

**Enhancing learning performance and school development:
Collaboration between teachers, school counsellors and parents
at secondary schools in Polokwane, Limpopo province**

by

LIANZA PRETORIUS

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Supervisor: Professor R.J. Botha

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DECLARATION

Name: Lianza Pretorius

Student Number: 33946655

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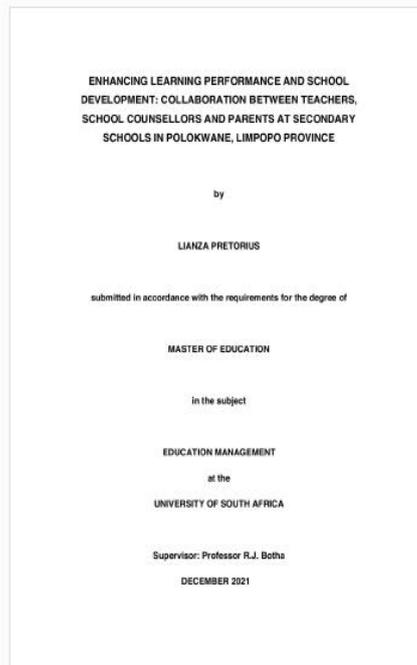


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Name: Mrs L Pretorius

Student No.: 33946655

Decision: Ethics Approval from
2020/08/12 to 2023/08/12

Researcher(s): Name: Mrs L Pretorius
E-mail address: lianzapret@gmail.com
Telephone: 072 183 5980

Supervisor(s): Name: Professor HM van der Merwe
E-mail address: vdmerhm@unisa.ac.za
Telephone: 083 442 1503

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Kind regards,



Prof AT Motlhabane
CHAIRPERSON: CEDU RERC
motthat@unisa.ac.za



Prof PM Sebate
EXECUTIVE DEAN
Sebatpm@unisa.ac.za



Approved - decision template – updated 16 Feb 2017

University of South Africa
Preller Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane
PO Box 392 UNISA 0003 South Africa
Telephone: +27 12 429 3111 Facsimile: +27 12 429 4150
www.unisa.ac.za

PROOF OF EDITING

CORNELIA GELDENHUYS

☎083 2877088
corrieg@mweb.co.za

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SCHOOL COUNSELLORS AND PARENTS AT SECONDARY
SCHOOLS IN POLOKWANE, LIMPOPO PROVINCE**

by

LIANZA PRETORIUS

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ABSTRACT

In 1998, I completed my studies in Social Work and Theology and had a burning desire to assist young people who were caught up in a dysfunctional system. In 2008, I became part of a school's counselling team and furthered my studies in order to be more efficient. I thereafter completed a degree in Education and in Psychology and specialized in Psychometry. However, I realized that one person cannot fulfil so many roles proficiently and that a team effort is what is required to address the growing dilemma our country is facing.

South African schools have been characterized by low pass rates and underachievement. Young people are bombarded by a number of problems that stem from their various ecological systems – home, school, community and the country at large. These have a ripple effect on their performance, behaviour and overall development.

The purpose of this study was to explore whether or not collaboration between key stakeholders will effectively address the diverse needs of learners and contribute to an improvement in learner performance and ultimately towards school development.

The research was conducted in the Limpopo Province, which has presented with some of the lowest pass rates over the past few years. Principals, deputy principals, school counsellors, heads of departments and parents from five local schools participated in the study. They shared their views and perceptions pertaining to the condition of education in South Africa and in their own schools and elaborated on collaboration as a possible solution to underachievement.

The study provided insight into their personal experiences and views and it concluded that collaboration is undoubtedly of great importance. Several challenges or impediments to collaboration were, however, identified that still need to be addressed in order for these partnerships to be truly effective. Key stakeholders, like teachers, parents and school counsellors play a pivotal role in the implementation of this strategy and teamwork, trust and mutual respect will determine its eventual success and outcome.

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KEY TERMS DESCRIBING THE TOPIC OF A DISSERTATION/THESIS

Title of dissertation:

Enhancing learning performance and school development: Collaboration between teachers, school counsellors and parents at secondary schools in Polokwane, Limpopo province

Key terms:

Collaboration, Learning and Learner Performance, School Development

Other:

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems, interactive dynamic components, barriers to learning, underachievement, partnerships, parental involvement, systemic ills, ideal outcomes, impediments, development criteria

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

DBE	Department of Basic Education
DoE	Department of Education
DoH	Department of Health
EST:	Bronfenbrenner's Bio-Ecological System's Theory
HoD	Head of Department
HPCSA:	Health Professions Council of South Africa
IEB:	Independent Examination Board
LCS:	Living Conditions Survey
NEPA:	National Education Policy Act
NSC:	National Senior Certificate
PPCT:	Process, Person, Context and Time
SAQA:	South African Qualifications Authority
SASA:	South African Schools Act
UNESCO:	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF:	United Nations Children's Fund
WEF:	World Economic Forum

CHAPTER 1: ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The quality and merit of education in general in South Africa gradually come under more scrutiny, while the performance of learners is a matter of great concern (Moloi, 2019; Lumadi, 2020; Muremela et al., 2021). It has been stated in various studies that there is an ongoing educational crisis and the system is evidently failing learners in South Africa (cf. Mouton, Louw & Strydom, 2012; Spaull, 2013; Van der Berg et al., 2019; Amnesty International, 2021). The Covid-19 pandemic moreover, had an immense effect on the performance of learners due to school closings and the broadening of forgoing education inequalities (Dorne et al., 2020; Spaull & Van der Berg, 2020; Zhu & Liu, 2020; Motshekga, 2021; Soudien, Reddy & Harvey, 2021).

Numerous schools in our country perform below standard and are subsequently considered to be dysfunctional (cf. Landsberg, 2005; Pretorius, 2012; Amnesty International, 2020). These dysfunctional schools are the outcome of "South African learners' persistent low performance in academic achievement" (Spaull, 2019:1). Some schools are currently falling even more behind due to the pandemic (UNICEF; 2021). According to Gustafsson and Deliwe (2020), local schools grossly underperform, given that they have more qualified teachers, lower pupil-to-teacher ratios and better access to resources, compared to other developing countries such as Kenya, Zimbabwe and Swaziland. Participation in international cross-national comparisons of primary school learner achievement, as well as a number of national standardised testing programmes, corroborate that South African learners does not perform on standard, compared to learners across the globe (Wilkinson, 2017). It is estimated by various authors that 80% of South African schools are underachieving (Salisbury, 2015; Child, 2019; Moloi, 2019; Steyn, 2019).

In March 2016, it was specified that 15% of South Africa's entire budget was spent on basic education. According to the National Treasury Report 2016/2017 (RSA, 2017), this amounted to a staggering R213,7 billion. The Education Budget Brief 2018/2019 (UNICEF, 2019) specifies that South Africa allocated approximately R246 billion (16,7%) of its overall budget on basic education alone. In spite of all the funds invested,

South Africa's primary education system was still rated at 126th out of 138 countries for the period 2016 to 2017 by the World Economic Forum or WEF (Schwab, 2017). According to Makou and Wilkinson (2018), the Global Information Technology Report (2016) placed South Africa 137th out of 139 countries for the overall quality of its education system. It seems to affirm that the South African educational system might be on a downward spiral and the pandemic has evidently exacerbated the situation (Pillay, 2020).

Although the Grade 12 pass rate at public schools in South Africa for 2018 was estimated at 78,2% (Kahala, 2019), education analysts such as Spaul (2019) questions these results. He indicates that only 400 761 of the 512 735 learners in public schools (who wrote the matric exams) passed, while a pass rate of 98,92% was evident for the 12 372 learners at private schools who wrote the Independent Examinations Board (IEB) National Senior Certificate Examination. He points out that this translates to an actual pass rate of only 40%, given that over one million learners entered Grade 1 in 2007. It is apparent that the 78,2% Grade 12 pass rate for 2018 was only based on those learners who remained in the school system. It did not consider the numerous learners who dropped out, those who failed or the ones who transferred to other educational institutions (Van der Berg, 2019).

The situation that prevails in some provinces is even worse than these averages indicate. According to Molefe (2019), the Limpopo Province obtained the lowest overall pass rate of only 69,4% of all the provinces in South Africa for the 2018 academic year. Only 53 254 of the 76 730 candidates who wrote the Grade 12 examination in 2018 passed, while three schools obtained a zero percent pass rate for the 2018 Grade 12 examination (Molefe, 2019).

Macha and Kadakia (2017) stipulate that the South African Government has done a great deal throughout the years with regard to issues such as policies, legislation and various programmes in order to enhance and improve learner performance. Initiatives employed in recent years addressed aspects such as, inter alia, school leadership, teacher development, learner support and early childhood development. According to Amnesty International (2020), the progress made to date is still viewed as inadequate to address the needs of the country.

However, the reasons behind the underperformance of South African learners are multi-dimensional. Learners struggle with barriers to learning of an intrinsic or extrinsic nature that impedes their ability to reach their full potential (Hans, 2014). According to Walton et al. (2009:107), intrinsic barriers include “physical, sensory, neurological and developmental impairments, chronic illness, psychosocial disturbances and differing intellectual ability”. On the other hand, extrinsic barriers to learning typically stem from the external environment or ecological systems (Stofile, Raymond & Moletsane, 2013). These include social ills like domestic violence, widespread poverty, malnutrition, escalating crime rates, violence in schools, economic instability, cultural differences, drug abuse, teenage pregnancies, and an acute lack of resources (Van der Berg et al., 2011).

A combination of these intrinsic and extrinsic aspects may lead to underachievement in South African schools (Siegel, 2018). Each learner has potential that should be realised. It is, however, evident that our current generation presents with more underachievers than previous generations (Hans, 2014). In this regard, Chohan (2018) stipulates that ongoing educational failure will affect a learner’s self-esteem and that persistent disappointment will eventually cause them to lose confidence in their own learning ability. This will increase the high dropout rates we are already seeing in South Africa today. Businessstech (2020) reports that drop-out figures in South African schools currently range between 37% and 42%.

Furthermore, according to Cronje and Matwasa (2018), South Africa's inadequate education system has become an obstacle to socio-economic advancement in the country. As a result, the current system may duplicate past patterns of poverty, inequality and joblessness and it can furthermore deny many young people the opportunity of acquiring a contented middle-class life (Morris, 2018).

With the above discussion in mind, it becomes clear that new approaches are needed that involve key stakeholders working together in order to address the diverse needs of learners in South Africa. One of these approaches may be collaborative partnerships (Roodt, 2018). Such partnerships could enable stakeholders to attend to the identified challenges learners encounter in order to impact their overall development and to ensure that they become resourceful, confident and contributing

citizens. Stakeholders such as teachers, school counsellors and parents are vital in cultivating these favourable milieus that can enhance learner performance and contribute to school development.

Teachers have the fundamental task of assisting learners with their academic work while cultivating a sense of social cohesion (Martens, 2015). They are able to identify potential problem areas and can refer a learner for the necessary psychological assessment and intervention. Fox (2009) states that all children can learn, but a learner who is troubled or distressed will not be able to perform optimally.

School counsellors can attend to learners' emotional and psychological turmoil as well as to matters pertaining to learning barriers, subject choices and realistic future planning. They can furthermore be a source of help to struggling teachers and parents alike.

Parents, on the other hand, can also have a huge impact on their child's learning by their mere involvement (Tárraga, Garcia & Reyes, 2017). Van Zyl (in Hill & Taylor, 2004:230) states that "cross-sectional and longitudinal studies have consistently shown that parent involvement in their children's formal education is associated with academic performance".

It is therefore clear that all stakeholders subsequently have a responsibility to reflect critically on their roles within schools. Each teacher, parent and school counsellor offer a unique contribution that is indispensable when addressing the wide-ranging and intricate needs of learners. It is postulated that once needs are adequately met, learner performance will increase and will contribute towards whole-school development. Collaboration from all involved ought to be a pivotal objective and an envisioned purpose.

Gabriel-Petit (2017) regards collaboration as the undertaking of working together with others in order to achieve a mutual purpose. Epstein (1995) emphasises that a cooperative perspective should replace the current 'sole-expert' model that has traditionally typified school relationships. Such a perspective, in the form of collaboration, might just be the point of departure needed to address some of the concerns addressed above.

