

https://dspace.org/

Exploring Grade 8 learner's experiences of inclusion and exclusion at a high school in Thohoyandou Limpopo

Zitha, Shirly

2025

University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

https://hdl.handle.net/10539/49432

Zitha, Shirly . (2025). Exploring Grade 8 learner's experiences of inclusion and exclusion at a high school in Thohoyandou Limpopo [Master's dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg]. WIReDSpace. https://hdl.handle.net/10539/49432

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND



Exploring Grade 8 learner's experiences of inclusion and exclusion at a high school in Thohoyandou Limpopo

By

Shirly Zitha

1482335

A research report submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

in the subject

Inclusive Education

at the

University of the Witwatersrand

Supervisor: Dr Moeniera Moosa

Signature: S.ZITHA

Declarations.

I Shirly Zitha student no 1482335 declared that Exploring grade 8 learner's experiences of inclusion and exclusion at a high school in Thohoyandou Limpopo is my own work and sources that I have used in this paper have been acknowledged by means of a complete reference.

Dedications.

This work is dedicated to God my heavenly father who has strengthen me through difficult situations and grunted me the opportunities to continue and thrive in my studies.

Acknowledgements.

I acknowledge with deep gratitude the assistance that I have received from the following people:

- My supervisor Dr Moeniera Moosa for her encouragement, patience and assistance in guiding me through my research. I cannot thank you enough for your unlimited support, caring guidance and valuable suggestion.
- My lovely grandmother who have been an inspiration and anchor through my life.
- My sincere thanks goes to my friends who have inspired me during my course while we were studying together and encouraged me to never give up until we reach the finish line.
- My lovely family which consist of my solid rocks that is my mother and my three wonderful aunties who have pushed me to achieve and attain my goals.
- The principal and teacher of the high school that allowed me to conduct my research at their school and with their learners during the tough times of Covid-19. Moreover, to the learners that participated in this study, I owe you special thanks.

Abstract

Transitioning from primary to high school presents learners with a variety of challenges that impact their view of being included or excluded. In the wake of the White Paper Six on inclusive education introduced by the South African government in 2001, there is need to understand the learners' experience so that interventions can be made to make the schools more inclusive. Thus the purpose of this study is to explore learners' experiences on transitioning from primary to high school. The purpose is achieved by analysing the experiences of the learners from their own perspective. The study is rooted in the interpretive paradigm thereby applying qualitative approaches to gather data. Data for the study were gathered from the grade eight learners at a full-service high school in Thohoyandou Limpopo Province. Using Tinto (1993) and Messious (2012) as the theoretical framework, the study was guided in its exploration of inclusion and exclusion. The study utilised a qualitative research paradigm drawing a sample of 15 learners from a population of 45. Open-ended questionnaires and focus group interviews were used to gather data and the data were analysed using thematic analysis. The study revealed that learners experienced a number of challenges, academic and social, on transitioning from primary to secondary school which made them feel excluded. Factors that could promote inclusion include teachers, school environment and social networks among others. Teachers at secondary school seem not well equipped to deal with transition hence not able to help learners. The study recommends that deliberate steps be taken to assist learners on transitioning so that inclusivity is achieved.

KEY WORDS

Transition, Inclusive Education, White Paper Six, inclusion, exclusion, high-school, learners

ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations were used in this study

DoE : (South African National) Department of Education

WP6: White Paper Six

RNCS: The Revised National Curriculum Statement

List of Tables

Table I: Conceptualising marginalisation:……..……..……..…..31

Table 3.1 Thematic analysis steps (Braun & Clarke, 2006)……..……..…..39

Table 4.2.1: Age and Sex of the Grade 8 learners……..……..…… 44

Table 4.2.2 Distribution of the focus group discussion participants by gender (N=15)……. 44

Table 4.3.1 Emergent themes and sub-themes based on analysis of open-ended responses. 45

Content

Declarations. 2
Dedications. 3
Acknowledgements 4
Abstract 5
KEY WORDS 5
ABBREVIATIONS 6
List of Tables 6
Content 7
Chapter 1 10
1.1 Introduction 10
1.2 Background of study 11
1.2 Problem statement 13
1.3 Rationale 14
1.4 Objective of the study 14
1.5 Research questions 15
a. Main question. 15
b. The following sub-questions will be investigated in order to better understand the research question 15
1.6 Conceptual framework 15
1.6.1 Inclusive education 16
1.6.2 Inclusion 16
1.6.3 Exclusion 16
1.6.4 Full-service school 17
1.6.5 Grade 8 learners 17
1.6.6 High school 17
1.6.7 School transition 17
1.7 Overview of study 17
Chapter 1: Introduction and background of the study: 17
Chapter 2: Literature review 17
Chapter 3: Research methodology 18
Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion 18
Chapter 5: Overview, recommendations and limitations 18
1.8 Conclusion 18
Chapter 2: Literature review 19
2.1 Introduction 19

2.2 Inclusive education global 19
2.3 Inclusive education in South Africa 20
2.4 Shift towards full service school. 22
2.5 Features of a Full–Service School 23
2.6 Definitions of inclusive education 24
2.7 School transitioning 26
2.7.1 Transitioning from primary to school high school. 26
2.7.2 Impact of school transition 28
2.7.3 Learners achievement during transition 28
2.8 Theoretical framework 29
2.8.1. Tinto's (1993) Theory of Adjustment 30
2.8 2 Theory of marginalisation 33
2.9 Conclusion 35
Chapter 3: Research design 35
3.1 Introduction 35
3.2 Research methodology 36
3.2 Research Paradigm 36
3.2.1 Interpretative paradigm 37
3.3 Research site 38
3.4 Sampling 39
3.5 Participants 39
3.6 Data Collection instruments 40
3.6.1 Questionnaires 40
3.6.1.2 Structured questionnaire 40
3.6.2 Focus group interviews 40
3.7 Data Analysis 41
3. 8 Trustworthiness 43
3.8.1 Transferability 43
3.8.2 Credibility 44
3.8.3 Dependability 44
3.8.4 Confirmability 44
3. 9 Ethical considerations 45
3.11 Conclusion 46
Chapter Four: Findings 46
4.1 Introduction 46
4.2 The Respondents' Profile 47

4.3 Findings 48
4.3.1 Forming relationship at school that promotes a sense of belonging 49
4.3.1.1 Uncertainty and anxiety 49
4.3.1.2 Trust in the school 51
4.3.1.3 Social Networks/ social engagement 53
4.3.1.3.1 Peer group 55
4.3.1.4 Attitude towards transition 56
4.3.2. School experience 57
4.3.2.1. Language barriers 57
4.3.2.2 Safety 58
4.3.3 Adjustment 59
4.3.3.1 Preparing for transition 59
4.3.3.2 Separating from primary school 61
4.3.3.3. Social and institutional adjustment 62
4.3.3.4 The Hidden Curriculum 64
4.3.3.5 Ableism 66
4.4 Conclusion 68
Chapter 5: Discussions and conclusions 68
5.1 Introduction 68
5.1.1 Overview 69
5.2 Findings and discussion 70
5.2.1 Making learners feel supported in the high school 70
5.2.2 Experiences and conditions making learners feel unsupported in high school 72
5.2.3 Difficult or easy experiences regarding high school 74
5.2.4 Difference between being at high school and being at primary school. 75
5.2.5 What high schools can do to make new comers in grade 8 feel more welcome and included 76
5.2.6 Conclusion 77
6.3 Limitations of the study 78
6.4 Recommendations for future research 79
6.5 Conclusion 80
References 81
APPENDICES 91
Appendix A: Ethics Clearance Form 91
Appendix B: Consent form and assent form 94
Appendix 1: LETTER TO THE PRINCIPAL/RECTOR OR OTHER GOVERNING BODY THAT NEEDS APPROVAL (SCHOOL DEPENDANT) 94

Appendix 2: LETTER TO THE LEARNER 97
Appendix 3: LETTER TO THE PARENTS 99
Appendix 4: Questionnaire for Grade 8 learners 102
Appendix 5: Focus group interview 104

Chapter 1

1.1 Introduction

Inclusive education is a worldwide perspective towards education that has gained much attention to change and transform how education systems includes excluded learners from education and securing educational rights for all learners. Since the Salamanca statement in

1994 inclusive education has received much attention at the world conference on Special Needs Education in 1994 (UNESCO, 1994). This has led many countries to adopt and implement inclusive education ideology in their education policies, including South Africa. The shift towards inclusive education embodied several principles, beliefs, and perceptions about learners, most associated with the belief that all children need to be included in learning process. Furthermore, it is children's fundamental right to receive access to quality education and support that is based on the learners needs in the classroom rather than the type of disability or learning difficulty of the learners (Engelbrecht, Nel, Smit & Van Deventer, 2016). Inclusive education has opened doors to challenge exclusionary practices not only for disabled learners but for every learner in the classroom or the schooling system so that any form of difference is embraced rather than being challenged. This chapter will provide an overview of inclusive education in South Africa. The background of the research will be laid forth in this chapter, as well as the study's problem and purpose statement, research questions, aim, and conceptual framework and overview.

1.2 Background of study

The dawn of a democratic South Africa brought about developmental changes in the structure of education that created a shift from one education system to a policy committed to social justice and human rights (Lomofsky & Lazarus, 2001; UNESCO, 2005). South African education was in the past a reflection of the fragmented society in which it was based. South Africa stems from a past in which apartheid education was used as a tool for dividing society, as it built certain forms of identity between learners (Msila, 2007). The Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) sees education as an instrument that could act as a foundation for the democratic principles such as social justice, non-racism, equality and reconciliation enshrined in the Constitution of South Africa (Msila, 2007). Towards the transition of the new South Africa, the government adopted inclusive education as part of their educational policy that was introduced in 2001 called the White Paper Six: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System (DBE, 2001). Given the dark history of apartheid, the country has adopted inclusive education as a way to redress past inequalities that were influenced by the apartheid system, to widen access to education for all. It is common knowledge that during apartheid in South Africa, the country's education was divided and segregated by race and as well as ability. In this sense, the education system was divided into a dual system of a special education and mainstream education component. This method resulted in the exclusion of a number of learners, particularly black learners, from mainstream education (Carrim, 2002). There was not

merely racial segregation in special education; there was also segregation based on learner impairment or disability. In South Africa, the end of apartheid signalled the beginning of social, political, and economic freedom.

The call for inclusive education in South Africa also challenges the provision of the separate schooling system that creates binaries of 'normal' schools and special schools which was influenced by the apartheid government. The introduction of full-service schools by the department of education was intended to address and develop new inclusive and supportive approaches for learners who are said to have a special need (DBE, 2001). As a result, full-service schools strive for diversity since they are committed to enhancing a variety of instructional methods.

Full-service schools provide varied levels of support based on the requirements of learners and any specific learning difficulties they may be encountering (DBE, 2001).One of the main goals of these schools is to inspire a paradigm shift in how the educational system views impediments to learning and growth, such as disability (DBE, 2010).The government is also in charge of choosing full-service schools that can accommodate all students, including those with impairments. New schools were created in some regions, or existing schools were transformed to full-service schools. That is, learners who attended a regular school were required to attend a full-service school, which included learners transitioning from primary to high-school. Learners are therefore left with the challenge of navigating two forms of transitioning. This includes the normal transition from primary school to high-school and as well as the transition from a mainstream primary school setting to a full-service high-school. The two forms of transition are a result of some residential area or community having one formal high-school in the area following the new policy of converting mainstream schools to be full service.

This study's main focus is looking at newcomer's learners' experiences of inclusion and exclusion during the transitioning from primary to a full-service high-school. Research on school transition has been conducted in other countries and some provinces in South Africa. While previous research has focussed on several aspects of the transition period such as learners with special needs, to the best of my knowledge there is very little, if any, research focussing on learners' experiences of inclusion and exclusion during the transition from primary school to a full-service high-school, especially in a rural setting. Therefore, the focus of this research is on the experiences of learners in relation to inclusion and exclusion when transitioning to a full-service high-school in rural areas. A full service school gives access to

all learners living in the catchment area whatever their learning need, hence the school chosen being a full service school allow the research to draw information from learners who have experiences in a full service school. full service school for this study is expected to bring forth difference experience in comparison with an ordinary school as full service school are inclined to be more inclusive and supportive of learners needs regardless of their diverse backgrounds. Moreover it is therefore important to note that initially the school was selected due to convenience as it is the only high school in the area. However the school happens to be part of the school officiated by the department of education to be converted into a full-service school.

1.2 Problem statement

After finishing their final year of primary school (grade seven) and beginning their high-school (grade eight) journey, learners in South Africa transition from primary to high-school between the ages of twelve and fourteen. This school transition plays a huge role in learner's development as effective adjustment and adaptation may lead to a successful schooling experience (Thabethe, 2014). However, moving to a new school for grade eight learners can be a very stressful period of social and academic change (Thabethe, 2014). The transition from grade seven to grade eight may present problems for many learners who struggle with issues related to academic performance, adjustment in the new setting and as well as psycho-social related issues. A successful transition to high-school can create a lasting impression for grade eight learners and promotes an attachment to successful learning and meaningful experiences (Kerr, 2002). Grade eight learners transfer from primary school to high-school, where there is, generally, a more supportive atmosphere that meets their social and emotional requirements as developing teenagers. These requirements are not often met by large, traditional high-school programs. Grade eight learners, on the other hand, join a high-school setting that is characterised by a high degree of anonymity (Blyth, Simmons & Carlton-Ford 1983).Unfortunately, many traditional high-schools put little emphasis on grade eight learners, instead "leaving them to fend for themselves" among the wider school population (Roderick & Camburn, 1996, p. 50).The "impersonal aspect of higher schools leaves learners indifferent, isolated, and alienated from the learning process," according to Kerr (2002), "while the curriculum leaves them yearning for purpose and connection to the outside world and their future aspirations" (p. 3).

Learners transitioning from primary to high-school may experience exclusion because the new environment may fail to meet their academic, social, and emotional needs, particularly if the school culture does not recognise and fully grasp its role in inclusion. As a result, when learners

transfer to a new school, they must be completely included, regardless of their learning needs, particularly in an inclusive or full-service school. Furthermore, academic success and adjustment throughout the early years of high-school are crucial in laying the groundwork for learners' education (Higgins, 2015). It appears that the first year of high-school is a vital time for learners as they form beliefs about what is important in education, build a knowledge base, and form attitudes about high-school. Thus, it is important to figure out how to make these learners feel included rather than excluded.

1.3 Rationale

Investigating learner's experiences of inclusion and exclusion in high-school will shed light on the challenges that learners experience when learners progress from primary to high-school and in the hopes of creating school awareness. This research has been prompted by my experiences as a student-teacher during my practical teaching. I have been cognisant that some high-schools do not address the needs of grade eight learners entering high-school. That as the context changes, the majority of teachers focuses more on the academic success of learners and less on the adaptation and development of learners as they move from primary to high-school. The traditional organisation of high-schools did not fulfil the particular demands of adolescent in grade eight, according to research done by the National Association of High-school Principals (1985). After coming from an environment where many decisions were made for them, large, comprehensive high-schools tend to provide grade eight with too many options and responsibilities too quickly (Powell, Farrar & Cohen, 1985). Morton (2005) discovered that high-schools were not a welcoming environment for grade eight learners, and that there were few practices to assists learners with the entire process of transferring to a new setting. I have also seen the same problem persisting with my little brother who is presently enrolled for his second year in grade eight. Whereby more focus is on his academics yet his overall experience of being fully included and adjusting to being at high-school is not recognised.

As learners move from primary to high-school, they face a variety of social and academic problems (Higgins, 2015).To promote inclusive education that supports learner development in grade eight, it is necessary to examine learners' experiences of inclusion and exclusion as learners make the transition from primary to high-school.

1.4 Objective of the study

The main purpose of this study is to investigate and explain learners' experiences of inclusion and exclusion in grade eight at a Limpopo full-service high school.

As such the objective of this research project:

- Is to understand how grade eight learners define inclusionary and exclusionary experiences at a full-service high-school.
- Is to gain an understanding of learners' experiences at a full-service high-school do grade eight learners regard as inclusionary and or exclusionary.
- Is to gain an insight into how grade eight learners cope with experiences of being included and or excluded at a full-service high-school

1.5 Research questions

a. Main question.

This study main research question is

1. Which experiences at a full-service high-school makes grade eight learners feel included or excluded?

b. The following sub-questions will be investigated in order to better understand the research question

2. How do grade eight learners define inclusionary and exclusionary experiences at a full service high school?
3. Which experiences at a full service high school do grade eight learners regard as inclusionary and or exclusionary?
4. How do grade eight learners cope with experiences of being included and or excluded at a full service high school?

1.6 Conceptual framework

Conceptual framework refers to principles, empirical research and applicable hypotheses to advance and systematise knowledge on related concepts or questions (Rocco & Plakhotnik, 2009). It further helps in ensuring the extension of expertise by providing both direction and impetus to the research investigation. The conceptual framework also helps in explaining the concepts that are important in the study.

It is critical for both the researcher and the readers to have a firm grasp on the key phrases and concepts that will be used throughout this study. As a result, the following paragraphs describe the important terms and concepts utilised in this study as well as those linked to it:

1.6.1 Inclusive education

Various authors have suggested that, depending on the circumstance, inclusive education means different things to different scholars (Armstrong, Armstrong & Spandagou, 2011; Florian, 2012).According to UNESCO (2008), inclusive education is a process that aims to react to the diversity of learners by enhancing their engagement and eliminating exclusion from and within education. For this research, I will draw on white paper six definitions of inclusive education. According to South Africa White paper six, “Inclusive education" means "recognising that all children, youth, and adults have the potential to learn, acknowledging that all children and youth can learn and that all children and youth need support, enabling education structures, systems, and learning methodologies to meet the needs of all learners, acknowledging and respecting differences in learners, whether due to age, gender, ethnicity, language, class, disability, HIV, or " according to South Africa's White Paper six (DBE, 2001, p.6). In this study, inclusive education is defined as a process that aims to respond to learners' difference by enhancing their involvement and decreasing exclusion from and within education, while also accepting that all learners can learn regardless of their particular differences.

1.6.2 Inclusion

Inclusion is giving all learners the opportunities to learn and participate equally in the classroom. That is referring to a situation where all learners, regardless of impairment or severity, can participate, are in a regular classroom, given the same opportunities (Dreyer, 2017). In using this definition, this study defines inclusion as creating an environment that allows all learners to feel supported emotionally while being given the appropriate support to learn.

1.6.3 Exclusion

Exclusion, like inclusion, is difficult to define, according to Kearney (2011), since the notions of exclusion are multifaceted. Exclusion is frequently associated with marginalisation and social exclusion, and marginalisation appears to be synonymous. Exclusion and inclusion are two interrelated and interdependent practices, according to (Hansen, 2012; Armstrong & Spandagou, 2011). Exclusion is typically regarded as the polar opposite of inclusion. Furthermore, Booth, Ainscow, and Dyson (1997) believe that processes of increasing and decreasing learners' participation in the cultures, curricula, and communities of local mainstream schools better explain inclusion and exclusion. Booth, Ainscow, and Dyson's (1997) definition of exclusion will be used in this study

1.6.4 Full-service school

According to the Department of Education, "full-service/inclusive schools are first and foremost mainstream education institutions that provide quality education to all learners by meeting the whole spectrum of learning needs in an equitable manner" (2010, p. 9). They should work to improve educational access, equity, quality, and social justice. This definition will be used in this research.

