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**RESEARCH REPORT**

**Title:** Public school teachers' perceptions of Educational Psychologists' services in Limpopo Province (Mamaila circuit)

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## **Abstract**

*South Africa, as a member to the global community has ratified global statutes like the Sustainable Development Goals 2030, Education for All, and No Child Left Behind Act. At a national level the progressive democratic policy, the Inclusive Education White Paper 6, supports the mandate to ensure that all children have access to quality education. Lack of learner support and a misfit in the school context are some of the factors that contribute to the low performance and high school dropout rates in Limpopo Province. Therefore, a collaboration between teachers and Educational Psychologists may reduce the effects of the above-mentioned factors. The services of Educational Psychologists are, therefore, pertinent to the provision of psychological, learning and developmental support needs for children, and for teachers. It is against this backdrop that this study provides a snapshot on educational support perceptions of rural teachers and learners in the Mamaila Circuit, in the Limpopo Province of South Africa. The study focuses on teachers' access to learning support services, with particular reference to the professional services provided by the Educational Psychologists. Eighteen public school teachers were interviewed in two focus groups, in a primary and a secondary school. Findings indicate a gap in teachers' understanding of the nature of learning support services provided by Educational Psychologists, and the community's inaccessibility to such services. The results of this study have implications for the Department of Education's strategies to provide not only access to schooling, but quality education for all children, including rural children.*

Key words: Educational Psychologist, Sustainable Development Goals 2030, Education for All, No Child Left Behind Act, Inclusive Education White Paper 6, learning support services

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

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HPCSA	Health Professions Council of South Africa
SIAS	Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder
DoE	Department of Education
TVET	Technical Vocational Education and Training
DSM	Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisations
SGB	School Governing Body
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USA	United States of America
SBST	School-Based Support Team
DBST	District-Based Support Team
DPO	Disabled People Organisations

## OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF TERMS

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- **Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support:** Outline procedures to identify, assess and provide programmes and appropriate school placements for all learners
- **Autism Spectrum Disorder:** A neuro-developmental disorders characterised by difficulty in social interaction and communication, which further affects the learner's ability to learn.
- **Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder:** A chronic condition characterised by persisting attention difficulties, hyperactivity and impulsiveness.
- **District-Based Support Team:** These teams work in collaboration to facilitate the process of screening, identifying, assessing barriers and provide support for the learners.
- **Educational Psychologists:** Professionals who study cognitive and socio-emotional processes involved in education and development and apply their knowledge to improve the learning processes.
- **Learning barriers:** Refer to difficulties that arise within the education system as a whole, the learning site and/or within the learner him/herself, which prevent access to learning and development.
- **School Governing Body:** a team of parents selected to ensure that all children have access to schooling. The SGB should be able to develop and implement a school strategic plan and be involved in voluntary work

- **Sustainable Development Goals 2030:** Global goals adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030.
- **School-Based Support Team:** teams that are supposed to be led by school principals to ensure adequate educational care and support for all learner in the school context.
- **Quality Education:** education that focuses on the whole child- the social, emotional, mental, physical, and cognitive development of each student regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or geographic location. It prepares the child for life, not for testing.

## Chapter 1: Background of the study

### 1.1 Introduction

Educational Psychologists are professionals who study cognitive and socio-emotional processes involved in education and development and apply their knowledge to improve the learning processes (Burns, 2013). According to the Board of Psychology under the Health Profession Council of South Africa (HPCSA, 2017), the roles and functions of Educational Psychologists include assessment, diagnosis and intervention in order to achieve optimal human functioning and development in the learning environment.

According to the scope of practice as determined by the HPCSA, assessment is described as the use of psychometric measures and procedures by Educational Psychologists to assess cognitive, intellectual and career abilities, aptitude, scholastic and academic achievement, social and emotional functioning, personality and interests associated with learning and development. Diagnosis involves the Educational Psychologists' description of mental disorders using the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders (DSM-V) and the International Classification of Disease (ICD-10). Lastly, intervention involves a collaboration between Educational Psychologists with principals, teachers, the school governing body, parents and other health professionals to provide support in terms of psycho-educational and career counselling, learning support, socio-emotional support and primary prevention programs (HPCSA, 2017).

The focus of this research is to understand the nature of collaboration between Educational Psychologists and teachers. This scope of the dissertation can be attributed to the reality that teachers spend more time with the learners and have awareness of their learners' needs for optimal learning development. Beukes (2010) mentioned that a

collaboration between Educational Psychologists and teachers promotes exchange of knowledge that is meaningful, rewarding, enabling and provides learner support in various aspects. This, therefore, suggests that a lack of collaboration may result in poor learner support. Based on this, it is important to investigate the public school teachers' access to and their perceptions regarding the roles of Educational Psychologists.

This chapter introduces the background of the study by outlining the statement of the problem, aim and objectives, primary and secondary questions and the rationale of the study. This chapter concludes with a chapter summation of the entire research report.

## 1.2 Statement of the problem

Statistics show that Limpopo is the second lowest performing province in South Africa with a pass rate of 33.6% (BusinessTech, 2017) and about 60.4% of learners drop out of school (Lehohla, 2013). Rammala (2009), Lehohla (2013) and Sinyosi (2015) remarked that the lack of learner support and a misfit in the school context are some of the factors that contribute to the low performance and high school dropout rates in Limpopo Province. Therefore, a collaboration between teachers and Educational Psychologists may reduce the effects of the above-mentioned factors, as it is within these psychologists' scope of practice to provide learner support (Moolla, 2011).

## 1.3 Rationale

Literature shows that the studies on teachers' perceptions regarding the roles and functions of Educational Psychologists have been conducted in developed countries such as Canada and United States of America (Corkum, French & Dorey, 2007; Reader, 2014; Watkins, 2001). In South Africa, studies have been conducted on the collaboration between teachers and Educational Psychologists to enhance learner support (Moolla,

2011). However, information on public school teachers' familiarity with the profession of educational psychology in Limpopo province seems unavailable in the knowledge field.

The findings of this research will firstly, establish the existing gap between the two professions and determine the extent of familiarity and access to the psychological services by the public school teachers. Secondly, the process and the outcomes of this study may create awareness among the public school teachers with regards to the psychological services available to them through Educational Psychologists. Thirdly, the study may stimulate thought and reflection on how collaboration or a lack thereof between teachers and Educational Psychologists might impact learner support. Lastly, the findings will be beneficial to Mamaila circuit in constructing robust school-based support teams and improving psychological services for learners.

#### 1.4 The aim and objectives of the study

The current study aims to investigate the perceptions of the public school teachers on the services provided by Educational Psychologists for learner support in Mamaila circuit.

The following research objectives facilitated the achievement of the mentioned aim:

- To explore public school teachers' familiarity with the role of Educational Psychologists in Mamaila circuit
- To explore the frequently identified barriers to learning identified in Mamaila circuit schools
- To investigate public school teachers' perception regarding accessibility of psychological services in Mamaila circuit

- To explore whether public school teachers in Mamaila circuit find the services of Educational Psychologists helpful
- To investigate the barriers to Educational Psychologists' services in Mamaila circuit

### 1.5 Research questions

The study seeks to provide responses to the following primary and secondary questions:

#### **Primary question**

What are public school teachers' perceptions on Educational Psychologists' services for learner support in Mamaila circuit?

#### **Secondary questions**

- What is the public school teachers' understanding of the role of Educational Psychologists in learning support?
- To what extent do public school teachers perceive psychological services to be accessible in Mamaila circuit?
- What barriers to learning are frequently identified by teachers in Mamaila circuit schools?
- What are Mamaila circuit public school teachers' perceptions regarding previous assistance received from Educational Psychologists' services?
- If there are any, what are identified barriers to Educational Psychology services in Mamaila circuit?

## 1.6 Exposition of the research report

Subsequent to this introductory chapter, there are four chapters. The first section of Chapter 2 reviews literature on teachers' role in providing quality education, Educational Psychologists' scope of practice, Educational Psychologists' accessibility and affordability in the South African context, possible learning barriers within the school context; and the policies such as the White paper 6, No child left behind and the Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) that govern Inclusive Education. This review highlights the role of both teachers and Educational Psychologists in inclusive education and how a collaboration may enhance learner support.

The second section of Chapter 2 presents Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory as the theoretical framework underpinning this research study. The bioecological systems namely the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and the chronosystem are discussed in this chapter in relation to the possible outcomes of effective collaboration between teachers and Educational Psychologists. The child's ability to receive educational support in their context is prioritized and thus the bioecological systems theory is pursued for the current research report.

Chapter 3 presents an outlines of the methodology for the execution of this study. Further discussed in this chapter are the procedure that was followed in selecting participants (purposive convenience sampling), Mamaila circuit as the research context, the data collection tools (semi-structured interview, biographical questionnaire, and document analysis), data analysis, trustworthiness and ethical considerations.

Chapter 4 presents the discussion of the findings of this study. The identified themes from the data analysis are discussed as responses to the primary and secondary questions of this research. Furthermore, the findings in relation to relevant literature and the theoretical framework are thrashed out.

To finalise the report; Chapter 5 presents the conclusion of the research report. Furthermore, the limitations, recommendation for further research, and the implication of this study are discussed.

## Chapter 2: Literature review and Theoretical framework

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section reviews literature that is related to the research topic and the theoretical framework, which is further discussed in the second section of this chapter.

### 2.2 Literature Review

In the literature review section, quality education, inclusive education and learning barriers are discussed with reference to the relevant literature. Furthermore, the collaboration systems emphasised in providing quality educational support for learners in their context, with focus on Educational Psychologists and teachers are explored. In addition, this section reviews policies, position statements and scope of practices to examine South Africa's current stance in inclusive education.

### 2.3 Quality education, Inclusive education and Education policies

#### 2.3.1 Defining quality education

In addition to the right to shelter and the right to health, education has been universally recognised and declared as a significant human right (United Nations, 1948; South African constitution section 29 (1) (a), 1996). More than 150 countries including South Africa adopted Education for All policy to support the universal Right to Education (UNESCO, 1990; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 2007; Madani, 2019). For numerous countries, this meant improving and ensuring optimal education access and promoting quality in education (Masino & Nino-Zarazua, 2016). The term 'quality' in education is a multi-dimensional concept with a

variety of components with no particular definition for it. However, one definition of the term 'quality' in general application is "leadership, teamwork, measurement and systematic problem solving" (Brucaj, 2014; as cited in Thangeda, Baratiseng & Mompati, 2016).

In order to achieve quality education, collaboration between the leaders and teamwork, measurement and systematic problem solving is of paramount importance (Masino & Nino-Zarazua, 2016). Furthermore, Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana (2016) asserted that to certify that all children have access to quality education, there has to be interaction between all the associated stakeholders. This includes at least teachers, learners, parents, and support personnel. This empowers healthy development of learners with confidence and competence (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2011). Therefore, it is vital to ensure quality education for all children as it will empower, impart skills and knowledge to children and make a difference in the economy of every country (Thangeda, Baratiseng & Mompati, 2016; Madani, 2019).

There are numerous positive gains associated with quality education. First of all, quality education ensures a positive future to individuals, societies and the world at large (Masino & Nino-Zarazua, 2016). When quality education is made accessible to societies, it inspires creativity and innovation and further improves the economy of any given nation (Masino & Nino-Zarazua, 2016). Secondly, quality education empowers growth in socioeconomic movement and is fundamental in avoiding poverty (United Nations, 2015). Furthermore, quality education is also vital in attaining numerous other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) such as reducing inequalities, achieving gender equality and empower societies around the world to lead healthy and sustainable lives. Additionally,

quality education is essential for promoting patience amongst societies and further influencing peace in societies (United Nations, 2015). However, there is no worldwide consensus on the suitable plan or policy to guarantee and accomplish quality education (Thangeda, Baratiseng & Mompoti, 2016).

### 2.3.2 Introduction of Inclusive Education

Ninety two governments and twenty five universal institutes gathered in Salamanca (Spain) in June 1994 to further explore on how to improve quality Education for All and promote the right to education as declared in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO], 1994). In the world Conference on Special Needs Education (1994), Inclusive Education strategies and frameworks were introduced in response to special education needs. The Salamanca statement indicates that inclusive education is created to support all schools to accommodate all learners, predominantly those with special education needs. This involves facilitating to eliminate discrimination and prejudice and constructing compassionate and inclusive societies (UNESCO, 1994).

Since then, inclusive education has been instigated in states such as the United States of America (USA) and Canada (Grynova & Kalinichenko, 2018). In these countries, an inclusive methodology in achieving quality education for all is deliberated as a strategy to transform education systems to meet the needs of a variety of pupils (Grynova & Kalinichenko, 2018). The inclusive approach is based on appreciating and treating all learners with respect. Furthermore, it is based on the belief that every individual contributes to the enrichment of the society and a diverse school environment should be

able to meet the needs of different learners (Grynova & Kalinichenko, 2018). According to Grynova and Kalinichenko (2018), inclusive education purposes to adjust school curriculum and school environments to meet the needs of children with special educational needs. This means that every school environment should be prepared to receive all learners at any time, and be determined to create satisfactory environments for learners' optimal development (Grynova & Kalinichenko, 2018).

In American schools, teamwork is considered as an effective strategy in inclusive education, since operative relationships are created (Tanner, Linscott & Galis, 1996; Grynova & Kalinichenko, 2018). In the teamwork, individual curriculums are created to successfully integrate a learner with special education needs (Tanner, Linscott & Galis, 1996; Grynova & Kalinichenko, 2018). The individual curriculum consists of well-developed structures of educational goals and objectives that are attained by utilising suitable alterations and adjustments of the regular curriculum, which permits a learner to be included in the classroom (Grynova & Kalinichenko, 2018).

In the American inclusive education system, Educational Psychologists guide learners, teachers, and families to develop educational quality and the school context (Tanner, Linscott & Galis, 1996; Dudley-Marling & Burns, 2014). Furthermore, they detect learners' scholastic and psychological needs and intervene accordingly. Educational Psychologists guarantee that all learners receive sufficient and constant education, despite the diversity of their needs (Dudley-Marling & Burns, 2014; Van Ingen, Allsopp, Broughton, Simsek, Albritton & White, 2018). Additionally, they provide psycho-educational guidance to teachers and principals to inform them on to better respond to learners' specific needs (Dudley-Marling & Burns, 2014). Educational Psychologists' further create awareness of

functional diversity so the school achieves an inclusive and universal education. Additionally, Educational Psychologists contribute to the collaboration between the school community for an enhanced communication (Dudley-Marling & Bunns, 2014; Van Ingen et al., 2018).

Similarly, the Canadian education system has always reinforced the democratic effort for civil rights and anti-discriminatory approaches in education (Grynova & Kalinichenko, 2018). Since the 1980s, the Canadian education system has introduced influential education improvements and school reorganisation. Several initiatives have been implemented, including the initiatives for promoting school proficiency, reforming school environments, peer teaching, as well as increasing teacher professionalism (Grynova & Kalinichenko, 2018). In addition, concepts such as incorporation, standardisation, normal and social justice, inclusion, less restrictive school environments, regular education have meaningfully influenced the development of adjusting theoretical observations on the education system for children with special needs (Grynova & Kalinichenko, 2018).

### 2.3.3 Inclusive Education introduced in South Africa

South Africa has embraced an Inclusive Education policy as uttered in the *Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System* (Department of Education, 2001; Murungi, 2015). Inclusive education is defined as “the understanding that the education of all children including those with disabilities, should be under the responsibility of the education ministries or their equivalent with common rules and procedures. In this model, education may take place in a range of settings such as special schools and centres, special classes, special classes in

integrated schools or regular classes in mainstream schools, following the model of the least restrictive environment” (p.12) (Department of Education, 2001; World Bank World Report on Disability 2009 as cited in Murungi, 2015).

In South Africa, the effects of years of seclusion and uneven distribution of resources are evident in the inequity amongst special schools that accommodated entirely white children living with disability and those that accommodated black children living with disability only (DoE, 2001). Thus, the evident enduring inequities in the special schools sector are being eliminated and replaced with promoting the relationship between learners, educators and professional support services populations of different racial backgrounds to become demonstrative of the South African populace (DoE, 2001).

The White Paper 6 indicates that the education and training system must transform and contribute to creating a compassionate and kind society, applying adjustments to accommodate all the learners’ needs. An inclusive education and training system should comprise of a variety of educational support services based on the needs of learners with disabilities (DoE, 2001; Murungi, 2015). Furthermore, the White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001) stipulates that learners who need less demanding support will obtain this in regular or mainstream schools and those needing reasonable amount of support will receive this in full-service schools. Learners who need severe educational support will continue to receive support in special schools.

The policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) was presented in 2014 by the Department of Education (DoE) to outline procedures to identify, assess and provide programmes and appropriate school placements for all learners. The Minister

of Education, Angelina Motshekga, indicated that “the SIAS policy aims to respond to the needs of all learners in our country, particularly those who are vulnerable, and most likely to be marginalized and excluded” (p.5) (DoE, 2014). She further indicated that the policy will introduce new roles so that the learners who experience barriers may access support in the comfort of their context. The SIAS policy (DoE, 2014) outlines guidelines on registering learners in special schools and environments, which also acknowledge and cater for needs of every learner (DoE, 2014; Murungi, 2015). The policy further outlines the role of support personnel within the school and the district accountable for preparation and provision of learner support (DoE, 2014; Murungi, 2015).

In order to achieve inclusivity within schools, it is mandated by the White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001) that there should be District–Based Support Teams (DBST) which comprise of curriculum specialists and developers, specialist teaching support facilitators, health and welfare workers and counsellors for the support of learners, parents, and teachers in their context (Landsberg, Kruger & Swart, 2011). As indicated in the introduction of this research and in line with the SIAS policy (DoE, 2014), Educational Psychologists are trained professionals to screen, identify, assess and provide support for learners, therefore would contribute a great deal in the implementation of inclusive education. Furthermore, as indicated in the problem statement, considering that learning barriers contribute to the high rates of school dropouts and low performance rates, this study therefore purports to identify whether public school teachers in Mamaila circuit have knowledge of and access to Educational Psychologists’ services to enhance learner support.

