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Psychological Challenges facing Primary School Children in Windhoek, Namibia: Perspectives of Teachers

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April 2022

This research report is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters in Psychology by Coursework and Research Report in the department of Psychology, Faculty of Humanities, School of Human and Community Development at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

Abstract

The study aimed to explore the psychological challenges that primary school children were facing through the perspectives of teachers. The study also investigated the support system that was available to mitigate these challenges both at school and in the community. Urie Bronfenbrenner's Bio-Ecological Theory of human development was used as a theoretical framework to comprehend and discuss the findings of the study.

The study employed a Qualitative Research approach using a phenomenological perspective. The data was collected from three primary schools in Windhoek Namibia, from a total of eight participants using face-to-face recorded interviews. The participants were recruited using a snowball sampling technique that allowed the researcher to network for the next participant.

The findings indicated that children are indeed influenced by their surroundings, experiencing many challenges such as those associated with Covid-19, those created by home circumstances, negative behavior, emotional distress and challenges associated with their schooling such as low school performance. The study revealed that various systems like the schools, churches and community members all collaborate to help primary school children navigate through their challenges.

Keywords: Psychological Challenges, Psychological Intervention, school-based Support, Social Factors, Psychological Factors, Bio Ecological Theory of human development

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- To my brother Hafeni, my sister Secilia, my friend Martha and others too many to mention, I love and appreciate you.

"Now thanks be to God, who always causes us to triumph in Christ…"

2 Corinthians 2:14

Declarations

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Title: Psychological Challenges facing Primary School Children in Windhoek, Namibia: Perspectives of Teachers.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

According to Avenevoli & Cui (2010), a lot of psychological problems begin at a very young age with an estimated 20% of adolescents exhibiting such challenges. Many children experiencing psychological problems do not however receive assistance which can be attributed to various hindrances (Gulliver et al., 2010). The high rate of children experiencing psychological challenges and their inability to seek help shows the need for services to be made available to them (Franklin, et al., 2017).

Many, if not most children spend more than half of their weekdays at school. This makes the school setting an excellent place to explore children's lived experiences and the effects these experiences have on them (Levers, 2002). According to Boothby & Melvin (2009), children who attend school on a daily basis have access to some of the most important forms of psychological support that can be effective against negative life circumstances. This support comes in the form of intellectual and emotional stimulation, social interaction and sense of community, personal satisfaction when the child performs well and an opportunity to envision a positive future (Boothby & Melvin, 2009). However, many children are reported to go through other experiences that require more than the natural remedy that school attendance provides.

Additionally, the school setting is one of the few places through which children could have access to physical interaction, food and other necessities, as well as services such as counseling (without having to incur personal financial responsibility). Schools play an important role in countering the negative effects of life challenges experienced by children. A study conducted in South Africa by Phasha (2008) on the role school teachers play in assisting children identified the

following actual and suggested roles that schools play: identifying abused or struggling children, providing moral, academic and emotional support, building trustworthy relationships with them, taking interest in learners' lives and gaining a better understanding of them. Furthermore, Phasha (2008) stated that teachers need to be honest with children and maintain confidentiality, they need to assist children in developing a positive self-image, to provide safe classroom environments that foster openness and participation from learners. Additionally, teachers ensure security, refer learners in need to appropriate organizations for help and make home visits to ensure child safety (Phasha, 2008, p.309-319).

Teachers are however reported to encounter problems carrying out some of these tasks, because of restrictions posed by the law and legal procedures surrounding cases of sexual abuse for instance, which sometimes makes it either impossible or too time consuming (Phasha, 2008). The role of teachers with regards to the counselling needs of children, is an added and contextually unique responsibility, it is however not supported equally in all schools.

Rones & Hoagwood (2000) defined psychological intervention in schools as programs that are meant to help learners improve on behavioral, emotional and social interaction challenges. The American Psychological Association (APA) (2021) dictionary defined school-based interventions as strategies that are created in classroom spaces to increase the health and wellbeing of learners, mostly by limiting or avoiding pathological or deviant behavior. Another recent definition of psychological intervention has been offered by England et al. (2015) and reads as follows, *"interpersonal or informative activities, techniques or strategies that target biological, behavioral, cognitive, emotional, interpersonal, social or environmental factors with the aim of improving health functioning and wellbeing"* (p.31).

1.2 Definition of key concepts

Upton (2013), states that social aspects generally incorporate factors related to social structures and processes that affect the well-being of people, while psychological factors include aspects at an individual level that affect their state of mind. These two terms, social and psychological, are mostly combined to form the term "Psychosocial" (Upton, 2013), but in combination can also imply that the negative effects of social processes on individuals are oftentimes eliminated via an understanding of psychological processes (Stansfeld & Rasul, 2007). The term "Psychosocial" has thus been defined by Stansfeld & Rasul (2007) as a combination of psychological factors (indicating individual, personal processes affecting mental health) and social factors (referring to social structures and processes influencing the well-being of an individual).

Additionally, the term psychosocial gives an opportunity to study the relationship between individuals and their social context, enabling one to focus on the Psychological aspects of the individual as impacted by broader cultural and historical factors (Frosh, 2003). This study has therefore used the term "Psychological" to refer to challenges that are both social and psychological in nature. The reason to place emphasis on the term 'psychological' serves as a barrier to thinking about the research findings in relation to contextual and systematic considerations.

1.3 Rationale of the Study

Research conducted by Levers (2002) in Namibia reveals that many children are prone to suffering from poverty, gender-based violence as well as alcohol and sexual abuse in their home setting. Children are further reported to carry to school a host of psychological issues emanating from parental divorces, teenage pregnancy, abuse and the loss of parents or other significant

persons (Mushaandja et al., 2013), which are all factors that inhibit their capacity to perform well academically and develop accordingly.

According to Timalsina et al. (2018), the developmental stage of adolescents is characterised by dramatic physiological changes that render children vulnerable to psychological problems. Additionally, this stage is associated with the development of adolescents' mental health (Timalsina et al., 2018). Children who are mentally healthy do no exhibit psychopathological symptoms and are able to function well at home, school, and other community settings (Fredrich et al., 2010).

Considering children's lives as they are experienced in settings outside the school grounds, an opportunity arises to reduce the effects of the many negative experiences on their development and school performance, through appropriate intervention. However, research reveals that a lot of psychological intervention carried out in schools involve teachers who are not professionally trained to administer psychological or social care (Franklin et al., 2012). The Namibian education sector policy of 2008, has made provision for psychological support services for each school going child. Albeit the education structure in the country make no provision for qualified counselling professionals, it allows that teachers be identified to provide for this service at schools as "teacher counselors" (The Ministry of Education, 2008).

To add on, a study conducted on teacher counselors in Namibia revealed that teachers were appointed by school management from the already existing number of teachers and this appointment was based merely on the teacher's personality, the kinds of subjects they taught and the amount of workload they had (Mushaandja et al., 2013). Seeing that the teacher counselor's position is not on the Namibian government school structure and establishment, it does not provide incentives and is therefore voluntary in nature. Mushaandja et al. (2013) also states that this

counselling role was viewed as an extra responsibility that can be equated with other extra-mural activities such as recreational activities, sports, religious activities and others. Furthermore, Chakravorty & Singh (2021) report that teachers in government schools get overloaded with work due to extended roles that add various responsibilities such as prolonged reporting, carrying out additional school programs and extra elective duties.

The curriculum for the degree of education (2021) at the University of Namibia shows that school teachers do not have the appropriate training to counsel. They only learn about the subject and are introduced to it. Mushaandja et al. (2013) states that some teacher counselors do receive in-service training but it is inadequate for proper counseling support. Since teacher counselors do not have the expertise and the resources to offer counselling services, what role do the schools play in the fight against psychological challenges experienced by school going children?

A few studies in the Namibian context did focus on the aspect of psychological challenges with regards to children, but did this mostly from the viewpoint of orphans and vulnerable children and their caregivers (Taukeni, 2015), discussing issues that plague them such as drug use and poverty (Chibaya, 2016). There are a few to no studies that examine the perspectives of teachers with regards to the challenges faced by the children in their care and what theirs and others' role is in relation to these challenges. More studies are therefore needed to explore the perspectives of teachers and the roles they play in caring for children with psychological challenges, as well as those of caregivers and the community at large.

1.4 The objective of the study and research questions

The objectives of the study were not only to explore the challenges facing primary school children (pre-adolescents and adolescents, aged 7-13) through the special lens of teachers, but

more importantly to understand the role of schools and others in providing the needed support for children. The study looked at the emotional and social support provided to children, focusing primarily on the role played by the schools and other community members. The results of this study are expected to contribute to school and community programs that prevent and mitigate psychological challenges hindering progress in children.

Research Questions

1. What are the psychological challenges facing primary school children in Windhoek, Namibia?
2. What is the primary school teacher's account and perspective of the challenges facing primary school children (pre-adolescents and adolescents, aged 7-13)?
3. What is the role of schools and others in the community in providing the needed support to primary school children, including emotional and social support?

1.5 Outline of study chapters

In conclusion, this study contains five chapters. Chapter one consists of the introduction, including the background, definitions of key concepts and the rationale of the study as seen above. In chapter two the researcher presents a review of the relevant literature and the theoretical framework. In chapter three the methods used to carry out the study are fully described and presented, while Chapter four offers a thorough presentation of the results obtained in this study. In Chapter five, the researcher discusses the findings of the study in relation to the literature reviewed and the theoretical framework. Limitations of the study, recommendations and a conclusion is also given in chapter five.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The literature review chapter gives an overview of the documented writings around psychological challenges experienced by primary school children. Included is the consequences of these challenges and the actions taken to mitigate them. Seven themes have been included in this chapter namely: Psychological challenges associated with Covid-19, Psychological challenges facing school children, Negative behavior and emotional distress, overcrowded classrooms, the need for inspection and re-evaluation of the education structure, addressing psychological challenges in primary schools and addressing psychological challenges at home and in the community.

A few studies in the Namibian context focused on the aspect of psychological challenges with regards to children, but did this mostly from the viewpoint of orphans and vulnerable children and their caregivers (Taukeni, 2015), discussing issues that plague them such as drug use and poverty (Chibaya, 2016). There are a few to no studies that examine the perspectives of teachers with regards to the challenges faced by the children in their care and what theirs and others' role is in relation to these challenges.

In trying to write a comprehensive review, the researcher therefore utilised a mix of sources from various academic articles, research reports and book chapters of studies conducted in different settings. Only sources of information relevant to the scope of the study have been included here for review. The Bio Ecological Model of human development was used to understand and make sense of the experiences of children.

2.2 Psychological Challenges Associated with Covid-19

Research shows that among the challenges encountered by primary school children is those uniquely presented by the Covid19 pandemic during the past two years. Reported is that the pandemic presented stressors in various areas of life. Barbarin et al. (2021) grouped stressors elated to Covid19 into medical, financial, interpersonal and existential stressors. Medical stressor are reported to be coming from the fear of contracting the virus and endangering those around, while financial stressors come due to loss or reduced financial resources due to lack of business activities (Barbarin et al., 2021). The inability to interact and socialize in settings such as schools and elsewhere has created interpersonal stressors, while excessive loss of life during the pandemic has created existential stress, which is fear due to the increased probability of death (Barbarin et al., 2021).

UNESCO (2020) reported that schools worldwide have had to close during the pandemic in order to curb new infections. This has had a global negative impact on how schools function (Prince, 2021) because it has caused delays in administering education in physical classrooms as online teaching and learning became a necessity (Lindzon, 2020). Learning from home can be unproductive because the learner is faced with a lot of disturbances (Aina, 2020) and making use of the internet, cellphones and computers in place of the usual classroom has been found to be a challenge for parents and learners from low-income countries because there is no knowledge of the use of these gadgets (Prince, 2020). Additionally, Prince (2020) stated that the difficulties imposed by poverty such as covering the costs associated with using the internet make it impossible to learn online effectively (Prince, 2020).

The social distancing and isolation mandates imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic meant that primary schools among other institutions were closed and children had to learn from home. It is

reported that children learn better when they are in contact with teaching aids and when in contact with each other, and when under the supervision and guidance of a teacher (Okendu, 2012). The negative impact of learning from home extends far beyond the lack of teacher supervision and guidance. According to a report by UNESCO (2020), the adverse consequences of schools closing are poor nutrition, parent's lack of preparation for online learning, reduced quality of childcare and social isolation leading to loneliness. In a study by Zar et al. (2020), many children from vulnerable communities count on free food provided at schools for their nutrition and this was eliminated when schools closed. UNESCO (2020) concurs by reporting that parents struggled to take on the role of teaching their children at home and that they had to work, leaving children with no supervision. According to Zar et al. (2020), the closure of schools isolated children and took away the opportunity for extra-mural activities and social interaction, which are important for children's development and learning.

2.3 Psychological Challenges facing Primary School Children

According to Timalsina et al. (2018), psychological challenges specifically behavioral, emotional and educational problems are reportedly common in children and adolescents. Children are susceptible to psychological dysfunction when they experience injuries, traumas and significant environmental changes, especially when there is no support system for them in the midst of these issues (Timalsina et al., 2018).

Bain & Diallo (2016) stated that poverty contributes to the negative behavior exhibited by many learners in schools, a situation which they say is further complicated by a lack of supportive resources from family and/or the community. In addition to poverty, other causes of problems experienced by children are reported to be parent's marital status (for example divorce or separation), anxiety, depression and family disputes (Timalsina et al., 2018). Research on the

subject in Namibia reports contributing issues such as hunger while attending school, gender based violence, alcohol and sexual abuse (Levers, 2002); parental divorce, teenage pregnancy, and loss of parents or other significant persons (Mushaandja, et al., 2013).

Furthermore, children are reported to be experiencing neglect from parents and/or caregivers. A report by Pro (2002) defined neglect as a situation where parents do not provide children with the required developmental needs when they are able to do so. The developmental needs of children are characterized as medical needs, educational needs, nutritional needs and the need for a safe living environment (Pro, 2002).

Additionally, many school going children and adolescents in Namibia are characterized as orphaned and vulnerable (Salvi, 2017; Breen & O'connor, 2011; Mnubi-Mchombu, 2011; Kalomo & Bresthorn, 2018), a phenomenon that presents its own unique challenges. According to Salvi (2017), too many school going children reside in informal settlements in crowded dwellings where there is scarcity of electricity and clean running water, have free access to alcohol and thereby are addicted and are experiencing starvation that significantly affects their ability to concentrate in school. Children in this categories are also said to experience a lack of psychological support from their immediate social networks (Breen & O`connor, 2011), are denied food, shelter and sometimes have to work in place of going to school (Mnubi-Mchombu, 2011; Kalomo & Bresthorn, 2018).

Also reported is that children experience significant problems when the challenges they are facing aren't deliberately dealt with. Reported of such issues is low grades (Franklin et al., 2017); increased developmental challenges (Bains & Diallo, 2016); increased risk to developing coexisting conditions such as alcohol and drug abuse, suicidal tendencies and absenteeism or dropping out of school (Rajaleid et al., 2016).

2.4 Negative Behavior and Emotional Distress in Primary School Children

Negative behavior in school learners has been an ongoing issue in different contexts for a long period time (Crawshaw, 2015). Such behavior is reportedly a challenge for both the teachers and the learners as it negatively influences the outcome of teaching efforts (Kuronja et al., 2019). Rubbi Nunan and Ntombela (2021) in reporting about learner's behavior in South African Primary Schools stated that learners are becoming unmanageable at an increasing rate, refusing to listen to teachers. This phenomenon limits both teachers and learners in their efforts (Rubbi Nunan & Ntombela, 2021; Crawshaw, 2015).

