. To ensure that this principle was adhered to, the researcher provided a thick description of the study’s methodology and limitations. This was believed to ensure that the reader is fully aware of the study, the number of participants and the boundaries that limited the study. Moreover, the researcher made use of purposive sampling. This was because the

researcher knew and understood the characteristics that participants possess, so that each and every information in thoroughly explained in the report for the reader.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the findings of a study remaining stable over time (Bitsch, 2005). It is stated that dependability involves participants assessing the study's findings, interpretation, and provide suggestions to ensure that they are all supported by the data gathered from them (Anney, 2014). To ensure the dependability of this particular study, the researcher sent learners the themes and codes that were identified, so that they could have a look and comment if the researcher did not write their responses as they said them. However, there was no participant who responded with feedback.

The researcher also ensured the dependability of the study using an audit trail. A researcher accounts for all the research decisions and activities to demonstrate how the data were gathered, documented, and analysed, according to Anney (2014), who defines an audit trail as an assessment of the inquiry process and product to validate the data. To ensure that this was done, the researcher had a supervisor who held her accountable for everything containing the research. The supervisor provided feedback to the researcher to ensure that everything written on the report was clear and sufficient information with regards to the data collection up until data analysis. The researcher provided a thorough summary of its execution, detailing what was planned and implemented to presenting the research approach used in this report.

Furthermore, Anney (2014) cites Guba and Lincoln (1982), who emphasise that the following records should be kept for cross-checking the research process in order for an auditor to conduct an exhaustive audit trial: raw data, notes taken during interviews and observation, documents any record that was collected from the field, as well as other important documents. To do so, the researcher made available all transcripts and audio recordings on the supervisor’s request. These were stored in a password protected computer to ensure the confidentiality of participants is protected, while also ensuring that the researcher remains accountable with the data and that there is no bias.

Confirmability

The qualitative researcher's equivalent of objectivity is the idea of confirmability. Here, measures must be made to help ensure, to the extent feasible, that the work's conclusions are the result of the informants' experiences and thoughts, rather than the researcher's qualities and preferences (Shenton, 2004). The researcher recorded all interviews and transcribed them word for word to ensure that the participants' responses were exactly as they said them. The definition of confirmability relates to study objectivity, thereby ensuring that the results of the analysis are the product of the participants' perceptions and thoughts and are not derived from the researcher's characteristics and preferences (Shenton, 2004). The audio recordings and transcripts were also kept safe and available on request. Moreover, as mentioned in the dependability section, there was an audit trail. Anney (2014) offers more support for this, stating that confirmability refers to the extent to which the findings of an investigation may be confirmed or corroborated by other researchers. In this case, the other researcher is the supervisor who has experience in the academic field.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

According to Bless et al.Kagee (2006) and Strydom (2005) in order for one to regulate a researcher's behaviour, ethics serve as norms, moral principles, and recommendations. Research ethics were developed and put into place to protect participants from being mistreated by researchers. They offer rules for what can be deemed acceptable behaviour regarding research (Sefotho, 2021, p. 15). According to Neuman and Robson (2014), ethical issues in research are dilemmas and conflicts that arise over the best way to conduct research.

Informed Consent

As much as feasible, research should be based on the freely given informed permission of research subjects who have received sufficient information about what will be done to them, the restrictions on their involvement, and any potential hazards they may face by participating in the study (Sin, 2005). This can be argued to include explaining the study's purpose and methodology to the participants while also making it apparent that they are free to leave the study whenever they choose to do so. In agreement, Klenke (2008) states that informed consent involves educating research participants on the overall purpose of the study, its procedures, the risks involved, as well as the benefits of participating in the study.

For the purposes of this study, this refers to obtaining permission from the parents or guardian of the learners; with the provision of necessary knowledge to make an informed decision. As some of the research participants of the study were learners under 18 years of age, the researcher found it important to ensure that process of participating in the study were clearly explained to them and their parents/guardian. As stated by O'Reilly and Kiyimba (2015), it is important that the researcher is aware that it is not about the participants' signature, but ensure that they fully understand what the research entails.

Voluntary participation

Giving participants the option to decide whether to engage in a research study is considered to be excellent ethical practice, according to Rubin and Babbie (2017). Before conducting the interviews, it is important that participants are aware that the study is voluntary and they can withdraw at any time from the study (Kerlinger et al., 2000). It was important that in the informed consent, the researcher clearly stated that it was well within the participants' right to withdraw from the study at any point without any negative consequences. The researcher also made it clear to participants before each interview that leaving the study would not affect them as individuals or at school.

Confidentiality and Privacy

When discussing how research data will be managed, maintained, and shared to prevent incorrect disclosure, the term "confidentiality" relates to how well the researcher safeguards the participant's private information (Leary, 2012). According to Novak (2014), privacy refers to an individual's amount of control over the information they choose to disclose, while confidentiality refers to the need to keep all information provided by participants secret during the research process. As a social worker, the researcher was aware of the importance of confidentiality. She ensured that the information shared by participants was confidential and not shared with anyone who was not part of the research. The transcripts from the recorded interviews were not stored using the participants' real names. For the purposes of the study, the participants were given pseudonyms, to ensure that their personal details could not be linked to any information they shared during interviews.

In addition, conducting interviews via a phone afforded participants an opportunity to be anonymous. This is because they could be able to use false names and thus not

fully identify themselves and be able to share personal information without fear of being identified in future. It is important to point out that anonymity could not be guaranteed throughout the data collection process as the researcher did know who the participants are. Due to the use of pseudonyms anonymity was guaranteed during the writeup of the research report. Even though the researcher was aware of the identification of the participants in the study, she took precautions to prevent others from revealing that identity.

Debriefing of participants

The right approach to debrief participants is to answer their insights about the study instantly after the session or send them a checklist informing them the basic objective or outcome of the current research (Strydom, 2005). The process of debriefing included explaining the purpose and the procedure of the study. Debriefing of the participants was provided at the school where the researcher explained to the participants about the research, its outcomes and their rights. Referral to colleagues (school social worker) was explained if there was be a need for some support or free counselling services after or before the interview. Participant information sheet includes the contact details for support or counselling services following the interview. Participants were informed that these services were available free of charge at Department of Social Development. The participants were also told that they may access telephonic service at the 24-hour helpline 0800 12 13 14 or the DSD office on (011) 278 3900. If participants preferred in person counselling, they were able to seek services from Department of Social Development, Feldar street, in Randfontein. All services are free and it was clearly sated to every participant. According to Draucker et al. (2009) a researcher conducting a study on emotional issues needs to identify potential participants who might be vulnerable to harm and be prepared to respond to negative emotional reaction that might occur course of the research. In doing so, the researcher informed participants of the services that were available should they need them.

Non-maleficence

This ethical standard ensures that no harm of any type is done to people and that their best interests are always put first in research as well as social work practice (Ryan, 2010). The researcher made sure that participants were not subjected to any form of mistreatment, harm, or manipulation as a result of taking part in the study, both during

and after it was completed. The researcher was also accountable to her supervisor as she shared every detail of the research process.