1.2 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

It is apparent from the previous paragraph that South African learners are facing unique hardships and challenges that stem mainly from the context in which they live. Social issues such as bullying, violent assaults, homicides, promiscuity and drug abuse are widespread in our schools and it is escalating at a disquieting rate (Van der Berg et al., 2011). These challenges have a significant impact on learners' academic performance and overall well-being. Many efforts have been made to address these exertions that impede school performance. Countless policy initiatives, legislation and other programmes have been introduced over the years aimed at ameliorating the specific educational environment. These initiatives focused on aspects like access, institutionalism, and inequalities amongst different categories of learners, such as categories representing race and socio-economic status (Kayser, 2014). These include, among others, the following:

- National Education Policy Act (NEPA) of 1996 (RSA, 1996a)
- South African Schools Act (SASA) of 1996 (RSA, 1996b)
- Employment of Educators Act (RSA, 1998)
- South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) Act (RSA, 1995)
- Curriculum 2005 (RSA, 1997)
- Education White Paper of 2001 on Early Childhood Development (DoE, 2001a)
- Education White Paper 6 on Inclusive Education (DoE, 2001b)
- National Development Plan of the National Planning Commission (RSA, 2012)

Despite all these initiatives, it is evident that there is still a considerable breach between policy, legislation and programme implementation as the idyllic position and practice as the actual condition representing real institutional change (Hudson, Hunter & Peckham, 2019). The researcher is of the opinion that collaboration can result in school improvement by linking policy formulation and practice implementation. Key individuals, as stakeholders that collaborate with one another can also make a difference to learner and school development. Unbearable demands are placed on schools alone to ensure optimal performance, but the learner population is clearly 'at risk'. Many schools may feel overwhelmed by the magnitude of their learners'

emotional and social needs. This can affect their ability to focus wholeheartedly on their mission to educate (McKay, 2015). Teachers, school counsellors and parents ought to take hands to support learners in all areas of their lives. By dealing with the root causes of learners' problems, underachievement can be addressed, and it will in all probability lead to improved academic performance and school development (Siegel, 2018).

1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM AND RESEARCH QUESTION

There is an African saying that it takes a village to raise a child. It conveys the notion that children are malleable and impressionable and that they are subject to exigent circumstances and challenges. Learners live in perilous times and they consequently require consistent structure, encouragement, regulation, and forbearance (Finlay & Gibbons, 2009). The collective efforts of key individuals can achieve more than the disconnected exertions of individuals (De Lange, 2016). Based on the focus of collaboration between the three key stakeholders, namely teachers, school counsellors and parents for improved learner performance and school development, the following main research question can be formulated: **How can collaboration between teachers, school counsellors and parents in Limpopo secondary schools enhance learner performance and school development?** With the purpose of finding answers to this question, the core research question is fragmented into four sub-questions that are reconnoitred first so that the solutions to these sub-questions can add to the resolution of the principal research question. The sub-questions for the study are:

- What are the ecological systems that form part of a learner's milieu with related problems that influence learning negatively?
- What are the benefits of collaborative partnerships between teachers, school counsellors and parents?
- What are the challenges with collaborative partnerships between teachers, school counsellors and parents?
- How can the roles of teachers, school counsellors and parents be infused to assist learners to achieve optimal learning, enhancing school development?

1.4 AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The aim of the study is to determine how collaboration between teachers, school counsellors and parents in Limpopo secondary schools can enhance learner performance and school development. The specific objectives of the study are to:

- explore the ecological systems that form part of a learner’s milieu with related problems that influence learning negatively;
- identify the benefits of collaborative partnerships between teachers, school counsellors and parents;
- determine the challenges with collaborative partnerships between teachers, school counsellors and parents; and
- provide guidelines on how the roles of teachers, school counsellors and parents can be infused to assist learners to optimal learning engendering school development.

1.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY

Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) bio-ecological systems theory was chosen to serve as the theoretical framework for the study. Bronfenbrenner postulated that to truly understand someone, one should look at them within their environment or context (Gray & MacBlain, 2012). One must consider all aspects of their experiences and the differential influences these experiences have upon them (Beckley, 2012). This theory explicates how development occurs in “nested systems” and how it brings about the necessary change, growth and development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979:3) and it views a learner’s development as an intricate arrangement of relationships that are influenced by the manifold levels of the encircling environment (Guy-Evans, 2020). This theory moreover acknowledges that a learner cannot exist in isolation from adjoining systems, irrespective of whether the system is a parent, a teacher, a school, or a curriculum. Whatever transpires in one system will subsequently affect and be affected by other systems. It is therefore essential for all interconnected systems to work cooperatively and communally in order for learners to develop holistically (Guy-Evans, 2020).

According to Eriksson, Ghazihour and Hammarstrom (2018), the bio-ecological systems theory of Bronfenbrenner considers psychosocial issues that have their origin in the interactive functioning of the different ecological systems that forms part of the educational system. This theory “began with the ecology of human development and evolved as a bioecological model including a process, person, context, time (PPCT) framework” (Griffore & Phenice, 2016:10). According to Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006), this theory consists of four major interactive dynamic components, namely Process, Person, Contexts and Time (PPCT). This theory and its components will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

The researcher refers to Epstein’s theory of overlapping spheres of influence that recognises schools, families and communities as major influencers that mould learners is an example of such a theory (Epstein, 1987; 1995). A pivotal assumption of Epstein’s theory is that certain objectives, for instance, learner academic success, are of the utmost importance to schools and their goals are best attained by means of cooperative action and support. Scholastic performance and success often necessitate resources beyond what a family or a school can provide. Cooperation and collaboration can make more resources available to those in need (Oni, 2013). This theory was incorporated as part of the discussion on the role of parents (par 2.5.7.2) and the third interactive dynamic components or the context as stipulated by Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological system’s theory (par 3.2.2.3).

1.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1.6.1 The research design

A research design provides the very foundation, frame and plan to a researcher to gather and to examine data accurately (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). It can be designated as the over-all blueprint or plan of action to conduct the research. The research design comprises distinct aims. It ascertains the resources from which data will be assembled, and it in addition conveys the research restrictions and feasible ethical concerns (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016). The research design is steered by the research goals and the theoretical underpinning of this study. The design employed was qualitative and exploratory by nature.

Qualitative research can be described as an approach to comprehend and to delve into the meaning people or groups assign to a human or a social problem (Creswell, 2013). Denzin and Lincoln (2011:3) state that “qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world”. They hold that it “consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011:3). They elaborate by indicating that these practices tend to transform the world and it involves a naturalistic and interpretive approach to the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Creswell (2013) identifies several characteristics of qualitative research. He indicates that the research is typically conducted in a natural setting, at the location where participants come into contact with the identified problem. The researcher is active in collecting data. Multiple methods are often used during the qualitative approach to gather data. Once data have been obtained, it is reviewed and methodically arranged into categories and subsequent themes. The qualitative researcher makes use of complex reasoning skills through inductive and deductive logic in an attempt to discover the meaning that the participants hold concerning the problem. Creswell (2013:47) states that “the research process for qualitative researchers is emergent” and that researchers must provide a “holistic account” of the phenomenon being studied.

The design was moreover exploratory and the researcher set out to explore the numerous ecological systems that form part of a learner’s milieu that can influence their ability to perform optimally. These included matters pertaining to underachievement and barriers to learning. The researcher took note of the various interrelated systems in the learner’s environment and acknowledged the notion that different systems have a profound effect on one another. One dysfunctional system can affect another and ultimately impede a learner’s performance. If a learner’s home life is characterized by violence or abuse it will affect his or her ability to perform optimally at school. If a learner grows up in an impoverished community, then it will also have an effect on his/her schooling, as it might affect the finances needed to obtain the necessary resources.

The researcher, in addition, wanted to determine the benefits and challenges associated with collaborative partnerships among teachers, school counsellors and

parents. The researcher aimed to provide guidelines on how the roles of teachers, school counsellors and parents can be infused to enhance learning and to facilitate school development. The perspective of several participants was needed to truly understand the research topic. The information obtained was subjective and subjected to the individuals' unique experiences. The researcher aimed to comprehend and to acknowledge their experience and their unique valuation of the phenomenon being studied.

1.6.2 The research paradigm

'Research philosophy' and 'research paradigm' are all-encompassing, inclusive terminologies that refer to a standpoint or view pertaining to the progression of knowledge and the eminence of that information (Ponterotto, 2005; Saunders et al., 2016). A research paradigm represents a worldview that embraces certain theoretical conjectures about the nature of knowledge (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). In educational research, the term 'research paradigm' is used to describe a researcher's worldview pertaining to a set of shared beliefs that guide the interpretation of research data (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). It can moreover be described as the way in which a researcher views his environment. It is deemed the intangible looking glass through which they study the procedural and operational facets of their research endeavours in order to establish the research methods that will be utilised and to determine how the data obtained will be examined (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

This current study is grounded in the interpretivist paradigm. The paradigm holds that a certain occurrence or incident can have manifold explanations or elucidations. In addition, this paradigm maintains that there is no straightforward procedure by which truth can be determined (Riyami, 2015). Interpretivists maintain a relativist ontology and they adhere to a subjectivist view, given that personal opinions and interpretations are significant. Researchers are not disconnected or removed from the study; they view themselves as active participants in the study (Guba & Lincoln, 2005).

The role of the researcher in the interpretivist paradigm is to "understand, explain, and demystify social reality through the eyes of different participants" (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007:19). Creswell (2007) states that researchers aspire to acquire a greater understanding of the topic being studied and they aim to grasp its multifariousness

within its unique context. Researchers who approach research from this paradigm is inclined not to generalize the findings to a whole population. “Interpretivists do not generally begin with a theory, rather they generate or inductively develop a theory or pattern of meanings.” (Creswell, 2007:9) Researchers who make use of this paradigm evidently seek to understand rather than to explain certain phenomenon.

According to Riyami (2015), the researcher who employs the interpretivist paradigm is prone to regard people as research participants and they are not treated as mere objects. They endeavour to encapsulate diverse perceptions and they attempt to analyse the phenomenon from several positions. Riyami (2015) further states that interpretive researchers are also prone to executing a study in its natural setting. According to studies by Kivunja and Kuyini (2017), Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Morgan (2007), the interpretivist paradigm comprise the following characteristics:

- Context is fundamental to obtain knowledge.
- Contextual factors must be taken into account when endeavouring to understand any systematic exploration.
- Causes and effects are mutually dependent.
- The world cannot be comprehended from the viewpoint of one person.
- Realities are socially composed and it is seen as manifold.
- The researcher should aim to understand the individual rather than the worldwide laws.

The researcher approached this study from an interpretivist viewpoint and aimed to explore the numerous ecological systems that form part of a learner’s milieu that can influence the learner’s ability to perform optimally (see par. 1.4).

The researcher, in addition, endeavoured to determine the benefits and challenges associated with collaborative partnerships among teachers, school counsellors and parents and to provide guidelines on how the roles of teachers, school counsellors and parents can be infused to assist learners to reach their full potential and to facilitate school development.

1.6.3 The research population and research sample

Polit and Hungler (1995:230) note that a population can be seen as the core group from which the researcher wants to learn something. It can, in addition, be defined as all the subjects that meet the prerequisites of a particular situation. They moreover state that “an accessible population can be described as all the cases that meet the criteria and are accessible for the study” (Polit & Hungler, 1995:229-230). Salkind (2010) affirms this and mentions that a population is deemed the entire collection of entities one seeks to understand or, from which one seeks to draw inferences.

Research population sites represent a diversity of precise locations and backgrounds where data are collected (Polit & Beck, 2012). In this study, the population consists of principals, deputy principals, HoDs, teachers and parents associated with five mainstream schools in Polokwane, Limpopo Province. These schools accommodate learners from diverse cultures, languages and socio-economic backgrounds. The researcher made use of multiple sites with the intention to include a larger, varied sample range.

It is important to note that qualitative research emphasizes inductive theory building, subjective understanding and detailed, holistic data, and these goals are often best met through intense investigations of small, systematically selected samples (Given, 2008). Research samples in qualitative research therefore tend to be small in order to support the depth of case-oriented analysis that is fundamental to this mode of inquiry (Vasileiou et al., 2018).

Research sampling refers to the process and method used to select people from the research population (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004; Martens, 2015). Selecting a research sample involves the process of choosing a sub-group from the research populace and it functions as the reference cluster for assessing characteristics of or acquiring assumptions pertaining to the research population (Portney, 2014).

According to the SAGE encyclopaedia of qualitative research methods, the overall populations are generally treated as part of *purposive sampling* (Given, 2008). Purposive sampling was therefore used in this qualitative study and the participants were deliberately selected for the important information they could provide. The

researcher decided to make use of purposeful sampling as it is seen as a technique commonly employed in qualitative research (Patton, 2002). Patton (2015:265) specifically states in this regard, “I introduced purposeful sampling as a specifically qualitative approach to case selection.” Purposeful sampling involves the identification and selection of people that are particularly experienced or familiar with the phenomenon being studied (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The selected individuals were not only knowledgeable about the phenomenon; they were also willing and available to participate in the study. The carefully chosen few were deemed capable of providing a wealth of information regarding their experiences in a reflective, articulate and expressive manner.

Purposive sampling was therefore used in this qualitative study and the participants were deliberately selected for the important information they could provide (Teddlie & Yu, 2007; Etikan, 2015). Convenience sampling was also used in this study. It is a type of nonprobability sampling where individuals are sampled simply because they are accessible and convenient sources of data for researchers (Frey, 2018). It is the most commonly used sampling technique as it is uncomplicated and inexpensive.