Challenges experienced by children produce negative behavior and emotional distress. For example, primary school teachers are reported to be finding it difficult to harness children's behavior in classrooms (Rubbi-Nunan, 2021). According to Rubbi-Nunan (2021), unfavorable family conditions, acts of aggression towards children and other social influences inform behavior that is challenging to deal with in the classroom. Also reported to be informing behavioral difficulties and emotional distress in children is the experience of a traumatic event. A report by the University of Queensland (2011) defined a traumatic event as any circumstance experienced by a child that is distressing or scary.

Examples of traumatic events in everyday life are reported to be serious illness, sexual or physical abuse, the death of a parent or other close persons, wars and other disasters (University of Queensland, 2011). Experiencing trauma causes children to react in different ways and these reactions can develop into emotional and behavioral difficulties such as crying and feeling sad, stomach cramps, headaches, trouble paying attention, challenges with school work, aggression, difficulties socializing with others, lack of interest and motivation in things usually enjoyed, suicide, self-harming thoughts or behavior (University of Queensland, 2011).

A significant challenge that has been reported in literature among challenges that plague primary school children is the issue of bullying. Bullying is a serious difficulty facing school going children (Due et al., 2005). It is defined by Cantone et al. (2015) as a purposeful act/acts of harm directed towards another person or group of people. Bullying includes physical acts such as beating, kicking, direct verbal abuse such as insults or making mocking remarks, and indirect verbal abuse such as gossiping or speaking negatively about a learner (Cantone et al., 2015).

Cyberbullying, another form of bullying has also been reported as an emerging problem facing children these days. Cyberbullying happens through social electronic platforms via media gadgets and devices such as phones and computers (Slonje & Smith, 2008). Perpetrators of cyberbullying attack their victims by the use of harmful and harassing electronic messages that inflict fright and other psychological distresses (Menesini & Nocentini, 2009). Arseneault et al. (2010) concur by stating that bullying has a significant impact on children's mental well-being and it causes emotional distress in them. Symptoms of emotional distress in children manifest as low self-confidence, depression (Due et al., 2005), increased anxiety, thoughts of suicide (Price et al., 2003), feelings of exclusion and isolation (Brown et al., 2005).

Research further reveals internalizing and externalizing behavior in children. A study conducted in Nepal revealed that school going children had internalizing problems such as Attention Deficit Hypertension Disorder (ADHD) and externalizing issues such as conduct disorders and misbehavior (Timalsina et al., 2018). Forns et al. (2011) defined internalizing problems as issues that are directed within the individual that produce internal distress and externalizing problems as those outside the individual producing discomfort and conflict in their environment. Some more examples of internalizing problems are depression and anxiety; while

externalizing problems is also expressed through acts of aggression and breaking of rules (Narusyte et al., 2017).

According to Buchanan et al. (2002), many children who inhibit and/or exhibit internal or external problems in childhood have the same kinds of problems in the adulthood. The recognition of protective strategies for children at risk of these problems is therefore very important because it provides a good developmental direction, away from internalizing and externalizing problems in adulthood (Campbell, 1995). Protective factors such a positive self-worth; an ability to cope with difficult circumstances; good school grades; good relationships with caregivers, friends and age mates; participation in extra-mural activities such as sports; caregivers involvement in things and activities concerning the child protects them (children) from negative life outcomes (Resnick et al., 1997, Compas & Rutter, 1995).

A lot has been written about the factors contributing to psychological problems in children. Issues such as social difficulties, fights between caregivers and parenting preferences that encourage punishing children for wrong behavior, being raised by a single parent, and stress in the family lead to externalizing problems (Resnick et al., 1997). Evidence by Buchanan et al. (2002) suggest that externalizing issues in children as young as 7 years old are highly attached to the same problem behavior in adulthood, whereas internalizing problems in children at the same age did not predict the same issues at age thirty three. Although there are studies indicating the presence of psychological problems in adulthood when encountered in childhood (Campbell, 1995), evidence from other studies show a discontinuation of the said behavior along the developmental process into adulthood (Smith, 1995).

Research reveals that teachers in the South African and Namibian primary school context do not have the required skills to effectively deal with challenging behavior from learners. Rubbi

Nunan & Ntombela (2021) stated that since corporal punishment in South Africa was removed in 1996, teachers are finding it difficult to make use of other effective ways to correct negative behavior. Evidence by Mncube & Harber (2013) indicated that teachers in South Africa are not properly trained to handle emotional and behavioral problems in children. This situation is said to be worsened by a lack of help from supportive structures that could enable teachers to better cope with the daily issues they encounter as they teach and care for children (Rubbi Nunan & Ntombela, 2021).

Amongst some of the things reported to be causing negative behavior in primary school children is *"attention seeking, power struggles, socio-economic factors as well as negative school cultures"* (Rubbi Nunan & Ntombela, 2021, p3.). Butler & Monda-Amaya (2016) speak of what they term *"a good understanding of classroom management"*, a state that is reported to include understanding why learners are behaving in a certain way, what action is effective in countering the behavior and the role teachers play in increasing or decreasing the said behavior. Thus when teachers effectively employ the management strategies that are appropriate for unique situations, there will be little to no disturbances from children (Butler & Monda-Amaya, 2016). When teachers are however not empowered to possess the needed skills to effectively assist children, the aforementioned problems persist (Rubbi Nunan & Ntombela, 2021).

Furthermore, Kuronja et al. (2019) stated that dealing with children who continually carry out problematic behavior can be a source of stress for teachers and causes feelings of inadequacy and helplessness in them. When learners exhibit behavior that is confrontational and even threatening, teachers are left feeling demoralized and humiliated (Singh & Steyn, 2014). Expecting teachers to fulfill many roles, for example those of counselling and social working in addition to teaching, is

creating an increasing burden that is only wearing them down (Segalo & Rambuda, 2018) and is also significantly reducing their job satisfaction and overall well-being (Walton et al., 2016).

2.5 Overcrowded Classrooms

A study conducted by Muthusamy (2015) in South Africa reveals that the challenge of overcrowded classrooms in mainstream schools. It is reported that teachers are encountering stress on a daily basis due to overcrowded classrooms (Muthusamy, 2015). Issues such as very little space in classrooms, difficulties associated with health and safe teaching environments, reduced interaction between teacher and learners and increased administrative work (Muthusamy, 2015). Additionally, other problems reported to be contributing to the stress experienced by teachers are lack of implementation, lack of training for teachers and lack of financial resources (Muthusamy, 2015).

Oliver (2006) concurs by stating that overcrowded classrooms lead to frustration for teachers and bad behavior from learners. It is also reported to directly influence the outcome of learning and teaching (Khan & Iqbal, 2012). Although schools can recruit additional staff to take on the excess load of teaching and administrative duties, there is often a lack of financial resources to do this (Muthusamy, 2015), hence teachers have no choice but to manage overcrowded teaching environments (Phasha, 2008).

2.6 The need for Inspection and re-evaluation of the education structure

Reported among the challenges facing children at schools is the need for school inspection and for improved quality of learning facilities, as well as the need for the re-evaluation of the structure of the education systems in low-income countries in order for the implementation of a new educational approach. Reigeluth (1987), though quite dated relevantly states that it is rather the

structure of the education systems that is the core foundation of problems experienced. For example, the use of computers has been speedily incorporated in the process of replacing human resources (Reigeluth, 1987), yet most educational structures still cannot comfortably accommodate the use of technology for effective school learning outcomes.

According to Bennet et al. (2008), a new generation of learners that were born into technological advancement are coming into the education system with unique skills and alternative tastes to learning that are not included in the traditional structure of education. A new approach to teaching and learning is therefore advocated for (Bennet et al., 2008).

Related in terms of school policy discussions, is the issue of school inspections. Thrupp & Lupton (2006) contended that it is important to understand different school contexts in coming up with policies that affect school practices. Ehren & Visscher (2006) further spoke of a school inspection system that incorporates both what happens in an individual school and in the entire school system as a whole. They report that having a good inspection system in schools, is directly related to the effectiveness of schools (Ehren & Visscher, 2006).

The government of England has introduced what is called the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) (Shaw et al., 2003). According to Shaw et al. (2003), OFSTED functions to increase school performance through the medium of inspection (Rosenthal, 2004). A study carried out by Ehren et al. (2017) concurs by stating that school inspections can lead to positive results for schools in poor countries. However, a study conducted in South Africa revealed that schools do not have plans for maintaining school grounds nor are they following any policies in regards to school inspections (Xaba, 2012).

2.7 Addressing Psychological Challenges in Primary Schools

Research in Namibia speaks about teachers having to take on the role of addressing psychological challenges experienced by school going children, a phenomenon that has attracted a lot of debate because psychological intervention is considered a specialized field that requires specially trained individuals. According to Mushaandja et al. (2013), teachers who take on a counselling role at school are called teacher counselors. In Namibia, professionally trained teachers take on this role for reasons such as a sense of commitment to helping learners, lower workload, already teaching subjects that are closely linked to counseling e.g. life skills or HIV/programs and selection due to trust by the school principle (Mushaandja et al., 2013). According to Mushaandja et al. (2013), teacher counselors are however experiencing many challenges while carrying out these roles, which include a lack of trust from learners, with regards to issues they consider private / personal among other challenges (Mushaandja et al., 2013).

Literature reveals a Response to Intervention (RTI) framework used in psychological intervention programs in schools in some contexts (Paulus et al., 2016), (Lenski, 2011), (Franklin et al., 2012), (Ferri, 2012) and (Wolmer et al., 2011). RTI is described as a three level system used to identify student needs and aims to ensure that they are given the support they need across this three level approach (Paulus et al., 2016). According to Lenski (2011), level 1 of the RTI framework being a basic assessment and diagnostic level is delivered by teachers in the classrooms and targets all students, where learners are assessed on an occasional basis to identify those with difficulties and in need of extra support. Level 2 goes beyond to target specific problems in children (Lenski, 2011). On this level, children who are not making enough progress in a regular classroom are given extra attention, for example extra help in subjects such a mathematics and reading comprehension in early grades of pre-primary to grade 3 (Mellard et al., 2010). Level 3

involves student intervention strategies such as therapeutic sessions or special education for those needing intensive care (Franklin et al., 2012).

The appropriateness of this multi-level approach has however been questioned because it is designed for special education and may not be applicable with more diverse challenges facing school children (Ferri, 2012). Wolmer et al. (2011) stated that the RTI approach is meant to be used in collaborative efforts of both teachers and other professionals, e.g. counselors and social workers, not only by teachers alone. Other studies also encourage collaboration between teachers and others in society. Ntinda et al. (2014) in a study conducted in Botswana on the in-school psychological support stated that teachers are in need of the help of parents, other professionals such as social workers and community organization to effectively carry out their functions. Phasha (2008) concurs by stating that support from other officials and community organizations is important in enabling teachers to have good relationships with learners so as to better manage behavior in the classroom.

2.8 Addressing Psychological Challenges at Home and in the Community

Children live in different settings such as homes, extended families, neighborhoods and playgrounds, school communities and religious settings (Sherman et al., 1994). According to Dear (1995), the issues experienced through children in schools for example are but a reflection of social problems and that solutions to these problems can be found in understanding the systematic nature and interdependence of schools, families and communities.

The World Health Organization (WHO) (2020) reports that mistreatment of children is a universal phenomenon. Also reported is that maltreatment in the form of abuse and neglect can have significant long-term consequences on the psychological well-being of children if not

counteracted at an early stage (WHO, 2020). According to Gilbert et al. (2012), the inequalities surrounding children's family circumstances lead to psychological (Including physical and emotional) maltreatment. Lunden (2011), grouped areas of child mistreatment into *"parent's emotional unavailability, emotional neglect, physical neglect and abuse"* (p.33-34, cited in Forsner et al., 2021).

Children are reported to do better in school when their parents are actively involved in their learning and school performance (Castro et al., 2015). According to Castro et al. (2015), parents who express high expectations, supervise their children's academic activities, those who talk to their children about school work and those who help their children learn how to read increase their chances of performing well in school. Povey et al. (2016) concur by stating that increased learning outcomes in children happens when parents commit to helping them learn how to read at home and by playing educational games and vocalizing their school expectations with them. According to Povey et al. (2016), parental school involvement is said to be characterized by *"behaviors, values, attitudes and parents activities that enhance their children's academic development"*.

Additionally, a study by Wolf (2020) reported that communication between teachers and parents benefits the children because it gives the opportunity for both parents and teachers to work together. Other studies show that parental involvement increases higher school performance (Reynolds et al., 2000) and (Arnold et al., 2008). It is also reported in South Africa that teachers understand low-income parents to be uninterested and uninvolved in their children's education (Bridgemohan et al., 2005, cited in Ozturk, 2013). Chikutuma (2017) concur by stating that in Zimbambwe, some parents were half involved in their children's education, providing only some aspects of parental involvement while other parents were not at all involved. According to a study

by Wolf (2020), many parents stated that they did not have time to extensively support children in primary schools.

The well-being of children is not only depended on the involvement of the schools they attend and their parents, the community in which they live also plays a major role. According to Gerrard and Soriano (2018), community psychology's emphasis is on creating changes that impact the broader system (for example community organizations and social institutions) where the individual is located, as opposed to only assisting people at an individual level. Gerrard & Soriano (2018) speak about a School Based Family Counselling (SBFC) approach that focuses on the significance of evaluating all the systems that affect children. The SBFC postulates that children are a part of various systems such as family, school, peer groups and the community at large (Gerrard and Soriano, 2018). According to Gerrard & Soriano (2018), families often experience difficulties that negatively affect the children and likewise, schools are affected by communities where poverty, racial discrimination and other deviant activities are prevalent. SBFC therefore works to help schools, families and communities find means to successfully dealing with such challenges in the community (Gerrard & Soriano, 2018).

There are a few documented examples of community intervention through the SBFC approach. Kruczek & Young (2013), report of a crisis intervention after a natural disaster, where the school collaborated with a local health facility to assist an injured learner to successfully return back to school. Morotti (2008) reports how schools in Alaska (USA) joined forces to create a cultural responsive guidance program that catered to isolated communities. Through this initiative, counselors lived in the community, took part in events and assisted families in arranging after school care groups (Morotti, 2008). This initiative is said to have facilitated the building of trust and enhanced community involvement and participation (Morotti, 2008).

In another study, a school based consultation and intervention that involved parents, students and community church leaders was organized to challenge discrimination against students of color (Pomerantz, 2013). Through this consultation, an agreement was reached between the school, parents and community church leaders to remove discriminating acts at the school (Pomerantz, 2013). In yet another project by Goodell (2012), as cited in Gerrard & Soriano, (2018), parents and the community were involved to help young people excel in school. According to Goodell (2012), the project involved the support of local government through which space and resources for project events were made possible. Through the involvement of all parties: the school, the community and parents, 80% of the youth who participated in the program went on to attend university (Goodell, 2012 as cite in Gerrard & Soriano, 2018).