1.6.5 Grade 8 learners

The Department of Education does not specify what grade eight learners are. However, from common knowledge or understanding, grade eight learners are students in the first year of high-schools in South Africa. In this study, grade eight learners are learners who have achieved or promoted from grade seven of primary school to grade eight of high-school.

1.6.6 High school

In the South African context, high-school means schooling that typically starts from grade eight to grade twelve. However, in some literature, the term high-school is sometimes used and considered the same as a secondary. This study will use high-school instead of secondary school while noting that they are sometimes used interchangeably in some literature.

1.6.7 School transition

According to Tobbell and O'Donnell (2014) to transit means moving from one educational institution to the next. In this study, school transitioning means moving from primary school (which is mostly from grade R to grade seven) to high-school which starts from typical grade eight to grade twelve. This includes learners being in a position where they have to negotiate their place in the new schooling context.

1.7 Overview of study

Chapter 1: Introduction and background of the study:

The major aim of this section is to provide an overview of the study, problem statement, rationale, research aim and questions and as well as conceptual framework pointing out the primary issue the study is based on.

Chapter 2: Literature review

This chapter compromises of the relevant body of knowledge related to this research. The history of the expansion of inclusive education, as to how it emerged and how it is practised in South Africa. It further examines the concepts and debates of school transitioning for grade

eight learners, and as well as experiences of learners using existing literature from different authors.

Chapter 3: Research methodology

The research paradigm, research design, research methodology, and research sampling are all covered in research design and methodology.

It also focuses on the study's data collection procedures, as well as data analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

This section discusses the study's findings, which were based on information gathered through open-ended surveys and focus group interviews. Following the presentation of the data, an analysis of the findings in connection to the study questions and theoretical framework is presented.

Chapter 5: Overview, recommendations and limitations

This chapter gives an overview of the research and also focuses on the recommendations proffered and a discussion of the limitations identified.

1.8 Conclusion

The first chapter acted as an introduction to this research, attempting to locate and problematise the study area of investigation.

The history of inclusive education was briefly explained, as was the problem description, which led to the main research question and its sub-questions, as well as the study justification. In Chapter two, I will look through the relevant existing literature that best supports the research. In addition, chapter two will outline the study theoretical background.

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the study's introduction and its main argument. This chapter reviews, literature that focuses on inclusive education, global and as well as in the South African context. The chapter further intends to convey information to the reader with a general overview of the issues related to learners' experiences of inclusion and exclusion in high-school by focusing on learner's transition from primary school to high-school and as well as a theoretical perspective that frames the research. The reviewed literature is divided into five main sections: inclusive education globally, inclusive education in South Africa, definitions of inclusive education, school transitioning and theoretical framework.

2.2 Inclusive education global

Inclusive education has become an important international policy issue for the past two decades. At a global level, inclusive education is defined as providing all children with a free, high-quality universal education (Ainscow & Miles, 2008). This includes poor or disadvantaged children, racial minorities, and those with impairments (UNESCO, 1994).Inclusion entails including everyone and fostering a more democratic society with an equitable and high-quality educational system (UNESCO, 2001). Inclusive education policy prioritises diversity and it is now the responsibility of teachers to meet the diverse needs of the students they educate. Inclusive education is, therefore, recognise as the common approach to address the educational need for all children including combating all inequalities that may lead to exclusion for some learners (Ainscow & Miles, 2008). Originally, however, inclusive education was related to disability, i.e., disabled learners and learners with specific learning disabilities (UNESCO 1994). Later, the inclusive educational outlook broadened and today inclusive education is seen as a policy that affects all learners. The current perspective of inclusive education has shifted from the phenomenon being only considered as an approach to serving children with disabilities to focusing on all learners. For this reason, associating inclusive education with disability hinders the overall goal of the inclusive education movement worldwide.

The call for inclusive education was endorsed by the Salamanca World Conference on Special Needs Education. The Salamanca statement calls for different governments to improve the quality of education in schools to implement practical and strategic changes. These changes should be endorsing inclusive education in all educational policies of different countries. Furthermore, the Salamanca statement is perhaps the most important international document

in the field of special education that has ever existed (Ainscow, 1999). As stated in this statement, inclusion entails not only recreating educational chances for learners with impairments, but also extending educational opportunities to a wide range of marginalised groups who may have had little to no access to schooling facilities in the past (Gordon, 2000). Inclusion should be a norm in most school regulations around the world, according to the statement. The Salamanca Statement of 1994 advocated that everyone disabled or not, should have the same rights and opportunities to access education. The focus of inclusive education is on schools and their structures, as well as the reform of traditional schools to better react to the variety of all students (UNESCO, 2005).

Inclusive education as a movement has gained much momentum and has spread across the world with many countries adopting it in their policies as a way to serve and integrate all learners in education (UNESCO, 2001). The practice of inclusive education has been embraced as an ideal model for education in the world (Mayor, 2009). The shift towards inclusive education, therefore, starts with the assumption that education is a fundamental human right and the cornerstone of a fairer society (Ainscow & Miles, 2008). In essence, the principles such as non-discriminatory, inclusion, equality, participation, accountability and the rule of law, and the human rights-based approach are priorities as part of the right to education for all learners (Ainscow & Miles, 2008).

2.3 Inclusive education in South Africa

Looking at the move towards inclusive education in South Africa means taking into account the context of education or the historical background and as well as South African schooling system. This implies that it is critical to evaluate South Africa's previous educational system as well as the modifications that have led to the current altered educational policy. In the case of South Africa, understanding inclusive education is tied to the country's apartheid history.

Apartheid legislation regulated every aspect of South African law when the apartheid regime took power in 1948. This had a significant impact on the school system in South Africa. Apartheid developed segregated educational departments administered by distinct regulations and divided along racial lines (Engelbrecht, 2006).South Africa's democratic struggle has miraculously avoided the disaster of civil war, and it has made substantial progress in normalising its racially divided society and redressing the disparities imposed by apartheid since 1994 (Taylor, van der Berg & Mabogoane, 2011). In comparison to apartheid, when the majority of learners were from the 'White' minority, today over a million students, including

formerly underprivileged students, have access to education (Department of Basic Education, 2011).

With the establishment of a democratic society for everyone, the education system in South Africa has experienced a number of significant changes during the last two decades. Such developments have resulted in the advancement of educational ideals, approaches and policies to make education and training more inclusive and open to all members of society. Such reforms are largely aimed at redressing historical imbalances and injustices in South Africa. Developments in South African education policy have been affected by changes in the country over the last two decades. The school system in today's democratic South Africa has undergone numerous reforms in an attempt to eliminate discrimination and promote inclusiveness (Pillay, Amp & Di Terlizzi, 2009). To move towards a democratic and equal education system, policies have been amended (Weber, 2011).Not only were the policies revised but also the curriculum has been restructured several times. Revised policies in South Africa have attempted to redress and address all the inequalities that were created by the apartheid government. For example, inclusive education in South Africa is framed within a human rights framework that turns integrated human values into the rights of disadvantaged learners (Engelbrecht, 2006).

White Paper Six documents South Africa's shift toward inclusive education. White Paper six, published by the Department of Education in 2001, has been acclaimed as a post-apartheid landmark policy that lays out the goal and framework for transforming South Africa's divided and unequal education system into one that is inclusive. The main aim of White Paper Six was to outline what exactly inclusive education entails and how South Africa intends to build inclusive education so that it could be clear for those who practice it in real school settings (Department of Basic Education, 2011). Engelbrech (2006) postulated that in South Africa the concepts of inclusive education embrace the constitution values such as equality, diversity and as well as human rights. The White Paper Six seeks to provide educational opportunities for those learners who have experienced or who are experiencing educational barriers due to the failure of the educational system to meet their educational needs using the concepts of the constitution. Following White Paper Six, policies such as the National Strategy on Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support (SIAS) (2005), Conceptual and operational guidelines for the implementation of inclusive education (2005), Framework and management plan for the first phase of inclusive education implementation: Managing the transition towards an inclusive education system (2005), Guidelines for inclusive programs (2005), and Guidelines for Fulfilling the Promise developed (Du Plessis, Conley & Du Plessis 2007).These

aforementioned policies are some of the policies that inform the implementation of Inclusive Education in South Africa and make clear that school becomes as inclusive as possible. In this sense, these policies should be able to inform teachers in high-schools on how to fully include all learners in every aspect of teaching and learning especially those learners who are coming from a different schooling context to embark on the new journey of high-school which is different from their previous schooling environment.

2.4 Shift towards full service school.

The South African schooling system was previously divided into two systems that are mainstream schools and special needs schools. As a way of bridging the gap, full-service schools were proposed as a way of achieving redress for those who felt and were in fact marginalised by the schooling system, as well as a way of transforming mainstream schools. According to the Department of Education there are three schooling system that is mainstream, special needs and full-service schools (Department of Education, 2001). The mainstream school operates as an ordinary school that caters for learners and aim to provide quality education. In contrast special schools are for learners in need of intensified support (Landsberg et al. 2005). These schools are considered to be the experts in suitably adapting instruction and intervention strategies, and they play an important part in an inclusive education system in South Africa. The significant contribution of special education in meeting learners' needs has been in developing a technology of supporting learners with special needs" (Hall, Campher, Smit, Oswald & Engelbrecht as quoted in Engelbrecht et al. 1999, p.163). On the other hand, full-service schools are defined as "schools and colleges that will be equipped and supported to provide for the full range of learning needs among all our learners" (Department of Education, 2001, p. 22). Learners with "medium intensity needs would be educated in a FSS" (Landsberg et al. 2005, p.4). At-risk learners would suffer without a full-service school, as Muijs (2007, p.348) puts it, "pupils are unlikely to perform to their potential if they suffer from health or social problems, and that therefore addressing these issues is a vital precursor to educational achievement as well as more generally enhancing pupils' life chances and well-being".

The concept of a full service schools was first introduced in South Africa through the reconfiguration of learning support in Education White Paper Six in 2001 (Department of Education, 2001). The full-service school involved the gradual conversion of five hundred mainstream primary schools into schools that would be equipped to provide moderate levels of learning support (Ibid). Therefore, the rationale for the introduction of full-service schools was

to strengthen learning support services for education to be able to provide for a range of learning needs (Mhlongo, 2017). A full-service school should have, these are some of the characteristics mentioned (Department of Basic Education, 2010, p.1). Full-service schools will welcome all learners and celebrate diversity. They will provide support to every learner. Landsberg et al. (2005, p.64) suggest that the main role of a full-service school is to employ "experienced learning support educators" to help with the learners; to reach out to neighbouring schools to provide support (Dryfoos 2011; Ferguson & Blumberg, 2001; Campbell-Allen et al. 2009) and assistance in helping learners with barriers (Landsberg et al. 2005; Warger 2002).

In support of full-service schools Warger (2002, p.2) also mentions five advantages of having a full-service school in the USA. These include students have faster access to appropriate mental health care; learners showed a decrease in depression levels, and a sense of self-worth was revealed by learners receiving the correct mental health support; schools with health-based clinics showed a decline of students who wanted to commit suicide; lower pregnancy rates than the national average; and finally the main benefit of an full-service school would be the higher attendance rates, since fewer students were truant from school.

2.5 Features of a Full–Service School

A full-service school must operate differently from an ordinary mainstream school and must have certain features that make it unique (Dryfoos, 1994). Full-service schools present a shared vision about improving long-term conditions for children and families, not simply a goal of providing services or treating a problem. Dryfoos (1994 & 2004) has identified the following as the features that must apply to effective full-service schools:

- Accessibility and learner-focus: Full-service schools need to be accessible and be anchored around by children's needs. The services provided at the school must cater for both children and family. Full-service schools should be in a position to help children and families in dealing with urgent problems and devise plans to eliminate further development of the problems and in so doing offer learning support services that are of good quality and make them easily accessible to both children and parents.
- Integrated services, from prevention to intervention: Full-service schools reveal the entire field of amalgamated services from systems of prevention, to systems of early intervention (early-after-onset), to systems of care for the treatment of severe and chronic problems.

- Collaborative partnerships: collaborative partnerships are at the heart of full-service schools and help at delivering integrated services. Full-service schools place an emphasis on partnerships between schools, families, and other public and private sector organizations. Amalgamation does not usually mean the joining of service systems but the accelerated collaboration among them working toward a common goal. In full-service schools, collaboration in full-service schools is very crucial as the involvement and input by the community helps in determining the support service to be provided (Vroom, 1997).
- Culturally competent services: act in response to the vast contexts of children and families are very important in full-service schools. Suitable staffing, training, or other tasks that are in operation are offered due to the presence of diversity (Behrman, 1992; Gardner, 1992; Jehl & Kirst, 1992).
- Shared funding responsibility: funding is a combined effort between partners. Schools refined extensive partnerships in order for instruction, family support, and professional resources to flow gracefully between home, school, and the community (Salisbury and Dunst, 1997). A full-service school is a new school reform model that is growing fast in its scope (Abrams & Gibbs, 2000). Full-service schools strive to combine various support programmes such as health care, mental health services, parent education, or afterschool care into the school-wide change process. The full-service school therefore requires extensive community and parent participation (Dryfoos, 1994 &1996). This is particularly important in that an inclusive education practice can only become effective in challenging societal prejudices and exclusive behaviour with the support of the community (Conway, 2017, p.8). Special schools are for learners in need of intensified support (Landsberg et al. 2005). These schools are considered to be the experts in suitably adapting instruction and intervention strategies, and they play an important part in an inclusive education system in South Africa. The significant contribution of special education in meeting learners' needs has been in developing a technology of supporting learners with special needs" (Hall, Campher, Smit, Oswald & Engelbrecht as quoted in Engelbrecht et al. 1999, p. 163).

2.6 Definitions of inclusive education

In a relatively short period of time, inclusive education has grown and established itself as a subject of educational study, policy, and practice. It has become a topic of many researchers within the field of inclusive and a common buzz that is associated with special needs education

(Walton, 2015). Walton (2006) posits that studies in inclusion have raised a vast body of literature in defining inclusive education. However, the term is often used without understanding thus making it impossible for people to grasp fully.

Defining inclusive education has opened many debates as numerous researches in the field have provided different conceptualisation to capture the phenomenon (Dyason, 2004; Miles & Singal, 2010; Walton 2015). According to Walton (2006), inclusive education implies different things to different people in different situations, but there are some constants. Furthermore, she also stated that the definition is linked to the context of the country where inclusive education is being developed as these countries are grappling with what it means to make education more inclusive and also depending on the lens in which the country views inclusion (Walton, 2015; Ainscow, Farrell & Tweddle, 2000). For example, in South Africa, the prime historical influence on exclusion is racism; hence the conceptualisation of inclusive education in South Africa is influenced by racism. Therefore, racism could not be an issue in another context and as such will not influence inclusivity. Thus, for some authors, inclusive education could mean something different depending on the context of historical backgrounds and contextual concerns.

Spurgeon (2007) cited in Miles and Singal (2010) explains that since context may differ, the conceptualisation of inclusive education in England is different from the one in South Africa as in England inclusive education definition in some context was linked to special education. In this context (England) much emphasis was put on trying to merge special and general education. This was on the basis that separate education creates inequalities amongst disable and able learners. However, as the Salamanca statement has put forward that disable learners are not the only children who run the risk of being marginalised (UNESCO, 1994). Consequently, there is a need to widen conceptual of inclusive education so that it can cover every school-age going child. UNESCO (1994) has proposed to incorporate all learners regardless of their physical ability, socio background and so forth. Also, Engelbrecht, et al. (2017) supports the view of inclusive education embodying all learners as they state that inclusive education is about acceptance of all learners and full participation which brings about unconditional, quality education for all learners.

Inclusion is described as "a system of policy and practices that accepts difference as a strength, promotes a sense of belonging, equal membership, acceptance, and being valued, and encompasses fundamental civil rights" for the purposes of this study (Jones, White, Fauske &

Carr, 2011, p.13). This concept upholds the South African constitution's principles of equity, participation, community, respect for diversity, and entitlement (Ainscow, Booth & Dyson, 2006). This also is supported by Engelbrecht et al. (2017. p.2) who stated that "inclusive education is about inclusive schools and classrooms creating a sense of belonging, nurturing and educating of all learners, regardless of their differences in ability, culture, gender, language, class, and ethnicity, and they are viewed as places that both embody and support learning for a diverse range of learners". This definition assists in providing a shift from the perspective that high-school classroom does not promote a more nurturing environment that supports grade eight learners social and emotional needs as developing adolescents propose by international literature that looked at school transition that is similar to this study (Blyth, Simmons & Carlton-Ford, 1983).

2.7 School transitioning

The inclusion of all learners in education should be a priority for most school settings to promote equality and as well as equity so that every learner can be able to benefit from education instead of just placing learners and giving them access to education (Stephen & Cope, 2003). In this way, inclusion should try to go beyond fitting in' approach of learners in the classroom. In particular, a school setting or classroom should be able to provide the opportunity to form a new and distinct community of learners that is responsive to the diversity of experience and preferences of its members in a way that promotes the inclusion of all in the educational project in which they will be compulsorily engaged for the five years of high-school, including newcomer learners (Stephen & Cope, 2003). For the reason that learners have different primary school experiences as well as different forms of primary care. Grade eight learners are also diverse in terms of culture and as well as experiences of home and family circumstances and community life. Some learners may be familiar with each other and have established friendship from primary school and others may have to start over and create a new friendship as well as create new relationships. Therefore, it is important to establish ways to make Grade eight learners feel included and not excluded as newcomer at high-school.

2.7.1 Transitioning from primary to school high school.

As adolescence develops, they go through variety of transitions that they have to negotiate. Amongst the variety of transitions that adolescent have to undergo, school transition is at the centre. Transitioning from primary to high school has become a complex issue in regards to education for educational research and educator on both the local and internal level (Cox &Kennedy, 2008). Papers written on school transition have asserted that transition as an

educational concept is one of the challenging phase for young adolescent characterised by the influence of social and institutional factors which can either be positive or negative (Johnson, 2014; Zeedyk, Gallacher, Henderson, Hope, Husband & Lindsay, 2003). In addition, it has been identified as a stressful, difficult event yet significant for those who are expected to undergo this process. According to Jindal-Snape, Douglas, Topping, Kerr and Smith (2006), the transition from primary school to high school is a crucial time for learners as it is also associated with both positive and negative outcomes. There is a diverse way in which learners respond to school transition as this may be dependent on the learners personalities and how the school system prepare learners for transition phase. During this time, children may express negative outcomes associated with the change. These concerns include fear of being bullied, loss of life, peer relationship issues and anxiety about dealing with an increased workload (Evans, Borriello, &Field, 2018). Some of the explanation for these negative impacts is that the transitioning coincides with early adolescent, a period during which certain psychological anxiety disorders become more salient. Akos, Rose and Orthner (2015) also state that the transition to secondary education can have a direct impact on educational achievement, with a recorded disruption of the academic growth of students over the transition year. As the new context is different from the old one, grade eight learners also need to adjust the way they think and how to act in high school. When grade eight learners move to high school, they find a new (and often larger) school, less-accessible teachers, more challenging classes, older learners, and a new social clique (Benner & Graham, 2007). Furthermore, high school have been found to be relatively bigger, more heterogeneous, more rule bound, more concern with ability and less personal than primary school (Benner & Graham, 2007). The transition from primary to high school entails several changes as the two schooling systems are two different environments or contexts. Learners are expected to adapt to a new environment, assume a different role, establish new friendships and adjust to the new teaching approaches and teachers. Learners frequently have mixed feelings about the transition (Zeedijk, 2003). Some look forward to high school but may also have reservations. For some learners, the move creates anxiety as they may constantly worry about what to expect or how they will adjust and question their feelings of belonging to their new school context (Akos, Rose & Orthner, 2015). Dinham and Rowe (2008) suggested that not all new learners find the transition problematic. Other looks forward to the upcoming change and believe that the new context will be interesting that there will be opportunities to make new friends and learn new subjects.