The selection of participants was therefore based on the criteria specifying the individuals’ specialist knowledge of the research matter linked to their willingness and availability to participate in the research. The researcher intentionally selected sites and individuals that would contribute to the understanding of the dynamics of collaboration between teachers, school counsellors and parents.

A total of twenty-seven participants took part in the data collection process. They consisted of four principals, two deputy principles, six HoDs, five school counsellors, five teachers and five parents. Even though the study focused on collaboration among parents, teachers and school counsellors, the researcher decided to include principals, deputy principals and HoDs in the study, as it was evident that these stakeholders would not be able to collaborate without the approval or guiding hand of these specific individuals. It was further decided to include them to obtain their objective opinion of the phenomenon from a leadership position. It is also important to take note that all the principals, deputy principals and HoDs who participated are also teachers and/or parents at the respective schools.

1.6.4 Data collection techniques

Data collection in this study proved to be rather challenging, as the study was conducted in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic. The researcher consequently encountered unique opportunities and challenges. Teti, Schatz and Liebenberg (2020:1) rightfully state that the pandemic is a “social event that is disrupting our social order”. This was indeed also the case for this study. The initial plan entailed conducting individual in-depth interviews with all the participants. Face-to-face meetings were prohibited due to restrictions on social distancing during the time of the interviews. The researcher was obliged to make use of other platforms in order to collect information. Participants were provided with open-ended questionnaires that had to be completed on an online platform (Google Forms). Thereafter, a telephonic interview was conducted with each participant.

The open-ended questionnaire was posted on an online platform and consisted of ten questions. The type of questions used served as probes that did not provide participants with a predetermined, fixed set of answer choices. Participants were allowed to respond to the questions and to elaborate on their view concerning collaboration in their own words. The open-ended questionnaire granted the researcher the opportunity to take a holistic and comprehensive look at the topic being studied. The participants’ responses enriched the data, as it added more diversity than would have been possible with a closed-question or forced-choice survey. Participants were requested to complete the questionnaires on Google Forms and to submit it to the researcher.

Telephonic interviews were arranged and conducted once the forms had been received. The researcher set out to be the prime instrument of data collection. Telephonic interviews were selected as the second means of data collection as it was an applicable means to obtain a rich understanding of the ‘lived experience’ of the participants and it provided information pertaining to how they derive meaning from their experiences (Alase, 2017).

The telephonic interviews were seen as a conversation or colloquy that aimed to acquire an enhanced understanding of the context in which the participants operate in (Rossman & Rallis, 2012; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Even though the telephonic interview

was not ideal, it proved to be useful, given that the researcher was able to explore and delve into related matters pertaining to collaboration and to survey particular aspects that led to more focused and practical suggestions in pursuing collaborative partnerships. The researcher took note of the following aspects throughout the data collection process (cf. Lankshear & Knoble, 2004):

- The kind of data that were prerequisite to answer the research question.
- The methods and tools required to gather the needed data.
- The manner in which the collected data would contribute to answering the research question.
- The kind of participants that would contribute with pertinent and appropriate information in order to answer the research question.

1.6.5 Data analysis and interpretation

Data analysis is the process in which the researcher has to scrutinise the information in order to understand the acquired data. This process entails the assessment, classification, reduction and interpretation of information. It is ascertained as a means of bringing the necessary order, structure and substance to the bulk of assembled data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006; Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Moreover, it involves the process of organizing the detected categories, themes, concepts and beliefs, inferring them systematically and ascertaining their significant relationships and features (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004; Rossman & Rallis, 2012).

Analysis of qualitative data involves the non-numerical processing and administration of information aimed at disclosing and unveiling patterns and ensuing themes. The researcher made use of thematic analysis as a means to analyse the data obtained from the open-ended questionnaires and telephonic interviews.

Thematic analysis was conducted and it was deemed the most suitable and fitting method for qualitative data analysis. It assisted the researcher in detecting categories and subsequent themes that emerged as being predominant in the portrayal of collaboration at various local schools in the Limpopo Province. Braun and Clarke

(2006) provide a six-phase guide that were considered throughout the data analysis process for this study:

- **Phase 1:** The researcher had to familiarise herself with the data by reading through all the information obtained and writing down preliminary ideas, initial thoughts and first impressions about the data.
- **Phase 2:** Data were organised systematically and initial codes were ascribed. The codes represented the rudimentary part of the raw data that distinguished a feature of the information that appeared thought-provoking and interesting. A deductive approach was implemented.
- **Phase 3:** Throughout this phase the researcher was required to identify main categories and subsequent themes that could be grouped together.
- **Phase 4:** In this phase themes were reviewed and thematic maps were compiled that displayed the connections between the categories and the subsequent themes.
- **Phase 5:** The main categories were thereafter defined, which ensured the clarity and comprehensibility of the themes.
- **Phase 6:** The last phase entailed reporting on the findings in order to convince the reader of the merit and validity of the analysis (within and across themes). Data extracts were embedded within an analytic narrative to make an argument in relation to the research question. Findings were presented in Chapter 5.

The researcher endeavoured to adhere to all six phases as indicated by Braun and Clark (2006). Once all the data had been obtained the researcher got acquainted with the information by reading through the transcribed notes obtained from both the open-ended questionnaires and additional notes taken during the telephonic interviews. Information was thereafter organized under initial codes. A deductive approach was employed. Codes were reviewed and grouped into corresponding themes. Themes were thereafter refined and the researcher made use of mind maps to determine relationships between the themes identified. Themes were clearly defined and a brief report was compiled. The process of thematic analysis will be described in full in Chapter 4.

1.6.6 Trustworthiness and credibility in qualitative research

In qualitative research, validity and reliability are construed as trustworthiness and transferability pertaining to how much assurance can be placed in the authenticity and soundness of the research procedures and results (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Validity and reliability are therefore described through strategies of trustworthiness. Trustworthiness can be explained as the degree to which other individuals reckon the outcomes of a study to be irrefutable (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). It is, moreover, noted that trustworthiness answers the following question, “Can the findings be trusted?” (Korstjens & Moser, 2018:121). For this study on collaboration, Guba’s model of trustworthiness was taken into account. It includes four aspects of trustworthiness, namely transferability, credibility dependability and confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

Credibility refers to truth-value and to truth-in-reality and it signifies the genuineness and the legitimacy of the research findings. It was suggested that the criteria of credibility be dealt with “as an analogue to internal validity” (Lincoln & Guba, 1986:76). Credibility can be seen as the correlation between the participants’ perspectives of the research and how those perspectives are portrayed or represented by the researcher in the outcomes or results (Nowell et al., 2017). Strategies to ensure credibility included using a combination of data collection methods and member checks. Shenton (2004) suggests three aspects that would contribute to the credibility of a qualitative study – voluntary participation, the use of iterative questioning and providing detailed descriptions of the phenomenon being studied. The researcher only included participants in this study who were fully informed of the nature of the study and who were willing to participate. During the interviews the researcher made use of probing methods to avoid any misunderstandings and a detailed description of collaboration was provided.

In the model of trustworthiness, transferability is described as the extent to which the outcomes or findings of the research can be transferred to a similar and comparable setting with other dissimilar participants and it is concerned with the aspect of applicability. It fundamentally denotes the potential to generalise outcomes to larger populaces. Transferability can therefore be seen as the measure to which results can

be reassigned, or have pertinence in different locations, circumstances and groups. Transferability is determined by means of thick description that is “necessary to enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:316). Shenton (2004) suggests that transferability can be enhanced if a comprehensive and detailed description of the study is provided. An in-depth portrayal of the study will help the reader of the report to fully understand and grasp what was studied. For this reason, the researcher endeavoured to give a thorough description of the phenomenon being studied.

The term ‘dependability’ refers to the constancy or uniformity of the results over the course of time. Consequently, when a different researcher analyses the data, he or she will attain undistinguishable, alike conclusions, validating that the research process is coherent, well executed and appraised (Van der Berg et al., 2011; De Vos et al., 2011). To contribute to the dependability of a study, Shenton (2004) recommends that the study’s research design be clarified to such an extent that it would serve as a model for future studies. The researcher stipulated the study’s methodology and the qualitative approach and interpretivism paradigm were described. The research furthermore specified data collection tools to ensure the clarity of the design employed.

According to Guba and Lincoln (1989), confirmability is established when credibility, transferability and dependability are all achieved. Confirmability is concerned with the aspect of neutrality and with the establishment that interpretations and findings are clearly derived from the data (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The researcher is required to demonstrate how conclusions and interpretations have been reached (Tobin & Begley, 2004). It furthermore refers to the potential for congruence between two or more unconnected people about the data’s accurateness, relevance, or meaning (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Polit & Beck, 2012). The researcher attempted to ensure confirmability by making sure that all reported data were a true reflection of the participants’ experiences.

1.7 RESEARCH ETHICS

Research ethics can be defined as the standards of the researcher's behaviour in relation to the rights of those who become the subject of the research project, or who are affected by it (Saunders et al., 2016). Research ethics are therefore connected to the integrity of the study. It involves the adherence and acceptance of moral principles when working with humans (Gregory, 2003; Ramrathan, Le Grange & Higgs, 2017). Ethical conduct and truthfulness were central to this study. The researcher endeavoured to adhere to the following ethical guidelines:

- **Protection from injury:** No participants were harmed or subjected to avoidable bodily or emotional harm.
- **Voluntary and informed consent or involvement:** All participants were informed about the procedures and purpose of the study and were allotted the choice to participate or decline participation.
- **Right to confidentiality:** All the notes and questionnaires used to acquire information was presented in such a way that participants' right to privacy were safeguarded. Participant's responses were kept confidential.
- **Candour with professional co-workers:** Results were reported in an authentic way without parody or deceptiveness about the nature of the conclusions.

The researcher was required to apply for ethical clearance before the research could be conducted. The application was submitted to the UNISA-CAES Health Research Ethics Committee. This committee reviews applications for research that involves human participants (such as collection of data through questionnaires or interviews), plants, genetically modified organisms (GMOs), biomedical research, and environmental research. The committee is registered with the National Health Research Ethics Council. Research was only conducted once an ethical clearance certificate had been obtained. The researcher endeavoured to act in an accountable manner and strove to achieve the highest possible level of excellence and scientific quality in the research.

1.8 DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

1.8.1 Learning performance and learner performance

Learning performance can be defined in different ways. It has been stated that it can refer to students' test scores (Ferguson & DeFelice, 2010; Ekwunife-Orakwue & Teng, 2014; Law & Geng, 2019) or to their satisfaction with learning (Ekwunife-Orakwue & Teng, 2014).

According to Holland (1982), learner performance in the educational context refers to both the actual assessment learners will face to demonstrate mastery of the learning goals, as well as the context in which the assessment will be administered. In this study, learner performance (or academic achievement in this context) can be described as an indication of a learner's academic success at school (Ahmad, Jelas & Ali, 2011). Learner performance or attainment is interrelated with the expertise and dexterities acquired and fostered by a learner by means of subjects and courses taken. The level of educational attainment or realisation is determined by using the results of examinations, tests, tasks and coursework and it is contingent upon the benchmarks established by the educational institution (Garner-O'Neale & Harrison, 2013). In this study, learner performance was used to refer to the learners' scores or grades obtained in the Grade 12 National Examination, which marks the end of secondary education.

A learner's learning performance and learner performance are interlinked as both are affected by problems that stem from the environment or ecological systems in which they are raised.

1.8.2 School development

School development (or school improvement) can be defined as a systematic, sustained effort aimed at a change in learning conditions and other related internal conditions in schools, with the ultimate aim to accomplish educational goals more effectively (Van Velzen et al., 1985). It is considered to be a systematic approach to change. School development can also be described as relatively systematic changes in the organisation of the school and its curriculum (content, methods of work, etc.) so

that the school's overall goals are improved (OECD, 2016). It is intended to guide and to help the school to focus on the achievement of its mission that is closely related to enhanced learning.

1.8.3 Collaboration

Collaboration can be defined as the direct interaction and interface between at least two equal parties who voluntarily and willingly engage in shared, communal decision-making as they work toward achieving a common goal (Cook & Friend, 1991). Collaboration can also be termed a mutually and reciprocally beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more partners to attain a collective objective (Mattessich, Murray-Close & Monsey, 2001). Collaboration entails partnerships between stakeholders who endeavour to work together, to share expertise and skills to attain mutual goals of assisting the learner to reach their full potential, to enhance learner performance and to contribute to school development.

1.9 CHAPTER OUTLINE

This study on collaboration for the sake of improved learning and enhanced school development consists of six chapters.

Chapter 1 provides an orientation to the study, while Chapter 2 elaborates on a literature review on the main aspects and concepts of the study. Chapter 3 is a presentation of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory that serves as theoretical framework for the study, while Chapter 4 presents the research methodology used in the study. Chapter 5 comprises the biographical information of the participants as well as the presentation, discussion and analysis of the obtained research data. The final chapter represents a summary of the study with findings and recommendations that derived from the study. It also contains sections on the limitations of the study as well as avenues for further research.