A study conducted in Zambia reveals that the government has allowed for the development of community schools that are founded by members of the community, religious leaders, development workers, political figures, and health workers, to fulfill the basic necessities of children who are not in a formal government or private schooling system (Henning & Chi, 2013). Community schools are reported to help educate the most vulnerable children in Zambia and that the community school setting is most appropriate for supporting OVC because it is easier due to some factors such as not being required to wear school uniform or pay school fees (Henning & Chi, 2013), requirements that are an actual burden to poor families.

According to Henning and Chi (2013), community school teachers however do not receive salaries but are rather given small donations from kind parents and others. There is also a lack of training for these school teacher and a lack of continued support from the community (Henning & Chi, 2013). The study highlighted the need for healthcare, government support, first-aid training and parental inclusion. One teacher stated:

"We need training, we need counseling skills, so we can deal with the day-to-day issues that these children are having" (Henning & Chi, 2013, p.240).

2.9 Theoretical Background

The Bio-Ecological Theory of Human Development

Urie Bronfenbrenner founded the Bio Ecological theory of human development, which postulates that human development is a transactional process of interaction between various systems such as the developing individual, other human beings and the environment in which they live (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007). Development is said to be an occurrence of continuous change in the biopsychological attributes of people both as individuals and as groups and this occurrence happens over the course of an individual's life span, cuts across generations and across historical time (past or present) (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007).

Additionally, Bronfenbrenner (1974) postulates that development should be studied from and/or in the environment in which people live their daily lives (The ecological Context). Many external influences impacting behavior and development can be understood only in the environment and/or physical circumstances in which they occur and are experienced (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). Accordingly, Bronfenbrenner& Morris (2007) stated that:

"Especially in its early phases, but also throughout the life course, human development takes place through processes of progressively more complex reciprocal interaction between an active, evolving biopsychological human organism and the persons, objects, and symbols in its immediate external environment. To be effective, the interaction must occur on a fairly regular basis over extended periods of time. Such enduring forms of interaction in the immediate environment are referred to as proximal processes. Examples of enduring patterns of proximal process are found

in feeding or comforting a baby, playing with a young child, child-child activities, group or solitary play, reading, learning new skills, athletic activities, problem solving, caring for others in distress, making plans, performing complex tasks, and acquiring new knowledge and know-how." (p.797).

'Proximal processes are said to primarily drive human development. These are forms of interactions between individuals and their environment (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007), that are essential for human development. The impact of these processes are however reported to be influenced by the characteristics of the growing individual, as well as by their immediate and extended environmental contexts:

"The form, power, content, and direction of the proximal processes effecting development vary systematically as a joint function of the characteristics of the developing person, the environment—both immediate and more remote— in which the processes are taking place, the nature of the developmental outcomes under consideration, and the social continuities and changes occurring over time through the life course and the historical period during which the person has lived." (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007, p.798).

According to Bronfenbrenner & Morris (2007), proximal processes can also include interaction with objects and symbols, not only with human beings and that such interaction need only attract the *"attention, exploration, manipulation, elaboration and imagination"* (p.798) of the individual to be an effective proximal process. In order for children's developmental abilities to grow, the proximal processes in their lives need to become more intensive and challenging in order to facilitate a continued pace of development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007). For example, children primarily have relationships and interaction with their parents but overtime, other people like relatives, siblings, friends, teachers and others in the community are introduced into their lives to facilitate more complex interactions.

Therefore, the bio-ecological model sees children's development as made up of various systems of relationships that are influenced by many layers from their environment, layers incorporating their immediate family, school and the larger community of cultural beliefs, laws and values (Guy-Evans, 2020). Children and adolescents are individuals who are engaged in school systems, the community, family structures, circles of friends and other relations in their immediate environments. According to the model, the child's environment is divided into systems (of which four are highlighted here) namely: The microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem and the macrosystem respectively. The initial microsystem is the most impactful because it consists of what has direct communication with the child, for example the caregivers, brothers & sisters, teachers at school, friends & peers etc. (Guy-Evans, 2020). Interactions on this level are very personal as the child can be influenced by those around them and in a likely manner, the child can influence those around them (Guy-Evans, 2020).

The mesosystem includes relationships between the child's microsystems for example, relations between caregivers & teachers, school friends and siblings etc., whereas the exosystem is made up of social structures that are either / both formal and informal structures that do not interact directly with the child but influences their life as one or more of the microsystems in their lives interact (Guy-Evans, 2020). Examples of the exosystem can be the caregiver's place of work, parent's friends / peers, social media, neighbours and others in the environment (Guy-Evans, 2020). According to Guy-Evans, (2020).The macrosystem is concerned with how cultural aspects that affect the development of the child, for example parents economic status, class, ethnical background, wealth or lack thereof, poverty etc. It is therefore concerned with the pre-existing conditions in which the individual is born and raised (cultural beliefs, laws, values and so forth (Guy-Evans, 2020).

Encounters (whether positive or negative) with these various systems shape and influence children's development. For example, the interaction between teachers or caretakers with the children can impact their cognitive and emotional development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007). According to Bronfenbrenner & Morris (2007), engaging in such interactive activities and communication over a period of time gives children the *"ability, knowledge and skills"* (p.797) to partake of such activities, in communications with others and with themselves. Children thereby become agents of their own development when involved in continued and more advanced interaction with their parents and others (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007).

Hayes & O'Toole (2017) write that Bronfenbrenner's ecological model gives a comprehensive approach that includes every structure through which children and their families are intertwined and also allows for an accurate picture of family relationships dynamics. The model asserts that these systems do not operate on their own but are depended upon one another and influence each other (Hayes & O'Toole, 2017).

According to Guy-Evans (2020), one limitation of the ecological model is that it may cause one to assume that people who do not encounter ideal ecological systems are or will be lacking in their development. However, a lot of children grow up to be well-balanced individuals regardless of challenging backgrounds (Guy-Evans, 2020). The researcher has taken this limitation into consideration when reporting on findings from the study. The study is therefore using Bronfenbrenner's bio ecological theory of human development to understand children in relation to psychological challenges.

3. Research Methods

3.1 Study Design

The study employed a Qualitative Research (QR) methodology. Shank (2002) writes that qualitative research is *"a form of systematic empirical enquiry into meaning"* (p.5), where the researcher attempts to comprehend how people make sense of their encounters (Ospina, 2004). QR is based on communication because the researcher collects stories, narratives and descriptions about people`s lived experiences (Morse, 1994). QR takes on a naturalistic stance (Controversies, 2000), whereby researchers study situations around them and try to make sense of phenomena through conversation with people (Ospina, 2004). Studies in psychology and behavioral sciences have made use of qualitative methods because they are considered more beneficial for exploring subjective and possibly sensitive experiences about people's lives (Taukeni, 2015). Advantages of doing a QR include being flexibility to explore ideas and understand processes effectively and the ability to question and make enquiry into what is said so as to bring forth meaning (Ospina, 2004).

The subjective experiences of the participants were explored using the phenomenological approach. Phenomenology involves capturing the quality of experiences, for example what it is like to be a primary school teacher, rather than only discovering what is actually going on or what causes phenomena to take place (Willig, 2013). For example the challenges facing primary school children and their causes. The researcher therefore aimed to explore the challenges facing primary school children through the perspectives of teachers.

Furthermore, Lester (1999) concurs by stating that phenomenological research encapsulates personal and individual experience from the perspective of the research participant, paying particular attention to assumptions and meanings that are taken for granted. Additionally, studies

based on phenomenology allow for a personal, subjective, knowledge-based paradigm that highlights the perspective and interpretation of the participant (Lester, 1999). The researcher took a descriptive phenomenological stance and gave a description of the primary school teacher's account of their teaching experience. Descriptive phenomenology involves recording experience exactly as it is presented without adding or removing from it (Willig, 2013).

3.2 Population and Sampling

The target population of this study comprised of a combination of three public schools in Windhoek, Namibia. The data collection entry point and site was the primary schools that gave permission to the researcher to collect data. Children were excluded from the study due to Covid restrictions. The study sample therefore comprised sorely of teachers teaching primary school children. A total of 8 teachers (seven (7) females & one (1) male) from these schools, made up of three (3), three (3) and two (2) teachers from each schools respectively, were recruited to allow for more saturation of the data. As a criteria, only teachers who were 21 years or older, teaching grades ranging from 1-7, and were willing to be interviewed and have their interviews recorded were recruited to participate in the study.

In Namibia, a person who is under the age of 21 is legally a minor. This is the reason why participants aged 21 and above were selected as study participants. The sample therefore included participants whose ages ranged between 28 to 62 years old, with years of teaching experience ranging from 2 years to 38 years. It was of the researcher's opinion that the knowledge and experience of the participants recruited positively contributed to the quality of information reported on this study.

The study used a convenient non-probability sampling method, particularly the snowball sampling technique. Snowball sampling involves getting the initial participants in the study to invite their suitable acquaintances to also take part in the study (Ghaljaie et al., 2017). This sampling is convenient in circumstances where it is difficult to get participants (Ghaljaie et al., 2017), such as is the case with the current Covid-19 pandemic. A snowball sampling technique therefore allowed the researcher to network to get initial participants and then made use of referrals from those who already participated to further collect data.

3.3 Study Settings

All three schools selected for the study are government or public schools that get their funding and resources from the government. However, two schools (School A & C) are situated in central town and are mixed schools where you get learners from both high-income and middle-income generating homes. These two schools also get learners from different racial backgrounds (whites, blacks, colored etc.) attending and still receive fee payments from able parents in addition to government funding.

It was also discovered that school A engages in fund raising initiatives to generate additional income for the school. Through these additional efforts and extra financial resources from affording parents and/or caregivers, the school is able to provide a better learning environment (for example, support / assistant teachers and library teachers) for their learners.

Although learners attending public or government schools in Namibia are not required to pay schools fees, they are still expected to have proper school uniforms and stationeries which are not provided for, by the government. School B is located in Katutura, one of the areas in Windhoek.

Learners attending this school are reported to experience more poverty related challenges such as lack of proper uniform and school stationeries.

3.4 Data Collection Tools

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were used to collect data. Preparing for the interviews involved the development of an interview schedule. Ryan et al. (2009) stated that the schedule is informed by the type of research, the type of interview and the aims and objectives of the study. Further stated is that interview questions should be kept easy and simple enough to understand and that in order to build rapport, relaxing warmup questions should be kept at the beginning of the interview (Ryan et al., 2009).

A self-made interview schedule that acted as an interview guide was therefore utilised in data collection (See Appendix C). The interview schedule is reported to assist in keeping the interview focused on the aims and objectives of the study while exploring the participant's experiences and perspectives (Stroh, 2000). The interview schedule for this study was developed in a way that structured the interview to guide the conversation. Demographics questions were used to obtain key information about the participants, followed by the main questions that addressed the aims and objectives of the study (Ryan et al., 2009). Most questions were formulated in an open-ended way in order to get descriptive and comprehensive answers from the participants (Ryan et al., 2009). It was expected that the structure of the interviews would allow the participants freedom to express and openly convey their views.

The study made use of face-to-face interviews to collect research data. Face-to-face interviewing is a widely used data collection method in qualitative research (Sandelowski, 2002) and it was appropriate for this study. It allowed the researcher to take advantage of non-verbal cues

and body language that became an added source of valuable information through observation of facial expressions and eye contact (Ryan et al., 2009).

According to Ryan et al (2009), the relationship between the interviewer and the participant/s is an important aspect in making sure that the interview process is successful and the posture of the interviewer helps in establishing, as well as maintaining this relationship. The role of the interviewer included: verbal and non-verbal communication, having a welcoming demeanor, maintaining eye contact, allowing the participant to freely air their views at their own pace, as well as probing for clarity and/or more information (Trochim, 2005).

3.5 Data Collection Procedures

The data was collected during a time when tighter Covid-19 restrictions were lifted in Namibia. This allowed the researcher and participants to engage in face-to-face interviews as opposed to the proposed online interviewing to collect data. The interviews did not need to be translated because they were conducted in the English language. Each interview took approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour and was recorded using a digital devise, in order to efficiently capture the information and to enable easier and accurate transcription of the data. Prior to data collection, the researcher carried out a pilot study with 1 person, enabling them to test the clarity and quality of the research questions in addressing the aims and objectives of the study and also to test the quality of the recording device and to test for time.

Participants were initially approached to obtained consent for participation and were asked for their contact details in order to further discuss what is expected of them. The information sheet was read and explained to them, as well as given to them for further perusal. Arrangements were

made to have the actual data collection interviews with the teachers at the schools they worked during their free periods.

3.6 Data Analysis

After recording the face-to-face interviews, the researcher transcribed the recordings by typing out the conversation with each participant into a word document. These data transcripts were therefore analyzed using Thematic Analysis (TA). Willig & Rogers (2017) defined TA as a method of identifying themes in qualitative data. Through TA, the researcher was able to easily breakdown these big sets of data transcripts by initially arranging the information into different broad categories (Caufield, 2020). According to Caufield (2020), TA is mostly used when attempting to discover something about people's experiences, thoughts, views, principles, values etc., on a certain subject matter. This is done by closely inspecting and analyzing textual data such as found on interview transcripts and/or responses to survey questions so as to recognize themes, ideas and patterns that are similar and restated among research participants (Caufield, 2020).

Braun & Clarke (2006) outline and describe six steps in TA as follows: Familiarizing with the Data, Generating Codes, Constructing Themes, Reviewing potential Themes, Defining and Naming Themes, and Producing the Report. Familiarizing with the data began during data collection (Willig & Rogers, 2017) and it involved getting a rigorous overview of the entire data collected (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This initial stage gave the researcher an entry point into the analysis to engage with and gain an initial understanding of the data (Willig & Rogers, 2017). This stage involved reading and being observant, taking note of patterns, asking questions of the data, listening and re-listening to the recordings (Willig & Rogers, 2017) etc.

The second stage of TA, Generating Codes (referred to as categories in chapter 4) immersed the researcher more deeply into the data and created the building blocks of analysis (Willig & Rogers, 2017). Coding is pointing out parts of the text, mostly phrases or sentences and creating heading or "codes" to explain their content (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As this process of coding carried on, the researcher began to see similarities and noticed patterns throughout the data set (Willig & Rogers, 2017). When constructing themes, the third stage, the codes created were examined more closely to identify patterns and were further used to come up with themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Willing & Rogers (2017) stated that constructed themes are draft versions of a researchers notes that are open and flexible to change.

Reviewing potential themes took place by ensuring that they were truthful representations of the actual data collected by comparing them to the data set (Responses on Interview transcripts) (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is a quality control activity that made sure that themes were represented well in relation to the data as coded previously by looking to see if they captured the correct meaning in the data and ensuring that the narrative represented through the theme answered the research question and/or satisfied the aims and objectives (Willing & Rogers, 2017) of the study.

The fourth step in thematic analysis is defining and naming themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This involved giving meaning to each theme and understanding how the themes helped to further comprehend the overall data. Defining and naming themes also included coming up with easy to understand names for each theme identified, making use of short theme definitions (short notes about the main idea and meaning of every theme) to help determine clarity and scope, ensuring cohesion, precision and quality of the TA in progress (Willig & Rogers, 2017). Defining and naming themes was an excellent time to re-check that every theme aligned well around a central organizing concept from the data set (Willig & Rogers, 2017).

