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Chiramba, Rumbidzaishe

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The experiences of learners from low socio-economic backgrounds in one suburban high school in Gauteng.

A report on a research study presented to:

The Department of Social Work

School of Human and Community Development

Faculty of Humanities

University of the Witwatersrand

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for the degree of Master of Arts in Social Work

in the field of School Social Work by Coursework and Research report

by

Name: Rumbidzaishe Chiramba

Supervisor: Dr Laetitia Petersen

December, 2023

University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

School of Human and Community Development

SENATE PLAGIARISM POLICY

Student Declaration

I, Rumbidzaishe Chiramba (Student number: 1852373) am a student registered for the Masters in School Social Work by Coursework and Research report program in the year 2022/2023. I hereby declare the following:

- **I am aware that plagiarism (the use of someone else's work without their permission and/or without acknowledging the original source) is wrong.**
- **I confirm that ALL the work submitted for assessment for the above course is my own unaided work except where I have explicitly indicated otherwise.**
- **I have followed the required conventions in referencing the thoughts and ideas of others.**
- **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 unaided work or that I have failed to acknowledge the source of the ideas or words in my writing.**

Signature: 

Date: 19/12/2023

Abstract:

The aim of this study was to understand the experiences of learners coming from low socio-economic backgrounds in one suburban high school in Gauteng, South Africa. This was achieved through the consideration of hardships and successes the learners face within their home and school environments. The qualitative method and phenomenological research design were used. The population was learners who are exempted from paying school fees due to their low socio-economic status. Purposive sampling was used to select six participants. The data collection methods used were semi structured interviews, conducted in person. The research instrument was an interview schedule. The research was underpinned by the Person in environment approach, which was used to understand how the participants' environments affect their current and lived experiences. The data analysed indicated that learners coming from low socio-economic backgrounds experience some adversities. Despite the challenges that the learners face, they are all determined to do well in school, matriculate successfully, further their studies and start working jobs which will allow them to elevate their economic status and help their families out of their current financial situations. A big contributor to the learners' positive attitudes is the fact that they have support structures as well as strength and protective factors within their various environments. These are in the form of their family, friends, loved ones, as well as their teachers, staff members, and the school as a whole. There is a need for further longitudinal and wide-ranging studies of these learners.

Key words: experiences, Gauteng, learners, low socio-economic backgrounds, suburban schools.

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List of Abbreviations:

DoE: Department of Education

SGB: School Governing Board

GDE: Gauteng Department of Education

SGB: School Governing Board

IPA: Interpretative Phenomenological analysis.

NDE: National Department of Education

PIE: Person in Environment

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1.Introduction:

This research study sought to explore the experiences of learners coming from low socio-economic backgrounds in one suburban high school in Gauteng. According to Niemiec & Ryan, 2009; Pittman & Richmond, 2007 and Ryan & Patrick, 2001, the more students feel like they belong in the school and in classroom, the more likely they are to be academically motivated, and have higher self-esteem and good general well-being. Similarly, students' low sense of classroom and school belonging can lead to negative mental health, poor academic performance, alienation, mental health issues, and eventually school dropout (Bhuhs & Ladd 2001; Chipuer 2001, Foster et al., 2017). To understand the association between learners' school/classroom belonging, and their academic performance, prior studies have focused on aspects such as teacher supportiveness, peer relationships and participation in extra-curricular activities. This study aimed to study/investigate leaners' experiences in their home environments as well as their experiences in the class and school environments and how all these factors work together to influence and affect the learners' academic performances. The population of this study was learners who are exempted from paying school fees in one suburban high school in Gauteng.

1.2.Motivation for the study:

After their formation in 1996, the National Department of Education (NDE) came up with a new education system (Fiske & Ladd, 2004). To this regard, 2500 schools were classified and placed into five different quintiles according to how much money and support they needed from the government (Fiske & Ladd, 2004). Schools in quintile one were made up of schools with the least resources and/or had a community whereby majority of the parents earned low salaries (Monama, 2022). On the other hand, schools with the most resources or located in communities whereby majority of the parents earned good salaries were placed in quintile five (Monama, 2022). This research study took place in a quintile five school. This was necessary in order to ensure access to the research population (learners exempted from paying school fees in a suburban school) as well as to get answers to the research question.

The findings of research studies nationally and internationally have shown that when learners from low socio-economic backgrounds do not have enough resources, they tend to face a lot of challenges and difficulties in their home and school environments. This, in turn, negatively affects their ability to concentrate and/or do well in the academic classroom.

It is also quite important not to under look the effects that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the learning of learners coming from low socio-economic backgrounds. According to Savvidou (2023), over half (61 per cent) of teachers report that the learning gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers has widened since the previous year, by an estimated 46 per cent. Given this, this study was important in order to explore whether learners coming from low socio-economic backgrounds are currently thriving in their school and home environments, or if they need more help and support in order to flourish.

1.3 Research Question:

The main research question is:

What are the experiences of learners from low socio-economic backgrounds in one suburban high school in Gauteng?

From this question, the following sub-questions were generated:

a) How do the learners' backgrounds impact their ability to navigate school?

b) How would the learners describe their challenges and successes within their home and school contexts?

c) What can be done to improve the overall experiences of these learners?

1.4 Aim of the study:

The aim of the study was to explore the experiences of learners from low socio-economic backgrounds in one suburban high school in Gauteng, South Africa.

1.5. Research Objectives:

- To understand how the learners' backgrounds impact their ability to navigate school.
- To learn how the learners' experiences within their home contexts affect their learning in one suburban school.
- To find out how the learners feel that their experiences could be improved.

1.6.Overview of the Research Methodology:

For the purpose of this study, qualitative methodology and the use of phenomenology was utilized. According to Fouche and Depot (2011), qualitative studies help the researcher to gain deeper insight and understanding about the variable of understanding. The purpose of using the qualitative research approach was such that I could gather data from the participants through enquiring and listening to their perceptions, experiences, beliefs, and values (Howitt,

2010). Furthermore, phenomenology is defined as a form of qualitative research that focuses on the study of an individual's lived experiences within the world (Neurbauer et.al., 2019).

The use of phenomenology design and the qualitative methodology made it possible to understand the participants' experiences within their home and school environments. The population of the study was learners who are exempted from paying school fees because of their low socio-economic status. There were originally meant to be ten participants in the study in order to account for data saturation. However, this was not possible as the subject was quite sensitive. As such, most of my invitations were either ignored or rejected. Due to this, purposive sampling was used to select a sample size of six learners. The data collection methods used were semi structured interviews, conducted in person. In order to analyse the data, I made reference to the person in environment approach as well as the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). The methodology used in combination with the person in environment approach and IPA offered me a means of studying the participants in their natural environments, whilst also trying to understand their perceptions. It is my contention that the methodology used was appropriate and aided in getting answers to the research question. While conducting the research, I also ensured trustworthiness of data and took ethical issues into consideration. To ensure trustworthiness, I made reference to credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability during the research study. In making ethical considerations, I made sure to obtain informed consent, voluntary participation, privacy and confidentiality. The above mentioned will be discussed in more depth in Chapter Three of the research study.

1.7.Limitations and Delimitations of the study:

In terms of limitations, it can be noted that the research topic is a sensitive subject. As a result of this, it was quite hard to get access to the population, and/or convince the population to take place in the study. This limited my sample and meant I did not manage to get as many participants as I had hoped to get. According to Finlay, 2009; Mason, 2010, and Wilson, 2015, in phenomenological studies, data collection interviews can be conducted from between 5-10 interviews. Furthermore, according to Groeneworld (2004), having up to ten participants helps to ensure that data saturation is achieved mostly. Even though I did not have access to the required ten participants in order to reach saturation, it is my contention that the data I have gathered was enough to go forward with the research study.

1.8.Definition of Key Concepts:

Defining concepts, also known as the conceptualization of terms, is the process in which the researcher identifies key concepts that will be used in the research study (Podsakoff et al., 2016). Different concepts can have various meanings depending on the context in which they are being used. As a result of this, the researcher needs to provide a unified explanation of concepts that will be used within the research study such that the researcher, the research team and the reader can all on the same page about the definition for the various concepts (Podsakoff et al., 2016). Outlined below are the definition of concepts that were utilized in this research study.

1.8.1. Suburban Schools:

According to Lumby and Heystek (2011), suburban schools can also be said to be Former Model C schools. These are schools that are located in areas that were once dominated by white people during apartheid. As such, it can be noted that prior to 1994, these schools' main aim was to serve white people only. However, when the post-apartheid government eliminated segregation, a "dramatic demographic change" occurred (Lumby & Heystek, 2011 p.5). Since the demographic change, such schools now have students from a wide variety of backgrounds.

For the purpose of this research study, the above definition of what a suburban school is, was utilized. This is to say that the term suburban schools was used to refer to high schools located in suburbs that used to house white learners only during apartheid, but now house learners from all races and backgrounds. These suburban schools are also classified as former Model C schools, and can fall under either quintile 4 or 5 schools, as they are fee paying schools. The above mentioned will be broken down in more detail in Chapter 2 of this research study. The school this research study took place in is a quintile 5 school.

1.8.2. School Fees:

School fees are payments made by parents to schools in order to improve the educational experience of their children (Macmillan & Schumacher, 2010). In primary and high schools, registration, administration, and other fees may not be included in the school fees (Macmillan & Schumacher, 2010). Furthermore, fees may not be charged by the school for additional subjects chosen by students from the school's curriculum (Macmillan & Schumacher, 2010).

For the purpose of this study, the above-mentioned definition of what school fees are was utilized.

1.8.3. Fee exemption:

The term fee exemption refers to the exemption from payment of school fees in a school (Maringe et al., 2015). It is a mechanism that the government put in place in an attempt to assist all parents in accessing quality education for their children, irrespective of their background or financial constraints (Maringe et al., 2015). If a parent qualifies for exemption, these exemptions are calculated retrospectively from the beginning of the academic year (Maringe et al., 2015). This definition of what fee exemption was utilized throughout the study.

1.8.4 Socio economic status:

The prefix socio- refers to the study of people and their behaviour, the structure of their families as well as how they interact with those around them (Maringe et al., 2015). The term economic, on the other hand, refers to people's money, income and finances within an economy (Macmillan & Schumacher, 2010). As such, it can be noted that the term *Socioeconomic* links financial and social issues together. Therefore, the term socio economic refers to the interaction between the social and economic habits of people (Macmillan & Schumacher, 2010). One's socio-economic status, refers to their standing or class in society, both individually and as a group (Baker, 2014). Generally, those who are better educated, wealthier, and live in more affluent circumstances enjoy better health status, than the less educated and poorer segments in society (Baker, 2014). This definition of what socio-economic status was utilized throughout the study.

1.9 Chapter Summary:

This chapter served as an introduction to the research study. It highlighted and presented the motivation for exploring the experiences of learners coming from low socio-economic backgrounds and exempted from paying school fees in a suburban high school in the Gauteng province. It also highlighted the methodology and theoretical framework that were used, and how this was applied to the study.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction:

Chapter two discusses the theoretical framework underpinning the study. It also reviews relevant literature to the study, discussing some key areas, theories related covering national and international literature on the history of education in South Africa and experiences of learners coming from low socio-economic backgrounds in schools on an international scale.

2.2. Theoretical Framework:

The theoretical Framework that covered this study is the Person in Environment framework (PIE). The Person in Environment framework is an approach to social work practise that speaks to how a person's environment has an impact on the way that they live and the decisions that they make (Edwards, 1998). It attempts to understand a person and their behaviour through their environment (Norton, 2009). As such, the perspective is believed to provide a more adequate framework for assessing an individual, their strengths, as well as their presenting problems better than an approach that focuses solely on changing an individual's behaviour, or environmental conditions (Norton, 2009). PIE considers various aspects, including those aspects in relation to education, family, religion, and various socioeconomic aspects. In making reference to this theoretical framework, this study considered the socio-economic aspects of the participants, their family environment, as well as their schooling/educational environment and how these various environments work together to contribute to the participants' current experiences.

2.3. Literature Review:

2.3.1. Introduction:

According to Ramdhani et al., (2014) a literature review is a critical analysis of published sources, as well as classification, comparison, and evaluations thereof. This literature review will be aimed at providing an overview of previous research on the experiences of learners from low socio-economic backgrounds on an international basis. Furthermore, in so doing, this literature review will draw on ideas from local, national, continental, as well as

international scholars. This will be achieved through close analysis of relevant academic sources and studies.

2.3.2. Local Studies

2.3.2.1. The introduction of the quintile system in schools:

Before 1994, under apartheid, the country had a total of four main education departments: one education department for black people (as well as 10 Bantu education departments which were sub departments of the black education department), an Indian education department, a coloured education department and a white education department (Ogbonnaya & Awuah, 2019). However, the National Department of Education (NDE), which was a racially integrated education department formed in 1996, decided on a new education system. In order to discover which schools needed more money and support from the government to better the quality of education in the country, the NDE sent out a questionnaire aimed at ascertaining the richness and poorness of the communities surrounding the schools (van Dyke & White, 2019). This questionnaire included questions such as:

a) What is the income of the parental figures within the family?
b) How many vehicles does the family own?
c) What is the value of the parental property?

On the basis of this information, schools were then placed into five categories/quintiles, whereby schools with the most resources, and located in communities where majority of parents earned good salaries were placed in quintile 5 (van Dyk & White, 2019). This in turn, meant that schools in Quintile 1 were made up of schools with the least resources, and/or had a community whereby a majority of the parents earned low salaries. There were 25000 schools placed in these quintiles. Furthermore, schools were also given the freedom and opportunity to appeal to the provincial departments to be moved up the quintiles. This was mainly because the further down a school was in the quintile system, the less funding they would receive from the government (van Dyk & White, 2019).

According to (Ogbonnaya & Awuah, 2019), when the quintile system was first developed, the annual allocation for each pupil in the quintiles were:

* Quintile 5: R204.

* Quintile 4: R590.

* Quintile 3 to 1: R1177.

This has remained constant for the past 12 years, with the government rarely considering inflation, price increases or economy changes (van Dyk & White, 2019). With this in mind, it can be noted that former Model C schools are now those schools that are classified as quintile 4 and 5 schools. As such, for the purpose of this research study, quintile 4 and 5 schools will still be referred to as former Model C schools. The above mentioned is significant as it provides a brief overview of the history and current state of former Model C schools in South Africa. The research study took place in a quintile 5 school. This was necessary in order to ensure access to the research population as well as to get answers to the research question.

Following the 1994 elections, which marked the end of an oppressive, apartheid era, the new South African government introduced several laws and legislations. Amongst these was the Policy Framework for Education and Training (1994). This policy, in turn, was designed to help the government give equal opportunities in schools and break down the barriers of racial prejudice (Metcalfe, 2007). The Schools Act (No. 84 of 1996) on the other hand, served as a means to eliminate and eradicate the system of segregation and exclusion in schools, which had once thrived under the apartheid regime (Fiske & Ladd, 2004). This, in turn, was done through calling for the right to education for all learners, whilst also providing the Department of Education with guidelines aimed at removing all segregation structures within the education system (Metcalfe, 2007).

As a result of these acts and policies, all South African schools were desegregated and opened to learners from various racial and economic backgrounds (Horn, 2019). However, looking particularly at public schooling, it can be noted that township schools previously had lower funding than suburban schools. As a result of this, and considering the new Acts and policies, a lot of parents who preferred public schooling to private schooling, chose to remove their children from township schools (Possey-Maddox et al., 2021). They chose, instead to place them in suburban schools which were perceived as having more resources because of the former apartheid policies and privileges (Enoch, 2007; Metcalfe, 2007; Msila, 2009; Monama, 2022). The same is still true in present day South Africa, where it can be noted that township schools are still viewed as having low quality education as opposed to former Model C schools (Monama, 2022, Radebe, 2015). As such, to this day, parents who have a

preference for public schools, still tend to have a preference for these former Model C schools as opposed to township schools (Monama, 2022). Moreover, even though township schools tend to receive a lot more money from the government than former Model C schools, former Model C schools are fee paying schools (Monama, 2022). This, in turn, means that they get funding from the government, as well as from school fees paid by learners and parents, thus ensuring extra income to contribute towards various facilities and resources (Monama, 2022, Radebe, 2015). These are resources and facilities such as science laboratories, scientific equipment, and sporting facilities for those learners interested in sports as a part of their extracurricular activities (Msila, 2009). This, in turn further makes these former Model C schools more desirable for parents and learners (Msila, 2009).

2.3.2.2Overview of some challenges experienced by learners within the school context:

It was hoped that integrating learners' needs into the education system would enable the learners to receive a truly equitable and quality education (Enoch, 2007). However, to this day, some learners still struggle to cope in the integrated school environment (Radebe, 2015). As a result of this, they do not thrive as well as their peers (Radebe, 2015). Challenges these learners face include challenges related to socializing with their peers from the same or different socio-economic backgrounds, integrating their schoolwork with their home life, as well as integrating and participating in activities within the school. These issues, in turn, may inform their academic success or lack thereof (Radebe, 2015). Whilst existing research acknowledges that learners experience hardships and successes in the integrated school environment, it tends to focus more on the role of various stakeholders in navigating integration and desegregation. These are stakeholders such as the schools, the government, and the School Governing Bodies (SGB's). There is, however, a shortage of more recent research done focusing on students' current experiences in integrated school spaces. The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of learners coming from low socio-economic backgrounds in one suburban high school in Gauteng. This was done with the aim of bridging through the knowledge gap through understanding how these learners' personal and academic experiences affect their learning, as well as how their experiences may be made better. The above mentioned is significant, as it has provided a brief, and broad overview of some challenges learners face within their school contexts.

2.3.2.3 Current Studies on Former Model C Schools' ability to manage diversity in schools:

Radebe's (2015) findings showed that some former Model C schools in Johannesburg needed training and development in understanding and managing diversity in schools. Schools were found to have a limited understanding of learner integration, a situation made worse by schools' refusal to also recognize differences within their learner populations. This was thought to be a possible explanation for the partial neglect of learners' disadvantaged backgrounds that was evident in some school activities.

Radebe's (2015) research also found that supporting schools is essential such that SGBs, principals, and teachers are equipped with the skills needed to promote equity. The study also emphasized the role of governments in meeting the need for active monitoring and evaluation of policy implementation, and the essential role of transforming SGB and education workforces.

The overarching finding of Radebe's (2015) study was that progress had been made in promoting equality in some former Model C schools in Johannesburg. However, achieving equity for schools was still proven to be a significant challenge. The study also found that school conditions are still not well suited to provide equal learning and development opportunities for learners from all socio-economic backgrounds. The above mentioned is significant as it showcases the results of a study that has been done on the topic, and how the findings of Radebe's (2015) highlight a need for this particular research study to be done in an attempt to try and build on existing knowledge which would then help address problems in schools going forward.