1.10 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study presented with several limitations that were mainly caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic restricted personal contact with participants and the in-depth

interviews that had initially been scheduled had to be cancelled and were replaced by telephonic interviews. Participants could not be observed in their work environment and time spent with the participants was limited. Data loss could potentially have occurred. Furthermore, the data collection process was delayed.

Moreover, during the data analysis process the researcher had to be vigilant about personal biases and peculiarities.

1.11 CONCLUSION

Chapter 1 provided an introduction and background to the study. The dire condition of South African schools was depicted, while collaboration between teachers, school counsellors and parents were posed as a possible solution to address poor learner performance and a means to facilitate school development. The chapter elaborated on the grounds for the study, provided the problem and research question and stipulated the proposed aims and objectives. The theoretical framework was outlined and it was noted that Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) served as the theoretical framework for the study.

The research methodology was specified and the research design, paradigm and approach were discussed, while the research population and sample were defined. Information was also provided pertaining to the collection, analysis and interpretation of the data. Trustworthiness in qualitative research was deliberated. The chapter concluded with matters concerning ethical considerations, while the definitions of key concepts, the preliminary chapter outline as well as limitations of the study were described.

The next chapter will comprise the literature review. It includes information pertaining to the condition of South African schools, underachievement, school development and collaboration.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE STUDY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The educational system presents with numerous challenges pertaining to poor academic performance and dealing with high dropout numbers (Hay & Beyers, 2011; Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). School dropout has been defined as “leaving education without obtaining a minimal credential” (De Witte et al., 2013:1). Moreover, the closure of schools in 2020 and 2021 due to the Covid-19 pandemic had a profound effect on the already fragile educational system (UNESCO, 2021). In South Africa a learning loss ratio of approximately 1:1.25 was proposed by Gustafsson and Deliwe (2020). This indicates that learning loss amounted to 1.25 for every day a learner was not able to attend class. Many factors contribute to the dwindling academic performances in South African schools. Some maintain that it stems back to the apartheid era (McKeever, 2017), while others believe that it is due to poor governance and lack of resources (Amnesty International, 2020). Socio-economic factors and inequalities have also been identified as key aspects contributing to the low academic performance of South African learners (Smillie & Mabotja, 2019; Gilili, 2020). Causes of underperformance in schools are evidently manifold, but it is apparent that the South African schooling system will continue to fail our learners without purposeful intervention. This, in return, will have dire consequences for the future prospects of South Africa (Roodt, 2018).

In this chapter, the learner performance and standards in South African schools will be explored. Underachievement and barriers to learning will also be reviewed in order to consider the impact they have had on the performance of learners. Chapter 2 also looks at school development and the concept of collaboration is explored as a possible solution to the social dilemma the educational system is currently facing.

2.2 LEARNER PERFORMANCE AND STANDARDS IN SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOLS

In the early years of South African democracy, discussions and numerous deliberations concerning education commenced. The government endeavoured to

improve the quality of education for all by means of numerous manifestos and undertakings. There has been wide-ranging educational reform in South Africa throughout the past twenty-five years, implemented by means of policies, legislation and numerous programmes. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA, 1996c) provides the foundation for the educational transformation. Still, after all these years, our educational system is still in a crisis situation (Mlachila & Moeletsi, 2019).

In 2018, the Department of Basic Education's Minister, Mrs Motshekga, reported that the National Senior Certificate pass rate for that specific year stood at a mere 78,2% (Kahala, 2019). The Democratic Alliance's shadow Minister of Basic Education, Ms Nomsa Marches, however, stated that the real matric pass rate for 2018 only amounted to 37,6% if one included the number of 2016 Grade 10s who did not write their matric exam in 2018 (Ngqakamba, 2019; Riddle, 2019).

In addition, South Africa's education system has been rated as the worst of all middle-income countries that participate in cross-national assessments of educational achievement (Spaull, 2013). The Department of Basic Education notes in their Annual Report for 2017/2018 that education still has a long way to go before South Africa starts performing at an acceptable level with regard to international assessments (DBE, 2018).

It was inferred that the statistics pertaining to the National Senior Certificate (NSC) exam in Grade 12 do not take learners into account who do not make it to Grade 12. It was stipulated that only 50 learners of every 100 who start school tend to make it to Grade 12. Of those 50 learners only an approximate of 40 will pass, and only 12 will qualify to attend university (Van der Berg, 2019).

Table 2.1 indicates the actual statistics with reference to the 2018 pass rate for Grade 12 learners that give a more accurate depiction of the condition of South African schools. Table 2.1 depicts that there is a definite decline of learners who were enrolled in Grade 10 in 2016 and the number of those learners who actually wrote their Grade 12 examination in 2018. If the real pass rate is calculated based on the 2016 enrolment numbers, then the real pass rates differ immensely. Nationally the given pass rate differs by 40,6%.

Table 2.1: Real academic achievements for the 2018 Grade 12 learners
(Adapted from Chambers, 2019)

Province	Class of 2018		% Grade 10 (2016) who wrote NSC	Passed NSC	Passed NSC (%)	'Real' pass rate (%)
	Gr 10 (2016)	Wrote NSC (2018)				
Eastern Cape	148 346	65 733	44.3	46 393	70.6	31.3
Free State	61 244	24 914	40.7	21 806	87.5	35.6
Gauteng	172 507	94 870	55.0	83 406	87.9	48.3
KwaZulu-Natal	243 935	116 152	47.6	88 485	76.2	36.3
Limpopo	184 028	76 730	41.7	53 254	69.4	28.9
Mpumalanga	90 201	44 612	49.5	35 225	79.0	39.1
North West	66 550	29 061	43.7	23 578	81.1	35.4
Northern Cape	23 082	9 909	42.9	7 264	73.3	31.5
Western Cape	77 182	50 754	65.8	41 350	81.5	53.6
National	1 067 075	512 735	48.1	400 761	78.2	37.6

The Department of Basic Education's 2017/2018 monitoring report was released at the beginning of April 2019 (DBE, 2018). Following this report, Basic Education Minister Motshekga again disclosed that the education system is in fact still dysfunctional (Buys, 2019). A report by the International Monetary Fund reflects corresponding results. It divulges that the majority of the country's public schools are still in a grim state (Mlachila & Moeletsi, 2019).

2.3 UNDERACHIEVEMENT DUE TO BARRIERS TO LEARNING IN SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOLS

Underachievement is currently reckoned a prime discourse in education and educational underachievement is deemed a matter of national and international concern (Smith, 2003; Delisle & Schultz, 2019).

2.3.1 Defining underachievement

Underachievement is a widely used term and numerous definitions have been compiled to encapsulate its true meaning. It can be described as the failure to realise one's capabilities (Gillies, 2009). Delise and Schultz (2019) state that academic underachievement is considered to be one's inability to meet the required academic criteria. Others view underachievement as the difference between high test scores and low grades (Ali & Rafi, 2016; Siegle, 2018), or as the difference between potential and

actual output (Davis & Rimm, 1998). An underachiever can therefore be seen as one who fails to reach his or her potential or who does not perform on par compared to the expected standard.

It can be deduced that underachievers constitute a diverse population, and that both gifted and non-gifted learners can underachieve (Mustafa, 2013). Gifted learners who underachieve are, however, referred to as “society’s greatest loss” (Davis & Rimm, 1998:278).

2.3.2 Factors contributing to underachievement

It has been stated that vulnerable children tend to underachieve (Pillay, 2017). Underachievement can be a direct result of barriers to learning (Nelson, 2005; Hans, 2014; McCoach, 2014). Barriers to learning refer to any difficulty that may stand in the way or prevent a learner from fully participating and learning effectively. All schools have learners who present with barriers to learning and who have diverse needs (Links, 2009). Barriers to learning may not exist all the time, but it can arise suddenly, due to factors such as changes in circumstances and emotional trauma (DoE, 2001b).

The Education White Paper 6 indicates that there is a difference between learners whose barriers to learning are rooted in organic or medical causes and those whose barriers are embedded in systemic difficulties (DoE, 2001b; Engelbrecht, Nel & Tlale, 2016). Barriers to learning can therefore result from intrinsic or extrinsic aspects (Vlok, 2016).

Intrinsic barriers include chronic illness, physical, sensory, and neurological and developmental impairments, psychosocial disturbances and differing intellectual ability. On the other hand, extrinsic barriers to learning may be caused by the external environment (Walton et al., 2009). Intrinsic and extrinsic barriers to learning do not function separately, but co-occur within a system (Pepin, Segal & Coolidge, 2009). Barriers to learning can be viewed as the interplay of challenges that learners encounter during their development in their immediate or external environment (Lourens, 2013). In this study the focus will be on extrinsic barriers that exist due to a child’s ecological framework.

Extrinsic barriers can result due to three key factors; firstly, from the systemic factors at home, school and in the local community; secondly, from teaching and learning factors in the learning environment; and lastly, from the broader systemic factors like inadequate psychosocial support or health and education support for learners and teachers (Stofile et al., 2013). It is apparent that what ensues in one system impinges on and is affected by other systems (Nicolescu, 2017).

In Figure 2.1, various intrinsic and extrinsic barriers to learning are represented as evident in independent schools within South Africa.

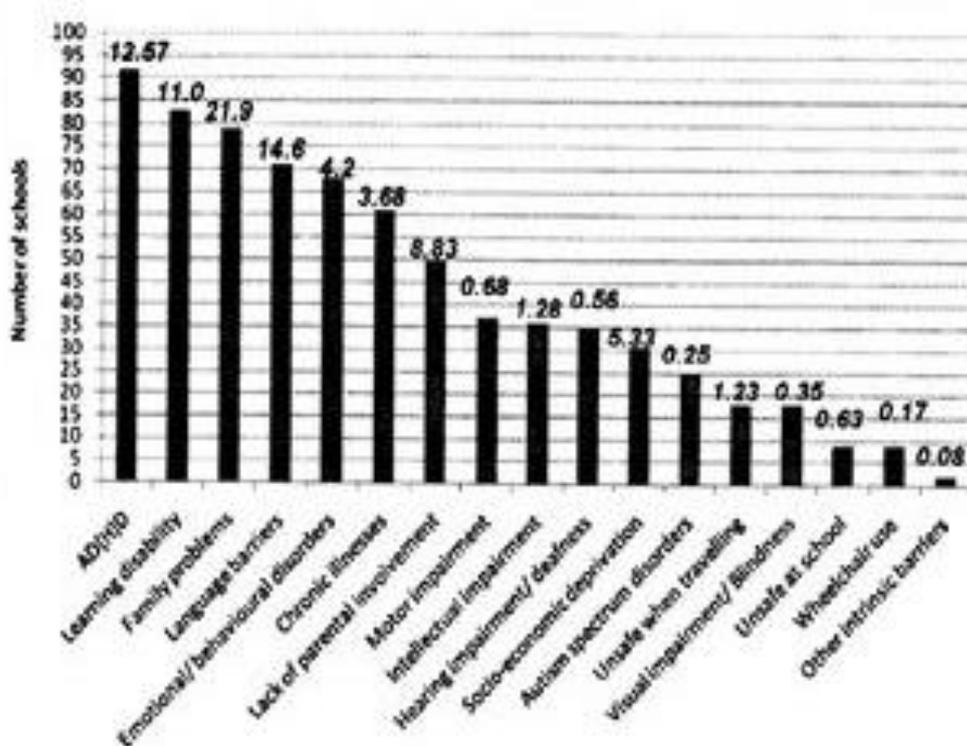


Figure 2.1: Barriers of learning prevalent in independent schools in South Africa (Adapted from Walton et al., 2009)

The italicised numbers in Figure 2.1 indicate the total number of schools reporting barriers to learning experienced by their learners. The challenge that the education system faces is therefore to understand the intricacy of the effects, connections and interrelationships between the individual learner and the multiple other systems that are connected to the learner from an ecological systems theory or systems change perspective (Swart & Pettipher, 2015; Darling-Hammond, 2019).

2.3.3 Main causes of underachievement

Poor academic performance and learner dropout are the most obvious causes of educational underachievement (Finlay & Gibbons, 2009). Learners who struggle to perform academically may be more likely to drop out of school (Archambault et al., 2009). McWhirter (2007:127) describes a dropout as “a pupil who leaves school before graduation and before completing a program of study”. Early school leaving is a notable component in the cycle of educational underachievement and is associated with a range of poor outcomes in adult life, including higher unemployment rates, poorer quality employment, low pay, poorer physical and mental health, and higher crime rates (Belfield & Levin, 2007; Smyth & McCoy, 2009). Girls who leave school early are more likely to become single mothers and there are higher rates of imprisonment amongst male early school leavers, compared to other groups of men (Levin, 2009; Smyth & McCoy, 2009). Learners who leave school early are more likely to experience several disadvantages pertaining to their adult life, given that they have a higher propensity to be subjected to poverty and social exclusion that will prolong and maintain the cycle of deprivation. Dropouts face dreary economic and social prospects, as they are less likely to secure employment and earn a decent income (Rumberger, 2013).