3.9 Conclusion

In conclusion the chapter focused on the research participation and selections, description of the participants, followed by the approach and design, the trustworthiness as well as ethical considerations that guided the study. The next chapter focuses on the results and the findings of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR:

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter of the report is a clear presentation of the results and findings of the study. Data was collected from semi-structured individual interviews, to seek to understand the impact that the social challenges they encounter have on their academic performance. With reference to the two theories framing this study, i.e., person-in-environment and Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the different social challenges that affect learners are analysed in this chapter to see their impact on academic performance. The findings that emerged during data collection with 15 grade 11 and 12 learners from Mohlakeng School in Mohlakeng are discussed systematically in accordance to the themes identified during thematic analysis. These themes are illustrated with direct quotes from participants. It is said that a person-in-environment viewpoint offers a more suitable context for evaluating an individual not only on their current challenges and strengths but also considering the environmental factors (Amadasun, 2020).

4.2 Demographic Information

A total of fifteen participants from Mohlakeng School in Mohlakeng were involved in this research study. The 15 participants were black and comprised of 7 males and 8 females. The majority of the participants were aged 19 and 20 years (5 participants each per age group) at time of the interview. Three participants were aged 21 years and 2 were aged 18 years. The above information can be related to the findings of a GDE report (2012) that conducted research on *factors contributing to dropout between Grades 10 and 11 in Gauteng.* The report found that repetition of a grade, being overage as a result of repetition, thinking about leaving school before grade 12 and feeling forced to leave school were shown to have a clear correlation (GDE, 2012). Their ages and show a relation in all of them having had failed a grade before. It was noted that some participants had repeated a grade more than once, or repeated multiple grades. A total of 10 participants had a history of having dropped out of school. They reported to have dropped out of school between the ages of 16 and 17 (grade 10) for a year and coming back to school after a year. To further highlight this issue, like many other countries, South Africa has a high percentage of learners who drop

out of secondary school (Mokoena & van Breda, 2021). Mokoena and van Breda (2021) cite Weybright et al. (2017) who point out that up to 60% of students in South Africa drop out before completing secondary school. A report by the GDE (2012) a total of 138 dropouts were interviewed from 30 different schools. What was found from these learners was that "half of them reported being *at home, doing nothing*, 21% reported that they engaged in some form of employment, about 15% were enrolled in an FET college, 7% in ABET, and the remaining 6% were seeking employment". The above information shows shocking numbers, that are unfortunately a reality in many parts of South Africa. It was therefore important to conduct a study that help explain the impact that social challenges have on academic performance. It was believed that the findings of the study would help identify solutions that would as a result, help in reducing these numbers.

Table 4.1 below depicts the demographic information of learners that took part in the study:

Description Factors	Sub-category	Number of participants
Gender	Males	7
	Females	8
Age Category	18 years	2
	19 years	5
	20 years	5
	21 years	3
Current Grade	Grade 11	10
	Grade 12	5
Repeated Grade before	Failed multiple grades	15
Dropped out of school before	Males	6
	Females	4

Table 4.1 Demographic Information

4.3 Findings

The researcher sought to describe and explore the social challenges that affect selected learners and their academic performance in Mohlakeng School in Rand-west municipality, Gauteng, South Africa. The results of the study are presented in

accordance to the themes that that were identified, while also answering the research questions that were set in the beginning of the study. The themes are described using verbatim quotes as said by participants.

The study had 4 objectives, and the researcher identified themes and sub-themes for each objective. The first objective, which was to explore the social challenges that learners at Mohlakeng School experience that have an impact on their academic performance. The themes identified under this objective were academic challenges, unpleasant home circumstances, with five sub-themes identified for both themes combined. The second objective sought to understand the coping strategies adopted by learners at Mohlakeng School in dealing with social challenges and balancing school. A total of two themes, which included not having the necessary resources to cope and adopting coping mechanisms, were identified, with three sub-themes emerging as a result.

The study also sought to describe the support needs of learners at Mohlakeng School who face social challenges that impact their academic performance, and this meant seeking to understand the support needs of learners and the perceived support from family. Extra academic effort, thinking about future prospects, mending family relationships and support from family were the themes that emerged, with only two sub-themes identified as a result. Only two contrasting themes were identified for the perceived support from family and no sub-theme identified. Below is Table 4.2, which summarises the themes and subthemes found in the study:

Objective	Theme	Sub-theme
4.3.1 Social challenges that learners experience that have an impact on their academic performance	Theme 1: Academic Challenges	Subtheme 1.1: Not performing well academically Subtheme 1.2: Learning Challenges
	Theme 2: Unpleasant Home Circumstances	Subtheme 2.1: Unemployment in the family Subtheme 2.2: Relational disconnect with family

		Subtheme 2.3: Other family responsibilities
4.3.2 Coping strategies adopted by learners	Theme 3: Not Having the Necessary Resources to Cope	
	Theme 4: Adopting Coping Mechanisms	Subtheme 4.1: Acceptance Subtheme 4.2: Avoidance Subtheme 4.3: Resourcefulness
4.3.3 The support needs of learners	Theme 5: Extra Academic Effort	Subtheme 5.1: Support from teachers Subtheme 5.2: Putting in Extra Effort
	Theme 6: Thinking about Future Prospects	
	Theme 7: Mending Family Relationships	
	Theme 8: Support from Family	
4.3.4 Perceived support from family	Theme 9: Help is available	
	Theme 10: No help available	

Table 4.2 Themes and Subthemes

4.3 Discussion of objectives, themes and subthemes

This section contains the discussion of the results according to the objectives. The themes and subthemes associated with each objective will be discussed below:

4.3.1 Social challenges that learners experience that have an impact on their academic performance

The first objective of the study sought to explore the social challenges that learners at Mohlakeng School in Mohlakeng experience that have an impact on their academic performance. This was important in that Kibaara and Kabura (2015) mentioned that there are many factors that affect high school learners' social issues, which may have an impact on how well they perform academically. The objective also contributed in the understanding and application of the person-in-environment approach as explained by Weiss-Gal (2008). This theory sees the individual and their multiple environments (micro, mezzo, and macro) as a system that is dynamic and interactive and explains how each component concurrently influences and is influenced by the other. As it is seen in the themes and sub-themes discussed below, social challenges have an influence in learner academic performance and vice-versa. The researcher wanted to first identify these challenges and then see how they affected their performance. A total of two themes were identified in response to this objective. Learners mentioned that they had *academic challenges* and *unpleasant home circumstances* affected their studies. All themes have been discussed in detail with their subthemes and supported by verbatim quotes from transcribed telephone interviews.