## 2.4 Teachers' role in education and barriers to providing quality education

The teachers' role in schools is more than standing in front of the class to teach and give grades, it also involves providing quality education, emotional support and a safe school environment for learners (Zeiger, 2000). Effective teachers have the best interest of the learner at heart. They have the ability to play the role of a parent, a role model, a counsellor and provide support for learner's development (Zeiger, 2000). Teachers also collaborate with Educational Psychologists to develop and implement Individual Educational Programmes (IEPs) and provide support for all learners (Farooq, 2012). As a result, it is important for teachers to be familiar with the psychological services available to them through Educational Psychologists from workshops or qualification programmes. This study argues that for teachers to be able to use any education and learning support services, including that of Educational Psychologists, teachers should, first, be in a position to identify barriers to learning and children's learning support needs, and second, understand how and where to source relevant learning support from.

### 2.4.1 Barriers to providing quality education

Aspects such as management, goals and teamwork that influence elevated quality in education are lacking or they are ineffective in promoting quality education (Van der Berg, Burger, De Vos, Du Rand, Gustafsson, Moses, Shepherd, Spaul, Taylor, Van Broekhuizen & Von Fintel, 2011). Furthermore, strictly applied procedures, poorly resourced and/or dangerous school environments and unsuitable teaching practice influence poor quality education (Van der Berg et al., 2011, Office, 2018). Poor understanding and teamwork between the government, principals, School Governing Body (SGB), support personnel, such as Educational Psychologists and teachers

influence poor quality in education (Van der Berg et al., 2011, Office, 2018). At times, principals and teachers do not have the competence to make adjustments and modifications to the teaching and learning practice. Moreover, teachers frequently have confidence in the operation of their teaching service, and are mostly unmindful of concerns or risks to learners (Dalton, Mckenzie & Kahonde, 2012). According to Dalton, Mckenzie and Kahonde (2012), poor quality in teaching practice is frequently rooted in the lack of inclination or enthusiasm to transformation of the practice.

Quality in teacher knowledge has been assumed to play a significant role in learners' performance (Van der Berg et al. 2011). Therefore, Van der Berg et al. (2011) indicate that inadequate teacher knowledge is problematic. Poor education practice has a negative impact on the relationship between teachers and learners as it contributes to high pressure, stress and anxiety levels for both teachers and learners (Dalton, Mckenzie & Kahonde, 2012). Teachers need to be provided with support and awareness that any given quality learning environment highly influenced the quality of learning, and are made up of physical, psychosocial, and quality education service delivery (Dalton, Mckenzie & Kahonde, 2012). Learners are often reported to appear bored, interested in activities outside of the classroom environment, bullying others, waiting for food or making noise and being unsettled in the classroom due to the effects of poor quality education practice and inadequate knowledge of a variety of learning barriers and possible interventions (Dalton, Mckenzie & Kahonde, 2012).

In some South African Universities, teachers are provided with rudimentary familiarity of educational psychology in their Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) training programme (University of Witwatersrand, 2000; University of Limpopo, 2017). According to Nezhad

and Vahedi (2011) teaching and educational psychology are interdependent. This is to provide teachers with the knowledge that children have different mental capacities and learn at different paces (Nezhad & Vahedi, 2011). The Economics Education Team (2010) emphasised that teachers have to interact with different learners with a variety of realities, therefore, it is important for them to “understand individual differences”. A collaboration of teachers with educational psychologists would be beneficial as they exchange knowledge in their areas of expertise to provide quality support for learners (Lohse-Bossenz, Kunina-Habenicht & Kunter, 2013).

## 2.5 Disabilities and learning barriers within a school context

Learning barriers listed in the SIAS policy (DoE, 2014) include learning difficulties (cognitive), bullying and behavioural challenges (social), and bereavement (emotional), sensory and mobility impairment (disability) and learners who are inclined to dropping out of school. According to Landsberg et al. (2011), disabilities include physical, sensory, neurological and intellectual disabilities. Physical disabilities affect body functioning (mobility and the use of hands), sensory disabilities affect the utilization of the senses such as hearing and sight, neurological disabilities affect the functioning of the nervous system (such as epilepsy) and intellectual disabilities involve a general problem in reasoning and understanding. Learning difficulties include a specific difficulty in learning (such as reading), communication difficulty and emotional difficulty (which is feelings or behavioural difficulties affecting learning) (Landsberg et al., 2011).

### 2.5.1 Specific difficulty in learning according to the DSM-5

According to the American Psychiatric Association [APA] (2013), Specific learning disorders “are neurodevelopmental disorder with a biological origin that is the basis for abnormalities at a cognitive level that are associated with the behavioural signs of the disorder” (p.31). The biological causes involve an interaction of hereditary and bioecological aspects, which impact the brain's capacity to observe and process spoken or nonverbal information proficiently and correctly (APA, 2013).

Learning difficulties are characterised by the existence of at least one of the subsequent symptoms that persisted for approximately six months, regardless of interventions provided to assist with the difficulties. These symptoms include: “incorrect or slow and effortful reading; difficulty comprehending what is read; difficulties with spelling (for instance, the child may add, omit, or substitute vowels); difficulties with written communication; and difficulties mastering number sense, number facts, or calculation; difficulties with mathematical reasoning” (p. 75) (APA, 2013).

Dyslexia refers to an array of learning difficulties categorised by difficulties with correct or effortless word recognition, inadequate translation skills, and inadequate spelling capabilities. Since dyslexia is utilised to identify this specific array of difficulties, it is vital to stipulate further difficulties that exist, for instance difficulties with understanding what is read or mathematical reasoning (APA, 2013). Moreover, dyscalculia describes a pattern of difficulties categorised by difficulties processing mathematical data, learning mathematical facts, and executing correct calculations (APA, 2013). Since dyscalculia is utilised to specify this specific array of math difficulties, it is vital to specify evident

additional difficulties, for instance, difficulties with math reasoning or word reasoning correctness (APA, 2013).

Learners who present with specific learning disorders may seem distracted because of frustration, lack of interest or inadequate capability. Nevertheless, inattention in children with a specific learning disorder who do not present with Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD) does not affect the child outside of schoolwork (APA, 2013). ADHD is a chronic condition characterised by persisting attention difficulties, hyperactivity and impulsiveness (APA, 2013). In addition to specific learning difficulties, ADHD is a condition that negatively affects learning progress in children affected by the condition. Educational Psychologists are trained and well-informed to provide guidance in addressing these learning difficulties and other neuro-developmental disorders such as Autism Spectrum Disorder which is characterised by difficulty in social interaction and communication, which further affects the learner's ability to learn (APA, 2013).

### 2.5.2 Emotional difficulty

Learners are also presented with a wide range of difficulties in their social environments. For instance, learners witness divorce and domestic violence in their homes, experience loss of a loved one, teenage pregnancy, substance abuse and peer pressure, which may destruct the learner and affect their academic performance (Weeks, 2000; Dunn, 2016). Dunn (2016) further mentioned that certain learners present with misconduct, behavioural problems and emotional problems as a result of interaction with each other. For instance, a learner with low self-esteem may experience a need to be accepted by peers and may

be influenced to exhibit misconduct. Furthermore, misconduct may be a child's way of crying out for help from, for instance, family dispute.

### 2.5.3 Family background and Parent involvement

Family and other bioecological factors contribute significantly to cognitive skills growth and development and ensuing employment market outcomes (Shepherd, 2011). Much of the global research suggests that family background contributes greatly to the development of a child compared to the effects of the school environment (Shepherd, 2011; Van der Berg et al., 2011). Research indicates that unprivileged children start school with minimal intellectual reasoning due to a lack of access to the kind of support, resources and interventions privileged children have access to (Shepherd, 2011). However, to minimise the effects of this gap, created by socioeconomic disparities, the department of education can implement mechanisms that empower the education system to play a role from an early age in the effort to overcome the initial discrepancies that some children experience (Shepherd, 2011, Van der Berg et al., 2011). For instance, the introduction of Educational Psychologists in collaboration with teachers in disadvantaged environments may assist in identifying and stimulating children from an early age.

Shepherd (2011) proposed that added parent involvement in a child's education does not contribute significant benefit in African language rural schools, however, there are apparent benefits to parental involvement in English and Afrikaans language schools. Shepherd (2011) further suggested that this may be due to subjective and case study evidence that suggest that unprivileged children are usually underrepresented by the School Governing Bodies and the entire school community does not have an effective

relation in promoting the education development of the child (Shepherd, 2011). For instance, if teachers and SGBs in rural schools were equipped with knowledge on learning barriers and Educational Psychologists' services in addressing them, it may provide a shift in providing quality education in African language schools such as those in Mamaila circuit.

## 2.6 Educational Psychologists scope of practice

This section outlines the scope of practice for Educational Psychologists as stipulated in Scope of Practice Guidelines for Educational Psychologists by the HPCSA Professional Board for Psychology (2017).

Educational psychology is described as a classification in specialized psychology centered on promoting, “emotional, learning, academic, intellectual, behavioural, social and developmental difficulties” (p. 2) in children and the youth (Professional Board for Psychology, 2017). Educational Psychologists work within and with the systems in which children and youth function, which include families, schools, peer groups and other settings (Professional Board for Psychology, 2017). Educational Psychologists further provide a wide-range of assistance and psychological services to role-players which may support the child's optimum functioning. Services comprise of “family-based intervention, teacher support and learning support”. Additionally, Educational Psychologists improve the occupational development of children and adults (Professional Board for Psychology, 2017). Furthermore, the discussed professionals provide support to promote the welfare of families, groups and communities at large (Professional Board for Psychology, 2017).

Educational Psychologists provide teachers with in-service trainings on matters such as “career counselling, behaviour management and parenting skills” (Professional Board for Psychology, 2017). Educational Psychologists are further involved in psychosocial intervention and preventative programmes that impact educational settings. Psychosocial issues include school violence, bullying, abuse, youth pregnancies, underachievement and others (Professional Board for Psychology, 2017). Moreover, Educational Psychologists research advanced techniques of supporting vulnerable individuals, train and support teachers and the school communities undergoing psychoeducational difficulties (Professional Board for Psychology, 2017).

The key duties of Educational Psychologists comprise of “assessment, diagnosis, prevention and intervention” (Professional Board for Psychology, 2017). Educational Psychologists intervene utilising observations, enquiry and evaluations in order to create a widespread case conceptualisation to define and clarify the source of the difficulty (Professional Board for Psychology, 2017). The case conceptualisation better informs individuals, families or groups in therapy and/or psycho-education, consultation and guidance. They also have proficiency in short-term therapy and “psychoeducational counselling, psychotherapy and career assessment and counselling” (Professional Board for Psychology, 2017).

#### [2.6.1 Psychoeducational Assessment](#)

Psychoeducational assessments are a multi-modal procedure that include assembling of information from different sources in a variety of environments over time (Professional Board for Psychology, 2017). The assessment process essentially includes parents,

caregivers, educators, children and youth, i.e., all individuals within the immediate environments of the child. The purpose of assessment is to illustrate and clarify the origin of the difficulty of referral and provide an in depth enlightenment of possible inclining, sustaining and causal factors and further provide helpful interventions that may support healthy functioning and optimal performance for learners (Professional Board for Psychology, 2017).

### 2.6.2 Diagnosing psychopathologies and learning barriers

Educational Psychologists are further trained to recognise and make a diagnosis of psychopathologies related to learning and development utilising interviews, observations and assessments (Professional Board for Psychology, 2017). They further identify and diagnose learning barriers such as dyslexia, dyscalculia and developmental barriers, such as Autism spectrum disorder by detecting, recognizing and categorizing the obstacles, difficulties and barriers to learning and development in relation to behaviour, emotional, and social functioning (Professional Board for Psychology, 2017).

### 2.6.3 Referrals for further intervention

Educational Psychologists can refer clients to suitable specialists for additional assessment or intervention (Professional Board for Psychology, 2017). They have the ability and knowledge to involve themselves in professional and ethical reflective practice and understand other disciplines' scope of practice for referrals to other psychology professionals (e.g., clinical psychologists, registered counsellors and others) and to other health and/or appropriate professionals for further assessment or intervention (Professional Board for Psychology, 2017). This comprises of consultation with doctors

and other specialists regarding for instance school functioning and learning of individuals with disorders such as “ADHD, learning disorders, chronic illness, physical or genetic conditions; emotional functioning such as eating disorders, self-harm, mood disorders; social problems such as substance abuse, bullying, conduct disorders; family functioning such as divorce; complex and/ or developmental trauma such as family violence, domestic violence, abuse in various forms and career development or life design issues” (Professional Board for Psychology, 2017).

Most teachers stress that they feel inadequately trained to meet the needs of the learner and the psychosocial challenges and barriers faced by their learners (Engelbrecht, Green, Naicker & Engelbrecht, 2009). Collaboration in inclusive education is vital as there will be meaningful exchange of knowledge to provide quality learner support (Engelbrecht et al., 2009). Inclusive education has been promoted in policy-making both locally and internationally. This promotion of inclusive education aims to address educational inequality to ensure that all learners have access to the range of psychological, social and educational opportunities within their school contexts (Mittler, 2012).

Literature shows that teachers need to understand the roles that Educational Psychologists play so that their contribution may be known and valued (Moolla, 2011; Mittler, 2012). This supports why the current study needs to be conducted in the Limpopo province to get a description of public school teachers’ familiarity with the Educational Psychologists’ services and the importance of a collaboration between them. However, to provide psychological services for all children, it is significant to identify their availability and access for all teachers in urban and rural areas.

## 2.7 Educational Psychologists' accessibility and affordability

The introduction of psychology in South Africa cannot be separated from the long history of apartheid, where black people were oppressed and segregated in their own country. Psychology was brought into South Africa to further segregate the minority groups and provide psychological services to the white population (Kumar, 2017).

According to de la Rey and Ipser (2004), South African psychology is not where it needs to be as it is still underdeveloped and isolated. During the 1980's till the early 1990s, South African Psychologists debated as to how relevant psychology is to the local socio-political context of South Africa (de la Rey & Ipser, 2004). Due to the socioeconomic inequalities orchestrated by the apartheid government, psychology was an exclusive reserve for the superior group of middle class white individuals (de la Rey & Ipser, 2004). The mental health needs of black South Africa citizens from disadvantaged communities have been neglected and the psychological practice has been criticised for being Eurocentric in its orientation (Naidoo, 2000; de la Rey & Ipser, 2004).

It is further perceived that not much has changed in providing psychological services to all South Africans as most psychologists are still based in urban areas and in private practice where the middle and upper class individuals can easily access and afford them (Barnwell, 2015; Kumar, 2017). Democratic psychologists should, therefore, be challenged to align themselves with the attempts to create a fair societal and commercial order in South Africa (van Ommen & Painter, 2008; Kumar, 2017). South Africans in rural areas constitute a large percentage at approximately 81%, which means that a large

number of South Africans are left without access to psychological services (van Ommen & Painter, 2008; Lotter, 2017, Statistics South Africa, 2019).

According to HPCSA registration statistics (2017), qualified Educational Psychologists are the second largest registration at 21.0% with clinical psychology at 22.5% in South Africa. Statistics further indicate that English speaking individuals are the largest language group serviced by Educational Psychologists at 63.4% and only 2% of Sepedi speaking individuals are serviced by them. Only 0.7% Educational Psychologists are involved in non-government organisations in Limpopo Province and 2.5% is involved in the public service such as government schools and hospitals. On the contrary, 49.4% Educational Psychologists are involved in NGOs in Gauteng and 46.0% of them are involved in public service in Gauteng province. Moreover, Gauteng province was declared the top performing province in matric results 2018 by the Minister of Education, Angie Motshekga (Africa News, 2019). Therefore, it can be hypothesised that the involvement of Educational Psychologists amongst other services provide enhancement in providing quality education in Gauteng Province. Provinces such as Limpopo still require attention in terms of providing psychological services to address a variety of learning barriers and enhance learner support and optimum development.

According to the HPCSA (2018), there are one hundred and thirty nine registered psychologists in Limpopo Province. Considering the aggregate of psychologists in Limpopo, only five clinical psychologists are in the vicinity of Mamaila circuit schools at approximately 21.1km to 43.8 kilometres (GoogleMaps, 2018). Four of the Clinical Psychologists are in independent practice with one Clinical Psychologist in public service and no Educational Psychologists are recorded, as indicated by the HPCSA (2018).

Observing contexts in which similar research has been conducted, the geographical locality of Mamaila circuit schools provides a unique environment in which public school teachers' perceptions of the roles of Educational Psychologists can be studied.

With the paradigm shift to inclusive education and introduction of community psychology, the psychology field is challenged to work beyond providing psychological services to those who are familiar and knowledgeable with the field of psychology to reach out to the disadvantaged communities (Flanagan & Hancock, 2010). Brown (2010) argued that Educational Psychologists are challenged to move beyond providing psychological services to those in greatest need to providing psychological services to all learners for their educational and developmental benefit. In order to understand the needs of teachers in Mamaila circuit, this research will express the perceptions of public school teachers regarding their familiarity with educational psychology, the roles of Educational Psychologists and possible barriers to their services within the chosen Mamaila circuit.

To investigate Mamaila circuit public school teachers' perceptions of Educational Psychologists' services, the theoretical framework discussed in the second section of Chapter 2 was utilised to describe, predict and comprehend Mamaila circuit as a context and the experiences within the context.

## 2.8 Theoretical framework

The second section of Chapter 2 provides a discussion of the bioecological systems theory, which will function as the theoretical framework for understanding the importance of collaboration between stakeholders in the microsystem, mesosystem, macrosystem, and the exosystem in better supporting a child's development. This section introduces

Urie Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory and further provides a description of the bioecological systems, where teachers and Educational Psychologists fit within the systems and how their contributions may impact a child's development.