2.3.3. International Studies:

2.3.3.1 Psychological and Social Challenges experienced by learners from low socio economic backgrounds in schools:

According to Mullings (1999), contrary to popular belief, the education system works to benefit the middle class and wealthy at the expense of those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Bajaj's (2009) study corroborates the above statement through stating that school norms and curricula are based on a major form of cultural capital that children from economically affluent backgrounds acquire early through family socialization. Bajal (2009) adds that learners coming from low-income immigrant families suffer in

classrooms. This, in turn happens because of their cultural forms being devalued, as well as them not always automatically possessing the tools to effectively participate in learning in the same way as other students due to their limited resources.

Ostrove (2007) reveals that whether or not a child attends a historically better-funded school outside the township is a very important indicator of the quality of schooling that they will receive. This further relates to the child's exposure to native English-speaking teachers. This is why parents prefer to enrol their children in these schools. According to Pillay (2006), if schools do not take cognisance of the environmental context of learners, or of their cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, then both learners and educators are likely to have negative experiences in their schools. Pillay (2006) further outlines that these problems are compounded if educators are not trained to work with learners from diverse backgrounds. The above mentioned is significant as it provides a brief overview as to how staff not being trained to work with a diversity of learners in schools may help to aid to the problems that learners face in diversified schools. In so doing, this highlights one of the challenges that learners may experience in school environments, whilst also highlighting the need for practical approaches to train staff members and on the way forward in order to make the experiences of learners in schools better.

Taylor and Coetzee (2013) have found that learners coming from low socio-economic backgrounds are often faced with diverse challenges as they try to adapt to the new school environment. This is affirmed by Cele (2018), whose findings found that children from impoverished backgrounds tend to be victims of classism in schools. Taylor and Coetzee (2013) and Cele's (2018) studies also concur with Pillay's (2006) study which found that learners from low socio-economic families felt lonely when their peers from middle socio-economic families did not want to socialise with them. Similar results were found by Spaull (2012), who explains that learners from low socio-economic areas in townships are isolated in schools by those from middle-class households. Furthermore, Pillay (2006) found that learners from the townships did not want to associate with learners from informal settlements because they perceived themselves as being of a higher class based on having their own houses and material possessions. The above mentioned is significant as it speaks to some potential psychosocial consequences that may befall learners because of failure to deal with diversity in schools. These psychosocial consequences have the potential to negatively affect the learners' schoolwork as well. However, taking heed of any and all issues affecting learners coming from low socio-economic backgrounds in schools, and exploring them using

the person in environment approach would help us to understand the topic on a deeper level. This, in turn, would open room for solutions to aid the problems.

2.3.3.2. Belongingness within the school context:

According to Niemiec & Ryan, 2009; Pittman & Richmond, 2007 and Ryan & Patrick, 2001, students' high sense of school and classroom belonging can be associated with positive outcomes such as higher academic motivation and engagement, academic competence and achievement and general well-being. Similarly, Bhuhs & Ladd, 2001; Chipuer 2001; Foster et.al., 2017; Pittman & Richmond, 2007 and Ream & Rumberger, 2008 proposed that students' lack of classroom belonging is consistently found to be associated with aspects such as internalising and externalising behavioural problems, mental health challenges, poorer academic performance, loneliness, alienation and eventually school dropouts. More recent studies are needed to understand the current association between learners and their school and classroom belonging. Moreover, according to Goodenow (1993), belongingness can be defined as the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported in the school environment (Goodenow, 1993). Having a sense of school belonging is perceived as a prerequisite for overall school functioning (Kiefer et al., 2015). Adolescents' sense of connectedness to school is found to be significantly associated with engagement, motivation and participation (Ryan & Deci, 2009; Kiefer et al., 2015), academic attitudes and achievement (Ostrove & Long, 2007; Pittman et al., 2007; Niemiec & Ryan, 2009), better self-esteem and self-efficacy (Dotterer & Wehrspann, 2016) and lower rates of emotional distress (Resnick et al., 1997). When students' needs to belong are not satisfied, diminished motivation, impaired development, alienation, and poor performance are predicted (Deci et al., 1991). Prior studies have focused on aspects such as teacher supportiveness, peer relationships and participation in extra-curricular activities and less on the significance of family background and socio-economic status. This study however aimed to build on these prior studies through studying and investigating the association between family background and classroom/school belonging, and how all these factors influence and affect each other in the participants' lives.

2.3.3.3. The role of positive relationships in the lives of learners

Korpershoek (2016) states that students have a drive to form and maintain significant interpersonal relationships with their teachers and peers and a psychological need to create ties to the school as an institution. Belonging and connectedness with same-aged peers and

adult figures outside the family, such as teachers, may play an important role as adolescents begin to transfer their dependencies from parents and families to extra-familial contexts (Allen, 2008; Demanet & Van Houtte, 2012; Österman, 2000). The above mentioned is significant as it speaks to the importance of positive relationships with same aged peers and adult figures in the lives of learners within the school context.

Baumester and Leary (1995) suggest that maladaptive school behaviours should be seen as attempts to establish or maintain relationships with others or sheer frustration and purposelessness when one's need to belong goes unmet. A lower sense of belonging is shown to predict a risk of school dropout (Ream & Rumberger, 2008; Merikukka et al., 2019). When students' needs to belong are not satisfied, diminished motivation, impaired development, alienation and poor performance are predicted (Deci et al., 1991). Additionally, a lower sense of belonging is shown to predict a risk of school dropout (Ream & Rumberger, 2008; Merikukka et al., 2019).

2.3.3.4 Family background and integration in schools:

According to Jost et.al (2004), Individuals tend to develop self-perceptions corresponding to, justifying, and reproducing the hierarchy of the society they live in. The self-concept of low-SES individuals is described as an "undervalued self" by some authors (Kraus & Park, 2014), and even the most competent low-SES students are found to face significant uncertainty regarding their recognition by others (Destin et al., 2017). However, to be able to feel belonging and connection to others, one must feel safe in one's social relations with peers, the larger community and with one's identity (Zhao et al., 2012). In children's lives, economic deprivation seems to actualise particularly in social relationships, especially with those children who possess better economic resources (Harju, 2008). Material resources are used in building a feeling of togetherness (Pugh, 2009; Buckingham, 2011), and having similar resources bonds friends together (Hakovirta & Rantalaiho, 2012), especially among youth (Croghan et al., 2006), both at school and in spare time (Korkiamäki & Ellonen, 2011). The above mentioned is significant as it touches on how the learners' socioeconomic back grounds, and history could possibly impact their experiences within the school.

2.3.3.5. The role of the COVID-19 pandemic:

It is also quite important not to under look the effects that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the learning of learners coming from low socio-economic backgrounds. According to Savvidou (2023), over half (61 per cent) of teachers reported that the learning gap between

disadvantaged pupils and their peers has widened since the previous year, with the remainder judging that the 'disadvantaged learning gap' had remained the same (32 per cent) or reduced (seven per cent) (Savvidou, 2023). Based on teacher estimates, on average, the gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers had increased by 46 per cent (Savvidou, 2023). There is a wide range of uncertainty around this estimate, and it is likely to be an underestimate, as differences between schools may have also contributed to changes in the disadvantaged learning gap (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2023). The majority of pupils were expected to learn at home throughout the year, but pupil engagement in remote learning in July 2020 was low (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2023). Parental engagement, which is critical to the engagement of pupils was also comparatively low, at 44 percent (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2023). Given this, the research thought it necessary to explore the various factors that affected learners from low socio-economic backgrounds during the COVID-19 pandemic, as this might possibly be informing some of their current experiences.

2.4 Chapter Overview:

This chapter briefly looked into the theoretical framework, which was used to underpin the study, and briefly explained some of the findings. In so doing, it was noted that in the research study, whilst the participants expressed that they had challenges and difficulties in their home and school contexts, they also had help and support in the form of family, friends, and community resources in their personal lives, as well as the school, teachers, peers staff members, and extra-curricular activities in their school system. As such, their challenges are eased, or made better by these resources they have in their environments, such that they are not as affected.

A literature review was also provided and in the literature review, the issue of inclusive education and dealing with diversity in schools was discussed both from a South African point of view, as well as from an international perspective.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction:

This chapter focuses on highlighting the research methodology that was utilised to achieve the aim and objectives of the study. The research methodology chapter includes a discussion of the research approach and design. A description of the population sample and sampling procedures follows this. Next is a description of the research instrument and a discussion of how the pilot study was conducted. The chapter continues with an outline of the data collection and analysis methods used. How trustworthiness was explored is also explained, followed by a discussion of the ethical aspects that were taken into consideration during the empirical study. Finally, a summary is provided to conclude the chapter.

To recap, the research question is:

What are the experiences of learners coming from low socio-economic backgrounds in one suburban high school in Gauteng?

3.2. Research Aim:

The aim of the study was to explore the experiences of learners from low socio-economic backgrounds in one suburban high school in Gauteng, South Africa.

3.3. Research Objectives:

- To understand how the learners' backgrounds impact their ability to navigate school.
- To learn how the learners' experiences within their home contexts affect their learning in one suburban school.
- To find out how the learners feel that their experiences could be improved.

3.4 Research Approach:

3.4.1 Qualitative Research:

This research study was aimed at exploring the experiences of learners from low socio-economic backgrounds in one suburban high school in Gauteng. Qualitative methodology, and the use of a phenomenological research design were utilized. The qualitative methodology was utilized as it offers researchers a means of studying people in their natural environment, whilst also attempting to understand their perceptions and critically evaluate their experiences according to the meanings they attach to various phenomena (Hennink et al., 2020). Qualitative research allows the researcher to view issues from the participants' viewpoint, which in turn allows the researcher to probe and explore to gain in depth

knowledge about the phenomenon (Henink et al., 2020). It is my contention that the research study and the data collection methods used will be useful in providing insight into the participants' experiences in their home contexts, as well as within their school contexts.

3.4.2. Advantages of Qualitative Research:

Whilst other research approaches (ie: quantitative research) tend to place time limits, and look for measurable outcomes, qualitative research methods tend to focus less on the metrics of the data being collected, and more on the subtleties of what can be found in the information provided by participants (Mason, 2021).This, in turn, allows for the data to have an enhanced level of detail to it, which can provide more opportunities to gather insights from it during the data analysis stage (Mason, 2021). Furthermore, unlike other forms of research that require a rigid framework, with zero deviation, qualitative research allows researchers to ask follow up questions, and also make use of observations (Henink et.al.,2020). This, in turn, enhances the overall database of the information being collected.

3.4.3. Limitations of Qualitative Research:

One of the main drawbacks of qualitative research is that the process is time-consuming (Henink et al., 2020). Another drawback is that the interpretations in qualitative research are limited, and that personal experience and knowledge tend to influence observations and conclusions (Henink et al., 2020). To address these drawbacks, I had to plan and organize my time appropriately such that I could go through all the steps of the data collection and analysis processes fully and effectively. Additionally, it can be noted that I had no personal knowledge or prior experience on the research topic which might have possibly influenced my observations and conclusions. As such, I had no personal experience or knowledge to influence my observations and conclusions. Additionally, according to Henink et al., (2020) qualitative research requires a labour-intensive analysis process such as categorisation and recoding (Henink et al., 2020). To account for this, I made sure that I planned my time appropriately to allow for the processing, categorising, and recording of data. With this in mind, it can be noted that despite the disadvantages highlighted above, the qualitative approach was considered to be the most suitable approach to facilitate the understanding of the experiences and perspectives of learners coming from low socio-economic background in one suburban high school in Gauteng South Africa. According to Delport and De Vos (2011), the core of qualitative research is to explore and understand participants' experiences, which is exactly what this study set out to do.

3.5. Research Design:

A phenomenological research design was applied in this study, with the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) being used for data analysis. The phenomenological research design, as defined by Neurbauer et al. (2019), focuses on an individual's lived experiences and perceptions of the world. It is designed to understand the subjective lived experiences and perspectives of participants (Hallet, 1995). As such, the purpose of utilising this research design was to study and understand the participants' unique and individual experiences, personal perspectives, and interpretations, as well as gaining insights into their motivations and actions (Neurbauer et al., 2019). By using the phenomenological research design, I managed to investigate the everyday experiences of learners coming from low socio-economic backgrounds at one suburban high school in Gauteng. Furthermore, the research design also allowed me to gain a much deeper insight into how the participants understand their experiences.

Phenomenology is both a philosophy and a research design (Hallet, 1995). As such, it also refers to the study of the structures of experience and consciousness (Neurbauer et al., 2019). It is designed to understand the unique, subjective, lived experiences and perspectives of participants. Phenomenology is also based on the premise that a singular experience can be interpreted in many ways. Therefore, even though multiple people might go through the exact same experience, they may interpret and process that same experience differently.

In phenomenology, data is collected through long, and intensive, semi structured, or structured personal interviews. Furthermore, follow up interviews may need to be conducted, as the study relies heavily on interviews. It is also quite important to note that the information gathered through interviews relies heavily on the researcher's interviewing skills as well as how articulate the participants are in conveying their experiences (Wilson, 2015). This is a limitation of phenomenology.

According to Wilson (2015), researchers may assume that people use a universal structure or essence to make sense of their experiences. However, the phenomenological research design requires the researcher to bracket whatever assumptions they have about certain experiences and/or phenomena. This, in turn, enables them to be better able to interpret the participants' feelings, perceptions, and beliefs to clarify the essence of the phenomenon under investigation (Wilson, 2015).

According to Nicholls (2019), bracketing is the setting aside of one's own beliefs and prior assumptions to avoid misrepresenting a subject's intended meaning, perception, or experience. For this research study, I had to put aside my own judgements and biases on the topic before engaging with the study. For example, when I started this study, I had the belief that learners coming from low socio-economic backgrounds would have quite a number of challenges within their home and school environments, which, in turn would negatively affect their schoolwork. However, I had to bracket this, and temporarily suspend this bias such that I could focus completely on the topic and receive it as it is. According to (Dorfler & Stierand, 2021) bracketing helps you recognize and temporarily suspend your personal judgments and biases on a subject while conducting qualitative data analysis. The above mentioned is significant as this is what I sought to do before the beginning of the research study.

According to Bliss (2016), there are several types of data that can be used with the phenomenological research design method, including documents, observations and art. The data is then reviewed a number of times in order to observe, form and develop themes. Clusters of meaning are then formed based on these themes (Bliss, 2016). Through this process, the researcher can construct the universal meaning of the event, situation, or experience and gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of the participants (Bliss, 2016, Neurbauer et al., 2019, Wilson, 2015).

With regards to the above discussed, I collected data in the form of interviews (guided by an interview schedule) which were recorded (with the assent of the participants, and the permission of their parents). Even though phenomenology encourages the use of multiple interviews, I only conducted one interview with each of the participants. It was my contention that the information gathered during these interviews would be useful in answering the research question. I was able to transcribe the interviews, as well as to keep a reflexive journal aimed at noting down observations I made and thoughts I had throughout my interactions with the participants. I then reviewed the transcribed data and reflected upon my observations.

Through exploring the research study's themes and subthemes, I was able to understand that whilst the participants had some challenges and negative experiences in their home and school environments/systems, they also had some strength and protective factors in these same environments, which, in turn, helped to balance their challenges and negative experiences.

Through repeating this process, and going through this process multiple times, I was able to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of the participants.

According to Wilson (2015) and Touffour (2017), phenomenological research aims to provide the most authentic data (Touffour, 2017, Wilson, 2015). Thus, it emphasises the need for the researcher to be objective in observing and analysing the data. To help do this, phenomenology encourages the researcher to document all personal experiences they have with the subject. The recording of these experiences is also done in an attempt to help the researcher detach themselves from the process (Wilson, 2015; Touffour, 2017; Neurbauer et al, 2019). To this regard, I kept a reflexive journal with me during the interview sessions I had with clients. Therefore, even as the participants were talking, I made notes of what they were saying, what stood out to me about the way they said what they said, their body language, as well as their tone of voice and any other observations. This, in turn, helped me to detach from the process and work with the data the participants gave me instead. I also kept a reflexive journal for the purpose of analysing data. According to Frechette et.al.,(2020), a reflective journal is a journal written by researchers themselves and is written throughout the research process. The reflexive journal sought to include details of what I did, thought and felt while analysing the data. Through this, the rationale behind my thoughts and perceptions were recorded (Frechette et.al.,2020).

3.6. Population, Sample and Sampling:

Kumar (2011) defines the term population, as a group of individuals from which the researcher draws the statistical sample for a study. It refers to the entire group of individuals that meet specific criteria and are of interest to the researcher (Kumar, 2011). Hence, any collection of individuals who share a common characteristic and are grouped together for the purpose of a study can be considered a population (Kumar, 2011). The population for this research study was high school going learners, both male and female, from any race and/cultural group, who were exempted from paying school fees because of their socio-economic background in one suburban high school in Gauteng.

The term sample, on the other hand, refers to the group of individuals who participate in a study (Elfil & Negida, 2017). It refers to a significant percentage of the population, and not an entire population (Elfil & Negida, 2017). As such, although there were quite a few learners who were exempted from paying school fees because of their socio-economic status within the school, only six of those learners volunteered to participate in the study. I initially

intended to have a sample size of ten learners as it was my contention that I would reach saturation with this sample size. However, upon my invitations either getting rejected or not getting responded to, it became apparent to me that I would not be able to get the ten participants I initially intended to have.

I made use of purposive sampling to select my sample size. According to Stratton (2021), purposive sampling is a type of non-probability sampling whereby the researcher selects the sample based on their subjective judgement, as opposed to random selection. For the purpose of this research study, purposive sampling was used in order to choose and select participants who have experienced the phenomenon and therefore understand it (Stratton, 2021) In order to meet the criteria, participants had to be excluded from paying school fees as a result of their socio-economic status. To gain access to the research population, I had to obtain permission from the Ethics Committee, the Department of Basic Education, as well as from the principal of the High School where I conducted the study. After obtaining permission, I then informed the school of what my criteria was. From then on, the school came up with a list of learners who fit the criteria. As I was doing my Masters in school social work field work practicals at the school, I had use of the school's therapy room two days out of the week. The learners who fit the criteria were instructed to come to me one by one throughout the day. I would then give the learners the information sheets to give to their parents, as well as consent forms, and assent forms to be signed should they be willing to participate in the study. Parents who were interested in their children partaking in the study either contacted me back to ask for more information or sent back signed consent forms. Those who were not interested simply declined the invitation or did not get back to me. Even though I sent out twenty-five invitations, only six of my invitations were accepted. As such, I collected data with six participants as opposed to the ten I had originally accounted for.

The small number of participants, however, allowed for the collection of rich, detailed data, from which themes and sub themes were established.

