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2025

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Teachers' perceptions on classroom overcrowding, disciplinary challenges and the inclination to the use of corporal punishment: A cultural historical activity perspective.



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March 2025

A research project submitted to the Discipline of Psychology in the School of Human and Community Development in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master in Education (Educational Psychology) in the Faculty of Humanities., University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

Declaration

I, Lindi Sithembile Skhosana (student number: 1432439) hereby declare that:

- I am aware that plagiarism (use of someone else's work without their permission and/or without acknowledging the original source) is wrong.
- I declare that this research report is my own work, and this has not been submitted before at this or any other university.
- All the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references in compliance with the APA 7 guidelines.
- I understand that the University of the Witwatersrand may take disciplinary action against me if there is a belief that this is not my own unassisted work or that I have failed to acknowledge the source of the ideas or words in my writing.



Lindi Sithembile Skhosana Date: 28 March 2025

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge and express my gratitude to:

- To God, thank you for such an amazing opportunity. Thank you for guiding me throughout and giving me strength to carry on when I wanted to give up.
- To my parents, thank you for awarding me with an opportunity you never had. Thank you for your prayers and words of encouragement. I wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for your support, encouragement and prayers.
- To my siblings, thank you for the unwavering support, prayers and words of encouragement.
- To my research squad, Judith, Matimba, Michelle and Naledi, thank you for the support, your words of encouragement when things got tough.
- To my friend, Wendy, thank you for listening to me venting every week, thank you for your support and words of encouragement.
- To my research supervisor, Dr Simangele Mayisela, thank you for your guidance, patience and constructive feedback.
- To the Mpumalanga Department of Education, thank you for giving me permission to conduct this research project at the school

Abstract

This qualitative research aimed to explore teachers' perceptions of the relationship between classroom overcrowding, disciplinary challenges, and the inclination to the use of corporal punishment in a primary school in the Mpumalanga Province. This study was guided by a cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) theoretical framework and adopted a qualitative constructivism case study research design as it aimed to explore teachers' perceptions of the relationship between classroom overcrowding, disciplinary challenges, and the inclination to the use of corporal punishment. The data of this study was collected using biographical questionnaires and focus groups, and the data was analysed using thematic analysis. Data was collected from one primary school in Moloto and a total of 13 teachers comprising of Foundation and Intersen (Intermediate and Senior) phases teachers were included. The research highlights the significant challenges teachers face in managing discipline in overcrowded classrooms. The findings revealed that it is challenging for teachers to maintain discipline in overcrowded classrooms, which leads to spending more time disciplining learners than teaching. Some teachers revealed that due to overcrowded, they cannot reach every learner in the classroom, which leaves learners with learning barriers unidentified and unattended. The findings emphasize the urgent need for systemic interventions to address classroom overcrowding, improve learner support, and promote alternative, practical disciplinary measures.

Keywords: *classroom overcrowding, corporal punishment, discipline challenges, Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT)*

List of Acronyms

CHAT	Cultural Historical Activity Theory
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DoE	Department of Education
HREC	Human Research Ethics Committee
IAQ	Indoor Air Quality
MDoE	Mpumalanga Department of Education
NNSSF	National Norms and Standards for School Funding
PIS	Participants Information Sheet
PM	Particulate Matter
SASA	South African Schools Act
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
USA	United States of America

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Chapter One: Introduction and Background

This chapter provides the background and rationale presented in this research report. Furthermore, I will also state the aims and objectives of the study.

1.1 Introduction and Background

Teachers around the world face many obstacles when trying to teach in crowded classrooms, including teaching, classroom management, assessment and discipline issues (Muthusamy, 2015). Muthusamy (2015) states that one of the biggest problems facing public school teachers is claimed to be overcrowded classrooms. As a former learner who went to schools that experienced classroom overcrowding, I know how difficult it is to focus on the lesson presented when there are other learners make noise, causing disruption in the classroom and making learning difficult. Classroom discipline can suffer as a result of larger classrooms' increased noise and tendency to hit and push (Marais, 2016). Teachers have difficulties when trying to enforce discipline when the classroom is overcrowded.

For primary schools in South Africa, the maximum acceptable learner-teacher ratio is 40:1, and for secondary schools, it is 35:1. Nevertheless, there are schools in South Africa with significantly more learners per classroom (Marais, 2016). In other cases, you would find 70 learners in a classroom that is supposed to cater for 35 learners, and three learners sharing a desk that is meant for two learners.

In South African schools, corporal punishment was frequently used to enforce discipline before it was banned in 1996 (Veriava et al., 2017). Corporal punishment was defined by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child as "any punishment in which physical force is used and intended to cause some degree of pain or discomfort, however light" (Veriava et al., 2017). However, Shaikhnag & Assan (2014) defined corporal punishment as a form of discipline that entails using physical force to discipline learners to cause them pain without hurting them.

Moyo et al., (2014) reports that disciplinary issues in schools are causing teachers in South Africa more and more anxiety. Schools have struggled with ensuring and maintaining discipline since the abolition of corporal punishment (Obadire & Sinthumule, 2021). In a study conducted by Obadire & Sinthumule (2021), it was found that teachers also lack the abilities necessary to manage their overcrowding classes; as a result, methods of negative reinforcement like punishment do not work. Participants in a study conducted by Mayisela (2018) stated that

they ought to discipline children; if they behave similarly again, corporal punishment would be an effective deterrent.

Contrary to popular belief, advocates of corporal punishment use tools like a stick, sjambok, leather strap or belt, or the strength in their hands to strike the hand, the back, or even the buttocks of a learner, which frequently results in physical injuries (Mayisela, 2018). Shaikhnag & Assan (2014) discovered that teachers expressed their disapproval with their learners in a way which included face-to-face reprimands, detention, unpleasant assignments, timeouts, and even physical punishment. Learners are also punished by teachers and school staff members by having them stand in painful positions, sit in an invisible chair, carry heavy objects, or stand in the sun for periods of time (Gershoff, 2017).

1.2 Rationale

I worked as an educator assistant for 10 months and I have observed how difficult it is for teachers to enforce discipline in overcrowded classrooms. In a study conducted by West & Meier (2020), it was discovered that due to the high number of learners enrolled in the classroom, teachers in overcrowded classrooms struggle to control and implement discipline strategies. They would discipline one learner, and another one would start misbehaving. The teaching-and-learning process would be disrupted as the focus would now be on enforcing discipline. I believe that this study is important as it highlights the difficulties teachers are facing in overcrowded classrooms that may cause the inclination of the use of corporal punishment, even when it was banned in 1996.

Muthusamy (2015) states that the growing number of learners in classrooms has resulted in classroom overcrowding, frustrated teachers, and numerous challenges. Discipline is one of the challenges (Muthusamy, 2015). The purpose of this study is to explore teachers' perceptions of the relationship between classroom overcrowding, disciplinary challenges, and the inclination to the use of corporal punishment. The study also aims to find out the association between overcrowded classrooms and teachers resorting to the use of corporal punishment and the importance of ensuring that classrooms do not become overcrowded so that a conducive teaching-learning environment prevails, for the implementation of positive disciplinary measures.

As of this date when checking the literature in Google Scholar, few studies are addressing this study's research questions, such as studies by Marais (2016) and Biyela (2019),

however the study also aimed to fill the knowledge gap in the literature by exploring teachers' perceptions on the disciplinary challenges in overcrowded classrooms and their inclination to the use of corporal punishment. In addition, this study aimed to inform the DoBE in the Mpumalanga Province of the challenges experienced by teachers in overcrowded classroom and the effects thereof, discipline being one of them.

1.3 Problem Statement

Little is known about teachers' perceptions of overcrowded classrooms, the difficulties they encounter in instilling discipline and enforcing rules, and their inclination to employ corporal punishment to keep the classroom in order. With corporal punishment being abolished in 1996, its use in the classroom means that teachers are not following the legislated rules, and the use of corporal punishment may lead to physical harm and emotional trauma to learners and create a hostile learning environment. Although classroom overcrowding is a common and complicated global problem, it poses serious difficulties for teachers, particularly in primary schools. Overcrowding has a variety of negative effects on learners' learning outcomes and behaviour, in addition to teacher morale and teaching effectiveness. It is against this background that an exploration of teachers' perspectives and experiences in overcrowded primary school classrooms is necessary to close this knowledge gap. Developing successful strategies to lessen the effects of classroom overcrowding and foster a positive learning environment requires an understanding of how it affects the teaching environment, teacher well-being, and learner behaviour.

1.4 Aims of the Study

The study aimed to explore teachers' perceptions of the relationship between classroom overcrowding, disciplinary challenges, and teachers' inclination to the use of corporal punishment in a primary school.

1.5 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this research study were to explore the teachers' perceptions of the relationship between classroom overcrowding, disciplinary challenges, and teachers' inclination to the use of corporal punishment in a primary school.

- to understand teachers' perceptions of classroom overcrowding
- to explore teachers' perceptions of learner discipline in overcrowded classrooms

- To understand disciplinary strategies used by teachers in overcrowded classrooms
- To investigate teachers' understanding of their inclinations to use corporal punishment in overcrowded classrooms

1.6 Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study are as follows:

1.6.1 Primary Research Question

What are the teachers' perceptions on the relationship between classroom overcrowding, learner discipline and the inclination to use of corporal punishment?

1.6.2 Secondary Research Questions

- What are teachers' perceptions of classroom overcrowding?
- What are teachers' perceptions of learner discipline in overcrowded classrooms?
- What disciplinary strategies are used by teachers in overcrowded classrooms?
- What are teachers' inclinations to use corporal punishment in overcrowded classrooms?

1.7 Conclusion

This study reports on teachers' perceptions on classroom overcrowding, disciplinary challenges, and the teachers' inclination to use of corporal punishment. The report consists of five chapters. This first chapter consists of the background of the study, research aims, rationale and research questions. Chapter two explores the literature related to this research topic and the theoretical framework employed in this research. Chapter three outlines the study' methodology which includes the research design, research tools and data analysis, and further outlines the researcher's considerations for research ethics and researcher reflexivity pertinent to this study. Chapter four presents the findings and discussion of these findings. Lastly, chapter five provides the summary, limitations and recommendations.

Chapter Two: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided an introduction and research questions of this study. This chapter focuses on the relevant literature of this research study and the theoretical framework, CHAT, used as a lens to understand the findings of this study.

2.2 Definition of Key Concepts

2.2.1 Classroom Overcrowding

The term "classroom" refers to a designated area where learners must be gathered for educational purposes (Ayub et al., 2018). As stated by Ndubueze & Chinasa (2021), the country's population growth and rising educational demand have caused enrolment to rise, which has resulted in overcrowding in the educational system. According to King-Agboto & Ugorji (2023), overcrowding occurs when a school's space starts to hold more learners than it was intended to. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) states that to facilitate educational activities, a class should not contain more than twenty-five learners (UNESCO, 2017). However, classrooms in South Africa have more than 50 learners in one classroom.

2.2.2 Disciplinary Challenges

When learners engage in disruptive behaviour, it can sometimes set off a series of events and reactions that go out of control, creating chaos in the classroom. Ayub et al., (2018) argue that managing a class of 40 or more learners is impractical for maintaining order and discipline. The problem is made worse when teachers lose control of their emotions and impulses and use inappropriate or illegal methods to try to discipline the learners (Naicker, 2014). According to Temitayo et al., (2013), in addition to interfering with instruction and learning, learner misconduct in the classroom is believed to be a risk factor for decreased school attendance and other detrimental social outcomes.

2.2.3 School Teachers

Any person who educates, teaches, or prepares others in an academic instruction setting or assists in providing training administrations, training aid, or support administrations provided by or in an academic division is referred to as a schoolteacher (Bayane, 2022). Furthermore, the Department of Education (DoE) (1997) defined a teacher as someone who works in academic and training settings, both official and informal, and whose duties involve

teaching learners at all phases of schooling. Research by Ida (2017) identified that effective teachers are easy to understand, patient, courteous, well-educated, kind yet firm, demanding but understanding, and consistent. A teacher is knowledgeable about the subject, a master, and a friend as well. The main goals of teachers in the classroom are to ensure that every learner receives adequate attention, allowing them to standardize their activities and grow their personalities. Additionally, they aim to create opportunities for learners to enhance their abilities, potential, and skills to the fullest extent (Ayub et al., 2018).

2.2.4 Corporal Punishment

The use of physical force on a child to regulate their behaviour is known as corporal punishment, and it is frequently employed as a form of discipline (Rimal & Pokharel, 2014). In their research, Gudyanga et al., (2014) stated that despite being a suggested method, the efficacy of physical punishment in managing misbehaviour in schools appears questionable, as demonstrated by its banning. Gudyanga et al., (2014) further state in their research that when considering the learner's age, the style of punishment, the learner's intellectual ability, and the injury the learner suffers, corporal punishment should only be used when necessary for correction, or discipline. While some claim that it is a safe and effective way to teach learners obedience, respect, and discipline, others list a number of negative outcomes, such as low academic achievement, low class engagement, school dropout, and deteriorating psychosocial well-being (Portela & Pells, 2015).

2.2.5 School

A learner receives formal education at school (Ayub et al., 2018). There are two categories of schools in South Africa established by the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 (SASA): state (public) schools and independent (private) schools (Republic of South Africa, 1996). According to a poverty scale known as the Quintile Ranking, state (public) schools receive distinct amounts of government funding (Maistry & Africa, 2020). The National Norms and Standards for School Funding (NNSSF) placed each school in one of five quintiles in an effort to increase equity in the way that education is funded (van Dyk & White, 2019). Schools in Quintiles 1 through 3 are exempt from fees and receive more government funding per learner (Ogbonnaya & Awuah, 2019), while Quintiles 4 and 5 schools are unrestricted to set their fees and take steps to increase their funds in order to maintain the standard and excellence of their educational provisioning (Maistry & Africa, 2020).

2.3 Overcrowded Classrooms Nationally and Internationally

A school can be considered overcrowded if, as a result of a lack of school resources or autonomy, some class sizes grow to the point where teachers and learners are unable to create an effective learning environment (Soekoe, 2021). Classroom overcrowding is caused by a high number of poorly resourced no-fee schools, a lack of school infrastructure, and a shortage of teachers (West & Meier, 2020). Nowadays, schools have an enormous number of learners, with a smaller number of teachers to provide effective teaching to learners (Marais, 2016).

Classroom overcrowding is a problem that is experienced globally. Overcrowding also affects schools in developed nations like the United States of America (USA) (Seherrie, 2023). Osai et al., (2021) states that in the ideal world, class size in the United States would be between fifteen and twenty learners, but unfortunately, many classrooms now have more than thirty learners, and in some cases, schools have more than 40 learners in a single class.

Through his research, Marais (2016) discovered that classroom overcrowding is a major cause of stress and burnout for teachers in Zimbabwe and Ghana. In Nigeria, overcrowding in classrooms has become the norm since 2004, making it impossible to maintain a healthy relationship between teachers and learners and preventing them from learning effectively (Marais, 2016). According to Hachem & Mayor (2019), a major obstacle is the exponential rise in the number of learners, a lack of trained teachers, and insufficient funding.

Teachers in South Africa have expressed concern over the significant gap between the number of learners in overcrowded classrooms and the number of teachers available (Seherrie, 2023). Some schools are reported to have classrooms with fifty or more learners (DBE, 2014). According to a study by Seherrie (2023), there are only twenty-four teachers working in an Eastern Cape school, although there are 1,300 learners enrolled. These conditions show that South African schools today have a teacher-to-learner ratio that is much higher than what is advised.

2.4 Teachers' Perceptions on Classroom Overcrowding

According to Ayu (2018), one of the most challenging problems teachers face is classroom overcrowding. Teaching in a crowded classroom presents a number of challenges for teachers worldwide, including issues with teaching, administration, assessment, and discipline (Muthusamy, 2015). Teachers themselves have recognized that a crowded classroom creates a stressful environment (Tshangana et al., 2023). They believe it is extremely difficult

to monitor and offer constructive criticism to a class of more than forty learners, and it is also difficult to verify that each learner has completed all of the assignments in the classroom (Sudrajat, 2021).

Although there appears to be distinction among teachers' perspectives regarding teaching overcrowded classes, the majority of them do not appear to be particularly inclined to do so (Ndubueze & Chinasa, 2021). According to the findings of the study by Ndubueze & Chinasa (2021), teachers prefer to teach small classes because it allows them to easily manage the learners and do so with little to no stress. In overcrowded classrooms, teachers argue that they lose important teaching time because they spend most of the time attempting to manage the learners, leaving little time for actual teaching and learning (Imtiaz, 2014).

According to numerous teachers, monitoring overcrowded classrooms can be difficult overall, especially when it comes to maintaining order (Matsepe et al., 2019). Due to increased noise levels and the likelihood of pushing, crowding, and hitting, overcrowded classrooms can have a detrimental effect on classroom discipline (Mustafa et al., 2014). Additionally, participants in a study conducted by Marais (2016) revealed that learners became bored when teachers were unable to maintain order in the classroom, which resulted in chaos. Furthermore, teachers reported that learners in overcrowded classrooms were rebellious and posed a threat to their safety and wellbeing (Orina et al., 2021). Therefore, it is quite evident that it is difficult for teachers to teach in an overcrowded classroom.

2.5 Effects of Classroom Overcrowding on Teaching and Learning

Classroom overcrowding is a global problem that makes it hard to teach and learn effectively (Osai et al., 2021). Classroom overcrowding hinders the teaching-learning process as well as progressive activities (Ayub et al., 2018). It is well established that overcrowding in a classroom greatly hinders learner and teachers' performance (Andries et al., 2022). According to research conducted by Epri (2016), classroom conditions that are too crowded prevent teachers from paying attention to individual learners and hinder learning progress. Every classroom consists of learners with different learning abilities, but due to overcrowded classrooms, it becomes difficult for teachers to reach each learner. Teachers want to be able to work with and comprehend the learners they teach, and they especially want to assist learners with learning difficulties in their classes (van Vuuren, 2020). West & Meier (2020) state that one of the most common causes of a teacher's inability to adequately address each learner's educational needs is classroom overcrowding. Teachers in large classes may be forced to give

up learner-centred instruction in favour of teacher-centred instruction, which negatively affect the culture of learning (Epri, 2016). As a result, lessons may continue without learners understanding anything that was taught.

With distractions in the classroom caused by overcrowding, teachers sometimes do not finish their lessons within the allocated times because most of the teaching time is now dedicated to managing the classroom. A participant in a study conducted by Marais (2016) stated that due to the excessive number of interruptions, they were unable to finish the lessons within the allocated time. This goes to show that classroom overcrowding poses a serious threat to the teaching-learning process. Additionally, research conducted by Ayub et al., (2018) found that inexperienced teachers find overcrowded classrooms more depressing than experienced ones, suggesting that teachers need to learn more technical strategies to manage overcrowded classrooms. According to research by Vakili et al. (2024), dividing the class into smaller groups improves participation and guarantees that every learner is paying attention. Teachers with more teaching experience employ this approach, and studies show that it improves academic results by providing more attention to individual learners (Choudhary & Batwal, 2024).

Teachers want to meet the individual requirements of their learners (van Vuuren, 2020). It is difficult for teachers to provide inclusive education due to the large number of learners in classes (van Vuuren, 2020). Teachers spend a large amount of time with each learner when they have one-on-one instruction in overcrowded classrooms (Epri, 2016). This negatively affects the learning process as it will take more time to teach, and the teacher cannot reach every learner within the allocated time. How teachers deliver daily instruction through verbal and nonverbal communication is impacted by overcrowded classrooms, as are the opportunities for teachers to provide differentiated instruction and accommodate learners with varying abilities (Duale et al., 2019).

2.6 Classroom Overcrowding as a Barrier to Learning

Overcrowded classrooms can hinder the teaching-learning process (Ayu, 2018) and place a number of restrictions on teachers, such as an excessive workload that prevents the opportunities to meet the needs of each learner in areas such as curiosity, safety and socialisation (Minaz et al., 2025). According to Siperto (2018), classroom overcrowding is a persistent and growing issue that hinders efficient teaching and learning. Results from a study by Minaz et al., (2025) discovered that teachers find it difficult to keep track of every learner's work, which has a negative impact on the learners' performance.