During these transition learners well-being and learning must be maintained as they do not only adjust to a new environment but also adjust to social change, which occurs when changing classroom and school. The transition to high school often coincides with important social, emotional and physiological changes in the lives of adolescents.

2.7.2 Impact of school transition

Previous research on school transition has raised a number of both negative and positive effects on school transition. However, a number of negative results surpassed the positive effects of school transition (Coffey et al. 2011). Dihnam and Rowe (2008) have argued that transition phase can cause feelings of anxiety, loneliness and vulnerability for some learners. Extending on this finding more research has also revealed that many learners experiences stress, low self-esteem, apathy, decrease in motivation and a decline attitude towards school work and school life (Cox & Kennedy, 2008; Moje, 2008; Evans, Borriello & Field, 2018). Also, a number of researchers has position their focus on learner social well-being as topic of interest to look at the impact of school transition (Topping, 2011; Akos & Galassi, 2004; Hopwood, 2014). Such research has concluded that school transition can cause a significant disruption to learners' social relationships. Moving to a new school means learners have to build new relationship not only with teachers but also making new friends. Transitions include not only physical changes, such as moving from primary to high-school school, but also psychological changes as schoolchildren adjust to a new social status; they are no longer the big fish in a small pond as they "move from being the oldest and most experienced children in primary school to being the youngest and least mature in high-school school" (Jindal-Snape & Foggie. 2008, p.6). As learners explore their identity in their new surroundings" (Who am I?) and examine their sense of belonging (Where do I fit?), issues of identity and belonging arise. Individuals attempt to positively identify themselves" (Haslam et al. 2012, p.204), and their image of self is formed by their social group membership and how they see themselves in relation to the other members of the group. Some children may find this difficult because they are still clinging to old primary school acquaintances. The change disrupts such groups at a period when friendship and peer group are highly crucial (Topping, 2011). Furthermore, Akos and Galassi (2004) pointed out that losing friends and starting over has been identified as a large cause of stress and anxiety to learners and can affect learners' emotional well-being.

2.7.3 Learners achievement during transition

Schiller (1999, p. 216-217) cited in Smith, Akos, Lim and Wiley (2008) describe learner academic transition as "a process during which institutional and social factors influences which

students' educational careers are negatively or positively affected by transition." This extend to the assumption that change in learners social relationship and change in context such as moving from primary to high-school can strongly affect learners academic outcome as proposed by Honewald (2013). There is a vast existing body of literature which suggest that as learners move form primary to high-school they experience a decline in their academic achievement (Zeedyk, Gallacher, Henderson, Hope, Husband & Lindsay, 2003). This suggested a discontinuity of primary school content in high-school and this disrupts learners' ability to learn.

Previous research on the transition to high-school has focused primarily on learners' academic achievement and engagement across the transition (Evans, Borriello & Field, 2018). Academic attainment of learners is of primary importance when they make the transition from primary to high-school. In particular, there is interest in how transition impacts upon academic attainment. These studies have also found that the grade averages of both learners and their school dedication declined significantly from grade eight to nine (Evans, Borriello & Field, 2018; Zeedijk, 2003). There seems to be a strong consensus in the global literature on the impact of the change that there is often a decrease in achievement after the transition (Evans, Borriello & Field, 2018; Zeedijk, 2003). Nonetheless, there are several different causes for this decline in performance. Some research has also shown that sometimes learners who fail to adapt to the new environment maybe because of the overall process of moving from one place to the next and for some learners it could be that high-schools put more emphasis on school achievement than creating an environment that is welcoming more nurturing which supports learners social and emotional needs as developing adolescents (Blyth, Simmons & Carlton-Ford 1983; Morton, 2005). Academic challenge is an ongoing and contentious issue even in the South African literature for most grade eight learners who are moving from primary to high-school. The actual cause of many learners ' academic achievement declines across transition have been the subject of research. While numerous theories have been advanced and conclusions given, the actual cause of the decline has yet to be determined. However, assumptions that may contribute to the cause of the decline have been made.

2.8 Theoretical framework

A theoretical framework is a literature structure of concepts, a ready-made study map which guides the study (Liehr & Smith, 2000). This theoretical framework helps to hold and support the theory that the research puts forward (Ibraham, 2018). Furthermore, the theoretical framework introduces the theory and describes why the research problem is being studied. The

study will use Theory of Adjustment as part of a theoretical framework proposed by Tinto's (1993). In addition, Messiou's (2012) theory of marginalisation will also be used in the study as inclusion and exclusion is a larger component of the study.

2.8.1. Tinto's (1993) Theory of Adjustment

First and foremost, it is important to note that Tinto's theory of adjustment for learners focuses more on students who are transitioning from high-school to embark on the new journey of the university. However, some of the components that he uses to explain newly university entries can also be applicable to grade eight learners who are also new entries at high-school. Adjustment is an important component for all learners who are moving from one environment to a new environment.

Tinto (1993) offers a model of academic and social integration that describes how new first-year students are going to succeed and continue at higher education institutions. He emphasised the applicability of the model by including separation, transition and incorporation phases, and added that these factors were crucial in understanding why learners leave higher learning college institutions (Kwai, 2009). Tinto (1993) further updated his model of 1975 by laying down five main theoretical bases for the creation and understanding of the changing essence of student adaptation. These include factors related to psychology, culture, economy, organisation, and interaction.

The transition phase is not the same for all learners, according to Tinto, (1983), as individual experiences vary considerably. He notes that the first term at college or university is considered the most important transition period because a student needs to adapt to the new institution as well as maintain a high level of stress and anxiety (Tinto, 1993). Therefore, student who can adjust to the new environment can create a sense of belongings and those who struggle to adjust can experience feelings of isolation.

The model is both interactional and empirical in that it theorises how experiences can influence departure behaviour or change within an organisation over time. Tinto (1993) argues that students are a diverse group and they enter new institution with various characteristics such as family background, family socioeconomic status, academic preparedness, along with their abilities and personality that influences success in college. This is also applicable to learners who are coming to high-school as they are also a diverse group of individuals who come from diverse family backgrounds and have other forms of differences such as different forms of upbringing and socialisation, and as well primary preparedness. These elements, he claims,

influence learners' commitment to their educational goals as well as their commitment to the institution. Tinto (1993) went on to say that enhanced student integration, both academically and socially, will increase commitment to learning, lowering dropout rates and improving persistence. As a result, Tinto (1993) claims that the more the social and academic institutions are integrated with the student's life experiences, the more likely the student will continue his or her education. In this regard, for high-school learners, learners who are more likely to be included socially and academically are also more likely to adjust and have better experiences of the new environment and more likely to continue with their education than to drop out.

Part of Tinto's (1993) integration model is social and academic integration. Tinto (1993) separated social and academic systems of higher education. The social system reflects on the student daily lives and their personal interest within the educational institution. On the other hand, academic system focuses on the engagement between student formal education opportunities (Tinto, 1993). Academic integration is relevant to this study because contact between learners and teachers during classroom learning helps to build supportive social and educational environments in which learners are respected and full members of their academic communities (Long, 2012). This indicates that students who are involved or included as valued members of the high-school community are more likely to stay in that institution. Tinto theory is more likely to classify new comers grade eight into both the social systems and as well as the academic system at a high-school institution.

Separation, transition, and assimilation or adjustments are the three steps that students go through when transitioning from school to a post high-school environment, according to Tinto (1993). Tinto (1993) outlines the steps of separation, transition, and inclusion that people go through to become members of traditional cultures. Students must first dissociate or disassociate themselves from their previous lives before transitioning to a tertiary setting and familiarizing themselves with its norms and practices. Finally, they accept the institution's atmosphere, as well as its norms and rituals, as their own (Longwell-Grice, Adsitt, Mullins, & Serrata, 2016). These three stages are also relevant to grade eight learners who are moving from one institution (primary school) to a new setting that is different from what they were familiar with from the past seven years or more of their schooling life.

During their first year at university, students go through a variety of stages, according to Tinto (1993) (or other institutions of higher learning). Separation, transition, and adjustment are the

three stages of adjustment that have been recognised (which he first called incorporation). The following are the stages of adjustment for new learners, taken from Tinto (1993).

- The Separation stage is marked by a decrease in interactions with previous associates as well as a shift in behaviour. First-year students establish a barrier between themselves and previous communities, families, schools, and workplaces. They must mentally and physically separate themselves from their past groups. Students who do not detach from their native cultures, according to Tinto (1993), do not reap the full benefits of membership in the college or university community and are at danger of leaving. New students may go through a process of evaluating previous communities' values in order to embrace values deemed fit for the university setting. Although this can be quite traumatic for learners, most are eventually able to move to the second stage, that of is to fully transit. The separation process for Grade eight learners is relatively the same as for college or university student. However as for student the separation require that they are integrated into college or university careers and for Grade eight learners they need to be integrated to the demands of high-school and adjust to their newly roles as high-school learners. In essence, some have to establish new friendship in the new context and as well change in behaviour and routine in order to fit in the new environment. As the new context is different from the old one, Grade eight learners also need to adjust the way they think and how to act in high-school. Separation becomes a huge component of learner's ability to adjust in their new environment. Virtually for most high-school student the process from separating from the past is stressful as new context brings out feeling of anxiety and fear. However, in order for these learners to be fully integrated into this new context they have to dissociate physically and socially from their former school.
- As college students transition from high-school to college or university, they must go through the second stage of adjustment. Transition, the second stage of college, is a moment of passage between the old and the new, when most students feel split between the old (high-school) and the new (college) (college or university). New students have yet to adopt the norms and patterns of behaviour necessary for integration into the college's new communities, despite having begun the process of detaching themselves from the past. Transition is

the second stage, during which the person begins to interact in new ways with members of the new group to which they are seeking membership. According to Tinto (1993), students acquire the information and abilities necessary to communicate with members of a new group during the transition stage. Individuals obtain the knowledge and abilities required for the performance of their specialised function in the new group during this transitional stage. Similarly, Grade eight students entering a new institution must develop skills and information that will enable them to connect with high-school students.

- Adjustment is the final stage, which includes student adjustment and participation in the institution's social and academic groups and activities. New contact patterns with other students, professors, and administrative personnel are developed, reducing the likelihood of leaving out. In the end, students succeed in the various conditions they come across. Financial worries, according to Tinto (1993), are crucial since they are one of the few factors that have a long-term indirect effect on a student's decision to drop out. Grade eight students must be able to engage with the new members of the school, namely the teachers, in order to achieve academic achievement and make friends in order to establish a sense of belonging in high-school.

2.8 2 Theory of marginalisation

According to Messiou (2012), the concept of marginalisation pervades current literature but is rarely define to the point where it is frequently confused with the ideas of inclusion and (social) exclusion, and indeed social exclusion and marginalisation tend to be employed interchangeably. According to Hansen (2012), because inclusion and exclusion are two interwoven and interdependent processes, they can only be understood through looking into what constitutes exclusion. Since exclusion is a larger component of marginalisation, defining marginalisation becomes akin to defining exclusion to some extent. As a result, any discussion of marginalisation must include concepts of inclusion and (social) exclusion.

“The state of being regarded unimportant, undesired, unworthy, insignificant, and different, resulting in inequality, unfairness, deprivation, and imposed lack of access to mainstream authority," is defined as marginalisation (United Nations Development Programme, 1996 as cited in Messiou, 2012, p.1312). Marginalisation is the process of relegating, degrading, or removing someone from society's benefits in general. Marginalisation, according to Booth and Ainscow (1998) and Messiou (2012), can take numerous forms, not all of which are easily

visible to the viewer or even the individual concerned, and can occur at several levels (formal and informal. Messiou (2012) also notes that exploring marginalisation experiences can be difficult because marginalisation is not always an open, observable practice. It is described as a subtle phenomenon that makes people feel unwanted, unworthy, unimportant, insignificant, and different, according to Messiou (2012)."What constitutes as marginalisation and participation in educational settings is not well defined and can be considered as inherently complex," according to the report (Messiou, 2012, p.1312).Furthermore, in the context of education, marginalisation can apply to any form of exclusion, when there is an interest in individuals who are "silently excluded" (Lewin, 2009, p. 157).

Messiou (2012) proposed four ways of conceptualising marginalisation for learners which includes: as it is also encapsulated within **Table I:** Marginalisation has been associated to decreased emotional well-being, increased mental suffering, and a desire to use violence (Issmer & Wagner, 2015). This emphasises the importance of addressing feelings of marginalisation in the classroom so that learners can develop healthy and safe life attitudes. Messiou (2012) outlined four methods for students to understand marginalisation, which are summarised in **Table I:**

1. When a child experiences some kind of marginalisation that is recognised by almost everybody, including himself/herself;

2. When a child feels that he/she is experiencing marginalisation whereas most of the others do not recognise this;

3. When a child is found in what appear to be marginalised situations but does not feel it, or does not view it as marginalisation; and

4. When a child is experiencing marginalisation but does not admit it.

Table I: Conceptualising marginalisation:

Experience of Marginalisation	**Recognition of Marginalisation**
Experienced by the individual	The individual and others
Experienced by the individual	Not recognised by others
The individual is construed by others as belonging to a marginalised population	Not recognised by the individual

Experienced by the individual	Denied by the individual

The distinction highlighted by Messiou between the experience of marginalisation (as interpreted by the individual or others) and its acceptance (by the individual and/or others), as well as the acknowledgment of the subjective nature of the construction, is crucial (Mowa, 2015). This shapes the overall learner's experiences in schools and well as in this study. Learner's experiences of marginalisation raise the important question especially if the school or teachers does not acknowledge that indeed learners are marginalised and excluded in some aspect of their learning.

2.9 Conclusion

This chapter has shown the transformation that the South Africa's education sector has undergone since 1994 democratic elections. That is the system changed from a separate system in the apartheid period to a unitary structure after the 1994 democratic elections. It has also provided a clear viewed of inclusive education on the global scale and as well as in the South African context. Inclusive education means a sense of belonging and acceptance, and thus has to do with how educators and the program react to differences in learners.

School transition also plays crucial role for learners as they move from one school to the next especially in a system of education that is inclusive of all learners' regardless of their individual difference. It is critical to comprehend the problems that all learners transitioning to grade eight experiences in order for them to adapt and adjust to these changes.

The research methods will be discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 3: Research design

3.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter looked at the literature on inclusive education around the world and in South Africa. The research design and philosophical assumptions that support the study are discussed in this chapter. The chapter discusses the study's research methodology and designs, including data collection and analysis strategies, instruments, and procedures, as well as the stages and processes involved.

3.2 Research methodology

A qualitative research design was adopted in this study. “Qualitative research is an approach for studying and understanding the meaning individuals or groups attach to a social or human problem," Creswell (2014, p.30). Cresswell (2014) further expressed that people construct reality as they engage in and create meaning of an experience, action, or phenomena in their natural contexts, according to a qualitative perspective. “The basic objective of qualitative research is to describe and understand," (Babbie & Mouton 2004, p.270). The qualitative method enables researchers to focus on the specific context in which people work and live, allowing them to understand the participants' historical and cultural backgrounds (Cresswell, 2009). Therefore, a qualitative approach was more appropriate to be able to understand how learners experience inclusion and exclusion in high-school as the perceptions and experiences of learner’s acts as a very important component for the study. Thus, researchers who use the qualitative approach focus on the perceptions, beliefs, and ideas of their participants, that there is no need for scientific knowledge (Cresswell, 2009). In this regard, the study is qualitative and located within the interpretive paradigm. According to Slee (2001), in order to understand learner’s experiences, one must first understand the meanings that learners attribute to them. As a result, the interpretive technique was the greatest fit for this research.

3.2 Research Paradigm

Thomas Kuhn coined the term paradigm, which is derived from the Greek word paradeigma, which means pattern (1962)."An integrated cluster of substantive concepts, variables, and issues coupled with matching methodological approaches and tools” (Kuhn,1962, p.102). According to him, the term paradigm refers to a research culture characterised by a shared set of views, attitudes, and assumptions about the nature and conduct of research among a group of researchers. "Research paradigms inevitably reflect our ideas about the world we live in and aspire to live in"(Lather, 1986, p. 259). The research process, according to Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999), comprises three main dimensions: ontology, epistemology, and methodology. To summarise, it is critical to first address the debate over the interpretive paradigm's epistemology, ontology, and methodology (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006).

Ontological and epistemological aspects concern what is commonly referred to as a person's worldview which has a significant influence on the perceived relative importance of the aspects of reality. The ontology aspect of reality focuses on what constitutes reality. This includes the description of concepts and relationships that are discussed in the study. Hence the epistemology focus on how do you know something and methodology on how do you go about

finding it out. This study's epistemology, which is founded on the interpretive paradigm, would refer to the participants' subjective meanings. Ontology and epistemology work together to produce a holistic understanding of how knowledge is regarded, how we might see ourselves in relation to it, and the methods we use to un/discover it. A study's methodology refers to how the researcher tackles the epistemology topic and then strives to bring the unknown reality into the known by investigating the participants' subjective realities and views. This lets the researcher to understand the participants' feelings, attitudes, and behaviours (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006). The study unpacks learners' or participants' experiences of school transitions as newcomers to high-school in the context of this study. For the reason that it is appropriate for the investigation, this study follows and employs an interpretative paradigm.

3.2.1 Interpretative paradigm

All research is predicated on a set of philosophical assumptions about what constitutes "real" research and which research procedures are best for generating information in a given topic. This investigation will be based on an interpretative paradigm, which will be utilised to analyse the findings. The interpretative or constructivist perspective's goal is to describe, comprehend, and interpret the phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Interpretive researchers think that the truth is made up of people's subjective experiences of the external world; as a result, they should adhere to an inter-subjective epistemology and the ontological assumption that reality is socially produced (Willis, 1995). Consequently, the goal of the study is not to conduct an experiment, test a theory, or collect data, but to discover the truth behind what people believe to be their reality. Thus, interpretive analysis focuses on the whole complexity of human meaning as the situation arises, rather than on dependent and independent factors (Kaplan & Maxwell, 1994).While positivism believes in a single reality, interpretivists disagree, claiming that reality is subjective, multifaceted, and socially produced (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011).Willis (1995) goes on to say that there is no single proper path or approach to knowledge, which supports and promotes comparable notions of multiples and socially constructed reality. According to Myers (2009) interpretive researchers, access to reality (whether given or socially built) can only be gained through social constructs such as language, consciousness, and shared meanings. Merriam and Tisdell (2016), states that exploring the interpretivism perspective indicates that a context-bound phenomena has various realities, and hence data is collected from participants in their natural surroundings. This is done in order to gain a better understanding of phenomena by looking at the interpretations that

people attribute to them from their own point of view. The interpretive paradigm is concerned with comprehending the world through the lens of individual subjective experienced, meaning (rather than measurement) oriented techniques, such as interviewing or participant observation, that rely on a subjective interaction between the researcher and the subjects, are frequently used to accomplish this.