Although the research was limited, it was purposive in the sense that it managed to explore the experiences of learners coming from low socio-economic backgrounds in a suburban school. Learners coming from low socio-economic backgrounds were identified through the inclusion criteria of being exempted from paying school fees because of their financial/or socio-economic backgrounds. The research study also welcomed both male and female participants between the ages of 13 and 18 years old.

When it came to gaining permission for the study, it can be noted that I started off by asking for permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to complete the research study. After gaining permission from the Gauteng Department of Education, I then approached the High School and asked the principal for permission to conduct my study within the school, as well as for the school's help in gaining access to the population (learners who are exempted from paying school fees because of their financial/economic status).

The Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA) of 2021, speaks to promoting the protection of personal information processed by public and private bodies, as well as the right to privacy against the unlawful collection, retention, dissemination, and use of personal information. On the other hand, research ethics stress the need for research participants to participate willingly and voluntarily. Considering this, to gain access to the population, I let the school know what my criteria was. The school then came up with a list of learners who fit the criteria. As I was doing my field instruction practicals at the school, I had use of the school's therapy room two days out of the week. The learners were told to come to me one by one throughout the day. It was then that I gave them the information sheet to give to their parents, as well as consent forms, and assent forms to be signed should they be willing to be in the study. Parents who were interested in their children participating in the study either contacted me back to ask for more information or sent back signed consent forms. Those who were not interested simply declined the invitation or did not get back to me. The above mentioned is significant as it speaks to how the POPI Act and research ethics were observed and applied during this research study.

3.7. Research Instruments and Pretesting of the research instruments:

3.7.1. The research Instrument:

A research instrument is a tool used to collect, measure, and analyse data related to the research interests or the topic under study (Hu, 2014). The type of instrument to be used is considered and based on the type of study the researcher is conducting (Hu, 2014). The research instrument should also be able to collect data in a way that is appropriate to the research question being asked, and assist in answering the research aims, objectives, and research questions as well as to prove/disprove the hypothesis of the study (Hu, 2014). For this research study, an interview schedule was used as the research instrument.

An interview schedule is a plan and/or guideline for investigation in the form of a set of questions with structured answers (Cormac et al., 2019). The interview schedule consisted of

a series of questions which were closed-ended, open-ended and semi-closed (Hu, 2014). Moreover, the Interview Schedule consisted of 14 set questions, though the questions were sometimes expanded for probing purposes, as well as to gain more insight. The interview took a very informal, conversational tone. This, in turn, made it a lot easier for the participants to open up to me.

3.7.2. Pre-testing of the research instrument:

The research made use of the qualitative approach. According to Wright et al. (2016), pre-testing interview schedules is quite an essential step in research. This is mainly because pre-testing helps when it comes to increasing the trustworthiness of the research study (Wright et al., 2016). Pre-testing also helps the researcher to ensure that the participants interpret and answer questions in the way that the research intended (Wright et al., 2016). Additionally, pre-testing can also help the researcher to identify questions that don't make sense to participants, or problems with the questionnaire that might lead to biased answers (Wright et al., 2016).

To pre-test, I interviewed two participants. This was done to identify questions that possibly did not make sense to participants, address problems with the interview schedule, as well as to ensure that the participants answered and interpreted questions in the way that the research intended. After the interviews, I was satisfied with how the interviews had gone, as well as how the participants had answered my interview questions. As such, I went through with the rest of the research study. Furthermore, as I did not change any of the questions in the initial questionnaire, I also included the results of the two participants in the final research study analysis. According to Collins (2003), the results of pretest can be included in a final research report provided the questionnaire/interview guide was designed correctly, captured all the answers, and therefore remained unchanged. This decision to use the results of the pretest was also motivated by how difficult it was to get participants for the research study, given how sensitive the topic is.

3.8. Methods of data collection:

3.8.1. The semi structured Interview:

According to McGrath et al. (2019), an interview is a conversation between the research interviewer (the person coordinating the process of the conversation) and the interviewee (the person responding to the questions), with the purpose of gathering information. Interviews

can be conducted face-to-face or over the telephone, with the internet also emerging as a useful tool for interviewing (McGrath et al., 2019).

The method of data collection utilized in the research study was semi-structured, face to face interviews, guided by an interview schedule. All interviews took place at the school, and they were face to face interviews. Furthermore, participants were given an opportunity to decide which date and time suits them to participate in the interview. Interviews were conducted in the school's counselling room with the doors and windows closed to ensure privacy. With the participants' assent, and their parents' permission, the interviews were also recorded for later use. I also made the participants aware that I would potentially conduct follow up interviews if I needed to get more insight on their answers. Interviews lasted for an average of about 40 minutes, with some going up to an hour. Participants' styles and methods when it came to answering the questions were quite different. Five out of the six participants gave detailed answers and elaborated on their experiences. One participant, however, gave short, concise answers without elaborating or expanding more on it. As a result of this, his interview was 17 minutes long. This particular participant appeared to be quite introverted. This might possibly explain why he gave shorter answers than the other participants. For future reference, if I am ever faced with participants that are introverted, I would build rapport with them for a longer period before commencing with the interview process. This would possibly allow them to feel much more comfortable with expressing themselves around me.

The life history approach was also used to guide the interview process. This was done as a way of attempting to understand the meanings that participants ascribe to past events and experiences in their lives (Mousson, 2004). According to (Kothari & Hulme, 2016), life histories offer a way to map multiple perspectives, and in so doing, they help account for the different ways in which people internalize social norms. In life history interviews, participants are encouraged to emphasize some aspects of their lives (Kothari & Hulme, 2016). In using the life history approach, I would encourage participants to focus on some critical junctures in their lives, such as changes in socio economic class, financial hardships, the death of parents/loved ones etc. This in turn allowed them to describe events and changes in their lives using their own words.

3.9 Methods of Data Analysis:

For this research study, the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was utilised to analyse the lived experiences of the participants. The IPA is a qualitative research data analysis method aimed at providing a detailed analysis of each of the participants' personal lived experiences (Miles et al., 2014). This method of data analysis also aims to move away from general claims/generalisations of people's experiences (Miles et al., 2014). In using the IPA, the research study focuses particularly on understanding and learning more about the participants' psychological world (Love et.al, 2020). This may be in the form of beliefs and constructs that are manifested or suggested by what the participant says. The aim is always to understand the content and complexity of what the participant is saying, rather than measuring the frequency in which they say it (Love et.al, 2020. To achieve this, the researcher has to engage in an interpretative relationship with the transcript. Having an interpretative relationship with the script meant that I had to understand deeper meanings the participants attached to their words. This was not always easy but had to be obtained through a sustained engagement with the recordings, transcripts, and a process of interpretation.

The IPA is quite person-centred (Love et al., 2020). As such, it mostly focuses on the person who has been through the experience (Smith & Osborn, 2015). Therefore, even though a coding system may be used to identify commonalities, it's important for the researcher not to lose the depth of experience or meaning by trying to reduce everything to codes (Smith & Osborn, 2015).

Additionally, it must be noted that, with IPA, the sample size is generally very small (Smith & Osborn, 2015). This, in turn means that the researcher usually won't be able to draw broad conclusions about the generalizability of the findings (Smith & Osborn, 2015). This was applicable to this study as well, whereby the sample size was quite small (six participants). This, in turn, made it difficult for me to make any broad conclusions about the findings, as that would need a much bigger study, with more participants.

Personal bias is something the researcher must guard against when using IPA (Love et al., 2020). As such, to refrain from personal bias, I had to practise self-awareness, such that my own potential personal bias would not have a major influence or any influence at all on the findings of the research study. I did this through keeping a reflexive journal during interviews, as well as taking note of the participants' body language, change in tone of voice, or any other cue that I thought might be useful when it came to analysing the data.

In making use to the IPA, I made sure that I recorded the interviews for future use (this was done with the assent of the participants and permission of their parents). Furthermore, I also made sure to take notes of words, actions and gestures that stuck out to me during the course of the interviews. This later helped me in the data analysis process.

The IPA was considered to be the most suitable data analysis method as it allowed me to analyse the learners' personal and individual experiences in their home and schooling environments, but to also analyse patterns and similarities amongst them. Discussed below is a step-by-step approach to the analysis in IPA, as well as illustrations of how it was applied in the research study.

Step 1: Reading and Re-reading:

The first step of IPA is termed the *Reading and re-reading* step. This step consists of reading and re-reading the transcripts to get a good understanding of the participants' answers, and the contexts under which they said what they said. In making reference to this step, *I* read the prescribed transcripts a number of times, such that I could really understand the participants' answers. According to Shinebourne (2011) each reading has the potential to throw up new insights. To this regard, it can be noted that the more I read, the more I familiarised myself with the participants life stories and experiences.

Step 2: Initial Noting:

The second step of IPA is termed the Initial Noting Stage. It consists of writing notes with regards to the content one is reading about Shinebourne (2011). To this regard, it can be noted that as I went through the transcripts, certain themes, similarities, and differences started sticking out to me with regards to the participants' stories. As such, I went through the transcripts again and made notes. I noted down and annotated what stood out for me, and/what was interesting or significant about what the participants said. I wrote down these notes on the left side of the transcript pages. These notes were not organised in themes but were simple notes of things that stood out to me with regards to the participants' answers.

Step 3: Developing Emergent themes:

The third step of IPA is termed the Developing Emergent Themes Step. It consists of taking the notes that were made in the second step of the IPA process, and developing these notes into themes (Charlick et al., 2015). This step also involves returning to the beginning of the transcript, re-reading the transcripts, and making more notes, and developing these notes into

emergent themes. In so doing, the researcher transforms the initial notes into concise phrases aimed at capturing the essential quality of what was found in the text (Charlick et al.,2015). To this regard, it can be noted that I went through the transcripts again, alongside the notes that I made in the second step. I then searched for connections, similarities, and differences across the participants stories. Through this, I was able to come up with an initial set of themes.

Step 4: Searching for links across evolving themes:

The fourth step of IPA is termed the Searching for links across evolving themes step. It includes taking the themes that were developed in the third step and looking for links between these themes (Charlick et al., 2015). This step involves the researcher trying to make sense between the connections between themes which are emerging. Some of the themes cluster together, and some emerge as more superior concepts than others. To this regard, I came up with links between themes, I then came up with a new list of themes through this. I also searched for connections amongst the themes that I found in the transcripts. This, in turn, enabled me to observe and see if any subthemes could be formed. Some themes were indeed more superordinate than others as they turned up multiple times and seemed to be contributing quite significantly to the lives and experiences of the participants. These were themes such as the negative and positive effects of the relationship between the participants and their family members as well as the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in the lives of the participants. These were superior in the sense that the information the participants divulged with regards to these themes suggested that these themes contributed greatly to the participants' current experiences.

Step 5: Moving to the next case:

This step includes trying to bracket previous knowledge obtained from various cases and themes and keeping open-minded in order to do justice to the individuality of each case and theme (Charlick et al., 2015). In referring to this step, I made sure to treat each case as an individual case, bracketing any assumptions I may have picked up from various cases, but choosing instead to look at each case individually and letting individual themes develop from each case.

Step 6: Looking for patterns across cases:

The next step of IPA is termed the Looking for patterns across cases step. It includes looking for patterns across cases and making note of similarities in cases as well as differences and

uniqueness across cases (Charlick et al., 2015). Through making reference to this case, I was able to come up with a total of six themes and thirteen subthemes. These have been discussed in more detail and depth in chapter four of this research study.

Step 7: Taking Interpretations to deeper levels:

This step includes deepening the analysis by making use of metaphors and temporal inferences, as well as making reference to theories to further deepen the analysis (Charlick et al., 2015). To this regard, I deepened my analysis of the data by making use of metaphors as well as making reference to other theories and literature in order to aid my analysis. Proof of this can be seen in Chapter four of this research study. In doing all this, I went through the seven steps of the IPA process (Charlick et al., 2015).



Figure 3.1: The seven-steps of IPA data analysis (Charlick, McKellar, Fielder, & Pincombe, 2015 adapted from Smith et al., 2009)

3.10. Trustworthiness of the Research Study:

3.10.1. Credibility:

Credibility in research, refers to how confident the qualitative researcher is in the truth of their research study's findings (Schmidt, 2017). To ensure credibility, internal validity also

has to be ensured. Internal validity refers to the extent to which the results observed represent the truth in the population that is being studied (Schmidt, 2017). Ensuring this would mean that the research studies findings are accurate and not due to methodological errors (Shchmidt, 2017). I was able to enhance credibility within the research study through audio recordings of interviews, and keeping a reflexive journal, so that the data could be triangulated, as well as to ensure that a detailed description of the findings was provided. The descriptions of detailed findings demonstrated that I captured and interpreted the view of the participants accurately.

3.10.2. Transferability:

Transferability refers to the ability to transfer qualitative research results to other contexts or settings with different respondents (Leung, 2015). Similarly, Nowell et al., (2017) defines the term transferability as the degree to which research findings can be generalised. For the purpose of this research study, thick description was used in order to ensure transferability. Thick descriptions are detailed observations and interpretations of observations (Leung, 2015, Noble & Smith, 2015). Furthermore, thick descriptions include explicit contexts for actions and social events, which are not always directly observable. As such, in making reference to thick description, I kept a record of all the actions that I took for the purpose of this research study. Furthermore, in addition to recording the interviews, I also kept a reflexive journal of my thoughts and observations during my interactions with participants. As such, it is my contention that experiences of participants in relation to this phenomenon have been accurately described and highlighted and should therefore be transferrable to other contexts and settings.

3.10.3. Confirmability:

Confirmability refers to the degree of neutrality in the research study's findings (Noble & Smith, 2015). Confirmability also refers to the level of confidence that the research study's findings are based on the participants' narratives and words, rather than potential researcher biases (Oates et al., 2021). To ensure neutrality and confirmability, I made use of an audit trail. An audit trail is a transparent description of the research steps taken from the start of a research project to the development and reporting of findings (Noble & Smith, 2015). The purpose of using an audit trail, was to provide a rationale for the decisions made. Another purpose of the audit trail was to try and showcase that the findings of the research study are

based on the participants' responses, and not any potential bias or personal motivations from me as the researcher.

3.10.4 Dependability:

Dependability refers to how traceable and well documented the research process is (Noble & Smith, 2015). Dependability is important because it shows the trustworthiness of the research study through establishing the research study's findings as being consistent and repeatable (Oates et al., 2021). Failure to ensure or prove dependability suggests to the critical reviewer that the study and its methods were poorly applied, thus coercing the reviewer to have less trust in the results derived from the study. Ensuring dependability on the other hand will ensure that if some other researchers were to look over the data, they would arrive at similar findings, interpretations, and conclusions about the data (Noble & Smith, 2015). This is also important to ensure that there was not anything missed in the research study, or that the researcher was not sloppy or misguided in their final report. To ensure dependability, I provided enough information throughout this research report to ensure that if another researcher were to replicate the study, the information in the report would suffice and enable them to do so. In addition, an inquiry audit was used to ensure dependability. An inquiry audit involves safe keeping research documents so that other people would be able to follow and critique the research process (Noble & Smith, 2015). To this regard, I kept all audio recordings of interviews in a protected file on my computer. Additionally, I also kept transcribed records of the interviews in a protected file on my laptop.

3.11. Ethical Considerations:

Ethics are an important part of research, as they provide moral guidance to the researcher, help the researcher to be reflective, and improve on the quality of the research study (Sanjari et al.,2015). Firstly, it must be noted that at the beginning of the year as well as during the previous year, I conducted my Masters in School Social Work field instruction academic practicals at the same school I collected my research data from. As a result of this, there were some perceived power relations involved. As a result of these perceived power relations, I was concerned about the learners/participants potentially hesitating to participate freely and voluntarily or pull out of the research study because they may have felt obligated to participate. There were also concerns surrounding the learners potentially divulging information they were not comfortable divulging because of these perceived power relations. However, to account for this, I made the learners aware that I was not affiliated with the

school in any way and therefore did not have any power. I also continuously reminded the participants of the below mentioned ethical considerations:

3.11.1 Informed Consent:

According to Arifin (2018), consent in research should be given freely and voluntary. To ensure this, the researcher needs to ensure that potential participants understand what is being asked and expected of them (Cumyn et al., 2019). Furthermore, the researcher needs to ensure that potential participants are competent and healthy enough to consent (Arifin, 2018, Oates et al., 2021).

Since the research was conducted in a school, this meant that I was working with learners under the age of 18. As such, consent was sought from the parents, whilst assent was also sought from the learners. To ensure that informed consent and assent were correctly and rightfully obtained, potential participants and their parents/guardians were adequately informed about the research through the use of the information sheets which were sent to them through the students. The school identified learners who fit the given criteria, and sent them to the therapy room, which was a private office whereby I was conducting my Masters field instruction practicals, and also where I eventually did my research interviews. I would give the learners two copies of the PIS (one for them, and one for their parents), as well as a consent and assent form for the participants and the participants' parents attention and consideration. After this, I would also briefly walk them through the research study and remind them to get in contact with me with a response regardless of whether their answer was positive or negative. Those who did not want to participate would simply reject the invitation, or not get back to me, whilst those that were willing to participate would either bring back signed consent and assent forms or have their parents get in contact with me for more information.

Outlined in the participant information sheet was information pertaining to the details about the research study, how long the research study would take, the role of the participants within the research study, as well as what the participants stood to gain from the research study. Outlined in the consent and assent forms was also a request for permission to record the interview, as well as a request for signatures from the participant and their parent/legal guardian outlining that they have agreed to let me record the interview and participate freely and voluntarily in the interview for the research study.

3.11.2. Voluntary Participation:

Voluntary participation refers to how the participants in a research study should have a free choice to be involved in the gathering of information (Cumyn et al., 2019). Furthermore, all participants should be able to withdraw from or leave the study at any point in time without feeling an obligation to continue (Oates et.al, 2021). Additionally, participants should not need to provide a reason for leaving the study (Arifin 2018; Oates et.al, 2021). To this regard, it must be noted that all participants were given a choice on whether they wanted to partake in the research study or not. In addition to their parents consenting to them participating, they were also required to assent, and were given the chance to walk away before the interview started, or to refrain from answering questions they did not want to answer. Therefore, whenever the participants indicated they did not want to answer certain questions, their choices were respected. Furthermore, if the participants had decided to stop participating in the study at any point in time, their decisions would have been respected as well.

3.11.3. Permissions:

According to the Wits University formal research guidelines, all research that involves the gathering of data from human participants must receive ethics clearance from the appropriate Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). As such, before conducting this research study, ethics clearance was sought and obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee. My protocol number is H23/03/08 Moreover, permission was also sought from the Department of Basic Education as well as from the principal and vice principal of the school before commencing with the research study. Only after permission was provided by the relevant parties did the research study data collection process commence.