Teachers may experience emotional and psychological difficulties as a result of the demanding environment that overcrowding creates (Muthusamy, 2015). This was corroborated by Tshangana et al., (2023), who added that teachers' stress levels both impact their capacity to teach and lead to increased stress and dissatisfaction with their jobs. Teachers frequently express feeling overburdened by the number of tests they have to mark (Minaz et al., 2025).

To cater for increasing learner populations, it is imperative to invest in sufficient facilities and resources (Vakili et al., 2024). Overcrowded classrooms lack the infrastructure and basic supplies needed for efficient learning, such as enough desks, chairs, suitable classroom environments, computers, and internet access (Minaz et al., 2025). Both learners and teachers may experience severe distress as a result of inadequate classroom resources since learners are unable to learn to the best of their abilities (Seherrie, 2023), which ultimately leads to poor performance of learners.

Overcrowded classrooms have health risks that can negatively affect both learners and teachers. Due to learners' close proximity, there may be health risks, such as the spread of illnesses (Vakili et al., 2024), since three or more learners share one desk in many schools, leading to an increased number of absenteeism. In addition to health risks, poor classroom conditions is another barrier to teaching and learning. Unfavourable classroom circumstances, like loud noises and insufficient space, negatively impact learners' performance (Saud et al., 2020). Due to these environmental stressors, learners find it challenging to focus and pay attention during lessons.

2.7 Effects of Classroom Overcrowding on Learner's Academic Achievement

Achievement by learners in a variety of academic subjects is measured by their academic performance (King-Agboto & Ugorji, 2023). According to Mankgele (2023), it has been established that overcrowded classrooms significantly affect learners' participation and engagement in learning environments. A study by King-Agboto & Ugorji (2023) found that when a teacher can regularly provide one-on-one or small-group instruction, learners perform better. Overcrowded classrooms are more likely to cause learners to feel disengaged from the learning process and less likely to be engaged in class discussions and activities (Marais, 2016). This lack of involvement may limit the development of critical skills and lead to lower learning outcomes (Matta et al., 2015).

Based on the results from the study conducted by Ndubueze & Chinasa (2021), it was discovered that participants generally agreed that overcrowded classrooms have a detrimental effect on learners' academic performance because they interfere with the way that instruction is delivered. It can be challenging for average and below-average learners to perform well academically in an overcrowded classroom (Aluyor & Matibemu, 2022). In order to fully maximize their learning potential, Aluyor & Matibemu (2022) added that these learners require more direct instruction, one-on-one teaching time, and fewer distractions.

Because of the overcrowding in the classroom, some learners are unable to perform tasks that require key skills and are not able to read, write, and count at the expected levels (Matshipi, 2018). This is supported by Imtiaz (2014), who argues that learners need space between them when writing tests and may copy from one another if there is not enough space. As a result, learners can advance to another Grade without the necessary foundational knowledge essential for each subsequent Grade (Imtiaz, 2014).

2.8 Effects of Classroom Overcrowding on Learner Behaviour and Discipline

The performance of learners is negatively impacted by classroom overcrowding, but teachers also face a variety of issues, including concerns regarding discipline, stress, and poor health (van Vuuren, 2020). Disciplining learners in an overcrowded classroom is a challenge for teachers. It was identified by Obadire & Sinthumule (2021) that overcrowded classrooms are one of the causes of disciplinary challenges among learners. In a small town in Kenya called Dadaab, it was revealed that teaching time is cut down because teachers frequently spend an excessive amount of time resolving disputes between learners (Duale et al., 2019). Enormous teaching time is lost while teachers are trying to discipline learners. Learners misbehave when a classroom is not conducive to teaching and learning (Obadire & Sinthumule, 2021).

Participants in a study conducted by Biyela (2019) stated that while they are pleased that there are learners who are succeeding and responding well in class, certain learners take advantage of the chance to act inappropriately because they believe their teachers will not notice them. Most learners become restless when the classroom is overcrowded, especially when it is hot, and then start misbehaving. Learners withdraw, become frustrated, and show negative attitudes when classrooms are overcrowded (Osai et al., 2021).

In overcrowded classrooms, disciplinary issues are common (Obadire & Sinthumule, 2021). Yousuf & Saboor (2019) also stated that when there are more learners in a classroom,

discipline and classroom management issues get worse. Teachers resort to corporal punishment as a way to maintain order in classrooms. When learners are punished by teachers or school administrators for breaking the rules, corporal punishment is carried out within schools (Addison, 2015). When analysing data for his study, Marais (2016) discovered that all 112 participants in his study concurred that managing discipline was harmed by overcrowding in classrooms. The majority of teachers use corporal punishment to discipline their learners (Yousuf & Saboor, 2019). Addison (2015) states that in schools, the purpose of punishment is to discourage the behaviour that results from it. Participants in a study conducted by West & Meier (2020) stated that you need to be very strict and firm to manage an overcrowded classroom, but there must still be a relaxed learning environment. With the experience of being a former learner and having worked as an educator assistant, I have seen that learners behave better in class when a teacher is strict.

2.9 Class Size

The number of learners in a classroom allocated to a teacher is referred to as the class size (Mushatq & Fatima, 2019). According to the Department of Basic Education (DBE), South Africa's official public school class size is 30 learners to one teacher, and anything more than that is considered overcrowding (Matsepe et al., 2019). Both the social dynamics among learners and the amount of time teachers spend with each individual learner can be impacted by class size (Muthusamy, 2015).

It is believed that smaller class size can have a positive impact on the teaching-learning process. With smaller class sizes, other important aspects can also improve, including more differentiated education, better classroom management, and teacher morale (West & Meier, 2020). Muthusamy (2015) stated that overcrowding in classrooms causes discomfort for many teachers as well as for learners who find it difficult to learn. Epri, (2016) supported this statement when he suggested in his research that there is growing evidence to suggest that smaller class sizes has long-term benefits for teachers and learners alike, as well as a positive impact on learner achievement and discipline issues. Smaller class sizes are quieter, which means less time disciplining learners.

A reduction in class size is not the only way to reduce the use of corporal punishment in classrooms. Participants in a study conducted by West & Meier (2020) suggested that teachers should also be self-disciplined and prepare for classes beforehand, arriving in classes organised and prepared, which will reduce the chaos from learners. Participants believe that if

a teacher goes to class for their periods on time and is prepared, it will lessen the time learners get to walk around in class and misbehave (West & Meier, 2020).

2.10 Effects of Classroom Overcrowding on Quality of Life

Effective learning requires a supportive school or learning environment (Aluyor & Matibemu, 2022), however, an overcrowded classroom can negatively impact learners' quality of life because of increased physical contact, a lack of privacy, poor hygiene, and eventually low academic achievement (Ndubueze & Chinasa, 2021). Due to a lack of space, poorly ventilated areas, and noise, overcrowded classrooms contribute to unfavourable learning environments, which have a significant impact on learners and have an impact on their performance and achievement (Seherrie, 2023). Learners' health, attendance, and performance can be negatively impacted by exposure to allergens, pollutants, and even chemicals due to inadequate ventilation, lighting, audibility, and classroom temperatures (King-Agboto & Ugorji, 2023).

Classrooms that are overcrowded are not conducive to learning and may have an adverse effect on learners' physical well-being. By reducing the amount of oxygen available, an overcrowded classroom lowers the quality of the air that people breathe, which has a negative impact on the learners and teachers' health (Abi, 2020). Therefore, other learners can easily become sick if one learner has an infectious illness (Aluyor & Matibemu, 2022).

Some learners are compelled to sit in front of the chalkboard due to the overcrowded classroom, which could be detrimental to the learners' health. According to Lin et al., (2015), the use of chalkboards and chalk sticks releases particulate matter (PM) in the form of variously sized and shaped chalk particles, which leads to poor indoor air quality (IAQ) in classrooms. Between five and eight hours a day can be spent in classrooms where teachers and learners may be exposed to chalk particles, primarily through inhalation (Mbazima et al., 2024). Even at low concentrations, exposure to chalk particles can cause both immediate and long-term health problems, including irritation of the eyes, throat, and nose (Sekar et al., 2021) and respiratory disorders (Szász et al., 2017).

2.11 Facilities and Resources in Overcrowded Classrooms

Inadequate school infrastructure, which is characterized as physical resources or school facilities that make up school assets, has become a major problem in the educational system, hindering the development of a favourable environment for learning and teaching (Seherrie,

2023). According to Makielski (2018), when the facilities do not match or correspond with the enrolment, there is overcrowding in the classroom. This includes several interrelated problems, including a lack of schools, poor infrastructure, a lack of teachers with the necessary training, and rising learner enrolment (Seherrie, 2023). School buildings, special education classrooms, extracurricular facilities, libraries, equipment, furnishings, grounds, fencing, and other services necessary for a school's efficient operation are all considered infrastructure (DBE, 2010).

In the context of South African schools, quality education has been linked to a "child-friendly" learning environment where learning can take place (UNICEF, 2007). However, when the environment is not conducive, it poses a threat to teaching and learning. Public schools in rural, typically isolated, and impoverished areas lack the necessary physical resources and infrastructure for road transportation, electricity, water, sanitation, and other necessities, as well as the necessary resources and access to technology for basic education (Seherrie, 2023).

Parents and learners complain about the state of the classrooms and the lack of books (King-Agboto & Ugorji, 2023). Inadequate learning resources in public schools were also made evident by overcrowded classrooms, which decreased learners' chances of active participation (Orina et al., 2021). According to Ndubueze & Chinasa (2021), insufficient educational materials, such as charts, graphs, and pictures, are another issue related to overcrowding. These resources are crucial for effective teaching in schools. Furthermore, according to Uweazuoke (2022), an overcrowded classroom makes it difficult to use the learning resources and may even cause damage to them, as learners do not handle them properly.

2.12 Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT)

Vygotsky devoted a significant portion of his life to analysing and pursuing an epistemological understanding of human scientific studies while also attempting to respond to contemporary questions regarding human development (Mayisela, 2017). Three research generations have developed the activity theory: the first was Vygotsky's description of the triangle; the second was Leontov's work on the collective nature of human nature and Engeström's activity system model; the third was the creation of two interacting activity systems (Engeström, 2001). The third generation of Vygotskians developed the constructivist framework known as cultural-historical activity theory in response to Vygotsky's findings of dialectical gaps in theories like behaviourism and Gestalt psychology, which he passionately challenged (Mayisela, 2018). CHAT is based on three fundamental principles: (1) people act in communities, learn by doing, and communicate through their actions; (2) people create, use,

and modify a variety of tools for survival, learning and communication; and (3) community is essential to the process of creating and interpreting meaning, and consequently to all types of learning, acting, and communicating (Foot, 2014).

Vygotsky believed that a person's development occurs in two planes (Vygotsky, 1987): the intrapsychological plane, where cultural tools are converted into psychological tools, leading to higher psychological functions, and the interpsychological plane (social level), where children develop culturally from their relationships with others (Mayisela, 2017). Teachers has been using corporal punishment as a form of a disciplinary measure (interpersonal plane). Therefore, Vygotsky's CHAT was employed in this study to explore how the teachers' use of corporal punishment before its abolition has influenced how they view and perceive the new disciplinary measures in overcrowded classrooms.

One of the several practice-based approaches that offer a solid framework for analysing professional work practices, including the provision of social services, is cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) (Julkunen, 2013). Foot (2014) notes that CHAT enables practitioners to participate in reflective research and researchers to analyse complex and changing professional practices. The CHAT model of an activity system makes it possible to conduct in-depth studies of the intricate procedures of professional work (Foot, 2014). The activity theory constitutes of systematic components of subject, tool, object, rules, and division of labour.

2.12.1 Subject

Sannino & Engeström (2018) characterized the subject as the individual or subgroup whose position and perspective are picked as the viewpoint of the examination. It is the person or a group under study. For this study, the subject referred to the teachers as they were studied on their perception on classroom overcrowding, disciplinary challenges and the inclination to the use of corporal punishment.

2.12.2 Object

An object is a focal point and/or an end goal (Foot, 2014). It is the intended activity. According to Qureshi (2021), the object holds all parts of a bound activity together and is the reason why people are participating in it. For this study, the object was the teachers' attempt at maintaining discipline and classroom management in the overcrowded classroom, to enhance teaching and learning activity.

2.12.3 Tools

The development of tools for collective problem-solving results in the emergence of collective practices (Mayisela, 2018). A tool can be a device used to execute an action. In this study, a tool refers to all that makes teaching and learning effective which includes the classroom setting, the curriculum, books, the conducive learning environment, teacher-learner activities, including disciplinary strategies. In this study, any tool used to enhance teaching and learning in overcrowded classrooms, and disciplinary strategies to deal with learner misbehaviour in such classrooms are considered as to be analysed. The abolished disciplinary strategy, corporal punishment, which refers to the infliction of pain using a stick, hands, duster, etc, by the teachers, will also be studied as a tool that teachers are inclined to use.

2.12.4 Rules

Sannino & Engeström (2018) alluded to rules as the express and implied guidelines, standards, shows and norms that compel activity. The rules, in this study, will consist of the policies set on class size, teacher-learner ratio, and the abolition of corporal punishment by the government and the school's code of conduct.

2.12.5 Division of Labour

The horizontal division of work and the vertical division of power and status are both referred to as the division of labour (Sannino & Engeström, 2018). In this study, the division of labour will include the actions and activities of general members of the school governing body (SGB), the government, learners, teachers, parents, and the community.

2.12.6 Community

Foot (2014) states that a community is made up of individuals who have an equivalent interest in and commitment to the same object. In this study, the community consists of the subject (teachers), learners and parents working together towards the object (maintaining discipline and classroom management).

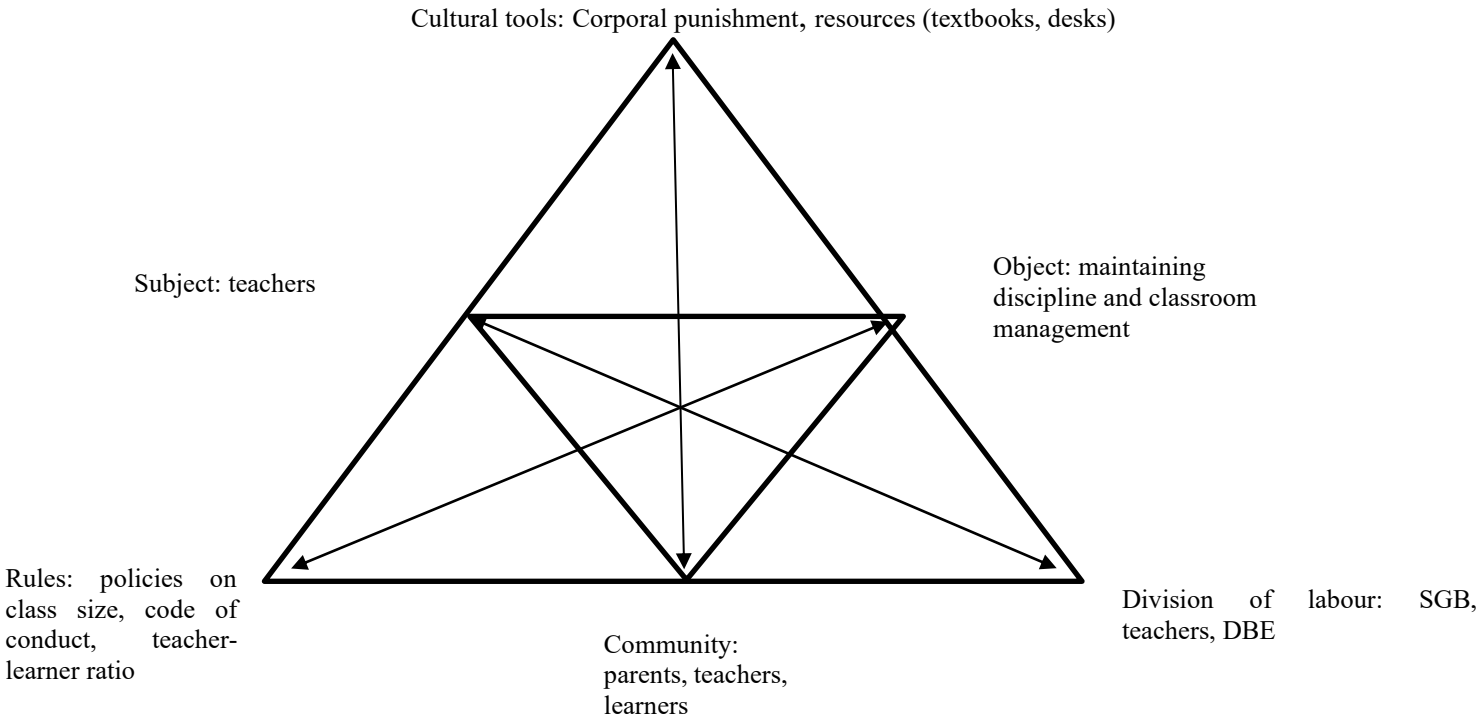


Figure 3.1: Vygotsky's second-generation model adapted from Mayisela (2017)

2.13 Contradictions Within the Activity Systems

Contradictions within and between activity systems are likely to arise when one analyses the components of the activity system, such as the cultural tools, the activity's object, and possibly the collective rules (Mayisela, 2017). As reported by Goodnough (2018), contradictions are the disruption, division, tensions, and systemic breakdowns that occur within a system. A study by Mayisela (2017) concurs and further states that contradictions must be recognised, comprehended, and acknowledged as essential forces behind change for transformation to occur. Four categories of contradictions that arise both within and between activity system components were distinguished by Engeström (1999):

2.13.1 Primary Contradictions

In this study, the teacher (subject) intends to maintain discipline in the classroom to reach their goal of teaching their intended subject material. Therefore, the teacher has two contradicting roles, which are to maintain discipline in the classroom (using alternate disciplinary measures from corporal punishment) and providing learners with adequate subject material (using textbooks). This contradiction was described by Beatty & Feldman (2009)

using the metaphor of "instructor | warden" as it appears in the teacher, the system's subject element.

2.13.2 Secondary Contradictions

When there is a conflict between two nodes in the activity system (e.g., tools and rules), secondary contradictions occur (Foot, 2014). The contradictions may take place in the relationship between maintaining discipline in the classroom and the inclination to the use of corporal punishment, as opposed to the abolishing of corporal punishment.

2.13.3 Tertiary Contradictions

Tension between the dominant and new versions of an activity occurs when tertiary contradictions occur, usually when the new version aims to resolve some or all secondary contradictions (Qureshi, 2021). With corporal punishment being abolished, new disciplinary measures were introduced by the DBE, which causes tension in school as teachers perceive them as ineffective as opposed to corporal punishment.

2.13.4 Quaternary Contradictions

When there is a conflict between the primary activity and one of its neighbouring activities, quaternary contradictions occur (Roth & Lee, 2007). Drawing from literature, it is evident that some teachers still prefer using corporal punishment as a disciplinary measure, despite its abolition.

CHAT helps identify areas of tension within a practice system (Qureshi, 2021). Thus, by focusing on these internal contradictions, analysts can learn more about how local practices are mediated by broader sociopolitical and economic conflicts (Roth & Lee, 2007). Corporal punishment was abolished by the DBE in 1996, however, there is an inclination to use of corporal punishment in order to attempt and maintain discipline in overcrowded classrooms.

2.14 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to review the relevant literature of this study. The relevance of CHAT as a theoretical framework to analyse and understand the subject of study, and its system components were discussed. The following chapter provides an overview of the methodology and research approach used in this study.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the research design, detailing the approach and strategy used to investigate the research questions. The chapter also discusses the research methodology including the data collection methods, research tools, the participants and techniques applied to gather and analyse the data. Furthermore, this chapter addresses the ethical considerations that guided the research process, ensuring the protection of participants' dignity and rights and, the integrity of the research findings.