In this study, data was collected from grade eight high-school learners in their natural environment, namely their schools, and the study was able to describe, understand, and evaluate their experiences based on their perspectives and meanings of inclusion and exclusion. Because the goal of an interpretative paradigm is to examine, evaluate, and enhance interpretive ideas rather than to create new ones (Walsham, 1995).

3.3 Research site

The proposed research site where the study will take place is a high-school located in Limpopo province outside Thohoyandou outskirt. The region is a rural area which is mostly composed by black people who are also historically, ethnically, financially and linguistically diverse. The area is also considered a developing area, whereby basic service was introduced to the area such as the new primary and high-schools. The school was recently given to the community so that learners who are from the community can have access to schools that are closer to them rather than travelling to Thohoyandou city centre for schools. The school has 947 learners, served by 30 teachers, with a student to teacher ratio of 32: 1. It is a full-service public farm high-school that caters to learners in the surrounding areas. It is a no-fee high-school with two grade eight classes. Most of the learners are from underprivileged backgrounds.

The researcher chose the school in particular because it was the department's first choice for implementing inclusive education in the area in 2011.The school chosen for this study is a fully functional full-service school that serves both mainstream and special-needs students and is the only high-school in the area.

Learners from the area who are moving from primary school have to attend this full-service high-school as it is the only available public high-school in the community. Learners now have to switch from a typical mainstream primary school to a high-school that is said to be inclusive and full service.

3.4 Sampling

"Sampling refers to the act of deciding what to research and focusing on a section of a population," according to Ploeg (1999, p.2). Ploeg (1999) claims that researchers make sample decisions with the intentional goal of getting the most comprehensive source of data possible to address the research topic, “rather than probability or random sampling, qualitative research sampling is often based on non-probability and purposive sample or convenient sampling" (Ploeg, 1999, p.2). Purposive sampling was utilised in this investigation.

Purposive sampling, according to Tongco (2007), is a method of non-probability sampling that is most successful when you need to conduct research with experienced experts in a specific cultural domain. The learners were selected using purposive sampling as they were the most suitable respondents who could provide insight into the area of investigation. McMillan and Schumacher (2001), further suggest that samples chosen are more likely to be informed and useful about the topic being examined by the researcher. I chose these learners because they were already enrolled in grade eight and may have had diverse experiences in the school context, I felt they were the ideal respondents in my field of study, likely to produce data that would be highly useful to the study. As a result, Makhado (2002) underlines the need of selecting information-rich instances, as this will assist the researcher in addressing the study purpose.

3.5 Participants

Participants in a qualitative study must be willing and reflective in providing information and have appropriate expertise and experience for the investigation. As a result, the targeted sample consisted of grade eight learners who were newcomers to the school. These learners ranged in age from 12 to 14 years old. This research was open to all learners in grades eight. Learners who were repeating grade eight were excluded from the survey because it was designed to look into the experiences of newcomers to high-school. As a mixed-gender school, I expected both male and female learners to participate, but I was open to any gender category that learners described. Thus the participants were mix gender however more female participated than males.

Participation in the research was voluntary. The school compromise of two classes of grade eight. However due to the restrictions of Covid 19 pandemic one class was used which compromised of thirty learners. The exact population of learners who were expected to participate was thirty and it was within the research control. All learners were interested in

participating in the study however they were restricted by the selection criteria as some were currently repeating grade eight. In the end only fifteen out of thirty participated in the study. Learners firstly completed the questionnaires and they moved to the focus group. All the fifteen learners participated in both questionnaires and focus group. The school is within the rural area of Limpopo and is predominated by Africans emanating from disadvantage background. Therefore, race was not a criterion in selecting learners as they were from the same racial background.

3.6 Data Collection instruments

Data was collected using two collection method namely: open-ended questionnaires and focus groups interviews for triangulation. According to Fielding and Fielding (1986) triangulation refers to a method whereby information is collected through various methods to validate the information in this case, using a questionnaire and focus group interviews was selected for the study.

3.6.1 Questionnaires

Abawi (2013) describes a questionnaire as a data collection tool consisting of a series of questions and other prompts to gather information from respondents.

3.6.1.2 Structured questionnaire

A structured questionnaire with open-ended questions was utilised in this study. According to Mathers, Fox and Hunn (2007), questionnaires are a very useful way of collecting rich comparable data from individuals. This can be achieved if the actual questionnaire has clear and precise questions that are asked consistently across all participants. The participants responded to questions that were written down, this was done on hard copies. A questionnaire, according to Abawi (2013), is a data gathering tool that consists of a sequence of questions and other prompts to collect information from respondents.

3.6.2 Focus group interviews

A focus group interview is characterised as a research technique that helps researchers gather data through group interaction on researchers-determined topics (Morgan, 1996). Ledemen (1990) suggests that a focus group emanated from group therapy with the simple assumption that people who share a common problem are more likely to be open to discussion than to individual interviews, thereby creating suggestions that would not appear in individual interviews. He further alludes that “the data generated in focus group interviews are often richer

and deeper than data elicit in the one-on one individual interview situation (Ledeman, 1990, p, 119). In essence, focus groups allow topics to be discussed in greater depth as well as more data to be gathered in a given amount of time than would be the case in individual interviews, allowing other participants to add comments, explain their disagreement or commit to the same exact question when answering.

Gibbs (1997) added that focus groups interactions allow participants to re-evaluate their ideas. This is significant to the study as learners will have the opportunities to re-evaluate their misconceptions regarding inclusion and exclusion. Hence, focus group interviews were used with the intention of acquiring data on learner's personal experiences during transitioning to high-school. The selected group does not necessarily represent the larger group, but participants chosen in the focus group were selected using the criterion that they would have something to add to the subject under study, have similar socio-characteristics and would find it easy to speak to the researcher and among each other (Richardson & Rabiee, 2001). The focus group interviews were used with the intention of getting the actual experiences about how they were included or excluded in the new school setting. Focus group interviews were chosen in the study because they enhance learner's participation through peer participation especially when dealing with grade eight learners as new comers to the school. Furthermore, they allow topics to be covered in more depth in a given amount of time.

The venue for the interviews was the teacher's classroom that the school availed for use. However, the interviews were conducted during the learner's free time which was given by the teacher as the research took place after the learners completed their June examinations. Learners were briefed about the procedure before the interview started.

3.7 Data Analysis

In order to make sense of, analyses, and theorise the obtained data, qualitative data analysis is considered a crucial activity in the research process (Smit, 2001). Data analysis, according to Smit (2001), is a critical step in the research process that comes before data interpretation. A thematic analysis was used in the research. A thematic analysis, according to Braun and Clarke (2006), is the process of discovering patterns or themes in qualitative data. The goal of thematic analysis is to identify themes, or relevant or intriguing trends in data, and use these themes to answer the research questions. Furthermore, Ryan and Bernard (2003) state that in searching for themes it is important for the researcher to pay attention to recurring and repetition that may occur more than once. Consequently, Braun and Clarke (2006) also point out that even though

thematic analysis may focus on summarising the data, the most important aspect of it is being able to interpret it and make sense of it. In doing the analysis Braun and Clarke (2006) proposed six steps that one needs to adhere to be able to interpret the data properly. While it is ideal to progress from the first step to the second in logical order, the steps are not linear one can go back to the previous step before proceeding to the next.

In line with Braun and Clarke (2006) steps, the data gathered from the recorded focus group interviews were first transcribed and rechecked for accuracy while data from the open-ended questionnaires were organised for purposes of reading and checking to identify emerging themes. The next step was to intensively read and re-read the conversation in order to familiarise myself with the data, linking both the data from the questionnaires and focus group interviews. I further carefully examined the text for words and phrases that I believed were important to the research and link with the literature review. I identified words or phrases that were repeated or used by the participants and looked for any commonalities and difference in the participants' comments. The data from the recorded focus group interviews was first transcribed and rechecked for accuracy, while the data from the open-ended questionnaires was arranged for reading and checking to discover emergent themes, as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006). The next stage was to read and re-read the conversation extensively in order to become familiar with the data, which included both questionnaire and focus group data. I went over the material again, looking for terms and phrases that I thought were relevant to the research and the literature review.

I looked for patterns and differences in the participants' comments and found words or phrases that they repeated or overuse. The color-coded selections were analysed inductively and deductively to find themes. To come up with themes for data analysis, the text was re-read. The use of color coding made obtaining the points of reference and comparing the responses simple. The table shows the necessary step for conducting a thematic analysis using Braun & Clarke:

Table 3.1 Thematic analysis steps (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Step 1: Become familiar with the data	Step 4: Review themes,
Step 2: Generate initial codes	Step 5: Define themes,
Step 3: Search for themes,	Step 6: Write-up

3. 8 Trustworthiness

The believability of the researcher's findings is described as everything the researcher has done to design, conduct, and report the research in such a way that the results are credible (Smit, 2001). Firestone (1987), notes that different paradigms use different ways of persuading readers that they are worthy of trust. He also claims that since qualitative research offers very little concrete explanation of what respondents and researchers are doing, it tries to convince its readers of its trustworthiness by providing sufficient description to prove that the conclusion of the researcher is sensible. This view is supported by Merriam and Tisdell (2016) who states that the research community can sometimes be suspicious about the findings and interpretations of an interpretive study. Therefore, the writer needs to find ways of safeguarding research trustworthiness especially research gained from an inquiry or investigation. This then means that researchers have a role to play in defending their studies (both from those with sincere intention to ask and those who wish to oppose the study). As naturalists differ from the positivist and prefer to use different terminology that will separate them for the positivity, they proposed four criteria to test the trustworthiness of qualitative research (Shenton, 2004). This includes ensuring transferability, credibility, dependability, and confirmability of research. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) state validity, reliability, transferability, and ethics are a major concern to every researcher. This study had endeavoured to execute these effectively, thereby contributing a credible and trustworthy knowledge to the field by providing sufficient description to prove that the conclusion of the researcher is sensible. Trustworthiness is all about the four items that are listed in more detail below.

3.8.1 Transferability

The extent to which the findings of one study may be applied to another scenario is referred to as transferability (Shenton, 2004). However, according to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), the transferability or generalisation of qualitative study findings to diverse circumstances is a contentious issue. Because qualitative research results are limited to a small sample of unique scenarios, it is impossible to show that the findings and conclusions apply to other situations or groups. As a result, ensuring that the study can be adapted from one group or location to another is a crucial component of a qualitative research design. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), it is the investigator's responsibility to ensure that sufficient contextual information about the fieldwork sites is presented to allow the reader to make this transfer. As a result, this research provided a comprehensive account of all contextual aspects influencing the investigation, as stated by Lincoln and Guba (1985).That is, readers should be informed about

the number of participants (students who were allowed to participate); the data collection methods used and how they were used; the number and length of data collection sessions; and the time period during which the data was collected, including study restrictions and so on, particularly in the school of choice.

3.8.2 Credibility

One of the most significant components in establishing trustworthiness, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), is assuring credibility. Also, because there is a lot of literature on transitioning learners from primary to high-school school, the study used an examination of previous research findings to assess the degree to which the project's results are congruent with those of previous studies. According to Silverman (2000), a significant criterion for evaluating qualitative research is the researcher's capacity to tie his or her findings to an existing body of knowledge. However, it is important to note that in this current study, the main aim is not to generalise findings since only one high-school will be used but to get a deeper understanding that will shade light into grade eight experiences of inclusion and exclusion in this particular high-school.

3.8.3 Dependability

To address the issue of dependability more directly, Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend that the study's methodologies be described in detail, allowing a future researcher to duplicate the work, if not necessarily with the same results. Key (1997) also defines dependability as "detailed" documentation of research methodology, triangulation, coding, and re-coding techniques since having an unbiased investigator do a research study inquiry audit is the simplest technique to evaluate reliability. An inquiry audit entails having a researcher analyse the data collecting, data analysis, and research study results outside of the data collection and data analysis process (Key, 1997).

3.8.4 Confirmability

Conformability refers to the investigator's ability to demonstrate that the data represents the participants' responses rather than the researcher's prejudices or perspectives (Polit & Beck, 2012).That is, procedures must be done to ensure that the findings of the study are based on the informants' experiences and ideas, rather than the researcher's personality and preferences (Shenton, 2004).As a result, this study established confirmability by describing how data was collected, coded, and analysed so that the purpose of this study is, therefore, to ensure that the

study findings are valid, accurate and confirmable and transferable to other similar situations next, I will be discussing ethical consideration as it also an important aspect of the study.

3. 9 Ethical considerations

Any study that involves humans must be cognisant of the ethical issues that may arise as a result of such interactions. Ethical concerns provide investigators with guidance on how to treat their participants in research (Bryman, 2012). Therefore, I had ensured that I adhered to the university's procedures for ensuring that the research is carried out ethically. Creswell (2013) has pointed out that researchers are required to conduct themselves ethically, especially when human participants are involved. This process involves honesty, integrity, expertise, as well as diligence.

The first step was to get permission from the university ethics committee to conduct this research, which was also achieved. Secondly, since this study must obtain information from a school in the province of Limpopo, the next step followed by the researcher (me) was to gain access to the school through requesting permission from the Department of Education in Limpopo to conduct researches. Furthermore, there are principles that researchers must respect especially when working with human participants who are under the age of 18. Therefore, I had obtained permission from the school of choice where I conducted my research. The most important aspect, in this case, is informed consent, protecting participants from harm, deception, and lastly maintaining of privacy of participants. Therefore, permission from parents of learners is important and was requested through a letter that explains fully the study, its methodology, and the study significance. However, I was also aware that not all parents may permit me to include their children in this study for some personal reason. As this has happened, I had only included learners whose parents have consented to work with even though my research sample may be compromised. Furthermore, with regards to working with minor's separate participation information form for both parents and child was given. The consents form and assent forms for minors were written in an appropriate language that both parents and learners can understand.

Bryman (2012) emphasises the need of providing participants with complete information about any research that will be undertaken with them, as this will help them decide whether or not to participate in the study. As a result, informed consent necessitates that participants comprehend the study process's consequences as well as the potential ramifications of their participation. Giving participant and parent information about the research guarantees that participants are

fully protected from danger because they are informed about every component of the study in which they will participate. As a result, the participants were given complete information regarding the study and the importance of their participation.

As a result, I avoided using identifying information in publicly available records and utilised pseudonyms to conceal the school's and participants' identities.

Participants in the study were assured that their names would not be included in the transcriptions.

3.11 Conclusion

The research design that was used in this study was explained in this chapter. A research design is essentially a map illustrating how the research would unfold as the researcher attempts to answer the research question. This review employed a qualitative research approach as a strategy for responding to the primary research questions and sub questions. The chapter further clarified the data collection method that were used, the context, the participant, and how to ethical clearance was obtained. This chapter also explained the study's approach to trustworthiness, which was necessary in order for the findings to be accepted by other researchers and readers.

Chapter Four: Findings

4.1 Introduction

The study methodology employed in the previous chapter was detailed in terms of the research design, paradigm, target population, and sampling techniques. The data gathering methodologies, as well as the data presentation and analysis road map, were also explained.

Because the research is based on the interpretive research paradigm, the prior chapter clearly indicated that the researcher used a qualitative research design. This was done in order to elicit responses from respondents, which was deemed necessary for the development of arguments in this study.

The researcher was able to gather and record the experiences, opinions, and viewpoints of the research participants, in this case grade eight learners at a high-school in Thohoyandou, Limpopo Province, using the research procedures. As a result, the data acquired throughout the data gathering procedure is presented in this chapter. This comprises information obtained from 15 open-ended questions as well as information gleaned from three focus group interviews. Thematic analysis was done to identify themes that would help to clarify the data collected. In the following section, the results of questionnaires and focus group interviews are analysed and discussed.

4.2 The Respondents' Profile

The profile of the respondents is presented in this section.

This is critical in demonstrating the competency of the respondents to provide accurate data to address the study problem. The respondents in this case were grade eight learners from a high-school in Thohoyandou, Limpopo Province, as stated in the preceding chapter.

Age		**13 Years**	**14 Years**	**15 Years**	**TOTAL**
Gender	Male	2	1	1	**4**
	Female	6	4	1	**11**
TOTAL		**8**	**5**	**2**	**15**

The sign (N) is used in this chapter to represent the total number of responders, which in this case was 15 Grade eight students (N=15). The participants' biographical information is listed in Table 4.2.1.

Table 4.2.1: Age and Sex of the Grade 8 learners

It is clear from the above table that the majority of the responders (53.35 %) were female, while males constituted 46.7%. The bulk of the respondents, almost 87%, were in the 13-14 years' age group which is in line with the age range learner's transition to Grade eight.

The 15 learners who responded to the open-ended questionnaires were also randomly assigned to three focus groups of equal number for the interview. **Table 4.2.2** below shows the gender distribution of participants in the focus group discussion

Table 4.2.2 The gender distribution of participants in the focus group discussion

(N=15)

Group	Female	Male	Total
Focus Group 1	**4**	**1**	**5**
Focus Group 2	**4**	**1**	**5**
Focus Group 3	**3**	**2**	**5**
Total Number of Participants	**11**	**4**	**15**

From the table it is clear that the ratio of females to males in Groups 1 and 2 was 80% to 20% while Group 3 was made up of 60% female and 40% male participants.

4.3 Findings

The results from the focus group discussions and the open-ended questionnaire were analysed using thematic analysis, as detailed in Chapter 3. The data revealed three main themes, each with a number of sub-themes that were identified. The general themes that emerged were: Forming relationship at school that promotes a sense of belonging, school experience and adjustment. The main theme (Forming relationship at school that promotes a sense of belonging) is broken down into four sub-themes; uncertainty and anxiety trust in the school, social networking and attitude towards transition. The second theme, school experiences, has the following sub-themes; language barrier and safety in the school. Theme three, adjustment and adaptation has the following sub-themes; preparing for transition, separating from primary, social and institutional adjustment, hidden curriculum and ableism. Table 4.3.1 below depicts the general themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data analysis.

Table 4.3.1 Themes and sub-themes that emerged from the analysis of open-ended responses

4.3.1 Emergent themes and sub-themes based on analysis of open-ended responses

Theme	Sub theme	Number of participants indicating this aspect
Theme1:Forming relationship at school that promotes a sense of belonging	1. Uncertainty and anxiety	15
	2. Trust in the school	8
	3. Social networking	15
	4. Attitude towards transition	8
Theme 2: School experiences	Language barrier	10
	Safety	15
Theme 3: Adjustment	1. Preparing for transition	12
	2. Separating from primary	15
	3. Social and institutional adjustment	15
	4. Hidden curriculum	8
	5. Ableism (assumptions	15

4.3.1 Forming relationship at school that promotes a sense of belonging

The themes under school relationship and belonging addressed research questions that centered on how grade eight learners perceived inclusion and exclusion at High-school and the experiences they regarded as being either inclusionary or exclusionary.