Theme 1: Academic Challenges

The first theme in this objective was academic challenges, and since the study sought to explore and describe the social challenges that affect selected learners and their academic performance, it was important to identify the different academic challenges that learners experienced. This helped with the first objective of the study. In relation to experiencing academic challenges, two subthemes were present. Not performing well came up in five responses out of 15. The illustrative quotes in support of this theme are presented below:

Subtheme 1.1: Not performing well academically

Different academic challenges that participants experienced were also seen through poor academic performance. There were learners who expressed not performing well academically, and this is seen in the quotes below:

From three participants' responses, repeating a grade was not a first-time occurrence, as seen below:

"*I am failing and have stress of been send to college if I fail grade 11 again*" – P1

"*Yes, I have failed 2 times grade 10 and 11*" – P4

"…*Failing Grade 9 and 10…*" – P14

Other responses from participants who did not perform well academically are as follows:

"*I have challenges of failing and I always give myself time for my books, but I still fail*" – P6

"… *failed Grade 10 last year. It affected me academically and I started smoking dagga*…" – P9

Based on this response, it can be pointed out that once a learner feels affected by social challenges, they may as a result, turn to change their attitude, lose interest in school or find comfort in substance abuse, further affecting their academic performance. This means that the different challenges that learner experience have an impact on their overall academic performance. From the above quotes, it can be seen that majority of the participants struggled academically; to a point where they repeated a grade, where some failed a grade more than once. Other learners, did not express failure, even though they shared to have challenges. Repeating a grade has also been reported to be a contributing factor to school dropout. GDE (2012) found that issues such as grade, age, and if they had repeated some grades were some of the factors mentioned by school dropouts. In that case, this further raise concerns in terms of learner' performance, the quality of education they receive and how this further affects their future negatively.

Subtheme 1.2: Learning Challenges

Other learners did not perform well academically, while for theirs they had learning (as seen in this theme). Observing the learning challenges that learners experienced helped in understanding the deeper root of their poor academic performance.

For two learners, their challenges seemed to be in the classroom. One participant shared that their challenge related to not being able to understand the teacher in class. This further adds on the point regarding the quality of education these learners received. It is argued that if learners are not able to grasp concepts that could potentially result in them performing well, then repeating a grade or dropping out of school could be inevitable. The responses below show that for some learners, factors that negatively affect their academic performance starts om the classroom:

"… cannot understand most of the teachers when they are teaching…" – P7

Another participant believed that the subjects they had chosen were wrong, as seen in the following response:

"…*I think I have chosen wrong subjects and I fail most of the subjects…*" – P4

The two subthemes showed that seven of the learners experienced challenges academically. This theme was important to highlight in that the responses showed that some of the challenges that learners faced, were those they experience at school or intrinsically. It is argued that the developmental phase secondary school learners find themselves in is set apart by uncertainty, and this may result in increased peer pressure and anxiety (Jonck et al., 2019). In that case, it can be argued that this may negatively affect them academically.

Theme 2: Unpleasant Home Circumstances

Living in unpleasant home circumstances was also observed to be some of the challenges that learners faced. It helped answer the first objective, which was to explore the social challenges that learners experience that have an impact on their academic performance. The second theme was visible in 8 responses; however, from these responses, three subthemes arose: *unemployment in the family, relational challenges with family members,* as well as having *other family responsibilities*.

Subtheme 2.1: Unemployment in the family

Unemployment in the family seemed to be another challenge mentioned by participants which helped explain the contributing factors to the social challenges experienced by learners affecting their academic performance. Whylken et al. (2022) stated that societal problems, like parental unemployment, food insecurity, poverty, and teenage pregnancy, are some of the many social challenges that exist in South Africa. Unemployment in the family seemed to affect 4 learners. One learner expressed that her family circumstances affected her academic performance:

"*…yes, the situation at home makes me not to focus on my studies*…" – P2

The same participant, further elaborated on their responses by stating:

"*…there is no one working at home so the poverty, we have is a challenge for us*…" – P2

Another participant elaborated that the unemployed resulted in them not having enough food and that was stressful:

"*…Yes, the situation at home… My mother is not working depending on grant of my 3 brothers we sometimes sleep without food and that is so stressful for us*…" – P5

Unemployment was seen to be a challenge, which to some had negative consequences such as stress. This theme helped shed light on the first objective, as unemployment was evidently a challenge that could potentially affect learners' academic performance. Moreover, Pretorius (2020) pointed out that education is the cornerstone of both human and socioeconomic growth and a key determinant of a society's well-being. To support this, Pretorius (2020) quoted Fleisch (2008), who posited that good education is seen as the sole significant stepping stone and means of escaping poverty globally. However, given the responses from participants, one would pose a question and ask how learners are expected to use education to step out of poverty, if the same poverty affects their performance? This raises a paradox that many South African learners have to fight and live in all at the same time. This can also be debated Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which argues that the more the basic needs are satisfied, the more beneficial it is for the overall wellbeing of the individual (Lester, 2013).

In addition, Genesis Admin (2020) pointed out that in South Africa poverty affects millions of households which it impacts the ability of some learners to learn and perform well at school. On the other hand, Spaull (2011) argued that poor school performance reinforces social inequality and creates a scenario in which children inherit their parents' social status, regardless of their ambition or aptitude. This can be argued to cement an unfair disadvantage of many learners.

Subtheme 2.2: Relational disconnect with family

Le Roux (2020) cites Battin-Pearson et al. (2000) who pointed out that family socialisation makes available crucial foundations for a child, and this child eventually dropping of school can consequently be traced back to early familial experiences. Another social challenge that learners expressed was having relational challenges with their family; particularly their fathers:

"*…my father does not want to have relationship with me, and I want to be part of his life*…" – P3

"*…No challenges since I made peace that my father will never be part of my life*…" – P11

The two responses above show that some learners found it to be a challenge that their fathers were not a part of their lives. It is further stated by Le Roux (2020) that parental style and control, family stress and divorce are some of the factors that could have an impact on a child's later capability to finish school. This further shows the impact of family dynamics and their impact on learner wellbeing, ultimately affecting their academic performance. Moreover, in this light, DeBell (2008) stated that there is indirect evidence that children who lived without their fathers could be disadvantaged on a wide range of factors of well-being, which includes their health, academic performance, as well as overall educational experiences.

Subtheme 2.3: Other family responsibilities

Other challenges that involved the family, included having extra responsibilities at home that affected their studying. To concur, DBE (2012) revealed that educators reported that some of the contributing factors to learner absenteeism and school dropout were child headed households, children who lived alone, financial challenges and living with extended family.

"*…challenges of doing my schoolwork at home as I have lot of work to do at home. I must take care of my siblings and bath them…*" – P8

"*…Am from child headed family. I must take care of my 2 siblings*…" – P10

"*…Given time to do my schoolwork at home as I must always assist with house chaos and when is time to do schoolwork am tired*…" – P15

"self-confidence, lot of house chaos at home. I have too much pressure to work hard" – P13

Unpleasant home circumstances were seen to be a challenge to most learners, and this came in different dynamics. This negatively affected their academic performance in that for some, the stresses became overwhelming, while for other family responsibilities resulted in them not getting enough opportunities to prioritise their school work. In this light, Romero et al. (2018) cited various studies which pointed out that dropouts and overaged children who still attend school often live in family homes that are overcrowded, informal settlements and households with low parental educational attainment. This then can be argued to be a challenge that is beyond the control of these learners. They are born into families that do not make it easy for them to get out of. Which further cements the points raised by Omoniyi et al. (2019) who asserted that children who are socially disadvantaged are trapped, predestined to stagnation and potential failure.