3.2 Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative constructivism, case study research design. In a qualitative study, a phenomenon under study is viewed from the perspective that knowledge is constructed subjectively, it is not absolute, and the respondents 'views are taken into consideration. Qualitative research focuses on exploring participants' subjective experiences, perceptions, and emotions to gain insight into the meanings and interpretations they assign to their lives (Sutton & Austin, 2015). The goal of this study was to find out what participants think and feel about a particular phenomenon. In other words, the participants' frame of reference is used to interpret reality (Bless et al, 2013).

Constructivism approach suggests that experiences help people form knowledge and meaning (Bada & Olusegun, 2015). In this study, I looked at how teachers' experience with classroom overcrowding has shaped their knowledge on how to instil discipline. Furthermore, I looked at how they perceived the meaning of discipline through their experiences of teaching overcrowded classrooms. The constructivism approach assisted me as the researcher to construct knowledge from subjects (teachers) which they have constructed from social interactions.

Furthermore, CHAT was applied to explore how teachers think, process and construct their understanding of teaching in an overcrowded classroom looking at their intrapersonal and interpersonal planes. With corporal punishment being legal in schools before its abolition in 1994, teachers experienced corporal punishment in their schooling years (interpersonal planes) and used corporal punishment in the classroom before it was abolished, which has impacted how they view, process and understand (intrapersonal plane) the effectiveness of corporal punishment in maintaining discipline in overcrowded classrooms, even after its abolition.

Therefore, this study intended to explore how teachers' interpersonal planes have affected how they instil discipline in an overcrowded classroom, and their inclination to the use of corporal punishment.

A case study is an in-depth analysis of a particular context, individual or group, clearly defined by its unique environment, period and setting (Mohajan, 2018). The case study explored in this study is a primary school situated in a township in Mpumalanga that is currently experiencing classroom overcrowding and previously used corporal punishment before it was abolished. Furthermore, the case study explored how the teachers' perceptions of classroom overcrowding, the difficulties they face when managing discipline in the classroom and their inclination to the use of corporal punishment.

3.3 Research Method

The data was collected using a focus group interview method. A group of individuals meet in a focus group to discuss a set of questions about a particular topic or set of topics (Cyr, 2016). A focus group consists of 6 to 12 participants (Blanche et al., 2014). Teachers from the school that is experiencing classroom overcrowding were asked to participate in the study to share their views, perceptions and understanding of the relationship between classroom overcrowding, discipline challenges and the teachers' inclination to use corporal punishment. Teachers from the foundation and intersen (intermediate and senior) phases were asked to participate in the study. The reason why I chose to include teachers from both phases was to get experiences and perspectives from teachers from both phases. Additionally, I wanted to explore the relationship between overcrowding, learner discipline and the teachers' inclination to use corporal punishment from both phases. I conducted two separate focus groups, one with foundation phase teachers and the second one with intersen phase teachers.

The fact that participants can talk in the presence of each other about the issues at hand is one of the benefits of using a focus group (Bless et al., 2013). All the participants chosen to participate in the focus group have a similar experience, which is teaching in an overcrowded classroom. In that regard, every participant has experience and knowledge of the challenges faced in an overcrowded classroom. Another benefit of a focus group is that it gives participants a chance to learn from one another's experience (Bless et al., 2013).

A focus group allowed the participants to share views and perceptions on the relationship between classroom overcrowding, discipline challenges and the inclination to use corporal punishment.

3.4 Research Tools

In this study, I used two tools to collect data from the participants: focus group interview schedule and biographical questionnaire.

3.4.1 Biographical Questionnaire

In this study, I used a biographical questionnaire (Appendix D) which consisted of closed-ended questions to obtain the participants' age, qualifications, current position at the school, teaching experience, the grade they are teaching, and the number of learners they have in a classroom. The background information obtained assisted me in understanding the teachers' perceptions on classroom overcrowding, disciplinary challenges, and how their experience as teachers has informed their views on corporal punishment.

3.4.2 Focus Group Interview Schedule

The focus group schedule (Appendix E) consisted of questions developed by the researcher to help guide the focus group process. The questions consisted of structured and semi-structured questions. Structured and semi-structured questions were used to develop a discussion among participants. Structured questions are predetermined, closed-ended questions that are set in a specific sequence to gather data. Semi-structured questions are predetermined, open-ended questions that are set in a specific order to gather data. Structured questions require straight forward answers, whereas semi-structured questions allow the participants to explore their thoughts and views (Bless et al., 2013), and it allowed me as a researcher to be flexible and to ask follow-up questions based on the participants' answers. The question "Does the number of learners in a classroom contribute to learner behaviour?" was one of the structured questions asked.

From the questions asked, the participants therefore discussed the question in detail, sharing their experiences. The questions on the interview schedule were phrased in a manner that provides answers to the research questions and the objectives of the study in Chapter One. A notepad and a pen were also used to write down notes as the discussion took place. Additionally, a phone was used to record the discussion among the participants. After

conducting the focus groups, a security pin was used to lock the recordings to ensure their safety.

3.5 Selection of Participants

For this case study, I selected participants in two phases. In the first phase, I selected a school to participate in the study. I purposively chose a school that is experiencing classroom overcrowding. With purposive sampling, the goal was to locate participants who most likely have similar characteristics or experiences. According to Etikan (2016), purposive sampling is identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals who are informed and skilled about a certain area of interest. The school was purposively chosen as it is experiencing classroom overcrowding and corporal punishment was previously used in the school before it was abolished.

The school is a quintile 2 public primary school (chapter two provided the breakdown of the categories of the South African schools). They depend almost entirely on the government to meet all of their needs, including textbooks, stationery, teaching aids, and utilities like water, electricity, and sanitary facilities, as well as maintenance and repairs.

The second phase involved selecting participants from the school selected. Convenience sampling was applied. Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling method where participants are chosen according to their availability and convenience (Bless et al., 2013). Teachers from the foundation and the intersen phase were asked to participate according to their convenience and availability. The teachers chose the time for the focus group that was most convenient for them

3.6 Research Procedure

Permission to conduct the research was requested from the Mpumalanga Department of Education (MDoE) (Appendix F) and the Human Research Ethics (HREC) (Appendix H). Once the researcher received ethics clearance certificates (Appendix I) from the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) and permission from the Mpumalanga Department of Education (Appendix G), I approached the primary school to request permission to conduct the research at the school (Appendix J). Once permission was granted by the school (Appendix K), I had a meeting with the teachers and explained the aims and details of the research using the Participants Information Sheet (Appendix A). Thirteen teachers (six teachers from the intersen and seven from the foundation phase) therefore volunteered to participate in the study, and they

decided on the time they would be available for the focus group. I thereafter provided the teachers with the biographical questionnaire (Appendix D) to complete, which they returned on the day of the focus group.

The focus groups were conducted separately. I first conducted a focus group with intersen (intermediate and senior) phase teachers which consisted of six teachers, and the duration of the focus group was 50 minutes. Before conducting the focus group, I ensured that the room we would be using was clean, conducive and far from the occupied classrooms to ensure privacy. I started the focus group by explaining the aims and details of the research using the Participants Information Sheet (PIS) (Appendix A) to the participants and they signed the consent forms (Appendix B) and the confidentiality agreement (Appendix C). During the focus group, I used a focus group schedule (Appendix E), which consisted of structured questions which aimed to answer the research questions written in Chapter One and a phone was used to assist me in audio-capturing participants' discussion, which was later transcribed.

Following the focus group with the Intermediate and Senior Phase (intersen) teachers, I took a break and put away the consent forms and confidentiality agreements signed by the intersen teachers and set up the room for the Foundation teachers. The second focus group consisted of seven Foundation Phase teachers, and the duration of the focus group was 47 minutes. I explained the aims and details of the research using the PIS (Appendix A) to the participants and they signed the consent forms (Appendix B) and confidentiality agreement (Appendix C). The same focus group interview schedule (Appendix E) that was used with the intersen teachers was also used with the foundation phase teachers, and a phone to capture the participants' discussion.

3.7 Data Analysis

According to Bayane (2022), data analysis is the process of breaking down a phenomenon into its component elements in order to gain a better understanding of it. Thematic analysis was used to analyse data. The process of finding, examining, classifying, defining, and reporting themes in a data collection is known as thematic analysis (Nowell et al., 2017). Braun & Clarke (2018) proposed six phases of thematic analysis which are:

- Familiarisation with the data: This is transcribing the data that was recorded during the focus groups, reading and re-reading the data and noting down ideas. In this phase, I dedicated myself to repeatedly listening to the audio recording

of the focus groups to ensure that I captured every information shared by the participants. After transcribing, I listened to the audio recording while going through the transcript to ensure that what was written matched what each participant reported.

- Coding: This is the process of looking for intriguing features or patterns throughout the whole set of data. After thoroughly going through the transcripts, I used codes to capture the raw data in line with the research questions. I ensured to remain objective and not let my bias influence how I captured the raw data.
- Inducing themes: Putting together all information pertinent to each prospective theme and categorizing codes into possible themes. In this phase, I used the codes to generate my themes. I looked at codes that were less common and more common and grouped them into themes.
- Reviewing themes: Determining whether the themes relate to both the full data set and the coded extracts. After generating my themes, I reviewed them to ensure relevancy to the study, the aim and research questions of the study.
- Defining and naming themes: Identifiable names and definitions for every theme was sought. Looking at the research questions and aims, I refined the themes and began naming them.
- Writing up: Writing a report on the findings of the investigation. After the themes were named, I reported on the participants' views and made a discussion based on the results while looking back and linking with the research questions set in chapter one.

3.8 Trustworthiness of the Study

The degree of confidence in a study's data, and its interpretation, based on the methods used to ensure its quality is known as its trustworthiness in qualitative research (Connelly, 2016). In qualitative research, trustworthiness is intended to support the claim that the findings are "worth paying attention to", i.e. are valid and credible (Elo et al., 2014). Connelly (2016) and Elo et al. (2014) suggested four alternative ways to assess and ensure trustworthiness in a study which are credibility, dependability, conformability, and transferability.

3.8.1 Credibility

When co-researchers or readers are presented with the experience and can recognise it, a study's credibility is established (Nowell et al., 2017). Credibility of this study was shown by ensuring that the research questions, study design, data collection method and the data analyses approach used are appropriate for the study, so that the findings of the study are relevant to the topic researched.

3.8.2 Dependability

According to Bless et al., (2013), dependability necessitates that the researcher accurately describes and follows a concise and well-thought-out research strategy. As a researcher, I made it a priority to follow all the steps of conducting my research and ensured that all information obtained from participants (and the audio recording of the focus groups) is protected and remains confidential.

3.8.3 Confirmability

Confirmability is the lack of bias, or the degree discoveries are predictable and could be repeated (Connelly, 2016). To ensure confirmability, I conducted two focus groups. A focus group increases confirmability because participants can confirm each other's articulations and having two focus groups further promotes this as articulations in one group can confirm or dispute the articulations regarding the phenomena under study.

3.8.4 Transferability

The idea that results can be generalized or applied to different groups or settings is the foundation of transferability (Elo et al., 2014). As the researcher, I provided a detailed explanation on how the data was collected, where it was collected, the participants and the analysis of the data.

Additionally, trustworthiness was ensured by my research tool, a phone to record the focus group discussions. This allowed me to capture verbatim responses from participants, minimizing the risk of bias and leaving out of important information associated with note-taking. The audio recordings also enabled me to revisit and verify data during data analysis, enhancing the reliability and dependability of the results.

3.8.5 Triangulation

In qualitative research, triangulation is the process of using various strategies or data sources to create a thorough understanding of a phenomenon (Carter et al., 2014). There are four types of triangulations identified by Denzin (1978); method triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation, and data source triangulation. Method triangulation, the approach used in this study, encouraged the use of various data collection techniques (Noble & Heale, 2019). In this study, I used a focus group interview schedule (Appendix E) and a biographical questionnaire (Appendix D) to collect data from the participants. The biographical questionnaire assisted me as the researcher to gather the participants' age, qualifications and teaching experience which informed their perception and understanding of classroom overcrowding. Although the participants are from the same school, their views, experiences and understanding of classroom overcrowding and disciplinary challenges differ. Additionally, the participants had training from different universities. Triangulation was further ensured by the use of the one focus group interview schedule for both groups.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

Every research has ethics to be considered, the same is true with this study. Maintaining ethical standards while conducting research is extremely important to protect and care for participants. It was crucial for me as a researcher to recognise and resolve any ethical issues that arise while conducting my study. In this research, I adhered to the following principles of research ethics; anonymity, informed consent and voluntary participation, non-maleficence, and confidentiality, which are outlined and discussed below.

3.9.1 Informed Consent

Participants must be adequately informed about the study, understand the information, and have the freedom to choose whether or not to participate in the study (Arifin, 2017). To emphasize informed consent in my research, I provided participants with a clear and concise explanation of the study's purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits (Appendix B). Participants were given enough time to ask questions and address any concerns before I obtained and documented their informed consent through signed consent forms (Appendix B). It was also explained to them that their participation is voluntary, and they can withdraw their participation at any moment without any penalty.

3.9.2 Confidentiality

The participant's information, particularly sensitive and personal information, ought to be kept in safe conditions (Bless et al., 2013). As a focus group was used, participants were made aware about the need for confidentiality, and they were encouraged to keep all discussions taking place within the focus group and the identity of other participants confidential. Participants were asked to sign a confidentiality form (Appendix C) to ensure that they do not disclose any information shared during the focus group with anyone.

3.9.3 Anonymity

Anonymity could not be assured to the participants since the data was collected using focus groups. I knew the participants' names and their contribution in the study. However, I did ensure that their identities would be protected from the public.; To ensure anonymity, I used pseudonyms such as alphabet letters and numbers to identify the participants when I transcribed, analysed the data and wrote the report. Additionally, no personal identifiable information was linked to participants' responses.

3.9.4 Non-maleficence

Non-maleficence ensures that participants are not exposed to any harm as a direct or indirect result of the research, which is the researcher's responsibility (Blanche et al., 2014). It was my responsibility as the researcher to ensure that the place I conducted the focus groups was clean, safe, and conducive so that the participants are not harmed. Since this study had a potential to arouse emotional distress, I discussed this possibility with the participants and provided them with details of mental health professionals they could contact when in need.

3.10 Reflexivity

Reflexivity entails turning the researcher's lens back on oneself to recognise and accept responsibility for one's situatedness within the research as well as the impact that it may have on the setting and subjects being studied, questions being asked, data being collected, and its interpretation (Dodgson, 2019). Recognising the mutual relationship between the subject of the study and the researcher is essential to reflexivity (Atkinson & Whitaker, 2020).

This study aimed to explore teachers' perception of the relationship between classroom overcrowding, learner discipline and the inclination of the use of corporal punishment. As a researcher who has experienced corporal punishment as a learner, and who has seen how difficult it is for teachers to teach in an overcrowded classroom, I was aware of my biases when

collecting data and when analysing raw data from the participants. I ensured that there was constant supervision when collecting and analysing data to ensure that my biases did not affect the participant's responses. As I am familiar with how learners and teachers feel about corporal punishment, I constructed my questions for the focus groups in a non-leading and non-judgemental manner. I kept my preconceived notions about classroom overcrowding and corporal punishment to myself. I subjected myself to constant supervision and critiqued all my actions throughout my research.

3.11 Positional Reflexivity

As someone who grew up in the community of Moloto and attended a school that experienced classroom overcrowding and experienced corporal punishment at school, I had my views on how teachers are supposed to better manage overcrowded classrooms. This is worth noting as it may have affected how I viewed the participants and conceived their views and experiences on teaching in overcrowded classrooms. However, having worked as a teacher's assistant may have also affected how I presented myself to the participants as I have experienced how difficult it is for teachers to teach in an overcrowded classroom, while attempting to maintain discipline, and while trying to shy away from using corporal punishment. My position of being a learner and teacher's assistant in an overcrowded classroom has helped me keep an open mind when constructing my focus group schedule and when I was conducting the focus groups. I was able to do continuous self-reflection and subjected myself to supervision to ensure that my potential bias does not affect how I interact with the participants and also when analysing raw data from the participants.

3.12 Conclusion

This chapter provided a detailed explanation of the qualitative research design used in this study including the procedure on how data was collected and the data collection method and tools. The case study and the participant selection were outlined and discussed. Additionally, ethical considerations, the trustworthiness of the study and the researcher's reflexivity were elaborated on. Lastly, this chapter also expanded on thematic analysis. The following chapter presents the findings, and discussion of analysis of these findings with reference to the literature and the theoretical framework.

Chapter Four: Findings and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on reporting the findings of the research on teachers' perceptions on classroom overcrowding, disciplinary challenges and the inclination to the use of corporal punishment. The first section of this chapter includes the description of participants' information that was gathered using the biographical questionnaire (Appendix D). The second section of this chapter entails the final phase of Braun & Clarke's (2018) six steps approach to thematic analysis. In the last section of this chapter is the discussion, where relevant literature and CHAT are further employed as analytical lenses of the findings that emanated from this study.

4.2 Biographical Information of Participants

The table below provides a summary of the information gathered using the biographical questionnaire (Appendix D) of thirteen participants. The participants in this study are from a Quintile 2 school in Moloto, Mpumalanga, which experiences classroom overcrowding. During the meeting with the teachers at the school (as stated in chapter 3), there were more female teachers present than male teachers, hence the participants consisted of twelve Black females and one Black male. The participants had teaching experience ranging from 2 to 35 years, and their qualifications ranged from Diploma to Honours degrees. Additionally, the table provides the pseudonyms for each participant which are used in the reporting of the findings. For Foundation phase teachers, P stands for participant and A stands for the first participant associated with the biographical information in the first row of the table. For Intersen teachers, P stands for participant and 1 stands for the first participant associated with the biographical information in the first row of the table. This was done for all the association of participants to their biographical information. Table 1 below provides the summary of the background information of each individual teacher, including the current number of learners in their classrooms.

Foundation Phase teachers						
Participant	Teaching experience (no. of years)	Age range	Highest qualification	Current position	Teaching Grade	Number of learners in class
A	35	50-59	Honours	Deputy principal	2	56

B	30	50-59	Diploma	Teacher	2	70
C	3	20-29	Degree	Teacher	2	60
D	27	50-59	Honours	Teacher	3	54
E	17	50-59	Degree	Teacher	1	70
F	10	50-59	Degree	Teacher	1	70
G	2	20-29	Degree	Teacher	3	55
Intermediate and Senior (Intersen) Phase teachers						
Participant	Teaching experience (no. of years)	Age range	Highest qualification	Current position	Teaching Grade	Number of learners in class
1	22	40-49	Degree	Teacher	6&7	68&65
2	5	30-39	Degree	Teacher	5&6	-/+70
3	3	30-39	Degree	Teacher	6&7	64&65
4	8	40-49	Honours	Teacher	5&7	64
5	8	50-59	Degree	Teacher	4-7	65
6	10	30-39	Degree	Teacher	6&7	60&74

Table 4.1: Descriptive information of participants quite a few in the older group who would likely have been around in the days of corporal punishment……

4.3 Findings

Upon completion of transcribing data from the focus groups and separating data into different codes, the next step was searching for themes following Braun & Clark's (2018) use of diagrammatic representation. The themes were identified using the study's research questions: What are the teachers' perceptions of classroom overcrowding, what are the teachers' perceptions of learner discipline in overcrowded classrooms, what disciplinary strategies are used by teachers in overcrowded classrooms, and what are teachers' inclination to the use of corporal punishment in overcrowded classrooms. From these research questions, seven themes emerged. Below is the representation of findings.

The first theme that emerged was the challenges of classroom overcrowding (see Figure 4.1). This theme emerged as participants highlighted that classroom overcrowding was characterized by high levels of noise from the learners which led to a lot of disruptions in the classroom, interrupting the teaching and learning process. Participants further highlighted that overcrowded classroom made it difficult for them to walk around the classroom and interact one-on-one with the learners. High levels of noise and teachers not being able to walk around the classroom, made it difficult for teachers to manage the learners' behaviour. Upon going

through the raw extracts from the data and refining this theme, three sub-themes emerged, which are: Increased noise levels and disruptions, difficulty in managing learner behaviour and difficulty reaching and attending to individual learners.