3.11.4. Navigating Distress in Participants:

In conducting this research study, references were made to research ethics. This included the ethical obligation not to harm participants either physically, psychologically, or emotionally. To navigate distress in participants, the following procedures were put in place:

If a participant indicated they are experiencing high levels of stress, emotional distress, or exhibit behaviours suggesting that the interview is too stressful for them (e.g.: uncontrolled crying), then the first step was to stop the interview immediately, and then offer immediate support to the participant by assessing their mental and emotional status (Draucker et al., 2009).

As I am a qualified social worker, I would have been able to offer immediate support by assessing the participants' mental status. This would have been achieved through the asking of questions such as:

1. What thoughts are you having?
2. What are you feeling right now?
3. Do you feel you are able to go about your day?
4. Do you feel safe?

From then on, if the participant felt that they were able to resume the interview, the interview would then be resumed (Draucker et al., 2009). However, if they were not able to carry on, then they would have been excused from the interview and encouraged to contact their school psychologist within the school. With parental consent and the participants' assent, a follow up in the form of a courtesy call would have been conducted within a week of the interview.

All participants, and parents/guardians that may also have been affected as a result of this research study, would have been encouraged to call either myself or the school psychologist if they experienced increased distress in the hours/days following the interviews.

However, this distress protocol was not implemented seeing as none of the participants experienced distress during the course of the interview.

3.11.5. Confidentiality:

According to Bracken-Roche et al.,2017; Weisser-Lohmann, 2012 and Kara, 2018, confidentiality refers to the researcher's responsibility and obligation (as bonded by the agreement with participants, and through the participants' informed consent) about how the participants' identifiable and/or private information will be handled, managed, and disseminated. It must be noted that in this research study, the confidentiality of the participants was preserved by means of not revealing the participants' names and identity in the data analysis and reporting of the study findings. Moreover, the privacy and confidentiality of the interview/surveying environment was managed carefully during interview sessions. The purpose of this was to ensure total confidentiality.

3.11.6. Anonymity:

Anonymity is a form of confidentiality, which includes keeping the participants' identities unknown to other parties other than the ones involved in undertaking research (Sanjari et al.,

2014: Bracken-Roche et al., 2017). As data was collected on a face-to-face basis, myself, my supervisor, the deputy principal, as well as two members of staff in the finance department know the identities of the participants. All parties were made aware of how important it is not to share the identities of the participants with other external stakeholders. They verbally agreed to keep the identities of the participants unknown to all other parties within the school. Furthermore, to ensure that the identities of the participants will be unknown to anyone else, pseudonyms have been used to refer to the participants as well as their school in this research report.

3.11.7. No Harm:

The term harm in the research context refers to the act of causing physical, psychological and/or emotional distress to participants (Sanjari et al., 2014, Cumyn et al.,2014). Researchers have an ethical obligation not to harm the participants. Researchers also have an ethical obligation to implement an immediate distress protocol should the participants feel distressed during the research data collection process. This also includes taking precautions such as providing free counselling to participants who may be psychologically or emotionally triggered during the research study. To this regard, I had a distress protocol put in place for immediate assistance to participants who may have felt triggered during my research study. This distress protocol was never utilized as none of the participants were triggered during the data collection process. However, all participants were provided with the contact details of a free and qualified counsellor within the school, to be provided with free counselling if they needed it at a later stage especially as a result of partaking in the research study.

3.12. Publication of results:

In publishing the results of the research study, the researcher has an ethical obligation to report the correct and unbiased findings (Kumar, 2014). The findings of this study were recorded in the form of a research report which will be submitted to the Faculty of Humanities and the Department of Social Work at the University of the Witwatersrand.

3.13. Research Procedure:

The procedure for this research study was conducted in the following sequence:

- Ethics clearance was obtained from the University's Human Ethics Research Committee (see Appendix A)

- Permission was also obtained from the Gauteng Department of Basic Education before data collection (see Appendix B).
- Furthermore, permission to conduct the study was obtained from the principal and vice principal of the school before the research study took place (see Appendix C).
- Potential participants and their parents were sent information sheets, as well as blank consent and assent forms to sign if they were interested in the study (see Appendices D-G).
- Participants whose parents consented to them being in the study then brought back signed consent forms and assent forms.
- The interview schedule was piloted with two participants who met the selection criteria and as no changes were made to the tool, the findings were also included in the main study. The participants provided me with the feedback that my questions were understandable and that the recording devices worked well. As such, I did not make any changes, and continued with the data collection process.
- Appointments were made with the rest of the participants who were going to be part of the study.
- I conducted the interviews with participants guided by the interview schedule (see Appendix I). The average interview time was forty minutes.
- Data was then presented in the form of themes and sub themes with verbatim quotes. (See Chapter Four in this research report) and presented as the final research report.

3.14. Chapter Summary:

This chapter provided a detailed explanation of the methodology underpinning the study. At the beginning of the chapter was a recap on the research question which was followed by the research aims and objectives. The chapter looked into how the study takes a qualitative approach guided by the collective case study design to collect data. The study's population focused on high school learners exempted from paying school fees, with a total of six sampled participants recruited to participate in the study and were interviewed using a semi structured interview schedule. The chapter discussed IPA as the analytical technique use to analyse the data and was followed by a description on how the study ensured trustworthiness by assuring credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability within the study.

Concluding the chapter was the ethical considerations which pointed out the ways in which the research study assured that participants were not harmed in the duration of the research study. Chapter four now follows with a discussion on the key findings of the research study.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1. Introduction:

This chapter presents the findings which came from the study. The chapter starts with a recap on the research aims and objectives. This section is then followed by a presentation of the demographic profile of the participants. Thereafter, the themes and subthemes that emerged from the data analysis are presented in table format. Verbatim quotes from the participants will also be used to support findings. The chapter will conclude with a summary.

4.2. Research question:

What are the experiences of learners coming from low socio-economic backgrounds in one suburban high school in Gauteng?

4.3 Research Aim:

The aim of the study was to explore the experiences of learners from low socio-economic backgrounds in one suburban high school in Gauteng, South Africa.

4.4 Research Objectives:

- To understand how the learners' backgrounds impact their ability to navigate school.

- To learn how the learners' experiences within their home contexts affect their learning in one suburban school.
- To find out how the learners feel that their experiences could be improve.

Table 4.1 – Demographic profile of the school:

Table 1 below shows the demographics of the school. It also shows that the school has a total of three deputies, and sixty six teachers and nine hundred and fifteen learners.

	Deputies		Teachers		Learners			
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Black	Indian	Coloured	White
	2	1	20	46	395	320	141	59
Total:	3		66		915		200	

Table 4.2: Biographic Information of participants:

Table 2 below shows the participants' ages, grades, gender, the number of sibling they have, as well as whether they live in a single or double income household.

Pseudoname	Age	Grade	Single/Double Income household:	Number of siblings	Gender
Hloni	17	10	Single Income Household.	Has one sister	Female
Soki	18	12	Single Income Household	Has one sister.	Female
Samukelo	17	11	Single Income Household	Has two sisters	Male
Thato	18	12	Single Income Household	Has a sister who lives in the Eastern Cape.	Male.

Wasara	**14**	**8**	**Dual Income household.**	**Is an only child**	**Male.**
Mark	**16**	**10**	**Dual Income Household.**	**Has a younger brother.**	**Male.**

4.5. Participants' Biographical Information:

Table 2 above shows that all participants are 18 years of age or younger. Furthermore, the table also shows the participants' home situation, including whether they live in a single- or double-income household, as well as the number of siblings they have. According to Jensen (2011), cultural background, customs and beliefs give children a sense of identity. The data analysed showed that the participants' backgrounds are a big part of who they are, and therefore is related to their current experiences.

4.5.1 Hloni:

Hloni is a 16 year old girl in Grade 10. She is 17 years old, and has one parent (her mother), as her father passed away. She also has one other sibling, a younger brother. Hloni spends her time between her Mother's place and her grandmother's place. She lived with her grandmother up until grade 4 when she moved in with her mother and started attending a suburban school.

"I went to Brakpan Senior School. And they made me do grade four again there because they said I came from a Kasi school so I might find adjusting to the English that we did there a bit difficult. So, they made me do it twice. And they also made my brother do it twice. He was doing grade one. And then, from there, we've been living with my mom. And we stay here during the week, and then on weekends, go home. And oh, my father passed away. So, it's just me, my mum and my brother."-Hloni.

At first, Hloni felt having to repeat grade 4 was a disadvantage and unnecessary as she felt she had gained enough knowledge from her previous school to be advanced to another grade. However, when her marks came out, she understood why there had been a need for her to repeat grade 4.

"I felt it was unnecessary. But then when my marks came out, I realized it was necessary. But they weren't that bad, so I was able to pick up from everything because we did learn English and I did go to a suburb school before I went to the Kasi School."-Hloni.

4.5.2. Samukelo:

Samukelo is a 17-year-old boy who is in Grade 11. Samukelo also has two older sisters. He lives with his mother in a single parent household as his father left when he was three years old. Even though Samukelo's sisters do not live with Samukelo and his mother, they help by sending money, and supporting Samukelo and his mother financially and emotionally wherever possible. Samukelo is quite close to his sisters, so much so that when he has academic problems, or needs career guidance, he feels he can turn to them.

"I was born in Johannesburg. I was born by a single mother. My dad left when I was, I think about three years old, my dad left so I was just raised by my mom, and with two other siblings. So I'm the last born of my two other siblings. One of them went to learn at a college, right? Studying accounting and stuff like that. And then my other sister, she was really good at academics and things like that so she got a scholarship to Kellerman College and yeah, that's where she finished her studies. I started school at Brakpan Senior School. So, it's just right here. I went there from grade one, up until grade seven. And I moved from there to here for high school from grade eight, and now I'm in grade 11 so yeah, my mom has been raising me as a single parent."-Samukelo.

Samukelo's mother is a domestic worker, and as she does not stay at her place of work, she and Samukelo live in a different neighbourhood to the one his mother works in. The neighbourhood that Samukelo and his mother live in is situated quite far from Samukelo's school, which means that he has to travel, and is usually tired when he gets home from school. This, in combination with the neighbourhood being loud, actually distracts him from his schoolwork.

"At some points? Yes, I would say yes, at some point, because in the neighbourhood that I live in, there tend to be distractions and stuff And so that causes me to not concentrate fully on my schoolwork and sometimes, I think it's because of distance. Okay, maybe it's my fault but, sometimes, after sports, I need to go home, and I eventually get home late and that would affect me because I'll be tired by then and then I wouldn't have the drive to open the books or start studying so I'll just go sleep. Some of the distractions that I may have at home is that I have grandparents, sometimes my grandparents come visit and so they expect me to go and

like do chores for them like stuff like that so, yes, there are some causes of distractions at home, but my mom has called a tutor for every Saturday for my studies for some of my subjects so that actually helps in kind of, like, revising on my schoolwork and doing my schoolwork."-Samukelo.

4.5.3. Mark:

Mark is a 16-year-old boy in Grade 10. He lives with both of his parents and has a little brother as well. Mark's mother is a domestic worker, and his father is an electrician. Mark has a good, strong relationship with his little brother. He stated that when he has a bad day, all he has to do is play with his little brother and he will feel much better. Mark recalled his journey in life prior to the COVID-19 pandemic as being neither good nor bad. However, for him he recollects the COVID-19 pandemic as the turning point in his life where he and his family started struggling financially.

"Okay, I was born in 2007 on the 14th of November, I wouldn't say it was a good or bad journey. When I was young it wasn't that bad, but when I got to grade 6 and 7, and especially when COVID hit, my parents started to struggle during the lockdown and all of that. Then I got into this school because I lived down the road, and like I didn't really find out that they were struggling until end of last year, beginning of this year. Yeah, and I have like a little brother."-Mark.

4.5.4. Soki:

Soki is an 18-year-old girl, who is in Grade 12. She lives with her mom, alongside her little sister in a single parent household. Though Soki is in contact with and has a relationship with her father, the relationship is quite strained. This is mainly because Soki's father does not contribute to the family financially. This, in turn, puts a strain on his relationship with Soki, and the rest of the family. Soki recalled her childhood as being "difficult" and reported that it even is difficult now as her mother has no one to help financially. Soki reported that it gets so bad to the point where she contemplates getting a job so that she can help around the house.

"And growing up for me was not difficult. But you know, it was just fine until my dad left. My dad left when I was kind of in grade eight, they got separated with my mom, and then he just went to Venda, going to a funeral but never came back. So that's what happened. And so then my mom was struggling like struggling with me, especially because my sister was like, still like a bit young because I'm the older one with my mom. So, she was struggling, and then

especially financially, because my mom is a domestic worker. And my dad was like, not supporting me and he was not talking to her and stuff like that. Basically, that's what happened."-Soki.

4.5.5. Thato:

Thato is an 18-year-old boy in Grade 12. He has an older sister, who lives in the Eastern Cape. Thato lives in Johannesburg with his mother, who is a domestic worker. As Thato's father passed away, Thato's household is a single income household. Thato also has a functioning relationship with his mother's side of the family, though he reported not knowing his father's side of the family.

"Okay. I have a sister who lives in the Eastern Cape and takes care of my mom's house. I live this side with my mom. My dad…I don't have a dad…he passed away. I don't know his side of the family. I only know my side of the family…my mom. Yeah, there's not much to say about that."-Thato.

4.5.6. Wasara:

Wasara is a 14-year-old boy in Grade 8. He is an only child, and he lives with both of his parents. His mother is a domestic worker, and his father works for British Ambassy. Wasara recalled what he described as a normal childhood, whereby everything he experienced was normal, and with no hardships. This links up to his current experiences, because even though his family is struggling financially, Wasara hardly feels it. Before the study, Wasara did not know he was exempted from paying school fees, as his parents are able to provide for all his needs and wants. Wasara also reported having some harships at school when it comes to making and keeping friends. He expressed that some of the friends he has made are not real friends, and that some of his friends ignore him, whilst others try to distract him from doing his schoolwork. From his facial expressions as he spoke about the topic, it was clear that this was something that upset him greatly.

"Okay. I was born in Berea. I grew up in a normal family with a father and everything. So as I grew up, I went to Houghton where I met friends, and I learned that some of those friends are not real friends, so yeah. So now I have been through a lot. It's okay, but some things are not okay. My mom works at a job, my father works at a job, so I eat good food and everything. I go to school every day with transport and everything. I carry lunch and when I came to Woodside, I made good friends, and I made a lot of real friends. I'm just seeing what

works out for me. So, so far, it's really good. My childhood experience was normal for a normal kid, I lived in a flat, I always watched TV and did normal kids' stuff. So my childhood was really normal. I never really struggled that much though, so that's how my life is so far. "-Wasara.

The interviews were semi structured and guided by an interview schedule. However, I noted that the participants felt a lot more comfortable when I took a more conversational tone with them and asked them the interview questions in a non-formal approach. As such, as they walked into the interviewing space, I would make casual conversation with them, ask them about their day, make a few jokes, and offer them tea, and snacks. I noticed that this put them at ease immediately and made the interviews flow much more smoothly. According to (Roulston, 2018), one of the benefits of informal, conversational interviewing is that participants feel more relaxed and therefore give more honest answers. Most of the participants were quite eager and open to telling me their life stories, whilst others remained a little more guarded in their responses.

4.6 Themes and Subthemes:

The above participants were interviewed, and after a rigorous and thorough data analysis, a number of themes emerged. According to Rivas (2018), themes are broad categories or ideas where common patterns in qualitative data analysis can be placed. These themes will be explored in detail in this chapter.

The themes discussed in this chapter emerged from the participants' responses to the interviews and help to address the research questions which underpin this study. The statements made by participants were compared and of significance are the converging ideas on how these learners experience their home and school environments, and the noticeable differences in their experiences, as they have expressed it. Because of these variations in experiences, it would appear that the experiences of these learners is affected by context, support systems, strength and supportive factors, as well as the approach of the individual.

From the data gathered, the following themes and subthemes emerged:

Table 3: Themes and Subthemes:

Themes:	**Subthemes:**

1. The negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in the lives of the participants.	1.1 The negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the academic lives of the participants. 1.2 The negative effects of the COVID-19 on the personal lives of the participants.
2. The positive effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in the lives of the participants.	2.1 The positive effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the academic lives of the participants 2.2 The positive effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the social lives of the participants.
3. The challenges faced by participants in their home environments	3.1. Financial Challenges 3.2. Challenges with relationships
4. The challenges participants face in their school environment	4.1.Academic and Classroom related challenges 4.2.Challenges with participating in extra-curricular activities. 4.3. Challenges with transport
5. Strength and Protective Factors in the Lives of the participants	5.1.Relationship with family, extended family, and family friends 5.2.Relationship with peers and staff members 5.3.Sports and Extracurricular activities 5.4.The existence and role of aspirations and motivations in the lives of the participants

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in the lives of the participants:

The participants were asked how the COVID-19 pandemic eased and/**or** worsened the personal and academic challenges in their lives. Six out of the six participants reported that the COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected aspects of their lives. Two out of the six participants also added that the pandemic helped to ease some of their hardships and therefore positively impacted their lives, to an extent.

Theme 1: The negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the lives of the participants:

Six out of the six participants were negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, they were all affected in various ways. Four out of the six participants reported being negatively affected academically, one out of the six participants reported being affected

socially, and one out of the six participants reported being affected financially. In this, it can be noted that participants were affected by the pandemic in various ways.

Subtheme 1.1.: The negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the academic life of the participants:

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on these participants can be understood better by looking at various studies on how COVID-19 affected school going learners. For example, Caroline et al's (2019) study on School's responses to COVID-19 speaks to how nearly all teachers (98 per cent) reported that their pupils were behind where they would normally expect them to be in their curriculum learning at the end of the 2019/20 school year.

The above mentioned corroborates and coincides with what the participants reported as to how the COVID-19 pandemic affected them. Wasara reported that the pandemic negatively affected his education in the sense that he did not learn as much during the pandemic as he learned prior to the pandemic.

*"The only change was in my education, you see? Because I don't think we learned that much in the COVID-19 period. But nothing really changed that much. So it didn't affect me that much.**"-Wasara.***

Similarly, Hloni also reported that the COVID-19 pandemic fuelled her academic hardships, and that she found it hard to interact with her teachers or to concentrate completely via the screen. She also reported that there were a lot more distractions when it came to learning online at home than there were at school.

"Academically, I learned from talking on a one on one basis with my teacher, and I can see what they're telling me and in person, I can understand very well whereas during COVID we used to do it online, and there are many distractions at home, so no matter where you were, you'd have to have that self-discipline that you came here to do something and you shouldn't let anything else distract you so it was also bad…The only bad thing about it was that I didn't get to properly learn some of the topics that we did during COVID."-Hloni.