### 2.8.1 Development of the bioecological systems theory

The bioecological systems theory was developed by a Russian-American psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner (Rogers, Zierten & Gilstrap, 2016). Bronfenbrenner's career as a psychologist was steered by his neuropathologist father. His father acknowledged that living organisms develop and survive through constant relationships with each other and their given context (Rogers et al., 2016). This became a subject of interest to Bronfenbrenner who received his Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) qualification at the University of Michigan in 1942. During his Ph.D., Bronfenbrenner was interested in concepts such as human development and human ecology, which led to his bioecological systems theory (Rogers et al., 2016). Finding this theoretical framework was a process of my metacognition about this study, and finding a scientific philosophy that embraces my thinking regarding the problem and how I want to approach solving it. In this process I have considered other theoretical frameworks before deciding on the bioecological system, one of which is the sociocultural theory.

### 2.8.2 Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory as a possible theoretical framework

Prior to the consideration of the bioecological systems theory as the theoretical framework, Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of human learning was considered as a possible theoretical framework for this research. In his theory, Vygotsky stresses that learning is a result of social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky further explained these utilising two planes, which he called the interpsychological (between people) and

intrapyschological (inside the child). Additionally, the sociocultural theory states that the cognitive development stems from guided learning from knowledgeable others within the zone of proximal development (McLeod, 2018). For instance, the exchange of knowledge between teachers and learners in a school environment and the interaction between a learner and an Educational Psychologist during remedial therapy may improve a learners' cognitive development.

The sociocultural theory acknowledges the social aspect of the child as a major contributor of intelligence development. Vygotsky further acknowledged that the environment, in which a child grows up, would impact how they think and what they think about. Within the sociocultural theory, emphasis is mostly placed on culture and the immediate society as promoters of cognitive development.

However, the bioecological systems theory appeared to provide an appropriate theoretical framework for this research as it points out the complex layers within the context and the relationships that form the child's environment (Paquettee & Ryan, 2001). Furthermore, the bioecological systems theory considers not just the interaction between the child and their environment for optimal development, it correspondently considers the interaction between the individuals and systems (which the child may not have direct contact with) that facilitate optimal development. This is in line with how teachers and Educational Psychologists collaborate through workshops for knowledge exchange, which indirectly may bring out support for a child's intellectual development. The Department of Education (exosystem) may not be in direct contact with the child, however, the decisions made by this body influences the amount of support a child receives for optimal cognitive development in their context.

This research aims to explore public school teachers' (microsystem) perceptions on Educational Psychologists' (exosystem) services in Mamaila circuit. Therefore, the bioecological systems theory provides guidance in identifying the level of interaction between the systems within and outside of the child's context to support their development.

### 2.8.3 Bioecological systems theory and learner support

In his quest for understanding human development and ecology, Bronfenbrenner (1994) discovered that individuals mature not in seclusion but in an interdependent relationship with other individuals around them (such as, family and friends) and the context they function in (such as, school, neighbourhood and society). Bronfenbrenner systematized these developmental interactions with the individual into five categories, that is, the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and the chronosystem (Paquette & Ryan, 2001; Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

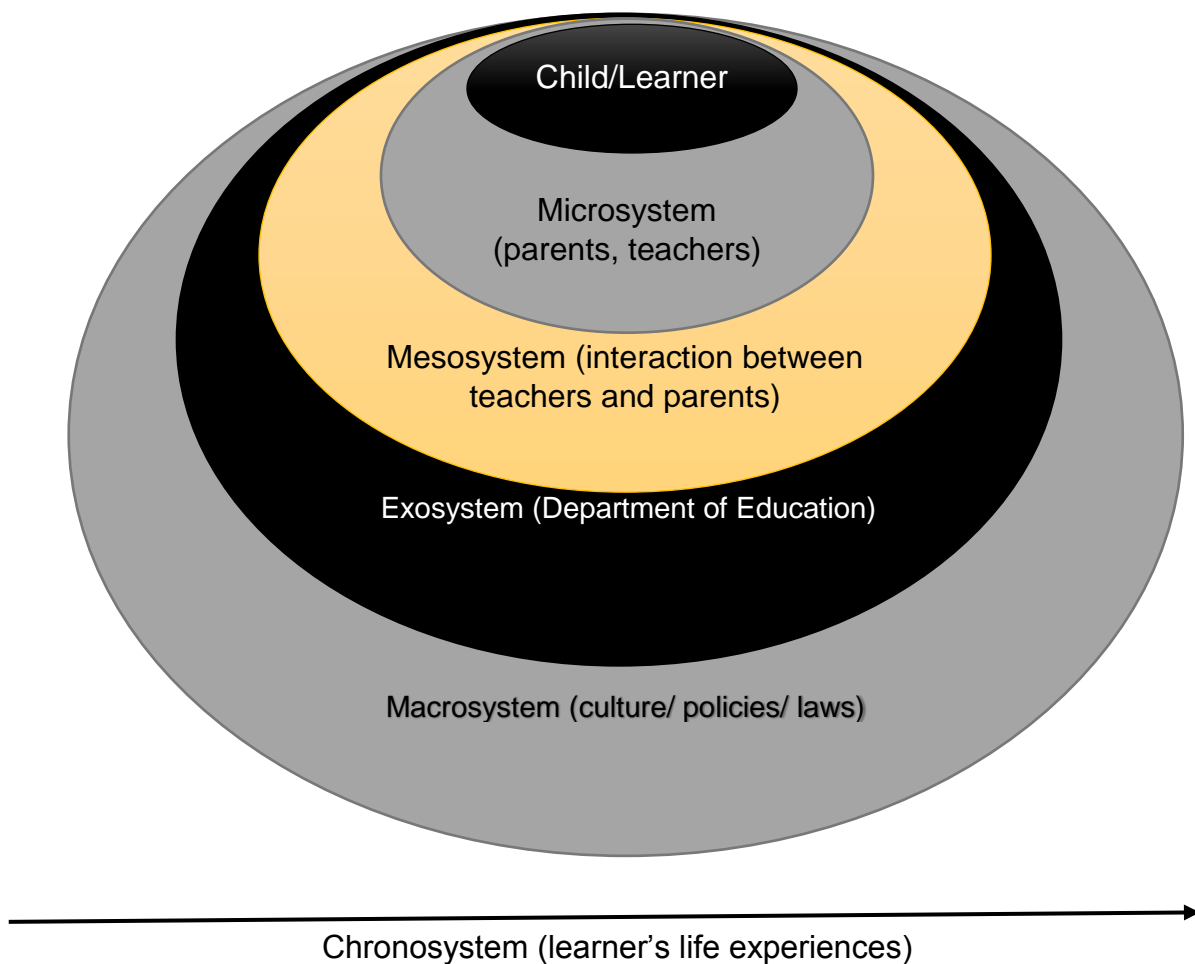
Tudge (2016) asserted that before observing other ecological systems, the child's bodily health, including the physical, mental, behavioural and cognitive functioning, needs to be considered first. Considering Tudge's assertion, the bio-physiological aspect is the point of reference for Educational Psychologists when working with the child in collaboration with other professions. Furthermore, Bronfenbrenner (1994) made an observation that the systems are in continual interaction with each other and alterations or conflict in one system affects the other systems.

When studying the child, all the systems including the child's immediate microsystem must be considered for the benefit of the child's development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Oswalt, 2008). Teachers are considered a crucial part of the immediate environment of

the child. Both teachers and Educational Psychologists are employed by the Department of Basic Education in Limpopo Province under the scope of provision of learning and development and for the provision of learner support (Department of Basic Education, 2012). Presented below is a diagram which summarises the systems of the bioecological systems theory, which are further explained in detail.

**Figure 1**

A diagrammatic representation of the bioecological systems (Paquettee & Ryan, 2001).



Note: This is a summary of the bioecological systems and examples of factors and individuals that impact each system for optimal development of the child.

## Microsystem

According to Oswalt (2008), this system consists of relationships that are more close to the child. It includes the people and the environment that the child is in direct contact with. The child's family, friends, neighbourhood and school are considered the most immediate relationships (Oswalt, 2008). The relationships the child has at this level have an effect on the child and in turn, they affect their immediate environments as well. Bronfenbrenner referred to this as a bi-directional relationship (Paquette & Ryan, 2001). In the case of this research, a learner's teachers are part of the closest relationships the learner has. Therefore, the teachers have an impact on the development of the child and the child also has an effect on the teachers' development (LeBlanc & Bearison, 2004). For instance, a teacher's teaching method may be too complex for a dyslexic learner and may result in frustration. In turn, a teacher that is not familiar with dyslexia may consider the learner lazy and uncooperative, which could be frustrating for both the learner and the teacher (International Dyslexia Association, 2013).

The family affairs surrounding the learner may also impact their development and their participation in school (Oswalt, 2008). The Economic and Social Research Council (2013) indicated that family conflicts, for instance, the parents getting a divorce or if they are experiencing abuse or bullying, the child may be uncooperative as a "cry for help". A teacher that has no knowledge of a child's reality may be frustrated and make erroneous speculations about the learner, which could affect their development in a variety of ways such as their cognitive development (Chang, 2011). It is important for teachers to be familiar with the roles and functions of Educational Psychologists, which include showing interest in the child as a person and henceforth, both the teachers and the Educational

Psychologists must have a collaborative relationship with each other for the benefit of the learner.

### Mesosystem

This system comprises of the relationships between the structures of the microsystem. This could include the relationship between the learner's teachers and parents (Oswalt, 2008). This relationship could be beneficial to the learner since there would be communication between the two closest contexts of the learner. A teacher that is familiar with the learner's familial context is able to communicate with the Educational Psychologist for intervention in situations that may need, for instance, family therapy (Chang, 2011). This drives back to the aim of the research to understand whether teachers are familiar with the services that are available to them through Educational Psychologists, where the Educational Psychologist's role is to serve the needs of both the teachers and families to enhance learning and development in all these structures of the microsystem.

### Exosystem

The structures involved in this system are not in direct contact with the child but their practice affects the child in either a positive or negative manner (Paquettee & Ryan, 2001). The exosystem structures impact the child by the interaction with the microsystemic structures (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Most Educational Psychologists in Limpopo Province for public schools are employed at the Department of Education's head office, and the learners have meagre or no direct contact with them. This makes the Educational Psychologists a part of the exosystem. As mentioned above, teachers form part of the microsystem. Therefore, according to the bioecological systems theory, there

has to be interaction between the Educational Psychologists (exosystem) and teachers (microsystem) for the support of the learners (Paquettee & Ryan, 2001).

### Macrosystem

This is considered the furthest system to the child's context. It includes the cultural norms, values, customs, rules and laws (Paquettee & Ryan, 2001). This system can impact all the other systems (Paquettee & Ryan, 2001). These could include the scope of practice and policies that teachers and Educational Psychologists have to abide by. These policies have the sovereignty to impact the development of the learner in a positive or negative manner. For instance, Danielson (2002) asserted that the grading policy is considered as motivation for learners to challenge each other and enhance their intellectual development. In some cases, this school tradition has enhanced the culture for learning. Whereas, there has been controversies about what grades mean and how they can be perceived as demeaning to both teachers and learners (Danielson, 2002). Some learners appear to develop a misfit in the school context due to some policies (Danielson, 2002), furthermore, teachers' lack of exposure to policies such as the White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001) and the SIAS policy (DoE, 2014) may negatively impact the process of learner support. Teachers and Educational Psychologists' collaboration to interpret such policies and discuss interventions may help learners adjust to school and create programmes that fit their intellectual capacity (Farooq, 2012).

### Chronosystem

Bronfenbrenner (1994) indicated that the chronosystem comprises of the experiences in the child's life. These could include environmental changes and sociohistorical occasions. Learners experience physiological changes as they mature (Paquettee & Ryan, 2001).

Learners also experience challenges in their social lives such as family trials, relationships with peers and the society at large, which may impact their participation in school (Oswalt, 2008). Teachers may be able to identify such changes through observation and enquiry when a learner is not coping well. Their familiarity with Educational Psychologists' roles and functions would be of assistance as they will be able to reach out for collaboration with them for the learner support.

The sociohistorical aspects of the chronosystem, related to teachers having been trained during the apartheid era when black South Africans received inferior education, may have had an impact on their familiarity with educational psychology and learner support. Inclusive education was only introduced ten years post-apartheid and teachers who received their teacher training during apartheid era may not have experienced the value of understanding individual diversity and inclusion for learners with special needs (Engelbrecht, 2006).

## 2.9 Application of the bioecological systems theory in South African research

Numerous studies have been conducted within the South African context, which sanctions the applicability of the bioecological systems theory (Snyman, 2012; Dawson, 2013). Recently, an exploratory study on youth resilience was conducted by Snyman (2012). The conducted study revealed that mothers, grandmothers, school and educational resources, religious beliefs, practices and access to information through media platforms play a vital role in the development of resilience for Basotho youth in the Thabo Mofutsanyana district (Free State) (Snyman, 2012).

Research conducted by Dawson (2013) comprised of the impact of culture and customs (macrosystem) on parenting capabilities of the South African parents (microsystem) to children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The study discovered that South African parents' experiences of raising a child affected by ASD are impacted by both Indigenous and Western Knowledge Systems (Dawson, 2013). Documented above, are conducted researches that utilised the ecological systems theory as a theoretical framework within the South African context, and have contributed greatly to the knowledge base in South Africa. Therefore, the ecological systems theory can be used with success for this study as well.

## 2.10 Conclusion

As this research seeks to understand the perceptions of the public school teachers in regards to Educational Psychologists' services, the bioecological systems theory appeared as an appropriate theoretical framework to understand where both professions fit in the context of the child. Furthermore, the bioecological systems theory emphasizes the importance of the interaction between the systems to enhance a child's development. Therefore, it awarded this research the opportunity to understand public school teachers' familiarity with Educational Psychologists' services and how they reach Educational Psychologists (exosystem) in Mamaila circuit to enhance learner support.

The bioecological systems theory further provided an opportunity to broadly think about the methodology of this research and established the foundation for the research design and methods, as discussed in Chapter 4.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### 3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the methodology for this qualitative research on public school teachers' perceptions of the services of Educational Psychologists in Mamaila Circuit. The applicability of qualitative research approach is discussed in this chapter along with the targeted population, sampling methods, how data was collected and analysed as well as the validity and reliability of the selected methods. Furthermore, participants will be described within their context with regards to socio-economic status and access to resources.

According to Creswell (2014), selecting the suitable research methodology must place insurmountable consideration to the rationale and the research questions that the research seeks to address. The methodology in this research describes the broad philosophical underpinning to the selected research methods, beginning with the approach, which in this case is the qualitative approach (Creswell, 2014). Based on the research title and rationale, qualitative research posed as the suitable approach as it awards the participants with the ability to express their thoughts and perceptions with minimal limitations. Furthermore, this research seeks to respond to the open-ended primary and secondary questions listed in Chapter 1 and the selected research approach provides platform to probe and counteract ambiguity in the quest to respond to the formulated research questions.

Based on the literature reviewed, most research conducted, both internationally and locally, utilized quantitative research approach in order to report the statistics behind the interaction between teachers and Educational Psychologists (Watkins, 2001; Corkum,

French & Dorey, 2007; Moola, 2011; Reader, 2014). However, one of the objectives of this research was to investigate the public school teachers' perceptions on the possible reasons behind the sufficient or scarcity of interaction between teachers and Educational Psychologists to enhance learner support in Mamaila Circuit. Thus, qualitative research approach and phenomenological research design provided an opportunity to acquire in-depth information in context to the formulated research objectives and the research questions.

### 3.2 Qualitative research approach

Berg (1998) defines qualitative research as the “meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions of things”. Therefore, qualitative research approach was used for the current study because of its ability to provide in-depth information, understand feelings, values, and perceptions that underlie individual experiences and influence behaviour (Mertens & Hesse-Biber, 2012). Furthermore, qualitative research emphasizes the vitality of the context in which the data is collected, which is in line with the chosen theoretical framework of this research. This research purports to explore the inter- and intra-subjective perceptions of public school teachers in the rural areas, which will be best achieved through qualitative research. In addition, qualitative research approach is able to uncover the meaning of what is stated by participants in relation to the reviewed topic (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2014).

### 3.3 Phenomenological research design

Within qualitative research approach, phenomenology research design was used for this research study. This phenomenological approach describes human experiences focusing on the participants' own perspectives (Vagle, 2018). In addition, phenomenological

research design provides an opportunity to possibly gain insights that provides direct contact with the daily experiences of the people (Vagle, 2018). The primary purpose of phenomenology stems from its philosophical origins, which is to study what it is like to find one in relation with others (Vagle, 2018). For instance, in this study, the researcher intends to find the relationship between public school teachers and Educational Psychologists to enhance learner support.

Conclusively, phenomenological research design allowed the researcher to gain an understanding of public school teachers' perceptions of Educational Psychologists' services in Mamaila circuit based on their daily experiences as they identify learning barriers and provide support for the learners (Mertens & Hesse-Biber, 2012).

### 3.4 Target population

The target population for the current study is the public school teachers in Limpopo Province, specifically in Mamaila circuit under Mopani District. Public schools in Mamaila Circuit include both primary and secondary schools in the rural areas. Mamaila circuit has twenty-one public schools, of which, twelve are primary and nine are secondary schools. According to the quintile ranking system (Department of Education, 1998), all the public schools in Mamaila circuit are considered to be no fee-paying schools as they fall under quintile 1. Quintile 1 schools are considered to be the schools that cater for "the poorest 20% of learners" (Department of Education, 2004). These are the schools that are considered to be of higher target in terms of resources and support provision (Department of Education, 2004).

### 3.4.1 Contextualization

These schools are situated in villages such as Makgakgapatse, Nakampe, Ga-phaphadi, Belleview, Ga-maphalle and Ga-ntata. Furthermore, these villages fall under the Greater Letaba Municipality and the Balobedu tribe in South Africa. Khelobedu is their unofficial spoken language, which is mostly translated into Sepedi during examinations and assessments. According to Statistics South Africa (2011), the Greater Letaba Municipality was at a population of approximately 212,701 and dominated by black Africans with 98.8%, followed by white population at 0.8% and both Indian and coloured populations at 0.1%.