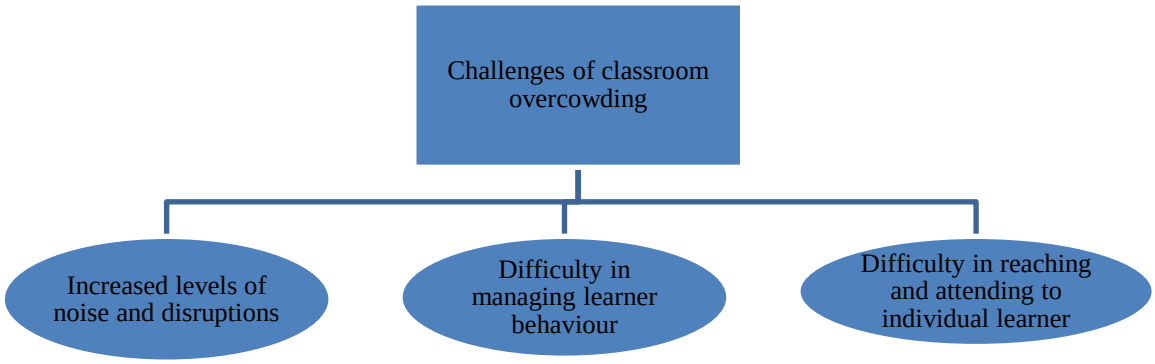


Figure 4.1: Theme 1 and sub-themes

The second theme emerged from participants highlighting how classroom overcrowding affected the resources (desks, textbooks, classrooms) that were available to both teachers and learners, which negatively affected teaching and learning. This was not the only impact on teaching and learning due to overcrowding that the teachers highlighted. In addition to difficulty maintaining discipline, teachers also highlighted that it was difficult for them to mark each learner's book after writing a class activity, which had a negative impact on the learners' academic performance as they did not have a clear indication of whether the learners were coping with the workload. Based on what the teachers' highlighted, a second theme emerged (see Figure 4.2) which was named the impact on teaching and learning. The sub-themes that emerged from this theme were: Difficulty in maintaining discipline, limited time for marking, limited resources, time management, and negative impact on learners' academic performance.

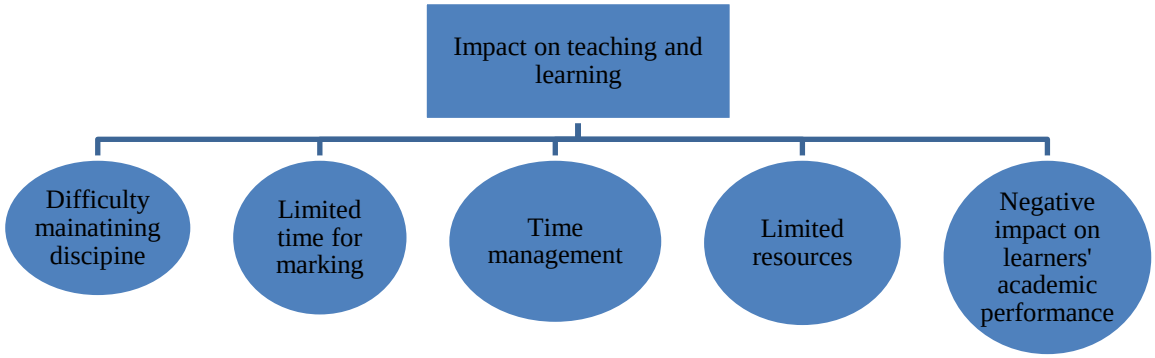


Figure 4.2: Theme 2 and sub-themes

The third theme was ineffective disciplinary measures (see Figure 4.3). This theme emerged from the participants pointing out that the DBE has provided them with alternative disciplinary measures, however, they are concerned that they are not effective in overcrowded classrooms. Participants highlighted that there are many steps that they are required to follow before they can say that they are fully disciplining a learner and maintaining discipline in the classroom. This has led to them creating their own disciplinary measures in their respective classrooms. The sub-theme that emerged from this theme is alternative disciplinary measures.

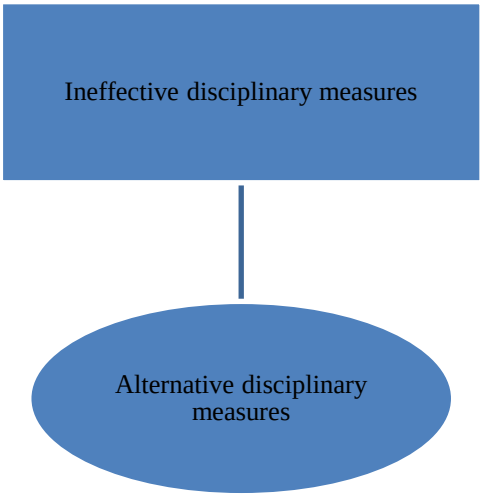


Figure 4.3: Theme 3 and sub-theme

The fourth theme emerged from the participants pointing out how classroom overcrowding has negatively impacted their motivation and passion for teaching. Participants

further highlighted that they get frustrated as learner misbehaviour escalates. This has led to them going to class and teaching because they have to complete the curriculum set for that specific subject, which robs the learners of the full teaching and learning experience. Based on what the teachers highlighted, the theme that emerged is teachers' well-being and demotivation (see Figure 4.4). In addition, two sub-themes emerged, which are decreased motivation and passion for teaching, and poor? teacher morale.

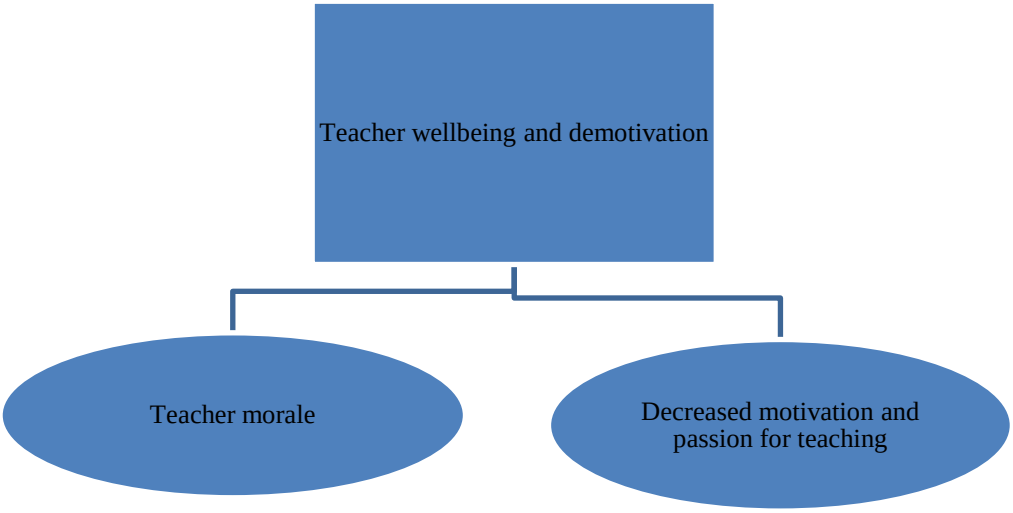


Figure 4.4: Theme 4 and sub-themes

The fifth theme emerged from the teachers expressing their views on the effectiveness of corporal punishment. Participants had different views on whether corporal punishment is effective in overcrowded classrooms or not. Almost all participants spoke about how they had seen the effectiveness corporal punishment before it was abolished. Furthermore, they highlighted that they also experienced corporal punishment during their schooling years. Other participants highlighted that they feel that corporal punishment leads to anger and violence in learners in the future. This led them to point out that they want corporal punishment to remain banned. The theme that emerged is abolition of corporal punishment and one sub-theme that emerged is mixed views on the effectiveness of corporal punishment (see Figure 4.5).

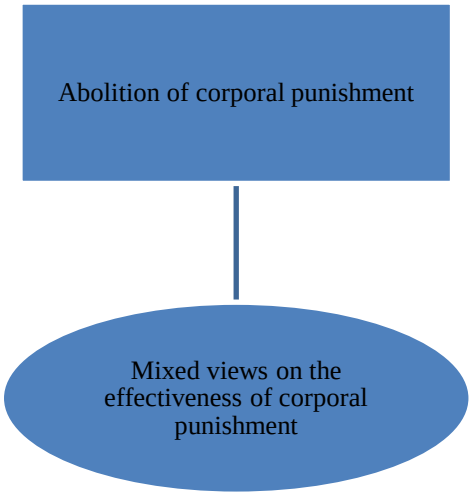


Figure 4.5: Theme 5 and sub-theme

The sixth theme emerged from the participants highlighting that overcrowded classroom has a big impact on learner behaviour. They expressed that overcrowded classroom increased learner misbehaviour and aggression. This aggression from learners has resulted in bullying amongst learners. Participants also mentioned that some learners feel that the discipline that the learners who bullied them received is not "enough", they usually take the matters into their own hands, resulting in increased aggression bullying. Additionally, the increased bullying that occurs due to classroom overcrowding and ineffective disciplinary measures had resulted in decreased school attendance. The participants mentioned that learners fear going to school due to the bullying they are experiencing. The theme that emerged from these highlights is learner behaviour and mental health (see Figure 4.6). In addition to this theme, two sub-themes emerged which are increased misbehaviour and aggression, and increased bullying and decrease in school attendance.

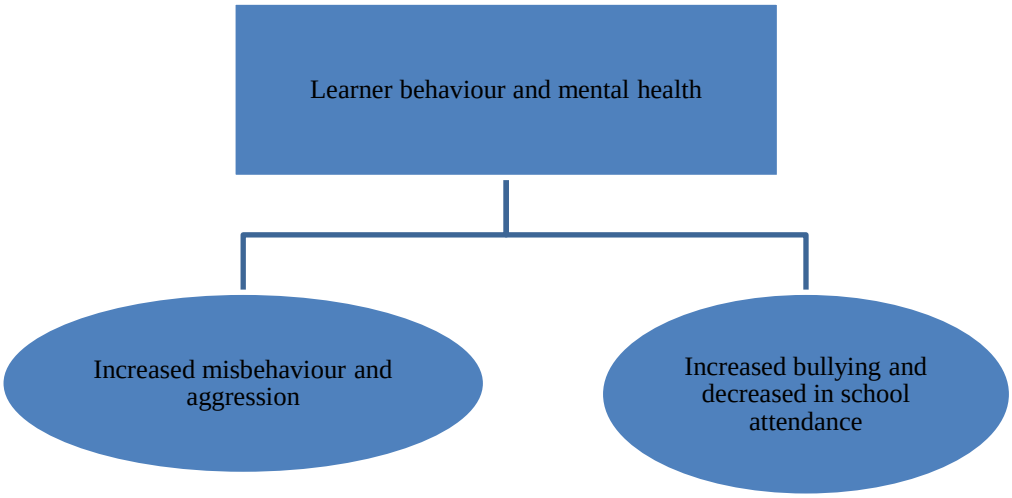


Figure 4.6: Theme 6 and sub-themes

The last theme emerged from the participants comparing classroom discipline in the classrooms during the COVID-19 era and now in overcrowded classrooms. Participants highlighted that reduced class size improved the teaching and learning environment, and overcrowded classrooms promote learner misbehaviour. Participants echoed this and expressed that there was better management of learners during COVID-19, and they did not have a lot of disciplinary challenges as learners were better behaved. Other participants highlighted that they wish to go back to the system that was used during COVID-19. Based on these discussions, a theme called comparison to the COVID-19 era emerged and two sub-themes emerged from this theme which were reduced class size and improved teaching and learning environment, and better management of learner behaviour during the COVID-19 era (see Figure 4.7).

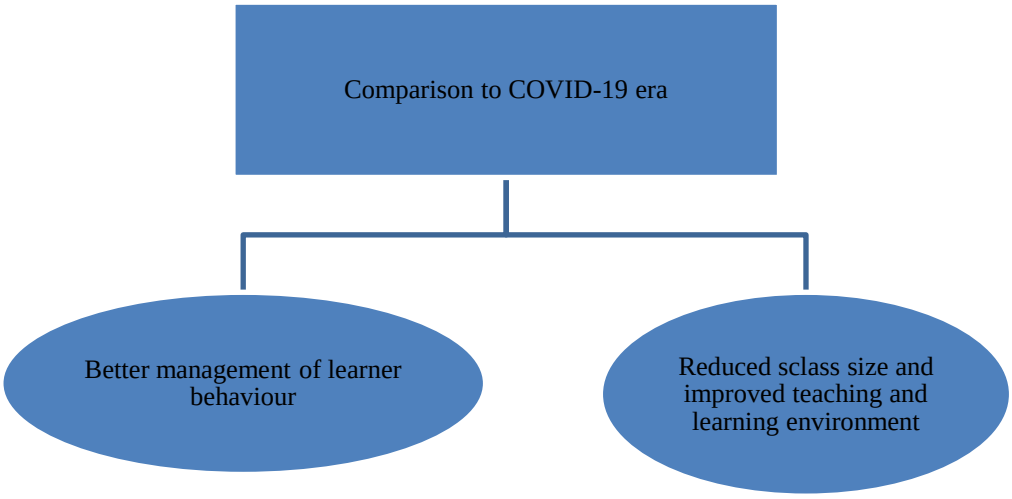


Figure 4.7: Theme 7 and sub-themes

4.4 Emerging Themes

This section of the chapter focuses on the findings from the thematic analysis of data that emerged from the two focus groups.

4.4.1 Challenges of Classroom Overcrowding

To get a better understanding of how teachers perceive their classroom when it is overcrowding, teachers were asked about their views and experiences with classroom overcrowding.

4.4.1.1 Increased noise levels and disruptions

Most teachers highlighted the challenges that they face in the classroom, and the majority of the foundation phase teachers highlighted that overcrowding in the foundation phase is characterised by noise, chaos and disruption. These disruptions seemed to be one of the challenges also faced in the senior phase as one participant from the senior phase supported this and highlighted how overcrowded classrooms are chaotic, in the sense that it makes it difficult for them to identify the learner who is disrupting the classroom. Participant 6 supported this and mentioned that learners will start taking advantage of the situation and start accusing each other, which further exacerbates the disruption.

> *P6: And then they start doing this thing "it's Joseph", "it's Millicent" and then it will be a whole five minutes of accusing each other, then learning again will be disrupted*

Unfortunately, when learners are being disruptive in the classroom and the noise levels increase, it puts learners who are struggling with reading at a disadvantage. This was supported by Participant C who reported that reading requires a quiet space, which is nearly impossible to have in overcrowded classrooms.

> *PC: And another thing is that it is difficult to help a learner with basic skills like reading, because when you are busy helping one learner, other learners start making noise and reading needs a quiet space.*

4.4.1.2 Difficulty in managing learner behaviour

With the classroom being chaotic, it makes it difficult for teachers to manage learners' behaviour. One participant from the senior phase shared their experience when learners have

to exchange classes, and highlighted how they have to first try to manage the chaos in the classroom before teaching and learning can take place.

> *P2: …. so, for them to just sit down, it eats up your time because they fight before sitting down and others go to the bathroom first before coming to class. So, when they have to sit down, they have to fight first, they won't sit down like quietly so, just sit down and save time. Then instead of starting with your lesson, you have to go and intervene then, solve problems, you know*

From the two focus group discussions, it was assumed that the difficulty of managing learners' behaviour is largely influenced by the seating arrangements. When learners do not have a "set" place where they sit every day, it may lead to them having to fight for seats, which causes disruptions in the classroom. However, this seemed to be more of one of the challenges faced by teachers in the intermediate and senior phases when it came managing learner behaviour than teachers in the foundation phase.

4.4.1.3 Difficulty in reaching and attending individual learner

Although there are limited desks for learners in overcrowded classrooms, teachers also find it difficult to move around the classroom as there is no space for them to move around the classroom during lessons to check the learners' work. All participants were in support of the mention of the limited space to move around; and Participant 2 further mentioned that as much as these learners are a group in the classroom, they are individuals with different learning difficulties/needs.

> *P2: Yes and another thing is that, as much as it's a group, but they are individuals, and they are different. So sometimes you need to attend to their individual needs.*

Teachers not being able to move in the classroom and attend to each learners' needs also limits one-on-one interactions between learners and teachers, especially when it comes to difficulties with reading. Participant C from the foundation phase echoed this when they stated that

> *PC: …. Also, it is really difficult to reach every learner and help them with reading*.

This theme and the sub-themes highlighted the challenges teachers face in overcrowded classrooms. Looking at this theme and its sub-themes, it is evident how difficult it is for teachers to assign each learner their own seat due to limited seats in the classroom, which

results in chaos and disruptions as teachers find it difficult to manage the learners' behaviour when they cannot properly move around the classroom. Furthermore, the classroom being overcrowded places a disadvantage to both learners and teachers and teachers find it challenging to reach and attend every learner.

4.4.2 Impact on Teaching and Learning

There are a lot of factors that contribute to the teaching and learning process, such as resources (e.g. textbooks, desks, classrooms), discipline in the classroom, and the teachers' time management skills. These factors may negatively or positively affect the teaching and learning process.

4.4.2.1 Difficulty maintaining discipline

During the focus group discussions, it became apparent that maintaining discipline in an overcrowded classroom also poses a challenge when it comes to teaching and learning. This challenge is caused by having to start by maintaining discipline in the classroom before teaching and learning can take place. It became evident that overcrowding is the main cause of the indiscipline faced in the classrooms. Participant E supported this and reported that,

PE: Overcrowding doesn't assist to promote discipline. In fact, it encourages the indiscipline

With the classroom being overcrowded, learners end up being chaotic and the teacher will have difficulty pinpointing the exact learner that is causing the disruption and discipline them. Consequently, they now resort to shouting in the classroom in an attempt to capture the learners' attention and maintain discipline in the classroom. While teachers are attempting to maintain discipline, they expressed that disciplining learners takes time away from teaching.

PB: You even get behind with your teaching schedule because you spend more time disciplining than teaching

4.4.2.2 Limited time for marking

While overcrowding affects teaching and learning, it also affects checking each learner's book and marking. With the number of learners present in the classroom, it is evident that teachers will struggle marking all the learners' books. Teachers not being able to mark all the learners' books means that they are unable to give proper feedback to the learners.

P2: … If you are checking 74 learners if they have written the homework, and, you can't give feedback properly because you can't check and see if there are mistakes

Apart from the number of learners each teacher has in the classroom, it is also important to consider the number of subjects each teacher teaches and the number of grades they teach. Participant A raised this point, and it was supported by all the participants.

PA: It's actually like dealing with 280 learners because it's one teacher for 4 subjects in one class and it makes everything difficult. You have their exercise books and also their workbooks to mark

With the classroom being overcrowded and the teacher having a challenge paying attention to each learner, learners end up taking advantage of the overcrowding and do not submit their books when it is time for submission. Participants from the senior phase reported that learners at times pretend to be submitting books, and end up turning back with the book, and it is difficult for them to identify the learners who did not submit the book. This also affects the marking process.

P3: Sometimes when they are submitting books, he just comes with the book. Sometimes you will lock eyes with him and say you haven't submitted your book and then, because there is so many of them, they are like 40, he comes with the book, and he makes a U-turn he goes back with the book. You don't see because like it's chaotic in the classroom

4.4.2.3 Time management

Time management proved to be one of the factors that affects teaching and learning. Teachers expressed that it becomes challenging at times to teach while having to ensure that learners have all the necessary materials (books, pencils, rulers) for the lesson. Participants from the foundation phase reported that since they are teaching learners who are under the age of ten, they have to ensure that all learners have the necessary material in front of them before beginning with their lesson.

PF: And another thing is time management. Having to manage the learners is difficult. When you are handing out books, because they are a lot, it takes time. You have to hand out the books one by one and that takes half of the period.