According to (Said, 2021), academic concerns refer to learning difficulties, lack of attention from teachers, and increasing workload that have restricted students' ability to concentrate during online classes. Several authors around the world have researched students' academic concerns caused by COVID-19 (Said, 2021). For instance, Realyvásquez-Vargas et al. (2020)

found that shifting to online learning affected students' academic performance and caused a lot of intellectual fatigue due to the increased workload. Mark spoke to this aspect.

"Not being able to have one on one conversations with a teacher, like not being able to learn in a classroom environment was really challenging, but they did start implementing online school which was not bad, but it was kind of boring…I got side tracked. I came back in term 3 and like for the first bit of tests, I didn't do really well, but I told myself that even though there were problems, I still strived to get the marks I got which were really decent. Especially with Accounting and EMS, I did good in that because that's another sector of the work. "- Mark.

On the other hand, Thato found he could concentrate better at home, than he did at school, seeing that there were so many distractions at school, in the form of friends. However, similarly to Mark, he also reported he struggled in the sense that he struggled to get help from his teachers or gauge their attention.

"During COVID we had to learn through Zoom, which made it hard because teachers were always busy with other classes, and also not everyone could hop on. But I would say it was kind of helpful. I could work at home, I could focus more so it was helpful. Yeah, another negative is I couldn't always ask them questions. I would message them on like WhatsApp and like WhatsApp groups and stuff."-Thato

Subtheme 1.2: The negative financial effects of the pandemic on the lives of the participants:

In addition to the pandemic affecting the participants' ability to concentrate and perform to their best academic level, the participants also spoke about how the pandemic exacerbated their financial hardships, which, in turn, also contributed to their academic hardships. According to Aucejo et.al.,(2020), students from the less privileged backgrounds have experienced larger negative impacts due to the COVID-19 outbreak. Soki clearly demonstrated this point when she spoke to her experiences during the pandemic. Not only did she find it hard to concentrate when all the work was online, but she also struggled in terms of access to devices to help her connect to online classes and learn. Moreover, she sometimes experienced load shedding and power cuts, and this affected her in the sense that the phone

she was using to log onto their online learning platforms would not always be charged. As a result of this, she fell behind on her classes.

"Challenges, for academic, the school didn't provide us with Wi Fi, or like laptops compared to like, you know, we have this thing of our school, they gave us like, data, so you can thingy and like laptops, even my brother's school, they gave them laptops and their school is like public to a point where they don't pay school fees and they gave them things and it was really hard to do online because like, batteries will be low and let's say you didn't even have a power bank and like the whole day in a room, I'd rather be at school, interacting with some people, because at home I also don't really focus at home, there are so many distractions, your phone, you can be like okay let me just watch TV for an hour, then it turns like into three hours sitting there on your phone you can be on your phone for a very long time and, like miss a class or something, and we didn't really do much, in the COVID 19 pandemic it was just like I don't know that year was, I don't know, there was just this thing of, I'm not in school, why should I do this? It's fine, because we never did online, like tests or something like that and it was not enough because you didn't learn. Sometimes you need like, face to face contact with someone in order for you to understand something. Especially when they teaching so that was also hard because I didn't understand some of the things. I did fall behind."-Soki.

Soki's experience coincides with Caroline et al's (2019) study on school's responses to COVID-19 which found that teachers estimate that their pupils are three months behind, on average. Moreover, according to (Caroline et.al, 2019) reduction in family income, limited access to digital resources, and the high cost of internet connectivity have disrupted the academic life of the students. In relation to this, it can also be noted that for Mark, the pandemic affected his life financially, in the sense that his father lost his job, leaving their family to survive on his mother's income alone. This, in turn put a lot of strain on the family.

"When I was young it wasn't that bad, but when I got to grade 6 and 7, and especially when COVID hit, my parents started to struggle during the lockdown and all of that. Then I got into this school because I lived down the road, and like I didn't really find out that they were struggling until end of last year, beginning of this year."-Mark.

Subtheme 1.3.: The negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the social lives of the participants:

Said (2021) states that the peer-to-peer impact in the school environment motivates individuals to work hard and learn social skills, which may not be possible in an online setting. One participant reported the pandemic eased her social challenges in the sense that she did not have to socialize during the pandemic. This was mainly because she describes herself as an introvert and finds it very hard to talk to people.

"So it eased the fact that I didn't have to socialize with people, because I'd find it very difficult talking to people and as you've noticed, I haven't made eye contact that much but yeah, stuff like that."-Hloni.

On the other hand, another participant reported that the pandemic negatively affected his social life. This was mainly because the pandemic started whilst he was still in primary school. As a result of this, he did not get to spend a lot of time with his grade seven friends and peers, and this was quite hard on him knowing that he would probably not see some of them again seeing as they were all going in different directions.

"For the personal bit, it was the not being able to see my friends for the last time because I was doing my Grade 7 year. It really affected me because I didn't spend enough time with them because we went to separate schools, others were going to other countries. So that affected me deeply because I had this bond with them, but COVID really ruined it."-Mark.

Theme 2: The positive effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the lives of the participants:

For some participants, however, the pandemic helped to ease their hardships. In fact, two out of the six participants reported that they found learning to be much easier when it was done virtually, as they could concentrate more and had less distractions.

Subtheme 2.1.: The positive effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the academic lives of the participants:

During COVID, we had to learn through Zoom, which made it hard because teachers were always busy with other classes, and also not everyone could hop on. But I would say it was kind of helpful. I could work at home, I could focus more, so it was helpful. (Thato)

So it eased the fact that I didn't have to socialize with people, because I'd find it very difficult talking to people and as you've noticed, I haven't made eye contact that much but yeah stuff like that and then academically, I learned from talking on a one on one basis with my teacher, and I can see what they're telling m and in person, I can understand very well whereas during COVID we used to do it online, and there are many distractions at home, so no matter where

you were, you'd have to have that self-discipline that you came here to do something and you shouldn't let anything else distract you so it was also bad and personally, I didn't get to see my friends, but then we also have like calls and all that. The only bad thing about it was that I didn't get to properly learn some of the topics that we did during COVID (Hloni).

I would say it eased my experience because I somehow got better academics than I anticipated. So, I don't know what happened, but I just had a hiccup in grade nine, because in grade eight, we didn't really get to learn a lot, so I did have that hiccup, but it actually eased my experience in my social life. In my personal life, I would say it has been the same so I wouldn't say it has eased or worsened my experience, but I would say that eased my experience though…Before COVID, I didn't really know anyone. I'd say maybe at school, or maybe, but after COVID, I got to know people better and I got to know people better and I got to experience more things than it was during COVID, so yeah, I would say (Samukelo).

Theme 3: The challenges participants face in their home environment:

The aspect of financial challenges came up, whereby participants divulged that they were experiencing financial problems at home. However, whilst participants all divulged they had financial challenges/difficulties in their home environments, three out of the six participants revealed they were negatively affected by these financial challenges, whilst the other three participants reported that they were hardly affected by these challenges as their needs and wants were still met in their home environments.

Subtheme 3.1: Financial Challenges faced by the participants:

For the participants that revealed that they were negatively affected by their financial challenges at home, they revealed that their financial challenges were affecting their social lives, and they especially felt this when their friends wanted to go out or participate in recreational activities that they didn't have the financial means for.

One participant in particular expressed that sometimes his friends want to go out or do activities outside of the school. However, he cannot always go, as he understands the financial situation at home. He expressed that sometimes he does disclose that he cannot go to outings as he does not have money, but that sometimes he just comes up with a scenario as to why he can't go. It was clear that this participant knew and understood the situation at home.

"I've came to the point where I understand where my mom comes from and the struggles that we're in. So I tend to not ask a lot, or either, I would say to put it in my own hands and tell my friends that I can't go even if I wanted to go. I can't go because so and so or sometimes I tell

them that I don't really have the money at the moment to come out with you guys. So it doesn't really affect me a lot I would say because, yeah, I've understood the struggle that my mom is in, and that she's a single parent."-Sandile.

Whilst Sandile chooses to be honest with his friends and let them know that he cannot always afford any friendship outings, Soki on the other hand revealed that she takes a different approach in the sense that she tries to get things done by herself. She does this either by saving up full amounts to do what she wants to do, or by saving up as much as she can, and then asking her mother to help with the remaining balance as opposed to asking for the full amount to do what she wants to do. As such, it can be noted that whilst Soki understands the financial predicament that she and her family are in, she takes actions to try and make sure that she can still afford some of her needs and wants. This is consistent with how Soki talks about herself as being quite self-sufficient and "craving to do everything by herself".

"So that's why most of the time, I usually just save up so when I want to buy something, I tell her I have this much money. Can you please add for me? I'm going to buy this and that, basically I do that."-Soki.

Mark on the other hand, revealed that whilst his family had always struggled financially, he did not always feel affected by his family's status as his parents made sure he had all he wanted and needed. However, after the COVID-19 pandemic, and even more so after his father lost his job, the family really struggled and that's when Mark felt the family's financial predicament the most.

Evidence from the participants' responses shows the impact of living in a single income household as opposed to living in a dual income household. Four out of the six participants interviewed come from single income households. This, in turn, places a lot of pressure on the single parent to provide for the household on their own.

During her interview, Soki spoke quite a bit to this aspect, and mentioned how it has affected her.

"My mom like mom does, like, everything, like, when I mean everything, she will make sure that you guys like have like everything. She will make sure you guys have a phone. Even though it's not an expensive phone, like, she understands that my child's needs are taken care off, my children need to dress nicely and stuff like that. So yeah, she's really trying her best and like

it's difficult since my dad left. Like things at home are like very difficult. Cause also I have uncles from my dad's side."-Soki.

According to (Neppl et.al.,2016), there is abundant evidence that children in low-income households do less well than their peers on a range of developmental outcomes. However, there is continuing uncertainty about how far money itself matters, and how far associations simply reflect other, unobserved, differences between richer and poorer families.

Another theory that was used to understand the relationship between the learners and their parents/caregivers is the family stress model. The 'family stress model' refers to the impact of economic disadvantage on the emotional home environment, holding that hardship causes stress for parents, and this in turn affects their parenting abilities (Neppl et.al., 2016). Economic stress can make parents frustrated, less patient and lacking in the emotional resources needed for supportive and nurturing parenting behaviours (McLoyd 1990; Magnuson and Duncan 2002).

In relation to this, Soki revealed that she sometimes struggles with her relationship with her mother. Whilst she understands and knows that her mother will always find a way to make sure that her basic and educational needs are met, she doesn't always feel emotionally connected to her and feels that she does not understand her. Soki also revealed that sometimes her mother would come back home from work extra stressed and would kick Soki out for something like not doing her chores. It was clear in Soki's tone that this caused her a lot of distress.

"So yeah, it's really tough. And you know, I really love my dad, but then I just, she's...he frustrates me also, cause like seeing my mom like, but you're at a point I'm just like, and you know, my mom takes out this frustration...it's like everything is on me most of the time because like she's like, "your dad is not giving me money" and stuff like that. She says you guys need to understand the situation at home... I do understand the situation at home. It's very hard for also me like, I need to tell her like before like Mom, I need something like this and that. She will make a plan, and then she will try give us something or like give us what she can. So yeah."-Soki.

Subtheme 3.2.: Participants unaffected by their financial situation:

Three out of the six participants revealed that they did not feel affected by their family's current financial situation.

One participant revealed that the reason why he was unaffected was mainly because his parents always made sure he had all his wants and needs provided for. He expressed quite a lot of gratitude for this. The only reference he made to feeling affected by his family's financial status is when he spoke about how they hardly go on holiday, and usually stay at home and "relax" whereas he would prefer to go on holiday.

"At home, I would say maybe we can think more out of the box when it comes to holidays and stuff like that. We mostly just stay at home and relax."-Wasara.

Similarly, Thato also expressed that whilst his family struggles financially, he hardly feels it as they have a lot of support. He expressed that both his older sister, his mother's employers, the school, his teachers as well as some of his friends are always helping out. As a result of this, he hardly ever feels the consequences of his family's current financial predicament.

"*I have this friend called Jacob, and his dad always helps me with stuff. He helps me get experience from different types of jobs and stuff, so he helps me, yeah…even things out. "-Thato.*

Hloni describes herself as being quite shy and introverted. Moreover, whilst she does have friends, she reported she feels a sense of relief when she is not around other people. Therefore, she does not hang out with her friends outside of school much. As a result of this, she does not really feel her financial status impacts her social life at all. Furthermore, Hloni reported her mother's employers are always ready to help and assist if she or any of her family members need help and/or support. Especially if it is school related. In return, Hloni reveals she feels responsible for her learning and education and feels it is her duty to make her mother and her employers proud as they do so much for her.

According to (Votruba-Drzal, 2003), children coming from low socio-economic backgrounds may find it harder to make friends, and/or navigate already existing friends. As if they do have friends, they won't be able to afford to do all the things they want to do. Just getting a bus to the shops could be too expensive (Votruba-Dzal, 2003). Based on the data analysed, it can be noted that this statement was found to be true, though it did not apply in all contexts. Children coming from low socio-economic backgrounds may very well find it difficult to make more friends or navigate existing friendships. However, those with external help and support tend to find it much easier.

Subtheme 3.3. Tumultuous/Negative relationship with family members and close friends:

A participant that spoke to this aspect was Wasara. Whilst Wasara demonstrated that he had a solid enough relationship with his family that allowed him to turn to them when he needed their advice, he also revealed that he would have wanted to "feel more loved by them".

Of the six participants interviewed, some had good relationships with their parents. Whilst others had strained relationships. Analysis of data shows that having a good positive relationship impacts positively on their social and academic careers.

According to (Tramonte and Willms, 2010), parents who command higher incomes are likely to have higher levels of human capital, leaving them better placed to help with school work and to negotiate public services in their child's interest. These parents may also, on average, put more emphasis on educational success (Tramonte and Willms, 2010). Furthermore, higher income and wealth may also be associated with types of social and cultural capital which can offer children multiple direct and indirect advantages affecting educational attainment and progression (Lareau 1987; Waterston et al. 2004; Ferguson 2006; Tramonte and Willms 2010). In relation to this, it can be noted that whilst some parents of the participants may not have the means or the direct resources to help their children to access services which will give them a higher chance of surviving economically, they are however connected to entities and organisations that can help them to achieve the same goal. These are organisations such as the school which offers extra lessons and extra-curricular classes that can help the learners in their academic journey. This, in turn, would put them at an economical advantage for later in life.

Furthermore, some participants even reported that their parents' employers are supportive factors to them, and make sure that if they need anything to help them further their education and their futures, then they are willing to fund it.

On the other hand, during the conversation, I had with Mark, it became clear that Mark yearned for a stronger relationship with his parents. He expressed gratitude for all they do for him, but he also expressed that he was quite upset at the fact that his parents had not told him he was exempted from paying school fees, or even let him know that they were struggling. It was clear that his parents withholding information from him upset him. And when I asked him what changes he would like to see happening in his life, he expressed that he would like for him and his family to spend more time together and just learn to communicate with each other more clearly and often. The above mentioned is significant as it shows how participants

not having a strong relationship with their family members can actually work as a barrier for them.

"*It didn't really affect me but like when I heard it, I was just like why did it take so long to tell me? But it's okay because it actually motivates me to work harder in school for me to get my family out of this situation.****"-Mark.***

Similarly, Soki's relationship with both her mother and her father is quite tempestuous. For example, Soki has a good relationship with her mother on a normal daily basis, and even more so, when she does her chores, and what's expected of her as asked. In return, Soki also feels when she really needs something, be it something personal or school related, she feels she can turn to her mother. Though sometimes she feels bad for asking her mother as she knows how hard she is struggling.

Yet sometimes, Soki indicated that her relationship with her mother is shaky, as she often gets kicked out for things such as not mopping the house or cleaning the house on time. Soki seemed quite distressed when she relayed this information to me, but it was also clear she was used to the situation and that the situation was now normalized for her.

"Sometimes my mom would shout at me for just not cleaning, parents and shouting for just not cleaning or for just not mopping. She'll kick me out, my mom will kick me out for like, not mopping the floor, and she will kick me out. I don't know, my mom expects me to be perfect then at this point ever since my dad left, when you do something… "You must go, I don't care, go to your father." She's like that sometimes I'm just like, okay maybe she's stressed or something and I have this thing for okay, I try to keep quiet I do keep quiet, when I'm quiet she say I must speak, when I speak, I'm wrong, I'm being disrespectful or stuff like that and she just won't understand. I feel like asking her sometimes because on Monday, she doesn't work, it's her day off and when I come back from school and she didn't do anything I feel like asking her, why didn't you do this and that, but I can't you know because it's her house."- Soki.

Similarly, Soki's relationship with her father is also quite shaky. She indicated that sometimes when she meets him in the streets and asks him to buy her some chips or a snack, then he can provide that for her. On the other hand, he is not always able to help the family

out financially. This creates tension between him and Soki because Soki cannot fully depend on her father.

The result of this is that Soki now finds it hard to ask for help even when she needs it, be it in her personal life or in her academic life.

"For personal life, I usually ask for help when I need help but I don't like asking for help, sometimes. I want to do things by myself, so I see that for myself, and like if I want something, I just buy it, and if I don't have something then that's when I can ask my mom and yeah, for me, like being alone and like doing my own things, things that I want, I feel like and then like my mom's responsibilities. If I could help her I would help her but there's nothing I can do about that.

....I'm craving this, I don't know if it makes sense, I'm craving to like, do everything by myself basically. So that's what I like, I don't ask for help mostly but when I really need the help, yes I do ask, and yeah me and my mom are not that close. So like, it's just mostly like school stuff, I ask for her help. Like "Mom, when you have something, please, I need to buy clothes." or like "I need these shoes, or like I wanna buy this skirt" or something like that. So that's why most of the time, I usually just save up so when I want to buy something, I tell her I have this much money. Can you please add for me? I'm going to buy this and that, basically I do that."-Soki.

When asked about the role of family and friends, Thato mostly referred to his friend Justin. For Thato, Justin is a friend who now feels more like family. Thato indicated that he feels he can go to Justin or Justin's parents if he ever needs any kind of help or support.

I have this friend called Justin, and his dad always helps me with stuff. He helps me get experience from different types of jobs and stuff, so he helps me, yeah…even things out…he is basically my second family.

Wasara has a tumultuous relationship with his family members. He has reported that where necessary, he often turns to them for advice with regards to school, or his personal life. However, he did also indicate that sometimes he feels that their advice sometimes makes things worse. Moreover, he also indicated that he feels he would like to receive more love

from his parents. This indicates how shaky their relationship is, as it is good enough for him to go to his parents for advice, though he does not always feel loved by them. Wasara also reported having a good relationship with his teachers as well. This might explain why he is able to go to his teachers when he needs help academically.

"First, I turn to my mother because she's more soft hearted than my father, so she'll understand the situation better. She's also been through some situations, so she understands them better, so I'll be asking her questions and she gives me a response, and I'll take those responses and put them into situations. And if that doesn't work, then I go to my father and he shows me how to deal with the situation."