In Mamaila circuit, statistics further stipulate that in 2011 youth unemployment rate was at 49.9%, only 6% of the population had higher education, 17.7% of the youth was able to reach matric, while 27% of the youth dropped out of school and the overall unemployment rate is at 40.3%. Additionally, female child headed households are at 56.8% and formal dwellings at 91.9%. Most of the households in these villages depend on agricultural revenues such as farming, animal grazing, livestock and chicken farms for survival (StatsSA, 2011). The statistics presented in this section are based on the StatsSA's report of the 2011 National Census, and the next National Census will be conducted in the year 2021.

The villages in Mamaila Circuit depend on community support through "stokvels", community organisations, church insurances and death covers to survive. Furthermore, most of these rural dwellers have limited access to quality health care services, as they have to walk long distances due to shortage of public transportation and funds to reach local public hospitals and clinics. It is further pointed that 55.3% of these communities

depend on community social support, traditional healers and church denominations for sustenance, while 88.8% also depend on elderly and child support grants (SA stats, 2011).



*Figure 2: Primary School in Mamaila Circuit*



*Figure 3: The streets of one of the rural areas in Mamaila Circuit*

### 3.4.2 Sampling method

Mamaila circuit has a variety of schools from public schools, private schools to Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) schools and colleges. The non-probability sampling technique known as purposive, convenience sampling was utilized to select two schools based on the characteristics of either being a public primary or secondary school situated in Mamaila Circuit. This was achieved through enquiry with the circuit office and

two schools that met the criteria within the vicinity of the researcher were selected. Purposive sampling method is selected because it allowed the researcher to access schools with the characteristics of the population being studied (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016). Purposive sampling of the schools awarded the researcher access to a population of participants with homogenous characteristics that qualified them to constitute a suitable sample for the research study.

Convenience sampling was utilized to access a sample of participants based on their accessibility and inclination to participate (Gravetter & Forzano, 2009). Inclusion criteria for participation/selection involved being a public school teacher in Mamaila circuit, and all the teachers in the selected schools had these characteristics. In the first school selected, eleven teachers participated and in the second school seven teachers participated. All male and female public school teachers within the two schools between the ages of 23 and 65 were invited to participate voluntarily in the study (see Table 1 and 2 below).

**Table 1**

*Demographic information of participants from research site 1 (Primary school)*

Research site 1:	Participant (P)	Age	Gender	Education Level	Experience	Inclusive Education Training
Primary school	P1	55	Female	B. Hons	24	Yes
	P2	59	Male	B. Hons	26	No
	P3	31	Male	B. Ed	4	Yes
	P4	36	Male	B. Ed	9	Yes
	P5	39	Female	B. Ed	13	Yes

	P6	50	Female	Diploma	21	No
	P7	50	Male	Diploma	20	No
	P8	43	Female	B. Ed	18	Yes
	P9	45	Female	B. Ed	12	No
	P10	39	Male	B. Ed	12	Yes
	P11	46	Male	Diploma	15	No

**Table 2**

*Demographic information of participants from research site 2 (Secondary school)*

Research site 2:	Participant (S)	Age	Gender	Education Level	Experience	Inclusive Education Training
Secondary school	S1	35	Male	B. Ed	6	Yes
	S2	50	Female	Diploma	20	No
	S3	37	Male	B. Ed	8	Yes
	S4	40	Male	B. Ed	13	No
	S5	51	Female	Diploma	22	No
	S6	54	Male	B. Ed	22	Yes
	S7	49	Male	Diploma	11	No

In research site 1 (Primary school), the sample consisted of 5 female participants and 6 male participants. Overall, there were 11 participants in the focus group. Two of the participants have less than 10 years teaching experience, 5 participants have over 10 years of teaching experience and 4 participants have over 20 years teaching experience. Three participants have a Diploma in Education, six participants hold a Bachelor’s degree in Education and two participants hold Honours degrees in Education Management. Six

of the participants indicated to have knowledge on inclusive education, learning support needs and/or functions of School Based Support Team (SBST).

In research site 2 (secondary school), the sample consisted of 2 female participants and 5 male participants. Overall, there were 7 participants in the focus group. Two of the participants have less than 10 years teaching experience, 2 participants have over 10 years of teaching experience and 3 participants have over 20 years teaching experience. Three participants hold a Diploma in Education and 4 participants hold a Bachelor's degree in Education. Only 3 of the participants indicated to have knowledge on inclusive education, learning support needs and/or functions of SBST.

Discussed below are the data collection tools that were utilized to acquire information from the participants.

### 3.5 Data collection tools

The two data collection tools utilized in this study included a biographical questionnaire, a semi-structured interview schedule and document analysis.

#### 3.5.1 Biographical questionnaire

The biographical questionnaire was essential in recording and providing statistics on age range, gender, number of years in teaching profession, familiarity of participants with inclusive education and the type of school (primary or secondary) they currently teach in. The information provided allowed the researcher to identify similarities and distinctions for a variety of perceptions regarding the research questions. The participants were handed the questionnaire and provided with time to fill the questionnaire.

### 3.5.2 Semi-structured interview schedule

The interview schedule was developed by the researcher on the basis of the relevant policies and literature. For instance, the SIAS policy was utilized in providing clarity on what learning barriers are, as a question on learning barriers is posed to the participants in the interview schedule. Research articles by Corkum, French and Dorey (2007), Reader (2014) and Watkins (2001) were utilized as guidance in developing the interview schedule (see Appendix 11 for the interview schedule).

The semi-structured interview schedule entailed a series of eight open-ended questions and was utilized to facilitate focus group discussions. Focus group discussions were selected for their ability to collect data from a purposely selected group of individuals (Nyumba, 2018). The semi-structured interview schedule was selected as it does not limit respondents to a set of pre-determined answers (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2014). In addition, this interview schedule provided the researcher with an opportunity to probe further during the discussions (Terre Blanche et al., 2014). Probing was an essential part of the interview as it provided the researcher an opportunity to ask the participants clarification questions that effectively eliminated misunderstandings in most cases (Marken, 2017). The focus group discussions were approximately an hour long, which provided the participants an opportunity to speak openly and provide in-depth responses.

The purpose of the open-ended questions was to obtain in-depth information on participants' perceptions on the frequently identified barriers to learning presented by learners in Mamaila circuit, perception regarding accessibility of psychological services, familiarity with the role of Educational Psychologists in Mamaila circuit and whether

participants find Educational Psychologists helpful, which are the research questions that this study seeks to answer.

### Language and transcription

The focus group discussions were conducted in English. The questions were asked in English and participants responded to the questions using a combination of English and their home language Khelobedu (indigenous African language). The participants would answer questions in English and through in some words and sentences in their home language. For instance, when the participants spoke about their personal distress as teacher, one of the participants indicated that “: *“I remember one day meneer once told another teacher okare otlile dikhomuni ( it is like you came here to herd cows) the way you are dressed...Go for support and not to criticize (appears concerned)”*. Khelobedu language is the researcher’s home language, therefore it was easier to understand and translate what the participants were discussing. The data was transcribed by the researcher, and further translated the African language words to English.

### 3.6 Pilot study

A pilot study was conducted to pre-test the interview questions prior to the commencement of the actual research focus group discussions (04 July 2018). Five public school teachers from different schools in Mamaila Circuit were selected through snowball sampling method. A focus group was created and the participants consented to participate in the research study. The aim of the pilot study was to assess the appropriateness and significance of the interview questions (Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001).

The participants were requested to provide feedback on the interview schedule so that adjustments could be made accordingly.

During the pilot study, the participants understood the questions with ease; however, they seemed to grapple with understanding the concept of “learning barriers” and the researcher had to prepare the definition of this term according to the SIAS policy (DoE, 2014) before commencing with the actual focus group discussions. In addition, the pilot study further enhanced the researcher’s interview skills and created awareness on personal feelings, values and perceptions regarding the research topic (see Section 4.6 Researcher Reflexivity).

Conclusively, most of the questions in the interview schedule evoked feelings of anger, helplessness and sadness. The pilot study further prepared the researcher to accommodate the emotions of the participants and get an understanding of what prompted the emotions (Kennedy, 2006).

### 3.7 Document analysis research method

According to Bowen (2009), document analysis is the process of systematically reviewing documents. These can either be printed or computer based material (Bowen, 2009). In comparison to other analysis methods in qualitative research, even in document analysis data is studied and understood to generate significance, comprehension and develop experiential information (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Documents analysed contain text or words that were recorded without the researcher’s intervention (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In the case of this research, learners’ schoolbooks were provided as evidence to back up an “inability to write” as a learning barrier experienced in Mamaila circuit.

The researcher went through the books provided by the participants to identify specific concerns such as reversing letters, an inability to write within the lines, struggles in copying from the board and struggling to identify where to begin when writing. In addition to focus group discussions as a qualitative method, document analysis awarded this research an opportunity to mitigate possible researcher's biases (Bowen, 2009). Document analysis was a form of triangulation and it mitigated researcher biases as it provided evidence of all the learning difficulties the participants indicated in the focus group discussions and were further discussed in this research report. Furthermore, it awarded the researcher with an opportunity to observe, understand and gain insight on frequently identified learning barriers by teachers.

### 3.8 Data Analysis

This section purports to describe the step-by-step processes the researcher followed in analysing both demographic information of the participants and the data collected through interviews.

#### 3.8.1 Descriptive analysis

The biographical questionnaire data was analysed using descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics allowed the researcher to provide demonstration and depiction of the indications from the collected data from the sample (Trochim, 2006). The raw data was captured and tabulated (see Table 1 and 2). The descriptive analysis was utilised for its ability to provide statistics on the number of participants, their age groups, gender and qualifications.

#### 3.8.2 Thematic analysis

Qualitative data is mostly subjective, distinct and contains in-depth information exhibited in the form of words, which are recorded and transcribed (Wong, 2008). Following the

process of transcription, the researcher is required to undergo the process of analysis, which entails reading transcripts, identifying differences and similarities, finding themes and developing categories (Wong, 2008). Data analysis systematically examines and organises interview transcripts and observes notes to proliferation the comprehension of the phenomenon (Wong, 2008).

### Transcription process

The transcribing process involved converting speech to text word for word (Streefkerk, 2019). The researcher was responsible for transcribing the research interviews recorded on an audio tape. The researchers followed the transcribing stages listed by Streefkerk (2019) as choosing preferred transcription method, transcribing the audio, clarifying the transcript where necessary and proofreading the transcript. The researcher followed the verbatim transcription method. This transcription method was chosen for its ability to include pauses, the emotions expressed such as laughter and hesitations such as “uhmm” (Streefkerk, 2019). Therefore, the researcher was able to track how the participants seemed to feel when they expressed a specific point (Streefkerk, 2019). After transcribing, the researcher listened to the audio and clarified where information might have been missed and further began with the data analysis process.

Data analysis in this research was accomplished by using Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) described thematic analysis as a technique that identifies, analyses and reports patterns (themes) within the data collected. Thematic analysis is selected based on its flexibility and usefulness in potentially delivering rich and in-depth account of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Furthermore, thematic analysis assists the construction of unexpected insights and provides a process to interpret data at both

an individual and social level based on the research topic (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Daly, Kallehear and Gliksman (2017) indicate that thematic content analysis is a search for themes that emerged as being important to the description of the data collected. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), “thematic analysis can be a method that works both to reflect reality and to unpick or unravel the surface of ‘reality’”, which is the purpose of this research project.

Identifying themes within thematic analysis can be accomplished in two primary ways: in an inductive ‘bottom up’ way or in a deductive ‘top down’ way. An inductive approach entails a strong linkage between the data and the themes identified. In an inductive approach, the themes identified may uphold relation to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Additionally, the researcher has to select the level at which themes will be identified, either at the semantic or latent level. With a semantic level of analysis, the themes are identified within the explicit or surface connotations of the data and the researcher will not be looking for anything beyond what the participants have stated. On the contrary, deductive thematic analysis is “driven by the researcher’s theoretical or analytic interest in the area, and is thus more explicitly analyst driven” (p. 4) (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The latent level of theme identification goes beyond reporting the data and identifying underlying ideas, assumptions and conceptualisations (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Within the flexibility provided by the thematic analysis approach, an inductive thematic analysis at the semantic level was used to analyse the data collected in the current research. The researcher did not pay attention to comparisons between the experiences

and perceptions of Mamaila circuit public school teachers with those recorded in other contexts or studies. The researcher's interest lied in thoroughly detailing participants' perceptions from the data collected and what it means to them as a school community. The researcher made an effort not to identify underlying meanings, ideas or assumptions in the analysis of the data (reflexive).

The researcher followed the following six phases of thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) and by Daly, Kallehear and Gliksman (2017). A step-by-step description of the data analysis implemented in this study is provided underneath.

#### Phase 1: Becoming familiar with the data

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), the initial phase in a thematic content analysis is for the researcher to get familiarized with the data. The researcher differentiated participants by assigning the letter 'P' to represent primary school participants in the transcripts and assigned the letter 'S' to represent secondary school participants. Prior to reading the interview transcripts, the researcher created a "start list" of potential codes, which were initially identified in the interviews. This was to assist the researcher to identify and record the themes in an orderly manner, once the codes were identified. The researcher read and re-read the transcripts while highlighting and taking notes of potential codes until she was comfortable with the data.

#### Phase 2: Generating initial codes

The second phase in the thematic analysis was to generate an initial list of items from the data set that have a reoccurring pattern to generate codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher identified all the participants' responses that were potential answers to

particular research questions and further noted them down. This coding process involves going back and forth (flexibility) between phases of data analysis as needed until the researcher was satisfied with the final themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During the analysis, the researcher identified similarities and/or differences in the codes identified. For instance, participants indicated that the “learners do not listen in class”, “they are disruptive” and “they do not follow instructions”. These codes were combined together to fall under one code or theme of “behavioural challenges”.

### Phase 3: Searching for themes

At this point, the researcher had a list of themes and began to focus on broader patterns in the data, combining coded data with the proposed themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher also began considering how relationships are formed between codes and themes and between different levels of existing themes (Daly et al., 2017). For instance, when identifying the common themes between the primary and secondary school, participants in the secondary school reason that “psychologists work in police stations since police men kill each other in the field” and the “psychologists have to check their minds”. At the primary school, participants indicated that they have heard of instances where “someone has committed a crime and they needed a psychologist to check the mind”. Initially, these were considered separate codes, but with careful consideration, the researcher identified the similarity in the indication that “psychologists work with the mind” and the participants clarified this with instances of crime and murders amongst policemen.

### Phase 4: Reviewing themes

During the reviewing of themes, the researcher searched for data that supports or disproves the proposed themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This allowed the researcher to

further expand on themes as they developed. For instance, at the primary school, participants had indicated that the learners are disruptive and at the secondary school, they emphasized the lack of discipline in the school and high rates of substance and drug abuse. Both schools have behavioural challenges, however, they were indicated in different ways. The primary school learners are not yet exposed to substance abuse, which is different from secondary school learners. However, there is a similarity that both schools struggle with behavioural problems and discipline, which the researcher collapsed to form one theme.

#### Phase 5: Defining and naming themes

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), it is important to identify the themes' principles related to how each specific theme affects the entire picture of the data. Analysis at this stage was characterized by identifying which aspects of data are being captured, what is interesting about the themes and why the themes are interesting (Daly et al., 2017). The existing themes were defined and refined to represent themes in the final results (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Some themes identified were not expected by the researcher, such as teachers' personal distress and the teachers getting into intimate relationships with the learners as discussed in the results section. To assist in identifying common themes, the researcher renamed the themes that are similar, keeping in mind the differences in the participants' elaborations. These are discussed and elaborated further in the results and discussion section.

#### Phase 6: Producing the report

In writing up the results, the researcher utilized extracts (verbatim) from the interview content as evidence to the identified themes. In conclusion, the researcher described the

data and involved interpretation of the meaning of the content in order to form an argument in response to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In order to ensure the credibility and reliability of the identified themes, the research utilized the concept of trustworthiness.

### 3.8 Trustworthiness

Guba and Lincoln (1985), introduced trustworthiness in qualitative research to answer the question “can the findings be trusted?” Since qualitative research does not utilize instruments with established metrics about validity and reliability, trustworthiness is vital when conducting qualitative research as it addresses the credibility of the research (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). Therefore, the validity of the qualitative data in this research was ensured through the four components of trustworthiness namely the “credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability” (Trochim, 2019).

#### 3.8.1 Credibility

Credibility is involved in establishing that the results of the research are credible or believable (Trochim, 2019) from the perspective of the participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). This depends more on the richness of the information gathered, rather than the amount of data gathered (Streubert-Speziale & Carpenter, 2007). According to Korstjens and Moser (2018), credibility is most concerned with the truth value. To ensure credibility in this research, the researcher utilized strategies such as prolonged engagement, method triangulation and data verification (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). This study further used piloting of the research instruments to ensure credibility (see 4.5.3 Pilot study).

Prolonged engagement entailed long lasting engagement with the participants during the interviews as the researcher was not time limited by the participants (Trochim, 2019).

Streubert-Speziale and Carpenter (2007) further indicated that the participants are the only ones who can reasonably judge the credibility of the results. Therefore, prolonged engagement awarded the researcher an opportunity to probe and move back and forth with the research questions to ensure saturation.

Triangulation purposes enhances credibility in any qualitative research by granting the researcher an opportunity to utilize multiple approaches (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). As discussed in the Methodology section, the researcher utilized focus group discussions, observations and document analysis as data collection methods. Information provided in the focus group discussions was supported by observations made within the school contexts and the written work in the learners' books. Theoretical saturation was achieved through debriefing sessions and data verification meetings following the transcription process to allow the participants to point out whether the researcher captured and understood all information they provided without additions and omissions (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Lastly, a pilot study was conducted to pre-test the interview questions and identify whether the interview questions complement and answer the research questions in an appropriate manner. Thus, increasing the confirmability and minimising researcher's biases.

### 3.8.2 Transferability

Transferability is the extent with which qualitative findings can be transferred to other settings or groups; it is a concept similar to generalizability (Trochim, 2019). In other descriptions, transferability is the degree to which the findings of this inquiry can apply or transfer beyond the bounds of the project (Streubert-Speziale & Carpenter, 2007). Guba and Lincoln (1985) believe that transferability speaks to the aspect of applicability.