This seems to be a challenge for all phases as Participant 3 also noted this as one of the challenges faced in the senior phase

P3: …. And another thing is the drawings using pencils and others, some of the learners don't have them, they are supposed to share. Let's say they are supposed to draw something; they will have to wait for someone else to finish using them so that they can borrow from them.

Learners borrowing each other material negatively affected teaching and learning as teachers have to stop their lessons to ensure that all learners follow the instructions properly and are not left behind during the lesson.

4.4.2.4 Limited resources

Managing time in the classroom and teaching and learning appeared to be affected by the lack of resources. Participants reported that learners had to share most of the resources due to classroom overcrowding. These resources include desks and textbooks, which pose a challenge to the learners. The lack of resources seems to be a challenge for both phases.

PE: … because sometimes the children fight for space, fight for desks

P4: Even the textbooks, they have to share

While teachers are attempting to maintain discipline in the classroom, learners are faced with a challenge of learning in an environment with limited resources. Learners share resources (desks and textbooks), which also cause a lot of disruptions in the classroom as they fight for these resources at times.

4.4.2.5 Negative impact on learners' academic performance

With the teachers struggling to mark each learner's book, this may negatively affect learners' academic performance as teachers will struggle to identify learners who are struggling academically. In other instances, learners may attend the whole lesson, but not understand the content being taught.

P6: So now sometimes we are going to teach so that we are able to finish the content in the given time, then it's going to affect the learning of a child.

P6: And also, I think it affects the learning part. You wouldn't know if these learners actually understand what you are teaching or what you are assessing them with

Due to this, learners resort to copying from other learners so they can submit completed work to teachers. However, this in turn negatively affects the learners as they may progress to a higher grade without understanding the content of the previous grade.

This theme and sub-themes highlighted the number of factors that affect the teaching and learning. As these factors were discussed, it was evident that they not only affect the teaching and learning, but they have a negative impact on the learners' academic performance.

4.4.3 Ineffective Disciplinary Measures

With the abolition of corporal punishment, teachers were asked which disciplinary measures are effective in an overcrowded classroom. All teachers expressed that there are no effective disciplinary measures in an overcrowded classroom. The suggested disciplinary measures seem to be not fit for classroom that are overcrowded.

> *PA: We would give you disciplinary measures if the classroom size is manageable, but because of overcrowding, there is no methods that will work*

4.4.3.1 Alternative disciplinary measures

Due to the need for a disciplined classroom so that teaching and learning can take place, teachers had to become creative and develop their own disciplinary measures in an attempt to instil discipline in the classroom. These creative ways include teachers making the learners causing disruptions sit in the front row in class, placing them at the back of the line when dishing out food during break-time, having them sit with them at their table, eating lunch in the teacher's office, giving them responsibilities such as cleaning the blackboard and giving other learners their workbooks.

Unfortunately, these methods seem not to work all the time. This was supported by one of the participants who stated that when you take the learner who was disrupting the classroom to sit next to you, the end up causing more disruption in the classroom. Participant E supported this and reported,

> *PE: .... The very same learner you let sit with you because he is misbehaving and distracting other learners will be the one throwing papers at the learners that you removed him from*

Another creative disciplinary method that teachers use in an attempt to maintain discipline is making the learners who are misbehaving pick up papers and plastics on the ground outside before entering the classroom after lunch-time. Unfortunately, participants reported that learners end up enjoying this punishment, which leads to them always misbehaving so that they can play outside.

> *PA: ..... They enjoy being outside, you will think that you are disciplining them, but they are enjoying*

Participants reported that they implemented these methods as the suggested disciplinary measures are not effective in overcrowded classrooms. Teachers mentioned that due to the ineffectiveness of the suggested disciplinary measures, they end up resorting to "illegal" measures to maintain discipline in the classroom. Participants view these "illegal" measures as corporal punishment.

> *P3: We resort to illegal ways of disciplining them like chasing them out of the classroom which is not allowed. But it just becomes your last resort. You would even say that you would rather have a misconduct of chasing them outside than having to beat them*

This theme highlights the challenges teachers face in their attempts in maintaining discipline in overcrowded classrooms using the alternative disciplinary measures. Although there are suggested disciplinary measures, it was quite evident that they are not as effective in overcrowded classrooms, which at times lead teachers to using what they referred to as "illegal" disciplinary measures.

4.4.4 Teacher Wellbeing and Demotivation

Classroom overcrowding appears to have a negative impact on teachers' passion for teaching as they have to implement different strategies so that the classroom can be disciplined. Unfortunately, this leaves teachers feeling tired and burnt-out as their attempts to maintain discipline bears no fruits. Teachers voiced out that with the classroom being overcrowded and the current disciplinary measures not effective, leads to them being frustrated most of the time as they cannot afford to step outside the classroom for too long as they always find a lot of cases when they return to the classroom. This was mostly raised by the teachers in the foundation phase.

PG: And because they are a lot in one class, it forces you as a teacher to be always present in the classroom because if you just step outside the classroom, it's another story. You will find a lot of cases when you come back, you also find that one is injured. So, you must always be in class, all the time.

PA: You can't even go to the bathroom properly. You have to make sure that you rush back to class

4.4.4.1 Teacher morale

It became evident that classroom overcrowding negatively impact the teachers' morale. Participants reported that they end up teaching for the sake of passing knowledge to the learners, and they are no longer teaching because they love teaching. Unfortunately, this disadvantages the learners as they are no longer receiving the best abilities of their teachers.

PA: .... You end up teaching for the sake of teaching, but you can see that you are not doing the learners any justice.

4.4.4.2 Decreased motivation and passion for teaching

With overcrowding being a challenge that teachers face yearly, teachers are bound to feel frustrated, and physically and emotionally drained.

PF: You even become drained, a lot

PG: Overcrowding is very serious ma'am, even us as teachers, we get drained, physically and emotionally

Being emotionally and physically drained each year when having to deal with classroom overcrowding, participants stated that classroom overcrowding is slowly decreasing their motivation and killing their passion for teaching, and they wish that something could be done to eradicate classroom overcrowding.

PF: We studied teaching because we love it and we are passionate about teaching, but classroom overcrowding slowly kills that passion. But we are still here because we want to help these learners, we want to see them succeed in life. We really wish something can be done with this overcrowding situation

This theme emphasizes the stresses classroom overcrowding poses towards teachers' emotional and physical health, which might have a negative impact towards the teaching and learning process.

4.4.5 Abolition of Corporal Punishment

4.4.5.1 Mixed views on the effectiveness of corporal punishment

When asked about their views on the abolition of corporal punishment, teachers had mixed views on the effectiveness of corporal punishment in schools and overcrowded classrooms. Two participants reported that they support the abolition of corporal punishment as they believe that corporal punishment inflicts pain on the learners, and pain and education do not go hand in hand.

> *PG: My view is it was the correct thing to abolish it because education and assault or inflict pain don't go hand in hand.*

> *PF: My view is, being beaten for 12 years, what kind of a person are you creating, whole 12 years you are getting a beating. You already know when you are waking up that you are going to get beaten.*

Participant F further supported their view and mentioned that corporal punishment is contributing to how learners end up in future, which may lead to a future full of anger and violence. Participant F further mentioned that the environment should be conducive for learning, and corporal punishment should remain banned.

While two participants are against corporal punishment, the majority of the participants wished that the government could bring back corporal punishment as they also survived in the past when corporal punishment was legal in schools.

> *P1: If it were up to me, I was going to say that it should come back because we survived back in the day and the teachers were using corporal punishment, and we were very disciplined.*

Participant C voiced that there are parents who are still in support of corporal punishment as they understand that they are trying to discipline the learners and not inflict pain on them. Furthermore, participants stated that the abolition of corporal punishment is

contributing to the misbehaviour of learners and when the government abolished corporal punishment, they did not provide them with effective alternative disciplinary measures.

> *PF: Yes. And also, discipline, yes they took out the corporal punishment, but they didn't give us something to replace it.*

In support of corporal punishment, participant A expressed that there should be rules that govern corporal punishment. They further explained that misbehaviour should be categorised and the kind of punishment it should receive.

> *PA: …. they should have categorised the misbehaviour and the kind of punishment the learner should receive. It won't be the full 12 years that now if a learner enters the school yard we beat them. They should know that when you do this, this is going to happen.*

This theme highlighted teachers' perceptions on the abolition of corporal punishment. It was quite evident that the majority of the teachers felt that the classrooms would be more manageable if corporal punishment was still practiced in schools, while other teachers expressed that corporal punishment in schools yields to angry and violent adults in future.

4.4.6 Learner Behaviour and Mental Health

4.4.6.1 Increased misbehaviour and aggression

It has become evident that overcrowding causes a lot of challenges in the classroom. Another challenge that teachers face in the classroom is the increased behaviour and aggression from the learners. Participants reported that some of the learners come with this aggressive behaviour from home and it becomes difficult to discipline them when they start being aggressive towards other learners.

These learners end up starting fights in the classroom, which ultimately results in gang groups in the school. Learners who are unable to defend themselves report these learners to their older siblings. This was supported by Participant 6 who stated,

> *P6: …. when it comes to fighting, it creates like gang groups…. they start fighting and then maybe the other has a big brother in a bigger grade, then she or he is gonna acknowledge the big brother and the big brother because he is big, he's gonna call his*

friends then they will wait for the child outside of the school and then they will start fighting

4.4.6.2 Increased bullying and decrease in school attendance

Unfortunately, the increase in gang groups within the school leads to a large number of bullying cases that teachers have a challenge handling. Participants reported that when a learner reports being bullied in the classroom and nothing is being done to discipline the learner who bullied them, they tend to take matters into their own hands and start being aggressive towards that learner.

PA: And then to add, the one who bullies other learners ends up being the one who gets bullied now. You can see that the child was quiet all along and was letting the bullying take place until angry to a point where now they want to bully their bullies.

The increase in bullying results in learners skipping school, with the fear of being bullied. Participants mentioned that learners start being afraid of coming to school when they experience bullying, which leads to a decrease in school attendance.

PB: And now the learner starts being scared of coming to school.

This theme indicates how great of an impact classroom overcrowding has on learners in the classroom and also on their emotional health.

4.4.7 Comparison to COVID-19 Era

During the focus group discussions, teachers compared the overcrowded classrooms to the COVID-19 era.

4.4.7.1 Better management of learner behaviour

When asked about the average number of learners participants had in the classroom during COVID-19, Participant 5 and Participant 3 reported an average that ranged between 25 to 28. This was supported by participants from both phases. It became apparent that the number of learners teachers had in the classroom was way less than the number that they currently have in the classroom. When asked how they experienced their classrooms when they were not overcrowded, Participant D reported,

PD: We did experience not working in an overcrowded classroom, and it was working perfectly, we enjoyed it

When asked about the learner behaviour during COVID-19, teachers expressed their experiences, and they pointed out that learners were better behaved during COVID-19. With good behaviour from the learners, teachers also expressed that even discipline was better during COVID-19, inside and outside the classroom

> *P2: For me it was very good. Even around the school, not just on the classroom. We had limited learners; the classroom was quiet. When you were in class, you never experienced any problems*

From the views of the participants, it is quite evident that learners' behaviour is mostly influenced by overcrowding. Additionally, it seems that learners were aware that they can be easily identified when they are causing disruptions in a classroom that is not overcrowded. This was supported by Participant 2 when they stated,

> *P2: ..... When you were in class, you never experienced any problems because if a person is sitting there and they know that if they speak, everyone is going to know that it is me*

4.4.7.2 Reduced class size and improved teaching and learning environment

With the number of learners being reduced in the classroom, this meant that the teachers were now able to reach every learner in the classroom. Additionally, this also meant that there were fewer disciplinary challenges in the classroom, which promotes a better learning environment.

> *PE: And also, you can attend the learners individually, do those one-on-one interactions*

> *P5: And during Covid it was easy. Sometimes we need to have this question-and-answer interaction. So, when it's just 28 learners you are able to see that this one is not answering then you are able to attend to that learner, ask them whether they understand*

A conducive learning environment was not the only benefit that teachers received from COVID-19. Resources (desks) were easily distributed amongst the learners, which reduced the fighting over resources, which ultimately reduced the disruptions in the classroom and noise levels.

P6: Each learner had their own desk and that contributed to them behaving well. It is better when each learner has their own desk because it also reduces the fights and noise in the classroom

Teachers pointed out that they prefer teaching learners in a small sized classroom, and Participant G reported that if COVID-19 was not a dangerous disease, they would prefer that it returns so they can return to having small sized classrooms.

This theme highlighted the teachers' experiences when the classroom was not overcrowded, how they experienced learners when the classroom was not overcrowded, and disciplinary challenges faced when teaching in a small-sized classroom.

4.5 Discussion

Based on the findings presented above, it is quite evident that overcrowding in classrooms affects teaching and learning in significant ways. In this section, I discuss the findings through the theoretical framework, CHAT, and relevant literature as lenses to understand this phenomenon.

4.5.1 Challenges of Classroom Overcrowding

Overcrowding in classrooms is a significant problem that affects teaching and learning and presents teachers with a number of difficulties. The effects of overcrowding are predominantly noticeable in terms of noise levels, disruptions, behaviour management challenges, and the inability to attend to the individual needs of learners. From a CHAT perspective, these challenges can be understood as disruptions in the activity system (Foot, 2014) of the classroom, where the interaction between the teacher, learners, and the learning environment becomes strained due to the classroom overcrowding.

4.5.1.1 Increased noise levels and disruptions

Increased noise levels and disruptions in overcrowded classrooms were among the most prevalent challenges that participants noted. Both foundation and senior phase teachers reported that overcrowded classrooms created chaotic conditions where noise and disturbances significantly hindered the teaching-learning process. According to Vygotsky (1987), learning is a socially mediated process, and the classroom environment plays a critical role in facilitating or hindering these interactions. In addition to disrupting the teacher, overcrowding produces an

environment that affects social interaction and communication, making it difficult for the learners to pay attention in class.

Learners often begin accusing one another of causing disruptions when teachers attempt to identify those causing disruptions, leading to wasted time and further escalation of the noise. This reflects the broader issue of how overcrowding exacerbates behaviour problems in the classroom. Research by Muthusamy (2015) supports this finding, indicating that overcrowded classrooms are often characterized by higher levels of misbehaviour and noise, which hinder the effectiveness of the teaching-learning process.

From a CHAT perspective, the classroom can be viewed as an activity system with various components (Foot, 2014): the teacher, the learners, the curriculum, and the learning tools. When the number of learners exceeds the classroom's capacity, these components interact less effectively. The noise and disruptions identified in the study can be seen as a result of the contradiction between the high number of learners (subject) and the limited space and resources (tools) available for effective learning (outcome). The increased noise levels and the chaos that arises create a breakdown in the activity system, where the teacher is unable to mediate the learning environment effectively, leading to less productive and more stressful interactions.

4.5.1.2 Difficulty in managing learner behaviour

Another significant challenge for teachers in overcrowded classrooms is the difficulty in managing learner behaviour. The study found that overcrowding exacerbated disciplinary problems, as teachers struggled to address the behaviour of individual learners within overcrowded classrooms. CHAT emphasizes the role of mediation (Goodnough, 2018) in teaching and learning, where tools (including teachers' disciplinary strategies) are used to shape learners' behaviour. However, in overcrowded classrooms, the tools available to teachers for managing behaviour – such as their space and time – are insufficient to mediate effectively.

Significant time is spent attempting to restore discipline before any teaching can take place, leading to time lost. This is consistent with findings from West & Meier (2020), who highlight that overcrowded classrooms often lead to an increase in misbehaviour, making it more difficult for teachers to focus on teaching. Teaching quality diminishes as a result of teachers having to continuously move their attention from teaching to attempting to maintain discipline.

4.5.1.3 Difficulty in reaching and attending to individual learners

The difficulty in reaching and attending to individual learners' needs is another key challenge identified in the study. Teachers in overcrowded classrooms expressed frustration at their inability to move around the classroom and offer individualized support to learners, especially those struggling with foundational skills like reading. This is supported by previous research that indicates overcrowded classrooms significantly hinder the teachers' ability to address the different needs of learners (Obadire & Sinthumule, 2021).

CHAT's emphasis on activity systems suggests that learning is not just a group process but also an individual one (Julkunen, 2013). As Daniels (2016) argues, CHAT underlines the importance of recognizing learners as individuals within a social context. Amissah et al., (2016) stated that it can be challenging to identify learners who struggle with learning barriers The limited ability to move around and interact with learners on a one-on-one basis lead to a disconnect between the teachers and learners, which results in learners, particularly those with learning difficulties, being disadvantaged and not receiving the full benefit of the teaching-learning process.

Although teachers struggle with reaching each child and paying attention to learners with learning barriers, it is stated in White Paper 6 that all South African schools are supposed to be inclusive, accommodating learners with mild to moderate learning barriers (DoE, 2001). According to Okongo et al., (2015), inclusive education is the adaptation of the school or classroom to accommodate all learners, irrespective of their linguistic, social or academic challenges. However, with classroom overcrowding, it has proven to be difficult for teachers to do so.

4.5.2 Impact on Teaching and Learning

The findings from this study highlight the multifaceted challenges teachers face in overcrowded classrooms and the significant impact these challenges have on the teaching and learning process. The application of CHAT provides a valuable lens for understanding how various elements (Sannino & Engeström, 2018) – such as classroom environment, teaching practices, and learner behaviour-interact within the activity system of the classroom. According to CHAT, an activity system consists of a subject (the teacher), object (teaching and learning), tools (resources such as textbooks and desks), rules (disciplinary policies), community (learners, other teachers, and school administrators), and the division of labour (who performs what tasks within the classroom context) (Engeström, 2001). By applying this framework, we

can better understand how overcrowding disrupts this system and leads to negative outcomes for both teachers and learners.

4.5.2.1 Difficulty maintaining discipline

One of the primary challenges identified by participants was the difficulty in maintaining discipline due to overcrowding. Teachers described how the chaotic nature of overcrowded classrooms hindered their ability to focus on teaching, as they had to first address disruptions before the lesson could proceed. From a CHAT perspective, maintaining discipline is a form of mediation in the activity system (Roth & Lee, 2007), where the teacher uses tools (such as verbal instructions or non-verbal cues) to manage learner behaviour. However, when the number of learners exceeds the available space, the teacher's ability to mediate becomes compromised.

According to Engeström (2001), contradictions within an activity system can lead to inefficiency. In this study, the contradiction lies between the teacher's goal to teach and the inability to maintain discipline due to overcrowding. This results in teachers spending more time on discipline than on teaching. This aligns with the findings of Ayub et al., (2018), who emphasized that the high number of learners in classrooms often results in difficulties maintaining discipline, leading to disruptions that hinder the teaching process. Vygotsky (1987) posits that effective learning occurs in environments where social interaction is properly mediated; however, overcrowding hinders this mediation, resulting in a less effective learning environment.

4.5.2.2 Limited time for marking

The challenges of overcrowding also manifest in limited time for marking, which directly affects the quality of feedback that teachers can provide to learners. Teachers in this study expressed frustration over their inability to check and mark learners' work properly, which affects both teaching quality and learners' academic progress. Teachers are expected to use tools (Qureshi, 2021) (e.g., textbooks, learner's workbooks) to facilitate learning and provide feedback. However, when the number of learners increases, the effectiveness of these tools is diminished, as teachers cannot attend to each learner's needs or provide adequate feedback.

The participants noted that learners often took advantage of this situation, such as by pretending to submit their books, knowing that the teacher's attention was divided. From a

CHAT perspective, this behaviour can be seen as a form of contradiction between the teacher's intent to monitor and provide feedback (subject) and the learners' ability to exploit gaps in the system (tools) (Roth & Lee, 2007). The breakdown in the teacher-learner interaction exacerbates the challenge of providing meaningful feedback, further affecting learning outcomes. This is echoed in literature, where Muthusamy (2015) argues that overcrowded classrooms significantly limit a teacher's ability to assess and provide personalized feedback to learners. The limited ability to assess individual learner progress diminishes the potential for individualized learning, which is a key element of effective teaching.