The final step, producing the report, involved documenting the analysis of the data collected. This stage presented a final opportunity to make changes that strengthened the analysis and correctly communicated the researcher's understanding of the data collected (Willig & Rogers, 2017). The final report includes an introductory section to restate the research questions, aim and study design. Also included in the write up of this research paper is a discussion of the results in relation to each theme identified and finally a conclusion section that highlights the major discoveries from the study and how the analysis answered the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.7 Ethical Considerations

As part of the ethical considerations, authorization to conduct the study was obtained from the University of Witwatersrand Ethics Committee on Human Subjects prior to data collection. Further approval to conduct the study was obtained from the Ministry of Education (the school governing body in Namibia), as well as from the school gatekeepers (the school principals). Participation was entirely voluntary. No participant experienced any major discomfort prior to or while being interviewed. Participants were given the liberty to request for a break at any time during the interview and to continue with the interview at a later stage if needed to. Additionally, participants were free to discontinue with the interview at any time if they needed to, without any negative consequences. Participants were also provided with referrals to free mental health professionals in Windhoek (See Appendix A) in case they felt the need to make use of them after the interviews.

Additionally, participants were issued with an information sheet (Appendix A) that included important information about the project and explained the aims and objectives of the study. This information sheet provided participants with an opportunity to understand and ask further questions concerning the study. In addition, participants were asked to formally give their consent,

not only to participate in the study, but also to have their interviews audio recorded by signing a Consent Form (Appendix B) prior to participation.

This research was committed to ensuring confidentiality and ensured that the rights of the participants were not violated in any way. The recordings of the interviews were securely kept in a password protected computer that is accessible only to the researcher for the duration of the data collection and analysis process. After this process, these recordings will be deleted and their transcriptions safely stored for future reference after reporting the findings of the study. Throughout the research process, pseudonyms were used to refer to the participants and the schools they work in order to ensure confidentiality. Reporting has therefore been kept anonymous. No identifiable participant information is recorded and/or disclosed within the report in order to protect their identity. Participants may access the findings of this study by contacting the researcher, via email to have a copy of the report made available to them.

3.8 Reflexivity and Trustworthiness

Roulston (2010) defined the researcher's reflexivity as their ability to consciously refer to themselves in regards to the knowledge production in relation to their research topic. This is said to help the researcher to not only explore their position as an individual and understand how this positionality plays a role in constructing knowledge, but it also helps to explore the researcher's relationship with their participants and the research phenomenon they are studying (Roulston, 2010).

Due to the subjective nature of this research study, the importance of exploring the researcher's positionality in reference to the phenomena being studied was understood. The researcher realised how their identity (gender, personal experiences, cultural orientation, ethnicity etc.), as well as

their contextual positionality were all instrumental in the establishment of the research process and the reporting of the final study findings. Therefore, in an effort to explore this positionality and minimize bias in the study, the researcher engaged in a reflexive process throughout every stage of the process to ensure trustworthiness of the knowledge as produced by them.

Trustworthiness in qualitative research refers to how accurately (valid) a study conforms to its purpose and design (Roulston, 2010). According to Roulston (2010), the researcher is a data collection and analysis tool and thereby plays an important role in ensuring that the results of a research study are credible, transferable and dependable. Accordingly and in like manner, Jackson et al. (2007) stated that QR *"tests trustworthiness through credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability"* (p.26). This research made use of member-checking to verify the accuracy of what is being reported. Member-checking included presenting the categories and themes developed back to the participants to make sure that what participants have said has been presented correctly (Jackson et al., 2007). Member-checking helped to enhance *'objectivity', 'ethical diligence'* and *'rigor'* (Jackson et al., 2007).

As a researcher, my childhood experiences have not always been negative or positive. In stating this, I wish to offer a reflective lens through which my motivation into children' studies can be better understood. Thematic Analysis is a subjective form of analysis. I as researcher recognize that my design of the research study and/or my interpretation of the research findings may have been influenced by my cultural orientation and personal experiences.

I was therefore committed to producing knowledge that is trustworthy and reliable, and was thus engaged in a continuance process of journaling throughout the research process. Personal thoughts, participant comments and reflections were noted after each interview. I asked myself questions such as what do I know? How do I know what I know? What has shaped or is shaping

my perspective and with what voice do I share this perspective? What do I do with what I have found out? (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Ryan et al. (2009) stated that daily journaling in research helps increase rigor and trustworthiness. Biases arising throughout the research process were hence filtered out by this continued process of reflection and journaling and thereby enhanced self-awareness and increased trustworthiness.

4. Results

4.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the results obtained from the study carried out in Windhoek, Namibia. Eight (8) participants from three (3) schools were interviewed face-to-face. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, and the data sorted and grouped according to similarities using Thematic Analysis (TA) as discussed in the previous chapter to form the categories, themes and sub-themes presented in this chapter.

The eight participants included three (3) participants from the first school, three (3) from the second and two (2) participants from the third school. The names of the schools and those of the participants have been omitted from reporting and replaced with pseudonyms for confidentiality purposes. For example, school A, B, C and Participant A1, A2, A3, B1, B2, B3, C1, C2 to represent each school's participants and their responses respectively.

Three (3) categories, eight (8) themes and twenty-six (26) sub-themes were identified on the study. Sub-themes were incorporated in order to comprehensively report findings about the challenges experienced by primary school children as experienced by school teachers. This information is summarized in Table 2 below.

4.2 Socio-demographic data of the participants

The demographic information of the participants was collected to show their age, years of teaching experience, the number of years at the particular school, and the grades they teach. Such information allows a good understanding of the experience and knowledge of the participants who provided the information being reported on this study. Participants who were older, for example 45 years and above were more inclined to extensively discussing the challenges children

experienced because they saw this as an opportunity to effect change. Additionally, the researcher discovered that participants who were Life Skills teachers were more knowledgeable with regards to the specific Psychological Challenges facing children. This is due to the fact that they acted as the 'Counselors' at their respective schools and children with difficulties were referred to them.

The socio-demographic data of the participants is therefore presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Data of Participants

School	Participant	Gender	Age	Period at this School	Years of Teaching Experience	Grades Taught	Subjects Taught
A	A1	Female	62	2 Years	38 Years	1 to 3	Reading
	A2	Female	53	9 Years	29 Years	4 to 7	Life Skills
	A3	Female	45	5 Years	5 Years	4 & 5	Social Studies
B	B1	Male	43	5 Years	5 Years	1 to 3	Class Teaching (All Subjects)
	B2	Female	27	2 Years	4 Years	4 to 7	Math & Natural Science
	B3	Female	29	1 Month	7 Years	4 to 7	Life Skills
C	C1	Female	36	13 Years	15 Years	2	Class Teaching (All Subjects)
	C2	Female	28	2 Years	2 Years	1	Class Teaching (All Subjects)

4.3 Categories, Themes and Sub-themes identified

The categories, themes and sub-themes identified as summarized in Table 2 below are described in this section.

Table 2: Categories, Themes and Sub-themes

Categories	Themes	Sub-Themes
Challenges facing Primary School Children	1. Challenges Associated with Covid-19	1. Learning from home instead of the school ground during Covid-19 2. The Inconvenience of Online Learning 3. Lack of Extra-Mural Activities 4. Dealing with Death, Grief & staying healthy
	2. Challenges at home	5. Financial Trouble / Poverty 6. Divorce 7. Alcohol and Substance Abuse 8. Domestic Violence 9. Neglect by parents 10. Physical and Sexual Abuse
Psychological Challenges	3. Negative Behavior	11. Indiscipline 12. Bullying and Self-Harming 13. Attention Seeking
	4. Emotional Distress	14. Depression 15. Stress 16. Loneliness and Low self-esteem / Low self-confidence
	5. Schooling	17. Low School Performance 18. Absenteeism 19. Overcrowding in Classrooms
The Support System	6. Support provided by the Schools	20. The Life Skills Teacher 21. Additional Duties

		22. Counselling Support Groups 23. Fund Raising Initiatives 24. Another Education Approach 25. School Inspections by Policy Makers
	7. Partnering with Parents and/or Caregivers	26. Parental Involvement
	8. Partnering with others in the community	

4.3.1 Challenges facing Primary School Children

Two (2) themes were identified in this category namely: 'Challenges Associated with Covid-19' and 'Challenges at home'.

4.3.1.1 Theme 1: Challenges Associated with Covid-19

Four (4) sub-themes emerged under this theme: 'Learning from home vs the school grounds during Covid-19', 'the inconvenience of online learning', 'Lack of extra-mural activities' and 'Dealing with death', 'Grief & staying healthy'.

Sub-Theme 1: <u>Learning from home instead of the school grounds during Covid-19</u>

Three (3) participants expressed that some parents and children preferred primary school learning from school instead of home because children either consider school a safer place or missed their friends. For example, participant C1 said: *"there's some children who walk in here and they just need a hug…Some kids just need a safe place."* participant B3 concurred by stating: *"So that child would look happy when she's at school. The moment the bell rings going home,*

she's like – can I not stay here a little bit longer?" Additionally, the study discovered that some parents preferred that their children learn from school instead of home because they did not have time to teach and supervise their children. Participant C1 expressed this by stating: *"…they send the child to school and…go off to work…I think parents were just not happy…They actually send their kids to the farms not to deal with them at home".*

The findings also suggested that children prefer to learn from school because they missed their peers and needed supervision. For example, participant A2 reported this by stating: *"…when they went back to school many kids told me that…they have to work under supervision…they don't have the discipline to sit at home especially when the parents are not there…they rather prefer school because they feel excluded from their friends and contacts…they just miss their teachers and…really they are kids that need guidance".*

Sub-Theme 2: <u>The Inconveniences of Online Learning</u>

Participants A3 and B1 expressed that online learning during Covid did not work because of difficulties associated with the use of computers and internet access. Participant A3 reported - *"they really…struggled to keep up…with the pace…they don't have internet access or the computer…"* Additionally, participant B1 reported that: *"It's not all the parents that can afford computers and internet because our learners are coming from different backgrounds"*

Participant B3 further expressed the need for practicality in primary school learning, stating that the practicality of learning, e.g. holding, playing, feeling, touching etc., was taken away by social distancing: *"…because now you could not come close to the child to actually teach them how to hold the pencil….you know when you're dealing with young ones, this junior ones, these*

people learn through playing…they need to touch, feel…sharing, but now we were told to tell them not to share because if you share, then you're sharing Covid"

Sub-theme 3: <u>Lack of Extra-Mural Activities</u>

Three (3) participants expressed the importance of extra-mural activities, a luxury that was made impossible by Covid. According to participant B2 - *"Extra mural activities were banned because of Covid…We were not allowed to be in contact with each other"*, while participant C1 reported that such activities are much needed by the children, especially after the past two years: "*I think kids need more extra mural activities. Bowling and…I think more age appropriate extra-mural activities…because schools for the last two years we've missed out on those"*. Participant B1 expressed that - *"…for the others with more difficulties they can have more e*xtra-mural *activities at school…maybe they can play with the kids games, soccer…"*

Sub-theme 4: <u>Dealing with Death, Grief & Staying Healthy</u>

Three (3) participants revealed how children experienced the death of loved ones and anxieties around contracting Covid-19. Two participant reported that children had to deal with losing very close relatives and loved ones too consistently during the Covid19 pandemic. Participant B3 - *"A lot of people died. Delta* (a Covid-19 variant) *really swept like a broom"…A lot of them lost either uncle, mommy, daddy, grannies…Losing a parent for a young child is like a slap in the face…"* and participant C1 in the same line said - *"the death ratio…there's too much consistency…Covid has a lot to do with that…It's very close relatives. It's the aunty…Now it's the mother at such a young age".* Participant A3 reported the following in relation to children experiencing feeling of anxiety and being scarred of contracting the virus - *"I see anxiety every day between the kids…they*

are really anxious of getting sick…some kids sitting the whole time and sanitizing their hands...they're so scared…it takes away the freedom of…school and just live a little you know"

4.3.1.2 Theme 2: Challenges at home

The study identified six (6) sub-themes under this theme, namely: 'Financial challenges' / 'Poverty', 'Divorce', 'Alcohol and substance Abuse', 'Domestic Violence', 'Neglect by parents' and 'Physical and sexual abuse'.

Sub-theme 5: *Financial Challenges / Poverty*

All participants that took part in the study expressed financial difficulties and poverty as a contributing factor to difficulties experienced by primary school children. Examples of such challenges given by participants are: fights between parents at home, not being able to provide adequate housing and food for the family and lack of money for extra activities at school. This is reflected in the following quotes: participant A2 - *"…but yeah financial…there's a lot of financial fights at home";* Participant A3 -*"Financially…, the people are struggling especially after Covid"*; Participant B1 - *"its poverty…sometimes some parents are just renting in a one bedroom and the kids are lying on the floor…"*; Participant B2 - *"There's no finances for food…finances as a challenge because we're living in a vulnerable community"*; Participant C1 - *"I think there is a huge money problem…I think there is a financial strain on parents..."*; Participant C2 - *"I think the parents were going through financial difficulties…she told me now no I didn't bring my money my mom said they don't have money."*

Sub-theme 6: Divorce

Divorce was reported to be contributing to the challenges facing children at home. This is what three (3) participants had to say about divorce among parents: Participant A2 - *"I think the problem*

in our society nowadays is uh, parent's divorce…I saw many, many, many tears in my office due to…divorce". Participant C2 said that - *"mostly…it's at home…either divorce….Parents maybe they are separated and also uh when parents are not together…"* Participant C1 in the same line stated that children are partaking of the difficulties encountered by parents when going through a divorce - *"the parents maybe just got a divorce. So right now the children are in a cyclone and they are getting so wrapped up in the adult world."*

Sub-theme 7: <u>Alcohol and substance Abuse</u>

Two (2) participants, A2 and B1 reported alcohol and substance abuse in both children and parents: Participant A2 reported that too many parents experience stress at work and abuse alcohol at home as a result - *"You won't believe me but alcohol abuse is a…strong factor I think because so many parents undergo so many stresses at work and when they come home its alcohol abuse".* Participant B1 narrates the following about a child whose parent abused alcohol - *"at home I cannot sleep…my mom, if she come back at night she is drunk…then she must come and quarrel with me at home…".* Additionally, participant B1 reported that primary school children are trying drug like substances and alcohol consumption - *"Let me say the other is now things that they are smoking – Scung* (a drug substance that is similar to Cannabis / Marijuana). *…it's like Dagga…even a small boy from grade 2, they are doing those and alcohol…"*

Sub-theme 8: <u>Domestic Violence</u>

Participant A2, B3 and C1 all reflected domestic violence as one of the challenges plaguing children at home: Participant A2 - *"Domestic violence definitely…I have to say it's domestic, domestic violence".* In like manner, participant B3 narrates the following about domestic violence in the home - *"That child used to come and complain to me every time…My mom and my dad was*

fighting last night..." furthermore, participant C1 stated that parents are fighting a lot because of financial stress and the children are experiencing this violence - *"...They see parents fight now...parents start to fight a lot because jobs have been lost"*

Sub-theme 9: <u>Neglect by parents</u>

Six (6) participants reported that children are experiencing neglect from parents and/or caregivers. Reflected here is evidence from four (4) participants. Participant B1 reported the following in relation to neglect of children by parents - *"Some parents don't even look after their kids...The way the children are coming from home...Some are not coming neat...The clothes are torn without proper school uniform."* Participant A3 concurred - *"...and definitely negligence from the parents side. They get, they feel neglected..."* Participant B2 in like manner, reported this - *"These parents are with their kids every day but they don't notice. Many of them are not well taken care of...a few parents cannot afford but there are just those ones who are neglecting totally..."* In addition to physical neglect, the study also revealed that children are experiencing emotional neglect from their parents. Participant C1 expresses this by stating that - *"some children are emotionally hungry...there's some children who walk in here and **they just need a hug** for that day, they don't need anything else..."*

Sub-theme 10: <u>Physical and Sexual abuse</u>

Responses from three (3) participants revealed that some children are experiencing physical and sexual abuse, as well as inappropriate sexual exposure in their environments. Participant B1 said this in relation to physical abuse - *"sometimes they are being beaten by their parents at home...even one was beaten, who was in grade 1b, by the father...he was sleeping in the bathroom and he was swollen up"*. Participant B3 in like manner stated - *"Yes! The father will beat up the*

child but in that case life skill teachers are always active there…sometimes it's the step kids…moody parents coming from there you want to take off on your step child."