Furthermore, it is asserted that the reader is responsible for making the judgment or assessing whether the research is transferable (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). The researcher provided demographic descriptive quantitative data, a thick description of the research process, research participants and the setting to assist the reader in assessing the transferability of the current research to their context (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). This would mean any South African population with similar profile, following the same research procedure and answering the same research questions are likely to yield similar results, with minor differences here and there (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

### 3.8.3 Dependability

Dependability includes the aspect of consistency (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). Dependability is demonstrated by indicating to the reader that repeating the inquiry with similar subjects in similar context will yield similar results (Streubert-Speziale & Carpenter, 2007). An audit log was utilised as a strategy to enhance the consistency of the research (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). An audit log is a chronological record of documents which provide evidence of the sequence that are part of the research procedure (Smit, 2018). The researcher has provided detailed information on the research process, research meetings, sampling, research materials such as the interview schedule, demographic information of the participants, request letters of entry to the schools and Mamaila circuit. Moreover, information on findings and information on how data was analysed to enhance the consistency of the research in instances where the research would be re-conducted has also been detailed (Guba & Lincoln, 1985).

### 3.8.4 Confirmability

Confirmability concerns the aspect of neutrality (Trochim, 2019). Confirmability is demonstrated by indicating the degree to which findings are the product of the focus of inquiry and not the biases of the researcher (Streubert-Speziale & Carpenter, 2007). The inter-subjectivity of the data was secured through the process of interpretation in data analysis. The researcher ensured that the viewpoints and perceptions are not based on the researcher's preferences but are grounded in data (Guba & Lincoln, 1985).

### 3.9 Researcher Reflexivity

In addition to the four criteria of trustworthiness to judge the validity of this research, researcher reflexivity was utilised as an “integral part of ensuring transparency and the quality of the research data collected” (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Researcher reflexivity involves the process of critical self-reflection as a researcher and how the researcher may influence the responses to the research questions that the participants have shared (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

The researcher acknowledges the presence of subjective views, values, experiences and attitudes about the topic in question because the researcher is also a former learner at one of the Primary schools in Mamaila circuit. The researcher further acknowledges that these views, values, experiences and attitudes may have affected the way the researcher interacts with the participants and how the data collected was analysed. To counteract these influences, the researcher continuously reflected on the existing feelings and position as a researcher of the topic. The researcher further relied on therapy and supervision to discuss these issues.

For instance, the researcher relied mostly on the containment provided in supervision through phone calls and emails when she was on-site collecting data. The researcher was at times overwhelmed and stirred by some of the learning barriers the participants shared and the feelings of helplessness to provide sufficient and quality learner support. The researcher was encouraged to be aware of and express those recurring feelings in therapy, in supervision and in writing (journal). Furthermore, the researcher allowed the participants to voice their experiences without any interference and ensured that the discussion in the focus group was reported accurately.

### 3.10 Research Procedure

In this section, the research process of this study is outlined to document a step by step process, in case there is a need to replicate this study in a similar or different context. Initially, a research report was outlining the aim, methodology and ethical considerations was presented and approved by the methodology and ethics readers. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Wits University Ethics Committee on the 29<sup>th</sup> of May 2018 (HREC Non-Med, MEDP/18/005 IH) (see Appendix 1). Application for permission to conduct research was granted by Mamaila circuit (Limpopo Department of Education) under the condition that the researcher does not conduct research during teaching hours (see Appendix 2). Letters were sent to public school principals via email addresses obtainable at the Mamaila circuit office, to request for permission to collect data at the respective schools (30 June'2018) (see Appendix 4).

A pilot study was conducted with five teachers to pre-test the interview questions and identify whether the research questions are answered in an appropriate manner and for the researcher to practice her interview skills (04 July'2018). Interview questions were

refined on the basis of the pilot study. The researcher sent letters of request via email to visit two schools in Mamaila circuit (30 July'2018). Consent letters from both the school were received on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of August 2018 and the 7<sup>th</sup> of August 2018 (see Appendix 5 and 6). The researcher visited both schools on the approved dates to conduct research (07 August'2018 and 08 August'2018). The teachers who confirmed their availability and willingness to participate in the research were verbally informed of the requirements and ethical considerations of the research and given the opportunity to read the information sheet (see Appendix 7) and informed consent form (see Appendix 8) prior signing.

Participants were requested to complete a biographical questionnaire (see Appendix 9) prior the commencement of the focus group discussions to get their age, gender, number of years in teaching profession and the type of school they currently teach. The biographical information were kept safe and secure in a locked cabinet. The participants voluntarily participated in the focus group discussions, which were recorded with a voice recorder. The focus group discussions ran for approximately an hour each. After the focus group discussion, some of the participants took the researcher to their respective classes to show her some of the learning difficulties that frustrate them in relation to reading and writing (see photos in Appendix 12).

The recorded raw data was downloaded in a password protected computer, which only the researcher had access to (8<sup>th</sup> August'2018). The recorded material was transcribed and saved in a password protected computer. The data was analysed using thematic analysis as described in the data analysis section. After completion of the transcription, the recorded content was destroyed to ensure confidentiality and the transcripts were stored in the university 'WIREDspace' archive and a password protected computer (22

November'2018). The researcher went back to the research sites in Mamaila circuit for data verification with the participants before commencing with the report writing process (06 May'2019). The results of this research will be made available to Mamaila circuit office and the participants upon request. The participants were informed of the contact details of the researcher to request for a summary of the research results.

### 3.11 Ethical considerations

Prior to commencing data collection, the research proposal was reviewed and accepted by the Wits University Ethics Committee. The researcher did not collect data during school activity hours as assurance to the Mamaila circuit office upon granting their permission. Principals of the targeted schools were contacted via email to seek permission for these public schools to participate in the research.

The following ethics were considered and communicated to the participants on the information sheet prior data collection:

#### 3.11.1 Autonomy and respect for the dignity of participants

Autonomy involves honouring the rights of participants to make their own voluntary informed decisions to take part in the research (Terre Blanche et al., 2014). Much emphasis was placed on voluntary participation and the participants' right to withdraw from the study at any time they choose to do so without any penalty. Participants signed informed consent forms voluntary prior to the commencement of focus group discussions. Under no circumstances was any participant coerced to participate in the research if they did not desire to do so.

### 3.11.2 Anonymity and confidentiality

Confidentiality and anonymity involved protecting the identity of participants and their responses (Fouka & Mantzorou, 2011). Confidentiality and anonymity was of utmost importance for this research. The protection of participants' identity was not guaranteed during focus group discussions because the participants were able to identify each other as colleagues. However, to counteract the weakness caused by lack of anonymity, the importance of confidentiality was emphasized prior the commencement of the group discussions (Olivier, 2009) and the participants were further requested to address each other with pseudo names, such as "meneer", as a reminder to maintain confidentiality within and outside the group discussions. The participants were not required to give out their names in the focus group discussions and they were assured that none of their names or their school names would be mentioned in the research report. Only the researcher and the supervisor have access to the information provided by participants and is kept safe and secure as previously discussed.

The participants were informed that the results would be reported in a Masters Research report, may be published in scientific journals and presented at conferences. Furthermore, the researcher was careful on reporting and presenting the results of the research to protect the participants.

### 3.11.3 Non-maleficence

Non-maleficence involved ensuring that participants are not harmed or placed at risk as a consequence of taking part in the research (Fouka & Mantzorou, 2011). The participants were provided full details on the purpose of the research and were not coerced into

participation. Participants were treated fairly and were not coerced to respond to any questions they were not comfortable with.

#### 3.11.4 Beneficence

According to Terre Blanche et al. (2014), beneficence involves the effort to increase the benefits that the research will provide to participants. In this study, there was no direct benefit for participating, however, the results provided information that is beneficial in terms of providing support and school-based mental health services to public school teachers and their learners. Furthermore, the conversations during research interviews stimulated the participants' thoughts on the subject, fuelled their curiosity and required answers and assistance with the questions they had. Therefore, this may have been an indirect and unintended benefit to the participants and the schools.

#### 3.12 Conclusion

In conclusion, this section has thoroughly outlined the specific procedures utilised to identify and select participants, process and analyse data regarding public school teachers' perceptions on Educational Psychologists' services in Mamaila circuit. Furthermore, it has stipulated the processes followed for the reader to critically evaluate the overall validity and reliability of the research findings, which are discussed in the next chapter.

## Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter reports the findings that emerged out the data, which is the content of the interviews. The findings are presented as the significant themes identified from the content of the interviews. Furthermore, these findings are discussed in relation to the literature and theoretical framework discussed in this research, to further explore where Mamaila circuit is in terms of learner support.

The process of data analysis described in Chapter 4 was utilised to answer the research questions. The primary research question is - What are public school teachers' perceptions on Educational Psychologists' services in Mamaila circuit? Five secondary research questions explored by the study are:

- What is the public school teachers' understanding of the role of Educational Psychologists?
- To what extent do public school teachers perceive psychological services to be accessible in Mamaila circuit schools?
- What are the frequently identified barriers to learning presented by learners in Mamaila circuit schools?
- Do public school teachers in Mamaila circuit find Educational Psychologists helpful?
- If any, what are the barriers to Educational Psychology services in Mamaila circuit?

According to the Centre for Support and Training in Analysis and Research (2010), data is collected and studied to answer secondary questions, which are instrumental in

defining any relational claims, in regards to the primary question. The research activities sought to respond to the secondary questions and which in the ultimate end would address the primary question.

#### 4.2 Themes identified in response to secondary questions

The first secondary question posed to the participants was, what are the frequently identified barriers to learning presented by learners in Mamaila circuit schools? From the pilot study, the researcher had identified that some of the participants struggled to understand what is meant [specifically] by the term learning barriers. Therefore, the researcher prepared a definition of this term prior the focus groups with the participants. The researcher drew the definition of learning barriers from the Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support policy (SIAS) (Department of Education [DoE], 2014). The SIAS policy indicates that “barriers to learning refer to difficulties that arise within the education system as a whole, the learning site and/or within the learner him/herself, which prevent access to learning and development”. The participants indicated they have never heard of and have never been exposed to the SIAS policy document.

After clarity was provided on what learning barriers are, the participants appeared to feel uninhibited to answer the question that was posed to them: what are the frequently identified barriers to learning presented by learners in Mamaila circuit schools? (Observation, 2018). Six themes were identified in answering this question; which included, inability to read and write, behavioural challenges, socioeconomic background of the learners, lack of collaboration with parents, teachers’ personal distress and lack of departmental support. Surprisingly, the participants by no means ever mentioned a lack

of infrastructure such as classrooms, transport to school, tables, chairs and textbooks as barriers to learning.

In reports, it is mostly observed and indicated that the primary learning barrier in rural schools is a lack of infrastructure. According to Khumalo and Mji (2014), infrastructure in rural schools is the major problem and this limits access to quality education and learners dropping out of school. Carelse (2018) pointed out that “driving on roads in South Africa, one sees many uniformed children walking to school or back home, as transport is entirely lacking or inconsistent. For many learners in rural schools, there is indeed no transport available. Having one’s own desk at school is a luxury that cannot be taken for granted (p.1).”

The absence of desks and other essentials may not be perceived as barriers to learning for Mamaila circuit public school teachers as they have found ways to adjust to the lack of infrastructure in their schools. Upon enquiry, in the foundation phase classes, the teachers have introduced ‘reading mats’, where learners sit on the mats to do their school work such as reading (Observation, August’2018). Furthermore, there is collaboration between the schools and community churches, “stokvels” and organisations. These organisations use the schools for safekeeping of their equipment such as tables, chairs and tents; which the school committee is permitted to utilise for the education process (Observation, August’2018).

In the two rural schools visited in Mamaila Circuit, the participants indicated the following as learning barriers:

## Theme 1: Learners' inability to read and write

This theme refers to learners' difficulties in reading and writing. According to the American Psychiatric Association [APA] (2013), these challenges may be referred to as Dyslexia and Dysgraphia, respectively. Dyslexia is defined as difficulties in reading, interpreting words or constructing meaning out of letters and symbols (APA, 2013). Dysgraphia is a difficulty associated with written expressions (APA, 2013). The scope of practice and training for Educational Psychologists equips them with the skills to assess, diagnose and provide intervention for these difficulties to support the learners (HPCSA, 2017).

From the focus group discussions, a common finding from both the primary and secondary school was that some of their learners struggle to read and write. The participants indicated that some of their learners do not even know where to start when they read and write. For instance, they have learners who start writing from the end of the book going backward or turn books upside down when reading. Primary school participants showed concern that some learners would even struggle to copy a three letter word such as "cat" from the chalkboard. The learners would also struggle to write within the lines in their books; reverse letters or write words that make no sense (see Appendix 12). Examples of this perception are demonstrated in the following quotes:

*P5: "Another thing, there are learners that cannot copy. You write something on the board there, but they can't copy even though they are looking at the word, they can't copy a simple word with 3 letters, like Cat or dog".*

*P1: very true. I have a learner in my class who just scribbles. No matter how hard you try to hold their hand to write the correct things, they just can't do it"*

*P3: "I think in our phase, foundation phase it is worse, learners even turn the books upside down when you ask them to read. I teach grade 3 and a learner still doesn't know where to start when reading or writing".*

Secondary school learners are said to struggle with their reading and writing as well. The teachers indicated that there are learners who even struggle to write their own names despite being in the higher grades. One of the participants added that he has observed that some of these learners prefer to sit outside of the classroom because they struggle with their school work. Spelling was also an identified challenge with regards to writing. All the participants had a common frustration on learner participation; not understanding whether some of the learners struggle with their school work or they just prefer to keep quiet and not participate in the classroom. When asked about their concerns, the participants asserted that:

*S2: "in grade 10 neh, there is a learner that cannot write. Cannot write a sentence or even her name"*

*S3: "I have always wondered what her story is. And it's not just her, there are 2 boys in grade 9 as well who cannot read or write".*

*S1: "ya, I have seen spelling problems as well. You could teach a learner to spell a word now, the next minute they forgot the word, they can't even spell it anymore"*

*S4: "Sometimes even when we are in the class, these learners don't even want to sit in the class because they can't do anything".*

*S2: Just to add on that meneer, it is frustrating because we end up not knowing whether they can't write or they are just bored in the class".*

*Other participants: hmm, hmm (nodding their heads)*

The participants further indicated that most of the learners that struggle with reading and writing appear to be distant in class, sitting by themselves or they are all over the place, disturbing other learners and teaching lessons. Some of their learners just prefer to go outside and play instead of being in class. As the researcher was listening to the participants discussing their frustrations on this theme and as an Educational Psychology

student, the researcher could identify some possible symptoms of learning difficulties such as Attention-Deficit/Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD) as indicated in the DSM-5 (APA, 2013). These include being forgetful, struggling to remain seated, interrupting others and being lost in their own thoughts.

It was probed further on what the participants contemplate as the possible cause of these challenges they experience in terms of reading and writing. Responses to this question from both schools included that the participants think that learners nowadays are “just lazy”, “disrespectful” and “they don’t listen”. On the contrary, other participants thought that perhaps the learners just genuinely struggled with reading and writing, that is why they [the learners] prefer being outside and not listen to the teacher’s instructions.

In the primary school, the argument on whether participants believe that learners are “just lazy” or they “really struggle to read and write” fuelled as participant P1 and P4 emphasised that:

*P1: “I would rather believe that a child is struggling in school than label them lazy or disrespectful without knowing for sure what the problem is. How will you help the child if you have already made up your mind that they just don’t want to learn?”*

*P4: “I agree. We may not have an idea what the problem is but the least we can do is have a positive view of the child rather than think they are just not interested”*

Other participants argued that:

*P6: “well it is frustrating to have hope on a situation that you are not certain of, those are just your opinions. What if we are right, these kids are just lazy?”*

*P7: “hmm, perhaps if we had an idea of what could be happening with the child, we can then be put at ease and not be too hard on the child, and try to help the child instead but for now, I don’t know”*

*P11: "I guess we will never know, everyone will just have to respond to the situation the best way they know how. What do we do then because these are just our opinions?"*

Reading and writing are essential tools individuals utilise to enhance their knowledge, attain effective written and expressive language and become exposed to the experiences of the world (Shriver, 1999; Sadiku, 2015). Therefore, every learner deserves an opportunity to develop their reading and writing skills (Sadiku, 2015). From the discussions, it was identified that participants experience feelings of helplessness and frustration as they grapple with understanding the reason behind their learners' inability to read and write. Interestingly, it also appeared that even though the participants struggle to understand their learners who struggle with reading and writing; participants who indicated to have some knowledge on inclusive education (see Table 1) opted to rather view the children positively ("they need support") rather than negatively ("they are just lazy").

The Head of Department (HOD) of foundation phase and both the principals from primary and secondary school were amongst the focus group participants. In both schools, they indicated to feel as if they are "failures" as they struggle to assist learners or respond to their colleagues' concerns as the school management.

The HOD and principal of the primary school indicated that:

*P2: "even I as the principal, I become helpless with such issues, teachers bring them to me, I appeal to the department and parents to help us, but help never comes, what can I do?"*

*P1: "to add to that, I am the HOD for foundation phase and I never know what to do with such difficulties, and my heart becomes painful when I feel maybe there is something we*

*can do to help the child. We have sent lists of learners who struggle to the department so they can tell us what to do, even today we still don't know what is happening”*

The secondary school principal asserted that:

*S2: “you know, it is even harder when you are the leader and everyone requires answers from you. At that time you don't even know where to start because the only place we can reach out to is the Department of Education, but we never receive help.”*

From the above extracts, it is noted that even the schools' management bodies, just like the other teachers feel helpless about learner support. They have sought assistance from parents (mesosystem) and the Department of Education (exosystem) but in vain, due to a lack of information.