Moreover, with regards to Maslow's hierarchy of needs and social problems such as poverty as seen in the themes above, it has been observed that when a learner's basic needs are threatened, effective learning tends to be a challenge. A question can also be posed in this regard, especially to the department of education and department of social development, to ask how effective their intervention strategies are in the development of the country. If learners are not empowered by their government, who should they cry to? What are the gaps in policy implementation?

4.3.2 Coping strategies adopted by learners

The second objective of the study sought to understand the coping strategies that learners at Mohlakeng School adopted so as to deal with social challenges and balancing school. The two themes that arose were *not having the necessary resources*

to cope and *adopting coping mechanisms*. The first theme did not have subthemes, while theme 2 had three subthemes.

Theme 3: Not Having the Necessary Resources to Cope

Participants were asked to share about their coping strategies with regards to the various challenges they experienced. Not having the necessary resources to cope was seen from 5 out of 15 participants, two participants even mentioned having thought about dropping out of school:

"*…I cannot cope I sometimes think of dropping out like I once did in grade 9 and my mother send me back to school*…" – P1

"*…I cannot cope I even once dropped out of school last year and come back this year after my teacher asked me to come back*…" – P4

To three participants, dropping out of school was not mentioned; however, they expressed their lack of the necessary resources to cope by stating that they were not able to cope with the challenges:

"*…I cannot cope as me and my brothers can eat at school and mom won't be having anything to eat at home*…" – P5

"*…cannot cope at all*…" – P7

"*…Cannot cope I have just accepted the challenges*…" – P8

As seen from the above responses, some learners showed a lack of necessary tools cope with the challenges they faced, to a point where some acted or thought about dropping out of school. With regards to learners not being able to cope, Garo et al. (2018) have argued that less institutional support for mental health is more common in underprivileged neighbourhoods. This further has an impact on children's emotional and behavioural health and raises the chance of behavioural issues, academic challenges, school dropout, as well as dysfunctional coping methods from becoming externalised. In that case, it can thus be argued that social challenges that children face, affect them academically both directly and indirectly. Meaning that they may either choose to leave school, as seen from the responses, or they may feel overwhelmed and not be able to perform well at school (also highlighted in the responses). While some participants did not possess the needed tools to cope, some

had adopted different strategies to help them cope with the challenges they faced individually.

Theme 4: Adopting Coping Mechanisms

When asked about their coping strategies, some of the learners' responses revealed the different coping mechanisms that each learner had adopted. This theme had three subthemes, with the third one having majority of learner responses

Subtheme 4.1: Acceptance

For some learners, accepting the situation as it is seemed to be their coping mechanism. This is expressed in the illustrative quotes from two learners:

"*…I try to get used to it but sometimes becomes a challenge as we would sleep without food and electricity*…" – P2

"…*Am coping course I have made peace with it*…" – P11

From the above two responses, it is seen that some learners preferred to accept their situations as they were, even though it was a challenge some times. To some learners, acceptance was not an option.

Subtheme 4.2: Avoidance

While some learners accepted their situations, one participant wanted to avoid the challenges they faced as seen in the illustrative quote below:

"…*try not to think of him and his new family*…" – P3

"Doesn't think a lot to stress myself and talk to the brother for support" – P10

Avoidance did not appear in many responses; however, it was deemed important in that it showed how some learners tried to balance their school work and social challenges by seeking an alternative to dealing with their issues.

Subtheme 4.3: Resourcefulness

To six learners, putting in an extra effort helped the cope with their challenges. One participant even mentioned self-motivation:

"…*I self-motivate, try to talk to my sisters with assistance and pushing schoolwork on weekends*…" – P13

Other responses in relation to this theme are as follows:

"…*Trying to make time for studying and getting some of my classmate to assist me with my schoolwork especially Maths*…" – P6

"…*Studying more than before and go for extra lessons once a day*…" – P9

"…*I try to study more*…" – P14

"…*I try to push lot of schoolwork during break and some weekends*…" – P15

Putting extra effort was an important subtheme as it also relates to the learners' resilience. Learners were observed to have different coping styles that may either help them perform better at school or be destructive to themselves and their studies. Further, according to researchers looking at children's goal orientations, youngsters with mastery goal orientations are more likely to remain motivated in their academic pursuits (Wentzel & Wigfield, 1998). Deeper processing methods (elaboration) and metacognitive, self-control tactics like planning, comprehension monitoring, etc. are related to mastery-type goals (Wentzel & Wigfield, 1998). This helped with the second objective and it highlighted the different ways in which learners coped with the various social challenges they faced; they had an influence on the academic performance.

4.3.3 The support needs of learners

The third objective of the study sought to describe the support needs of learners at Mohlakeng School who face social challenges that have an influence on their academic performance. Learners were asked to share what they believed they needed to cope with learning, and four themes arose. The identified themes are: *extra academic effort*, *thinking about future aspects*, *mending family relationships* and getting support from family.

Theme 5: Extra Academic Effort

The first theme had two subthemes, one related to external help, while the other was related to the extra effort coming from the individual.

Subtheme 5.1: Support from teachers

A total of four participants mentioned that their support need was getting help beyond what was in their time-table. The learners believed that getting extra support from teachers would be beneficial to overcome some of the challenges they faced. This is illustrated using verbatim quotes from participant responses:

"…*If the would-be teachers who can give more lessons and know how to explain when teaching*…" – P1

"…*extra lessons and teachers who can be patient to learners like me who takes time to understand*…" – P6

"…*If we can get teachers who will have time and assistance to help us who need more time to understand*…" – P7

"…*Get extra lessons*…" – P14

From the responses above, it can be understood that since many learners expressed academic challenges, getting extra support and assistance from teachers the boost they needed to perform better.

Subtheme 5.2: Putting in Extra Effort

While some learners believed that they needed extra support from teachers, there was a group (4 out of 15) that believed in putting the extra effort themselves. This is seen in the below illustrative quotes:

"…*Studying more*…" – P9

"…*Study hard and avoid challenges at home*…" – P11

"…*Given more time after school at home so I can have enough time to do my schoolwork*…" – P15

"…*chance to change subjects maybe I can cope with doing Consumer Studies unlike Maths and Science*…" – P4

Although some learners believed in getting external support, other believed in pushing themselves to attain the desired outcome. However, even with these two different views, there seems to be a consensus that all participants believed that for their academic performance to improve, they needed an extra push or support. In this light, one may argue that what the Department of Basic Education (2014) introduced in terms of screening, identification, assessment and support (SIAS) policy with the aim of providing programmes for all learners who are in need of additional support to improve their school participation and overall performance, is a good initiative. Moreover, the school-based support teams (SBST) in schools whereby there are teachers that have been identified by the school's principal to support and access

learners in need of support (Inclusive Education South Africa, 2018), can be argued to have a positive contribution to learner performance.

Theme 6: Thinking about Future Prospects

The second theme did not have subthemes. What is highlighted from this theme is that some learners had hopes about changing their circumstances.