2.3.4 Addressing underachievement

To effectively address underachievement within a school setting, learners will have to be provided with comprehensive learner support that includes academic assistance as well as emotional support that will adequately address unfulfilled needs or problems that stem from external systems (Mashau et al., 2008). According to Lazarus (1987), this support should reduce barriers to learning. Learner support should therefore address both learners’ academics as well as their social and emotional well-being.

The researcher is of the opinion that effective collaboration between key stakeholders will address the problem of underachievement that is widespread and common in schools. Teachers, parents and school counsellors can combat this crisis by means of working together and providing a unified front. Each stakeholder fulfils a unique role and offers distinctive skills and expertise that can assist learners effectively and holistically.

A further consideration when addressing the occurrence of underachievement and barriers to learning is to understand the concept of school development.

2.4 THE CONCEPT OF SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT

School development in this study is closely related to school improvement and school effectiveness. School improvement can be seen as the process by which a school endeavours to improve its proficiency, which involves a learner's achievement and basic functionality (Makoelle, 2012). School improvement is deemed a persistent process of improving the productivity of the institute (Macbeath & Mortimore, 2001). It can also be specified as the long-standing aim of progressing towards the epitome of the self-renewing school (Teddlie & Reynolds, 2000).

Schools will develop once they accept that change is important. Any kind of transformation within a school will moreover depend on the proficiency by which it is governed. Change and school improvement are interrelated. Change can lead to improvement if it is systematic, focused on internal conditions and set on accomplishing educational goals. For change to be effective, stakeholders should maintain a multi-level perspective, make use of integrated implementation strategies and incorporate new ideas (Hopkins, 2001). However, many schools struggle to develop, as they find it demanding to embrace transformation (Fullan, 2004). Schools are seen as sites typified by variety, power relationships and micro-politics, which habitually block out any form of transformation. Change must, however, be a focal matter for the educational community (Fullan, 2001).

School improvement is directly associated with school effectiveness. The two processes signify how well a school functions and it adds to the fostering of a conducive climate in which a school can flourish. School effectiveness can be described as a school's ability to achieve their objectives (Makoelle, 2009). A school's effectiveness can therefore be equated with their capability to realise their set goals (Beare, Caldwell & Millikan, 1989). The literature based on school effectiveness seems to correspond to that of school improvement (Van der Westhuizen, 2002).

Collaboration between key stakeholders can contribute towards overall school effectiveness (Rubin, 2002), while collaboration among school leaders could develop

the interchange of mindsets and opinions that can contribute to astute decision-making (Esp & Suran, 1995; Reynolds, 1995; Gray, 1996). Collaborative partnerships will contribute towards the proficiency of a school. Each stakeholder should, however, acknowledge the roles and functions of the other; expectancies should be attuned; roles must be clearly defined; and open communication ought to be maintained at all times. The stakeholders should also the same communal standards and values (Sallis, 2001).

School development in this study is therefore understood as the process where the school strives to uphold high levels of productivity and effectiveness in order to improve learner performance. Change is, however, an inevitable prerequisite and requirement for transformation to occur.

It is apparent that change is indispensable, considering the current state of South African schools. Collaborative partnerships between stakeholders are posed as the change needed to facilitate the necessary school development.

2.5 THE CONCEPT OF COLLABORATION

2.5.1 Defining collaboration

Collaboration is one of the most misconstrued concepts within the educational setting, and without dedication to its success and commitment to understanding the intricacies thereof, collaboration will become more form than content. It is, however, seen as a ubiquitous concept (Fullan, 1993; Friend, 2000).

The term 'collaboration' originated from a Latin word *col* (meaning 'together') and *laborare* (meaning 'to work'), literally meaning 'to work together' (Paddick, 2016). It involves partnerships between equal parties who engage voluntarily to attain mutual goals, which in the milieu of this research is meeting the needs of all learners. Collaboration is furthermore portrayed as the action of working with someone in order to produce something (*Oxford Dictionary*, 2016).

Collaboration has also been described as a mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more partners to realise a mutual objective

(Mattessich et al., 2001; Mattatall & Power, 2014). It implies a commitment from all parties involved to jointly solve a common challenge through innovative teamwork. In addition, collaboration is seen as an active and dynamic process and partnerships should be cultivated amongst teachers, parents and school counsellors that are devoid of traditional 'turf issues' (Hoover & Achilles, 1996; Epstein, 2016). It has also been understood to be "a process through which parties who see different aspects of a problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited vision of what is possible" (Gray, in Rich, Giles & Stern, 2001:198).

Collaboration is in general characterized by equal contributions, equivalent decision-making power, a shared problem, joint responsibility in the problem-solving process, mutual accountability for the outcome and pooled resources (Friend & Cook, 2007). It is viewed as a course of action through which individuals, groups and organisations work collectively to attain dual objectives (e.g. solving a problem or pursuing a communal vision). It is, however, evident that collaboration has to be fostered to catalyse limited resources and to reach distinct goals. Collaboration requires an enabler, mobiliser or facilitator that will get the process moving. It is apparent that collaboration is anything but simplistic. According to Powell (2013), collaboration comprises all the following important aspects:

- Forming or establishing beneficial interactive and interpersonal relationships;
- Working towards mutuality (giving and receiving help);
- Sharing information, expertise, observations and reflections;
- Overcoming territoriality and moving beyond working independently;
- Inspiring an expectation of persistent reflection and professional development;
- Participating in co-planning;
- Improving communication;
- Developing a sense of belonging and membership;
- Creating a shared vision or a mutual purpose; and
- Moving from the idea of "work" to the concept of meaningful mission.

Collaborative partnerships between the identified stakeholders should include all the above-mentioned aspects to ensure the effectiveness of their efforts. The partnerships should be to the benefit of all the stakeholders and open communication should be maintained at all times. Parents, teachers and school counsellors should work towards obtaining the same goals and be actively involved in the process by providing assistance when needed and by asking help when required.

Each stakeholder brings something unique to the partnership – his/her own set of skills and expertise – that can help a learner in need. Teachers, school counsellors and parents must work as a team when planning and implementing initiatives and respect for one another should be of the utmost importance. All stakeholders should work towards mutual goals – addressing the needs of learners holistically, enhancing academic performance and contributing to school development. Collaborative efforts should not be viewed as an added responsibility, but as a calling that will bring forth much-needed change.

2.5.2 The nature of collaboration

Collaboration is the process whereby persons or groups of individuals work conjointly towards attaining a mutual goal. However, collaboration is more than simply sharing knowledge and information (communication). It is much more than a relationship that aids all stakeholders to attain their goals. Collaborative partnerships endeavour “to create shared visions and joint strategies” that will address concerns that go far beyond mere individual needs (Chrislip & Larson, 1994:5). It is the act of working with another person or group of people to create or produce something that will facilitate change (Couch, 2020). It is not about creating a place where people feel good, but rather about cultivating the expertise of each stakeholder that will be drawn from in order to reach a collective purpose (Fullan & Quinn, 2016).

The word ‘collaboration’ is often associated with other words that are used interchangeably. These include words like ‘alliance’, ‘partnership’, ‘networks’, ‘coalition’, ‘cooperation’, ‘coordination’, or even ‘consortium’ (Winer & Ray, 1994:23). It is therefore important to take note of the differences between these words indicated above as interchanging these words will make the understanding of collaboration difficult and it may result in stakeholders engaging in relationships that are defined

differently from what is required (Winer & Ray, 1994).

- Cooperation entails working together towards a shared aim or "working together to produce an effect" (Winer & Ray, 1994:23).
- An alliance denotes a group of people who work together to achieve something they all want (Ferguson, 1999).
- A partnership signifies a relationship between two or more people who similarly invest funds or resources into and collect from a project (Winer & Ray, 1994).
- A network refers to a closely connected group of people who exchange information (Winer & Ray, 1994).
- A coalition refers to a group formed by people from different groups, agreeing to work together for a particular purpose (Bailey & Koney, 1995).
- Coordination involves the act of making parts of something, groups of people, working together in an efficient and organized way. It is working together for a common goal, but without conflict (Winer & Ray, 1994).
- A consortium is described as a group of people who work together on a particular project (*Oxford Dictionary*, 2016). It is seen as

a partnership [that] identify themselves with a particular community, neighbourhood, or locale [who] unite in an effort to apply collectively their resources toward the implementation of a common strategy for the achievement of a common goal within that community (Bailey & Koney, 1995:22).

Collaboration entails common goals, joint work or interdependence, parity or equality and voluntary participation. Trust, respect, transparency, active listening, unambiguous communication and risk taking are essential prerequisites for collaborative efforts (Couch, 2020). It is a dynamic process and is characterized by collaborative diversity, conflict, respect, time and hard work. The partnerships amongst teachers, parents and school counsellors must be cultivated and enduring collaborative relationships must be nurtured through the discovery and cultivation of exosystemic partners (Kodama, 2018).

2.5.3 Purpose of collaboration

It has been stated that there are many purposes of collaboration (Frey et al., 2006). The foremost purpose of collaboration within educational settings is the improvement of learner learning (Muijs et al., 2011). Fullan states that the ability to collaborate on both a small and large scale is becoming one of the core fundamentals of postmodern society (Fullan, 1993). Collaboration has become and will continue to be a significant and critical factor in the dynamics of modern-day education and school reform (Muijs et al., 2011). School development is the joint responsibility of all those concerned with education, and collaboration is vital if schools are to be maintained efficiently and empowered to provide quality education. Research indicates that stakeholders should work in collaboration, given that identified problems in schools cannot be resolved in isolation (Moolla & Lazarus, 2014).

The main goal of collaborative initiatives amongst schools should therefore be the enhancement of learners' performance and learner learning (Hattie, 2015). Teachers, parents and school counsellors work within the ecosystem; that is, the school, the family, the community, institutions, and other subsystems that interact within the school. As such, they assume a pivotal role in learners' development and the support they provide in the different systems are vital to learner performance (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Donald, Lazarus & Moolla, 2014; Landsberg, 2005). It has been claimed that collaborative relationships between teachers, families and communities improve learner outcomes (Boethel, 2003; Thorson, 2018). When working collaboratively, individuals and organisations learn from one another and from different parts of the organisation. This typically results in innovative change, effective interventions and the avoidance of repetition of mistakes and unproductive, futile endeavours (Conley & Cooper, 2013).

2.5.4 Collaboration and learner support

'Support' suggests the holding up of something that might be in danger of collapsing. It signifies that there is a firm hope that something might be improved upon. Therefore, support in education can be seen as the response to learners who are in need of help or guidance, with the main purpose being to develop their potential and capabilities. The Department of Education defines learner support as a school's responses to the

varied needs of the learners in order to increase the capacity of learners through various activities (DoE, 2001b). Any supportive interventions that seek to remove or minimise any barriers to learning might have an effect on one or more of the other systems a learner is part of. Effective education support must therefore occur within a systems approach and collaboration between these systems must be established.

2.5.5 Key components of collaboration

Knowledge of the key components of collaboration and insight into the specific contexts in which to apply collaboration strategies is important in order to provide effective learner support, as indicated in paragraph 2.3.4 (Darling-Hammond, 2019). Some noteworthy authors who have studied collaboration identified the following important components: common goals (Cook & Friend, 1991; Welch & Sheridan, 1995); joint work or interdependence (Gray, 1989; Little, 1990; Welch & Sheridan, 1995); parity or equality (Cook & Friend, 1991; Welch & Sheridan, 1995); and voluntary participation (Cook & Friend, 1991; Hargreaves, 1994). These components are illustrated in Figure 2.2.

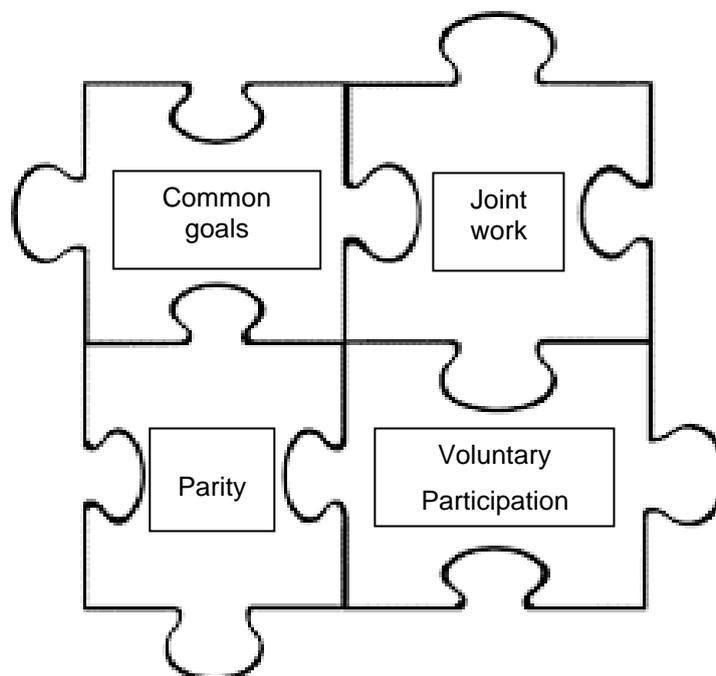


Figure 2.2: Important components of collaboration (Adapted from Cook & Friend, 1991)

Collaborative partners have common or mutual goals that are favourable to all. The objectives are decided on and framed by the stakeholders themselves. Collaboration

cannot exist without shared goals. Sharing a common goal will clarify each participant's contribution and provide an indication of how their input fits into the larger picture, what each partner does and what individual responsibilities entail. This will in all likelihood result in improved general communication, accountability and transparency, and it will contribute to a sense of belonging (Welch & Sheridan, 1995; Powell, 2013). Teachers, school counsellors and parents should have mutual goals that focus on addressing the learners' diverse needs, enhancing their scholastic performance and facilitating school development.