4.3.1.1 Uncertainty and anxiety

This sub-theme explores the participant's learner's emotional aspect of transition which may have contributed to anticipated feelings of being included and excluded during the whole process of transitioning. The early stages of the transition were characterised by uncertainty and anxiety for learners as they entered the new schooling environment. Concerns centered on the potential response of the school principal and staff, fellow learners and incidences of not

knowing key information. All learners in the focus groups and through questionnaire responses reported to have experienced uncertainty and anxiety as they prepared to move to grade eight with some even expressing fears they would not fit in the high-school environment. In line with this, eight out of the fifteen learners stated they were dreading the prospect of starting a new school as they feared that the new environment might not be as accepting as their previous school and might not be warm enough and be further be challenging to their sense of belonging. This supports the findings of Hopewood (2014) and Ashton (2008) that, even when learners experience a successful transition, the transition is in most cases accompanied by feelings of stress and concern about sense of belonging in the new environment. Such research highlights the impact that transition has upon learners' emotional and social well-being. From the data, 53% of the respondents shared their perceptions about changing an environment (moving from primary to high-school). One of the participants had this to say:

> *"Me ...mam. I was just scared of going to high-school because of what people say about high-school. I enjoy being in primary. People say lots of bad things about high-school……. like bullies. Plus, we use to see those big boys who came to our primary school* [school]. *They were angry at us. I didn't want to go to high-school and learn with them."*

Fear of perceived threats created stress and anxiety for most learners. Learners were afraid that they might not fit in the high-school environment. Research states that a child self of concept may be a challenge as they move from primary to high-school (Jindal-Snape & Miller, 2008). Lots of learners developed fear of being in the bottom of the social ladder as they transitioned to high-school. Moving from the top to the bottom of the social ladder causes anxiety, a sense of insignificance, uncertainty, and anonymity, all of that have been linked to a reduction in learner self-concept (Mackenzie et al, 2012).

About a fifth of the participants' issues with school transition centered around the sense of "place" or value which questions their importance through the social ladder which for them made the whole schooling experience challenging and also made some of the learners experience feelings of neglect and exclusion. They noted that:

"... The grade 12's here thinks they are bosses of us and also the teachers focus on them more and not us. Mam this is sad as we are new we need the teachers to look at us and show us around. (Laugh) we are babies and they are old."

"Yes it is true of what she is saying. Mam being in grade eight is not nice the grade 12's bully us, even the teachers takes them serious .... Even during break the food is given to grade 12's first and we are last."

The transition in high-school can also be viewed as the period of disequilibrium for learners, as learners move from comfort to discomfort, further creating anxiety and uncertainty for them. On disequilibrium, it has been shown that learners become more anxious, stressed and less confident at the beginning of the new term during school transition (Sefotho & Onyisi, 2021). Furthermore, learners who fail to make a successful transition may feel marginalised and unwelcome.

4.3.1.2 Trust in the school

As learners are expected to move from primary to high-school they anticipate circumstances that alleviated the anxiety and uncertainty described previously, and that contributed to the establishment of a trusting relationship. These included, among others, the welcoming response of the school principal and the approach taken by school staff in getting to know the learners and meet their individual needs. A welcoming school climate creates an environment where learners may feel supported and included rather than excluded. This was noted by all the participants who pointed out that the school response towards them as new learners was rather negative. They all shared the experience of being left to fend for themselves as they entered the new schooling environment. Responses through the open-ended questionnaires and focus group interviews painted a picture of frustration towards the school staff for not creating an environment where the new grade eight learners could feel welcome and find easy to belong to. Participants had this to say on this aspect:

"No one showed us around and we have to learn about the school from other learners. Plus, I was afraid that I will get lost."

"Even with learning I feel like no one is showing us how to learn. Teachers teach those who know and those who don't will have to ask their friends".

Thus learners felt that the orientation had not been done in a way that made them feel, safe and being able to trust and belong to the school. Thus learners felt excluded.

Such feelings of exclusion do not bode well for the progression academically and socially of the new learners as they have a lot of issues and questions that they expect to be addressed by the teachers. Yet with the teachers creating an impression of not being approachable it would impact negatively on the learners' trust in the school and teachers. Thus participants indicated that:

"when I first came here mam it was hard for me to make friends and I thought it will be hard for me to speak to the teachers and the learners as no one welcomed me. And I also didn't know the teachers"

"Yes, I know about the school from other learners but I wanted to know about the school from the teachers when the year started but no teachers were speaking about the school and the rules of the school. The rules are hard as we had to learn them after making a mistake. Like this is not allowed after they beat you."

While the learners considered the first meeting as critical for them getting into the culture of the school and building a trusting relationship with the staff, it was not the same for the staff members who did not take time to bond with the learners. One participant in focus group interview group 1 said the following of her experience on the first meeting:

"The first day or first meeting was important but it was not good. I was scared and no one make it easier for me to be less scared"

Even though the respondents felt that the staff had not been welcoming enough, they noted that their feelings tended to change as the year progressed. That is, as the school year progressed, learners began to trust the school and to feel that they belonged there. This was shared by 67% of the participants who felt that they could now trust their teachers. Learners' ability to trust in the school can also create or shape their experiences of being included or excluded in the school setting. One participant expressed the following sentiments:

"Now if I don't understand a certain topic after, like after the teachers taught something eh … no one will understand it at the same time. We ask the teachers and they give us the solution. They offer beyond what the school expects of him according to me. I even laugh that I was scared of the teacher when school started."

The establishment of a relationship between the learner and school was an active and evolving process. Learners reported events and interactions that cause anxiety including apprehension about the potential reactions of the school principal and staff. Although not completely erased, learners' anxiety was reduced by the perception that some of the teachers made an extra effort in supporting them as the year progressed. In summary, the development of a positive school relationship between the school and learners formed a core component of the school transition process and helped create a positive schooling experience for learners.

Children who fail to make a successful transition frequently feel marginalised, unwelcomed, and not respected or valued by others. This may initiate a disengagement process from school (Roderick 1993, in Anderson et al. 2000), lead to poor academic achievement and school dropout. All participants felt that the environment that included the school culture (beliefs, shared values and commitments of members) and school climate (feelings of the school reflected in the relationships between, learners and school staff) was part of the things that made them feel supported or unsupported which contributed to their ability to either trust or not trust in the school. This is in line with the assertion by Hanewald (2013), that learners' positive perception of school climates and academics is linked to teachers' support.

4.3.1.3 Social Networks/ social engagement

In the context of this study, I define social networks as the groups of connections that early adolescents form and retain for a variety of reasons. Adolescents can benefit from social networks for social, emotional, and cognitive support as they navigate the hurdles of transitioning. According to Weller (2007), social networks and the social support they can provide emerged as a crucial element in students' high-school experiences. They appear to help learners be more resilient by functioning as buffers for them as they traverse high school, and

they can be regarded a protective factor by assisting in the development of student resilience Adolescents require social, emotional, and cognitive assistance as they encounter the obstacles of transitions (Weller 2007). Resilience is defined by Jindal-Snape and Miller (2008) as "a dynamic process comprising positive adaptation in the face of considerable adversity" (p. 218).

All participants regarded the child's social engagement in school with peers as an important component of the transition to school, which made them feel either excluded or included in school, and so affects the learner's ability to survive at school as well as school motivation.
Furthermore, because most people want to be liked, accepted, and respected by others, there is a significant correlation between social participation and a sense of belonging.
As a result, in the school setting, a sense of belonging is linked to feelings of importance and respect from classmates (Booker, 2004 ; Booker & Lim, 2018).This also included being accepted by peers and developing a feeling of importance to the class or one's friends. Participants stated that:

> *"When I first came into this school it was hard to learn about the place and also I come from a different school than the other kids. So I was supported by the other learners in class as they were also looking for friends and I was also looking for a friend."*

> *"It was not hard to feel belonging to the class as my friends from primary were here"*

> *"When I didn't understand my friends who can understand borrowed me her notes and also explain to me since we are not the same."*

The learners' social networks provided them with social support, allowing them to navigate the school with ease and helping them increase their self-esteem and confidence by admitting each other into the group. According to Jindal-Snape, Vettraino, Lowson, and Mcduff (2011), social support improves self-esteem and helps learners who are at risk of failing in school in adapting to new environment requirements. Social media serves as an external influence that helps learners in overcoming educational obstacles. As a result, belonging to a social group might assist meet the underlying psychological urge to belong.

4.3.1.3.1 Peer group

Having a sense of belonging leads to feelings of social connectedness and it is associated with better academic outcomes (Thapa et al., 2012). Book (2004) posits that when learners sensed they were accepted and felt a strong social connectedness with teachers or peers they experienced higher levels of belonging and performed better academically. Eight (53%) of the participants had similar responses that support the above as they indicated that: Feelings of social connectivity are linked to a sense of belonging, which is linked to improved academic achievement (Thapa et al., 2012). According to Book (2004), when learners felt accepted and had a strong social connection with their professors or peers, they felt more connected and did better academically. Eight (53%) of the participants gave similar responses to the above, indicating that:

> *"I really struggle making friends even now I had few friends and I could not ask my friends if I didn't understand and I didn't pass like the other people in class who their friends help them".*

> *"But I am very shy and afraid they will laugh at me and I can't speak good English so it is not easy to ask in Tshivenda"*

The peer micro-system (student social network) helps to support the learners academically and socially which helps learners to cope with the demands of high-school, thus making learners to have a positive experience of school and to feel more included than excluded. Most learners have shown that it is through their fellow classmates that they are able to access content information by copying from their friends or through being explained in great depth by friends. Friends also help them with preparing for test or examinations which help learners feel important and accepted. A sense of belonging also has implications for learner's self-esteem. One participant stated that:

> *"It is easy when you have friend's coz they help you when you do not understand. Like the friends in primary school we will work in groups and help each other. If you do not have friends is like not easy and you don't talk in class. Now we know each other and we help each other".*

Learners who are most likely to be rejected by peers are more likely to develop a negative self-esteem. Having a sense of belonging is important when considering learners who are transitioning from grade seven to eight as they are most likely to be at risk of exclusion by peers during the first weeks of schooling in the new environment. They may be isolated from class activities (group activities) and have less engagement with their classmates.

The teenage support system relies heavily on peer relationships (Standton -Salaza & Spina, 2005) taken in (Hargreaves & Galton 2002). This helps to influence learner's self-image and identity amongst group and further creates a sense of belonging and acceptance which will further enhance academic achievement

4.3.1.4 Attitude towards transition

There is diversity in relation to how learners respond to the transition which is linked to how their previous primary school prepares them. Surprisingly, despite all the negative anticipation of high-school, eight learners (53%) pointed out that they were excited for high school. This corroborates the findings of Dinham and Rowe (2008) cited in Hopewood (2014) that suggest that not all learners find the transition to be challenging. As this is a place where new opportunities await them, thus looking forward to having more freedom, taking on new challenges, and meeting new people which mostly is supported by several studies of school transition (Sesofo, 2021; van Rens, 2020). High-school brings with it a growth of independence associated with adolescence and a relative lack of supervision compared to primary school. This perspective from learners can also be taken as learners anticipating being included in the school and establishing new identities for them. Participants indicated that:

> *"Besides being scared, I was also happy that I'm going to high-school now. I feel like I'm old now and is not like in primary and high-school is a nice place I think so when I was in primary"*

> *"I could not wait to wear my new uniform and to make new friends at school."*
> *"It is nice in here in high-school and I was looking forward to coming here like my big sister."*

Thus, despite the fear, there were also responses depicting positive anticipation had shaped their experiences. As initially the participants expressed feelings of fear and anxiety.

.

4.3.2. School experience

Learners undergo different school experiences during the transition from primary to high-school. Every child is influenced by several factors that include their primary school background, personality and how the learner interacts with their environment among others. Interviews with learners revealed various school experiences which were either negative or positive. A significant majority (66%) of the learners admitted being constrained by language and was concerned about their safety which made them feel neglected or excluded from the school system.

4.3.2.1. Language barriers

Despite the school being in a rural area, English is used as the medium of teaching, which two thirds of the learners found difficult to comprehend and this was considered a form of exclusion which would lead to failure. One participant stated that:

> *"In primary school we learn using both English and our home language. The teachers will teach in English and explain in Venda. Yes, we know English but not all of us understand we need to be explained so we can pass".*

Furthermore 55% of the participants from focus group interviews pointed out that the high-school requirement to be independent and search for information for oneself meant navigating the English language which they found challenging. The transition from primary to high-school needs one to shift from being a child who is spoon fed to be an independent learner. Participants indicated that:

> *"High-school is a lil hard you have to get used to working alone at home and using a dictionary a lot. Some is easy and for me it is hard and worse teachers will pay attention to the ones who knows English more in class. I don't speak English at home and I live with my grand mom".*

> *"I don't even try to speak in class coz of the English and I know the answer plus the teacher does not want us to speak in Venda."*

Thus the use of English as the medium of instruction became a barrier some learners found difficult to cross. It became a form of exclusion for learners negatively affecting their school performance. Thus academic success in the classroom is dependent on the ability to comprehend the medium of instruction in this case English.

4.3.2.2 Safety

Safety in school is a huge concern for learners which further creates experiences of being excluded and marginalised by other learners. Edward and Mills (2001) argue that incidents of school violence can be linked to learners who lack a sense of belonging and experience isolation and alienation. Bullying is a major concern for not only learners but also school staff. Participants, mostly girls, reported that being subjected to ongoing bullying at school made them feel excluded and isolated by the older learners as well as their peers. The participants indicated that:

> *"The bullying that happens to us when we first come here is too much. The boys bully us as girls; they call us ugly when we do not want to come to them"*

> *"I don't feel safe in the school coz of the fighting that happen here at school, even last our school was on the news coz of the fight that happen and the girl kill herself after they had a video"*

To some the bullying experiences were so severe, 80% of the girl participants wished they had enrolled in an all-girls school where they felt they would feel safer. This might be an indication that a school climate has a greater social significance for girls than boys as it is the basis for social solidarity around shared gender identities especially when their safety is threatened by boys. One female participant stated that:

> *"The school is not safe, even the toilets people bully us and they even open toilets when we go in. Yes, mam I will feel safer if I go to a school of girls alone."*

Also the way the school deals with violence may further perpetuate feelings of alienation among at risk learners. Thus Ma (2003) argues that the school climate is responsible for making a learner feel safe. A school that fosters school and classroom management which encompasses sets of routines and guidelines, adequate planning and fair consequences for misbehavior helps

to create a positive environment and increased school connectedness (Jindal-Snape & Miller, 2008). In line with this learners disclosed that the school did not have an effective way to deal with the bullying, but resorted to violence or corporal punishment as a way of dealing with the problem. Participants had this to say:

> *"Sometimes the teachers will send the people who fight home. It is good but they end up not learning and missing school.*
>
> *"There is nothing wrong with sending the fighters home (to punish them) so that they can learn that fighting is wrong. Punishment is good".*
>
> *"The teachers beat us still which we know it is wrong and we learn to beat each other".*

A child that is send home as punishment is subjected to feelings of being excluded by the schooling system. Thus in a school with harsh and punitive discipline climate, learners' connectedness is lower leading to learners feeling that their safety is threatened (Patton, Bond & Carling, 2006).

4.3.3 Adjustment

Under adjustment learners' concerns were centered around preparing for the transition; leaving primary school and the experiences of high-school.

4.3.3.1 Preparing for transition

Attending a new school setting for learners requires a lot of preparation which may also include information about the school that they will attend so that they can be physically and emotionally prepared, thus leading to a successful adjustment. Before any change can occur, substantial planning and induction of how transitions should be handled is required. The primary school and the home should both participate in this induction or preparation. As a result, the child is ready to move on from one familiar situation to another. However, significant linkages between the child's previous and new contexts are required, such as between the school and the home, and between primary and high- school. Incorporation and acculturation is the ultimate step of the transition process, in which the child identifies with his or her new environment and becomes a member of it. Before any change can occur, substantial planning and induction of how transitions should be handled is required. The primary school and the home should both

conduct this induction or preparation. The child is therefore ready to separate from his/her familiar context to another. However, there needs to be very strong links between the child's previous context and the new context such as between the school and the home and between the primary school and the high-school. The final stage of the transition process is absorption and acculturation, in which the child identifies with the new surroundings and becomes integrated as one of its members. Only if the directions for each stage are adequately pelts out and understandable for the child to "navigate this ecological shift" will the child and family be successful in navigating these transitions (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2002).

Gathering information about the high-school is one of the first steps towards a successful transition and it is regarded as beneficial, including references to knowledge provided by family members and activities conducted in primary school. This allows the three different contexts (the home, primary and high-school schools) to work together towards a successful transition. Of the 12 learners who commended on preparing for transition, 20% said the preparation was made easier by the knowledge they already had about the school, while the majority (80%) were not prepared for transitioning to the high-school. Thus learners shared both positive and negative experiences about going to the new school which later fostered their adjustment to the new school. The participants stated that:

> *"..... Ah mam before we came to the school, some of us we were looking forward to coming because of the things we heard it became easier. Is like I feel I had the support from my friends about coming to the school."*

> *"I know the school since I was in primary* [school]*, like we pass by the school and we see the other learners of the school"*

Those who reported not being adequately prepared for the transition cited not having enough or having only negative information about the school.

One of the most important factors in a successful transition is whether or not the learners received significant assistance from their high school. Procedures can be used to assist learners adapting to high-school and navigating their way around. It is easy for learners to adjust at the new school environment if they were fully prepared to move into the school, by either parents showing support about high-school and through primary school preparing

learners emotionally and psychologically about the shift and journey they will embark on. Van Rens (2020) argues that it is the role of the primary school to prepare learners for high-school. That is, for learners to realise their academic potential at high-school; they have to be prepared by their primary school with high-school becoming responsible for curriculum continuity. However, high-school being larger and wider in terms of curriculum, it can present more challenges for learners as learners may feel less prepared and perceive academics and curriculum as challenging. The learners stated that:

'*… I honestly didn't want to come to this school. Because this school does not teach right and have too much learners than primary school".*

"Primary school was better mam because the work was not hard and there were no new things. Some of the things that happen here are new to me and are too much... like the home work, the teachers and the subjects are too many".

4.3.3.2 Separating from primary school

This theme was apparent in the responses from all the participants as they noted having experienced a range of emotions on leaving their primary school. They expressed regret for abandoning some of their friends and teachers with whom they had developed deep bonds.

The transition to high-school can be both exciting and discouraging (Fabian, 2002). The transition was made more challenging because the primary school setting was a familiar environment from which the learner now had to detach. As they adjust to the new school culture, learners encounter cultural adversity and emotional problems.

Transition can induce stress and despair in certain students due to feelings of loss and loneliness (Topping, 2011). The learners expressed negative attitudes towards separating from their old school especially separating from their old friends. Participants indicated that:

> *"I'm still not used to being here as I miss primary school… I was sad leaving primary school. Leaving my friend and it is hard making new friends in high-school".*

> *"Because I was worried about making friends I thought high-school is not going to be fun like primary and I felt sad about leaving primary and also some of my friends said they were going to other high-school not this one and I won't see them again".*

Separating from the caring teachers they had been used to in primary school was also a huge component in the learner's experiences of transition which also influenced their advancement in the long run. All learners in the study reported that one of their biggest challenges in the transition was leaving behind teachers whom they considered as warm and supportive unlike the high-school teachers. Participants indicated that

> *"It not easy talking to the teachers here and that it is why I feel sad about leaving primary school and my teachers".*

> *"The teachers here are all about teaching they don't know us like primary school teachers, sometimes I wish I could go back and talk to my teachers in primary"*

The high-school teachers did not make an effort to get to know their learners intimately. This made it difficult to build a strong relationship making learners miss primary school. One participant said:

> *"Teachers in primary even laugh and play with us, here they do not know our names and yes if I had to choose I will choose primary and go back there than be here."*

As a result, transition indicates that social-emotional development is shaped and impacted in a particular way. According to Piata and Cox (1999), it is the acts of the schools that will lessen the emotional impact on the child as he or she moves from one environment to the next,

4.3.3.3. Social and institutional adjustment

Adjustment is a prominent theme for learners who are transitioning from primary school to high-school. All the learners in this study voiced concerns regarding social and institutional adjustment. Concerns about social adjustment include being teased or not being accepted by older students, losing friends and making new ones, among others (Topping 2011). The institutional adjustment included having to get along with a number of teachers, academic work, homework, detention and getting lost in an unfamiliar setting. Most of the learners raised issues of being bullied in the school and not being accepted by the older students which later created feelings of being excluded and isolated. Participants indicated that:

> *"We get teased a lot here in high-school and last I even fought someone (like fight fight)*

"So mam when I came here they were only few of us from our primary and some of the kids made fun of us because they were already friends"

"Making friends in grade eight is hard, for me as I don't talk a lot and I'm shy, others here are already friends and know each other."