According to the Screening Identification Assessment and Support (SIAS) policy (DoE, 2014), the implementation of Inclusive Education initiates with developing key coordinating structures such as the School-Based Support Teams (SBSTs) and the District-Based Support Teams (DBSTs). These teams work in collaboration to facilitate the process of screening, identifying, assessing barriers and provide support for the learners (DoE, 2014). Furthermore, the SBSTs are supposed to be led by school principals to ensure adequate care and support. However, the results of this study indicate that the school principals in both Mamaila circuit schools are not familiar with the SIAS policy and SBST leadership, which hinders the process of learner support.

As much as an inability to read and write overwhelmed teaches, it was further indicated as one of the possible sources of behavioural challenges. Learners who struggle to read and write were said to be “disruptive” and “disrespectful”. Research indicates that emotions can impact a child's ability to read and write in school and vice versa (Hascher,

2010; Dunn, 2016). For instance, according to the bioecological systems theory, the microsystem's lack of knowledge on dyslexia and dysgraphia in Mamaila circuit has led to frustration and confusion, which has further led to labelling learners "lazy", "disruptive" and "disrespectful". A learner who's aware that he/she struggles with their reading and writing may experience low self-esteem, anxiety, emotional distress, bullying and exclusion in the school context, which may ultimately impact a child's learning process and contribute to the child's misfit in the school environment.

According to Lyons and Beilock (2012), emotional distress is listed as one of the major contributors of behavioural challenges, poor academic performance and suicide. A learner's emotional wellbeing is significant for progress in school as much as the ability to focus and learn (Tresize, 2017). In addition, emotional distress is a possible cause of behavioural challenges observed in children (Tresize, 2017). A child's emotions and experiences can impact their ability or inability to engage in the classroom environment (Lyons & Beilock, 2012; Tresize, 2017). The microsystem is frustrated and feels helpless in responding to learners' learning difficulties, which ultimately impacts learner support as a whole.

## Theme 2: Behavioural challenges

This theme refers to behavioural challenges. According to the Emerson (2001), behavioural challenges are "culturally abnormal behaviours of such an intensity, frequency or duration that the safety of the person or others is likely to be placed in serious jeopardy". Behavioural challenges can either be internalized (anxiety) or externalized (disruptive behaviour) (Ogundele, 2018). This means a biophysiological aspect of the

child's behavioural patterns need to be taken to consideration for the appropriate institution of the micro- and meso-systematic interventions.

In this study all participants have indicated that they struggle with behavioural challenges. At primary school, bullying was considered as the major behavioural challenge. This is indicated through disrupting the learning process, grabbing things from classmates by force and lack of respect for teachers. One participant added that behavioural challenges are a depiction of home situations, and since learners have realized that there is no corporal punishment, they portray these behaviours in school. Behavioural challenges are described in the following quotes:

*P4: "these learners don't even have that respect for teachers. That is why they disturb the process of reading and writing in class"*

*P11: "they would fight each other right in front of their teachers, grab pens and other things from each other, it gets too much at times"*

*P8: "even if you teach, if she doesn't want to listen to you, you will talk until you knock off. Never cooperating. They would talk and walk up and down while you are teaching"*

In addition to the behavioural challenges noted at the primary school, high school participants indicated that their major behavioural challenge are substance abuse, which include drugs and alcohol and the inability of the learners to produce school work when needed. The participants are concerned about being there for their learners emotionally, while they feel emotionally challenged by the disrespectful and disruptive behaviour of some of the learners. They end up being frustrated about the rude behaviour their learners bring to class and this leads to conflict between them and learners, resulting in the disruption of the entire learning process.

Interestingly, one participant added that learners who are quiet in class and would never participate or interact with anyone including their teachers also have behavioural challenges. Another participant added that it is quite frustrating and disrespectful of the learner to just keep quiet and not respond when spoken to, “how will they learn?” On the contrary, some teachers indicated that they would rather have a quiet learner in their class than a disruptive one. This was backed up by the participants who indicated that, “at least a quiet learner would not disrupt other learners who want to learn”.

The participants were posed with a question on what they consider to be the reasons behind the learners’ silence and disruptive behaviour in class. Some of the responses included the assumption that the learners are just disrespectful by nature, they are not taught respect in their homes and they know extensively about their human rights. This led to participants indicating that the learners take advantage of the fact that corporal punishment is forbidden in schools and they can behave immoral as they like.

Having discussed emotional challenges leading to suicidality in the previous these, it emerged that behavioural challenges are a common cause of suicide in their schools (Shilubane, Bos, Ruiter, Borne, Van Den & Reddy, 2015). Most learners and teachers who committed suicide appeared to be dealing with internalized emotions, which weighed them down.

#### [Sub-theme: Mental Health related difficulties](#)

Among the learning barriers that teachers in the two schools identified are related with mental health. While child and adolescent mental health are neglected areas of focus, this study suggest the need to pay attention to child and adolescent mental states as presented in the education setting. Depression and anxiety, with features of suicidality

are reported to be prevalent in among South African children (Shilubane et al., 2015). In specific terms, teachers in both primary and secondary schools reported that they lose some of their learners to suicide. The World Health Organisation (WHO) (2019) describes suicide as an act of taking one's own life and is the third leading cause of death in children between the ages of 12 and 19 years old. Sadly, during the data verification focus groups, the participants indicated that they have lost a 13 year old learner the previous week who took her own life (Observation, 06 May'2019). The learner was described as withdrawn in class and her school performance was inadequate. The participants indicated that they thought she is reaching the teenage phase and by no means thought it was anything "serious". This further indicates the urgency on informing teachers on roles of their school support personnel including Educational Psychologists, working collaboratively and referring to Educational Psychologists for further assistance in learner support. The following extracts highlight this point:

*P3: "we are in mourning as we speak"*

*P6: "we have lost one of our grade 7 learners, she committed suicide over the weekend"*

*Researcher: "that is sad news. My condolences to the school and her family. How are you holding up?"*

*P1: "to tell you the truth, it is not easy. We saw the signs but we took them for granted. This child was very withdrawn and I wish we could have reached out and spoke with her maybe we could have saved her life"*

Suicide has also been identified to be common amongst the teachers as well. The participants indicated that they also go through their challenges in their own personal lives, which makes it difficult to reach most of their learners emotionally.

Gray (2018) asserted that suicide is the “third leading cause of death in school-aged children over 10 years old”. It is indicated that there is high suicide ideation and attempts when learners are in school rather than when they are at home. This further indicates that teachers are more perceptive of children’s problems than parents (Gray, 2018). Therefore, it is vital for teachers to be well informed of such instances where behaviour is caused by emotional distress. They should be able to identify children’s struggles and should refer for further assistance and intervention in therapy and other possible ways (Gray, 2018). Findings show that Mamaila circuit school communities appear to be no exception to mesosystem psychosocial challenges such as child headed homes, unavailable parents and bullying which may lead to suicide and would benefit from a collaboration with Educational Psychologists. Furthermore, the bio-physiological aspect of children presenting with depressive and anxiety symptoms need may need intensive health care interventions, which means there is a great need for the micro- and the meso-systems to work in the integrated approach to address the biopsychosocial needs of children and adolescents.

### Theme 3: Teachers’ personal distress

This theme, which refers to teachers’ personal problems that contribute to their distress came out strong in both focus group discussions. All participants reported concerns on the challenges that they encounter in their personal lives for which they do not receive support or counselling. Participants indicated that they require help in this regard. Instances highlighted include high indebtedness, which causes distress, domestic violence, culpable homicide and suicide. The following extract highlights the point:

*P11: “even us as educators, we have got other colleagues, you hear that your colleague has committed suicide and killed the wife and children, why? Because of challenges of life”*

*P1: “we need help (with a sad voice)”*

*P7: “I remember one day meneer once told another teacher that it is like you came here to herd cows the way you are dressed and you don’t understand the teacher’s problem, go to his boots and you will understand. Go for support and not to criticize (appears concerned)”*

*P3: “True, I mean we are having teachers who are dying (appears sad)”*

*P5: “let’s not even go far, one of our principals committed suicide in her office due to personal problems”*

*P2: “eish that is still a deep wound for us even now”*

*All participants:” hmm, hmm (nodding heads)”*

It is further highlighted that teachers need intervention at both the school level and the personal one. Analysing the teachers’ utterances from a bioecological point of view; depression, anxiety and other mental health issues, need a biopsychological intervention that the mesosystem in the form of the Department of Health need to provide. Following the idea that teachers form the majority of the government workforce (Armstrong, 2015), an effective inter-mesosystemic collaboration between the Department of Education and the Department of Health in addressing issues of mental health is necessary. In addition, one participant indicated that some teachers end up in intimate relationships with the learners, as a way of relieving stress. Some teachers are having marital issues and they come to school with a lot of anger and they end up fighting with both their colleagues and their learners.

Mamaila circuit teachers are aware of their personal challenges which may hinder effective teaching and learning. The current era is the one wherein societies value

education and strive to respond to learners' difficulties in an empathetic way (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). When Educational Psychologists provide emotional support to teachers to confront certain stressful situations in which their actions can impact the students' learning and wellbeing, only then empathetic learning environments will be promoted (Ruzek, Hafen, Allen, Gregory, Mikami & Pianta, 2016; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Emotional support will further help teachers to handle circumstances they've never encountered before brought to school by challenging groups of learners, crowded classrooms, a lack of enthusiasm and absent parents, which will strengthen both the microsystem and the mesosystem (Hogekamp, Blomster, Bursalio, Mihaela, Cetincelik & Van den Berg, 2016; Ruzek et al., 2016).

#### Theme 4: Socioeconomic background of the learners

The socioeconomic background defines an individual's social and economic status in comparison to others based on the household earnings, education and work (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2008).

The socioeconomic background of learners is said to create a barrier for effective teaching and learning. Some learners miss school and upon enquiry, it is revealed that the child had no food or sanitary products. Furthermore, some learners are raised in child headed homes and they have to acquire piece jobs to fend for their families. Furthermore, it has been indicated that there are certain instances where learners would miss school in the morning and only come in during lunch time to eat. The following extract highlights the point:

*S7: "we are in a rural area, there is no money, there are no resources and families are struggling"*

*S5: "you find that the reason a child doesn't come to school properly, it is because of the responsibilities they have at home, some have to go look for piece jobs just so they can have something to eat"*

*S1: "some learners come to school very late and when you ask, they will tell you I was bathing my younger siblings"*

*S5: "it is very painful"*

Some learners are raised by their grandparents who cannot read and write, which makes it challenging for teachers to collaborate with them and stimulate the learner in his/her school work. Participants emphasised that it is more challenging as most learners from child headed and granny headed homes seldom do their homework and/or do it with minimal effort. Due to lack of support from the home environment and having to take responsibility for their basic needs, truancy and school dropouts have been escalating year after year.

Furthermore, participants believe that the socioeconomic background of the learners may be the reason there are a number of teenage pregnancies in the community and schools. It was indicated that they believe some of the reasons their learners fall pregnant is the need to increase their social grant income and a lack of parental support and involvement. This further indicates the struggles experienced at the microsystem and the mesosystem, and an intervention and collaboration with systems such as the exosystem and macrosystem can highly strengthen the microsystem to support learners.

It is acknowledged that low socioeconomic background is considered as a national and local dilemma that affects not only the education system, but also impacts the health of a

child (Blakely & Hales, 2004). However, small scale interventions such as starting vegetable gardens may be introduced at the school context to empower child headed homes and the School Governing Body (SGB) to help in providing basic needs of children in Mamaila circuit. As indicated by the Department of Education (2001), the functions of the SGB (microsystem and mesosystem) includes ensuring that all children have access to schooling, they should be able to develop and implement a school strategic plan and to be involved in voluntary work. All support personnel including Educational Psychologists may intervene and collaborate to provide psycho-education for the SGB, grandparents, parents and the entire community on behavioural challenges, learning difficulties, physical disabilities and how to further assist child headed homes with home visits and emotional support.

The SIAS policy (DoE, 2014) further promotes an integrated Community-Based Support, where the entire community is involved in the care and support for teaching and learning. A strength that was identified in Mamaila circuit schools is their ability to collaborate with community organisations and churches to receive support, mostly in terms of infrastructure. If the SIAS policy (DoE, 2014) is introduced and implemented in Mamaila circuit schools, it may create awareness on other facilities in the community that may assist in further improving education quality through, for example, Disabled People Organisations (DPOs) and community-based rehabilitation services. This will further enhance support and strength amongst the mesosystems, and between the microsystem and the mesosystem.

## Theme 5: Lack of collaboration with parents

This theme refers to the collaboration between teachers and parents to support optimal development of the learners. As indicated above, most learners come from child headed and granny headed homes, which is one of the factors that impact optimal learning. However, similarly, with children from homes that have either parents or a single parent, there is lack of interaction and collaboration between parents and teachers. The participants indicated that parents do not cooperate with them in discovering or creating interventions to their children's learning needs. One participant (P2) added that *“parents appear to be in denial of their children's challenges and thus end up being defensive and hostile towards the teachers”*.

The disparities between teachers and parents may be caused by the fact that they [as teachers] are also not well informed on the possible causes of their learners' inability to read and write. Parents become frustrated when they are called on continuous meetings to be informed that there is a “problem” with their child, whereas, no one seems to know what could be the cause or what can be done to support them. Participants indicated that parents end up denying attending school meetings and appealing to fight teachers for inviting them to discuss a problem with no solution.

The participants have indicated that there were instances where parents became furious and asked teachers to explain to them why they continuously break their hearts and contribute to low self-esteem in their children as they are continuously labelled as “the children who struggle” but with no assistance for them. The participants further indicated that this has contributed to so much tension between teachers and parents and therefore, a lack of collaboration and loss of confidence in the education system.

Furthermore, most learners who have been labelled to be “struggling” in school have dropped out before they reach grade 10. It is only a few who stay in school, however, with the observation that parents have given up and not involved in any way. The participants further pointed out that there are parents that are not involved in their children’s education and development, no matter how much teachers reach out, they just never get involved, which then poses a huge barrier to learning. The following extract highlights this point:

*P5: “we have got parents who don’t want to take responsibility of their children’s barriers. When they hear that their child has a problem, they say “who’s the teacher, I want to go to the teacher, I want to show him/her who I am”. They don’t want to accept, they just want to come here and try to bully the teachers”*

*P2:” I think sometimes parents don’t want to listen to us because all we do is give them the problem with no solution, I also wouldn’t come if I was just going to be reminded that my child is failing”*

*P11:” but still what must we do as well, they have to come, maybe someone might have a solution rather than leave it and wait for the children to give up and dropout as usual”*

Moreover, participants emphasised that if they received support from the DoE in addressing learning barriers in reading and writing, it would have minimised labelling of the children and conflicts between parents and teachers.

Findings of this research show that a lack of knowledge on how to address learning barriers such as emotional distress, low socioeconomic backgrounds and an inability to read and write has further affected the relationship between parents and teachers who constitute the microsystem level of support for a learners’ optimal development. Research indicates that children who receive support both at school and at home show significant improvements compared to children who receive support at school only (Stelmach, 2009). One of the roles of Educational Psychologists is to provide prevention, developmental

and remedial interventions with children in their context (HPCSA, Form 242) and to provide parent guidance in context (HPCSA, Form 224), which may combat the rift between teachers and parents. Therefore, providing every school in every province with knowledge on psychological services provided by Educational Psychologists is vital, regardless of urban or rural area.

According to the SIAS policy (DoE, 2014), the initial screening process has to be facilitated by teachers though keeping a record or profile of each learner's progress in each phase (DoE, 2014). Once a learner has been identified as being vulnerable and/or presenting with a learning barrier, the teacher has to take the role of a case manager and coordinate the process of support (DoE, 2014). Furthermore, teachers are supposed to work in collaboration with parents to gather information about the child on behaviours, challenges, health and making decisions that would assist in providing significant support for the child (DoE, 2014). Teachers and parents in Mamaila circuit lack information on how to assist learners who present with learning barriers. Based on the bioecological systems theory; parents, teachers and principals are part of the immediate environment (microsystem) of the learner and their interaction at the mesosystemic level is considered the most significant for optimal development (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Therefore, the lack of information on the SIAS policy hinders the initial stage of providing quality education through care and support at the mesosystem.

#### Theme 6: Lack of Department of Education's support

This theme refers to the collaboration between the Department of Education (DoE) (exosystem) and teachers (Microsystem). The DoE is considered to be outside the child's immediate environment, however they play a major role in ensuring that every child

received quality education, even in the rural areas. The DoE falls in the exosystem around the child and they also have influence on the policies at the macrosystemic level and the employment of teachers and support personnel at the microsystemic level.

The participants indicated that they feel unheard by the DoE. Demands are continuously made by the Department in meeting the curriculum, however, the teachers' concerns are mostly taken for granted. The participants asserted that the DoE has issued a statement indicating that learners are not allowed to remain in the same grade for more than two years, and they have to be move beyond their grades. The National Curriculum Statement Grade R-12 propagated on the 28<sup>th</sup> December'2012 stipulates that a pupil may repeat once in a phase to prevent the learner from spending over four years in one phase. This suggests that a pupil who fails a grade twice cannot be retained in the grade.

Participants feel that their work is taken for granted if learners can be progressed without meeting the minimum requirements and without any intervention to assist them. The learner may be progressed until grade 12, however, they will struggle when they have to write their matric examination as they would lack some of the basic concepts that they didn't comprehend in the previous grades. Participants appeared upset by the obligation to progress the learners with minimal or no intervention at all (Observation, August'2018). According to the participants, this is the major reason why learners drop out of school.

Teachers believe this has also degraded the dignity that comes with being educated as learners know each other and those that are struggling in class. However, they get surprised when they see the learners that struggle progress to the next grade. The participants have indicated that some of their learners have informed them that they do not take education seriously as they can fail and still make it to the next grade. The

participants further added that they think that this reason only, has escalated the behavioural challenges that they have observed in their school context.

One participant from the primary school asserted that:

*P1: "And the department wants the learners to pass and then the learners can't write and read. So what is education in that case? Learners cannot write and read, so I progress learners to the next grade, what is that?"(Appeared upset).*

Another participant from the secondary school indicated that:

*S5: "And we know that failing is not nice and it is painful for the learners and their parents, but at least the department has to find a way to get these learners help and stop asking us to progress them when we don't know why they are progressing" (Appears upset).*

The participants further discussed the need to reach out to the DoE once more so that their concerns may be addressed accordingly.