The second important component of collaboration is joint work. This signifies teamwork. All stakeholders should commit to rely on one another and to work in unison as they pursue their identified goal of supporting learners. Individuals are typically driven to collaborate when they are of the opinion that they are dependent on their partners and that their success hinges on teamwork (Little, 1990; Slater, 2010).

Parity or equality in relationship is an additional indispensable element of collaboration (Welch & Sheridan, 1995; Slater, 2010). In education, collaboration may bring together individuals of uneven eminence and status such as parents, teachers and support staff. All stakeholders should believe that they have a profound input to offer the collaborative process and that their contribution is appreciated and esteemed by others. Collaboration offers teachers who have customarily been concerned in tiered and competitive top-down structures with a means of working to attain objectives in a more horizontal, even-handed and cooperating manner. Learning to collaborate is about the distribution of power, knowledge and influence. Once stakeholders in education work together, their communal influence entails pooled power and equality amongst participants (Slater, 2010).

Collaboration should be voluntary and all stakeholders should participate in collaboration by choice (Cook & Friend, 1991; Slater, 2010). Collaborative work relations arise not from administrative constraint or compulsion, but from the perceived value and understanding among participants that working together is productive.

Other important components of collaboration that have been identified include cultivating a conducive climate for collaboration and the importance of trust. To enhance collaboration, one should cultivate a favourable environment in which

partnerships will flourish. Essential characteristics crucial to creating a collaborative climate include collective responsibility, clear purpose, time allowance, effective communication and collective inquiry (Sharratt & Planche, 2016). A conducive school climate can have a significant effect on family-school partnerships (Berkowitz et al., 2017).

The school climate ought to be considered a serious matter in the promotion of a good atmosphere in the school (Henson, 2012). Learners tend to realise their academic, relational and physical capability in a school with an optimistic, reverential ambiance. A welcoming climate is therefore essential, because it sets the context for positive participation (Armstrong, 2015). Moreover, relationships and interaction variables are important to parents in determining whether the school environment is welcoming.

In the milieu of developing partnerships with families, care should be taken to ensure a climate that is welcoming and that fosters trust between the home and school (Parrett & Budge, 2012). This is particularly true when there are social or physical distances between homes and schools, or when there is a history of poor relationships between families and the school (e.g. uncomfortable meetings, or a large number of meetings to discuss disciplinary actions taken against a child). If family-school partnerships are to thrive, schools must be seen as convivial and family-friendly communities (Slater, 2010).

Trust formation may be viewed as a means of building a conducive climate between the family and the school (Armstrong, 2015). Trust building creates the conditions that promote participation and a positive working partnership that endorse children's learning. Trust is also a prerequisite for more serious intervention discussions (Slater, 2010). Parents and teachers alike consider trust as a very important part of effective partnerships centred on improving student learning – even though parents typically report trusting teachers more than teachers report trusting parents (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Katz & Strier, 2015). Trust formation is evidently a key component of building successful collaborative relationships. Much literature in addition expands on trust formation in schools as a predictive factor in school improvement (Daly, 2009; Tschannen-Moran, 2009).

2.5.6 The collaboration process

Collaboration occurs in varying stages of interactions. There are numerous views on what these stages comprise of. Roberts, Van Wyk and Dhanpat (2017) identified the following stages of collaboration – networking, partnering, merging and unifying. Gulati, Wohlgezogen and Zhelyazkov (2012) indicate that cooperation, coordination and collaboration are stages that foster partnerships. They maintain that the identified stages are developmental and that each stage builds upon another by adding increasing levels of communication and shared decision making (Gulati et al., 2012).

Hogue's 3 Levels of Community Linkage Model is a commonly used collaboration framework. It identifies five levels of collaboration, which include networking, cooperation (or alliance), coordination (or partnership), coalition and collaboration (Hogue, 1993; Zoia, 2016). This model maintains that the collaboration process exists across a continuum, with the stages differing, based upon purpose, how decisions are made and the type of leadership employed (Frey et al., 2006).

The first stage of the collaborative continuum is networking. Networking entails being aware of other units and having loosely defined roles, while only little communication and independent decision making are evident. Networking can be useful in establishing initial connections that can later develop into more intense collaborative partnerships (Hogue, 1993).

The next stage on the continuum is the development from networking to cooperation. Cooperation is seen as the stage where initial information is shared, roles are defined to some extent, communication is deemed a bit formal and decision making is still independent and self-determining (Winer & Ray, 2012).

Coordination occurs where stakeholders start to share more information and resources. Roles are defined more meticulously, frequent communication transpires between the stakeholders, and there is evidence of some shared decision making. Coordination is an important stage of development in the continuum of collaborative relationships. Coordinated groups provide formal access and input to building wide collaborative tasks (Hogue, 1993; Winter & Ray, 2012).

The coalition stage is characterized by shared information and resources, frequent and prioritized communication, and defined roles. All stakeholders have a say in decision-making (Hogue, 1993). Coalitions increase collaborative intensity by providing a higher level of input and decision making by groups, such as which problems to focus on, which programmes to improve, and what assessments to implement.

Collaboration represents the final stage on the continuum. This is where all members are viewed as partners and all share their information and resources. Authentic collaboration results in the creation of a new, shared identity into a new organizational unit (Hogue, 1993). Stakeholders maintain open and frequent communication and their relationships are characterized by mutual trust and respect. All members participate in decision making and consensus is reached before any action is taken. True collaboration is embodied in a longitudinal culture of shared identity, trust, and consensus making (Franklin, Harris & Allen-Meares, 2006; Cassandro, 2011). Table 2.2 illustrates the five levels of collaboration.

*Table 2.2: Hogue's 3 levels of community linkage model
(Adapted from Zoia, 2016)*

	NETWORKING	COOPERATION	COORDINATION	COALITION	COLLABORATION
Organization	Aware of organizational units	Provide information to each other	Share information and resources	Share ideas and Share resources	Members belong to one collaborative organizational unit sharing ideas and resources for advantage
Role Definition	Loosely defined roles	Somewhat defined roles	Defined roles Defined roles	Defined roles	Defined roles with Authority
Communication Level	Little communication	Formal communication	Frequent communication	Frequent and prioritized communication	Frequent communication is characterized by mutual trust
Decision Making	All decisions are made independently	All decisions are made independently	Some shared decision-making	All members have a vote in decision making	Consensus is reached on all decisions

Collaborative processes are an integral part in understanding collaboration and its

success with collaborative partners. Collaboration is not based on like-minded compromise, but is characterised by collaborative diversity, conflict, respect, time and hard work. Collaboration is not a quick and easy process; it demands much of stakeholders.

2.5.7 Collaboration partners and their roles

Over the last few years, policymakers have emphasised the need for school reform that will improve the practices of teachers and other professionals, which will increase learner achievement (Waldron & Mclenskey, 2010). Teachers, parents and school counsellors play a pivotal role as they engage with the learner within the various ecosystems, which include the home, the school, the community and the country at large.

2.5.7.1 The role of teachers

The role of a teacher has become progressively more complex. Teachers are no longer simply required to prepare and present classes; they are also expected to fulfil the role of Learning Programme Developer, Assessor, Curriculum Developer, Classroom Manager and Mediator of Learning, as specified in the *Norms and Standards for Educators* (Pierce, 2017). Despite increasing responsibilities, they are additionally expected to manage the diverse needs and growing barriers to learning of their learners (DoE, 2011). Some of the roles teachers are required to fulfil might even fall outside their scope of expertise.

Since 1994, South Africa's educational system has been subjected to a process of transformation with the purpose of producing an inclusive educational environment that will benefit learners and enhance their academic progression and overall development (DoE, 2011). However, inclusive education added to the demands on teachers (Nel et al., 2016). Research indicates that many teachers were not ready for the transformation in schools and accommodating learners with diverse needs proved to be challenging (Harper, 2019). The experience of being an inclusive teacher is, moreover, challenging enough to cause physiological and psychological stress.

It was furthermore noted that teachers often feel a sense of disempowerment and

many tend to leave the profession as a result (Maphosa & Shuma, 2010). Teachers are required to manage diverse behaviour in their classrooms. Addressing behavioural problems consumes a great deal of a teacher's time as they tend to devote excess time dealing with troublesome behaviour, hostility, vandalism, withdrawal and depression (Potgieter-Groot, Visser & Lubbe, 2012).

It subsequently leaves them exasperated, frazzled and disheartened (Prinsloo, 2005) and with little or no time to inspire pleasing performances, such as efficacious social abilities (making and sustaining friendships, dealing productively with peer pressure), self-regulation (working autonomously, concluding a task on time), and behaviour that is suggestive of a good self-esteem, for example, taking pride in work and feeling good about achievements (Saloviita, 2013).

Emotional and behavioural barriers are found in between 3% and 6% of learners in South African schools and are increasing globally. These estimates indicate that potentially two or more learners per class in South African schools may experience emotional and behavioural problems (Winter 2007; Potgieter-Groot et al., 2012). This number of learners per class may even be much higher in South African schools if a broader definition of emotional and behavioural barriers is used that includes a systemic perspective (Potgieter-Groot et al., 2012).

Using a systemic framework requires changes in teachers' behaviour, classroom practices and school organisation to be able to take active steps and be supportive of the diversity of learner needs (Harcombe, 2009). Teachers can play an important role in taking action to assist learners who are struggling. They are, however, not trained to be experts when it comes to psychological difficulties and interventions.

Teachers are regularly involved in intense communication with their learners, as they spend a substantial amount of time with them. As a result, teachers can provide crucial information regarding their behaviour and functioning and help school counsellors to design appropriate and unique interventions (Kauffman & Landrum, 2013).

Collaboration, involvement, redirection, dedication, and community support can provide a solution to the problem of fulfilling the needs of learners and actualising their full potential. Collaboration with other stakeholders is of the utmost importance to

address the known problems in classrooms effectively (Slater, 2010). However, some teachers still believe that they are exclusively responsible for learners' learning in their classroom, and that parents and counsellors should be kept at a distance and only be involved if the teacher cannot resolve a learner's difficulties. However, by building strong positive relationships with the families, teachers can help to serve as a protector or buffer against risk factors posed by the children's environment (Nalls et al., 2010).

Teachers can, however, impede collaboration and effective relationships with the parents and counsellors due to the following barriers, lack of time, own background, fear of criticism, negative attitudes, institutional atmosphere, expectations, and unclear role definitions (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Adams, Harris & Jones, 2016).

2.5.7.2 The role of parents

Many researchers recognise the important role that a strong positive bond between home and school plays in the development and education of learners. It was noted that "level of commitment and active participation is what makes an involved parent" (La Bahn, 1995:62). Several studies indicate that there is a strong correlation between academic achievement and involved parents (Tárraga et al., 2017). Families are a crucial ingredient in determining whether a learner flourishes at school.

Studies also indicate that parental involvement is the most effective when viewed as a partnership between teachers and parents (Epstein, 2008). Increased parental involvement is also related to a learner's positive self-image (Garbacz et al., 2017), school retention and attendance (Ross, 2016) as well as to the social competence of learners (Amatea, 2013; Jeynes, 2011). Parental involvement also improves learners' achievements, intellectual skills, and their motivation to study. It can also decrease disciplinary problems in the classroom (Epstein, 2008). Parental involvement will improve parents' attitudes towards a school; it will enhance their cooperation while also motivating teachers to seek even better instruction methods (Tam & Chan, 2009; Koutrouba et al., 2009). It seemingly contributes to favourable and encouraging school environments.

Joyce Epstein developed a framework that focuses on school, parent and community involvement. It is aimed at cultivating partnerships that will ultimately provide greater

support for learners. In this framework she refers to the theory of overlapping spheres of influence and she specifies six types of involvement. The major spheres of influence comprise parents, teachers and the community and she emphasises that collaboration between the three will have an immense effect on a learners' success. She furthermore holds that the partnerships are reciprocal and that it will also profit the parent, teacher and community as a whole (Epstein, 2001; Epstein et al., 2009). Each of Epstein's six types of parental involvement has an impact on the progression and learning of the learner and facilitates the growth of the parents, school and community.

Figure 2.3 provides a depiction of the six types of parental involvement approaches developed by Epstein (1995), which include parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making and collaborating with the community. This model accentuates the role of partnerships.