Participant C2 reported sexual abuse in primary school children, making mention of two kids at their school who were raped by family members - *"Some of the kids actually they were raped when they were small…we have 2 kids here that were raped by the uncles."* Additionally, participant B1 expressed that some children are inappropriately exposed to their parents' sexual activities due to the lack of separate bedrooms for children and adults - *"sometimes some parents are just renting in a one bedroom and the kids are lying on the floor and there on the bed if they start to make sex than the kids are always observing and uhm, even if you say draw for us something, than the kids are drawing funny things…"*

4.3.2 Psychological Challenges

Three (3) themes were identified in this category: 'Negative Behavior', 'Emotional distress' and 'Schooling'.

4.3.2.1 Theme 3: Negative Behavior

Three (3) sub-themes were identified in this theme, namely: 'Indiscipline', 'Bullying and Self-harming' and 'Attention seeking'.

Sub-theme 11: <u>Indiscipline</u>

Four (4) participants complained about indiscipline as a big issue among the learners. According to participant A1 - *"My main concern is the uncontrolled and undisciplined learners…the ill-discipline is definitely coming from home."* Participant A2 concurred - *"Many children that are experiencing problems at home are naughty at school. They…often get into trouble and you dig deeper and you understand why the child is behaving like that…"* Participant

B1 also stated lack of discipline at home by giving an encounter of a child who lacked manners at school -*"because at home he is out of hands. Even in the class…he don't have manners…"* Participant A3 concurred - *"It's usually the children that takes stuff that doesn't belong to them or they're just out of hand…they're out of control you cannot!"*

Sub-theme 12: <u>Bullying and Self-harming</u>

Four (4) participants expressed bullying (being rude, negative social media messages, mocking etc.) as a problem experienced by primary school children, while one (1) participant expressed self-harming as a problem:

Participant A1 - *"they sit alone there if you approach them they will tell you – "they are bullying me", "they are rude"…"* Participant B2 also reported incidences of bullying at their school - *"some of them they are facing…uhm bullying from others…"* Participant B3 stated that some children are being mocked by other because of physical or other challenges - *"Those ones are also a challenge working with them because they're being mocked by other learners."* In addition to physical bullying on the school grounds, children are reportedly experiencing cyberbullying through social media massaging platforms. Participant A2 reported that - *"…They start to become bullies…there's always a reason for behavior…especially when this child is being bullied on social media, they will come and show me the messages."* Additionally, self-harming, especially the act of making incisions on the body (self-cutting) was reported as a challenge among primary school children. Participant A2 - *"…and then Urg they start to cut themselves…self-harming is a big thing under the learners especially under the girls…"*

Sub-theme 13: <u>Attention seeking</u>

Attention seeking behavior among children with psychological challenges was reported by three (3) participants. Participant B2 expressed that - *"the child needs attention from the parent and some of them the way they behave you can just see that this child needs attention from me."* Participant B3 in like manner reported that - *"You'll find other learners have behavioral problems due to the fact that they don't get attention from home. I've realized that through that way they're seeking for attention."* Further stated by participant B2 is the following in relation to lack of affection - *"Lack of affection…from parents which is causing the children to act out and seek for attention…All they want is just someone to talk to."*

In the spirit of needing attention and wanting someone to talk to, participant A2 went on to state that social media has become an escape for many children who are desperate for some attention - *"children are desperate for attention. They need a shoulder…that's why they are so much on social media. At least there is somebody who can hear them on the other side even if it's virtual…they can make their voices heard through the Instagram or what, what, what because parents are too busy to listen to them."*

4.3.2.2 Theme 4: Emotional Distress

The study identified three (3) sub-themes under emotional distress: 'Depression', 'Stress' and 'Loneliness & Low self-esteem / Low self-confidence'.

Sub-theme 14: <u>Depression</u>

Depression among learners and parents was reported as a challenge facing primary school children. Participant A2 reported that many teenagers are depressed - *"Depression under learners…they are bringing problems from home…to school…many teenagers are depressed lately."* Participant B3 concurred - *"…sometimes it's depression from home."* Participant C1

stated that the depression experienced is due to financial distress - *"…depression has a lot to do with that now…it's too much emotional…it's financial, its depression…*

Sub-theme 15: Stress

The study revealed that teachers, learners and parents experience stress. Participant B1 expressed that dealing with children who lack manners is stressful for him, a situation that is exacerbated by the large number of children they accommodate in one class - *"He don't have manners…It's stressful because we are teaching 42 learners in a class. I cannot teach these manners and the others don't have manners…"* Participant B3 stated that some children go through stress as well - *"Some of them they go through under stresses…",* while participant C1 reported that parents are encountering their fair share of stress due to financial burdens - *"…And financial stress is terrible. Everything goes out of the window...If there is money stress, it's a problem."*

Sub-theme 16: Loneliness and Low self-esteem / Low self-confidence

Three (3) participants expressed that children with psychological challenges become loners at school. According to participant A1, *"you look at them on the school ground and you see some of the learners sit alone".* Participant A3 further stated that - *"…or their loners outside"* and participant B3 concurred by stating - *"…they can barely socialize. They don't want to make friends. As a child it's normal for you to make friends."*

In addition to loneliness and the inability to make friends, participant A3 and B3 reported that children with psychological challenges struggle with self-esteem and low self-confidence issues. Participant A3 - *"they do not believe in themselves anymore…it's like lack of self-confidence"* and participant B3 agreed that - *"…it affects their…self-esteem and their confidence."*

4.3.2.3 Theme 5: Schooling

Three (3) sub-themes were identified to describe findings related to schooling, namely: 'Low School Performance', 'Absenteeism' and 'overcrowding in classrooms'.

Sub-theme 17: Low School Performance

Five (5) teachers reported that children struggle to perform well at school due to psychological challenges. According to participant A1, *"The first thing is when they start falling out with their…marks…"* Participant C2 in like manner stated that -*"Mostly it's just their performance drops. Their performance literally drops"*, and participant B2 concurred by stating - *"it affects their performance…All of a sudden the child is just there withdrawn from what is going on…Even in their assessment, even in responding to questions in the class…They stop doing that..."* Participant A2 who is a trained counselling psychologist and a life skills teacher had this to say - *"…but it's so interesting…many children who are with me are the same ones that need remedial-teaching* (Extra lessons)*. It's like if there's problems at home the child also struggles at school..."* Participant B3 in agreement added - *"You cannot force the child to learn…If they're going through all that…so their performance really goes down..."*

Sub-theme 18: Absenteeism

Absenteeism was reported among children by four teachers. Reasons given for this were various issues at home such as transportation, financial lack and not doing homework or meeting other school related demands. Participant A2 reported that the level at which children are absent is unbelievable - *"…or the child is absent…you won't believe absenteeism…then you start to phone why the child is so many times absent and it's like you open a can of worms."* Participant B1 had this to say about transportation issues in relation to absenteeism- *"…and from the tenth she*

only come…on the fourteenth on a Friday and last week the same problem. The whole week she was not here…the father said yesterday that the child will not come back because of transport." Participant C1 in like manner added that - *"If the child is supposed to come to school and the mother doesn't have taxi money, she cannot call somebody and ask for twenty six dollars…so that child has to stay at home."* Additionally, participant B2 reported that - *"…some of them they might not even come to school because they didn't do their homework"*

Sub-theme 19: <u>Overcrowding in classrooms</u>

Four (4) participants from two (2) schools reported their exasperation with the large number of learners in small classrooms. Participant A1 expressed that each year the government increased the number of learners in one classroom - *"It get worse and worse and worse every year and I blame the full classes…this year they even force us to, where our maximum start from 30 to 35, they say okay 38…we sit 40…they sit on top of each other…"* Participant A3 expressed that the issue of overcrowding is making teaching and learning difficult - *"…they don't know the size of the classes! They just say 45 kids, 45 kids (*tapping her fingers on the table*)…but they don't know the sizes and they don't care about the teacher or that child that's sitting there at the back and is totally lost."* Participant A2 said that the government is well aware of the problem but the excuse they always get is lack of financial resources to do anything about it. School B is also experiencing the same predicament as reported by participant B1 - *"Yes because we are teaching 42 learners in a class…"*

4.3.3 The Support System

The final category identified three (3) themes to describe the support available to primary school children: 'Support provided by the schools', 'Partnering with parents and Caregivers' and 'Partnering with others in the Community'.

4.3.3.1 Theme 6: Support provided by the schools

The first theme in this category has six (6) sub-themes namely: 'The life skills teacher', 'Additional duties', 'Counseling support groups', 'Fund raising initiatives', 'Another educational approach' and 'School Inspection by educational policy makers'. Findings under each theme are presented below:

Sub-theme 20: <u>The Life Skills Teacher</u>

All three (3) schools that took part in the study have life skills teachers. Five (5) participants expressed that this is the person that takes up the responsibility of counselling and problem solving with regards to children experiencing psychological challenges. According to participant A1 - *"There's a life skills teacher. Every school must have a life skills teacher so if you pick up a problem than you uhm refer the problem to the life skills teacher."* Participant B1 concurred by stating that they have a life skills teacher that deals with counselling - *"…and afterwards the life skills teacher, she's here for counselling."* Additionally, participant C1 reported that their life skills teacher is in contact with organizations outside the school if extended help is needed for a child - *"…we have a…wonderful life skills teacher…if she needs to involve authorities to help this child, or if she needs to involve the day care, or if she needs to involve a soup kitchen, she will go out of her way…"*

All government schools seem to have the same system where teachers identify children needing help in the classrooms and there after refer them to the life skills teacher who then refers to external parties such as government social workers or private entities. For example, participant C2 stated that - *"…if we…now tend to pick up these things as a teacher because it starts with the class, you refer that child first…to the life skill teacher."* Participant B2 in like manner reported that - *"If as a teacher I find out there might be something wrong with this child, I refer this child to the life skills teacher for counselling and also to…go into too much detail until home…"*

Sub-theme 21: <u>Additional Duties</u>

All teachers that participated in the study expressed that they have extra duties on top of their teaching responsibilities. A few teachers have expressed that they feel overworked. The following quotes from five (5) participants reflect these findings:

Participant A2 expressed that each teacher has other responsibilities apart from teaching - *"…Well as any other teacher you have responsibilities. Like we serve on committees and currently I'm responsible for the second hand clothing shop…then I was involved in other projects like the sick room…"* Participant B3 said that she is responsible for the soup kitchen at school - *"I need to make sure that the kitchen is always having food…"* Participant A1reported her own share of extra duties - *"…this year we have a concert because we're 50 years old…I'm involved there. Then I am at the book store I'm busy sorting it out now because the lady that was there has left now so…and then I voluntarily offer my services with the garden…"*

Participant A3 expressed that sometimes it feels too much - *"I am the culture coordinator…there is price giving. There is the Mr. and Ms. Parkies, Uhm then this year our school turned…50 years so we have this 50 year celebration committee. I'm there as well so uhm,*

so yeah…it's a lot of things. Sometimes it feels…I'm so tired but you just have to go breathe and…" Participant C1 concurred with this - *"…we have extra curriculums which is like uhm GI (Girls in Action), things like arts…there's just a lot…We're overworked here…Yes you have extra. Which is part of what you signed for as a teacher…Bazars and like I have the cultural event…"*

Sub-theme 22: <u>Counselling Support Groups</u>

It is reported that primary schools in Windhoek have counseling support groups consisting of teachers who are appointed to be "teacher counselors". Participant A2 who is a life skills teacher said: *"Yeah we have a counselling support group but they are so overloaded with work that I'm in the end the only one that sits with all the problems."* Participant C1 said - *"…we have prefects that I'm sure also pick up things…"* Participant A1 concurred by adding that - *"…apart from the life skills teacher we have about three or four teachers that they appoint as counselors."*

Teachers however expressed that these teacher counselors are not trained psychological counselors, and are only appointed by school management to take up that additional role at schools. Participant A1 had this to say - *"…It's normally…some of the elder teachers and then teachers that…did some…psychology when they were studying…If some of them had Psychology as a subject then they…"* Participant C1 expressed the need for training in counselling for teachers - *"…as a teachers…we also need counselling now…I think we need to be taught how to counsel now…"* Participant A2 in like manner stated the following in relation to training - "…*so it's not really trained teachers. I think definitely we need teachers to be trained…currently they just rely on…their goodwill to also talk to learners…"*

Sub-theme 23: <u>Fund Raising Initiatives</u>

Two (2) schools reported that they are involved in fund raising activities to support children in need. Participant A2 said the following in relation to a second hand clothing shop - *"We started that shop in 2020 because we saw a need for parents buying cheaper clothes and yeah we started the shop …We buy it for very cheap prices and its income for the school to help the parents."*

Participant B3 reported that they write letters to donors for certain things - *"A school will fund raise some money, ask donors for uniforms…Like now we just received 70 trousers…As the school we will have to write letters, ask for donors – "no we need to help our OVCs with this and this and this…"* and added this concerning a soup kitchen at the school - *"We have a kitchen where they, those ones who are not able to afford food they can go and eat."*

Sub-theme 24: <u>Another Education Approach</u>

Participants felt that re-evaluating the Namibian education system and approach will go a long way in helping children navigate through unique challenges. Participant B2 reported that children these days are not as motivated and disagreed with the system of not allowing children to repeat grades even when they do not meet the required competencies - *"but now these years, they're not motivated at all and this system of letting the kids go also to the next grade…*she feels that the system in place causes children to not take learning seriously: *"…and our education system also must not be changed to make kids feel like…our education is just something that you need to go through…There's no need for you to be serious or something."*

Participant C2 feels that children are not only so sensitive but they know a lot more than she does because they live in a world that affords them access to information - *"These nowadays kids…they're very sensitive. They pick up each and everything and I think sometimes they even know things that I don't know to be honest. They came in the world that mostly has everything.*

They have access to most of the things…" and participant C1 expressed the following about the challenges children are facing - "*I don't remember my childhood like this…so it's not supposed to be like this and also knowing what I go through but you as an adult you try…These kids are going through! They have learned to hide emotions"*

Participant A2 reported that another education system is needed to cater for the child that is going through a different set of challenges - *"…we must have a total other approach also in our learning system…we have another type of child that's sitting in front of us than 20 years ago. They are facing other challenges and I think our teachers need to be trained in what difficulties learners face nowadays…then you will so much more understand the child that's sitting in front of you…Like the social media, like all the things that's going on in the world currently…"*