"…*If I can finish school and get a job or if my mom can get a job, I think things will be better*…" – P2

"…*Finish Grade 12 and look for job so I can take care of my family*…" – P5

From the two responses above, it should be noted that these learners had hopes of changing their current circumstances, and these hopes included completing school and being able to get a job and improve their family circumstances. One may argue that these hopes are brought by the universal belief that education is *the* key to success. As pointed out by Omoniyi et al. (2019) millions of poor South Africans' lives are being improved by education, which has long been recognised as the most significant force in social progress, if not the only one. However, even with this case, the impact of poverty delays their progress as argued that poverty becomes a trap to many disadvantaged learners who want to improve their lives through education. In this light, Brende (2015) argues that when poverty denies a child their right to education, that child is also being denied many other opportunities, that would result in them being able to support their families and contribute towards the change of their communities.

Theme 7: Mending Family Relationships

Mending family relationships was only mentioned by one participant; however, it was deemed important for the study in that some participants mentioned that having relational disconnect with family affected them.

"Having a relationship with him can change me from imagining having one with him" – P3

It was noted from the findings that mending a relationship with an absent father would potentially help a learner deal with their social challenges.

Theme 8: Support from Family

Getting support from family was also mentioned by one participant but deemed important for the study in that getting supported meant that the learner would be able to focus on their studies.

“Given more support or if my mother can help with taking care of my sisters and brother so I can have time for my schoolwork” – P8

From the above response, it was seen that at times, what a child needed to overcome their challenges was support from family members, so that they could use the extra time and focus on their studies. This can be related to the person-in-environment approach. According to Weiss-Gal (2008) citing Hare (2004), this approach perceives the individual and their multiple environments (micro, mezzo, and macro) as a system that is dynamic and interactive. As seen from the findings, the learners do not only perform poorly because of their abilities or lack thereof. Their environment (family support) also has an impact on their performance. In this system, each component concurrently influences and is influenced by the other; in this case, learners are affected by their environment and challenges that come with it. Therefore, it can be argued that the different social challenges faced by learners have an impact on their performance while at the same time, their academic performance may contribute towards their overall success.

4.3.4 Perceived support from family

Learners also had differing views about perceived support from their family members. Mmutle (2019) cites Harte (1994) who argued that a positive relationship within one’s family is crucial and has a great impact on preventing children from dropping out of school. To further elaborate, Mmutle (2019) argued that the lack of support from family with when it comes to their school work, results in increased chances of such a child dropping out of school. The evidence in light of the referenced literature is seen in the two subthemes that arose which were: *help is available* and *no help available.* The two themes are discussed and supported by verbatim quotes from participant responses.

Theme 9: Help is available

A large number for participants (9 out of 15) expressed that they were given enough support at home. This support seemed to be provided differently by different family member, as seen below:

"…*yes, my sister is supportive*…" – P1

"…*My mom is supportive*…" – P3

"…*we are united family that love and support each other*…" – P5

"…*My family is supportive especially my brother always gives me hope that I will pass*…" – P6

"…*I have support from external family they support financially and always there when we need help*…" – P10

"…*I get support from my mom and brother financially and in everything*…" – P11

"…*Supporting my mental well-being*…" – P12

"…*my grandmother is motivating me*…" – P13

"…*Financial support that is the only support I get from my family*…" – P15

From the above six responses, it can be seen that given the various challenges they experienced, majority of the interviewed participants believed that they received the support they needed.

Theme 10: No help available

Even when others believed they got support from home, there was a substantial number that believed otherwise based on their individual experiences. This is shown by the following verbatim quotes:

"…*The is no support*…" – P2

"…*they not happy with me failing so am not getting any support from them at all*…" – P4

"…*I do not have support*…" – P7

"…*am not getting any support*…" – P8

"…*Do not get any support from the family*…" – P9

"…*No support*…" – P14

There were six learners interviewed, who shared that they did not receive any support from home; even with the challenges some of them mentioned. This theme was

important in shedding light on the overall research topic, which sought to explore and understand the different social challenges that learners experienced. One of the objectives of the study was to explore the coping strategies adopted by participants. It is thus believed that not having enough support could also affected learner academic performance. This then becomes a concern in that according to GDE (2012), an absence of care from parents is a protruding reason for why children would feel like they needed to drop out of school. In this light, the person-in-environment theory is based on the assumption that phenomena are interdependent in influencing, transforming, and preserving human life (Green & McDermott, 2010). With that said, it makes sense how the learners, being affected by their environment (through social challenges) are in turn able to influence their environment (school dropout and not contributing to the economy due to no prospects).

4.4 Commonalities and Differences

Based on the findings of the study and the themes that arose, it may be pointed out that some learners seemed to be more resilient than others. What was common from the responses is that substance abuse or usage was not mentioned by participants; however, it can also be noted that it could be because the researcher did not unpack it or directly ask about it. As mentioned by Anyamene et al. (2019), social issues may cause learners to become emotionally and socially unbalanced, and this may drive them to develop further issues like drug misuse, prostitution, and other unhealthy behaviours. One may also argue that the statement by Anyamene et al. (2019) could also be supported and explained by the person-on-environment theory, as it shows the interrelatedness of social issues within one's environment. Moreover, with 5 out of 15 learners showing low-resilience, and acceptance and avoidance being some of the coping mechanisms adopted by learners, one may argue that learners tend to deal with challenges in unhealthy ways. With that said, social challenges do not only have a harmful impact on learner academic performance, but also on their emotional and mental wellbeing.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter presented the findings of the study. This was done in relation to the objectives that were set to guide the study. Each objective was discussed according

to the identified themes from participant responses. The next summarises the key findings, draws conclusions and suggests recommendations.

CHAPTER FIVE:

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

In summary, the study was positioned within an interpretivist paradigm with a qualitative research approach. The overall aim of the study was to explore and describe the social challenges that affect selected learners and their academic performance at Mohlakeng School in Rand-west municipality, Gauteng, South Africa. The research approach was qualitative and the study was located within an interpretivist paradigm. The problem being studied and the aim of the research meant that the design be explorative. The sample comprised of 15 grade 11 and 12 learners from the Mohlakeng School and the type of sampling technique used was non-probability purposive sampling. Data were collected using individual phone interviews. The researcher made use of a semi-structured interview guide that comprised both closed-ended and open-ended questions. Thematic data analysis was the method of data analysis that was employed in this study. This chapter provides a summary of the key findings that emerged in from the research, draws conclusions and recommends solutions and future research. The aim and objectives of the study are stated again below:

5.2 Aims(s) and Objectives of the study

Aim:

The aim of this study was to explore and describe the social challenges that affect selected learners and their academic performance at Mohlakeng School in Rand-west municipality, Gauteng, South Africa.

Objectives:

In addressing the overall aim of the study, the following objective were identified:

- To explore the social challenges that learners at Mohlakeng School in Rand-west municipality experience that have an impact on their academic performance.
- To understand the coping strategies adopted by learners at Mohlakeng School in dealing with social challenges and balancing school.

- To describe the support needs of learners at Mohlakeng School who face social challenges that impact their academic performance

5.2 Summary of the Key Findings

The important findings of the study are summarised in accordance to the objectives set out in the beginning to guide the study and the themes that were identified in the findings chapter.