The majority, (80%), of the learners raised a number of institutional challenges that made their process to adjusting in the school harder and these included the school (physical buildings), the academic work as well as the discipline in the school. They noted that:

"For me it was challenging getting around the school as we were not told about the place, we only learn about our classes and toilets from our following others or from each other

"No one showed us around and this school is big (laugh) I even got lost many time".

"Yes, mam what she is saying is true, our primary was small and we know the place, unlike here at first it was hard and we did not want the older kid to laugh at us".

The issue of too much homework and finding the work hard was also prominent in 60% of the learners' responses with learners pointing out that it affected their adjustment. The learners stated that:

"We have so much subject and homework, every week and assignment and we have to submit".

"A lot of subject in grade eight are harder compared to subject in primary school and the work is too much"

It is crucial to highlight that most of the participants experienced some anxiety as they transitioned to high-school; nonetheless, the shift was usually perceived as much better than they had anticipated, with all of the participants satisfied or happy with their high-schools after transition.

The stronger the child's perception of discontinuity, the more help is required. We need to focus more on the social and personal experiences of vulnerable children during this time to help

them cope with, and even benefit from, the transition period (Jindal-Snape & Miller, 2008) During the shift, children face two types of discontinuities: organizational/formal (departmentalisation) and social (fear of becoming lost and abused) (Anderson et al. 2000).

4.3.3.4 The Hidden Curriculum

The hidden curriculum disseminates unofficial school messaging and assists in the support of schools' academic and social agendas (Ahwee et al. 2004, p. 26). This type of curriculum has gotten less attention than other types of curricula, such as taught curricula., yet it is critical in molding instructors' and students' views, assumptions, and attitudes, and it unobtrusively conveys the school and society's culture. It also influences on how learners adjust to the school environment. Learners are able to be excluded from the hidden curriculum exhibited by teachers in class because of the suggested implications in the hidden curriculum. Learners gain an understanding of their identity as a result of what they see, hear, and experience, and they become aware of where they belong as a result of what they see, hear, and experience. It also has an impact on how learner acclimatises to their new educational environment. Learners are most likely to be excluded from the hidden curriculum exhibited by teachers in class because of the suggested implications in the hidden curriculum. Learners gain knowledge from what they see, hear, and experience, and they develop an understanding of their own identity, including which others say they are and who they believe they are, as well as where they belong.

Learners may begin to doubt their skills as a result of messages of intellectual capacity provided through the hidden curriculum. This may lead individuals to assume they are not smart enough since they do not complete tasks as quickly as their peers, such as understanding concepts or taking notes. Learners may begin to doubt their skills as a result of messages of intellectual capacity provided through the hidden curriculum.

This may lead learners to assume they are not intelligent since they do not complete tasks as quickly as their peers, such as understanding concepts or taking notes. Half of the focus group participants indicated developing certain beliefs about themselves from classroom interaction with the teachers. These beliefs included doubting their capabilities in class. Participants indicated that:

> *"Mam the subject here in high-school are hard, even the teachers tell us to attend afternoon classes especially us who are not doing well. Now I feel like I'm not smart*

like other learner ……. yes everyone can come to attend even the morning classes but if you are passing you don't have to come."

"The teacher made the class to laugh at me coz I have failed. mam for me it was bad because some of the things she said were true and I wanted to cry".

Such statements from learners appear to imply that the words and expectations conveyed through the hidden curriculum influenced their sense of self. As evidenced by the following comments, the curriculum also informs learners on the dynamics of expected classroom behaviors and consequences:

"The reason I failed is because I sleep in class and I know some other make noise in class disturbing the teacher".

"For example, like the girl who sit in front and is quiet is liked by teacher she does not make noise and she pass. They always use an example about her"

Learners are held to unsaid behavioral rules in the hidden curriculum". The do's and don'ts are not written down, but everyone knows what they are" (Myles and Simpson 2001, p. 2803wq). Understanding the hidden curriculum requires intuition (Redish, 2010), and social-cultural information is likely to influence one's intuition. Some learners were sensitive to the dynamics in their classrooms due to intuition. Some learners, for example, believed that smart students sat in a specific section of the classroom and asked smart questions. They also stated that professors focused more on the bright learner. For example, the hidden curriculum could persuade teachers of the need of focusing on covering the academic curriculum's material. The assumption is that particular information must be covered within a given amount of time, regardless of whether or not students require additional time or assistance. As a result, some learners may believe that their teachers are uninterested in assisting them with their understanding or that they just do not have the time to do so.

4.3.3.5 Ableism

4.3.3.5.1 Assumptions

Ableism entails viewing a person within the framework of normalcy and mostly focuses on disability. As much as this study is not premised on disability, ableism is also a huge applicable factor to the participants. Smith et.al (2012) point out that ableism is a method of judgment against people, in this case learners, especially as learners in class possess different capabilities. Learners bring a whole dimensional variety of factors that can be considered as difference and difference can be seen as abnormality or deficiency instead of a measurement of difference. Ableism entails not accepting learners' differences and expecting learners to operate the same way disregarding the factors that can arise from a variety of issues that influences leaner transition and could lead to learners' exclusionary experiences (Keaveny, 2014).

Ablest assumptions can influence how a school operates and how teachers make decisions on placing of learners in classes which could either be a disadvantage or advantage. All the learners in the study shared similar ablest experiences perpetuated by the teachers' teaching methods and the class setting as the school operates within the inclusive framework stipulated in the white paper six. Participants indicated that:

> *"The class is a one size fit all mam, we come from different primary schools where the class were small and some of the teachers at primary use to help us eh, is like when we do not understand the teacher will try to find a way for us to understand, as we don't learn the same mam. But here teacher teach and we have to all understand".*

> *"Sometimes when I ask the teacher they say we have done that in class and ask where I was. sometimes they say we learn that in primary. But our primary is not the same mam"*

Teachers engage in ableist pedagogy when they use one-size-fits-all techniques that neglect the diversity among learners. Learner responses clearly show that teachers fail to accommodate all learners which is more likely to result in learners feeling excluded in their learning and as well as in the classroom. This also occurs even if learners raise objections or despite the teacher knowing the learner's challenges. This was noted by participants in the following statements:

> *"……..Yes mam I have tried to speak to the teacher about her being fast, even told my mother to talk to the teacher but it is still hard. I don't like EMS at all"*

This type of approach within an inclusive school becomes a great hindrance for learners to enjoy school and as well as the subjects taught by teachers. Teachers are more likely to impose requirements that expect learners to learn the same regardless of their differences leading to a learning environment that is more exclusionary.

The negative societal beliefs about education and how learners learn are at the basis of ableism. It stems from the failure to move from the traditional methods of teaching which are exclusionary and fail to acknowledge learners' differences. Teachers develop assumptions about learners and their ways of learning which may have a huge. The participants' sentiments are depicted in the following statement:

> *"The teachers here support us but they do not treat us the same, like they teach for those who know and those who are slow are left. We are not the same and the teachers know that".*

Schools must accept students for who they are and recognise that one size does not fit all in order to provide a just and inclusive education. Learners face additional challenges as a result of ableist teaching methods. According to Heir (2007), a refusal to be flexible in how learners obtain and display knowledge could result in many learners having lower educational attainment. Thus teachers who practice ablest belief are more likely to produce learners, who are not confident in their learning, learners with low self-esteem and self-efficacy (Burman, 2010).

Ableist practices within the classroom have academic implications as depicted in the following statements by the participants:

> *"I would like it if the teacher could actually slow down or actually stop sometimes and give me the paper so I could get the notes to write, and they could continue to read from the paper while I am writing."*

> *" It is really hard for me to catch up and I remember I fail with the first test and I am not passing even now. High-school teaching is hard."*

Which learners are valued and which are not is a question that arises. Learners that are self-motivated and independent are more likely to get the attention of the teacher. Therefore, ableist assumptions promote unjust and exclusionary practices emanating from the negation of the fact that learners are not the same as they have different backgrounds.

4.4 Conclusion

The results of the open-ended questionnaires and focus group interviews were presented and analysed in this chapter. The views of the participants were presented in the framework of the research objectives. It was noted that all the participants reported several issues with the transition to grade eight in as far as experiences that made them feel excluded and included were concerned. Thus the description throughout the chapter provided a detailed analysis of the themes that emerged from the participants' responses which are school relation and belonging, school experiences and adjustment.

Chapter 5: Discussions and conclusions

5.1 Introduction

While the previous chapter presented the research findings, this chapter discusses these findings in the context of Tinto's Theory of Adjustment (1993) and the Theory of Marginalisation (2012) outlined in Chapter 2. However, with both two theorist suggested, the study finding were more inclined to the former than the later. For the reason that the second theory had minor limitation based on the data analysed. Both theorist will be used as guidelines to answer the research questions proposed in the study. The chapter also discusses the limitation of the study and proffers recommendations for future studies. This research was focused on understanding learners' experiences of being excluded and included as they transit from primary to high-school. The data gathered offered rich descriptions to elaborate on the

identified themes and sub themes. While the research findings were reported in the previous chapter, this chapter analyses them in light of Tinto's Theory of Adjustment (1993) and the Theory of Marginalisation (2012), which were discussed in Chapter 2. These will be used as guidelines for answering the study's research questions. The chapter also examines the study's limitations and makes recommendations for future research. The goal of this study was to better understand how students feel about being excluded and included as they progress from elementary to high-school school. The information acquired provided detailed descriptions of the identified themes and subthemes. The research shows that the participants encountered problem throughout the process, with some continuing to experience difficult circumstances. The discussion proceeds by responding to the study's questions. The following were the research questions:

How do grade eight learners define inclusionary and exclusionary experiences at a full-service high-school?

1. Which experiences at a full-service high-school do grade eight learners regard as inclusionary and or exclusionary?
2. How do grade eight learners cope with experiences of being included and or excluded at a full-service high-school?

5.1.1 Overview

This study was an exploration of grade eight learners' experiences of inclusion and exclusion at a full-service high-school in rural South Africa. The research was based on the experiences and views of the key informants, grade eight learners. Chapter 1, which is the introductory chapter, demonstrates that the study is an exploration of the implementation policy of inclusion in South Africa, which was adopted through White Paper Six introduced in 2001. This chapter serves as a cross-examination of this policy especially with the introduction of full-service high-schools in mind. The justification for this policy was to redress past inequalities emanating from the Apartheid system. Thus experiences of the study participants were intended to gauge how the policy was faring in the schools.

Chapter 2 of this study extensively reviewed related literature in line with the research questions. The chapter exposed that learner who transition from primary to these full-service high-schools still experienced exclusion even though the schools had been established as beacons for inclusive education in South Africa. It showed that learners transitioning to Grade eight experienced several academic and social challenges. Thus, the chapter showed that it is

critical to understand the experiences of learners on transition so ways can be devised to assist them feel included.

The methodology employed in this study is outlined in Chapter 3 of this report. The research paradigm used in this study, the research design, the target population and sampling methodologies, the data collection methods, the data presentation and analysis plan for this study, and ethical issues were all covered in this chapter. The qualitative research design was used in this study, according to the chapter, since it is placed within the interpretive paradigm, which means that the participants' perspectives were crucial to the formation of arguments in the study. As a result, the study methods used were focused on collecting the participants' opinions, view and experiences. An open-ended questionnaire and focus group discussions were used to collect data from purposively sampled grade eight students. To ensure dependability and validity, researchers used a triangulation of research approaches

The research findings from the open-ended questionnaires and focus group interviews were presented and analysed in Chapter 4. The grade eight students' diverse perspectives and opinions were analysed and presented in the context of the study's research objectives and theoretical framework. Transitioning from primary to high-school school was evidently difficult for all of the participants. These issues cantered on the educational environment, with primary schools being perceived as more compassionate than high-schools. The participants' views showed that they experienced uncertainty and anxiety moving to high-school having to make new friends and getting to know the teachers. The participants unanimously agreed that the way teachers welcomed them and interacted with them was critical in them feeling included or excluded.

5.2 Findings and discussion

5.2.1 Making learners feel supported in the high school

A critical pillar of support cited by learners was from their social network which created a sense of belonging whether in the school or classroom. The sense of belonging to a group or place is a pivotal aspect of human interaction which is important for psychological and physical well-being (Ahmed et al., 2011). Thus Tinto (1993) places emphasis on both the social and academic integration of learners. According to Tinto (1993), student integration into an institution can take place on two levels: academic and social. Academic integration occurs when students become involved in the college or university's intellectual life, whereas social integration

occurs when students form relationships and connections outside of the classroom. Though analytically distinct, these two notions interact and complement one another. Students must be integrated into the institution on both dimensions to enhance their chances of persistence, but they do not have to be equally integrated on both dimensions. Integration is described in this study as a sense of belonging in the school. Thus it follows that learners who reported a feeling of being integrated at school were more likely to feel supported by the school and more likely to persist in the school.

Friends and classmates provided a social network that made high-school feel more friendly and manageable, allowing them to overcome barriers that could have resulted in alienation or frustration with the new institutions and its demands. As a result, social networks appear to have helped learners feel at ease in the classroom while also providing them with the tools they need to succeed in the academic demands of the new environment. Other learners in this study learnt about their school through social interactions, resulting in a smooth transition. Typically, their friends provided information about subjects which helped them understand where they struggled, the teachers, and all the other requirements needed to persist in high-school which created feelings of being included. The learners reported getting a sense of belonging through their peers while experiencing some form of exclusion and marginalisation from teachers and older learners. However, they expressed doubts on whether the teachers were aware that their interaction with the learners had created a barrier and was exclusionary. According to Tinto (1993), the more the social and academic institutions are integrated with the student's life experiences, the more likely the learner will continue his or her education. The finding also supports the literature that state that increased peer support is also linked with student support (Epstein, 2005).

The finding from the research also contributes to the existing knowledge of school transition that peer support helps learners feel a sense of belonging into a new group and also allow learners to feel included. Learners' responses verified the importance of peer connection in addressing the challenges of exclusion during transition. Learners expressed the importance of peer relationships and looked towards their peers to assist them with transition indicating the importance in a familiar relationship that offers healthy peer support.

In conclusion it was discovered that learners' social support and learners' integration in the school is attained through social networks, learners used these networks to navigate the school

environment, gain information about classes, establish a sense of social belonging, and, ultimately, feel that someone is concerned about their academic success. It's important to note that these networks are not just simply a collection of social connections. People can obtain specific pieces of information through social ties, which facilitates integration and, eventually, persistence. As a result, it can be claimed that learners with weak social networks are less likely to experience a strong sense of belonging and are unable to access the resources they require to successfully navigate high-school. This may lead to disengagement, a lack of motivation to learn, and greater difficulties in successfully transitioning to high-school.

The majority of the participants received little support from their teachers in assimilating into the school culture. Some teachers were viewed as being unjust, demanding, insensitive, and lacking understanding. As a result, the learners viewed their schools as hostile environments. The evidence suggests that action behaviors can have an impact on learners 'sense of belongingness in the classroom (Ma, 2003; Pavi & Monda-Amaya, 2001).
Many teachers, according to the learners responses, are trapped in pedagogical approaches that effectively exclude some learner from the learning experience and contribute to feelings of disconnection "A pedagogy of belonging emphasise the importance of the teacher-student connection and actively incorporates all students in the life of the classroom and school community," Beck and Malley (1998, p.135) With this said, are I believed that many teachers are impacted by ableist assumptions in the classroom. Individual differences are not taken into account in the classroom that is influenced by such assumptions.

5.2.2 Experiences and conditions making learners feel unsupported in high school

According to Bean and Eaton (2000), the first semester is regarded as a period of transition during which students must acclimate to a new institutional environment while also managing heightened levels of stress (Hawkins & Larabee, 2009; Tinto, 1993: Upcraft, Gardner & Barefoot, 2005). Learners who are able to adjust and receive help in their new environment feel a sense of belonging, whereas those who are unable to do so feel isolated. According to Bean and Eaton (2000), an individual must not only adjust at the new environment, but also adapt. Bean and Eaton (2000) correlate adaptation to Tinto's (1993) concept of integration, defining adaptation as a decision to cope with an environment. Adaptation, according to Tinto (1993), could relate to the process of learners integration into the institutional environment (Bean & Eaton, 2000). Learner's ploy coping mechanisms to deal with environmental

stressors, according to Bean and Eaton's (2000) definition of adaptation. Coping, according to Lazarus and Folkman (1984) (as referenced in Howcroft, & Jacobs, 2009), refers to the behavioral and cognitive modifications that a person must make in order to deal with diverse inter-personal or environmental demands that are viewed as intimidating in some way.

Students must participate in the academic and social communities of the institution during the incorporation phase (Tinto, 1993). They get involved by forming significant ties with existing college subcultures. According to Kuh and Love (2000), a student does not have to conform to the institution's prevailing culture in order to integrate or make cultural links (sense of belonging). A student can instead join a 'cultural enclave.' Cultural enclaves are groupings inside an institution that share norms, attitudes, and beliefs that are comparable to the culture of a'minority' student (Tinto, 1993). Cultural enclaves assist students in adjusting to their new surroundings and feeling a sense of belonging to the institution (Kuh & Love, 2000Even after accounting for the independent impacts of background, personality, and academic performance, a sense of isolation is regarded as the single most important predictor of eventual departure (Pascarella & Terenzini,1991) quoted in Tinto (1993). Tinto's (1993) work on academic and social integration and its relationship with withdrawal is based on the work of Pascarella and Terenzini (1991), as cited in Tinto (1993). Contact, both meaningful and regular, is vital for student persistence among the two types of integration that are required at an institution (Tinto, 1993).

The participants raised a lot of issues which contributed to their feelings of being excluded and marginalised in the new environmental setting (the new school). Such issues made them to feel unsupported in the school. Tinto's (1993) theory of integration emphasise the first term as the most crucial period of transition and thus this term can influence learners' experiences of inclusion and exclusion. Learners are most likely to express feelings of being more excluded than included as they navigate the new environment. From the data gathered more learners felt excluded from the school as the teachers and principal had not done much to make them feel welcome. Learners mentioned feelings of never being welcomed and fully oriented in the school which created a sense of being lost than belonging. Learners need to adapt thus those who can easily adjust can experience a sense of belonging and failure to adjust creates a sense of isolation which was mostly expressed by the learners at the beginning of the academic term. Learners are diverse and have different personalities which can either affect their need to belong and to feel supported. Emotionally vulnerable learners are more likely to seek supports from the school environment and failure to receive such is more likely to create feelings of

being unsupported and excluded in the new environment which can affect learners' overall transition experience.