4.5.2.3 Time management

Time management emerged as another critical factor impacting the teaching and learning process. Teachers in overcrowded classrooms face the challenge of ensuring that learners have the necessary materials (e.g., textbooks and pencils) and that all learners are actively engaged in the lesson. Vygotsky (1987) emphasized that time, like space, is a critical tool in the learning environment. From a CHAT perspective, time is a mediating tool in the activity system (Foot, 2014). When this tool is misused or lost due to inefficiency, the learning process suffers. In line with Biyela's (2019) findings, Marais (2016) also highlights that time management is one of the greatest challenges faced by teachers in overcrowded classrooms. With teachers spending more time on administrative tasks (such as distributing textbooks) and discipline management, less time is available for the actual teaching.

4.5.2.4 Limited resources

The study also highlighted the limited availability of resources, such as textbooks and desks, in overcrowded classrooms. Learners are forced to share resources, leading to conflicts and disruptions in the classroom. Engeström (2001) discusses how contradictions in resources can cause breakdowns in the activity system. In the context of overcrowding, the limited availability of resources creates tensions between the teacher's goal of delivering the lesson and the learners' ability to access the tools they need to engage with the lesson (Khumalo & Mji, 2014). The sharing of desks and textbooks introduces conflicts, reducing the effectiveness of teaching and further contributing to the chaos in overcrowded classrooms.

This challenge is mirrored in research conducted by Marais (2016), who found that resource limitations in overcrowded classrooms significantly hinder teaching and learning. The lack of resources forces teachers to adopt strategies to deal with resource-related conflicts, such

as asking other learners to borrow those without resources, thereby taking time away from teaching.

4.5.2.5 Negative impact on learners' academic performance

The result of these challenges – difficulties in maintaining discipline, limited time for marking, ineffective time management, and lack of resources – leads to a negative impact on learners' academic performance. Teachers expressed concern that overcrowding made it difficult to identify learners who were struggling academically. According to Vygotsky (1987), learning is a process of internalizing knowledge through social interaction and mediation. According to CHAT, the activity system becomes increasingly disordered as contradictions in the system increase (Qureshi, 2021). The learners, unable to receive the necessary support, may progress to higher grades without understanding the material taught in lower grades, which puts their academic progress at risk.

West & Meier (2020) and Biyela (2019) highlight that overcrowding negatively impacts academic performance due to disrupted learning environments and teachers' inability to attend to individual learner's needs. The lack of individualised teaching/feedback results in learners failing to grasp the required knowledge, which hinders their academic achievement.

4.5.3 Ineffective Disciplinary Measures

Classroom overcrowding poses significant challenges for maintaining discipline and effective teaching. In this study, teachers reported that overcrowding exacerbates the challenges of maintaining discipline in the classroom. This finding aligns with research by Temitayo et al., (2013), who emphasized that overcrowded classrooms contribute to the inefficacy of disciplinary strategies. Many participants expressed that, in the context of classroom overcrowding, even alternative disciplinary measures are ineffective. Teachers in overcrowded classrooms are unable to provide the individualized attention necessary to manage and address disruptive behaviour effectively (Marais, 2016). This inability to identify individuals misbehaving or respond promptly to disruptions possess a major challenge. West & Meier (2020) also found that teachers in overcrowded classrooms struggle to identify and address disruptions promptly, leading to further misbehaviour in classrooms. Overcrowded classrooms creates a situation where learners are more likely to take advantage of the chaos, further diminishing the authority of the teacher.

To understand the challenges associated with discipline in overcrowded classrooms, it is essential to apply CHAT, which provides a framework for analysing human practices in context (Roth & Lee, 2007). CHAT emphasizes the interaction between individuals, their activities, and the environment in which these activities occur (Sannino & Engeström, 2018). In the context of overcrowded classrooms, the teachers (subjects) are tasked with managing classroom behaviour (object), using a variety of disciplinary measures (tools), while interacting with learners (community), all within the school setting. The contradiction arises in the imbalance between the tools (disciplinary strategies) available and the complex demands of the environment (overcrowded classrooms). This tension leads to ineffective practices and resorting to "illegal" disciplinary methods, as described by the participants.

The lack of appropriate disciplinary tools in overcrowded classroom becomes a source of frustration for teachers (Marais, 2016). The tools are seen as inadequate for achieving the desired outcome of discipline. This gap between the tools available and the expectations placed on teachers illustrates the core contradiction in the activity system.

4.5.4 Teacher Well-being and Demotivation

Classroom overcrowding not only affects the teaching and learning process but also has significant consequences on teacher well-being. Ahmad et al., (2018) state that teachers suffer from emotional exhaustion and frustration, which has a detrimental impact on their motivation to teach and general well-being. The emotional and physical strain that teachers experience in overcrowded classrooms leads to decreased motivation and a loss of passion for teaching. These findings align with existing literature, which highlights the negative impact of overcrowded classrooms on teacher morale, emotional exhaustion, and job satisfaction (Muthusamy, 2015; Biyela, 2019).

The emotional and physical exhaustion described by teachers is a key indicator of demotivation, with teachers beginning to see their work more as a duty or obligation rather than a calling. According to Marais (2016), when teachers are overwhelmed by administrative burdens and classroom management challenges, their capacity for passion-driven teaching diminishes, which affects their overall job satisfaction.

According to CHAT, teaching can be seen as a complex activity system (Goodnough, 2018) in which the teacher (subject) interacts with learners through various mediating tools, such as teaching materials, classroom management strategies, and curriculum guidelines. The

disruption caused by overcrowding acts as a mediating factor (Foot, 2014) that disturbs the balance of this system, leading to stress, demotivation, and burnout.

According to Engeström (2001), when the tools available to the teacher (e.g., space, support, resources) are insufficient or ineffective, the activity system becomes destabilized. In the case of overcrowded classrooms, teachers are unable to effectively use their tools, such as disciplinary strategies and individualized support, to manage learners or deliver quality education. This leads to increased frustration, a decline in morale, and emotional exhaustion. Furthermore, the disruption of the activity system has consequences not only for teachers but also for learners, as the quality of teaching and learning diminishes.

4.5.5 Abolition of Corporal Punishment

The abolition of corporal punishment in South African schools, which was formalized in 1996 through the South African Schools Act, has been a controversial topic among teachers, particularly in overcrowded classrooms. Teachers' perceptions of corporal punishment and its impact on classroom management are shaped by various factors, including their experiences with alternative disciplinary measures and the cultural context of discipline in schools, as stated by Mayisela (2021).

4.5.5.1 Mixed views on the effectiveness of corporal punishment

As outlined in the findings, teachers hold mixed opinions about the abolition of corporal punishment. Some teachers express support for its abolition, seeing corporal punishment as harmful to learners' emotional well-being and development. For example, one teacher emphasized the psychological harm that corporal punishment can cause to learners. This view aligns with the broader educational philosophy that advocates for a supportive, non-violent approach to discipline, where education focuses on nurturing rather than punishment (Herman et al., 2022). These teachers argue that corporal punishment fosters an environment of fear and aggression, which may ultimately lead to a future generation of adults who internalize anger and violence.

However, a significant portion of teachers, particularly those who have experienced corporal punishment during their schooling years, support its reinstating. This may stem from the internalisation of corporal punishment as a cultural tool (Armijo et al., 2022). This can be explained using the teachers' inter-psychological and intra-psychological planes (Vygotsky, 1987). The majority of the teachers have experienced and utilised corporal punishment in their

classrooms (interpersonal plane), and it has yielded positive results such as discipline in the classroom, according to the teachers. This has influenced how the teachers perceive (intra-psychological) corporal punishment.

Additionally, teachers who express support for the reinstating of corporal punishment also draw from their historical and cultural experiences (Mayisela, 2021), where strict discipline was normalized and perceived as effective. According to CHAT, the historical dimension is important because it influences how individuals interpret current practices (Vygotsky, 1987). The apartheid era (history of South Africa) left violent psyche in the broader communities. Communities were exposed to domestic violence, corporal punishment in schools and at home, gender-based violence and bullying.

These historical contexts shape their current beliefs about discipline and their sense of what is "necessary" for classroom management. The school in which the data was collected from used corporal punishment before it's abolition, therefore, the majority of the teachers have internalised the effectiveness of corporal punishment as it was a "norm" and they still prefer the use of corporal punishment as opposed to the alternative measures, as they believe its effective in maintaining behaviour. This is the same with the teachers who are against the reinstating of corporal punishment.

4.5.6 Learner Behaviour and Mental Health

Classroom overcrowding has a profound effect on learners' behaviour, emotional health, and overall well-being. In this study, teachers highlighted that overcrowded classrooms often lead to increased misbehaviour, aggression, and emotional distress among learners, which can exacerbate existing challenges in the classroom environment.

4.5.6.1 Increased misbehaviour and aggression

According to CHAT, human behaviour is shaped by interactions within an activity system (Foot, 2014), which includes the individual (learner), the tools (such as classroom resources), the rules (educational policies), the community (teachers, peers, and parents), and the division of labour (the roles and responsibilities of each participant in the classroom). In the context of overcrowded classrooms, the learners' aggressive behaviour can be viewed as an outcome of tensions and contradictions within the activity system. Historical factors (Mayisela,

2017), such as the learners' home environment and their prior experiences with violence, shape their behaviours. These learners may come with external conflicts into the classroom, where limited resources and overcrowding act as additional stressors.

As Vygotsky (1987) suggests, the social context in which learning occurs is essential to understanding behaviour. In overcrowded classrooms, the limited effective, positive interactions between teachers and learners inhibits the development of healthy social skills and coping mechanisms (Daniels, 2016). Instead, learners may adopt aggressive behaviours to gain attention, assert dominance, or deal with feelings of inadequacy and frustration. Research has shown that effective classroom management can decrease disruptive and aggressive behaviour (Herman et al., 2022).

4.5.6.2 Increased bullying and decrease in school attendance

CHAT also emphasizes the role of the tools and rules in shaping behaviour (Foot, 2014). In this study, the tools are the disciplinary measures available to teachers, which in overcrowded classrooms may be insufficient to address misbehaviour effectively. The results of this study revealed a concerning increase in bullying within overcrowded classrooms. Teachers observed that learners who were either victims or perpetrators of bullying became trapped in a cycle of aggression and retaliation. This cycle of bullying and retaliation within the classroom can be seen as a systemic issue within the activity system. In extreme cases, bullying becomes a trigger for learners to avoid school altogether, as they fear returning to an environment where they feel unsafe (Minaz et al., 2025).

The absence of effective discipline or emotional support systems allows the bullying culture to flourish, which, in turn, affects learners' mental health and academic performance. Studies have shown that bullying is closely linked to increased anxiety, depression, and social withdrawal among learners (Espelage & Swearer, 2003). In the case of overcrowded classrooms, these issues are intensified as learners are less likely to seek help or confide in teachers due to knowing that the bullies will not receive punishment that satisfies them.

4.5.7 Comparison to COVID-19 Era

The comparison of overcrowded classrooms with the COVID-19 era highlights a significant contrast in teaching and learning environments. Teachers reported that the reduced class sizes during COVID-19 brought noticeable improvements in both learner behaviour and

overall teaching conditions. These observations are vital for understanding the ongoing challenges faced in overcrowded classrooms and the potential benefits of smaller class sizes, both in terms of discipline and teaching effectiveness.

4.5.7.1 Better management of learner behaviour

The positive impact of smaller class sizes on learner behaviour is emphasised by teachers after experiencing improved discipline during the COVID-19 period. One teacher noted that with fewer learners in the classroom, it was easier to identify disruptive learners, which naturally limited misbehaviour. The reduced number of learners created a more controlled and quieter environment, which contrasts sharply with the chaotic environment reported in overcrowded classrooms.

This observation aligns with CHAT, which posits that the structure and composition of a classroom (the tools and rules) can significantly shape learner behaviour (Daniels, 2016). In small sized classrooms, learners are better behaved, which reduces disruptions in the classroom. This was echoed by a study conducted by West & Meier (2020) were they stated that small sized classes promote better management of learners with fewer disciplinary issues. In contrast, in overcrowded classrooms, learners misbehave without immediate identification or consequence, making it difficult for teachers to maintain control and discipline.

4.5.7.2 Reduced class size and improved teaching and learning environment

The COVID-19 period not only improved classroom discipline but also enhanced the quality of teaching and learning. One of the major benefits of smaller class sizes during this period was the ability of teachers to attend to learners individually, a luxury that overcrowded classrooms make difficult to achieve. This individualized attention is crucial in ensuring that learners grasp the material taught, which is more difficult to manage in overcrowded classrooms. CHAT highlights the role of mediation through tools (Roth & Lee, 2007), and in this case, smaller class sizes served as a tool that allowed teachers to effectively mediate learning, ensuring that each learner received individualized attention. This aligns with Vygotsky’s notion that learning is a socially mediated process, where the teacher's interaction with learners is crucial for cognitive development (Daniels, 2016). However, in overcrowded classrooms, this mediation becomes constrained due to the high number of learners requiring attention.

Moreover, the small number of learners allowed for better resource distribution, such as desks and textbooks. According to CHAT, contradictions arise when the tools (desks, books, classroom space) do not align with the objective of effective learning (Qureshi, 2021). Overcrowding creates a contradiction between available resources and learners' needs, leading to conflict among the learners. During COVID-19, this contradiction was temporarily resolved as smaller class sizes meant that resources were more evenly distributed, contributing to a more structured and effective learning environment. This was corroborated by Makielski (2018) who reported the challenges faced by teachers in overcrowded classroom due to insufficient resources.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter presented the findings of the research report which aimed at understanding teachers' perceptions on classroom overcrowding, disciplinary challenges and the inclination to the use of corporal punishment. From the two focus groups that were conducted, this study discovered seven themes which include; challenges of classroom overcrowding, impact on teaching and learning, ineffective disciplinary measures, teacher well-being and demotivation, abolition of corporal punishment, leaner behaviour and mental health, and comparison to COVID-19 era. From the findings, a discussion integrating relevant literature and the theoretical framework, CHAT, followed.

Chapter Five: Summary and Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

This study aimed to explore teachers' perceptions of the relationship between classroom overcrowding, disciplinary challenges, and the inclination to the use of corporal punishment in primary schools. It adopted CHAT as a theoretical lens. This chapter will focus on the summary, limitations, recommendations and the conclusion of the study.

5.2 Summary of the Study

The study's primary question was: What are the teachers' perceptions on the relationship between classroom overcrowding, learner discipline and the inclination to the use of corporal punishment? CHAT was adopted as a theoretical framework to understand the teachers' perceptions on classroom overcrowding, disciplinary challenges and the inclination to the use of corporal punishment. This study adopted a qualitative constructivism case study research design as I looked at knowledge from the teachers on classroom overcrowding, disciplinary challenges and the inclination to the use of corporal punishment through their experiences in the classroom.

Purposive sampling was used to purposively choose a Quintile 2 primary school in Mpumalanga that is currently experiencing classroom overcrowding and previously used corporal punishment as a disciplinary measure before it was abolished. To select participants, convenience sampling was adopted where participants were chosen according to their availability (Bless et al., 2013). Participants were teachers who are teaching in an overcrowded classroom and experiencing disciplinary challenges in the classroom. The participants' age range were between 20-29 to 50-59 and their teaching experience ranged from 3 to 35 years. This allowed me as a researcher to get experiences from teachers who have more experience with classroom overcrowding and have used corporal punishment before it was abolished and obtain experiences from teachers who are new to teaching in an overcrowded classroom and have not used corporal punishment.

The exclusion criteria for this study were private schools, secondary schools and primary schools that are not experiencing classroom overcrowding. Data was collected through the use of biographical questionnaire (Appendix D) and focus groups. Thematic analysis was used to generate themes from the data collected.

The research findings reflected the challenges that teachers face in overcrowded classrooms. As this study adopted CHAT as a theoretical lens, it focused on teachers as subjects and focused on their perception on classroom overcrowding, disciplinary challenges and the inclination to the use of corporal punishment. Teachers expressed the challenges they face in overcrowded classrooms which negatively impact the teaching and learning process. From their experiences, it was quite evident that there is a conflict between following rules and maintaining discipline in the classroom. Since the abolition of corporal punishment, teachers were provided with alternative disciplinary measures that they can use in the classroom to maintain discipline, however, teachers mentioned that the suggested disciplinary measures are not effective in overcrowded classrooms.

5.3 Implications of the Study

The findings of the study emphasize how urgent alterations to legislation and practical solutions are needed to address the challenges caused by overcrowding in classrooms. Since more learner misbehaviour and disruptions in the classroom are caused by overcrowding, the Department of Basic Education should give priority to measures that may mitigate these problems.

One significant implication is the necessity of reconsidering classroom size guidelines to ensure learners receive sufficient assistance and attention from teachers. Establishing realisable maximum class sizes should be the main goal of policies, especially in schools with limited resources like those in Quintile 2. Infrastructure improvements like adding more classrooms and employing more teachers could significantly lessen overcrowding and improve the learning environment as a whole.

Another crucial aspect is the effectiveness of disciplinary measures. The study revealed that the alternative disciplinary measures provided after the abolition of corporal punishment are not effective in overcrowded classrooms. This underlines the need for developing and implementing context-specific disciplinary strategies that align with the realities of overcrowded classrooms. These measures should include classroom management training for teachers, and school-wide behaviour policies that are both practical and enforceable in overcrowded classrooms. Moreover, the provision of sufficient resources such as textbooks and desks could contribute towards mitigating learner misbehaviour as the sharing of resources often leads to learner misbehaviour and challenges of maintaining discipline in overcrowded classrooms.

Furthermore, because of the psychological and professional stress that teachers endure as a result of overcrowding and disciplinary issues, policymakers should think about providing more resources, like mentorship programs, school psychologists, and teacher assistants, to help teachers cope with these challenges.

These issues must be resolved in order to improve educational standards, create a supportive learning environment, and fostering positive learner behaviour. Without intentional intervention, overcrowded classrooms will keep hindering learning outcomes and teaching effectiveness, which will eventually affect the broader educational system.

5.4 Limitations of the Study

Study limitations are drawbacks in a research design that could affect the study's findings and conclusions (Ross & Zaidi, 2019). This study was limited to one primary school in Mpumalanga and had a small sample size consisting of thirteen participants, seven participants from the foundation phase and six participants from the intersen phase. The inclusion of a second school could have improved the trustworthiness of the data collected. However, time constraints and funding posed a limitation on this study, as data collection needed to be completed before the end of the fourth term.

In addition, the study did not analyse how the perceptions of the teachers who are between 50-60 of age, who were trained and educated during the apartheid era when corporal punishment was accepted differed from the perceptions of younger teachers who were trained and educated post-apartheid era when corporal punishment was abolished. This analysis could have added more depth in understanding how the teachers' perceptions on corporal punishment was influenced by their era of training.

5.5 Recommendations

Based on the above-mentioned limitation, it is recommended that future researchers should consider conducting data from more than one school to obtain other teachers' experiences with classroom overcrowding and disciplinary challenges.

This study focused on teachers' perceptions on classroom overcrowding, disciplinary challenges and the inclination to the use of corporal punishment. It could be beneficial to literature for future researchers to conduct a study focusing on the learners' perceptions on classroom overcrowding. This could be beneficial for the DBE to see how both teachers and learners experience classroom overcrowding and how it affects them.

Based on the findings, it is recommended that teachers be trained on the suggested disciplinary measures in an environment that is similar to the one they teach in, as it was mentioned by one of the participants that training on alternative disciplinary measures usually take place in a setting that is different to the one they teach in.

Additionally, it is recommended that the DoE builds more schools to accommodate the growing population and provide mobile classrooms to schools experiencing overcrowding. This will lead to the employment of more teachers. The provision of mobile classrooms and the employment of more teachers will reduce the high teacher-learner ratio in schools experiencing overcrowding.