5.2.1 Social challenges that learners experience that have an impact on their academic performance

The study revealed that learners experienced academic challenges and were also affected by unpleasant home circumstances which in turn affected their studies. All 15 learners seemed to struggle academically, to a point where they failed a grade. Grade 10 was the most repeated grade, as 10 learners mentioned to have repeated grade 10. All participants indicated that challenges experienced at home and socially influenced their academic performance. These challenges include unpleasant home circumstances for 8 participants, academic challenges for 5 participants, and 5 participants not having the necessary resources to cope.

Moreover, one of the biggest challenges experienced outside of school that had a great impact on 8 learners, was unpleasant home circumstances (unemployment of parents and other caregivers at home, relational disconnect with family members, and other family responsibilities). This finding is supported by Chen (2022) who argued that learners who do not get adequate food or sleep have less chances to achieve their full academic ability. Chen (2022) further stated that learners from challenging home environments have higher dropout rates than their counterparts. Some of the negative consequences of unemployment as mentioned by learners was stress. This factor helped shed light on the first objective, as unemployment was evidently a challenge that could potentially affect learners' academic performance.

In addition, another family characteristic or challenge that seemed to have a big impact on the learners was found to be relational disconnect, with 2 learners reporting that their fathers are absent in their lives. One learner seemed to have accepted the circumstance, while another still had hope to mend their relationship with their biological father. This challenge was experienced by only 2 participants; and the impact was argued to be significant on their academic performance. Lastly, having

added responsibilities at home appeared to be a significant challenge on the lives of learners. This was observed to manifest in different dynamics in that 4 out of 15 of the interviewed learners mentioned to have extra responsibilities at home (such as taking care of their siblings and doing house chores), while another participant mentioned being the eldest in a child headed household. Le Roux (2020) cites Battin-Pearson et al. (2000) who states that family socialisation makes available crucial foundations for a child, and a learner eventually dropping of school can as a result be traced back to early familial experiences

This may be argued to have had a negative effect on the learner's academic performance as they had previously repeated a grade. This was argued to negatively affected the academic performance of learners in that for some, the stresses became overwhelming, while for others family responsibilities resulted in them not getting enough opportunities to prioritise their school work.

5.2.2 Coping strategies adopted by learners

With regards to the coping strategies that learners adopted in order to deal with social challenges and balancing school. A total of 5 out of 15 learners seemed to not have the necessary resources to cope while others (4 out of 15) were able to adopt coping mechanisms that seemed to fit their challenges. Of those who seemed to not have the necessary resources to cope, there were two participants who mentioned dropping out of school. Others (3 out of 15) who did not have the necessary resources to cope further pointed out that they were struggling to cope with the challenges they faced. In dealing or coping with their challenges, there were learners who showed acceptance towards challenges. Their reasons were not explored; however, one of the participants mentioned that they accepted the situation so as to have peace within themselves. There were two learners who seemed to prefer accepting their situations as they were, even though it was a challenge most times. Nonetheless, to some learners, acceptance did not seem to be an option.

Avoidance (2 out of 15 participants) was another coping strategy that learners adopted, even though it did not appear in many responses. It was, however, deemed important in that it showed how some learners tried to balance their school work and social challenges by seeking an alternative method of dealing with their issues. Moreover, coping strategies came in different forms, and these could either be

productive or not. For some learners (6 out of 15), putting extra effort on their studies was important and it was argued to relate to the learners' resilience. It was revealed by the discoveries of the study that some learners reacted differently to social challenges, and this impacted the different coping styles that they adopted and that may either help them perform better at school or be destructive to themselves and their studies.

5.2.3 The support needs of learners

It was important for the study to describe the support needs of learners at Mohlakeng School who face social challenges that have an influence on their academic performance. In asking learners to share their experiences and to share what they each believed they needed to cope with learning; they indicated that they needed to put extra academic effort, while others (2 out of 15) hoped and thought about future aspects that could bring positive changes in their family environments. One other participant further mentioned that they needed to mend disconnected family relationships while another learner stated that they needed support from family. Mending family relationships was mentioned by only one participant; however, it was deemed important for the study in that some participants mentioned that they experienced relational disconnect with some family members, particularly their fathers (2 out of 15). Therefore, the study revealed that mending a relationship with an absent father would potentially help a learner deal with their social challenges. It was thus understood that since many learners (7 out of 15) expressed academic challenges, getting extra support and assistance from teachers and their families can be the boost they needed to perform better.

Moreover, even though some learners (4 out of 15) believed in getting external support, there were those (4 out of 15 learners) who believed in pushing themselves to attain a desired outcome. However, even with these two opposing perspectives, there seemed to be a consensus that all learners believed that for their academic performance to improve, they needed an extra push. This extra push could either be inward or overt. It can therefore be argued that the assistance proved by Department of Social Development (DSD) by offering social work services to support learners, family and community, could be the outward support they need to also develop the skills that will benefit them as individuals. The study also noted that some of the learners had hopes of changing their current circumstances, and these hopes included

completing school, being able to get a job and improve their family circumstances (2 out of 15 learners said this). Additionally, it was seen that at times, what a child needed to overcome their challenges was support from family members, so that they could use the extra time and focus on their studies.

5.2.4 Perceived support from family

Participants perceived the support they received from family in totally opposing views. There was a large number for participants (9 out of 15) who shared that they were given enough support at home. This support was noted to be provided differently by different family members. On the other hand, even when others believed they got support from home, there was a substantial number of learners who were of the belief that there was a lack of support from their families. Six participants shared that they did not receive any support from home. Their academic performance was also affected by the lack of support as they were among those who repeated a grade. One of the participants even mentioned that getting support from home could allow her enough time to focus on her homework and studies. One of the objectives of the study was to explore the coping strategies adopted by participants. It was thus believed that not having enough support could also have an impact on learner academic performance.

5.3 Conclusions Emanating from the Findings

Based on the study's findings, it could be pointed out that when learners feel affected by social challenges, they change their attitudes towards learning, lose interest in school. This further impacts their academic performance. This means that the different challenges that learner experience have an impact on their overall academic performance. Repeating a grade has also been reported to be a contributing factor to school dropout. GDE (2012) found that issues such as age, grade, and if they had repeated a grade were some of the factors mentioned by school dropouts. In that case, this further raise concerns in terms of learner' performance, the quality of education they receive and how this further affects their future negatively.

Moreover, with regards to the coping strategies that learners adopted, among the conclusions were that five out of fifteen learners seemed to not have the necessary resources to cope. They reported that they were not able to cope with the challenges they experience and it resulted in dropping out of school. For some learners, avoiding challenges was a coping mechanism, while to others putting extra effort towards their

studies was a coping mechanism. It was thus concluded that whatever coping strategy learners have, it had an impact on their academic performance. With regards to the support needs of learners, it was revealed that having a support structure had a positive impact on the learners' academic performance. This is further supported by the person-in-environment theory, which argues that phenomena are interdependent in influencing, transforming, and preserving human life (Green & McDermott, 2010).