Marginisation, according to Messious (2012), is a phenomenon that occurs when a person feels unwanted, worthless, unimportant, inconsequential, or different. These feelings resonate with some of the learner's experiences during the schooling transition. Learners pointed out situations where they were explicitly marginalised showing how different forms of marginalisation occur in the classroom. Learners noted that they felt excluded when teachers seemed to favour learners who do well in class, could keep up with the pace of teachers and who could communicate using the medium of instruction fluently. This form of exclusion can have detrimental effects on the child's overall schooling experience and can be damaging to the child self-esteem especially when it is done in the presence of other learners. Thus the theory of integration notes that exclusion can affect the child's motivation to stay in school thus contributes to learners dropping out of school. Explicit exclusion can lead to learner de-motivation and further poor academic performance.

The study's finding also suggested that there is an issue of teachers practicing exclusion through ableism and the hidden curriculum. Teachers play a pertinent role in the transition process from primary to high-school; therefore, it is also their role to ensure learners have a smooth transition. Therefore, Queens (2002) posits that teachers should provide learners with opportunities for participation in a variety of school related activities than a one size fit all activity.

5.2.3 Difficult or easy experiences regarding high school

The transition from primary to high-school often present new learners (grade eight) with new sets of responsibilities, some of which could be challenging to different learners. Poor language skills, such as the capacity to listen, speak, and write fluently in the teaching language, were among the issues mentioned by learners. In terms of the curriculum, the location, and the people involved, children entering grade eight face a situation that is radically different from their primary school experience. These differences may have an impact on how learners adjust to school, which could have a detrimental impact on their learning. As a result of these difficulties, several learners have expressed feelings exclusion from high-school. According to research, children's emotional and social well-being are important factors in how successfully they adjust to school (Fabian, 2000). Overall, the learners raised several concerns which include anxiety

relating to their transition. Such anxiety was associated with the academic pressure and subject choice as well as anxiety about the expectations and changes they may face in the new school setting.

The finding contributes to the views that the process of transition for most learners is fraught with anxiety and uncertainty. The learners' descriptions of their fears and anxiety are congruent with the finding from the literature reviews (Brigman, Cambell & Webb, 2007).

5.2.4 Difference between being at high school and being at primary school.

Tinto (1993) model of academic and social integration emphasises separation and transition. Separation, in this case, was a concern raised by every learner across the themes. Transition theory needs strategies to help learners as they move from one institution to the next. As students move they experience fear and anxiety and also become restless, thus need support. Such forms of support can, more or less, be provided by both the old and the new school. Therefore, it is important for the supportive systems to provide knowledge, academic and social support to the learners so that the separation process from old to new could be easy. It could be drawn from the learners' responses that some of them are still longing for the familiar environment of the primary school. This could be because the new environment was not as welcoming as they anticipated with no orientation done leaving them to fend for themselves.

Thus, with little help from the high-school the separation from the primary school became a challenging process for the learners. According to Thurder and Walton (2012) separation is an important part of successful transitioning if learners are to make the most of the educational and social benefits of their new environment. In some instances, some of the participants used the old environment as a point of reference to the new environment. Learners stated that the teachers from primary were better and more nurturing than the high-school teachers. Change acts as bridge between the old and the new for new learners to attain new skills and knowledge necessary to interact with members of the new group (Tinto, 1993). When the gap between the old and new is large; learners find it even more difficult to adjust. Learners may struggle to select between their old and new environments, and they may be mental unaware that they do not belong in either. According to Peters (2000), learners regard attending to high-school to be difficult as stressful due to discontinuity between the primary school and the high-school. While some children were concerned about the differences between the schools, others were

excited to learn new things in a new setting and saw this chance as a challenge rather than a threat. They saw discontinuity as a test to see how well they could prepare for the new situation.

Tinto (1993) argues that for learners to move into the second stage during their transition they need to fully separate and disassociate themselves with the old or past lives. In this case exclusionary practices in the high-school made separation challenging. Learners also expressed finding challenges with the culture and norms of the school. This was because they had not been fully oriented beginning of the year hence could not easily adopt and adjust to it. This is in contrast to the stage of transition proposed by Tinto (1993) as learners need to fully separate and then adopt the new institutional norms and patterns. Grade eight coincides with adolescence which is a challenging period in children's lives hence without proper support the process of separating from the past becomes challenging and can create feelings of fear and anxiety.

5.2.5 What high schools can do to make new comers in grade 8 feel more welcome and included

Through the focus group interviews learners emphasised the need for orientation as a form of support structure in the beginning of the year so that they can feel a sense of belonging. Yet it was revealed that most of the learners had to navigate the school on their own rather than being inclined by the school. The orientation should encompass everything about the school. This would smoothen the transition and make learners feel part of the school culture. There is a big role that the school has to take in making transition successful for learners while promoting inclusion. This includes that the school should help learners to be well prepared about the new changes and provide support for them, (Jacobs, 2002).

Jacobs (2002) further explains that preparedness should encompass four areas which are; academic preparedness, independence and industriousness, ability to conform to adult standards and possession of coping mechanisms for a number of students negotiating the transition is difficult, associated with academic difficult subjects, teaching methods, language and homework or assignments. While it should be appreciated that the number of learners who responded to the open-ended questionnaires is limited, it is consistent with other studies in identifying learners' fears with going to high-school. The findings also suggest that there is need for academic assistance for learners who are transitioning from primary to high-school as

well as offering specialised programmes to orientate learners from primary to high-school. This could suggest collaboration between primary and high-schools in the transition process. Teachers should be able to build meaningful relationships with learners through their daily interactions. Learner-academic staff (teacher) interactions should go beyond organised academic exchanges to include supporting conversations on "intellectual" and "social" topics. Learners' perceptions of integration are aided by contacts outside of class or in professor offices, which assist them, decide whether or not to continue. According to Hawkins and Larabee (2009), learners must feel welcomed at school, valued, and that their needs are relevant.

5.2.6 Conclusion

Overall, the above discussion suggests that Tinto's (1993) student integration theory and theory of marganalisation were useful analysing learners experiences of inclusion and exclusion as they transit from primary to high-school. Some of the challenges like bullying and language issues are able to lean and link within the theory of marginalisation as learners becomes excluded through such aspect. However, it is also important to note that both theories were limited and does not provide room for social context as some of the challenges raised in the study and discussion are deep seated in social issues and are not only limited to a full-service school. Moreover, some of the social issues are not within the framework of the theory chosen for the analysis.

The nature of the school is full service and with the expectation of full service school more learners were subjected into exclusion than inclusion. A full-service school must operate differently from an ordinary mainstream school and must have certain features that makes it unique (Dryfoos, 1994). In this sense learners were expected to experience a higher degree of inclusion than exclusion. At-risk learners would suffer without a full-service school; as Muijs (2007, p.348) puts it: "pupils are unlikely to perform to their potential if they suffer from health or social problems, and that therefore addressing these issues is a vital precursor to educational achievement as well as more generally enhancing pupils' life chances and well-being". If it is easy for learners to fall into exclusionary practices even within a full service school, then it means teachers have a huge role to play in ensuring that learners are fully included. The findings also suggested that the value of a full-service school are not functioning differently from any ordinary school.

In conclusion, finally, learners' responses to open-ended questionnaires and focus group interviews served as the foundation for triangulation, as their qualitative responses in focus groups were also confirmed in the questionnaires. This study adds to the current body of knowledge on learners' transition from primary to high-school school by providing useful information. Learners' experiences with inclusion and exclusion, in particular, are important aspects of the study that should influence future research.

6.3 Limitations of the study

Marshall and Rossmarry (2006) argue that al academic studies have limitations that arise of their research design, conceptual framework and other factors. Therefore, this study is no exception. Several limitations were considered in this research. Chief among the limitations is the small sample size and the COVID-19 restrictions. The sampling included grade eight learners in one high-school in rural Thohoyandou in Limpopo. Despite the sample size being limited, COVID-19 restrictions meant the school had to limit the number of participants which might affect the credibility of the study. It affects the generalisability of the study in schools with similar conditions and those in different settings, especially urban.

Time was also another limitation. It was not easy to find the right time to conduct the interviews and have learners respond to the open-ended questionnaires. I had to work with learners during break and some after school.

The fact that girl participants outnumbered boys by a wide margin is also cause for concern. It makes it challenging to further generalise as the male voices are overshadowed therefore threatening reliability and validity. However, to minimize this, the importance of providing truthful responses was emphasised and also the importance of confidentiality was also considered.

Due to the fact that interpretation is subjective as it rests with the researcher, it might also be considered a limitation in this case. A different researcher may interpret the responses differently.

The study also experienced the issue of language as a huge barrier between the researcher and the learners. Even though the open-ended questionnaires were written both in English and Tshivenda some of the information was not correctly translated. Thus with the focus group interview there could have been instances where learners could not have articulated themselves clearer.

6.4 Recommendations for future research

As alluded to earlier, the study has pointed out several limitations which need to be taken into consideration. Future researchers could investigate the following aspects which were not fully considered in the research. First, a qualitative approach was used in the study to explore learners' experiences of inclusion and exclusion during the period of transition from primary to high-school. To expand this, future research could make use of a mixed methods approach. Secondly, instead of using one single school, future researchers could add two or more schools to help with generalisability of the results. They can also replicate this information with a different sample of a school in different settings. Thirdly, there are various instruments used to conduct research which could be employed in a study similar to this. This could help with generating and obtaining insightful results and finding.

There need to be a national transitional policy. Such policy will help to hold school accountable for the success fullness of transition of learners from primary to high-school. This policy should also bridge the gap for both primary and secondary school so that both sectors work together in helping learners prepare and adjust for transition. It will have established a link between the two form of school, bringing a link between the final years of primary school and early years of high-school so that learners have the skills, both academically and socially for a successful transition. As failure to develop and implement such policy will lead in the common challenges drawn from the experiences of the learners in the study and situations where learners are left to sink or swim.

6.5 Conclusion

The study explored learners' experiences of inclusion and exclusion in high-school. This was done through open-ended questionnaires and focus group interviews to obtain in-depth data from learners' experiences. Furthermore, through using the aforementioned data gathering method the study was able to obtain the experiences from learners. Based on the findings the study was able to confirm some of the aspect proposed by both the literature review and as well as the theoretical framework. The results were therefore, able to capture the important aspects of learners' experiences and able to create awareness for teachers so that learners do not experience exclusion during transition. It was motivational and encouraging and provides opportunities for sharing.

References

Abawi, K. (2013). Data collection instruments (questionares & interview). *Geneva: Geneva Foundation for Medical Education and Research*.

Ainscow, M. (1999). *Understanding the development of inclusive schools*. Psychology press.

Ainscow, M., & Miles, S. (2008). Making education for all inclusive: Where next? *Prospects, 38*(1), 15-34.

Ainscow, M., Booth, T., & Dyson, A. (2006). *Improving schools,developing inclusion.* Routledge.

Ainscow, M., Farrell, P., & Tweddle, D. (2002). Developing policies for inclusive education: a study of the role of local education authorities. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 4*(3), 211-229.

Akos, P., Rose, R. A., & Orthner , D. (2015). Sociodemographic moderators of middle schools transition effects on academics achievement. *The Journal of Early Adolescence, 35*(2), 170-198.

Anderson, L. W., Jacobs, J., Schramm, S., & Splittgerber, F. (2000). School transitions: Beginning of the end or a new beginning?. *International Journal of Educational Research, 33*(4), 325-339.

Armstrong, D., Armstrong, A. C., & Spandagou, I. (2011). Inclusion:by choice or by chance? *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 15*(1), 29-39.

Ashton, R. (2008). Improving the transfer to secondary school: how every child's voice can matter. *Support for learning, 23*(4), 176-182.

Benner, A. D., & Graham, S. (2007). Navigating the transition to multi-ehics urban high schools: Changing ethnic congruence and adolescents school- related affects. *Journal of Reserch on Adolescents, 17*(1), 207-220.

Benner, A. D., & Graham, S. (2009). The transition to high school as a developmental process among multiethnic urban youth. *Child Development, 80*(2), 356-376.

Blyth, D. A., Simmons, R. G., & Carlton-Ford, S. (1983). *The adjustment of early adolecent to school transition, 3*((1-2)), 105-120.

Bond, L., Butler, H., Thomas, L., Carlin, J., Glover, S., Bowes, G., & Patton, G. (2007). Social and school connectedness in early secondary school as predictors of late teenage substance use, mental health, and academic outcomes. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, *40*(4), 357-e9.

Booker, K. (2016). Connection and commitment: How sense of belonging and classroom community influence degree persistence for African American undergraduate women. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, *28*(2), 218-229.

Booker, K. C., & Lim, J. H. (2018). Belongingness and pedagogy: Engaging African American girls in middle school mathematics. *Youth & Society*, *50*(8), 1037-1055.

Booth, T., Ainscow, M., & Dyson , A. (1997). Understanding inclusion and exclusion in the English competitiveeducatingsystem. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 1*(4), 377-355.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77-101.

Brigman, G. A., Webb, L. D., & Campbell, C. (2007). Building skills for school success: Improving the academic and social competence of students. *Professional School Counseling*, *10*(3), 2156759X0701000310.

Bryman , A., & Becker, S. (2012). Understanding Research for social science policy and social work: *Themes, Methods, and Approaches* , The Policy Press, Bristol.

Carrim, N. (2002). Inclusion/exclusion in South African education: Learning about inclusion and exclusion in education policy implementation in India and South Africa". *Education Institute of Development Studies*.

Creswell, J.W. (2012). Educational Research. 4th Edition. Boston: Pearson

Creswell, W. (2013). Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing amoung five approaches.

Department of Education (DoE). (2001a). Education change and transformation in South Africa: A review 1994-2001. Pretoria.

Department of Education (DoE). (2001b). Education White Paper Six on special needs education: Building an inclusive education and training system. Pretoria.

Department of Education (DoE). (2002). Draft guidelines for the implementation of inclusive education. Pretoria.

Department of Education (DoE). (2003a). Education statistics in South Africa at a glance in 2001. Pretoria: Department of Education. Department of Education (DoE). (2003b). South African department of education: Vision and mission. Retrieved February 11, 2005, from http://www.education.gov.za/?src=vami

Department of Education. (2005). Conceptual and operational guidelines for the implementation of inclusive education: District-based support teams. Pretoria: Department of Education.

Department of Education. (2005). Conceptual and operational guidelines for the implementation of inclusive education: Full-service schools. Pretoria.

Department of Education (2001) Education White Paper Six: Special needs education: building an inclusive education and training system (Pretoria, South Africa, Department of Education).

Department of Education (DoE) (2002). Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS). Government Printers, Pretoria.

Dinham, S., & Rowe, K. (2008). Fantasy, fashion and fact: Middle schools, middle schooling and student achievement.

Donohue, D., & Bornman, J. (2014). The challenge of realising inclusive education in South Africa. *South African Journal of Education, 34*(2).

Dreyer, L.M. 2017. Constraints to quality education and support for all: A Western Cape case. *South African Journal of Education,* 37(1).

Dyson, A. (2004). Inclusive education: A global agenda? *Japanese Journal of Special Education, 41*(16), 613-625.

Engelbrecht, P. (2006). The implementation of inclusive education in South Africa after ten years of democracy. *Europian Journal of Psychology of Education, 21*(3), 253.

Engelbrecht, P., Nel , M., Smit , S., & Van Deventer, M. (2016). The idealism of education policies and the realities in schools: The implementation of inclusive education in South Africa. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 20*(5), 520-535.

Engelbrecht, P., Savolainen, H., Nel, M., Koskela, T., & Okkolin, M. A. (2017). Making meaning of inclusive education :Classroom practices in Finnish and South Africa classrooms. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education, 47*(5), 684-702.

Evans, D., Borriello , G. A., & Field, A. P. (2018). A review of the academic and psychological impact of the transition to secondary education. *Frontiers in Psychology, 9*, 1482.

Fielding , N. G., & Fielding , J. L. (1986). *Linking Data: Qualitative and Quantitative Methods in Social Research.* Berverley Hills: CA: Sage.

Firestone, W. A. (1987). Meaning in method: The rhetoric of quantitative and qualitative research. *Educational Researcher,, 16*(7), 16–2.

Galton, M., Hargreaves, L., & Pell, T. (2003). Progress in the middle years of schooling: Continuities and discontinuities at transfer. *Education 3-13, 31*(2), 9-18.

Gibbs, A. (1997). Focus groups. *Social research update, 19*(8), 1-8.

Gordon, C. (200). Attitudes of teachers with experiences in exclusive education towards inclusion (Doctoral dissertation).

Hansen, J. H. (2012). Limits to inclusion. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 16*(1), 89-98.

Hanewald, R. (2013). Transition between primary and secondary school: Why it is important and how it can be supported. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education (Online), 38*(1), 62-74.

Hawkins, V. M., & Larabee, H. J. (2009). Engaging racial/ethnic minority students in out-of-class activities on predominantly white campuses. *Student engagement in higher education: Theoretical perspectives and practical approaches for diverse populations,* 179-197.

Hopwood, B., Hay, I. & Dyment, J.E. (2014). Literacy and students' transition into secondary school. In Fitzallen, N., Reaburn, R. & Fan, S. (Eds.) The Future of Educational Research.

Hopwood, B., Hay, I. & Dyment, J. (2016). The transition from primary to secondary school: Teachers perspectives. The Australian Educational Researcher, 43(3), 289–307

Issmer, C., & Wagner, U. (2015). Perceived marginalization and aggression: A longitudinal study with low educated adolescents. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 54*(1), 1-18.

Jacobs, J. E., Davis-Kean, P., Bleeker, M., Eccles, J. S., & Malanchuk, O. (2005). 'I can, but I don't want to': The impact of parents, interests, and activities on gender differences in math. In A. M. Gallagher & J. C. Kaufman (Eds.),Gender differences in mathematics: An integrative psychological approach(pp. 246–263). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Jindal-Snape, D., Douglas, W., Topping , K., Kerr, C., & Smith, E. F. (2006). Autistic Spectrum Disorders and Primary-Secondary Transition. *International Journal of Special Education, 21*(2), 18-31.

Jindal-Snape, D., Vettraino, E., Lowson, A., & McDuff, W. (2011). Using creative drama to facilitate primary–secondary transition. *Education 3-13, 39*(4), 383-394.

Jones, P., White, J. R., Fauske, J. F., Jones, P., Fauske, J. R., & Carr, J. F. (2011). Creating inclusive schools. Leading for inclusion: How schools can build on the strength of all students. 5-13.

Kaplan, B., & Maxwell, J. A. (1994). Evaluating health care information system: Methods and application. *Qualitative Research Methods for Evaluating Computer Information System* .

Kearney, A. (2011). Exlusion from and within schools: Issues and solutions. *14*.

Kuh, G. D., & Love, P. G. (2000). A cultural perspective on student departure. *Reworking the student departure puzzle, 1*, 196-212.

Kwai, C. A. (2009). *Model of international students persistence : Factors influencing retention of international undergraduate students at to public state-wide four-years university system.* University of Minnesota: Unpublished doctoral dissertation.

Lewin, K. M. (2009). Access to education in Sub-Sahara Africa: Patterns, problems and possibilities. *Comparative Education, 45*(2), 151-174.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry.* Berverly Hills.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). Naturalistic inquiry.Thousand Oaks .