Sub-theme 25: <u>School Inspection by education policy makers</u>

Participants strongly expressed that the right people from the Ministry of Education should visit and inspect the working conditions of teachers and the learning environment of children to get acquainted with the challenges encountered at primary schools:

Participant A1 was concerned to know if the ministry of education will at least have the opportunity to be informed about the situation at schools through this project - *"Will the Ministry of Education…have a little bit of insight what some of the schools are going through on the ground level?"* Participant A2 urged that I take these findings to the concerned people at the ministry in hopes that change will be effected because of it - *"Go to the Ministry! Don't leave it here, go to the right people at the Ministry…they must be here on the ground to see the challenges we're going through…It's not easy!"*

Participant A3 expressed that the policy makers are not aware that everything is falling apart at the schools because they themselves are making use of private education - *"…everything is falling apart and they don't know why because their children are in private schools…I would really love if the government people just make more of an effort to see what is going on in classes…"* Participant C1 strongly feels that the policy makers need to start reading research reports to acquaint themselves with the situation - *"They should start reading things…it's not supposed to be like this."*

4.3.3.2 Theme 7: Partnering with Parents and/or Caregivers

The second theme in this category found one (1) sub-themes namely: 'Parental Involvement'. Findings under this sub-theme are outlined below:

Sub-theme 26: <u>Parental Involvement</u>

Teachers expressed that they have a close working relationship with parents and/or caregivers but reported that most parents are not as involved in their children's education as they should be. Communication between teachers and parents is maintained through parent's meetings and WhatsApp groups. According to participant A1 - *"once a term we have a parents evening…then we address the concerns of the parents that we have and what we experience"*. Participant A2 concurred - *"We have parent's meetings and they have WhatsApp groups and the parents are welcome to contact the teachers."*

Participant B1, B2 and C2 in like manner reported the use of parents meetings and WhatsApp groups to communicate with parents. Participant B1 - *"we have numbers and we are always creating WhatsApp groups*; participant B2 - *"We also have parents meetings to talk to them…Class teachers have also a WhatsApp group with the parents whereby they can communicate with the*

parents"; participant C2 - *"we have a WhatsApp group for my class that's how we communicate and they have my number as well."* In addition to the use of WhatsApp for communication, participant C1 mentioned the following in relation to her efforts to communicate with parents and/or caregivers - *"…we also go into WhatsApp groups…so I go out to the gate if I see them I greet them…I tell them something nice about their child, just to create that familiarity…"*

Some teachers however expressed that not all parents are easy to work with, reporting them to not only be uninvolved (participant A3 and participant C2) in their children's education but that they tend to be disrespectful towards teachers (participant B1). According to participant A3, *"they don't attend parents meeting they just want to mourn and groan but taking part and being actively involved in their children's lives…it's not there…I can't force a parent to please assist your child at home…please make sure your child is eating tonight…make sure your child doesn't use the Wi-Fi until 1 o'clock in the morning…I can't force them…"* Additionally, participant C2 stated the following in relation to parental involvement - *"I think parents should get more involved because it really just starts from home…Homework is not completed…I have even seen it when we did the meeting here, It's only a few that came."*

Participant B1 reported experiencing difficulties dealing with parents - *"…but there are some parents who doesn't have manners…They are out of order…some parents they're so arrogant…some are very difficult, swearing at you as the teacher and for me respect must come from both sides…"*

Teachers (participant A3 and participant C1) further expressed the following in relation to focus and parental education: Participant A3 - *"We really need to focus more on our children. I think people get…children too easily. People are not…educated enough to actually raise a child…they don't care about their kids…they don't want that responsibility…that's irritating for*

me…" Participant C1 - *"Parents should spend time with their kids…they are very absent…they just need to spend time with their kids because when you ask who helped you with homework it's either aunty or daycare…"*

Participant A2 went on to say that parents are in denial or shocked with regards to what their children are going through, are too tired to spend time with them in the evenings and/or they are too busy on social media - *"**Some of them live in denial**. They don't think there is any problem and it's always the teacher or the school's fault. **Some of them are shocked**. They are so disconnected from their kids and the things the kids do on social media, the parents are normally very, very shocked when I say what the children are doing…parents are too tired to sit in the evenings with their kids. That's the problem I pick up so the parents are not very, very involved in their kid's school work…**They're too busy** and…or they're on social media. Many kids tell me - "Mom and Dad come home and they're on social media" - **they're too tired** to spend time with them or not in the mood…especially your younger parents in the cities you know. They are addicted…to social media…Children come and tell me say - **"my mom is the whole time on her cellphone"** - and what example do they set for their kids? So the kids obviously also…It's a vicious cycle."*

Four (4) teachers further expressed that because of parental un-involvement, they take up the role of parenting children at school. For example, participant B1 said that they sometimes have to wash children's clothes at school to make them look presentable - *"we have to take their clothes and wash it here…so that they can even look neatly like the others."*

Participant B2 stated that they think as both teachers and parents - *"…but we think as a teacher and also as a parent because at school we act as a parent."* Participant C1 in like manner reported that a teacher needs to consider the other needs of a child apart from education - *"…as a teacher*

you need to balance the needs of this child…some children are emotionally hungry…there are some children who walk in here and they just need a HUG…for that day." Participant C2 concurred by stating the different roles they play in children's lives - *"You play a role as a mom, as a dad, grandma, uncle…"*

4.3.3.3 Theme 8: Partnering with others in the Community

The study discovered that schools partner with others in the community to support children. Reported is partnership with Clinics, Police stations, Orphanage homes, LifeLine / ChildLine centers, as well as Volunteers and Churches. This is expressed in the following quotes from six participants:

Participant A1 made mention of the clinic and other such services - *"…they can go down to the clinic if they have a physical problem and the clinic…they can call…the life line and…tell them you can call it for free and… you can go to the police station…"* Others also made mention of the police in addition to churches and orphanage homes. Participant B1 - *"from our side sometimes we are calling the police to come…the churches they can help…"* Participant B2 - *"we also call the police sometimes or refer to the police…there are also some churches that can help...there are also orphanage homes because we have some kids that are coming from orphanage homes"*. Participant A2 reported that volunteers from the community have been helpful - *"we had an organization here that offered, they have a bread project that makes sandwiches for the kids but it's all volunteers from the community…there were in the past people…psychologists…there's one lady that offered her help and said she will see them for free…the church, yeah they are willing…they give us clothes and food if they hear there's…a family who don't have food they drop food parcels so I think at this stage the church is helping"*.

4.4 Summary of Results

The researcher interviewed eight (8) participants from three primary schools in Windhoek, Namibia. The socio demographic information of the participants was collected to reflect their age, years of teaching experience, the number of years at the particular school, the grades and subjects they teach. The identity of the schools and that of the participants has been omitted for confidentiality purposes and pseudonyms have been used instead.

The interviews were recorded, transcribed, the data sorted and grouped to come up with categories, themes and sub-themes as described in this chapter. In support of Urie Bronfenbrenner's Bio-Ecological Theory of Human Development, the study identified three (3) categories, eight (8) themes and twenty-six (26) sub-themes that concur with the theory in that human beings are a product of the interconnected systems that surround them (Bronfenbrenner, 1974). Findings contained in each theme and sub-theme were presented and described in this chapter. The categories identified on the study are as follows: Challenges facing primary school children, psychological challenges and the support system. The eight (8) themes identified under these categories were: Challenges associated with Covid-19, Challenges at home, Negative behavior, Emotional Distress, Schooling, Support provided by the schools, Partnering with parents and/or caregivers and lastly, Partnering with others in the community. The sub-themes under some of the themes were added in order to give a comprehensive report of the findings of this study.

5. Discussion, Limitations, Recommendations and Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

The Bio Ecological theory of human development postulates that human development is a transactional process of interaction between various systems such as the developing individual, other human beings and the environment in which they live (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007). According to Bronfenbrenner (1974), development should be studied from and/or in the environment (The Ecological Context) in which people live their daily lives. Of utmost importance to the application of this theory to the findings of the study are proximal processes. These are defined as forms of interactions between individuals and their environment (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007), that are most essential for human growth and development. The bio-ecological theory suggests that children do not only interact with other human beings in their growth process but they likewise interact with objects and symbols, and that the impact of these other interactions are just as effective in facilitating growth.

According to Bronfenbrenner & Morris (2007), the impact of these processes are however reported to be influenced by the characteristics of the growing individual and that of their immediate and extended environmental contexts because they need to attract an increased level of *"attention, exploration, manipulation, elaboration and imagination"* (p.798) in order to have an increased level of impact. The bio-ecological model sees children's development as made up of various systems of relationships that are influenced by many layers from their environment, layers incorporating their immediate family, school, the larger community of cultural beliefs, laws, values (Guy-Evans, 2020) and all the different dynamics these present.

The objectives of this study were to find out the psychological challenges facing primary school children from the perspective of teachers, as well as to investigate what support system

children have at school, at home and in the community. The study was carried out in Windhoek, Namibia where research data was collected using face-to-face interviews. The data was then transcribed and analyzed to form a total of three (3) categories and eight (8) themes that reveal that the psychological well-being of children is indeed influenced by their immediate families, their extended environments and the dynamics at play within these settings (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007). Given the theoretical lens on Urie Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological theory of human development, the study findings revealed that the growth of primary school children was facilitated by certain factors (such as the help and support they received at home, in schools & in the larger community), as well as inhibited by other aspects of their lives, the environments they interacted with/in and the historical occurrences of the times they existed in such as the Covid-19 pandemic.

The first category identified on the study has two themes namely: 'challenges associated with Covid-19' and 'challenges at home'. The second category has three (3) themes namely: 'Negative behavior', 'Emotional distresses and 'Schooling'. The final category identified on this study has three (3) themes selected to present the support system available for children as revealed on the study, namely: 'Support provided by the schools', 'partnering with parents and/or caregivers' and 'Partnering with others in the community'. These findings are discussed in this chapter, in relation to the literature reviewed.

5.2 Challenges facing primary school children

The challenges facing primary school children were revealed to be those relating to Covid19 and challenges that children generally encounter in their home environments.

5.2.1 Challenges associated with Covid-19

The findings of this study show that dealing with death and grief due to Covid-19 has been a challenge for children. A lot of children lost their loved ones due to the pandemic especially during the Delta wave (a covid-19 variant) and experienced feelings of anxiety about contracting the virus. Study findings also revealed evidence of financial difficulties due to Covid-19 isolations and lockdown mandates. Participants reported that people had a lot of financial struggles due to complications caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Such complications were in the form of loss of jobs, closure and/or cessation of business activities and death of bread winners. Prior research reveal that the Covid-19 pandemic presented medical, financial, interpersonal and existential stressors that have had a ripple effect on the lives of children (Barbarin et al., 2021). According to Barbarin et al. (2021), medical stressors manifested in people's lives through the fear of contracting the virus and endangering loved ones, while financial stressors were experienced due to reduced or loss of income emanating from lost jobs or loss of business activities. Interpersonal and existential stressors were encountered due to the inability to interact and socialize in settings such as schools or elsewhere, while the excessive loss of life during the pandemic has created existential stress, which is fear due to the increased probability of death (Barbarin et al., 2021).

Study findings also revealed that the lack of interaction and extra-mural activities presented as a challenge for children during the Covid-19 pandemic, including the banning of extra-mural activities, which led to children missing out on play activities for the past two years. This lack of play and social interaction that is critical in enhancing the '*proximal processes'* essential for human development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007), has had a negative impact on the well-being of primary school children in Namibia. According to Zar et al. (2020), the closure of schools isolated children and took away the opportunity for extra-mural activities and social interaction which are

important for children's development and learning. Resnick et al. (1998) and Compas and Rutter (1995), concur by stating that participating in extra-mural activities such as sports acts as a protective factor that shields children from negative life outcomes.

In addition to the fear of contracting the virus, losing loved ones, financial struggles and loss of social interaction, findings from the study in relation to Covid-19 further indicate that learning from home and through online platforms presented as a challenge for primary school children. The study showed that online education during the Covid-19 period did not work well for many children because of the difficulties associated with the use of computers, such as the lack of computer literacy and access to computers at home. Previous literature concur with these findings. Learning from home has been found to be unproductive due to various reasons: the learner is faced with a lot of disturbances around the home (Aina, 2020), the home environment is not always safe (UNESCO, 2020) and making use of the internet, cellphones and computers in place of the usual classroom is a challenge for parents and learners from low-income countries because there is no knowledge of the use of these gadgets (Prince, 2020). Furthermore, Prince (2020) stated that the difficulties imposed by poverty such as covering the costs associated with using the internet make it impossible to learn online effectively. The study also found that some children preferred studying from school instead of home because it is a safer place due to reasons such as hunger and violence or abuse in the home. Further evidence from the study showed that some children preferred the school grounds as opposed to being at home due to reasons such as the need to be guided by their teachers and the need to be in contact with their peers. These findings are in line with Okendu (2012) who reported that children learn better when they are in contact with teaching aids and each other, and when under the supervision and guidance of the teacher.

5.2.2 Challenges at home

The current study showed that challenges that children were facing at home are financial or poverty related, parental divorces, alcohol and substance abuse, domestic violence, neglect from parents and/or caregivers, as well as physical & sexual abuse. Consistent with these findings is Levers (2002) who reported that many children in Namibia go through poverty, hunger, gender-based violence in the home, alcohol abuse and child sexual abuse. Previous literature also revealed that children in Namibia take to the school grounds a host of psychological issues emanating from parental divorces, abuse and loss of parents or other significant persons (Mushaandja et al., 2013).

Evidence from the study suggested that divorce was a major challenge facing primary school children in addition to loss of parents or significant others. Additionally, study findings revealed that children are taking drugs, consuming alcohol, and suffer from hunger while attending school. Also in line with these findings is Salvi (2017) who stated that many school going children in Namibia reside in informal settlements and crowded dwellings where they have free access to alcohol which results to addiction. Children are also experiencing starvation which significantly affects their ability to concentrate in school (Salvi, 2017). The study further revealed that primary school children experience issues such as domestic violence and physical and sexual abuse. Other researchers support these findings by reporting of challenges like gender based violence, sexual abuse (Levers, 2002) and domestic violence in the home (Resnick et al., 1997).

5.3 Psychological Challenges

Evidence from the study shows externalizing problems such as behavioral issues and internalizing problems such as emotional distress in children. Also revealed is that children who are dealing with externalizing and internalizing problems were more likely to be experiencing challenges in school. According to Timalsina et al. (2018), psychological challenges specifically

behavioral, emotional and educational problems are reportedly common in children and adolescents. Other researchers have likewise reported that internalizing and externalizing problems are common among children (Forns et al., 2011), (Timalsina et al., 2018), (Narusyte et al., 2017), Buchanan et al. (2002) and (Campbell, 1995). According to Forns et al. (2011) internalizing problems are issues that are directed within the individual that produce internal distress and externalizing problems are those outside the individual producing discomfort and conflict in their environment. A study by Resnick et al. (1997) revealed that children who are exposed to difficulties such as fights between caregivers and stress in the family experience externalizing problems. Externalizing problems are said to be expressed through acts such as aggression and breaking of rules (Narusyte et al., 2017).