5.4 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study as well as the literature reviewed and related to the research aim, the following recommendations have been put forward:

- The study found that social challenges had a negative impact on the academic performance of learners and that the type of coping strategies that they adopted also played a role in whether or not they completed high school. What was also observed is that support from various aspects was a need. This was further supported by the person-in-environment theory and Maslow's hierarchy of needs. With that said, the study recommends that further research be conducted in terms of the impact that current intervention strategies with regards to the support provided to learners have on their performance. Moreover, research conducted ought to look into the current gaps in literature with regards to the impact that support has on the performance of learners.
- With regards to further research, it is also recommended that more research be conducted to replicate this study in the same school but explore further on the coping strategies of learners (such as the use of substances) and how this impacts their academic performance. This can be done using a different sample and a modified interview guide.
- It is also recommended that school dropout not be dealt with only on the surface, but rather that more recent studies be conducted in other contexts to ensure that policies implemented are based on well researched findings.
- Relational disconnect with family members, particularly fathers, was one of the findings of the study. With regards to the support needs of learners, it was also noted from the findings of the study that mending a relationship with an absent father would potentially help a learner deal with their social challenges. Therefore, it is recommended that the GDE and DSD collaborate on providing

family healing programmes for learners and their families. Providing such intervention methods is in line with what Le Roux (2020) stated, that parental style and control, family stress and divorce are some of the factors that could have an impact on a child's later capability to finish school. Therefore, it is believed that if there is healing in the family, a learner may be able to focus on their academic performance, which could potentially have a positive impact.

- Repeating a grade seemed to be a big challenge in that all participants had repeated a grade before. With that said, it is recommended that the GDE introduces proactive programmes to deal with repeating the grade and academic challenges. This may also include providing academic support to learners. It is believed that if learners are supported academically and there are proactive measures to curb grade repeats, learners may perform better in the long run.
- Poverty was another major challenge from the findings, that seemed to negatively impact learner academic performance. It is therefore recommended that the DSD takes proactive measures to help improve the living conditions of learners. For example, having other family responsibilities, such as looking after siblings, was an added challenge that negatively affected learner performance. It is thus believed that if challenges at home are dealt with, learner focus and performance at school with greatly improve.
- When going with the belief of "prevention is better than cure", it is recommended that learners be connected with early appropriate help, such as programmes that will equip them with coping strategies and balancing school and personal lives. The belief is not that poverty will be eradicated overnight, but that learners will be resilient and identify positive and empowering coping mechanisms. It can be argued that more resilient learners have a higher chance of performing well at school. This is in support of what Omoniyi et al. (2019) pointed out that millions of poor South Africans' lives are being improved by education, which has long been recognised as the most significant force in social progress.

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Appendix

Appendix A Ethics Permission

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND JOHANNESBURG

Research Office

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)
R14/49 Mokoena

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: H21/11/36**
PROJECT TITLE	Title of the Study: An exploration of social challenges uncounted by learners in Mohlakeng Schools in Rand-west municipality in Gauteng province of South Africa
INVESTIGATOR(S)	Ms P Mokoena
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT	Human and Community Development/
DATE CONSIDERED	19 November 2021
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved Risk Level: Low
EXPIRY DATE	16 May 2025

DATE 27 May 2022 **CHAIRPERSON** _____
(Professor J Watermeyer)

cc: Supervisor : Dr L Peterson

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR(S)

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Secretary at Room 10004, 10th Floor, Senate House, University. Unreported changes to the application may invalidate the clearance given by the HREC (Non-Medical)

I/We fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to submit an amendment of the protocol to the Committee. **I agree to completion of a regular progress report. For Minimal and Low studies, this is due annually on 31 December. For Medium and High Risk studies, this is due twice annually on 30 June and 31 December.**

_____ 30 / 12 /2022
Signature **Date**

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES

Appendix B Permission from GDE

GAUTENG PROVINCE
Department: Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

8/4/4/1/2

GDE RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER

Date:	**03 February 2022**
Validity of Research Approval:	**08 February 2022– 30 September 2022** **2022/39**
Name of Researcher:	**Mokoena PO**
Address of Researcher:	**Tiara's Rest Complex**
	12 Sadie Road
	Unit 26
Telephone Number:	**067 254 7590**
Email address:	**Prudencemorobe3@gmail.com**
Research Topic:	**An exploration of social challenges encountered by learners in Mohlakeng Schools in Rand –west Municipality in Gauteng Province of South Africa**
Type of qualification	**Masters**
Number and type of schools:	**1 Secondary School**
District/s/HO	**Johannesburg West**

Re: Approval in Respect of Request to Conduct Research

This letter serves to indicate that approval is hereby granted to the above-mentioned researcher to proceed with research in respect of the study indicated above. The onus rests with the researcher to negotiate appropriate and relevant time schedules with the school/s and/or offices involved to conduct the research. A separate copy of this letter must be presented to both the School (both Principal and SGB) and the District/Head Office Senior Manager confirming that permission has been granted for the research to be conducted.

03/02/2022

The following conditions apply to GDE research. The researcher may proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below being met. Approval may be withdrawn should any of the conditions listed below be flouted:

1. *Letter that would indicate that the said researcher/s has/have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.*

1

Making education a societal priority

Office of the Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management
7th Floor, 17 Simmonds Street, Johannesburg, 2001
Tel: (011) 355 0488
Email: Faith.Tshabalala@gauteng.gov.za
Website: www.education.gpg.gov.za

2. *The District/Head Office Senior Manager/s must be approached separately, and in writing, for permission to involve District/Head Office Officials in the project.*
3. ***Because of COVID 19 pandemic researchers can ONLY collect data online, telephonically or may make arrangements for Zoom with the school Principal. Requests for such arrangements should be submitted to the GDE Education Research and Knowledge Management directorate. The approval letter will then indicate the type of arrangements that have been made with the school.***
4. ***The Researchers are advised to make arrangements with the schools via Fax, email or telephonically with the Principal.***
5. *A copy of this letter must be forwarded to the school principal and the chairperson of the School Governing Body (SGB) that would indicate that the researcher/s have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.*
6. *A letter / document that outline the purpose of the research and the anticipated outcomes of such research must be made available to the principals, SGBs and District/Head Office Senior Managers of the schools and districts/offices concerned, respectively.*
7. *The Researcher will make every effort obtain the goodwill and co-operation of all the GDE officials, principals, and chairpersons of the SGBs, teachers and learners involved. Persons who offer their co-operation will not receive additional remuneration from the Department while those that opt not to participate will not be penalised in any way.*
8. *Research may only be conducted after school hours so that the normal school programme is not interrupted. The Principal (if at a school) and/or Director (if at a district/head office) must be consulted about an appropriate time when the researcher/s may carry out their research at the sites that they manage.*
9. *Research may only commence from the second week of February and must be concluded before the beginning of the last quarter of the academic year. If incomplete, an amended Research Approval letter may be requested to conduct research in the following year.*
10. *Items 6 and 7 will not apply to any research effort being undertaken on behalf of the GDE. Such research will have been commissioned and be paid for by the Gauteng Department of Education.*
11. *It is the researcher's responsibility to obtain written parental consent of all learners that are expected to participate in the study.*
12. *The researcher is responsible for supplying and utilising his/her own research resources, such as stationery, photocopies, transport, faxes and telephones and should not depend on the goodwill of the institutions and/or the offices visited for supplying such resources.*
13. *The names of the GDE officials, schools, principals, parents, teachers and learners that participate in the study may not appear in the research report without the written consent of each of these individuals and/or organisations.*
14. *On completion of the study the researcher/s must supply the Director: Knowledge Management & Research with one Hard Cover bound and an electronic copy of the research.*
15. *The researcher may be expected to provide short presentations on the purpose, findings and recommendations of his/her research to both GDE officials and the schools concerned.*
16. *Should the researcher have been involved with research at a school and/or a district/head office level, the Director concerned must also be supplied with a brief summary of the purpose, findings and recommendations of the research study.*

The Gauteng Department of Education wishes you well in this important undertaking and looks forward to examining the findings of your research study.