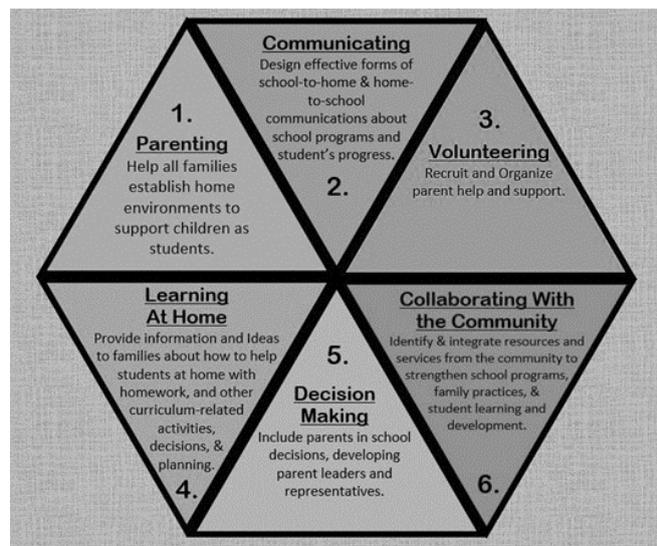


Figure 2.3: Epstein's model of parental involvement (Adapted from Keany, 2019)

The model focuses on how schools reach out to parents to form partnerships. Parenting entails helping families to establish home environments where learners will be supported. The school can provide parents with the necessary parent education or various family support programs that will empower them to assist and guide their own children. Schools can further make use of parent orientation programmes that will enhance their knowledge about school practices and requirements.

Communicating refers to designing effective means of communication between the

school and the home. These means of communication should clearly inform parents of various programmes or events held at the school. Learners' progress should also be communicated. This can be done by means of hosting parent conferences or parent days. Schools can send out regular newsletters, calendars indicating important dates or set up WhatsApp groups where information is shared.

Volunteering involves the recruitment of parents that will offer their support and time. Schools can send out annual surveys to enquire about the unique skills and availability of parents. The school can even set aside one classroom in the school where these volunteers can work. Parents can volunteer to help at sports events or even join school patrols to ensure the safety of learners before and after school, or they can assist with the regulation of the traffic before or after school. Schools can also provide parents with information on how they can assist their children at home. Information provided can guide parents on how to help their children with their homework and how they could monitor their schoolwork. In addition, parents can be provided with information about study skills or homework policies.

Decision making requires that parents be included when various school decisions are taken. Parents can be asked to join the school board or a parent committee. Collaborating with community entails identifying a number of services and resources within the community that will ultimately contribute towards learning and development. This can include allowing experts in various fields to provide workshops to parents and learners alike or partnering with school counsellors and psychologists.

Numerous aspects can, however, hinder parents from becoming fully involved in their child's education. Some of these include lacking childcare, rigid work schedules, insufficient earnings and transportation to participate in school programmes and events, or insecurity to interact in a culture and/or in a language that differs from their own. Additional aspects include feeling embarrassed about their own educational failure, lack of written literacy skills, insufficient information of home-school collaboration, and different expectations of the school's role. Parents' discomfort in higher-class settings can also inhibit parental involvement (Kantahyanee et al., 2016).

Probably one of the most important aspects of cultivating parental involvement is maintaining communication. Collaboration between teachers and parents is often quite

limited (Correira, Teixeira & Forlin, 2021). Many teachers admit that they usually communicate with parents only in cases when they encounter negative learner behaviour or when a child tends to fail a class (Epstein, 2008). Educational and cultural gaps may also hinder easy and effective communication between parents and the educational team (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005; Ratcliff & Hunt, 2009), and parents are less inclined to be involved as children get older (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Baker et al., 2016).

Communication can cease if parents perceive that teachers harbour negative attitudes towards them (Baum & Swick, 2008) or if teachers are of the opinion that parents are not interested in being involved (Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Epstein & Dauber, 1991). Teachers may object to parents' involvement as they might feel that parents do not have the necessary expertise to contribute within an educational setting. Empowering parents to participate in decision-making might even instigate conflict between teachers and parents, but in some cases, teachers may feel that such collaboration undermines their professional status (Epstein & Sanders, 2000).

Continuity between the home and school environment is important, and to maintain that continuity, primary caregivers and school staff need to maintain two-way communication (Fantuzzo, Tighe & Childs, 2000; Sheridan & Kim, 2016). Communication and partnership will benefit all stakeholders. Communicating with parents and acknowledging them as the experts on their children will allow parents to be a resource for teachers, also to understand the children's needs and abilities better, and parents and teachers could form a relationship of mutual respect and trust.

To promote effective communication with families, schools should design a variety of school-to-home as well as home-to-school communication strategies about events, programmes and learners' progress on a continual basis (O'Connor, 2008). This communication should be part of a co-equal relationship (Spry & Graham, 2009). Parents should be seen as equal partners and should be treated accordingly. Even when engagement is difficult, their wealth of knowledge is worth pursuing, and it can make a real difference in services. While school professionals often see the learner in only one setting, parents are accustomed to dealing with multiple systems and they are knowledgeable about interventions that have worked in different

situations.

Parents can also facilitate communication between school providers and other agencies. Because of the different strengths parents and professionals bring to collaboration, there are different actions each can take to make the relationship more productive. Schools and families have been described as partners in the education of their children (Epstein, 2011a) and parents and teachers should therefore work hand in hand. Parents and teachers will enjoy reciprocal support and satisfaction in achieving positive changes in learners and at the school (Lemmer, 2013).

Direct involvement of parents in learners' schooling will make a difference. Engaging and including parents can have a positive effect on a learner's motivation and wellbeing at school and can also encourage learning attainment (Epstein, 2011b). There are several avenues through which parents can become involved in a school (Patall, Cooper & Robinson) and these should be encouraged and promoted by teachers and school counsellors.

2.5.7.3 The role of school counsellors

Counsellors have been designated by the Health Professions Council of South Africa as psychological personnel who do psychological screening, basic assessment and technically restricted psychological interventions with an assortment of individuals. In addition, they endeavour to improve personal performance within a range of milieus, including school, work, sport and community (Abel & Louw, 2009; HPCSA, 2019). In South Africa, school counsellors need to complete an Honours degree in education with psychology as a major subject. Units to be covered through the course of study include counselling practice, psychometrics, psychological assessment, counselling theory, development and learning, special needs and support, life skills and health education, and an educational psychology research project.

The HPCSA furthermore expects of counsellors to be proficient in particular areas or practice domains, for example, School Counselling, Career Counselling, Family Counselling, Primary Mental Health, Trauma Counselling, HIV/AIDS Counselling, Pastoral Counselling, Employee Well-Being, Sports Counselling, and Human Resources. On completion of a six months' practicum, followed by a board exam,

registration with the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) is required.

As stated by the Health Professional Counselling Board for Psychology, registered counsellors' principal aim entails assessments relating to intellectual and/or scholastic barriers, aptitude tests, personality profiling and career placements. Counsellors can do referrals, short-term interventions – psycho-education, or promoting psychosocial wellbeing (Abel & Louw, 2009; HPCSA, 2019). The minimum qualification to hold the post of a school psychologist in the Department of Basic Education in South Africa is a four-year degree (e.g. an Honours degree), which allows one to register as a counsellor or psychometrist (Daniels et al., 2007).

According to the Policy regarding Registered Counsellors issued by HPCSA – Form 258 (HPCSA, 2019), registered counsellors conduct psychological screening, perform basic assessment and implement psychological interventions with groups or with individuals that are meant to improve their overall functioning. In essence, their function entails to prevent, promote, intervene, and to refer, when necessary. Their role at a preventative and promotional level includes:

- Offering counselling services and interventions that will contribute toward prevention and development;
- Screening and identifying any possible mental health issues;
- Conducting psychometric assessments that fall within their scope of practice;
- Addressing identified problems, i.e. dealing with stress or trauma;
- Providing the necessary support to restore a 'normal' level of functioning;
- Providing psycho-education and promoting mental health and psychosocial welfare;
- Working collaboratively with interdisciplinary professional teams; and
- Referring to other professionals or resources, when needed.

Counsellors can also participate in the formulation of policies and are involved in the design, management and evaluation of psychologically based programmes. Additionally, they are required to act in accordance with the Ethical Rules of Conduct for Practitioners registered under the Health Professions Act, 1974 (HPCSA, 2013)

and they must adhere to the scope of practice of registered counsellors. Registered counsellors can also conduct and report on research projects and provide expert evidence and/or opinions (DoH, 2011). The roles and responsibilities of school counsellors in South Africa are clearly very broad.

Numerous social ills are conspicuous in South Africa. These include poverty, various forms of abuse, violence in schools, discrimination, sexism, xenophobia, high crime rates, HIV/AIDS, and teenage pregnancies. These social problems make school counsellors essential. They fulfil an invaluable service at schools as they endeavour to support the teachers, learners and parents, ultimately to facilitate the improvement of the school as a whole. Schools need to be physically safe spaces if they are to support the development of learners. Teaching and learning cannot take place optimally in a social setting that feels unsafe and threatening. School counsellors can play an important role in providing safe environments for learners (Moolla, 2011).

Counselling practices that are child and family centred and that also take into consideration the needs of the educational staff for emotional support and professional guidance are the most effective in responding to learners' problems (Adelman & Taylor, 2010; National Association of School Psychologists, 2010; Kourkoutas, 2012).

In addition, school counsellors can provide teachers with the necessary support they too require. Teachers require specialised support in light of the rising complexity of learners' social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and the higher demands placed upon them (Antoniou, Polychroni & Kotroni, 2009; Kauffman & Landrum, 2013).

Teachers increasingly face many challenges in a wide range of areas, mainly in those related to their learners' behavioural problems and psychological wellbeing. Evidence shows that teachers can assist learners at risk or with difficulties effectively when they are adequately guided and supported by well-trained school counsellors. There is evidence that learners are also served better by school-based counsellors than by professionals in traditional psychiatric settings, especially when counsellors integrate scientific knowledge and expertise with inclusive goals and a school-family-professionals partnership (McNab, 2009; Adelman & Taylor, 2010; Simson & Mundschenk, 2012; Kauffman & Landrum, 2013).

School counsellors can serve both as a counsellor and as a guidance teacher. Overall, the school counsellor can teach learners to be resilient and assist them to address educational challenges by dealing with their personal or social needs (Moolla, 2011). The school counsellor will reinforce the integration of school guidance and counselling services and as a result will address school and community needs. School counsellors should be seen as staff members who work in partnership with other qualified teachers and clinical professionals to enhance prospects for achievement in the lives of all learners (Stone & Clark, 2005).

The foundational approach to family involvement perspective views the home and community environments as strongly influencing the school environment. The responsibility for integrating the home, school and community environments is assumed largely by the school and school counsellors. School counsellors operating in this perspective are focused on interventions on the individual and the microsystem level of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model (Green & Keys, 2001; McCarthy, 2014).

School counsellors are called upon to become leaders and advocates that will influence the social, cultural, and political dynamics of schools to improve family-school relationships and academic success. School counsellors can strengthen the connections families have with teachers. This will in all probability expand the resources available that is required to promote education. School counsellors can engage with teachers and parents and cultivate family-school partnerships that will replace the 'sole-expert' model that has traditionally characterized family-school relationships (Epstein, 1995).

School counsellors can assume a crucial role in rendering services to learners at the onset of each school year. Likewise, when creating guidance lesson plans where learners focus both on important academic and social emotional skills, counsellor-classroom teacher collaboration is critical (Van Velsor, 2009). The school counsellor can fulfil all the following roles:

- **Counsellor:** The school counsellor assumes an expert, knowledgeable role and provides parents and teachers with information and guidance needed to

address any potential problem or learning barrier (Jones, 2013). The counsellor can also provide learners with the necessary expertise support to deal with any difficulty they may encounter.

- **Parent consultation:** Consultation in a school setting should be conducted in a triadic manner. The school counsellor works with parents or teachers to increase their understanding of how best to help a learner academically, socially and behaviourally. A collaborative approach to consultation will portray the counsellor as a team member with parents and teachers, where the goal of the team is to define the problem collaboratively and to produce goals, solutions and plans collectively (Perera-Diltz, Moe & Mason, 2011; Jones, 2013;)
- **Parent education and training:** The school counsellor conducts parent educational programmes as a means of intervention with families. Parent education and training aim to assist parents to improve their parenting skills so that they will be able to support their children with their academic pursuits as well as their behavioural, social and emotional functioning (Hoard & Shepard, 2005).
- **School-based family counselling:** The school counsellor provides counselling to family members with the purpose of resolving a learner's academic or behavioural difficulties by affecting and reinforcing positive change within the child's family. The implication is that these positive changes will ultimately affect the child in the home and school environment as well (Gerrard, 2008).