5.3.1 Negative Behavior

Challenges experienced by children causes them to behave negatively. This study identified negative behavior such as indiscipline, self-harming and attention seeking among others. Also revealed is that children who exhibit problematic behavior at school are experiencing psychological problems at home. In line with these findings is a study by Rubbi-Nunan (2021) that reports primary school teachers to be finding it difficult to harness children's behavior in classrooms. According to Rubbi-Nunan (2021), unfavorable family conditions, acts of aggression towards children and other negative social influences inform behavior that is challenging to deal with in the classroom. In light of evidence about children exhibiting self-harming tendencies and attention seeking behavior, it is reported elsewhere that experiencing trauma causes children to react in different ways and these reactions can develop into emotional and behavioral difficulties such as suicide and self-harming thoughts or tendencies (University of Queensland, 2011). Rubbi

Nunan & Ntombela (2021) in support of this stated that attention seeking is one of the issues contributing to negative behavior in learners (p3.).

5.3.2 Emotional Distress

Emotional distress emerged as a challenge for parents, teachers and children. Evidence from the study showed that both parents and children experience depression and teachers experienced stress from carrying out their duties. Depression in parents and children was reported to be coming from negative situations experienced in home environment because parents were experiencing a lot of financial distress and other issues, which in turn negatively influences the children. A study conducted in Nepal revealed that school going children had internalizing problems (Timalsina et al., 2018). Forns et al. (2011) defined internalizing problems as issues that are directed within the individual that produce internal distress. Some examples of internalizing problems are depression and anxiety (Narusyte et al., 2017) as revealed by this study.

Stress was reported among teachers due to the burden of carrying out their many duties. The study revealed among others that dealing with negative behavior exhibited by learners was a source of stress. Literature suggests that dealing with children who continually carry out problematic behavior can be a source of stress for teachers and causes feelings of inadequacy and helplessness in them (Kuronja et al., 2019). In addition to stress, evidence from this study revealed that primary school teachers are overloaded with administrative and extra-curricular duties in addition to their teaching responsibilities. A study by Chakravorty & Singh (2021) concurred by reporting that teachers in government schools get overloaded with work due to extended roles that add various responsibilities such as increasing administrative work, carrying out additional school programs and extra elective duties.

5.3.3 Schooling

The study revealed that school going children who experienced various psychological challenges at home had low school performance and were absent from school a lot. Financial difficulties in families made it impossible for children to attend school and some of those who managed to attend school, were dealing with hunger and other psychological issues which made it difficult for them to learn properly. Children who experience challenges or traumas in their environment struggle with school work and often lose interest and motivation in things usually enjoyed (University of Queensland, 2011). In like manner, other research reports have documented that children experience low grades or a drop in school performance (Franklin et al., 2017), increased developmental challenges (Bains & Diallo, 2016) and increased risk of developing co-existing conditions such as alcohol and drug abuse and absenteeism or dropping out of school (Rajaleid et al., 2016) when psychological problems at home are not adequately addressed.

Challenges revealed by the study as experienced by Namibian children in relation to schooling also included the issue of classroom overcrowding. Evidence from the study showed that classrooms in Namibian primary schools are too small for the number of children accommodated in them. This has contributed to reduced interaction between learners and teachers and has lessened the learning outcomes at schools. Teachers were also revealed to be finding it difficult to properly manage classroom environments due to the increased number of learners in small classrooms, a situation that also enhanced their stress levels. Literature supports the findings of this study. Research by Muthusamy (2015) stated that the issues of overcrowded classrooms is associated with less healthy and less safe teaching environments, reduced interaction between teachers and learners and increased administrative work. The issue of overcrowded classrooms does not only

lead to frustration for teachers and bad behavior from learners (Oliver, 2006), it is also directly associated with negative outcomes of learning and teaching (Khan & Iqbal, 2012).

Additionally, the study revealed that the overcrowding problem is well known by the Namibian government, but that it remains unaddressed because of financial constraints. Literature reports that a solution to the problem of overcrowding is to be building more schools or classrooms and to employ more staff (teachers) to lessen the burden (Muthusamy, 2015). This is however vastly impossible due to lack of funds (Phasha, 2008). According to Phasha (2008), teachers in government schools have no choice but to manage overcrowded teaching environments due to this.

5.4 The Support System

The study revealed that primary school learners receive support from the schools, from parents in partnership with schools and from other members of the community.

5.4.1 Support provided by the Schools

The establishment of primary schools in Namibia does not make provision for educational psychologists or school counselors. Rather, evidence from the study suggests that every government primary school in Namibia has a life skills teacher who takes on the role of counselling learners. The study showed that Namibia primary schools have a multi-level system that involved the identification of problem areas in children, in the classrooms (level 1). Children identified as having psychological challenges were then referred to the life skills teacher who either counselled them, arranged meetings with parents to discuss issues, investigated home situations etc., (level 2) or arranged with external parties for further assistance (level 3). Contact with outside parties includes getting the help of government counselors and making referrals to private organizations for families who can afford it. This three tier system is similar to the Response to Intervention

(RTI) framework explained in literature (Paulus et al., 2016), (Lenski, 2011), (Franklin et al., 2012) and (Mellard et al., 2010). This is a three level framework that identifies the needs of learners to ensure they are given the support they require (Paulus et al., 2016). Assessment at level one is carried out by teachers in the classrooms (Lenski, 2011). Level two targets the specific issues that children have (Mellard et al., 2010) and level three is said to involve intervention strategies to help mitigate psychological challenges (Franklin et al., 2012). In continued efforts to assisting primary school children, the study revealed that teachers are also involved in fundraising initiatives such as income generating schemes at schools and donor inducing activities to help children. The extra funds generated are used to enhance the learning environment of children such as being able to pay for remedial and/or support teachers, an expense that is not covered by government funding. The support teachers offered additional lessons to learners needing it.

In addition to the life skills teachers, the study revealed that schools had counselling support groups that were made up of teachers appointed by the school management to act as counselors. However, the study also revealed that these teacher counselors were not properly trained to take up counseling roles, they felt they had too many responsibilities and expressed that they needed training in counselling to be able to carry out this task successfully. Literature carried out in Namibia concurred with these findings. According to Mushaandja et al. (2013), teachers who take on a counselling role at school are called teacher counselors. They are professionally trained teachers who take on this role for reasons such as having a sense of commitment to helping learners, lower workload, already teaching subjects that are closely linked to counseling e.g. life skills or HIV/programs and selection due to trust by the school principle(Mushaandja et al., 2013). Teacher counselors are reported to be experiencing challenges such as lack of counselling skills, lack of trust from learners and work overload (Mushaandja et al., 2013).

Study participants suggested that in order to enhance the learning outcomes of learners and improve their learning environment, the education system may need to be re-evaluated. It was revealed that children may not be fully benefitting from the school curriculum as it is due to the reason that it was established many years ago and no longer caters for the advanced challenges facing children nowadays. According to Bennet et al. (2008), a new generation of learners that were born into technological advancement are coming into the education system. These learners therefore have unique skills and alternative tastes to learning that are not included in the traditional structure of education (Bennet et al., 2008).

The study also revealed that school inspections by policy makers may greatly enhance the current learning environments. It was found that education policy makers in Namibia do not visit or inspect the schools to see the situation on the ground. A study conducted in South Africa revealed the same results, stating that the government does not have plans for maintaining school grounds nor are they following any policies in regards to school inspections (Xaba, 2012). Thrupp & Lupton (2006) stated that it is important to understand different school contexts in coming up with policy that affects school practices. Ehren &Visscher (2006) speak of a school inspection system that incorporates what happens in an individual school and in the school system as a whole. They report that having a good inspection system in schools is directly related to school effectiveness (Ehren & Visscher, 2006). Participants in this study urged that the results be shared with the Ministry of Education in hope that schools will be inspected and change will thereby be effected. In further support of these findings, Ehren et al. (2017) stated that school inspections can lead to positive results for schools in poor countries.

5.4.2 Partnering with Parents and/or Caregivers

This theme represents the support created for children when parents and/or caregivers partner with teachers to assist children learn better. Contrary to the benefits of parental involvement on academic performance as revealed by literature (Povey et al., 2016), and (Castro et al., 2015), evidence from this study revealed that some parents of children attending primary schools in Windhoek Namibia are uninvolved in their children's education. The study showed that parents do not spend time with their children, do not help them with homework and do not talk to them about their education goals and expectations. Study results therefore express the need for parents to make time for their children. In support of this, literature revealed that communication between teachers and parents benefits children because it avails the opportunity for both parents and teachers to work together (Wolf, 2020). Other studies showed that parental involvement increases school performance in children (Reynolds et al., 2000) and (Arnold et al., 2008). Results from this study further suggested that parents are very absent when it comes to the academic performance or well-being of their children. In like manner, a study conducted in South Africa revealed that teachers believe low-income parents to be uninterested and uninvolved in their children's education (Ozturk, 2013). A study carried out in Zambia revealed that some parents were half involved with their children, providing only some aspects of parental requirements while other were not at all involved (Chikutuma, 2017). Elsewhere, research found that parents did not have time to extensively support children in primary schools (Wolf, 2020).

Literature talks about parental involvement as characterized by *"behaviors, values, attitudes and parental activity that enhance their children's academic development"* (Povey et al., 2016). It is reported that children perform better in school when their parents are actively involved in their learning and school performance by expressing high expectations, supervising their academic

activities, talking to their children about school work and helping them learn how to read (Castro et al., 2015). It was revealed by this study that primary schools in Namibia do partner with parents and/or caregivers and are in close contact with them through meetings and social media massaging platforms. However, the efforts of schools to partner with parents weren't always fruitful because not all parents are corporative or forthcoming with regards to the education of their children. The results showed that parents like to complain about the schools and the teachers but they are themselves not interested in their children's lives. Additionally, it was revealed that teachers find it difficult to deal with some parents because they are arrogant and abrasive towards them.

5.4.3 Partnering with others in the community

In addition to collaborating with parents and/or caregivers, the study revealed that schools are also partnering with the community to support children at schools, especially children with psychological challenges. It was revealed that teachers involve Clinics, Orphanage homes, LifeLine or ChildLine centers, churches, as well as Volunteers from the community such as psychologists and private organizations to help children. In literature, Pomerantz (2013) report of a school based consultation that involved parents, learners and the community, for example church leaders, to fight against discriminating acts. Results from this study showed that teachers collaborate with the police to tackle issues they consider extremely serious such as bullying. Kruczek & Young (2013) report of a crisis intervention program that was entered into by the school and members of the community to offer help after a natural disaster. In another report, a joint effort between schools, families and community members came up with a program to tackle issues that challenged poor families (Gerrard & Soriano, 2018). Evidence from this study reveal combined efforts between one of the schools and a private organization to provide sandwiches for hungry

learners, as well as a collaboration with willing donors from the community to provide for uniforms for children who cannot afford it.

Henning & Chi (2013) reported that in efforts to cater for those from poor communities, community schools were opened in Zambia for those who are not in formal government schooling. These schools come without the burden of being required to wear school uniforms or pay school fees. The findings of this study did not reveal the existence of a community school in Windhoek, participants however expressed the burden of school requirements such as buying school uniforms and stationeries for children.

5.5 The Bio-ecological theory of human development

According to Urie Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological, human development is a transactional process of interaction between various systems including the growing individual, other human beings and the environment in which they live (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007). In support of this, the study revealed that children are indeed affected by different influences surrounding them. The study showed that children encounter psychological challenges such as neglect, abuse at home, challenges related to schooling, lack of resources, dealing with the death of loved ones due to Covid-19 etc. Also evidenced by the study is that it - *"It takes a village to raise children"* as participants revealed working with parents and/or caregivers through various means such as one-on-one interaction and social media massaging platforms to communicate about issues concerning primary school children. Guy-Evans (2020) in like manner reported that the bio-ecological model sees children's experiences as made up of various systems of relationships that are influenced by many layers from their environment, layers incorporating their immediate family, school and the larger community of cultural beliefs, laws and values. Children therefore encounter these

psychological challenges due to home circumstances and due to their interactions at schools and elsewhere in their surroundings.

The study further revealed that a level of support is provided at the micro, meso and macro levels of the bio-ecological systems surrounding primary school children in Windhoek Namibia. Evidently, this support as provided to children is not sufficient. There needs to be more coordinated efforts to increase support and the provision of services through strengthening relationships and interactions at these different levels. For instance, the strengthening of parent-child relationships, teacher-learner relationships and fostering healthy peer relations (micro level) would be more helpful. Furthermore, increasing the quality of parent-teacher relationships, increasing community involvement, encouraging healthier home environments through poverty eradication (meso level) and changing or enhancing the value systems concerning the school curricula or school environment, parental beliefs and involvement etc. (macro level) will be an added advantage.

5.6 Limitations of the study

A few limiting factors were identified while carrying out this study. The study was conducted solely in Windhoek and recruited eight (8) participants from only three (3) primary schools. These results can therefore not be generalized because the sample size is insufficient to represent the entire Khomas region. Additionally, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, there was a sudden and early closure of schools in December 2021. Data collection was hence delayed, resulting in hurried efforts to conduct interviews. Had it not been for time constraints, the researcher may have had the opportunity to carefully select a more balanced sample taking into consideration the socio-economic status of the schools and participants represented. Furthermore, the subjective nature of qualitative data collection means that the researcher may have influenced the findings reported here due to their background and experiences. This biased position was acknowledged throughout

the research journey through a continuous process of journaling and supervision to enhance reliability.

5.7 Recommendations

Children spend a lot of time at school, making the school setting an excellent place to explore their experiences and how these experiences affect them, and also a good place to provide the needed services and interventions to help them navigate childhood better. The findings on this study can be important information to put into consideration when planning intervention strategies against challenges experienced by children or when effecting primary education policy. The following recommendations are therefore made based on the findings of the study.

There is a need to provide government primary schools with assistance in the form of assistant or remedial teachers. Teachers have expressed that due to administrative and extra curricula duties, they cannot provide children with the extended learning support they need. The study also recommends training teachers in counselling should they be expected to take up counselling roles. Teachers reported that they needed to be trained in counselling to be more effective in helping children.

Additionally, the study recommends that the Ministry of Education comes up with education campaigns to inform and educate parents on the importance of parental involvement in children's performance and well-being. The study revealed that most parents are not involved in the education of their children, are absent, neglecting and/or do not take the parenting responsibility seriously.

It is also recommended that the government builds more schools to increase the number of classes and employ more teachers at primary schools. The study revealed that the classes at primary schools were too small for the number of children allocated to them. Teachers expressed that they

cannot be effective in their efforts due to the size of the classes, a situation that causes a lot of frustration for them.

Additionally, it is recommended that the Ministry of education makes an effort to inspect the school grounds and listen to teacher's concerns. Teachers reported feeling that the government does not care about them or the children they teach.

Furthermore, the study recommends that the curriculum of the education system be changed or improved to incorporate syllabus that cater for the challenges and education needs of the nowadays child. Teachers reported that children are going through challenges that were not taken into consideration when the curriculum was set up many years ago. For example, children are engaging in activities such as bullying and self-harming. Also available to them is a vast amount of information they do not know what to do with. Incorporating current affairs in relations to technological advancements such as social media in teaching programs could go a long way in helping children cope and learn better.

5.7.1 Recommendations for future research

The study revealed that some parents are absent and uninvolved in their children's school work and well-being. This arose a curiosity in the researcher as to what the perceptions of parents and/or caregivers with regards to parenting are. Future studies can therefore look into how parents or caregivers view their roles and expectations when it comes to parenting, with specific focus on cultural and/or racial parenting perceptions or believes in relation to school performance.