Kind regards

.....

Mr Gumani Mukatuni

Acting CES: Education Research and Knowledge Management

DATE: 03/02/2022

Office of the Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management
7th Floor, 17 Simmonds Street, Johannesburg, 2001
Tel: (011) 355 0488
Email: Faith.Tshabalala@gauteng.gov.za
Website: www.education.gpg.gov.za

Appendix C PIS for parents

Participant Information Sheet for parents

Title of the study: An exploration of social challenges encountered by learners in Mohlakeng Schools in Rand-west municipality in Gauteng province of South Africa

Good Day,

My name is Prudence Mokoena and I am a postgraduate student registered for the degree MA currently in Social Work at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. As part of my studies, I have to undertake a research project, and I am investigating the social challenges that learners faced in school that might lead to drop-out, under supervision of Dr Laetitia Petersen. The aim of this research project is to find out the experience of learners who are facing social challenges that are affecting their learning.

As part of this project, I would like to invite your child to take part in a telephonic interview. This interview will involve your child answering seven (7) interview questions and may take around 20 minutes. With your permission, I would also like to audio record the interview using a digital device. This recording will be deleted after two years of following publication or for six years if no publications emanate this study.

There will be no personal costs to participate in this study. There will be no benefits for taking part in the study or any penalties if your child do not want to take part or withdraw from the study. Your child is permitted to withdraw at any time or not answer any question if your child does not want to. The interview will be completely confidential and anonymous as I will not be asking for your child's identifying information. The information received from your child will be treated with confidentiality and will not be disclosed to anyone else. I will be using false name to represent your child's participation in my final research report. If your child experiences any discomfort at any point in this process, we will stop the interview or resume it another time. If your child needs some support or counselling services following

the interview you may access it free of charge on the Department of Social Development 24 hour helpline on 0800 12 13 14 or in-person counselling at Department of Social Development at Feldar street Randfontein on contact number: (011) 278 3900.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research, feel free to contact me on the details listed below. The recording will be stored in a secure location (password protected laptop) with restricted access to the researcher and the research supervisor. Will be kept for two years of following publication or for six years if no publications emanate this study. With your permission, the data collected from this research project may be used by other researcher's in anonymized format. If you have any concerns or complaints about the study, please contact University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical) telephone: (011) 7171 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za

Yours Sincerely

Prudence Mokoena

Researcher:

Prudence Mokoena, email: 2393677@students.wits.ac.za, contact: 067 254 7590

Supervisor:

Dr Laetitia Petersen, email: laetitia.petersen@wits.ac.za, contact: 011 717 4474/2

Appendix D PIS for participants

Participant Information Sheet for learners



Title of the study: An exploration of social challenges encountered by learners in Mohlakeng Schools in Rand-west municipality in Gauteng province of South Africa.

Good Day,

My name is Prudence Mokoena and I am a postgraduate student registered for the degree MA currently in Social Work at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. As part of my studies, I have to undertake a research project, and I am investigating the social challenges that learners faced in school that might lead to drop-out, under supervision of Dr Laetitia Petersen. The aim of this research project is to find out the experience of learners who are facing social challenges that are affecting their learning.

As part of this project, I would like to invite your child to take part in a telephonic interview. This interview will involve your child answering seven (7) interview questions and may take around 20 minutes. With your permission, I would also like to audio record the interview using a digital device. This recording will be deleted after two years of following publication or for six years if no publications emanate this study.

There will be no personal costs to participate in this study. There will be no benefits for taking part in the study or any penalties if you do not want to take part or withdraw from the study. You are permitted to withdraw at any time or not answer any question if you do not want to. The interview will be completely confidential and anonymous as I will not be asking for your identifying information. The information received from you will be treated with confidentiality and will not be disclosed to anyone else. I will be using false name to represent your participation in my final research report. If you experience any discomfort at any point in this process, we will stop the interview or resume it another time. If you need some support or counselling services following the interview you may access it free of charge

on the Department of Social Development 24 hour helpline on 0800 12 13 14 or in-person counselling at Department of Social Development at Feldar street Randfontein on contact number: (011) 278 3900.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research, feel free to contact me on the details listed below. The recording will be stored in a secure location (password protected laptop) with restricted access to the researcher and the research supervisor. Will be kept for two years of following publication or for six years if no publications emanate this study. With your permission, the data collected from this research project may be used by another researcher's in anonymized format. If you have any concerns or complaints about the study, please contact University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical) telephone: (011) 7171 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za

Yours Sincerely

Prudence Mokoena

Researcher:

Prudence Mokoena, email: 2393677@students.wits.ac.za, contact: 067 254 7590

Supervisor:

Dr Laetitia Petersen, email: laetitia.petersen@wits.ac.za, contact: 011 717 4474/2

Appendix E Consent Form

Consent Form



Title of the Study: An exploration of social challenges encountered by learners in Mohlakeng Schools in Rand-west municipality in Gauteng province of South Africa

Name of the researcher: Prudence Mokoena

I, …….., agree to participate in this research project. The research has been explained to me and I understand what my participation will involve. I agree to the following:

(Please circle the relevant options below).

I agree that my participation will remain anonymous

YES NO

I agree that the researcher may use anonymous quotes in his / her research report

YES NO

I agree that the interview may be audio recorded

YES NO

I agree that the information I provide may be used anonymized after this project has ended, for academic purposes by other researchers, subject to their own ethics clearance being obtained.

YES NO

Name of participant: _____
Date: _____
Signature: _____

Prudence Mokoena
Date: _____
Signature: _____

Appendix F Interview guide

Interview Schedule

1. SECTION A *(Demographic information section)*

Age: _____

Gender:

Male □ Female □

Grade: _____

2. SECTION B

Question:

1. Are you currently experiencing challenges that affect your schoolwork?

_____

_____

2. What are the challenges that are you experiencing?

_____

_____

_____

3. How do you cope with these challenges?

_____

_____

_____

4. What do you think you need to cope better with learning?

_____

_____

_____

5. What type of support do you get from family?

_____

_____

_____

6. What type of support did you receive from: social workers, teachers, psychologists or anyone?

_____

_____

_____

7. Provide suggestions of how the Department of Education, your school and community can assist you and others to help you cope and support you learning.

_____

_____

_____