Furthermore, to address the challenge of insufficient teaching-learning materials, it is recommended that the DoE provides more textbooks and desks and investigate the implementation of electronic gadgets in schools to mitigate the challenges of insufficient learning resources.

5.6 Conclusion

This study aimed to explore teachers' perceptions of the relationship between classroom overcrowding, disciplinary challenges, and teachers' inclination to the use of corporal punishment in a primary school. The data was collected which aimed to address the primary research question: What are the teachers' perceptions on the relationship between classroom overcrowding, learner discipline and the inclination to use of corporal punishment?, and four secondary research questions which were: What are teachers' perceptions of classroom overcrowding? What are teachers' perceptions of learner discipline in overcrowded classrooms? What disciplinary strategies are used by teachers in overcrowded classrooms? What are teachers' inclinations to use corporal punishment in overcrowded classrooms?

From the findings of the study, it can be concluded that classroom overcrowding poses significant challenges for both the teachers and the learners. Due to classroom overcrowding, there are limited resources available for learners, which leads to disruptions in the classroom as learners fight for the resources. It was also reported that it is challenging for teachers to identify learners who have learning barriers as overcrowding limits their movement in the classroom. Furthermore, the results revealed that it is difficult for teachers to maintain discipline in the classroom as the disciplinary measures used are deemed ineffective in

overcrowded classrooms. This has led to the majority teachers expressing a desire that the government brings back corporal punishment.

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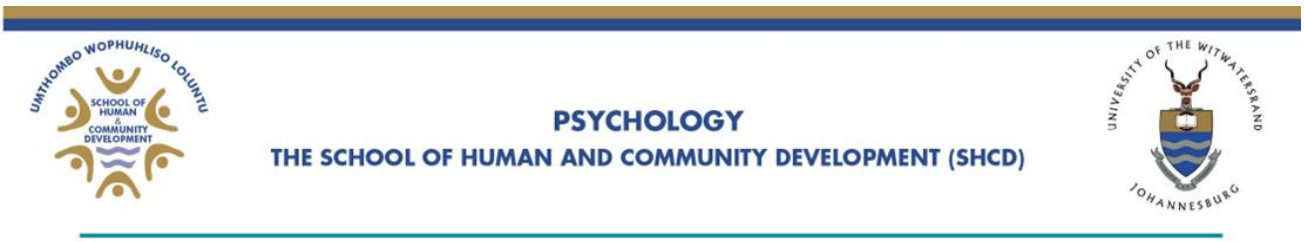
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Appendices

Appendix A: Participant Information Focus Group



Participant Information Sheet (PIS)

04/04/2023

Dear Sir/Madam

My name is Lindi Skhosana. I am a Masters student in the Psychology Department at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. My supervisor is Dr Simangele Mayisela. I am conducting a research study about teachers' perceptions on classroom overcrowding. The study title is Teachers' Perceptions on Classroom Overcrowding, Disciplinary Challenges, and the Inclination to the use of Corporal Punishment: A Cultural Historical Activity perspective.

I am inviting you to take part in a focus group. If you decide to take part, your participation in this research study will last about 45-60 minutes. This activity will compose of a single focus group interview which will take place at your school at a time convenient to the participants.

With your permission, I would like to audio record the focus group. This data will be stored safely in my laptop, which is password protected, for 5 years. Only the researcher, Lindi Sithembile Skhosana, will have access to the data. During the research activity, I will need to ask for some personal information about you, including answers to a biographical questionnaire.

The focus group interview is interactive, therefore, this research activity can neither be confidential nor anonymous. However, as participants in the focus group, you will be encouraged to keep confidentiality by signing a confidentiality agreement. Your personal identities will not be divulged in the research report. When sharing the results of my research, I will not include any of your personal identifiers. With your permission, other researchers may use the data collected from this research study, but your personal information will not be used or passed on. This research may also be published in a journal article or presented at a conference. If this does occur, your identity once again will be completely protected, your name and any identifying information, including the name of your school will not be mentioned anywhere, included in the research report.

If you decide to take part in the research study, it should be because you want to volunteer. You do not have to take part. You can stop being in the study at any time. You do not have to answer any questions if you do not want to. You will not get any direct benefits if you choose to join the research study. You will not lose any services, benefits, or rights you would normally have if you decide not to join. Taking part in the research study will not cost you anything. You will not be paid for being in this research study. Furthermore, the researcher has ethical obligation to report physical punishment used on learners to the principal.

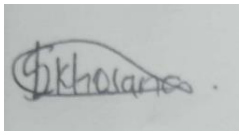
The risks for this research study are no more than what happens in everyday life, or some of the questions asked may make you feel sad or upset. If this happens, I will stop the focus group interview and continue another time. If you need some support or counselling services following the focus group interview, these are available free of charge at Lifeline and the contact details for the counselling services are 011 715 2000, info@lifeline.org.za.

This research study will be written as a research report. If you would like to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research study, feel free to contact me at the details listed below. If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical procedures of this research study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za.

Yours sincerely,

Lindi Sithembile Skhosana



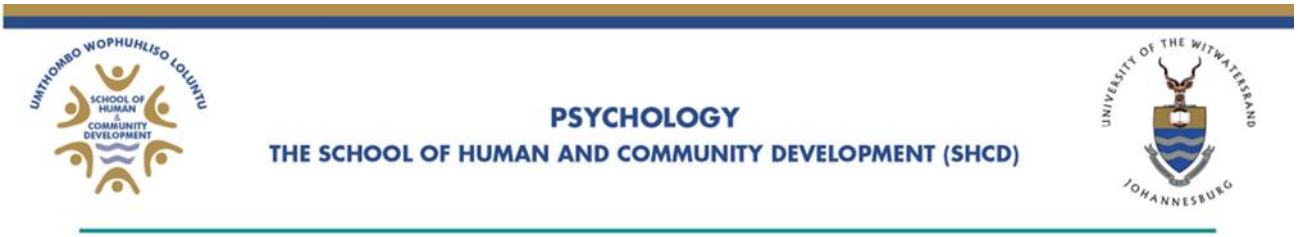
Researcher:

Lindi Skhosana, email address: 1432439@students.wits.ac.za, Cell No: 076 255 8699

Supervisor:

Dr Simangele Mayisela, email address: Simangele.mayisela@wits.ac.za, Contact No: 012 717 4529

Appendix B: Consent Form



Consent Form

Title of Research project: Teachers' Perceptions on Classroom Overcrowding, Disciplinary Challenges, and the inclination to the use of Corporal Punishment: A Cultural Historical Activity Perspective.

Name of researcher: Lindi Skhosana

I, ……., agree to participate in this research project.

I agree to the following:

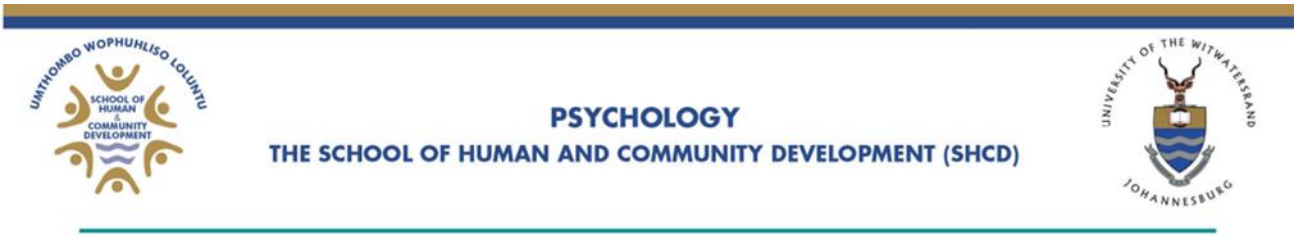
(Please circle the relevant options below)

The research study was explained to me. I understand what this study is about.	YES	NO
I consent to take part in the focus group	YES	NO
I agree that the focus group may be audio recorded.	YES	NO
I agree not to share any information shared by other participants in the focus group	YES	NO
I agree that direct quotations from the focus group may be used by the researcher in their research report.	YES	NO
I agree that my participation will remain anonymous (my name will not be used by the researcher in their research report).	YES	NO

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Researcher: _____ Date: _____

Appendix C: Confidentiality Agreement



Confidentiality Agreement

Title of research project: Teachers' Perceptions on Classroom Overcrowding, Disciplinary Challenges, and the Inclination to the use of Corporal Punishment: A Cultural Historical Activity Perspective

Researcher: Lindi Skhosana

As a member of the focus group, I understand that I may have access to confidential information about the research study and other participants in the group. By signing this statement, I am indicating my understanding of my responsibility to maintain confidentiality and agree to the following:

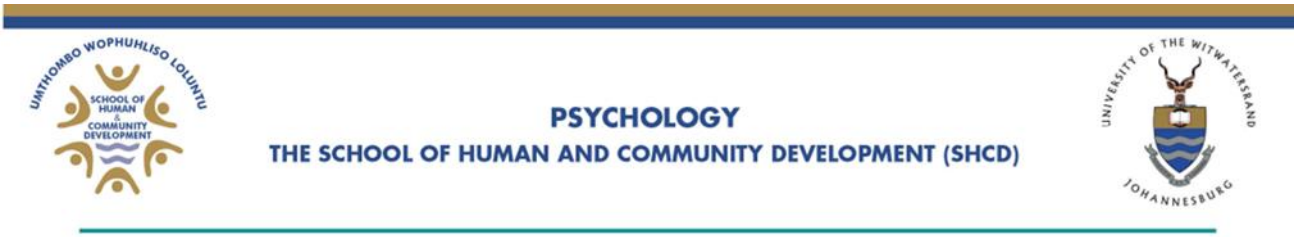
1. I understand that names and any other personal information about the research study and other participants in the group are completely confidential.
2. I agree not to divulge, publish, or otherwise make known to unauthorised persons or to the public any information obtained during this research project that could identify the persons who participated in the study.
3. I understand that all information about the study or participants obtained or accessed by me as a member of the focus group is confidential. I agree not to divulge or otherwise make known to unauthorised persons any of this information.
4. I agree to notify the researcher immediately should I become aware of an actual breach of confidentiality or a situation which could potentially result in a breach, whether this be on my part or the part of another person.

_____ _____ _____

Signature of participant **Date** **Printed name**

_____	_____	_____
Signature of researcher	**Date**	**Printed name**

Appendix D: Biographical Questionnaire



Biographical Questionnaire

Title of the study: Teachers' perceptions on classroom overcrowding, disciplinary challenges, and the inclination to the use of corporal punishment: A cultural historical activity perspective

Please tick the appropriate option below

1. Teaching experience (number of years):

   _____

2. Age range:
   20-29
   30-39
   40-49
   50-59
   60-65
3. Qualifications:
   Certificate
   Diploma
   Degree
   Honours
   Masters
   Doctorate
4. Current position:
   Teacher
   HOD

Deputy principal

Principal

5. Which grade/s are you teaching?

_____

6. How many learners do you have in each classroom?

_____

Appendix E: Focus Group Interview Schedule

1. What are your experiences of classroom overcrowding?
2. What are your perceptions on classroom overcrowding?
3. What are the effects of classroom overcrowding on learner behaviour?
4. How is the teaching-learning process affected by classroom overcrowding?
5. Were you trained on teaching overcrowded classrooms?
6. Is the number of learners in a classroom contributing to learner misbehaviour?
7. Referencing from the Covid-19 social distancing in the classroom, what is the average number of learners did you have in the classroom?
8. How was the learner's behaviour during the Covid-19 period?
9. What do you think made learner behaviour to be in that manner during that period?
10. What are your views on the abolition of corporal punishment?
11. What disciplinary measures, besides corporal punishment, do you use in the classroom?
12. Did you receive training on the alternatives of corporal punishment?
13. What are your experiences on teaching in an overcrowded classroom?
14. What are your experiences on disciplining learners in an overcrowded classroom?
15. How do you make your learners aware of your disciplinary methods?
16. Which disciplinary methods do you believe are most effective and why?
17. Besides disciplinary methods, which other methods do you think would lessen learner misbehaviour in an overcrowded classroom? Why do you think so?

Appendix F: Request Form

basic education
Department:
Basic Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

For admin. use Reference number:

REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE NATIONAL DEPARTMENT OF BASIC EDUCATION

---

1. **PARTICULARS OF THE RESEARCHER/S** (if there is more than one researcher involved, provide the details of the main researcher)

1.1. Personal details	
Title (Prof/Dr/Mr/Mrs/Ms):	Ms
Surname and initials:	Skhosana
First name/s:	Lindi Sithembile
SA ID number:	980406 1177 08 1
Work permit number (If not SA citizen):	

1.2. Contact details	
Tel home:	N/A
Tel work:	N/A
Cell:	076 255 8699
Email address:	Sithembileskhosana06@gmail.com
Home address:	3242 Block 21 Moloto South
Postal code:	1022
Postal address:	PO Box 214 Kwamhlanga
Postal code:	1022

2.1. Affiliated organisation	
Email address (head/research promoter):	

2. PARTICULARS OF AFFILIATED ORGANISATION (if applicable)

3. STUDENT AND POSTGRADUATE ENTROLMENT PARTICULARS (if applicable)

3.1. Enrolment particulars	
Name of institution:	The University of the Witwatersrand
Degree/qualification:	Med (Educational Psychology)
Faculty and discipline/area of study:	Humanities
Name of supervisor/promoter:	Dr Simangele Mayisela
Student number:	1432439

4. PURPOSE AND DETAILS OF PROPOSED RESEARCH

4.1. Purpose of the research (please indicate by placing a cross where appropriate)	
Undergraduate study – Self	
Postgraduate study – Self	x
Private company/agency – Commissioned by National Government Department	
Private research by independent researcher	
Non-government organisation	
Department of Basic Education	
Commissions and committees	
Independent research agencies	
Statutory research agencies	
Higher education institutions only	
Other (specify)	

4.2. Details of proposed research
Full title of research project/thesis/dissertation

Teachers' Perceptions on Classroom Overcrowding, Disciplinary Challenges, and the Inclination to the use of Corporal Punishment: A Cultural Historical Activity Perspective
Brief description of proposed research
This study aims to explore teachers' perceptions of the relationship between classroom overcrowding, disciplinary challenges, and the inclination to the use of corporal punishment in primary schools in the Mpumalanga Province.
Value of the research to the National Department of Basic Education: The study aims to inform the Department of Basic Education about the challenges faced by the teachers in overcrowded classrooms in the Mpumalanga Province.
4.2. Details of proposed research
In this study, I will approach a school that is experiencing classroom overcrowding and where corporal punishment was previously used, before it was abolished in 1996. I will conduct two focus groups with teachers from the foundation and the intersen phases. Data will be collected using structured and semi structured questions and analysed using thematic analysis.

Envisaged date of completion of research at the DBE (day/month/year):	29/09/2023
Envisaged date of submission of research report and research summary to DBE (Month/Year):	03/2024

5. REQUEST OF INTERVIEWS WITH DBE OFFICIALS

5.1. DBE official details	
Name of official/s requested to interview*:	
Unit/division:	Primary schools
Area of interest of research (if you do not know the name of a particular DBE official/s you would like to interview):	I am interested in conducting my research in a primary school in the Nkangala district.

 If you do not know the name of the official in the DBE that you would like to interview, specify the unit or area of interest for your research, and the RCME Directorate will advise accordingly.

5.2. Key questions for the DBE official (also attach a draft questionnaire)
Questionnaire attached.

6. DATA REQUEST

6.1. Request for datasets available to the DBE (please indicate by placing a cross where appropriate)	
Education Management Information System ("EMIS")	
Grade 12 examination results	
Former Systematic Evaluations	
Annual National Assessments ("ANA")	
National Education Infrastructure Management System ("NEIMS")	
Personnel Salary System ("PERSAL")	
6.1. Request for datasets available to the DBE (please indicate by placing a cross where appropriate)	
Learner Unit Record Information and Tracking System ("LURITS")	
Other (specify)	

6.2. Data should be disaggregated by: (please indicate by placing a cross where appropriate)	
Gender	
Race	
Age group	
Geography (urban/rural)	
Province	
Time period (specify)	
Other (specify)	

6.3. Request for supporting letter for access to the options below (please indicate by placing a cross where appropriate)	
Provincial Department of Education	
National Government Departments (specify)	
Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study ("TIMSS")	
Progress in International Reading Literacy Study ("PIRLS")	
The Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality ("SACMEQ")	
Data from the World Bank	
Data from the HSRC	
Other (specify)	

7. ATTACTHMENTS (please indicate which of the following attachments are accompanying this form)

7.1 Attachments (please indicate by placing a cross where appropriate)	
Approved research proposal	
Draft questionnaire for DBE official/s to be interviewed/survey for DBE officials to complete	x
7.1 Attachments (please indicate by placing a cross where appropriate)	
Ethics clearance for study	
A letter from your supervisor confirming registration of your course (university students)	
Other (specify)	

8. COMMENTS

If you have any additional comments/concerns, please specify them in the box below.

This form, along with the relevant documentation should be emailed to research@dbe.gov.za. All queries pertaining to the status of the research request can be directed to Dr J Kotzé at kotze.J@dbe.gov.za or Ms L Malemela at Malemela.l@dbe.gov.za

Appendix G: Permission from the Mpumalanga Department of Education



education

MPUMALANGA PROVINCE
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Ikhamanga Building, Government Boulevard, Riverside Park, Mpumalanga Province
Private Bag X11341, Mbombela, 1200.
Tel: 013 766 5552/5115, Toll Free Line: 0800 203 116

Litiko le Temfundvo, Umnyango we Fundo Departement van Onderwys Ndzawvlo ya Dyondzo

---

Enq: Lindi Sithembile Skhosana

University of the Witwatersrand
Tel: 012 717 4529
Email: Simangele.mayisela@wits.ac.za

RE: "Teachers' perceptions on classroom overcrowding, disciplinary challenges, and the inclination to the of corporal punishment: A cultural historical activity perspective".

Your application to conduct research study was received and is therefore acknowledged. The title of your research project reads: "Teachers' perceptions on classroom overcrowding, disciplinary challenges, and the inclination to the use of corporal punishment: A cultural historical activity perspective".

I trust that the aims and the objectives of the study will benefit the whole department especially the beneficiaries. Your request is approved subject to you observing the provisions of the departmental research policy which is available in the department website. You are requested to adhere to your university's research ethics as spelt out in your research ethics.

In terms of the research policy, data or any research activity can be conducted after school hours as per appointment with affected participants and COVID -19 regulations to observed. You are also requested to share your findings with the relevant sections of the department so that we may consider implementing your findings if that will be in the best interest of the department. To this effect, your final approved research report (both soft and hard copy) should

be submitted to the department so that your recommendations could be implemented. You may be required to prepare a presentation and present at the departments' annual research dialogue.

For more information kindly liaise with the department's research unit @ 013 766 5015/5124
Or c.maohanqa@mpuedu.qov.za
The department wishes you well in this important project and pledges to give you the necessary support you may need.

MRS LH MOYANE

10 / 07 / 2023
DATE

HEAD: E UCATION

MPUMALANGA
THE PLACE OF THE RISING SUN

Appendix H: Ethics Application Form

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

Ethics Application Form* for *Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC Non-Medical)
(SCHOOL ETHICS COMMITTEES: Revised January 2022)

Instructions

1. This form must be completed by Honours (4th year) and Masters by Coursework and Research Report students who require ethics clearance, or for ethics clearance for coursework activities as part of a taught degree. Note that staff non-degree applications, PhD and research Masters students must complete the online form.
2. Completed applications must be submitted to the relevant School Ethics Committee.
3. Applications may be submitted as hard or soft (electronic) copies, but the first page of the application must contain the signatures of the student and supervisor. Final revised versions must be in soft (electronic) copy as all documentation will be archived.
4. Incomplete or handwritten applications will **NOT** be considered, including where signatures are missing.
5. Necessary supporting documents (e.g. *Participant Information Sheet, Consent Form*, copies of instruments, permission letters, etc), must be provided.

SECTION A
Complete this checklist to show what documents you have submitted and that you agree with the conditions of application.