Teachers are employed and placed in the immediate environment of a child, however, they still require continual support on how to respond to the different needs of learners, continual updates on policy development and implementation (macrosystemic level), and information on support personnel (DBST) employed at the DoE (exosystemic level) to assist them further in improving the ongoing learning experience of children (chronosystem).

South Africa has adopted an Inclusive Education policy and laid it out in the Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education [DoE], 2001). However, two decades later, teachers in Mamaila circuit still lack knowledge on learning barriers; for instance, the findings of the research show that teachers struggled to understand the meaning of the term 'learning barriers'. It was further perceived by the researcher that even though

teachers would like to assist learners with learning barriers, the lack of resources such as resource centres, full service schools and special schools in Mamaila circuit with support personnel such as Educational Psychologists in the neighbourhood pose a great barrier.

Statistics indicate that over 300,000 learners still await placement into special and disability schools in South Africa as a whole (StatsSA, 2017). Therefore, if a child is assessed in Mamaila circuit, it may be required that the child be removed out of the comfort of their home and away from their families to receive such support. This may escalate emotional distress as a child's immediate environment plays a vital role in his/her development. Furthermore, moving learners to special schools would require financial strength, which may pose a challenge for low socioeconomic environments as Mamaila circuit. Therefore, it is essential that every learner receives psychological services, learner support and quality education in their context.

Currently, it is universally acknowledged that every child has the right to basic education as an essential human right (Marishane, 2017; Madani, 2019). However, satisfying this right requires a holistic need to meet all children's educational needs and this is achieved through three components, i.e. access, quality and safe environment for learning (Marishane, 2017). This suggests that the right to basic education is only satisfied when every child in South Africa has access to quality education in a secure school context. Following the Sustainable Development Goals 2030, South Africa appears to have improved access to education, however, providing quality education for all appears to be a challenge (Marishane, 2017).

Review (2019) indicates that approximately 95% learners in South Africa reach Grade 7, however, less than 51% of these learners completed Grade 12. Furthermore, there are

still high school dropout rates concerning children living with disabilities and overall low participation rates (Review, 2019; Sinyosi, 2015). The year 2020 marks two decades since South Africa's initial democratic election and introducing quality education for all, furthermore, it marks two decades since the introduction and implementation of the White Paper 6 (Department of Education [DoE], 2001). However, a number of learners including those in Mamaila circuit still struggle to access quality education though quality learner support and providing suitable school environments (Marishane, 2017).

The White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001) and the SIAS policy (DoE, 2014) are policies developed to positively contribute to the macrosystemic level of a child's development. However, Mamaila circuit public school teachers' lack of exposure to these policies has prohibited the possible collaborations with parents (mesosystem) and support personnel such as Educational Psychologists (exosystem) to enhance learner support. Therefore, as indicated, the macrosystem affects all other ecological systems that are supposed to function together to support a child's optimal development (Tudge, 2016).

The second and third secondary questions that the participants were asked were - do public school teachers in Mamaila circuit find Educational Psychologists helpful; and if any, what are the barriers to Educational Psychology services in Mamaila circuit?

One theme was identified in answering these questions and it is discussed below.

#### [Theme 7: Lack of knowledge on Educational Psychology](#)

This theme refers on how well informed public school teachers are at Mamaila Circuit about the services of Educational Psychologists or rather, on the role played by

Educational Psychologists in supporting schools. Furthermore, it explores whether collaboration between Educational Psychologists and teachers in Mamaila Circuit is considered productive in providing learner support. All participants in both primary and secondary schools have indicated that they have never seen nor heard of an Educational Psychologist. Therefore, they would not certainly know what they do or what they contribute to the education system. Furthermore, participants appeared hopeless about ever meeting and working with any Educational Psychologist as they feel failed and neglected by the DoE. Participants further added that it is the first time they hear about the term Educational Psychology specifically.

However, some participants' optimism appeared to be lighted when I explained and brought to their awareness Educational Psychology as an additional profession to assist them in providing quality education and interventions. The primary school participants highlighted that:

*P2: "We don't know the services of an educational psychologist because we don't have, maybe we would have met one if the department took our lists seriously and sent us one to help"*

*P1: "I have 24 years in teaching but I don't know the services of an educational psychologist or even heard of one and it is so embarrassing"*

The participants at the secondary school discussed:

*S4: "Colleagues, is there really such a thing though, I never met a single Educational psychologist"*

*S5: "Even me, it is the first time I hear about the term educational psychology today"*

*S1: "But I think this is the beginning of change, now we know, it is up to us what we do with the knowledge and information"*

The participants could not comment on the helpfulness of psychological services as they have never heard nor seen an Educational Psychologist. This is an indication that they may not be aware of the services provided by the discussed professionals

One participant added that there was an instance where they were asked to fill in forms because a learner had to go to a psychologist, however, they have never received any feedback.

*S2: "There was a time a parent came with a form and asked me to fill it in because her child will be attending a psychologist, the child is still with us here, I reached out to his mother but she also said she has not heard anything, we are just progressing him as per policy requirements because really, we don't know the way forward"*

*S5: "And remember we were not aware that there is an educational psychologist, we just thought he is going for a psychiatric evaluation, to check his brain if he is not crazy"*

The field of psychology is regarded by the participants as a field for evaluating people's minds and counselling people who experience trauma. Moreover, based on the knowledge of the participants, the psychology field has never been considered as a possible contributor to learner support. The SBSTs in schools and Educational Psychologists can work collaboratively to address a majority of learning difficulties, however, in Mamaila circuit, this appears to be a foreign implementation to them.

Following the process of the SIAS policy (DoE, 2014), the SBST creates and implements a support plan for the identified learner. If the support plan does not meet the needs of the learner, the SBST has to communicate with the DBST to provide further support. According to the bioecological systems theory, this is now an interaction between the microsystem and the exosystem in support of the child. Further assistance may then be

provided in terms of psychoeducational assessments, teacher and parent counselling, and suitable school placements. The DBST has to consist of all support staff including curriculum and school managers, social workers and Educational Psychologists to contribute to quality learner support.

The final secondary research question posed to the participants was - to what extent do public school teachers perceive psychological services to be accessible in Mamaila circuit? One theme was identified in response to this question and it is discussed as follows.

#### Themes 8: Inaccessibility of psychological services in Mamaila Circuit

In response to the question about participants' awareness of the nearest location of Educational Psychologists and whether they have access to a psychologist. All participants have indicated that they have never met an Educational Psychologist and, therefore, do not have an idea of where to locate them. It was further assumed that the nearest psychologist could be approximately 60 kilometres away from them at Khapane Public Hospital. However, participants are not certain if it is a fact that there is a psychologist as they are not well informed. The following extract highlights the point:

*S4: "We wouldn't know how far, as a matter of fact, we don't have educational psychologists"*

*S6: "The senior management of the school has never gone to a workshop conducted by such a person, so we don't know whether they are around or not"*

*S1: "But we are told that there is an office of a psychologist at Khapane hospital, according to my knowledge close to 60km just to see a psychologist and the thing is we don't even know if it is an educational psychologist or what?"*

At the primary school, participants highlighted that:

*P1: "You know even if there is a psychologist at Khapane hospitals, it still wouldn't be accessible for parents in our community. What about child headed homes?"*

*P7: "To be honest, we fall under quintile 1 and the department should at least meet us half way and make sure the learners receive support without us having to fight with parents about money first."*

Even though there might be a psychologist at Khapane Hospital, it is still not accessible enough for the learners and the parents. Participants have indicated that most of their learners are from low socioeconomic backgrounds and traveling expenses have to be considered for intervention. Therefore, participants believe that the learners should be able to access psychological services in their schools.

According to Dudley-Marling & Bunns (2014), Educational Psychologists at schools work as facilitators and developers. Educational Psychologists perceive ways in which pupils learn and recall information, and handle the whole school community and the school itself. Educational Psychologists have to acquire consciousness of the teaching techniques that educators utilise, ensuring that teaching and instructing learners is conducted properly for the needs of the learners. Furthermore, they ensure that the school community responds well to the demands of the school (Dudley-Marling & Bunns, 2014; Van Ingen et al., 2018).

The primary role of Educational Psychologists is collaborating with diverse professionals in and outside of the school context, as well as with the entire school community (parents, School Governing Body (SGB), teachers and learners) to enhance learner support (Dudley-Marling & Bunns, 2014; Van Ingen et al., 2018). The findings of this study show that Mamaila circuit public school teachers' lack of knowledge on and access to

Educational Psychologists has prohibited opportunities for collaboration and enhancing learner support.

Despite the significant demand to access psychological services, the majority of South Africa's underprivileged communities still do not have access to such essential services (Barnwell, 2016). With the evident inequalities in South Africa, Educational Psychologists cannot limit themselves to consulting offices (Barnwell, 2016). These findings are in line with the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) statistics (2017) that indicate that in South Africa, 50.4% of Educational Psychologists work in private practice and only 5.2% of these professionals are involved in public service.

The uneven distribution of Educational Psychologists may be due to the perceived possibility of the lack of opportunities and resources to contribute to learner support in rural schools. Educational Psychologists are then highly distributed to urban areas such as Gauteng Province and in private practice, where most individuals are able to afford their services (Gaede & Versteeg, 2011). Furthermore, in Gauteng Province, 46% Educational Psychologists are involved in public schools and hospitals, on the other hand, only 2.5% Educational Psychologists are involved in public service in Limpopo Province. The DoE is considered to operate at both the meso-and exosystemic levels, has great influence in creating an environment of healthy biophysiological and microsystemic levels of the development of every child for effective learning. Therefore, the DoE has the responsibility to assist in providing platforms for Educational Psychologists to work with disadvantaged communities to enhance learner support and initiate collaboration with the teachers at the microsystemic level.

#### 4.3: Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has outlined the findings of this research study and a discussion of the research findings in relation to literature and the theoretical framework. It is further acknowledged that the research may have encountered limitations, therefore, chapter 5 concludes the research report with the implications, limitations of the research and the recommendations for further research.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the summary of this research report. Furthermore, the implications, limitations and recommendations for further research are discussed.

### 5.2 Summary of findings

This research was conducted with an aim to understand public school teachers' perceptions of the services of Educational Psychologists in learning support. In the problem statement, it is indicated that Limpopo province is the second lowest performing province in South Africa with 33.6% pass rate (Business Tech, 2017) and about 60.4 % of learners drop out of school (Lehohla, 2013). It is further indicated that a lack of learner support and a misfit in the school environment contribute to the high rates of school dropouts and poor school performance. This study is deemed important due to the perceived possibility of Educational Psychologists having the capability to intervene to provide learner support and determine learners' misfit in the school environment.

To investigate teachers' perceptions of Educational Psychologists' services, eighteen public school teachers in Mamaila circuit were selected in two schools and interviewed in two focus group discussions. A semi-structured interview schedule (see Appendix 10) was utilised to address the aim and objectives of this study. Prior the commencement of the data collection, a pilot study was conducted to discover the suitability and applicability of the research scales and approach. The data collected from focus group discussions was analysed using the six stages of thematic analysis.

As indicated in chapter 4, eight main themes emerged out of the findings. In Mamaila circuit, public school teachers appeared to be confused about the meaning of the term

learning barriers, which provided evidence that they may have never been exposed to policies such as the White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001) and the SIAS policy (DoE, 2014). When clarity was provided, public school teachers in Mamaila circuit have indicated that learners' struggles in reading and writing, socioeconomic background, behavioural challenges, lack of collaboration with parents and their personal distress are some of the learning barriers experienced in their schools. The public school teachers exhibited feelings of frustration and helplessness in response to these learning barriers. They further asserted that a lack of support from the Department of Education in response to learning difficulties has greatly contributed to the rising numbers of school dropouts and low school performance rates. Central to the primary research question of this study; the findings of this study indicate that public school teachers in Mamaila circuit are not familiar with Educational Psychologists' services for learner support. In addition, educators do not have access Education Psychologists in Mamaila circuit. A lack of information has hindered opportunities for collaboration with support personnel such as Educational Psychologists, the DBST and forming SBSTs in response to learning barriers.

In conclusion, platforms for collaboration between stakeholders such as parents, teachers, District-Based Support Team (DBST) and support personnel such as Educational Psychologists should be implemented to provide quality learner support. Educational Psychologists in the urban areas and in private practice are requested to involve themselves in community work through NGOs and other ways possible so that learners can access psychological services in their contexts. The department of education is further challenged to respond to the need for psychological services in Mamaila circuit

as the public school teachers have indicated to experience and witness learning barriers that may require an intervention of Educational Psychologists.

### 5.3 Implications of the study

Since the introduction of the right to education as a Universal Human Right (1948) and the World Declaration of Education for All policy (UNESCO, 1994); Inclusive Education has been adopted by numerous countries including the USA, Canada and South Africa. Since then, Inclusive Education meant improving and promoting access to education and promoting quality in education. Quality education has been declared a major contributor to the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 as a campaign to address and reduce inequalities, improving growth in socioeconomic movement, alleviate poverty and growing an inclusive economy (United Nations, 2015). The findings of this research confirm that, in South Africa, there is still a gap in providing quality education which has contributed to the rise in school dropouts (Lehohla, 2013), low performance rates (Business Tech, 2017) and limited access to school for children living with disabilities (StatsSA, 2017). Moreover, the limited access to quality Education for All has decelerated the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 since its introduction in 2012 (Review, 2019).

The finding of this research further confirm the gap between public school teachers in Mamaila circuit and Educational Psychologists and further confirms the inaccessibility of psychological services in Mamaila circuit for quality learner support. The DoE is therefore notified that there is significant need to create awareness in rural schools with regards to psychological services available to teachers to enhance learner support and ensuring that the services are accessible to them. This research has further identified the important role

played by community organisations and denominations in these rural areas in support of the public schools (Observation, August 2018). Therefore, community involvement should be emphasised in supporting schools with resources, infrastructure and emotional support. Support personnel in the DBSTs such as Educational Psychologists should consider working in collaboration with the rural schools and the community at large for added access to resources and support for the learners. This may further enhance the relationship between teachers and parents as they are involved in the process of identifying barriers and providing support as a community.

#### 5.4 Limitations of the study

The findings of this research are based on two rural schools and will not be generalised to other rural schools in Mamaila circuit. However, despite the limited generalizability of the current study due to the small sample and the explicit geographical setting under study, it is the initial study that concentrated on public school teachers' perceptions of Educational psychologists' services to enhance learner support in Mamaila circuit (Limpopo Province).

While this study achieved its aims and objectives in finding answers to the main research question, the study could have achieved more as a community based study through Action Research making the study richer and intervention focused. However, this limitation was mitigated as the researcher went back to the schools to conduct workshops on learning barriers, the possible causes of learning barriers and possible interventions to address the need for information and knowledge on how to further assist learners experiencing learning difficulties. The researcher has further informed the school

community (teachers, parents and the SGB) on the services of Educational Psychologists to create further awareness (see Appendix 13, June'2019).

The researcher is also aware of the power dynamic, which may exist between the researcher and the participants. For instance, it is a possibility that there were instances where the participants may have felt the need to provide answers they think the researcher hopes to hear rather than their uninfluenced perceptions. However, the flexibility provided by a semi-structured interview provided the researcher an opportunity to probe for clarity on participants' thoughts and creating an unrestricted environment for teachers' expressions.

#### 5.4 Recommendations for further research

Insufficient research has been conducted in the rural areas regarding public school teachers' knowledge of learning barriers, Educational Psychologists' services and how to access their services. Therefore, it is considered of great importance that further research is conducted to identify needs and possible interventions strategies. It is further recommended that further research is conducted in other rural schools to compare the similarities and/or contradictions on public school teachers' perceptions of Educational Psychologists' services. Furthermore, research that explores or audits the resources and services currently available for learning support in the SBST in the Mamaila Circuit is recommended.

Recommendation for future research also includes Action Research. Action research involves disciplined enquiry done by professionals with the intent that it will inform and change practices in the future (Best & Kahn, 1998). Action research is conducted in the quest to improve how things can be done better. Therefore, it is hoped that this research

challenges Educational Psychologists to reach out to the rural communities to make enquiring and research on how psychological services can be better adjusted to reach and suit the needs of rural children.

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## **Appendix 1: Supervisor-supervisee Agreement Form**

**Supervisor:** Dr. Simangele Mayisela

**Supervisee:** Ms. Nomsa Machweu

**Title of research project:** Public school teachers' perceptions of educational psychologists' services in Limpopo Province (Mamaila Circuit).

1. The supervisor and supervisee will meet and/or communicate electronically for supervision as many times as possible every month. If any meetings are cancelled the reason will be documented.
2. The supervisor will undertake to read and comment on any drafts within 3 weeks of receipt. If workload or absence makes this impossible, this will be clearly conveyed to the supervisee and a realistic time frame negotiated.
3. The supervisee will undertake to keep the supervisor regularly informed of her/his progress, and of any absences from university.

Signed on date: 29 January 2018

Supervisor: Dr. Mayisela

Supervisee: Ms. Machweu M.N.

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (SCHOOL OF HUMAN & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT)

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

**PROTOCOL NUMBER: MEDP/18/005 IH**

**PROJECT TITLE:**

Public schools' perceptions regarding the roles and functions of Educational Psychologists

INVESTIGATORS  
DEPARTMENT

Machwewu Makobo  
Psychology

DATE CONSIDERED

29 May 2018

DECISION OF COMMITTEE\*

Approved

**This ethical clearance is valid for 2 years and may be renewed upon application**

**DATE: 29 May 2018**

**CHAIRPERSON**  
**(Dr Zaytoon Amod)**



cc Supervisor:

Dr Simangele Mayisela  
Psychology

---

**DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR (S)**

To be completed in duplicate and **one copy** returned to the Secretary, Room 100015, 10<sup>th</sup> floor, Senate House, University.