Wasara has also reported not having a strong relationship with his friends and called them fake. He even made hints at how his friends sometimes bully him, though he did not expand more on the matter. This would explain why he did not mention him as his support systems.

Theme Four: The challenges participants face in the school environment:

Subtheme 4.1.: Academic Challenges:

Six out of the six participants divulged that they face challenges in their school contexts related to their learning. These are challenges such as:

- Not understanding what is going on in class.
- Inability to grasp concepts the first time they are explained.
- Inability to understand the way teachers explain concepts.
- Not being able to fully participate whilst sitting at the back.
- Friends distracting them from their schoolwork.

According to Gorski (2008), children from low-income backgrounds tend to have values such as valuing education, and the importance of hard work. This is consistent with what the participants reported to be their values as well. However, it became quite clear that the participants had factors hindering them from fully applying these values, and these were classroom related challenges which were not always within their control. Furthermore, according to Gorski (2008), 14 per cent of variation in individuals' performance is accounted for by school quality. Most variation is explained by other factors, underlining the need to look at the range of children's experiences, inside and outside school, when seeking to raise

achievement. With this in mind, perhaps it is worth doing a more in-depth study, looking into the various factors that could be contributing to these learners' academic challenges.

Subtheme 4.2: Participation in Sports and other extra mural activities:

Participants expressed facing challenges and/or hardships when it comes to participating in sports and extra mural activities. Participants outlined the below as the aspects they experience hardships with:

4.2.1. Lack of motivation to participate in extra mural activities:

An aspect that came up was that learners sometimes feel demotivated to participate in sports and extra mural activities as they feel that academics are more important and that they should therefore be putting all their energy into their academics.

Hloni highlighted this aspect when she spoke about how playing soccer and laughing around with her teammates felt therapeutic, but how she also wanted to focus more on school, and less on sports and extra murals as she has dreams of becoming a forensic psychologist, and therefore needs to get good grades.

"So lately, I've been looking at maybe being a neurosurgeon, so I want to maybe pursue my dreams in being a neurosurgeon or a forensics pathologists or anthropologist, and maybe I also want to pass school with like amazing marks because last time we had this awards ceremony, and every awards ceremony you go to at the school, there's always that one child that just stands out, I want to be that child in my year and again I want to have a more social life, but I'm scared like if I try to have a social life, it will affect my academics, because it'll be me trying to focus on having friends and then I have to go focus on extra murals, and then I have to focus on academics and stuff like that."-Hloni

Wasara in particular expressed that whilst his parents and educators encouraged him to participate in sports and activities such as rugby, his head and mind were not there at the moment, as he wants to mostly concentrate on his schoolwork at the moment. He did however, also express and indicate that he understood the need to unwind, and then stated that the school did not have enough activities he was interested in for him to unwind properly.

"At Sweetvalley high, I think they should add more events, because there are not many events at Sweetvalley High because mostly we only focus on our education but at some point we have to have fun. "

Similarly, Thato also expressed that whilst he used to partake in cross country, he has not done so since the pandemic. He expressed that this is because he has been focusing on school, since he is in his matric year. However, he also expressed how much he enjoyed running, how it eased his mind, as well as a willingness to go back since his friends were also pushing him to come back as well.

In this, it can be seen that whilst participants have the desire to participate in extra mural activities and are aware of the benefits of participating in extra mural activities, they do not always do this, as they are more focused on their academic work, and doing well in school academically.

Three out of the six participants on the other hand, expressed that they participate in extra mural activities. Out of the three participants, two indicated that they experience the below challenges as a result of participating in extra-curricular activities:

4.2.2. Difficulties with transport:

Participants revealed they make use of extra mural sports and activities as a way to release stress and socialize with their peers. However, because they usually end up leaving school quite late (as a result of participating in extra-curricular activities) they also get home late and are tired. This, in turn, affects their ability to do their homework to the best of their abilities.

"For my personal life? There's not really much I would say, but it's just that problems of transport after school when maybe because I do soccer, and I also do dance so maybe soccer practice ends at half past four and now I need to I worry about transport because 90% of the time, I go with a bus so with the bus you need to catch the time and if you don't catch the time it leaves you so it tends to be a hassle for me to do that. I'd say yeah, its transport and for my academic life, I'd say I don't really have because I'd say my mom tries, by all means to, to make me concentrate on my studies a lot so I'd say yeah, there's not much for academics there's not much."-Samukelo.

"It is tiring though. When you come back from sports then get home late then like you have to concentrate in doing your school stuff."-Soki.

Theme 5: Strength and Protective factors in the lives of the participants:

Theme 5.1. Positive Relationships with family as a strength and positive factor:

The data analysed showed that having a strong relationship with one's family members, worked as a protective factor in the lives of the participants. This is mainly because having a strong

relationship with family members means that participants have someone to go to for help when they are experiencing challenges in their various environments. All six of the participants confirmed this to be true.

For example, Samukelo has a strong relationship with his mother and his sister. As such, he refers to them when he has a problem, or when he needs help at any point in time. During my conversation with him, Samukelo referred to how he is currently struggling in school, and how he recently told his mother about this. His mother then proceeded to get him a tutor in order to help with his schoolwork. It was clear that he and his mother had a good, fond relationship, and this was evident when he called her his best friend.

"Yes, I would say I'm comfortable doing that because most of the time I spend most of my time with my mom so she tends to be like my friend kind of so I tend to tell her everything that happens at school or something like that and yeah, my sister also helps me with my social stuff and yeah, they tend to help me a lot"-Samukelo.

According to (Zachrisson & Dearing, 2015) the family of a child plays an important role in his social, emotional, psychological, cognitive, and economic well-being. From the conversation I had with Samukelo, it was quite clear that his mother was one of his strongest support systems. This would then further explain why Samukelo is so free and open to go to his mother for help. As he and his mother have a good, strong bond, he is then able to go to his mother with his stressors and worries, and trust that she will help him to lessen his problems and worries.

Similarly, to Samukelo, Hloni has a sibling, and her and her brother spend their weekdays at their mother's place, and their weekends at their grandmother's place. Hloni's father passed away at a very young age. Even though Hloni's mother tried to fill both maternal and paternal roles, Hloni was still negatively affected whenever she would see and hear her peers talking about spending time with their fathers.

Maybe in the sense that when other kids spoke about their families they'd include their fathers and I would feel left out, or maybe when we were playing with our friends, sometimes their fathers would take them out and when we come back they'd say stuff like they were out with their fathers, they did this and that. But my mom made sure that we didn't feel as like, you know… something. She made sure that it wasn't a reality that would really make us feel bad or yeah, something like that.

According to The Harvard Gazette (2020), even though children who live outside of the two-parent family tend to fare worse than those who live with two parents, minority children are less negatively impacted by this. Scholars have speculated that maybe this has something to do with minority families having a stronger extended family support network than white families or perhaps that they are more frequently exposed to socioeconomic stressors such that the independent effect of living apart from a parent is just not as pronounced (The Harvard Gazette, 2020). This could be true for Hloni, for even though she reported feeling negative feelings whenever her friends would make reference to spending time with their fathers, she never really felt her father's absence that much due to the strong presence of her mother, and her grandmother who are raising her.

Subtheme 5.2.: Relationship with staff members and peers as a strength and protective factor:

Data analysed showed that participants with positive relationships with staff members, friends, and family members felt more comfortable to speak out to them when they needed help, be it personal or academic help. Hloni and Samukelo described some positive relationships they have with staff members, and how comfortable, free and open they feel in these relationships.

Data analysed also showed that those participants with a positive relationship with their peers experienced the school environment much more positively than those who reported not having a positive relationship with their peers.

For example, even though Hloni spoke about she is shy and introverted, and therefore does not always engage with her peers. She did however point out that she had a good positive relationship with her family, as well as her mother's employers, which makes it easier for her to ask for help when she needs it, be it personal or academic related. Moreover, Hloni showed excitement when speaking about her Zulu teacher in particular. She spoke quite fondly about their relationship and stated that she went to her with her worries both personal, and academic, and sees her as an adult friend. This, also, in turn, enables her to ask for help when she needs it.

"I enjoy talking to like, my former Zulu teacher from grade eight, I still go to class and chill with her and just talk about how school is and she's like a friend, an adult friend at school."- Hloni.

Similarly, Samukelo also spoke about how much he interacts positively with the staff members within the school, and talked about how much he respects (and tries to show this respect) to the

staff members, as well as to his peers. As a result of this, he says he has not had negative experiences such as bullying or harassment within the school environment. Samukelo also expressed having a good, positive relationship with his mother, and sisters. This, in turn means, he feels comfortable enough to ask for help when he needs it. An example he made was with regards to how his marks were "not looking so good" earlier on in the year. This was mainly because he was struggling to understand the content. He had a conversation about it with his mother, and now he goes to extra lessons within the school, as well as privately, outside the school.

> *"I would say, my interactions with my educators or my teachers at school is really good, because it's all about respect so I respect my teachers, and my peers, I also respect them too. And yeah, it's really good, because I haven't experienced any type of bullying or any type of harassment. So I would say it's a really good relationship between me and my educators. So as my peers."-Samukelo.*

Similarly, Mark also expressed he had a positively neutral relationship with his peers as well as staff members. This, in turn, contributes to his positive experiences in his school environment. This, in turn, also contributes to him feeling comfortable enough to ask questions in class when he is struggling. Furthermore, Mark expressed he has a positive relationship with his family, though he feels they could all work on their communication which would help him open up as well.

Wayne spoke about how he has a neutral relationship with his peers and staff members, though sometimes he does struggle with his relationships. This, in turn, makes his experience in the school negative at times. Wayne did, however, express that he has a good relationship with his parents and is closer to his mother than his father. This, in turn, enables him to ask for help whenever he is faced with a challenge, be it personal or academic.

Thato, on the other hand expressed that he had a neutral relationship with teachers and staff members within the school, but that this did not stop him from asking for academic help when he needed it. For personal problems and challenges, Thato stated he goes to either his mother, his sister, or his best friend, whom he sees as family, as he is always helping him out with his personal problems. An example of a time when Justin and his family helped Thato is when Justin's family exposes Thato by giving him job opportunities so he can update his curriculum vitae (CV).

Similarly, Soki expressed that whilst she had a neutral relationship with all her teachers and staff members there was one teacher that stood out, and she goes to this teacher for personal and academic problems alike, as she is a good listener. Soki also expressed she had a positively neutral relationship with her peers, though she did not currently have a best friend as she passed on. This, in turn, meant that even though she felt safe enough to confide in her friends, she does not always feel confident enough to talk to them about personal problems such as what is happening at home. Moreover, Soki indicated that whilst she felt confident enough to approach her mother with academic challenges.

Subtheme 5.3.: Sports as a strengths and protective factor:

Even though the participants had some significant challenges in their personal and academic lives, data analysed also showed that the participants had some significant strengths and protective factors. The analysed data further showed that participating in sporting, cultural and other extra mural activities within the school offers the participants relief and helps them to cope and manage their stress better. Even though three out of the six participants divulged that they currently did not participate in any extra mural activities, they expressed knowing the benefits of participating in these extra mural activities as well as a willingness to start participating in the extra-curricular activities.

For example, though Wasara does not participate in extra-curricular activities as he would like to focus on his education more, he did express a willingness to engage with sports at a later stage.

"My parents are encouraging me to do rugby, so I think I'm gonna try and see if it is really for me or not. Because I really just want to focus on my education, and then sports, I'll think about that later"-Wasara.

"I used to do cross country and athletics, and then COVID happened. I decided not to go, but Imma go next week. Imma start doing it next week. It made me feel better. I got to burn a lot of energy."-Thato.

"I enjoy them and sometimes they get rid of like a lot of academic stress. So if maybe, let's say, that day I got a test and I didn't do as well as I wanted to do, going to soccer kicking around the ball laughing with my teammates, that's fun, and it gets your mind off the fact that you didn't do as well as you wanted to and it also offers a chance to bond with your schoolmates and all that."-Hloni.

The concept of participating in sports and other extra mural activities was explored, and it was clear that the participants knew the benefits of participating in sports, though they did not always have the motivation to participate. Three out of the six participants divulged that they engage in sports and other extra mural activities, and acknowledged that they participated for fun, for social interactions, as well as for the physical and mental health benefits. Mark, in particular showed interest in wanting to play soccer professionally. In this sense, it was easy to see that participants also saw their extra-curricular sports and activities as something they could possibly do for a living.

"Like at school I have the opportunity to play soccer which is one sport that I really love, and I have the opportunity to go pro with it. So every chance that I get to play soccer, I will play soccer. And also, spending time with my little brother because he just makes everything better."

According to Islamov (2021), out-of-school activities can help build self-confidence. Children from advantaged backgrounds experience more structured and supervised out-of-school activities. Perhaps it would be worth exploring for the school to make sports or extra-curricular activities compulsory within the school to help boost all participants mental health, as well as attention span during classes.

Theme 6: The existence and role of aspirations and motivations in the lives of the participants:

Resilience refers to successful adaption to situations despite risks that put someone at a disadvantage or adversity (Mampane & Bouwer, 2015) In line with this general definition, academic resilience refers to the capacity of students to perform well in school despite a disadvantaged background (Russell et.al.,2020) or more precisely the heightened likelihood of success in school despite environmental adversities brought about by early traits, conditions, and experiences (Russell et.al., 2020).

Of all the participants interviewed, they all felt that their backgrounds and current economic situations motivated them to do better in life. However, the analysed data suggested that despite the participants coming from low economic backgrounds, and having had faced quite a few adversities in life, they also had strong support systems, and support structures in their lives, which enabled them to become more resilient as well as to become motivated to finish their education and start successful careers which would then enable them to get better their families' current economic situations.

Wasara indicated that his dream was to make money.

"My dream is to make money, live a life that I really like, and to have money and buy cars and live in a nice house, and just have a normal life that is not that big. " –Wasara

Thato also indicated that his dream was to become a chef and to make money such that he could help his family out financially.

"I hope to own a restaurant one day. Hence me going to the chef school, and also just supporting my family, and money and stuff like that"-Thato

Soki indicated that she also wanted to make money and better her current financial situation whilst also helping her mother out. But that she wants to make sure that ultimately in the end whatever she is doing she is happy. The notion of having all the money in the world and still not being happy or satisfied came up in this sense/regards.

"In life, what I want is to be happy not that I'm not happy, but then you know, you can't you can have all the money in the world, but you cannot buy happiness, but you just need to have both and just balance, so in life, I just want to be happy and have money. I want to afford to get my own things because I can see how my mom is struggling like right now, she can't afford some things like my mom can't afford. You see when you go to the shop and you want to buy something which, you say I need to budget for that it's too expensive and stuff like that and for other people is just a basic thing. They could just go okay, month-end I'll get that and I have to buy this and that. So I want to be happy and I also want to be an example to my sister and to my other young cousins, just want to set an example and they should have like someone to look forward to like "I have an aunt who did this and that." Like I want them to wish to be like me basically have someone to look up to because I look up to my mom but then she's like, okay, my mom doesn't have everything, she just supports me maybe like she gives me love, she supports me like as a mother but then sometimes you need like something that's going to be like okay, your aspiration basically like you said, like someone to look up to I want to be like that one person, because they like this and that and stuff like that, so that's what I want in life, to be successful, be happy. I want people, especially my sister to look up to me and be like, also my mom to be proud of me and stuff like that so that's what I want and to be successful."-Soki

For Samukelo, his current situation motivates him to finish school, pursue his studies further, as well as to get a better life that would make himself and his family proud.

"I would say, first of all, I really want to make my mom proud and my family, overall proud and I want to finish school, same as university, and I want to achieve a career of engineering, civil engineering and yeah just better my studies and get a better life."- Samukelo

Similarly to the other participants, Mark also expressed wanting to be successful such that he could help his family out financially.

"My aspirations in life is to really just be successful. Even though its gonna be a hard and long journey, I really want to be successful. I want to do this for my parents because they did a lot for me, and I wanna just repay the favour, and also to like have a good image in the school, and wherever I go, I just wanna have good vibes and good energy, and encourage people to not give up on schools for example because you can't pay school fees. Just work hard, you just have to think positively, and just change the way you do things, just change the goal and everything will be okay."-Mark.

For Hloni, she feels that coming from a disadvantaged background motivates her to work harder and do better in life. Currently she works hard in school and makes sure she gets good marks.

"The fact that I came from… not….I wasn't as advantaged as most kids who come to the school. So I try my best to make sure that my mom doesn't feel guilty that she's not able to provide for us the same things *that most kids in the school can get. So I work hard, I make sure I pass like well and I do my best to make my mom proud of us."-Hloni*

Hloni also hopes to be a neurosurgeon, or a forensics anthropologist someday. However, analysis of data showed that whilst Hloni is motivated to do better and achieve more in life, this can sometimes negatively affect her social life as she is afraid that if she puts more energy in her social life, then this might negatively affect her academic life.

"In the long run, I wanted to be a forensics anthropologist, or a forensics pathologist, but the education counsellor, he said I have a medical mind so whichever field in medicine I take, I can really go high and so I can, I can do well in. So lately, I've been looking at maybe being a neurosurgeon, so I want to maybe pursue my dreams in being a neurosurgeon or a forensics pathologists or anthropologist, and maybe I also want to pass school with like amazing marks because last time we had this awards ceremony, and every awards ceremony you go to at the school, there's always that one child that just stands out, I want to be that child in my year and again I want to have a more social life, but I'm scared like if I try to have a social life, it will affect my academics, because it'll be me trying to focus on having friends and then

I have to go focus on extra murals, and then I have to focus on academics and stuff like that."-Hloni.

Table 3: Summary of Participants' experiences in their home and school environments:

Context:	**Positive experiences:**	**Negative Experiences:**
Participants experiences in their home environment:	• Some participants were able to work better in the virtual school environment during the COVID-19 pandemic as there were less distractions. • Some participants signalled they have a good relationship with their parents and close family members which enables them to turn towards them with their challenges and difficulties.	• Financial difficulties which were further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic which came with a loss of jobs for some of the participants' parents and caregivers. • Some participants signalled that they have a negative/tumultuous relationship with their parents. This is a negative experience as this means they have little to no support in their home environment as they do not go to their parents for help with their difficulties.
Participants experiences in their school environment:	• Some participants signalled they have a good relationship with their peers and staff members within the school. This enables them to see them as support structures and turn to them should they need help. • The participants reported playing sports helps them relieve stress	• Academic and classroom related difficulties. • Problems with socialising with friends and other peers exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. • Some participants expressed having luke-warm relationships with their peers

	and tension whilst also helping them to socialize and bond with their peers. • The participants reported that their current socio-economic status motivates them to do well in school, further their studies and then one day go on to work high paying jobs.	and staff members within the school. As such, they sometimes struggle to approach these people and ask for help with their difficulties. • Lack of motivation to participate in extra mural activities. • Difficulties with transport which limits the participants' abilities to partake in after school/extra mural activities. • Tiredness when participants get home from school which negatively impacts their ability to do their school work.