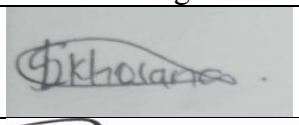
x	Completed ***Ethics Application Form***.
x	Copy of the ***Research proposal.***
x	Copy of proposed ***Research instruments*** (e.g. questionnaires/interview schedules).
x	***Participant Information Sheets*** (for each different sample group and/or instrument used).
x	***Consent forms*** (for each different sample group and/or instrument used).
x	***Relevant permission letters*** if required (from, e.g. company's HR department, National authorities such as Government departments, etc.) - consult the ***Guidance on the Use of Permission Letters*** document.

SIGNATURES (REQUIRED)
Declaration: We, the signatories, declare that all information on this form is correct and that we will strive to maintain the highest ethical standards in this research at all times, according to disciplinary and university expectations, recognising that ethical practice in research is always a continuing process.

I recognise that it is my responsibility to conduct my research in an ethical manner according to Guidelines of the University of the Witwatersrand, according to any laws and/or legal frameworks that may apply, and according to the norms and expectations of my discipline. In preparing this	[X] Yes	[ ] No

Application for Ethics Clearance form, I have consulted the ***Guidelines for Human Research Ethics Clearance Application/Non-Medical*** (available on this website https://www.wits.ac.za/research/researcher-support/research-ethics/ethics-committees/). In receiving ethics clearance, I agree to abide by the conditions of data collection as outlined in the *Guidelines* document.

By signing this form, the researcher and supervisor of this project undertake to ensure that any amendments to this project that are required by the Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical) and School Ethics Committees are made before the project commences.

	Date	Name	Signature*
Applicant	27 March 2023	Lindi Sithembile Skhosana	
Supervisor	27 March 2023	Dr Simangele Mayisela	

*electronic signatures are permitted but there are requirements governing this – please see *Guidelines for Applicants* document.

SECTION B

1. Summary of risk categories of this research project

1.1 Does this project involve human participants?
If NO, an ethics waiver may be appropriate. Please complete the Ethics Waiver application form
[X] Yes [ ] No

1.2 I have read and understood the risk categories table
Applicants must have read the table of risk level category definitions on the final page of this document. This table is also available on the University Ethics Committee webpage.
[X] Yes [ ] No

1.3 The applicant must tick the box for the category that best applies to this project:

Risk category	**Tick the appropriate box**
No risk	
Minimal risk	
Low risk	x
Medium risk	
High risk	

Medium or high-risk applications must be subm
the School Ethics Committee to the University

1.4 Are all of the participants selected as **experts**?
See the Guidelines for Applicants *document for the definition of an expert*
[ ] Yes [X] No

1.5 Will human participant research involve **vulnerable categories**?
[ ] Yes [X] No

If **YES** state which ones: N/A

If **YES**, how will **existing vulnerabilities** among research participants be addressed? N/A

1.6 Does this research expose either the participant(s) or the researcher(s) to any **potential risks or harm** to which they would not otherwise be exposed? [ ] Yes [x] No

If **YES**, how will **potential risks or harm** be addressed? Participants that will experience emotional distress due to their participation in the research will be directed to the free counselling offered by Lifeline.
See the Guidelines for Applicants *document for guidance on a distress protocol, if needed*

NB: Vulnerability is context specific. The term 'vulnerable categories' includes, among others, children under 18, orphans, prisoners, persons with cognitive or communication disorders, people who are traumatised or currently in traumatic situations. Vulnerable categories do not necessarily include poor or marginalised communities, older people, women, people with disabilities (unless it results in diminished capacity to give informed consent). Not all research involving 'vulnerable categories' is Medium or High-Risk research: here vulnerability must be considered in terms of the nature of the research and the context in which the research is carried out. Where necessary, include details of steps to be taken to facilitate data collection across language barriers (e.g. interpretation or translation).

2. Researcher's personal data

Your family name: Skhosana	Your first name: Lindi

[ ] Mr [x] Ms [ ] Other: _____
Title:

School:	Psychology – Human & Community Development
Your student number:	1432439
Your email:	1432439@students.wits.ac.za
Your Tel number:	076 255 8699
Name of supervisor(s):	Dr Simangele Mayisela
Your supervisor's Wits email:	Simangele.mayisela@wits.ac.za
Your supervisor's Wits Tel number:	011 717 4529

2.1 Is this application for a multi-student project (i.e. several students working on exactly the same topic under the same supervisor)? [ ] Yes [x] No

If **YES**: List the names and student numbers of additional students working on this project: N/A

3. Research project

3.1 Title of research project: Teachers' Perceptions on Classroom Overcrowding, Disciplinary Challenges, and the Inclination to the use of Corporal Punishment: A Cultural Historical Activity Perspective

3.2 Is this research for degree purposes?

[x] Yes [ ] No

If so, for what degree?

[ ] Honours [x] Masters (research report) [ ] Other (specify) _____

3.3 Has the proposal been **approved** by the relevant School or Faculty higher degrees committee or other unit?

[x] Yes [ ] No [ ] Submitted and pending

3.4 Will any **additional researchers** be covered by this ethics protocol (including translators/interpreters, research assistants, etc. but not including supervisors)?

[ ] Yes [x] No

If yes, please specify their names, affiliations and roles:

3.5 What are the **aims and objectives** of the research? (Please be specific) The aim of the study is to explore teacher perceptions of the relationship between classroom overcrowding, disciplinary challenges and the inclination to th use of corporal punishment in primary schools. The objective is to explore teachers' perceptions of classroo overcrowding, to identify disciplinary strategies used by teachers in overcrowded classrooms

3.6 Summary or abstract of the research (100 words maximum)

Give a brief outline of the research plan such that reviewers can understand what the study is about, who the participants are, and how you will collect the data

The purpose of this study is to explore teachers' perceptions of the relationship between classroom overcrowding, disciplinary challenges and the inclination to the use of corporal punishment. The study will be conducted in a qualitative approach with data being collected through focus groups. The data will be analysed using thematic analysis. The participants will be teachers from a school experiencing classroom overcrowding. The following ethical principles will be adhered to, anonymity, informed consent and voluntary participation, non-maleficence, and confidentiality.

3.7 Do you have any **financial or material interests or a relationship** associated with your research participants or with the organisations that you will be involved with in your research? (such as a familial relationship; lecturer/student relationship; collegial relationship; employer/employee relationship)

[ ] Yes [x] No

If yes, please explain how you will **manage any existing or potential conflicts of interest and potential coercion** during recruitment and data collection, if applicable:

4. Formal permission

4.1 Where will the research be carried out? (Please give a specific location and /or the names of specific organisations or institutions)

At a Primary School in the Mpumalanga Province. Permission request letter will be sent to the Mpumalanga Department of Basic Education.

4.2 Has appropriate **formal permission been obtained**, if required (e.g. employer, government department, land owner, etc.)?

x	Yes (attached)		Not required		Pending (must be supplied before ethics clearance can be given)

NB: Obtaining permission is often necessary when conducting research *within the premises* of a particular site such as an ethnographic study of the functioning of a supermarket or a school, or the way staff interact with client in a clinic or how members of a closed social media group interact/post on a specific topic. Permission is also required to use data from personal communication with participants or experts. Please note that any research done on Wits University campuses with employees or students of the University requires formal permission from the Registrar. Please read the detailed guidelines on Permission Letters from the Ethics website https://www.wits.ac.za/research/researcher-support/research-ethics/ethics-committees/

5. How will data on human research participants be collected (instruments, methods, procedures)? (tick all applicable boxes) (**NB:** All applicable instruments must be attached to the application)

x	Hard copy questionnaires or diagnostic tests, etc.
	Online instruments (e.g. questionnaires, surveys)
	Individual interviews (e.g. structured, semi-structured, etc.)
	Personal communication (e.g. email or informal conversation with experts)
x	Group interviews (e.g. seminar/discussion groups, focus groups, etc.)
	Ethnographic observation, participant observation, other informal descriptive, and/or interactive methods (you **must explain** the ethnographic methods in the box below)
	Autoethnography
	Community-based methods or techniques such as drama workshops, community theatre, training workshops, participant rural appraisal, rapid rural appraisal, etc. (you **must explain** in the box below)
	Research on/in therapeutic or counselling contexts
	Putting on your own exhibition / public performance
	Observation of public performances, and/or public behaviour observation
	Photography
	Video recording
x	Audio recording (e.g. of interviews)
	Use of data from social media
	Other research methods or techniques (you **must explain** in the box below)

Explanation of **research methods** specified above, and / or explanation of any other **research methods that are not listed** above:
The data will be collected through the use of focus group which will consist of at least 6 to 12 participants which will be recorded using a phone to record. The participants will be given a biographical questionnaire before participating in the focus group.

6. Who will the research participants be?

6.1 List the **different** participant groups (e.g. experts, community members, key informants) that you will be working with in your project:
Principal, deputy principals, Head Of Department and teachers.

6.2 Description of these participant groups, including **age range** and **sample size**, for **each group**:

Two groups each consisting of a deputy principal, HOD and four teachers, all between the ages of 25-65.

7. How will informed consent be obtained?

7.1 How will **potential participants** be **identified / selected / recruited**?
Potential participants will be identified using purposive and convenient selection of participants. The criteria for selecting the school identified that is experiencing classroom overcrowding and it is accessible to the researcher. Once the principal of the school grants me permission to conduct the research at the school, I will give the principal, the deputy principals, head of department and the teachers detailed information about the research and then request them to participate in the study. If they agree, I will then request them to sign the informed consent.

7.2 Will any **incentives** be offered to participants?
(**NB**: it is NOT compulsory to offer any incentives. Please note for any curricula incentives, permission is required from the Registrar's office and DVC. Fiscal incentives are limited to R150 – see *Guidelines* document)

[ ] Yes [x] No

If **YES**, please explain: N/A

7.3 How will informed consent be obtained?

[x] Formal (Signed form) [ ] Informal (e.g. verbal) [ ] Other (e.g. online survey)

If you cannot obtain **formal written consent**, explain why:
N/A

NB: Attach *Participant Information Sheets* and *Consent Forms* for each sample group (please label these carefully), and/or other related materials. It is essential that participants in research be fully informed (irrespective of the method used) and then be able to agree on this basis to participate in the research.

8. Protecting participant identities	
8.1 Can **confidentiality** of participants' responses be guaranteed throughout the **data collection** process?	[ ] Yes [x] No
8.2 Can **anonymity** be guaranteed throughout the **data collection** process?	[ ] Yes [x] No
8.3 Can **anonymity** be guaranteed in **resulting research reports** or publications?	[x] Yes [ ] No

8.4 Explain how you will manage issues of **anonymity and confidentiality** in your project (What will participants be told in this regard?):
Participants' identifiable information will not be used, and I will make use of pseudonyms and confidential information will not be disclosed. The principles of anonymity and confidentiality are included in the Participant Information Sheet to be signed by all participants, and the participants will be informed that confidentiality and anonymity have limitations in the case of a focus group. However, participants will also be encouraged to keep confidentiality by signing a confidentiality agreement. I will request permission from the participants to use data for secondary purposes, for publication and for conference purposes. However, in all instances, participants' identities and the name of the school will be kept confidential.

Definitions: ***Confidentiality***: that any information considered confidential by the participant or researcher will not be disclosed to others. ***Anonymity throughout the data collection process****:* that you as the researcher will not be able to identify the participant. ***Anonymity in the resulting reports***: that the participant's name/identifying data will not be disclosed and that anyone reading your results will not be able to identify the participant. **NB**: While confidentiality may be desirable, it cannot be guaranteed in, for example, focus groups, or ethnographic observations. Similarly, anonymity should be preserved in questionnaires, but cannot be offered in workshop methodologies, focus group research, etc. Participants should have the right to remain anonymous in the final report and this must be respected in handling of all data relating to them. Participants need to be informed about these issues through the *Participant Information Sheet*.

9. Protection of data during and after the research

9.1 How will the data be protected while the research is **in progress**? (This includes how the identities of participants will be protected).
The identities of the participants will be protected using pseudonyms and collected data will be stored in a password protected file in my password protected laptop.

9.2 What is to be done with the research data **after completion** of the project? Please note that usage of data should be consistent with what is indicated to participants in the *Participant Information Sheet* and *Consent Form*.

	Stored in archives (specify below)		Stored in online database (specify below)
x	Stored in password protected computer		Stored in digital form with all identifying features removed
	Stored for future secondary analysis	5	Destroyed after … years (insert numbers of years, if applicable)

Please specify which archives **or online databases** will be used (if applicable):

NB: 'Raw' or unprocessed data, especially **where the identity or personal data of research participants is included, must be safeguarded** and preserved from unauthorised access. Data may be destroyed after use, but **preservation in an archive or personal collection** may also be appropriate, desirable or even essential. For instance, datasets that contain **historically important information** or information that relates to **national heritage** must be preserved and should be placed in a public archive where possible and appropriate. An **online database** could include secure databases such as REDCAP, or open access databases (see loadb.org for examples). All data should be preserved in a

way that **respects the nature of the original participants' consent**. If you are unsure about the procedure of data management and storage, please contact the Data Services Librarian.

10. Summary CV of applicant ALL boxes in the following table must be completed by the applicant. Do not attach a formal CV to your application.	
10.1 List your academic qualifications. Include dates or current registration status	National Senior Certificate Bachelor of Sciences Bachelor of Sciences (Honours) Currently registered for MEd Educational Psychology
10.2 Describe any ethics <u>content</u> training* you have received in the previous 3 years (e.g. ethics short courses; online courses; ethics CPD courses; ethical input as part of a research methods course)	08/02/2023- Research Ethics and Data Management 16/08/2023 – Ethics In Research and Applying for Ethics Clearance
10.3 List of instruments or methods used in this project, as listed in Section 5 of the application form (Tick the appropriate boxes and describe these specific instruments if necessary)	[x] Hard copy questionnaires or diagnostic tests, etc. [ ] Online instruments (e.g. questionnaires, surveys) [ ] Individual interviews (e.g. structured, semi-structured, etc.) [ ] Personal communication (e.g. email or informal conversation with experts) [x] Group interviews (e.g. seminar/discussion groups, focus groups, etc.) [ ] Ethnographic observation, participant observation, other informal descriptive, and/or interactive methods (you **must explain** the ethnographic methods in the box below) [ ] Autoethnography [ ] Community-based methods or techniques such as drama workshops, community theatre, training workshops, participant rural appraisal, rapid rural appraisal, etc. (you **must explain** in the box below) [ ] Research on/in therapeutic or counselling contexts [ ] Putting on your own exhibition / public performance [ ] Observation of public performances, and/or public behaviour observation [ ] Photography [ ] Video [x] Audio recording (e.g. of interviews) [ ] Use of data from social media [ ] Other research methods or techniques (you **must explain** in the box below)

	Explanation of **research methods** specified above, and / or explanation of any other **research methods that are not listed** above: The data will be collected through the use of focus group which will consist of at least 6 to 12 participants which will be recorded using a tape recorder. Participants will be given a biographical questionnaire to complete before participating in the focus group.
10.4 Describe your previous **experience** in deploying the instruments or methods of research which you are applying here (refer to Section 5 and table in Section 10.3)	I have collected data through focus groups, using an audio recorder in my Honours year at Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University.

*Ethics training is strongly recommended, especially for postgraduate students. Please consult the *Guidelines for Applicants* document for details of training options

Appendix I: Permission from Human Research Ethics

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

Research Office

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

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE PROTOCOL NUMBER: H23/07/65

PROJECT TITLE Teacher's perceptions on classroom overcrowding, disciplinary challenges, and the inclination to the use of corporal punishment: A Cultural Historical Activity perspective.

INVESTIGATOR(S) Miss L Skhosana

SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT Human and Community Development/

DATE CONSIDERED 21 July 2023

DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE Approved

Risk Level: Low

EXPIRY DATE 15 October 2026

DATE 16 October 2023 CHAIRPERSON

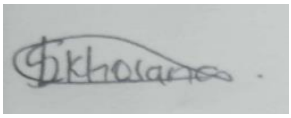
(Professor J Watermeyer)

cc: Supervisor: Dr S Mayisela

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR(S)

To be completed in duplicate and A SIGNED COPY returned to the Secretary electronically. Unreported changes to the application may invalidate the clearance given by the HREC (Non-Medical)

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

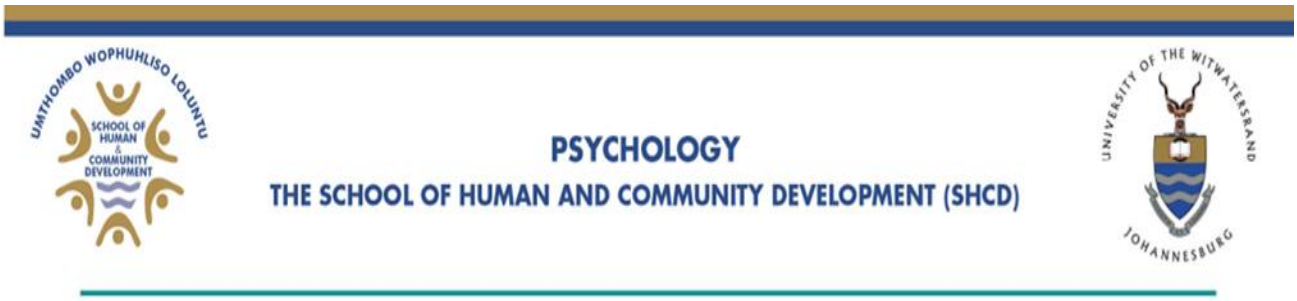


17/10/2013

Signature Date

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES

Appendix J: Letter of Permission to the School



PO Box 214

Kwamhlanga

1022

2023

The Principal

Mpumalanga Department of Education

Nkangala District

Dear Sir/ Madam

Permission to conduct research.

My name is Lindi Skhosana, and I am an Educational Psychology Masters student at the University of the Witwatersrand. I am engaged in a research project in primary schools as a requirement towards the fulfilment of my qualification. The title of my research study is Teachers' Perceptions on Classroom Overcrowding, Disciplinary Challenges, and the inclination to the use of Corporal Punishment: A Cultural Historical Activity Perspective.

I am therefore requesting permission to conduct my research at your school. The study will be conducted in a form of a focus group. The participants will be required to complete a biographical questionnaire. The focus group interview will take place at the convenient time of the teachers. To ensure confidentiality, the name of your school and that of the participants will not be revealed in my research report. This research may also be published in a journal article or presented at a conference. If this does occur, your identity once again will be completely protected, your name and any

identifying information, including the name of your school will not be mentioned anywhere, included in the research report. If you wish to see the report, I will be glad to make it available to you.

Your school's participation in this research is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any point and there will be no penalties. For further information about the study, please contact my supervisor, Dr Simangele Mayisela on 012 717 4529, email address: Simangele.mayisela@wits.ac.za.

Yours Sincerely

Skhosana LS

Appendix K: Permission from the School



TO : SKHOSANA LINDI SITHEMBILE

FROM: THE SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAM



SUBJECT: RESPONSE ON A SUBMITTED REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT THE SCHOOL

THE SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAM (SMT) OF THE ABOVE-MENTIONED SCHOOL HEREBY

ACKNOWLEDGE RECEIPT OF YOUR LETTER THAT SERVED AS AN APPLICATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT THE ABOVE-MENTIONED SCHOOL.

THE SMT GLADLY LIKE TO INFORM YOU THAT YOUR REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

PROJECT ABOUT TEACHERS PERCEPTIONS ON CLASSROOM OVERCROWDING,

DISCIPLINARY PROBLEMS AND THE INCLINATION TO USE CORPORAL PUNISHMENT: A

CULTURAL HISTORICAL ACTIVITY PERSPECTIVE FOR A FOCUS GROUP IN THE FOUNDATION

AND INTERMEDIATE PHASE IS APPROVED.

YOUR VISIT TO OUR SHOOL IS MORE THAN WELCOME

YOURS IN EDUCATION

ITHEBE N.B. (PRINCIPAL)

MRS NTH