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

**This ethical clearance will expire on 31 December 2020**

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER IN ALL ENQUIRIES



**LIMPOPO**  
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

DEPARTMENT OF  
**EDUCATION**

Ref: Dr LC Makhuvha

0722836076

University of Witwatersrand

Dean of students

School of Educational Psychology

To whom it may concern

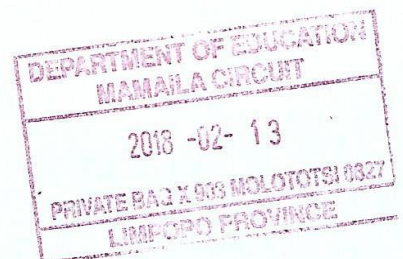
I, Dr LC Makhuvha , the circuit manager of Mamaila circuit hereby give consent to Machweu Makobo Nomsa to conduct her research at Mamaila circuit. The permission is granted for her to select participants, from the pool of teachers who are serving in nine secondary and twelve primary schools in Mamaila circuit as requested. The permission is granted pending the names of the schools the researcher is intending to work with.

The researcher should take note that, she should under no circumstances disturb the school program in the institutions she is going to be engaged with. Thus the research should be conducted after contact time to by all means protect the teaching time.

On ethical consideration, I hope the researcher will abide by the guidelines as stipulated above.

Regards

Signature





**Psychology Department**  
School of Human and Community Development  
University of the Witwatersrand  
Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050  
Tel: (011)717 4500 Fax: (011) 717 4559



#### **APPENDIX 4**

01 August 2018

Dear Principal  
Makhaka Secondary School

#### **REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT MAKHAKA SECONDARY SCHOOL**

My name is Nomsa Machweu and I am a Masters student in Educational Psychology at the University of Witwatersrand. As a requirement for obtaining this qualification I am to conduct a research. I hereby request to conduct my research at your school on the **08<sup>th</sup> of August 2018** with the school teachers as my research participants.

My research is about public school teachers' perceptions of Educational Psychologists in Limpopo Province (Mamaila circuit) under the supervision of Dr. Simangele Mayisela. I will be conducting my research after school hours and under no circumstances will I disrupt school activities. The aims of the research are to investigate public school teachers' perception regarding accessibility of psychological services in Mamaila circuit, public school teachers' familiarity with the role of Educational Psychologists in Mamaila circuit, whether public school teachers in Mamaila circuit find Educational Psychologists helpful, the barriers to Educational Psychologists' services in Mamaila circuit and the frequently identified barriers to learning presented by learners in Mamaila circuit.

The findings of this research will firstly, establish the existing gap between the two professions and determine the extent of familiarity and access to the psychological services by public school teachers. Secondly, the process and the outcomes of this study may create awareness to public school teachers with regards to the psychological services available to them through educational psychologists. Thirdly, the study may stimulate thought and reflection on how collaboration or a lack thereof between teachers and educational psychologists might impact learner support. Lastly,

the findings will be beneficial to Mamaila circuit in constructing robust school-based support teams and improving psychological services for learners.

For further inquiry on this research, you are welcome to contact me or my supervisor.

Your response will be highly appreciated

Yours sincerely

Machweu Makobo Nomsa  
nomsamachweu@gmail.com  
011 717 0894

Dr. Simangele Mayisela (Supervisor)  
Educational psychologist  
Sma.mayisela@wits.ac.za  
011 717 4529



## PHAKENG PRIMARY SCHOOL

Emis No. 918521255  
P. O. Box 5169 Molototsi 0827  
Tel No. 081 325 2498 / 076 577 9787 Fax. 086 608 6369  
Email Address :phakengprimary@gmail.com  
Mamaila Circuit- Mopani-District-Limpopo Province

Enq: Madia M.J  
Cell : 076 577 9787

02.08.2018

Psychology Department  
School of human and Community Development  
University of the Witwatersrand  
Private Bag 3  
WITS  
2050

### NOMSA MACHWEU: YOUR REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT PHAKENG PRIMARY SCHOOL

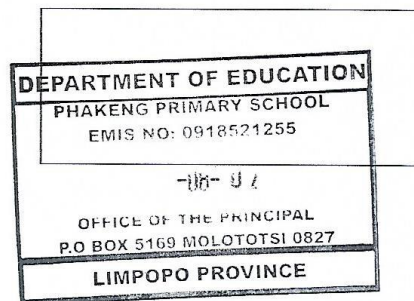
1. The above-matter refers:
2. We acknowledge receipt of your later dated ....
3. We have read and understood the contents as stipulated therein and you are more than welcome to come to our school to conduct a research.

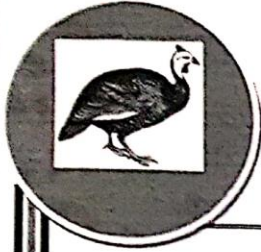
Thank you and hoping to meet you on 7<sup>th</sup> August 2018

Yours faithfully

Madia M.J.(Acting Principal)

School stamp





**MAKHAKA SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL**

EMIS NO. 918521385

P. O. BOX 5191 MOLOTOTSI 0827

TELEPHONE NO.081 565 8139 / FAX NO. 086 571 6975

MAMAILA CIRCUIT- MOPANI-DISTRICT-LIMPOPO PROVINCE

**Confidential**

30 JULY 2018

Enq: Mohale J

Cell :084 0999 155

The coordinator

University of Witwatersrand

Department of human and social development

Educational psychology

This letter is written by the principal of Makhaka Senior Secondary School, Mrs J Mohale and it serves to accept Nomsa Machweu's request to conduct research with the educators as her research participants. This research will be conducted on the 8<sup>th</sup> of August 2018 at 14:30

This request is accepted provided that Ms Machweu doesn't conduct research during school hours, which may disrupt teaching lessons.

If i can be of any further assistance, or provide you with any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me at the Cell phone numbers listed above

Yours Sincerely

Mohale J

(Principal)

Date

30/07/2018

<b>DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION</b>
MAKHAKA SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL EMIS NO: 918521385
2018 -07- 30
P.O. BOX 5191 MOLOTOTSI 0827
<b>LIMPOPO PROVINCE</b>



**Psychology Department**  
School of Human and Community Development  
University of the Witwatersrand  
Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050  
Tel: (011)717 4500 Fax: (011) 717 4559



## **Appendix 7**

Dear Teacher

My name is Nomsa Machweu and I am a Masters student in Educational Psychology at the University of Witwatersrand. As a requirement for obtaining this qualification I am to conduct research. My research is about public school teachers' perceptions of Educational Psychologists in Limpopo Province (Mamaila circuit) under the supervision of Dr. Simangele Mayisela. The aims of this research are to investigate public school teachers' perception regarding accessibility of psychological services in Mamaila circuit, public school teachers' familiarity with the role of Educational Psychologists in Mamaila circuit, whether public school teachers in Mamaila circuit find Educational Psychologists helpful, the barriers to Educational Psychologists' services in Mamaila circuit and the frequently identified barriers to learning presented by learners in Mamaila circuit

The findings of this research will firstly, establish the existing gap between the two professions and determine the extent of familiarity and access to the psychological services by public school teachers. Secondly, the process and the outcomes of this study may create awareness to public school teachers with regards to the psychological services available to them through educational psychologists. Thirdly, the study may stimulate thought and reflection on how collaboration or a lack thereof between teachers and educational psychologists might impact learner support. Lastly, the findings will be beneficial to Mamaila circuit in constructing robust school-based support teams and improving psychological services for learners.

I invite you to participate in the research by completing a biographical questionnaire and participating in a focus group discussion which will take approximately an hour to complete. The focus group discussion will be recorded. I undertake to adhere to the following ethical research principles:

- I promise that information given to me will be treated confidentially. Protection of your identity during the discussion is not guaranteed. However, you are not required to say your names during the discussion.
- The recorded information provided to me will be kept safe and secure in a password protected computer and will be destroyed after completion of the research report.
- There are no anticipatable risks nor benefits involved with participating in this research.
- Participation is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the research at any time you choose to do so.
- A summary of the findings of this research will be handed to Mamaila circuit office or you may contact me directly to obtain a summary of the results.
- Furthermore, the findings may be published in scientific journals, presented at conferences and will be written up in a research report, the researcher will be careful in reporting the results.

For further inquiry on this research, you are welcome to contact me or my supervisor.

Your participation will be highly appreciated.

Kind regards

Machweu MN  
MEd Educational Psychology student  
nomsamachweu@gmail.com  
011 717 0894

Dr. Simangele Mayisela (Supervisor)  
Educational psychologist  
Simangele.mayisela@wits.ac.za  
011 717 4529

April 2018



**Psychology Department**  
School of Human and Community Development  
University of the Witwatersrand  
Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050  
Tel: (011)717 4500 Fax: (011) 717 4559



## **Appendix 8**

### **INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

#### **Statement concerning participation in a Research Project**

Name of study: **Public school teachers' perceptions regarding the roles and functions of educational psychologists in Limpopo Province.**

I have read the research information on the public school teachers' perceptions regarding the roles and functions of educational psychologists in Limpopo Province. I have heard the aims of the study and was provided the opportunity to ask questions and given adequate time to rethink the issue. The aims of the study are sufficiently clear to me. I have not been coerced to participate in any way.

I know that the information provided will be recorded by the researcher and my identity may not be protected during the focus group discussion. I am aware that this material may be used in scientific publications which will be electronically available throughout the world. I consent to this provided that my name will be kept confidential.

I understand that participation in this study is completely voluntary and that I may refuse to participate, withdraw from the research process at any time without supplying reasons, with no penalty for my withdrawal and refuse to answer questions that I am uncomfortable to answer.

I am aware that there are no benefits and risk in my participation in the study.

I am fully aware that the results of this study will be used for scientific purposes, and may be presented at conferences and published in journals and written in research report. I agree to this, provided my privacy is guaranteed.

I hereby give consent to participate in this study.

.....  
Name of participant

.....  
Signature of participant

.....  
Place.

.....  
Date.

**Statement by the researcher**

I provided verbal and/or written information regarding this study.

I agree to answer any future questions concerning the study as best as I can.

.....

Name of researcher

Signature

Date

Place

**Appendix 9**

**BIOGRAPHICAL QUESTIONNAIRE**

**1. What is your gender?**

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to answer

**2. What is your age?**

- 20 to 24
- 25 to 34
- 35 to 44
- 45 to 54
- 55 to 64
- 65 to 74
- 75 or older

**3. How many years have you been employed in an educational setting? (Including current year)**

- $\leq 5$
- 6 to 10
- 11 to 15
- 16 to 20
- 21 to 25
- $\geq 26$

**4. What type of school are you currently employed at?**

- Primary
- Secondary

**5. Teaching qualification obtained**

- Diploma**
- Degree**
- Honours**
- Masters**
- Doctoral degree**

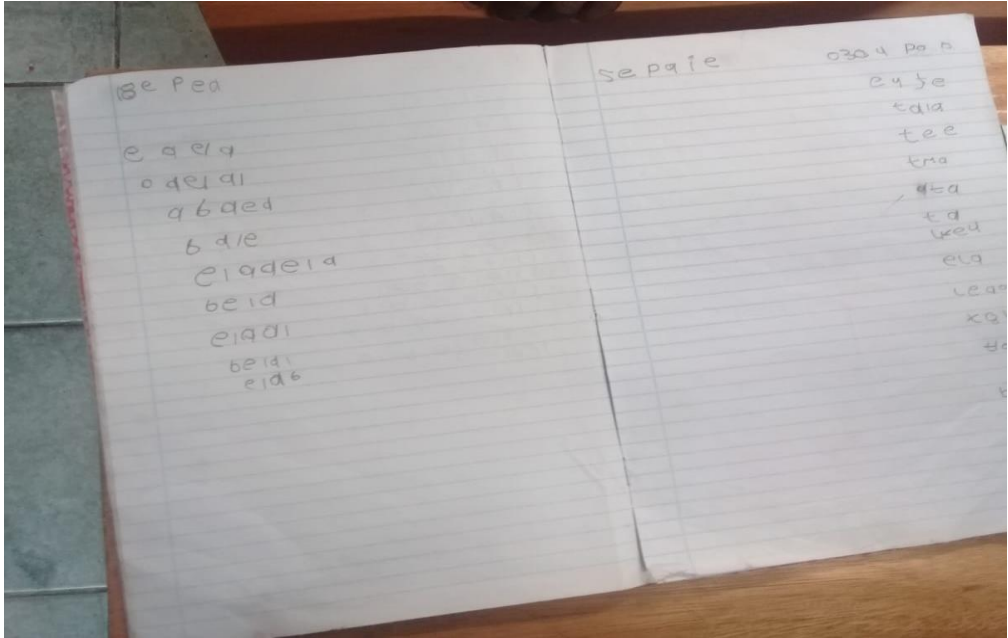
**6. Have you ever attended any training or workshops on inclusive education, learning support needs and/or functions of school based support teams (SBSTs)**

- Yes**
- No**

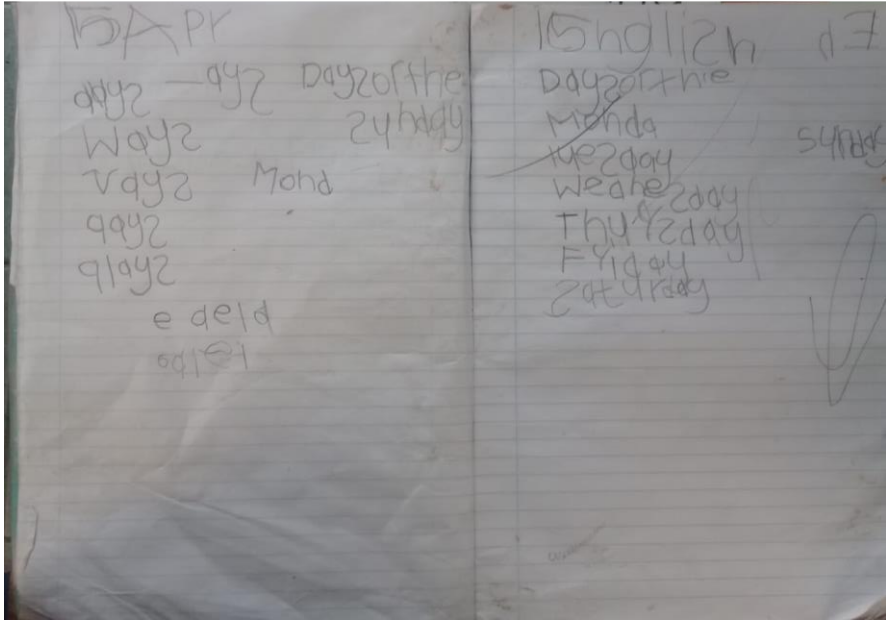
**Appendix 10**  
**Interview Schedule**

1. What learning barriers or learning difficulties do you frequently identify in your school or classrooms?
2. Which of these learning barriers experienced hinder effective teaching and learning? Please explain.
3. If there are any, which of these learning barriers that you think need the services of a psychologist? And why?
4. What is your understanding of professional services provided by psychologists?
5. Which of these services have you used?
6. What do you think of the outcomes of the services of the psychologists in cases where you had received such services? – Please give examples and cases
7. How far are the educational psychologists located from your school? What does it take for the school/ the teacher/ the parents to access these psychologists or psychological services?
8. How difficult or easy is it to access psychological services? Please explain

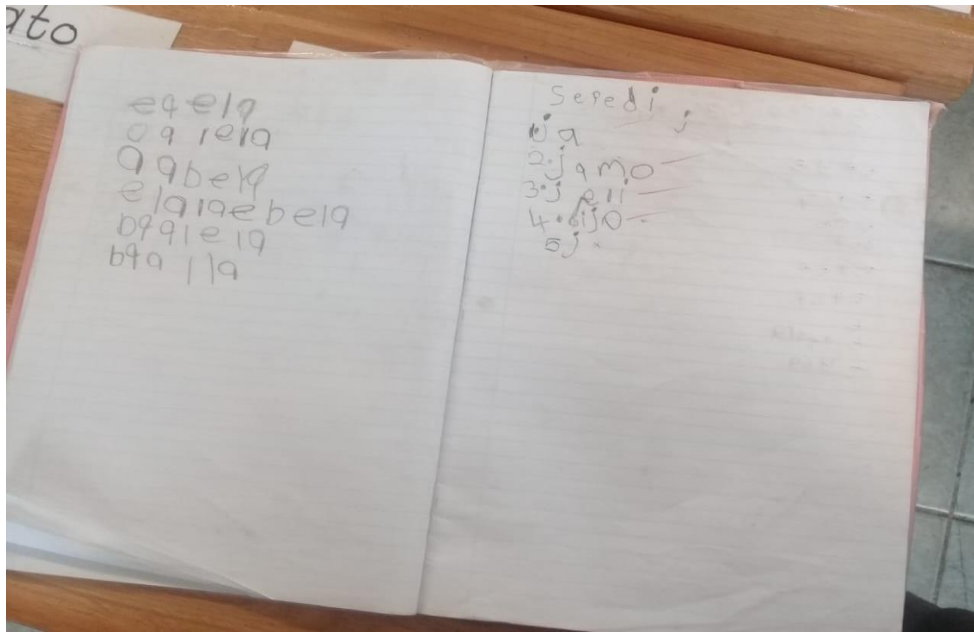




Struggling to structure work, starting at the end of the page - Grade 7



Letter reversals, struggling to write within the lines - Grade 3



Letter reversals, struggling to write within the lines – Grade 1

**Appendix 12: Pictures - creating awareness workshops on learning difficulties and psychological services**





## Appendix 13: Editing Certificate

**CERTIFICATE FOR EDITING**

It is certified that the Editing of dissertation listed below as edited by the professional editors at Editing for the accuracy of the language, Format, and grammar use.

**Dissertation Title**  
Public school teachers' perceptions of Educational Psychologists' services in Limpopo Province (Mamaila circuit)

**Author**  
Machweu Makobo Nomsa

**Date issued**  
14<sup>th</sup> March 2020

**Certificate Number:**  
REPIDOT001236895614

This certificate is generated and verified by Editing and attested the fact that the editor did not alter the idea and aim of the researchers. The certificate can be referred by the journals for ensuring the quality check of the dissertation ready for publication