The study also revealed that many parents come home after work and would spend time on their phones, engaged on social media instead of spending time with their children. Future studies can investigate the relationship between parental child neglect and addiction to social media.

Additionally, evidence from the study suggested that children are not only lacking attention and affection from parents but that they are physically neglected. Participants also reported that children feel this parental absence and neglect. Future studies can investigate this emotional and physical neglect from the experience and/or perspective of children.

5.8 Conclusion

The findings of this study represent data collected from three (3) government primary schools in Windhoek, Namibia. The results were presented in the previous chapter and discussed in relation to existing literature on the subject. The findings were mostly found to be consistent with the literature reviewed and in line with the theoretical framework selected for the study.

The objectives of the study were to investigate the challenges facing primary school children and to discover what support system is available to help them with the said challenges. The challenges were hence discovered to be those related to Covid-19 such as the inconveniences of online learning, the lack of extra-mural activities for children and dealing with death, grief and staying healthy. Challenges at home were discovered to be those emanating from financial lack, parental divorces, alcohol abuse, domestic violence, neglect from parents and physical & sexual abuse.

Evidence from the study also showed that children encounter behavioral challenges such as indiscipline, bullying, self-harming and attention seeking. Emotional challenges experienced by primary school children were found to be issues such as depression, stress and loneliness & low self-esteem / low self-confidence. The study discovered the support system for children to be made up of the efforts by schools to avail the needed teaching environment, to raise funds and other needed items, as well as partnering with parents and/or caregivers and other entities in the

community. In support of the Bio-Ecological theory of human development, the healthy development and growth of primary school children in Windhoek, Namibia is indeed holistically depended on various factors in the home, around extended family members, friends and the larger community in which they live. These different systems work together to provide an avenue through which development is either adequately enhanced / promoted, or stifled as seen in the study findings.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Participant Information Sheet

Good day Sir / Madam

This is a research project conducted by Victoria N. Uupindi, as part of the requirements to complete a Masters of Psychology degree program, under the supervision of Dr. Mambwe Kasese-Hara at the University of Witwatersrand (WITS) in Johannesburg South Africa. This project focuses on the Psychological Challenges experienced by primary school children in Windhoek, Namibia, through the experience of teachers. I am also exploring the roles played by teachers, family members and the overall community in helping children cope with these various challenges. You are therefore kindly invited to participate in this research project as you fall within the population of interest.

What will I be asked to do if I participate?

Should you agree to participate, you will be asked to have an online or face-to-face interview with the researcher were you will be asked to answer a few questions about yourself and about the children you teach. Please note that taking part in this study is entirely voluntary. Should you experience any discomfort, you can choose to stop participating at any time before or during the interview without any negative consequences. You can also request that we take a break and

continue the interview at a later stage if need be. Should you need transport to an appropriate interview place, data for a stable internet connection, this will be provided to you by the researcher

How will data be stored?

The information obtained through the interviews will be stored in password computer and will be stored for future secondary analysis. Only the researcher and research supervisor will have access to the information. A Pseudo name (a false name) will be used to refer to you in reporting the findings of the study and a number will be used to refer to the school where you work. Your identity and personal information will therefore be kept entirely confidential and the answers you give during this interview will not be linked back to you in any way.

What are the risks of this project?

Since we will be talking about your personal experiences of being a teacher, a risk associated with this is that you may feel sad, upset or may experience other negative emotions from recounting these experiences. Should these emotional reactions be overwhelming uncomfortable, we will stop the interview and either continue at a later stage or discontinue it completely. Referrals to mental health professionals in Windhoek are provided below for your assistance if you need to make use of them:

1. Lifeline Namibia

   45 Bismarck Street, Windhoek, Namibia

   Toll free Number: 106 / 116

2. Philippi Trust Namibia

   Windhoek, Namibia

Information@philippinamibia.com

Tel: +264 61 259 291

3. Trauma and Resilience Centre

   428 Independence Avenue

   Contact: +264 81 446 5577

What are the benefits of this research project?

If you choose to participate in this study, you will not be compensated for it and you will also not incur any costs. Your participation is however very valuable as your responses will be used to suggest improvements to the government and to education policy makers in the country. This information will also contribute to the body of knowledge surrounding the topic of discussion.

Do you have any questions?

If you have any questions and need further clarity concerning this research project, please contact the researcher at 1775222@students.wits.ac.za. Questions may also be directed to the research supervisor Dr. Mambwe Kasese-Hara at Mambwe.Hara@wits.ac.za.

Kindly read and sign the attached Consent Form to formally agree to take part in this study.

Appendix B. Participant Consent Form

Title of Project: Psychological Challenges in Primary School Children in Windhoek, Namibia: Experiences of Teachers

I, ……, hereby consent to participate in this research project.

I agree to, and understand the following:

	Yes	**No**
I agree that the research has been explained to me and I understand what my participation will involve		
I agree that my participation will remain confidential		
I agree that the researcher may use anonymous quotes in her research report		
I agree that the interview will be audio/video recorded		
I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw my participation at any time without any consequences of any kind		
I am not required to answer questions which may make me feel uncomfortable		
I agree that my participation in this study is voluntary		
I agree that participation will not result in any rewards or benefits		
I agree that I may request a summarized copy of this study by June 2022		

Participant's Name and Surname: _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Researcher's Name and Surname: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____

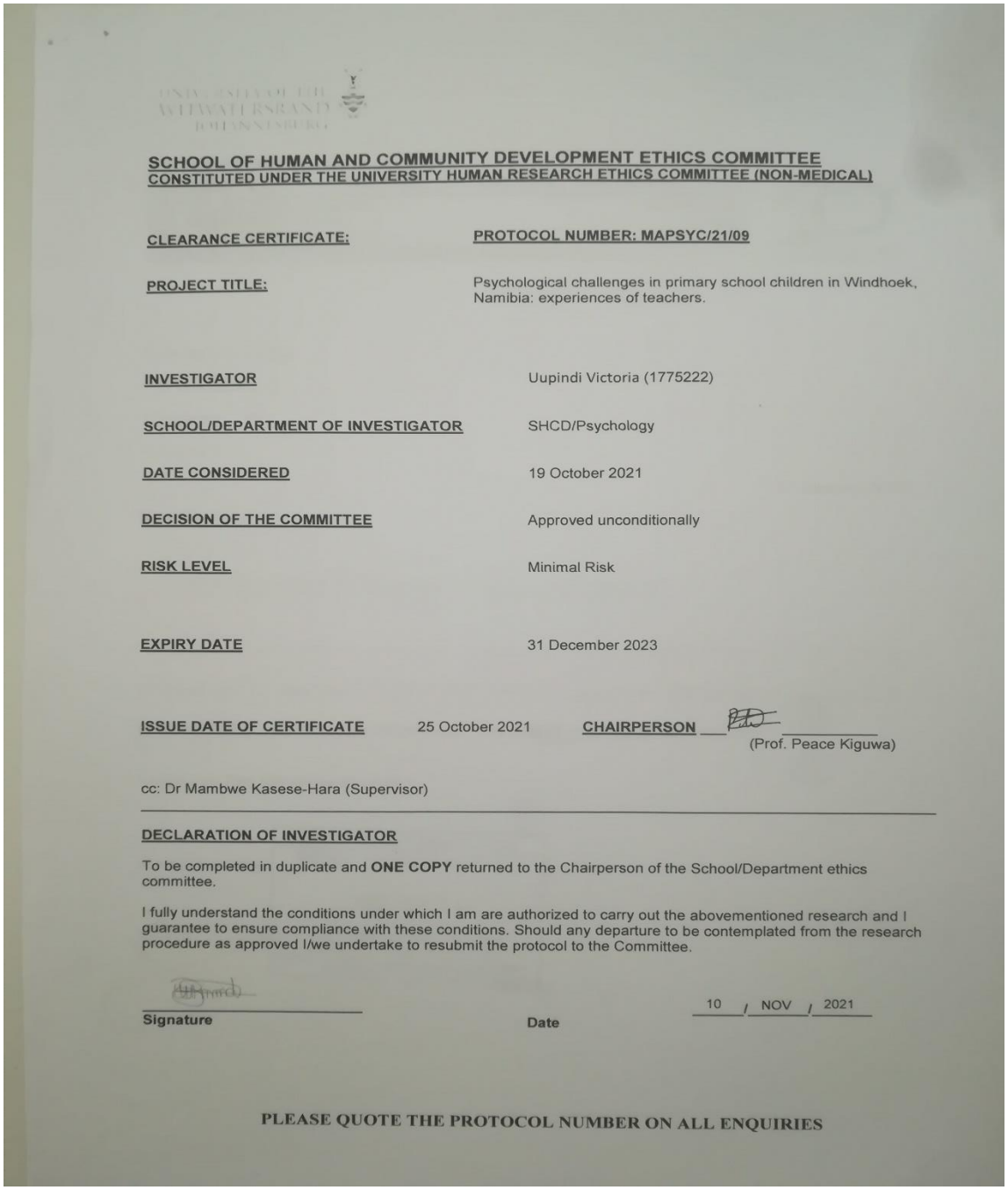
Please note that the researcher will make a copy of this consent form for ethical purposes and you can keep one for record keeping.

Appendix C: Interview Schedule

Interview Sequence	Questions
Opening Questions: (15 - 20 Minutes) - Building Rapport - Demographic Questions - Introducing topic & objectives - Motivating participant to honestly partake - Indicate length of interview (45 – 60 minutes)	o Introduce research topic & objectives o Please tell more about yourself o Gender: _____ Age:_____ School:_____ Period employed:_____ o How long have you worked at this school? o Tell me about your experience with Covid-19 and online learning. How has that been for you? o What subjects do you specialize in? o Are these the only subjects you teach? o Which grades do you teach? o Do you have any other responsibilities apart from teaching? If yes, please share.
Addressing Research Questions: (25 – 30 Minutes) - Interview Questions	1. From your experience as a teacher, what challenges or difficulties are children facing? 2. What in your opinion / understanding is causing these challenges? 3. How do you get to know about these challenges? What are there give-away signs or behavior in children?

	4. In your understanding, how exactly do these challenges affect the children? 5. What does the school do to help children with these difficulties? o Does the school have a counselor? o Who else to the children talk to? o Does the school have a referral program? 6. What do you as a teachers think is still required to help children with difficulties? 7. Do teachers work with parents / primary caregivers to help children? o How do teachers work with parents to assist children? 8. Are you aware of any place in the community where children get help outside of the school? (Psychological or Social help)
Closing Session: (5 – 10 Minutes) - Closing questions - Summarizing interview & participant responses - Maintaining rapport (warmly thanking participant for taking part).	1. Is there anything else you want to add? 2. Do you have any questions for me? o Summarize & Close Interview Session o Warmly thank participant for taking part

Appendix D: Ethical Clearance Certificate



UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND JOHANNESBURG

SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ETHICS COMMITTEE
CONSTITUTED UNDER THE UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE:	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: MAPSYC/21/09**
PROJECT TITLE:	Psychological challenges in primary school children in Windhoek, Namibia: experiences of teachers.
INVESTIGATOR	Uupindi Victoria (1775222)
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATOR	SHCD/Psychology
DATE CONSIDERED	19 October 2021
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved unconditionally
RISK LEVEL	Minimal Risk
EXPIRY DATE	31 December 2023

ISSUE DATE OF CERTIFICATE 25 October 2021 **CHAIRPERSON** _____
(Prof. Peace Kiguwa)

cc: Dr Mambwe Kasese-Hara (Supervisor)

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Chairperson of the School/Department ethics committee.

I fully understand the conditions under which I am are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee.

_____ 10 / NOV / 2021
Signature **Date**

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES

Appendix E: Permission Letters

REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, ARTS AND CULTURE

Enquiries Mr. G. Munene
Tel +264 61 293 3703
Fax +264 61 293 3922
Email Gibson.Munene@moe.gov.na
File no 13/2/9/1

Luther Street, Govt. Office Park
Private Bag 13186
Windhoek
Namibia

Ms Victoria Uupindi
Cell: +264 81 337 7209
Email: victoriauupindi2@gmail.com

Dear Ms Uupindi,

SUBJECT: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT ACADEMIC RESEARCH IN KHOMAS REGION

The Ministry wishes to acknowledge receipt of your letter dated 24 January 2022 seeking for permission to conduct academic research in Khomas region for your Master's Degree studies which is focusing on: *"Psychological challenges in primary school children in Windhoek, Namibia: experiences of teachers."*

Permission has been granted to you. However, you have to seek for further clearance from the Khomas Regional Director of Education, Arts and Culture to ensure that:

- staff members' normal work is not disrupted during your interviews;
- participation is voluntary; and,
- Parental consent should be granted by the parents / guardians of all participants who are under the age of 16 years.

Furthermore, you are kindly requested to share your research findings with the Ministry after completion of the research project. You may contact Mr. G. Munene on the above provided contacts at the Directorate: Programmes and Quality Assurance (PQA) for submission of your research findings at the above indicated details.

We wish you the best in conducting your research and the Ministry looks forward to hearing from you upon completion of your studies.

Yours sincerely,

Sanet I. Steenkamp
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

26. 1. 2022.

All official correspondence must be addressed to the Executive Director Page 1 of 1

GOTTVERTRAUEN
DSW
FREUDIG WERK FESTER STAND

DELTA SCHOOL WINDHOEK

Cnr Dr A.B. May and Rev. Michael Scott Street, Ausspannplatz
Private Bag 12010, Ausspannplatz, Windhoek, Namibia
Tel: +264-61-228 536 | Fax: +264-61-220 916
info@delta-school.com | www.delta-school.com

Windhoek, 25 January 2022

Victoria N. Uupindi
P O Box 21065
Windhoek
Namibia

Re: Permission to conduct Research at Delta Primary School

Dear Ms. Uupindi

This letter serves to give you permission to interview teachers working at Delta Primary School in Windhoek, Namibia for your Master's Research Project titled: **'Psychological Challenges in Primary School Children in Windhoek, Namibia: Experiences of Teachers'.**

I hope you find the above in order.

Yours Sincerely

C. Schoonbee
(Principal)

DELTA SCHOOL WINDHOEK
OFFICIAL
Tel. 228536 - Fax 220916
P/Bag 12010 AUSSPANNPLATZ
WINDHOEK
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

BET-EL PRIMARY SCHOOL
Andrew Megali Street
P O Box 7065
Eahutura – Windhoek
Tel : 262509/262960
Fax : 265897
Eahutura
delivering equitable quality education since 1980

Victoria N. Uupindi
P O Box 21065
Windhoek
Namibia

24 January 2022

Dear Ms. Uupindi

Re: Permission to conduct Research at Bet-El Primary School

This letter serves to give you permission to interview teachers working at Bet-El Primary School in Windhoek, Namibia for your Master's Research Project titled: **'Psychological Challenges in Primary School Children in Windhoek, Namibia: Experiences of Teachers'.**

I hope you find the above in order

Yours Sincerely,

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
BET-EL PRIMARY SCHOOL
2022 -01- 24
TEL: 262509, FAX: 203897
P.O. BOX 7065, KATUTURA
WINDHOEK REGION

20 December 2021

Dear Ms. V Uupindi

Your letter dated 14 December 2021 bear reference:

Approval has been granted to do research at Pionierspark P/S in the form of face-to-face or online interviews. Please provide us with more information pertaining your research next year.

Yours in Education

R BRAND
PRINCIPAL