This study employed the person in environment approach. In using this approach for the study, it was noted that whilst participants have some challenges in their home and school environments, they also have material and non-material resources in these environments that help to ease their challenges and hardships. For example, participants divulged that they sometimes find it hard to concentrate in school and/grasp concepts the first time they are explained to them in class. To help account for this, the school offers extra lessons which the participants revealed they find to be quite helpful. Moreover, four out of the six participants also divulged that their parents or their parents' employees had employed tutors for them to help account for their academic difficulties. In this way, it was showcased that whilst the participants have challenges in their school environment, they also have support in both their home and school environments to help them overcome these challenges. As such, the learners are struggling, but to a much lesser extent. Furthermore, as a result of the support the participants are getting in their environments, they are motivated to work hard in school in an

attempt to make their support systems proud, as well as to prepare for their future, such that they can one day work in jobs that will allow them to earn enough money to help their families with their financial hardships.

4.7 Chapter Summary:

Chapter Four presented the empirical findings on the lack experiences of learners coming from low socio-economic backgrounds in one suburban high school in Gauteng. Within this context, the research aims and objectives were recapped. This was then followed by the presentation of the demographic information on the school in which the study took place in, as well as the demographics of the participants in table form. The data and information collected from the interviews were analysed, and the findings were discussed through six themes, and fourteen subthemes. Lastly, a summary of the chapter has been provided. The key findings, conclusions and recommendations will be discussed in the next and final chapter of the research report.

CHAPTER 5: GENERAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

5.1. Introduction:

This study set out to explore the experiences of learners coming from low socio-economic backgrounds in one tier 5, suburban high school in Gauteng, South Africa. To achieve this aim, six participants were interviewed. Central to this study was to try and understand and learn how these learners' backgrounds and experiences affect their learning and impact their ability to navigate school. Central to this study, was to also give a voice to these learners through finding out how they felt their experiences could be improved. It is hoped that highlighting and bringing awareness of these learners' experiences in their various contexts may build on existing knowledge, and lead to eradication of challenges for effective learning, and success within their academic context.

This chapter draws together and gives conclusions to what was discovered about the experiences of learners coming from low socio-economic backgrounds in a suburban high school and considers how the research questions were addressed and whether or not the aims and objectives were met. Secondly, this chapter reflects on the limitations of the study and makes recommendation for further research.

5.2. The main research question:

The main research is:

What are the experiences of learners from low socio-economic backgrounds in one suburban high school in Gauteng?

From this question, the following sub-questions were generated:

a) How do the learners' backgrounds impact their ability to navigate school?

b) How would the learners describe their challenges and successes within their home and school contexts?

c) What can be done to improve the overall experiences of these learners?

5.3. Research Objectives:

- To understand how the learners' backgrounds impact their ability to navigate school.
- To learn how the learners' experiences within their home contexts affect their learning in one suburban school.
- To find out how the learners feel that their experiences could be improved.

5.4. Conclusions:

This study sought to explore the learners' experiences in their home and school environments given their socio-economic backgrounds. The study also explored how the learners' experiences in their home and school environments impacted their learning. As the study sought an understanding based on the learners' experiences (and not necessarily how others view and understand them), it employed an interpretative phenomenological analysis which is an aspect of qualitative research which seeks an in depth understanding of how participants experience and make meaning of their world (Charlick et al., 2015). Furthermore, the study also employed the person in environment approach to understand the participants' experiences. The person in environment approach speaks to how a person's environment has an impact on the way they live and the decisions they make (Edwards et al.,1998). It also attempts to understand individuals and their behaviour through their environment (Edwards et al., 1998). Therefore, the research questions, aims and objectives aimed to discover the learners' experiences within their home and school environments, and how this ultimately affected their learning process. Below I will demonstrate how the objectives were met:

Research Objective 1: To understand how the learners' backgrounds impact their ability to navigate school:

This objective was achieved through asking the participants questions in the research interview using an interview schedule. The participants' responses were then reviewed and analysed. Out of the six participants, four grew up in single income households, whilst the other two grew up in dual income households, though this fluctuated from time to time. It is clear that the kind of household participants grew up in is related to the experiences they were exposed to. The participants who grew up in single income households reported feeling the financial predicaments and hardships their families were under, whereas those who grew up in dual income households reported feeling less affected by their family's financial situations. In this, it becomes clear how the participants' home environments contribute significantly to their current experiences.

Similarly, another challenge the participants expressed having encountered was the challenge of growing up in single parent households. Four out of the six participants grew up in single parent households, and therefore had only one parent present. One participant, (Hloni) brought up the fact that she felt excluded whenever her peers would bring up spending time with their fathers, as she often wondered what that would feel like. The other three participants on the other hand seemed to be quite unfazed about having grown up without their fathers present. To this regard, the data analysed showed that there was a difference between those that grew up without fathers because of unavoidable consequences such as death, and those who grew up without fathers as their fathers had willingly walked out of their lives. Those who grew up without a father due to unavoidable situations such as death displayed more emotions when the topic was brought up, whereas those who grew up without a father because of their fathers walking out of their lives appeared to be a bit more nonchalant towards their relationships with their fathers.

Moreover, the data analysed showed that the participants with parents who had a good external support system (such as employers or extended family members) regarded their parents' support systems as their support systems too, and therefore felt comfortable to approach these people and ask for help with regards to their academic and social problems. Whereas those with parents with very little to no support systems often keep their problems to themselves as they are aware of how much pressure their parents are under and with very little to no support.

The data analysed further showed that even though some participants had very little to no support in their home environments, all of them had a strong support system in their school environment. This support systems is in the form of friends, peers and stuff members as well as the school environment as a whole. The data analysed also showed that participants take advantage of the support they have in their school systems, and therefore lean on these support systems to help ease their difficulties. As a result of this, even though all the participants divulged that they were struggling financially at home, only two out of these six participants reported that this was affecting their schoolwork. The other four participants felt that they had challenges, but they had enough support systems in their home and/or school environments to help them out. As a result of this, their work was not suffering. To better understand this, the person in environment theory can be utilised. In which it was noted that

as a result of the participants having support in their home and/or school environments, the participants struggle to a lesser extent with regards to their learning.

Research Objective 2: To learn how the learners' experiences within their home contexts affect their learning in one suburban school.

In terms of personal challenges, the learners spoke to how their current financial situations and struggles impacted their relationship with their parents. Two out of the six participants expressed that they struggle to ask their parents for money, unless it is an absolute necessity. This is mainly because they are aware of the amount of struggles their parents go through in order to provide and put food on the table. Another result of this is that some of the participants feel the need to make money on the side and save up such that they can be able to buy things that they want, that aren't necessarily deemed as necessities.

Another challenge was with regards to obtaining transport to go home after extra mural activities. Two out of the six participants reported that transport is quite scarce. This therefore often means that they get home late and are therefore too tired to do their homework and schoolwork to the best of their abilities.

Even though all participants revealed that they had financial troubles making it hard to ask anything of their parents unless it was necessary, four out of the six participants revealed that they had strong support systems in their home environments. This support system was in the form of their parents' employers and family friends who made it clear that if the participants ever needed anything, especially if it was school and/or career related, then they could turn to them for help.

With regards to the school environment, participants revealed that they sometimes struggle to understand what is going on in class due to them not resonating with some of their teachers' teaching styles and methods. Participants also revealed that they are not always able to grasp concepts the first time they are explained.

Participants further informed that they are not able to fully participate when they sit at the back of the class due to distractions. One of the distractions that participants face when they are in class is when their friends talk with them and try to distract them whilst their teachers are speaking.

Data analysed showed that learners use extra lessons and classes to catch up on their classes and solidify their understanding of academic concepts. Moreover, the data analysed also showed that participants use extra-curricular activities to connect with their peers, whilst also relieving stressors, and unwinding. One participant (Mark) even revealed that he had interest in playing soccer professionally and would do so if the chance ever revealed itself. Moreover, participants also revealed that they had positive relationships with staff members, which in turn made it easier for them to enquire and ask questions with regards to schoolwork. They also reported that having a good relationship with peers and staff members made it easier in the sense that they had someone to open up to and talk about their stressors. In making reference to the Person in Environment theory to analyse the above-mentioned information, it can be noted that the challenges participants experience in their home environments are with regards to financial struggles, strained relationships with family members, as well as a lack of or shortage of support systems. However, the participants have support systems in their school environments. These are in the form of teachers and staff members, peers, extra-curricular classes, as well as sports. This, in turn, enables them to continue working hard in school, and push towards achieving their goals.

Research Objective 3: To find out how the participants' experiences can be made better:

Things that participants would like to change in their lives:

- Samukelo indicated he would like to change the general area he and his family stay in as it is noisy, and that sometimes distracts him from doing his schoolwork.
- Soki indicated she would like to have a longer break, as she feels that the lessons are long. One period is 50 minutes long, and a double period is 100 minutes. Whereas the break is 20 minutes long.
- Soki also indicated that she would love to have less homework as she is tired when she gets home and isn't always able to do self- study.
- Soki expressed that she would love it if she had her own transport as it would allow her to balance her schoolwork and extra murals without stressing too much about what time she will get home. Moreover, having transport would allow her to get home on time meaning she wouldn't be as tired once she gets home. This, in turn would allow her to do her schoolwork much better as she won't be tired. Having her

own transportation would furthermore mean she would not need to wake up as early. This would ensure she is alert and energised throughout the school day.

- Thato mentioned that sometimes teachers are busy with other learners and therefore aren't always able to assist with academic questions. He would like teachers to have more time to attend to his questions.
- Mark and Wasara mentioned they would like the extra murals and fun activities within the school to be expanded to accommodate everyone so they can all have a good, fun and relatable way to relax.
- Wasara also mentioned he would like his family to go on more holidays as they usually stay at home and relax.

From the participants' responses, it was clear that whilst some participants had a number of things they wanted to change for the better, others were satisfied with what they currently had and therefore did not necessarily want anything to change. Hloni, for instance felt there was nothing she needed to change either at home or at school as she felt that she had enough support systems and structures in place to help her.

5.3.2. The main research question:

This research study's overarching research question is: What are the experiences of learners coming from low socio-economic backgrounds in one suburban high school in Gauteng? There were several challenges in the learners' contexts, ranging from financial, personal and academic challenges, but the six learners under study have not allowed those challenges to affect their determination and their drive in life. This is mainly because the learners have good support structures and systems in place to help them keep pushing forward. These are systems such as their parents, and their parents' employers in their home system as well as peers, teachers and staff members, and the school in general within their school system.

Theme 1: The negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the lives of the participants

Subtheme 1.1: The negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the academic lives of the participants

Key Findings: The overall findings from this study show that the COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected the participants' learning as the learners struggled to concentrate on

virtual platforms and also struggled with access to devices and making sure that those devices were charged as well.

Conclusion: The COVID-19 pandemic introduced virtual learning to the lives of the participants. However, the learners struggled to cope with the changes that came with virtual learning as they were not fully equipped for them. This change required the learners to have access to fully charged devices as well as connection to the internet, which wasn't always possible considering they had/have financial hardships.

Subtheme 1.2: The negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the financial lives of the participants

Key Findings: The overall finding from this study shows that some participants' financial situations were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, whilst some others reported their financial situations remained the same. Those who reported being negatively affected by the pandemic financially reported one of their parents losing their jobs or struggling to gain access to devices and resources to help the learners to learn virtually.

Conclusions: It is evident that some learners' finances were negatively affected and/or exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, therefore affecting their ability to show up and do their schoolwork to the best of their abilities.

Subtheme 1.3: The negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the social lives of the participants

Key Findings: The overall findings show that the COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted some of the participants' social lives. Those who reported their social lives being negatively affected spoke to aspects of how they were unable to see their friends, and interact with them, which, in turn, affected their moods and mental health negatively.

Conclusion: The COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected the social lives of those participants who reported their friends and peers as being their strength and protective factors. As such, it can be noted that the pandemic affected these learners in the sense that it limited their access and interactions to some of the strength and protective factors in their lives thus limiting or risking their ability to cope.

Theme 2: The positive effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the lives of the participants

Key findings: The overall findings show that the COVID-19 pandemic positively impacted some of the participants. One participant felt they could work better in a virtual environment as there were less distractions, and another participant also felt that not having to socialize was an advantage. This was mainly because they described themselves as an introvert, and therefore often felt shy and overwhelmed in social contexts.

Conclusion: The COVID-19 pandemic positively affected some participants in the sense that eased some of the academic and social hardships they experienced prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Theme 3: The challenges participants face in their home environment

Subtheme 3.1 and 3.2: Financial challenges faced by participants:

Key Findings: The overall findings showcase that all participants are currently experiencing financial hardships in their home environments. However, the extent to which participants feel this depends on how much support they have in their home environments. Participants with more external support from extended family and friends reported that even though their families were currently experiencing financial hardships, they did not feel affected that much, whereas those with very little to no support systems reported that they did feel the negative impacts of their current financial status.

Conclusion: Even though participants stated that they all experience financial challenges in their home environment, the extent to which they felt these challenges was depended on how much support they received from extended family members, friends, and their parents' employers. Those with more support reported not feeling the financial difficulties in their home environments as much as the participants who reported having less support.

Subtheme 3.3.: Negative relationship with parents

Key Findings: The overall findings showcase that participants with what they perceived to be a positive relationship with their family, and close members felt more comfortable to go to these people and ask them for help with their challenges and hardships, whereas those with what they perceived to be negative or tumultuous relationships with their family members were less inclined to ask them for help with regards to their challenges.

Conclusion: Participants with positive relationships with their parents and family members regarded these relationships as being strengths. Whereas those with less positive relationships

with their parents considered the state of their relationship to be a challenge, weakness or hurdle in their lives.

Theme 4: The challenges participants face in their school environment.

Theme 4.1.: Academic/Classroom related challenges:

Key Findings: The key findings in the study show that participants face academic challenges in the sense that they do not always understand what is going on in class or they struggle to grasp concepts the first time the concepts are explained to them. Other participants also reported not being able to understand the way some teachers explain concepts, as well as not being able to concentrate when they sit at the back, or when they are sitting next to their friends.

Conclusion: Participants face academic challenges related to their ability to concentrate in class, not being able to grasp concepts or being distracted by either their friends or their environment. This is a significant hindrance to their studying and learning process.

Subtheme 4.2: Participation in sports and other extra mural activities

Key Findings: The key findings in the study show that some participants struggle to participate in extracurricular activities due to lack of motivation as well as lack of transport to go home after school. Participants who do participate in sports also reported feeling fatigued when they got home after extra murals. This, in turn, affects their ability to do their homework, as they are tired and want to sleep, or the quality of their homework.

Conclusion: Participants appeared to know the importance of sports in their lives. However, they divulged that they are not always able to participate due to lack of motivation and scarcity of transport. Those who reported participating in sports also reported feeling extremely tired after sports, and that this affects their ability to do homework to the best of their abilities. This is a significant hindrance to their learning process.

Theme 5: Strength and Protective Factors in the lives of the participants:

Subtheme 5.1.and Subtheme 5.2.: Good relationship with family members, staff members, and peers as a strength and protective factor:

Key Findings: The study found that some participants had good, strong relationships with their peers, friends, family members and staff members, whilst others did not. Those with

strong relationships with their peers, friends, and family and staff members considered these relationships to be strengths as they could turn to these people with their challenges and hardships.

Conclusion: It is evident that participants experience adversities in their home and school contexts. However, the existence of positive relationships with their peers, friends, family and staff members within the school help them to overcome and tackle these challenges and hardships, thus making it a lot easier for them to navigate their schoolwork regardless of the challenges and hardships they face.

Subtheme 5.3.: Sports and extra mural activities as a strength and protective factor:

Key Findings: The study found that learners knew the physical, mental, and social benefits of participating in sports and extra-curricular activities. Those who reported participating described feeling good, motivated, and refreshed after. They also described sports as a stress reliever, and a way to connect with their other peers.

Conclusion: It is evident that participants know the benefits of participating in sports and extra-curricular activities. As such, they use sports and other extra mural activities as a way to combat stress and other mental health related issues, whilst also using it as a way to interact with their peers, loosen up and have fun. As such, sports and extra mural activities can be regarded as a strength and protective factor in the lives of the participants.

Theme 6: Aspirations

Key findings: The overall findings show that even though the participants experience adversities in their home and school contexts, they are still determined to matriculate, further their education and then start high paying careers to help their families out of their current socio-economic situations.

Conclusion: It is evident that even though participants experience some adversities in their home and school contexts, they also have some strength and protective factors enabling them to be resilient despite the odds. As a result of this, participants are still hopeful for the future and work hard to one day earn high paying jobs which will help their families better their socio-economic circumstances.

5.5. Recommendations:

From the findings, this study exposed the need for further research in experiences of learners coming from low socio-economic backgrounds in suburban high schools. Therefore, recommendations are very important for future research. The contexts the learners are exposed to as well as the presence or absence of support systems in the learners' lives determine whether the learners struggle to cope or survive despite the odds. This study was small, and because of that, it cannot be generalized. As a result, a bigger study which may be generalized is recommended. Such a study may also help to inform and direct future policies. The other recommendations are presented in bullet points below:

- In addition to economic and academic relief, the government should also provide emotional relief to school going children. This should be relief such as the existence of school social workers and psychological counsellors to help with the learners' emotional needs. These mental health practitioners can be located within the school for easy access, as well as outside schools for extra privacy.
- There could also be community health workers and community social workers employed in every community in South Africa. These workers, in turn could also help by referring individuals and families to appropriate programs and organisations to help further alleviate problems within the home.
- Mental health should be emphasized within the school and community contexts for both learners and parents.
- Parenting classes and support should be offered to parents who need them.
- Career guidance should be provided to and for learners that do not have internal and external resources.
- The government could introduce student specials and discounts on public transport as well as transportation that travels at later hours of the day for learners that need to stay at school until late hours.
- The government can also fund more charity organisations to help and assist with post COVID relief packages and services for those families that are still struggling.

5.6. Important Reflections and Contributions of this research:

The biggest problem I faced was that whilst the learners knew they came from low socio-economic backgrounds, they did not always know that they were exempted from paying school fees prior to the research study being conducted. This, in turn meant they found it

challenging to answer questions in relation to their experiences as learners coming from low socio-economic backgrounds within the school context. The research has gathered crucial contributions towards understanding the context of suburban schools and learners coming from low socio-economic backgrounds in the present time. However, a longitudinal research study is needed to fully understand the experiences of learners coming from low socio-economic backgrounds in suburban high schools in
Gauteng.