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic observation.*Thousand Oaks .

Lincoln, Y. S., Lynham, S. A., & Guba, E. G. (2011). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emergingconfluences, revised. *The Sage handbook of qualitative research, 4*, 97-128.

Lomofsky , L., & Lazarus, S. (2001). South Africa :First steps in the development of inclusive education system. *Journal of Education, 31*(3), 303-317.

Longwell-Grice, R., Adsitt, N. Z., Mullins, K., & Serrata, W. (2016). The first ones: Three studies on first-generation college students. *NACADA Journal*, 34-46.

Ma, X. (2003) 'Sense of belonging to school: can schools make a difference?', *Journal of Educational Research*

Mathers, N., Fox, N., & Hunn, A. (2007). Surveys and Questionnaires. *The NHHR RDS for the East Midlands/Yorkshire & the Humber*.

Maxwell, J. A. (2013). Applied social research methods. *Qualitative research design :An interactive approach*,California: Sage publication.

McMillan, J. H., & Shumacher, S. (2010). Research in Education: Collecting Quantitative Data.

Mackenzie, E., McMaugh, A., & O'Sullivan, K. A. (2012). Perceptions of primary to secondary school transitions: challenge or threat. *Issues in Educational Research, 22*(3), 298-314.

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). Designing your study and selecting a sample. *Qualitative research : a guide to design and implementation*, 73-104.

Messiou, K. (2012). Collaborating marginalisation : An approach to inclusive education. *International Journal of Inclusive Educatiom, 16*(12), 1311-1322.

Miles, S., & Signal, N. (2010). The education for all and inclusive education debate: Conflict contradiction or opportunity. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 14*, 1-5.

Morton, D. C. (2005). Ninth grade transition: The impact of the ninth grade academy at Ridgemont High school.

Mphanda, E. G. (2018). From mainstream to full-service schools: an exploration of teachers attitude towards the inclusion of learners living with physical disabilities in South African schools (Doctoral dissertation, University of Pretoria).

Msila, V. (20017). From apartheid education to the Revised National CurriculumStatement: Pedagogy for identity formation and nation building in South Africa. *Nordic Journal of African Studies, 16*(2).

Pavri, S. and Monda-Amaya, L. (2001)'Social support in inclusive schools: student and teacher perspectives', *The Council for Exceptional Children* [online] 67(3), 391-411.

Ploeg, J. (1999). Identifying the best research design to fit the question. Part 2: Qualitative designs. *Evidence-Based Nursing, 2*(2), 36-37.

Polit, D., & Beck, C. (2012). Essentials of nursing research. *Ethics, 23*(2), 145-160.

Richardson , C. A., & Rabiee, F. (2001). A question of access: An exploration of the factors that influences the health of young males age 15 to 19 in Corby and their use of health care services. *Health Education Journal, 60*(1), 3-16.

Rimm-Kaufman, S. E., & Pianta, R. C. (2000). An ecological perspective on the transition to kindergarten: A theoretical framework to guide empirical research. *Journal of Applied developmental psychology, 21*(5), 491-511

Rocco, T. S., & Plakhotnik, M. S. (2009). Literature Review, conceptual frameworks and theoretical framework :Terms functions anddistinctions. *Human Resource Development Review, 8*(1), 120-130.

Roderick, M., & Camburn, E. (1996). Academic difficulty during the high school transition . *Reform in Chicago: The student Peak Chicago: Consortium on Chicago Research*.

Ryan, G. W., & Bernard, H. R. (2003). Techniques to identify themes. *Field methods*, *15*(1), 85-109.

Sefotho, M. M., & Onyishi, C. N. (2021). Transition to Higher Education for Students with Autism: Challenges and Support Needs. *International Journal of Higher Education*, *10*(1), 201-213.

Sharma, B. (2012). Adjustment and emotional maturity among first year college students. *Pakistan Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, *9*(3), 32.

Shenton, A. K. (2004). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Education for Information*, *22*(2), 63-75.

Silverman, D. (2000). *Doing qualitative research* . London: Sage Ltd.

Smith, J. S., Akos, P., Lim, S., & Wiley, S. (2008). Student and stakeholder perceptions of the transition to high school. *The High School Journal*, 32-42.

Spurgeon, W. (2007). *Diversity and choice for children with complex needs.* London: Routledge.

Stephen, C., & Cope, P. (2003). An inclusive perspective on transition to primary school. *European Educational Research Journal*, *2*(2), 262-276.

Thabethe, C. S. (2014). Negotiating the transition between primary and high school within the context of teaching and learning science: A case study in the Umgungundlovu district (Doctoral dissertation,University of KwaZulu Natal,Durban).

Thapa, A., Cohen, J., Higgins-D'Alessandro, A., & Guffey, S. (2012). School Climate Research Summary: August 2012. School Climate Brief, Number 3. *National School Climate Center*.

Thurber , C. A., & Walton, E. A. (2012). Homesickness and adjustment in university students. *Journal of American College of Health, 60*(5), 415-419.

Tinto, V. (1983). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition (2d ed).* Chicago: IL: University of Chicago Press.

Tobbell, J., & O'Donnell, V. (2014). A socio-cultural exploration of the mechanism underpinning performance dips following school transitioning from primary to high school. *Journal of Education and Human Development, 3*(1), 159-176.

Topping, K. (2011). Primary–secondary transition: Differences between teachers' and children's perceptions. *Improving schools*, *14*(3), 268-285.

Tongco, M. D. (2007). Purposive sampling as a tool for information selection . *Ethnobotany Research and Applications*, 147-158.

UNESCO (1994). Salamanca Statement and framework on special needs education. Paris: UNESCO

UNESCO. (1994). Final Report; World and Conference on Special Education; access and

equality; Paris; UNESCO

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). (2003). Overcoming exclusion through inclusive approaches in education: A challenge & a vision, conceptual paper. Paris: UNESCO.

van Rens, M. L. G. A. (2020). The transition from primary to secondary education: a study of the voices of children and teachers in the Netherlands.

Walsham, G. (1995). The emergence of interpretivism in IS research. *Information system research, 6*(4), 376-394.

Walton, E. (2015). *The language of inclusive education: exploring speaking, listening, reading and writing.* Routledge.

Walton, E. L. (2006). *The extend and practices of inclusion in independent schools (ISASA members) in Southern Africa (Doctoral dissertation, University of South Africa).*

Weller, S. (2007). 'Sticking with your mates? 'Children's friendship trajectories during the transition from primary to secondary school. *Children & Society, 21*(5), 339-351.

Willis, J. (1995). A recursive, reflective instructional design model based on contructivist-interprevist theory. *Educational technology, 35*(6), 5-23.

Zeedyk, M. S., Gallacher, J., Henderson, M., Hope, G., Husband, B., & Lindsay, K. (2003). Negotiating the transition from primary to high school: Perception of pupils, parents and teachers. .*Pschol.Intel, 24*, 67-79.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Ethics Clearance Form

WITS SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION ETHICS COMMITTEE

CONSTITUTED UNDER THE UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: 2020ECE260M**
PROJECT TITLE	**SHIRLY ZITHA**
INVESTIGATOR	**Exploring grade eight learner's experiences of inclusion and exclusion at a high school in Thoyandou, Limpopo**
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATOR	WITS SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
DATE CONSIDERED	15 February 2021
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved unconditionally
EXPIRY DATE	Date of submission of the project report

ISSUE DATE OF CERTIFICATE 03 March 2021 **CHAIRPERSON** _____ (Dr Paul Goldschagg)

cc: Supervisor: Dr Moeniera Moosa

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** emailed to the Ethics Office: Matsie.Mabeta@wits.ac.za .

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

_____

Signature **Date**

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES

LIMPOPO
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

CONFIDENTIAL

Ref: 2/2/2 Enq: Makola MC Tel No: 015 290 9448 E-mail:MakolaMC@edu.limpopo.gov.za

Zitha S
P O Box 145
Sibasa
0970

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

1. The above bears reference.

2. The Department wishes to inform you that your request to conduct research has been approved. Topic of the research proposal: **"EXPLORING GRADE EIGHT LEARNERS EXPERIENCES ON INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION AT A HIGH SCHOOL IN THOHOYANDOU LIMPOPO "**

3. The following conditions should be considered:

3.1 The research should not have any financial implications for Limpopo Department of Education.

3.2 Arrangements should be made with the Circuit Office and the School concerned.

3.3 The conduct of research should not in anyhow disrupt the academic programs at the schools.

3.4 The research should not be conducted during the time of Examinations especially the fourth term.

3.5 During the study, applicable research ethics should be adhered to; in particular the principle of voluntary participation (the people involved should be respected).

Cnr. 113 Biccard & 24 Excelsior Street, POLOKWANE, 0700, Private Bag X9489, POLOKWANE, 0700
Tel: 015 290 7600, Fax: 015 297 6920/4220/4494

The heartland of southern Africa - development is about people!

3.6 Upon completion of research study, the researcher shall share the final product of the research with the Department.

4 Furthermore, you are expected to produce this letter at Schools/ Offices where you intend conducting your research as an evidence that you are permitted to conduct the research.

5 The department appreciates the contribution that you wish to make and wishes you success in your investigation.

Best wishes.

Dederen KO
Head of Department

06/07/2021
Date

Appendix B: Consent form and assent form

Appendix 1: LETTER TO THE PRINCIPAL/RECTOR OR OTHER GOVERNING BODY THAT NEEDS APPROVAL (SCHOOL DEPENDANT)

Dear Madam/Sir

My name is Shirly Zitha I am a Masters Student in the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand. I am doing research on inclusive education and my research title is Exploring Grade 8 learner's experiences of inclusion and exclusion at a high school in Thohoyandou Limpopo

My research involves exploring learners' overall experiences of inclusion and exclusion as new comers in Grade 8. As a way to conduct my research, I would like learners to complete open-ended questionnaires about their experiences in Grade 8 as newcomers. Learners will be given the questionnaires to take home and be asked to return them to me within two days. The questionnaires compromises of eight questions that can be completed within fifteen to twenty minutes. This is to avoid the study interrupting learning and teaching time. I would also like to interview selected learners based on their responses to the open-ended questionnaire. The selected learners will therefore participate in three focus group where we will further explore their experience in detail. Three focus groups will be conducted comprising of five or six learners per group. The interviews will be audiotape and recorded for accuracy and reference.

The reason why I have chosen your school is because the school is regarded as a functioning full-service school that accommodates mainstream learners as well as learners with special needs and is the only high school in the area. I am inviting your school to participate in this study to further the understanding of Grade 8 learners' experiences of inclusion and exclusion as they transit from mainstream primary school to a full-service high school.

The research participants will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way. I will obtain learner and parental consent and assent before conducting the study. Learners and parents will be reassured that they can withdraw their permission at any time during this project without any penalty. The participant will be learners with both consent and assent form. There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this study. The participants will not be paid for this study.

The names of the research participants and identity of the school will be kept confidential at all times and in all academic writing about the study. Your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study. All research data will be destroyed between 3-5 years after completion of the project. The findings garnered from this research will be used for my research report to obtain a Masters in Inclusive Education and may be published in articles or presented at conferences. In addition with regards to confidentiality and anonymity as a researcher I will try to maintain external confidentiality by establishing ground rules that participants has adhere to and this can be done by also allowing participants to sign an agreement of non-disclosure of information shared during the focus group interviewer's interaction since members are familiar with each other and already have pre-existing relationship amongst each other. This is to avoid the third-party breach of confidentiality whereby participants may make reference to personal views or experiences of another group member that individual does not feel comfortable divulging within that particular group setting. Furthermore, this is to not to harm participants relationship and future relationships due to over disclosure of their personal experiences and to avoid psychological and social harm that may arise through breach of confidentiality and anonymity. Since disclosure of personal experiences may lead to embarrassment, shame, stigmatisation, discrimination and disruptive of existing relationship. Moreover since the school is within the jurisdiction of child welfare a social worker will be available if the children feel discomfort or stress during/after the focus group interviews .

If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me. I look forward to your response as soon as is convenient.

Yours sincerely,

Shirly Zitha

1482335@students.wits.ac.za/ shirlyzitha5@ gmail.com

Cell: 0792323100

Supervisor: Dr. Moeniera Moosa

moeniera.moosa@wits.ac.za

011 717 3085

PRINCIPAL/RECTOR OR OTHER GOVENRNING BODY THAT NEEDS APPROVAL (SCHOOL DEPENDANT) CONSENT FORM

Please fill in the reply slip below if you agree that your school participates in my study called: Exploring Grade 8 learner's experiences of inclusion and exclusion at a high school in Thohoyandou, Limpopo

I, _____ the principal/rector at _____ give my consent for the above research to be conducted at the school.

Sign_____ Date_____

Appendix 2: LETTER TO THE LEARNER

Dear Learner

My name is Shirly Zitha and I am Masters Student in the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand. I am doing research on exploring Grade 8 experiences of inclusion and exclusion at high school.

My investigation involves finding out information about your overall transition experiences from primary to high school. I would like to request you to complete a questionnaire about these experiences. Furthermore, I might also ask you to participate in a group discussion with five or six of your peers to chat more about some of your answers given in the questionnaire. At this meeting I will audio record your answers so that I make sure to remember exactly what you say.

Remember, this is not a test, it is not for marks and it is voluntary, which means that you don't have to do it. Also, if you decide halfway through the process that you prefer to stop, this is completely your choice and will not affect you in any way.

I will not be using your own name but I will make one up for you so no one can identify you. All information about you will be kept confidential in all my writing about the study. Also, all collected information will be stored safely and destroyed between 3-5 years after I have completed my project. The information gathered from this research may be published in articles or presented at conferences.

Your parents have also been given an information sheet and consent form, but at the end of the day it is your decision to participate in the study.

I look forward to working with you!

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions

Shirly Zitha

011452 Msogwaba 1215

1482335@students.wits.ac.za/ shirlyzitha5@ gmail.com

Cell: 0792323100

Supervisor: Dr. Moeniera Moosa

moeniera.moosa@wits.ac.za

011 717 3085

LEARNER ASSENT FORM

Please fill in the reply slip below if you agree to participate in my study called: Exploring Grade 8 learner's experiences of inclusion and exclusion at a high school in Thohoyandou, Limpopo.

My name is: _____

Permission to review/collect documents/artifacts Circle one

I agree to complete a questionnaire for this study. YES/NO

YES/NO

Permission to participate in focus group interview

I would like to participate in a focus group interview for this study. YES/NO

I know that I can stop the interview at any time and don't have to

answer all the questions asked. YES/NO

Permission to be audiotaped

I agree to be audiotaped during the focus group interview. YES/NO

I know that the audiotapes will be used for this project only YES/NO

Informed Consent

I understand that:

- my name and information will be kept confidential and safe and that my name and the name of my school will not be revealed.
- I do not have to answer every question and can withdraw from the study at any time.
- I can ask not to be audiotaped.
- all the data collected during this study will be destroyed within 3-5 years after completion of my project.

Sign_____ Date_____

Appendix 3: LETTER TO THE PARENTS

Dear Parent

My name is **Shirly Zitha** and I am a Masters Student in the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand. I am doing research on inclusive education and my research tittle is Exploring Grade 8 learner's experiences of inclusion and exclusion at a high school in Thohoyandou, Limpopo. The reason why I have chosen your child's class is because is currently the only school in the area that is implementing inclusive education and it is a full-service school.

My research involves exploring learners' overall experiences of inclusion and exclusion as new comers in Grade 8. As a way to conduct my research, I would like to invite learners to complete open-ended questionnaires about their experiences in Grade 8 as newcomers. Your child will then be requested to complete a short questionnaire that they will take home and return to me after two days. The questionnaires compromises of eight questions that can be completed within fifteen to twenty minutes. Based on the answers on the questionnaire, I may select your child for a short focus group interview to participant in with other learners in order to gather more information for his or her overall experiences in Grade 8 as a newcomer. The interview will be audio-recorded for accuracy and reference.

Your child will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way. He /She will be reassured that he/she can withdraw his/her permission at any time during this project without any penalty. There are no foreseeable risks in participating and your child will not be paid for this study. Your child name and identity will be kept confidential at all times and in all academic writing about the study. Your child's individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study. All research data will be destroyed between 3-5 years after completion of the project. The findings garnered from this research will be used to obtain my Master's degree and may be published in articles or presented at conferences. Furthermore since your child has to participate in focus group interviews, they will be also asked to sign a non-disclosure agreement as not to reveal anything said in the group to anyone outside the group this is to ensure confidentiality and anonymity as this is to not to harm participants relationship and future relationships due to over disclosure of their personal experiences and to avoid psychological and social harm that may arise through breach of confidentiality and anonymity. Since disclosure of personal experiences may lead to embarrassment, shame, stigmatisation, discrimination and disruptive of existing relationship. Moreover since the school is within the jurisdiction of child welfare a social worker will be available if the children feel discomfort or stress during/after the focus group interviews.

Please let me know if you require any further information.

Thank you very much for your help.

Yours sincerely,

Shirly Zitha

011452 Msogwaba 1215

1482335@students.wits.ac.za/ shirlyzitha5@ gmail.com

Cell: 0792323100

Supervisor: Dr. Moeniera Moosa

moeniera.moosa@wits.ac.za

011 717 3085

PARENT CONSENT FORM

Please fill in and return the reply slip below indicating your willingness to allow your child to participate in the research project called: Exploring Grade 8 learner's experiences of inclusion and exclusion at a high school in Thoyandou, Limpopo.

I, _____ the parent of _____ give my consent for the following:

Permission to review/collect documents/artifacts Circle one

I agree that my child can complete a questionnaire that will be used for this study only. YES/NO

Permission to be interviewed in focus group interviews

I agree that my child' may be interviewed for this study. YES/NO

I know that he/she can stop the interview at any time and doesn't have to answer all the questions asked. YES/NO

Permission to be audiotaped

I agree that my child may be audiotaped during interview. YES/NO

I know that the audiotapes will be used for this project only YES/NO

Informed Consent

I understand that:

- my child's name and information will be kept confidential and safe and that my name and the name of my school will not be revealed.
- she /he does not have to answer every question and can withdraw from the study at any time.
- She/he can ask not to be audiotaped.
- all the data collected during this study will be destroyed within 3-5 years after completion of my project.

Sign_____ Date_____

Appendix 4: Questionnaire for Grade 8 learners

Please answer all the questions in the questionnaire below.

SECTION 1: PERSONAL DETAILS

1. Gender of respondent

Male **Female / Other**

2. Age …….

1. What has made you feel supported in this environment?

   ……
   ……
   ……
   ……
2. What has made you feel unsupported in this environment?

   ……
   ……
   …….....
3. What have you found to be difficult about being at high school?

   ……
   ……
   ……
   ……....
4. What has been easy for you at high school?

   ……
   ……
   ……
   ……
   ……
5. What is the biggest difference between being at high school compared to being at primary school?

……

……

……

…….

6. What do you think high schools can do to make new comers in grade 8 learners feel more welcome and included?

……

……

……..

.....

Appendix 5: Focus group interview

1. Tell me about your experiences at high school. How have these experiences made you feel? What can the school do to make it easier for eight learners to adjust to high school? How do you think that primary school have prepared you for high school?

2. What advice can you give a grade seven learners who is coming to Grade 8 next years about dealing with the challenges or any other challenges in Grade 8