5.7. Chapter Summary:

Participants' negative experiences within their home and school environments were related to their financial difficulties. It was also established that context plays a pivotal role in participants' experiences. As such, participants who had support and strength and protective factors within their various environments reported having fewer negative experiences than those participants with less support and/or strength and supportive factors in their environments.

All participants reported having some challenges in their home and school environments. Though the extent and/intensity of these challenges varied from participant to participant depending on how much support, strength, and protective factors they had available them. Despite the challenges the participants faced, they remain hopeful and optimistic about their future. The help and support they get from their families; their school and communities contribute to their current successes and positive outlook on life and the future.

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Appendices:

Appendix A: Ethics Permission

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

Research Office

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

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: H23/03/08**
PROJECT TITLE	The experiences of learners from low socio-economic backgrounds in one suburban high school in Gauteng
INVESTIGATOR(S)	Miss R Chiramba
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT	Human and Community Development/
DATE CONSIDERED	17 March 2023
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved Risk Level: Low
EXPIRY DATE	08 May 2026

DATE 09 May 2023 **CHAIRPERSON** _____
(Professor J Watermeyer)

cc: Supervisor : Dr L Petersen

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.**

_____ 10 / 05 / 2023
Signature **Date**

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES

Appendix B: GDE Permission

GAUTENG PROVINCE
Department: Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

R/4/4/1/2

GDE RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER

Date:	27 January 2023
Validity of Research Approval:	08 February 2023– 30 September 2023 2023/20
Name of Researcher:	Chiramba R.J.
Address of Researcher:	Unit 1, Berg en Dal Complex
	28 6th Road West
	Northcliff, 2195
Telephone Number:	0744400509/0647694535
Email address:	rjchiramba@gmail.com
Research Topic:	The experiences of learners from low socio-economic backgrounds in one suburban school in Gauteng.
Type of qualification	Masters
Number and type of schools:	1 Secondary School
District/s/HO	Johannesburg North

Re: Approval in Respect of Request to Conduct Research

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

27/01/2023

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

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

1. *The letter would indicate that the said researcher/s has/have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.*
2. *The District/Head Office Senior Manager/s must be approached separately, and in writing, for permission to involve District/Head Office Officials in the project.*
3. ***Because of the relaxation of COVID 19 regulations researchers can collect data online, telephonically, physically access schools, or may make arrangements for Zoom with the school Principal. Requests for such arrangements should be submitted to the GDE Education Research and Knowledge Management directorate.***
4. ***The Researchers are advised to wear a mask at all times, Social distance at all times, Provide a vaccination certificate or negative COVID-19 test, not older than 72 hours, and Sanitise frequently.***
5. *A copy of this letter must be forwarded to the school principal and the chairperson of the School Governing Body (SGB) that would indicate that the researcher/s has been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.*
6. *A letter/document that outlines the purpose of the research and the anticipated outcomes of such research must be made available to the principals, SGBs, and District/Head Office Senior Managers of the schools and districts/offices concerned, respectively.*
7. *The Researcher will make every effort to obtain the goodwill and cooperation of all the GDE officials, principals, and chairpersons of the SGBs, teachers, and learners involved. Persons who offer their cooperation will not receive additional remuneration from the Department while those that opt not to participate will not be penalised in any way.*
8. *Research may only be conducted after school hours so that the normal school program is not interrupted. The Principal (if at a school) and/or Director (if at a district/head office) must be consulted about an appropriate time when the researcher/s may carry out their research at the sites that they manage.*
9. *Research may only commence from the second week of February and must be concluded before the beginning of the last quarter of the academic year. If incomplete, an amended Research Approval letter may be requested to conduct research in the following year.*
10. *Items 6 and 7 will not apply to any research effort being undertaken on behalf of the GDE. Such research will have been commissioned and be paid for by the Gauteng Department of Education.*
11. *It is the researcher's responsibility to obtain written parental consent of all learners that are expected to participate in the study.*
12. *The researcher is responsible for supplying and utilising his/her research resources, such as stationery, photocopies, transport, faxes, and telephones, and should not depend on the goodwill of the institutions and/or the offices visited for supplying such resources.*
13. *The names of the GDE officials, schools, principals, parents, teachers, and learners that participate in the study may not appear in the research report without the written consent of each of these individuals and/or organisations.*
14. *On completion of the study, the researcher/s must supply the Director: Knowledge Management & Research with one Hard Cover bound and an electronic copy of the research.*
15. *The researcher may be expected to provide short presentations on the purpose, findings, and recommendations of his/her research to both GDE officials and the schools concerned.*
16. *Should the researcher have been involved with research at a school and/or a district/head office level, the Director concerned must also be supplied with a summary of the purpose, findings, and recommendations of the research study.*

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

Kind regards



.....

Dr. Gumani Mukatuni
Acting CES: Education Research and Knowledge Management

DATE: 27/01/2023

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

Appendix C: School Permission

GREENSIDE HIGH SCHOOL

GAUTENG DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Geers Avenue Greenside Johannesburg 2193 | P O Box 84042 Greenside 2034

Tel: (011) 646-0113/4 or (011) 486-0762/3/4/5/7 | Fax: (011) 646-2436

Email: info@greensidehigh.co.za | Website: www.greensidehigh.co.za

21 February 2023

Dear Ms Chiramba

Permission to do conduct research at Greenside High School

Thank you for enquiring about conducting your research at Greenside High. We would be very happy to accommodate you in this regard.

Yours sincerely

Dr G Barry

Deputy Principal

Appendix D: PIS-Parents:

Parents' Information Sheet

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Title of the study: The experiences of learners from low socio-economic backgrounds in one suburban high school in Gauteng.

Dear parents/guardians:

My name is Rumbidzaishe Chiramba. I am a full time Masters student in the field of School Social Work at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. As part of my degree requirements, I have to undertake a small-scale research project in the area of my specialization, namely school social work. I am therefore warmly inviting your child to participate in this research study. The topic of my research is: The experiences of learners from low socio-economic backgrounds in one suburban high school in Gauteng.

The research intends to explore the experiences of learners who are exempted from paying school fees as a result of their socio-economic status within one suburban high school in Gauteng. The research will use 30–45-minute face to face interviews guided by an interview schedule. Follow up interviews may also be conducted in order to gain clarification on questions. Participation in the interview may take up to two hours of the participants' time,

i.e.: The initial interview, and potential follow up interview. To assist me in the writing up of the information from the interviews, in addition to note taking, I would also need permission to use a voice recorder. However, this will be completely voluntary.

During the research activity, I will need to ask the participants some personal information about themselves, including their experiences in their home and schooling environments. The interview will be confidential and anonymous. However, I will not be able to guarantee the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants as the school will know their identities. When I share the results of the research study, I will not include participants' names or anything else that could identify them. With your consent and your child's assent, other researchers may use the data collected from this research study, but participants' names and any personal information will not be used or passed on.

Participation in the study is completely voluntary, and there are therefore no direct benefits or losses if you allow your child to participate in the study. Some of the questions asked may make participants feel sad or upset. If this happens, I will stop the interview and continue another time. If participants need some support or counselling services following the interview, these are available free of charge at Greenside High School. The name of the counsellor is Ms Nicole Economou and they can find her in room A.1.2. at Greenside High School.

This research study will be written up as a research report. The report will be available on the university library website. If you would like to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you. Your child's participation in this study will be highly appreciated. If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research study, feel free to contact me or my supervisor on 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,

Rumbidzaishe Chiramba

Researcher: Rumbidzaishe Chiramba

Email address: 1852373@students.wits.ac.za

Phone Number: 0647694535

Supervisor: Dr Laetitia Petersen

Email Address: laetitiapetersen@wits.ac.za

Appendix E: PIS for participants

Participant Information Sheet (PIS)

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Title of the study: The experiences of learners from low socio-economic backgrounds in one suburban high school in Gauteng.

Dear Learner:

My name is Rumbidzaishe Chiramba. I am a Masters student in the field of School Social Work at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. I am inviting you to take part in a study called: **The experiences of learners from low socio-economic backgrounds in one suburban high school in Gauteng**. A research study is a way to learn more about something. Research studies help us to find out the answers to important questions. I would like your help in finding out more information on some of the experiences you have at home and at school. Before you decide if you want to take part, please read this information sheet and discuss it with either your parent/guardian or trusted teacher. You can also ask me if there is anything you don't understand, or if you would like more information from me.

Why is this study being done?:

I would like to know your story, as well as your experiences as a learner exempted from paying school fees within the school. I would also like to understand how these experiences

affect how you learn and do your schoolwork, and what you feel can be done to make your experiences better or more positive.

Why have you been chosen?:

I am inviting you because you are between 13 to 18 years old, and you are exempted from paying school fees within the school. I would like to know your experiences of this.

Do I have to take part?

You can choose to take part or choose not to take part. If you want to take part now, you can still change your mind later. If you decide later that you want to stop taking part, you can either tell me, a trusted teacher or your parent/guardian and they will let me know.

What will happen to me if I take part?:

If you decide to take part in the research study, it should be because you want to do so. You may choose not to answer some of the questions if you do not want to. You will not get any benefits by participating in this research study. You will also 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.

What would happen during the study?

The research would be in the form of an interview, guided by an interview schedule. An interview schedule is a list of the questions I would like you to answer during the interview. You would have access to the interview schedule before the interview. There might be a follow up interview if I need to clarify some information. Your participation in the research would take approximately 2 hours of your time in total, i.e.: the initial interview, and potential follow up interview.

What would be required of me?

I would need your permission to use a voice recorder. Recording our interview sessions would help me when it comes to writing up information after our interviews. However, this will be completely voluntary and up to you to give me permission to do so. Only my supervisor and I would have access to these recordings. The interviews will take place at Sweet Valley High School in Therapy room A.1.2 at a time suitable for both of us. During the interview, I would need to ask some personal information about you, including your

experiences in your home and schooling environment. The interviews will be confidential. However, I would not be able to guarantee complete anonymity as the school will know your identity. When I share the results of the research study, I will not include your name or anything else that could identify you. With your permission, other researchers may also use the data collected from this research study, but your name and any personal information will not be used or passed on. After transcribing the recordings of the interviews, I may also come back to you to confirm if what is on the transcript is what you really wanted to say.

What happens if something goes wrong?:

I am not anticipating anything going wrong. However, some of the questions asked may make you feel sad or upset. If this happens, I will stop the interview and continue another time. If you need some support or counselling services following the interview, these are available free of charge at Sweet Valley High School. The name of the counsellor is Ms Nicole Economou and you can find her in counselling room A.1.2 on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays at Sweet Valley High School. Other than that, I do not anticipate anything going wrong.

Who will know I am doing this?:

The school principal as well as some members of staff will know. Your parents should also know that you are taking part in the study. However, measures will be put in place to try and ensure that your peers do not know about your involvement in the study. The choice of counselling room A.1.2 is one of the measures to make sure your peers would not know. This room has a door, that can close for privacy as well as windows that are strategically placed so that no one will be able to see you from the outside. My supervisor and I will also know who you are. But I will use fake names when talking about you and your school in my final report.

What happens once the study is finished?:

I will share the information (where no one can be recognised) with other researchers interested in this topic, so we can all learn as much as possible. I might use the information I get from the study to write journal articles and any other publications necessary for disseminating the findings. If you would like to read the full research report once it is finished, I can also send it to you.

Who is conducting the research?:

I will be conducting the study. My name is Rumbidzaishe Chiramba, and I am a researcher, a social worker and a Masters student at the University of the Witwatersrand.

Did anyone else check the study is OK to do?:

The study has been reviewed by an Ethics Team. They make sure that everything we do is suitable for children. If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical procedures of this research study, you are welcome to contact the University of the Witwatersrand's Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za.

How can I find out more about this study?:

You can contact either myself of my supervisor. We will both be able to answer your questions, and/or provide you with more details about the study.

These are our contact details:

Researcher: Rumbidzaishe Chiramba

Email address: 1852373@students.wits.ac.za

Phone Number: 0647694535

Supervisor: Dr Laetitia Petersen

Email Address: laetitiapetersen@wits.ac.za

THANK YOU for taking the time to read this information sheet 😊

Appendix F: Consent Form for Parents:

Title of project: The experiences of learners from low socio economic backgrounds in one suburban high school in Gauteng.

Name of researcher: Rumbidzaishe Chiramba

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

I also 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 understand that participation in the study is voluntary	YES	NO
I agree that the interview may be audio recorded	YES	NO

I agree that direct quotations from the interview may be used by the researcher in their research report	YES	NO
I agree that participation will remain anonymous (names will not be used by the researcher in their research report)	YES	NO
I agree that other researchers may use the information provided in the interview (depending on their own ethics clearance being obtained) but names and any personal information will not be used or passed on	YES	NO

…… (Signature)

…… (Name of participant/person giving consent)

…… (Date)

…… (Signature)

…… (Name of researcher/person seeking consent)

…… (Date)

Appendix G: Assent form for Learners:

Title of project: The experiences of learners from low socio economic backgrounds in one suburban high school in Gauteng.

Name of researcher: Rumbidzaishe Chiramba

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

I also 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 understand that participation in the study is voluntary	YES	NO
I agree that the interview may be audio recorded	YES	NO

I agree that direct quotations from the interview may be used by the researcher in their research report	YES	NO
I agree that participation will remain anonymous (names will not be used by the researcher in their research report)	YES	NO
I agree that other researchers may use the information provided in the interview (depending on their own ethics clearance being obtained) but names and any personal information will not be used or passed on	YES	NO

…… (Signature)

…… (Name of participant)

…… (Date)

…… (Signature)

…… (Name of researcher/person seeking consent)

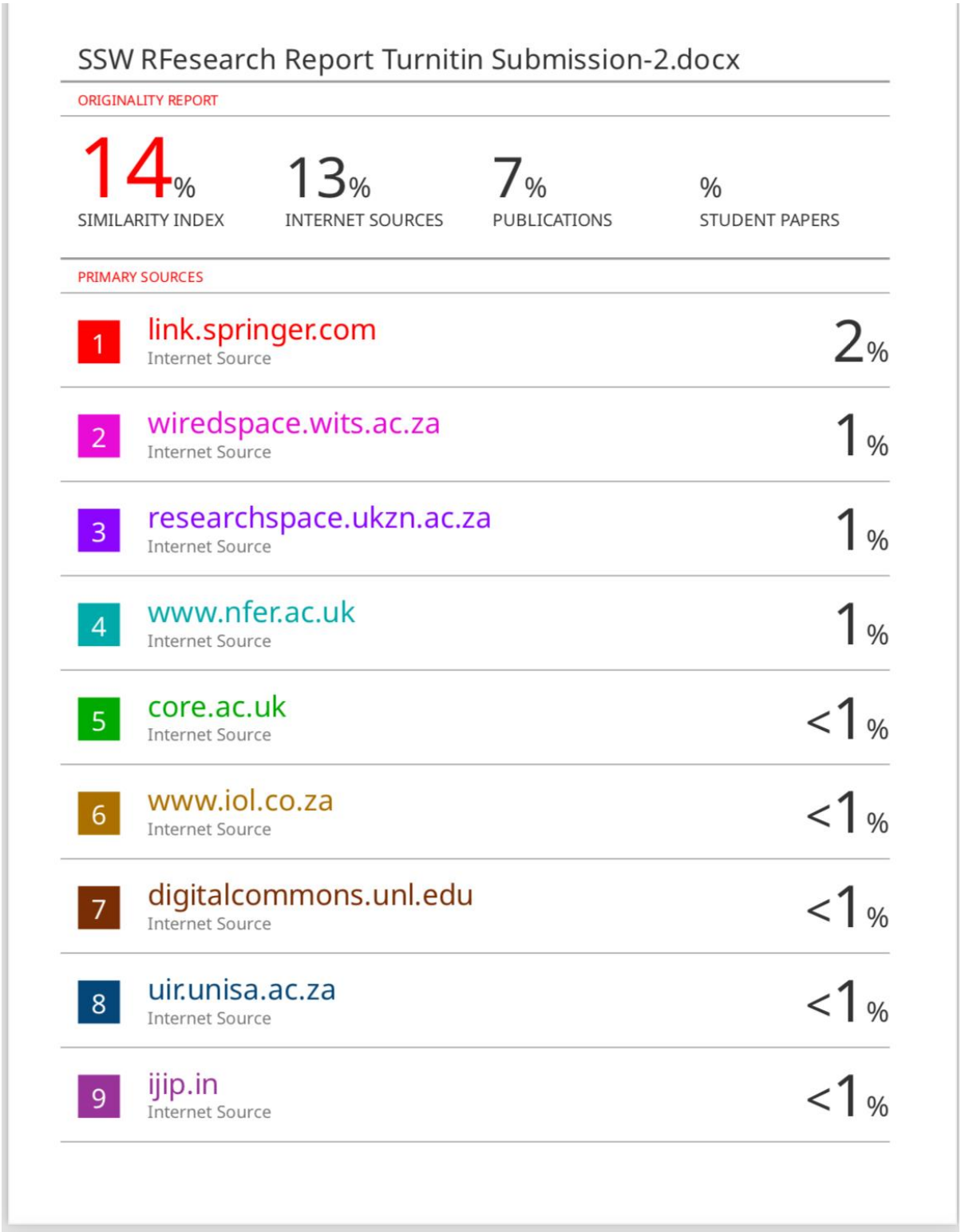
…… (Date)

Appendix H: Interview Guide:

Appendix 6: Interview Schedule

1. Tell me about your background (including when you were born, the circumstances surrounding your birth, your home and family life, and your journey in life to become where you currently are right now).
2. Do you feel your personal circumstances influence the way you do your schoolwork? In what ways?
3. What kind of opportunities (if any) to ease your hardships or challenges (both personal and academic) surround you in your personal life, and how do you take advantage of these opportunities?
4. Do you find any challenges as you learn? If you do, what are those challenges?
5. How do you experience being exempted from paying school fees? Do you feel it is an advantage or disadvantage?
6. How do you cope with and overcome challenges in your personal life as well as challenges in the classroom?
7. Given this, what changes do you anticipate happening/would you like to see happening?
8. Do you participate in extracurricular activities? Why, or Why not?
9. Describe the interactions you have with your peers and staff members within the school.
10. How do you feel about this interaction between you and your peers as well as the staff members?
11. How would you describe the help you get from the school as a whole? Apart from the fee exemption, what else are they doing to make your overall experience positive?
12. Given the COVID-19 pandemic, how do you think it eased or worsened your challenges? Both personal and academic?
13. What do you think can be done to improve your experiences at home and at school?
14. What are your aspirations in life?

Appendix I-Plagiarism Report



SSW RFesearch Report Turnitin Submission-2.docx

ORIGINALITY REPORT

14%	13%	7%	%
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

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