Parents and teachers must recognise the need for school counsellors and accept their assistance in resolving their child's problems and learning barriers (Jones, 2013). They are also expected to recognise and connect the benefits of these types of assistance to their child's improved academic progress. Additionally, teachers and caregivers should value school counsellors' expertise and trust that they can provide them with the necessary information, ideas and resources to solve the learner or family's presenting problem. Parents should be encouraged to attend and actively engage in consultation, training or therapeutic activities and then apply the skills and information that they have learned in a consistent and appropriate manner at home. The foundational approach to family involvement emphasizes the important role of the

family in learner success, and school counsellors operating in this perspective provide resources and support for families in order to boost learner achievement (Hoard & Shepard, 2005; Jones, 2013).

A school counsellor is expected to affirm a family's vital role in their child's education and to highlight and utilise a child and family's strengths in promoting a learner's academic, behavioural and social progress at school. The school counsellor, from this perspective, is also expected to co-create and promote new, collaborative roles for involvement for learner and families (Jones, 2013). The concepts of collaboration and consultation suggest that to provide effective services the counsellor must be willing and committed to build a team with other school personnel and with the school community as a whole.

Teachers, parents and school counsellors work within the ecosystem; that is, the school, the family, the community, institutions, and other subsystems that interact within the school. As such, these key individuals form a crucial role in the individual child's development and support and the different systems they are connected to (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). They are required to work within the microsystem to improve the school. Their roles should focus on supporting and developing the various systems that learners are engaged in.

2.5.8 Collaboration as family-school partnerships

Collaborative partners recognise their shared interests in and responsibilities for learners, and they work together to ultimately improve learner performance and to cultivate school growth. Effective collaboration can improve school programmes and school climate, provide family services and support, increase parents' skills and leadership, connect families with others at the school and in the community, and help teachers with their work (Epstein et al., 2002). The main goal of collaboration should be to help all learners to succeed in school and in later life (Epstein, 2011). Collaborative partnerships cannot simply 'yield' thriving learners, but the collaborative efforts are designed to engage, guide, empower, and encourage learners to produce their own successes. The interpretation is that if learners feel cared for and if they are encouraged to work hard, they are more likely to do their work and to remain at school (Epstein, 2011b).

Research, however, indicates that partnerships between the school and home tend to decline across the grades (Epstein, 2011b). This occurs due to the complexity of learners' schedules in higher grades and the belief of parents that older children desire more independence and are less receptive to parental involvement. Stakeholders must nevertheless continue to work to develop and to implement appropriate practices of partnership (Gonzalez-DeHaas, 2020).

Successful school communities present with greater family involvement. Schools and teachers in economically distressed communities are so much more required to work very hard to develop strong partnerships. In addition, studies indicate that schools in poor communities tend to make contact with families only to address problems and difficulties (Epstein, Sanders & Stevens, 2018). Single parents and those who live in other provinces while the children remain with caregivers tend to be less involved with the school. The school must endeavour to organise various occasions for parents to volunteer in order to enhance parental involvement (Epstein, 1995; Epstein, 2011).

Most parents are concerned about their children and want them to prosper. In a recent global survey (Johannes, 2020), it was reported that South African parents want their children to succeed more than parents in any other countries. In general, parents are keen to get information from schools to be effective allies in their children's education. Many teachers, on the other hand, want to involve families, but they do not know how to facilitate the collaboration process. Lack of skills keeps them from initiating collaborative efforts. This causes teachers to stagnate and though they might express support for partnerships they never take the necessary action (Fultz, 2017).

Parental involvement has a profound effect on academic achievement (Lara & Saracostti, 2019). It improves a learner's self-esteem (Madaugwu & Maduagwu, 2014) and their academic performance and has a positive effect on school retention and attendance. Parental involvement has also been found to be associated with positive school attachment and positive school climates (Tárraga et al., 2017). Research has also demonstrated that programmes focused on increasing parental involvement in education have a positive impact on children, families, and school communities (Lara & Saracostti, 2019). Learners are also willing to play an active role in assisting communication between home and school (Epstein, 1995).

The main goal of collaboration is to encourage sustainable and operational partnerships between teachers, parents and school counsellors. These partnerships should view each partner as making equally valuable contributions, while respecting different contributions. Stakeholders ought to address barriers to involvement and actively help previously uninvolved parents to become more involved in their child's schooling. These partnerships should endeavour to create better programmes, opportunities and interventions to assist learners.

2.5.9 Benefits of collaboration

Numerous benefits can be gained from collaboration. Collaboration can assist with problem solving, as it brings all stakeholders together and creates opportunities for them to learn from one another. Collaboration furthermore opens up new channels of communication. It boosts morale and causes those involved to be more efficient (Mosley, 2019). Collaborative educational environments can build a community of caring individuals who share their knowledge and expertise to achieve one common goal. In this study, it will be to increase the learners' academic outcomes (Boethel, 2003; Collier, Reeve & Hirrel, 2015).

Collaborative efforts will additionally streamline practices and will ensure that previously made errors are avoided and not repeated (Brook, Sawyer & Rimm-Kaufman, 2007). Constant observation and feedback among stakeholders will be encouraged by effective collaboration where communication and teamwork become the norm (Kohm & Nance, 2009; Alen, 2019). School counsellors, teachers and parents will moreover secure increased visibility and viability by their involvement in collaborative programmes.

Collaboration can lead to higher homework completion rates, better maintenance of behaviour and discipline, lower drop-out rates and improved school attendance (Durisic & Bunijevac, 2017). Collaboration with parents can additionally contribute to learners' positive engagement with peers and adults, and enhanced relationships. Increased feelings of competence or capability, positive engagement with learning and motivation to learn, persistence, and mastery of goal orientations in which learners seek challenging tasks and persist with academic challenges can also be a result of effective collaboration with parents (Sheridan & Kim, 2016).

Teachers, school counsellors and parents will benefit from collaboration. Parents can gain greater confidence and satisfaction in their parenting skills. They can, moreover, benefit from improved adult and family learning. Teachers will benefit from feeling supported and appreciated, as well as from improved parent-teacher relationships, which will lead to higher teacher morale and a more positive school climate. Bennett (2017) affirms that collaborative partnerships will also influence teaching practice positively and develop student learning. School counsellors benefit, as they are provided with the necessary support and guidance to formulate effective interventions (Sheridan & Kim, 2016). The community at large will also benefit, given that home-school partnerships can stimulate self-growth and contribute to the building of social capital in the community (Durisic & Bunijevac, 2017). Collaborative efforts will also lessen the struggle for limited resources and reduce the duplication of services. Collaboration therefore provides an expanded and varied method to resolving problems and providing the services needed by learners. Collaboration will promote change beyond the classroom and it will result in whole-school improvement (Slater, 2010).

2.5.10 Challenges associated with collaboration

It has been stated that "collaborative work, no matter how experienced the collaborators, is a difficult and a new experience on each occasion" (Johnson & Oliver, in Miller & Hafner, 2008:69). Several factors can obstruct the collaborative process (Geenan, Powers & Lopez-Vasquez, 2006; Gabriel-Petit, 2017).

The most prominent factor inhibiting collaboration is distorted communication. Communication can be a major barrier to collaboration. Non-verbal communication and preferences for direct or indirect communication are different across families and can affect the relationship negatively when they are not understood (Baker et al., 2016). Collaboration requires active communication for shared decision-making, planning and to discuss ways of improving learner performance. Communication needs to be done in a variety of forms and should not only be one-dimensional (Taylor, Smiley & Richards, 2009). Flawed communication will affect the process and cause confusion or division. In addition, lack of proper planning will contribute to miscommunication about roles and responsibilities and give rise to conflicting

priorities. In response, this can influence the trust between stakeholders, and a lack of trust will have significant implications for the outcomes of collaborative initiatives. Trust can be regarded as a defining factor of success or failure in any relationship (Reina & Reina, 2015).

The socio-economic status of the stakeholders will also have an impact on collaboration. According to the Living Conditions Survey (LCS), approximately half (49,2%) of the adult populace in South Africa live below the poverty line (Statistics South Africa, 2019). The province with the highest indication of poverty is Limpopo (67,5%), with more than half of the population living in poverty (Statistics South Africa, 2019). Poverty will have a profound effect on parents' ability to contribute financially, travel to meetings and to arrange care for other siblings while engaged in collaborative efforts. Many parents live in other provinces due to the scarcity of employment opportunities. Parents without financial means also do not have access to the internet, WhatsApp or Skype as a means of communication.

Collaborating within diverse population groups can be yet another challenge that impedes collaboration. The population of Limpopo consists of several ethnic groups distinguished by culture, language and race. 97,3% of the population are Black; 2,4% are White; 0,2% are Coloured and 0,1% are Indian or Asian. English is regarded as a corporate language, but other national languages of the province include Xitsonga, Setswana, Tshivenda, Sepedi, isNdebele and Afrikaans. Moreover, the population has different religious beliefs and numerous cultures. Being aware that different cultural orientations exist is extremely important when cultivating collaborative relationships. Failure to acknowledge cultural and racial differences obstructs collaboration to take place. Learning to work with people from other cultures in order to collaborate productively is a crucial skill (Blanding, 2012).

Collaboration furthermore requires that all parties be regarded as equal partners. Some stakeholders may not believe in the parity of the partnership and it will be detrimental to the process. If parents and professionals enter into a collaborative relationship with different expectations, understandings and assumptions, true collaboration will not be effective (Adams & Christenson, 2000). Teachers and school counsellors should acknowledge parents as the experts of their children and allow

them to participate on an equal footing when considering ways to improve learner outcomes. Collaboration cannot occur if parents are not included in conversations or when teachers and school counsellors are unwilling to take the time to build the partnership (Blue-Banning et al., 2004; Elser, 2017). Similarly, parents must understand their role and the importance thereof.

A sense of self-efficacy amongst teachers and school counsellors may keep collaboration from being cultivated. Stakeholders must understand that they need one another to address learner needs adequately and to contribute to school growth (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009). Effective collaboration is based on all parties' efforts in pursuit of similar goals. Teacher-parent collaboration is more difficult to promote and maintain if teachers and parents work as separate units (Braley, 2012).

Limited studies exist about how teachers ought to cooperate and partner with school counsellors to ensure the success of learners. There is a lack of role definition between teachers and school counsellors, making collaboration difficult. Teachers may be less prone to allow school counsellors to take learners out of the classroom for individual counselling or small-group counselling than they did in the traditional school counselling model, because teachers are concerned about learners' academic performance and do not wish to interrupt classroom learning time (Clark & Breman, 2009). Even in cases where teachers and school counsellors understand one another's role, when it comes to take action in implementing intervention or prevention programmes, teachers and school counsellors might not know what to do in terms of collaboration. While one study investigating the partnership between school counsellors and teachers in literacy circles reports a negligible difference in learners' learning between a control and treatment classroom, the authors note the importance of structuring collaboration with clear goals in mind (Kourkoutas & Giovazolias, 2015). In addition, families and professionals both experience fears that limit their ability to participate effectively in collaborative relationships (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Lasater, 2016).

Obstacles are plentiful and school systems are not always structured to encourage collaboration. Community biases must be addressed, as resentment may exist when content-area teachers come to perceive collaboration as 'extra work' and additional

responsibilities (Armstrong, 2015). Other aspects like lack of planning, scheduling problems, and personality conflicts, absence of administrative support and resistance to change are also impediments to collaboration. Teacher discomfort, fear of criticism and fear of the unknown may also inhibit the cultivation of effective collaboration (Powell, 2013).

Lack of time can also hinder collaboration from taking place (Roberts et al., 2017; Gabriel-Petit, 2017). Attitudinal, communication, socioeconomic and cultural factors can also potentially be barriers to effective teacher-parent-counsellor collaboration (Geenan et al., 2006). Other factors that could be unfavourable to the success of collaboration include an ineffective leader, past conflict between members, competing behaviour and being incapable to add to the process (Winer & Ray, 1994). Even though consensus prevails in literature about the importance of collaboration between teachers, parents and school counsellors, there is little evidence that such collaboration occurs on a large-scale basis.

2.5.11 Sustaining a collaborative culture

Collaboration should aim to create and to sustain a conducive school culture. Collaborative cultures in schools can be referred to as the working relationships that are unprompted, voluntary, transformational, and development oriented. A collaborative culture at schools will ultimately improve learning for everybody. A school can work cooperatively towards the mutual objective of better education for all.

Collaborative transformation displays immense potential for ensuring the progress of inclusive programmes that alter teaching practices and better learner outcomes (Dalton, McKenzie & Kahonde, 2012). These changes necessitate a school culture that advances a collaborative culture, the administration of high-quality professional development, and strong leadership within the school with school counsellors, teachers, and parents playing essential roles. The collaborative system is an advantageous means of creating a school culture that enables inclusive learning (Waldron & Mclenskey, 2010).

This culture at schools is cultivated by developing programmes for parents to participate in school or education-related activities. Schools provide professional

development and training on the importance of collaboration and offer training for parents and community stakeholders on effective communication and partnering skills. Moreover, a cooperative culture is cultivated by providing stakeholders with better information and ensuring timely access to information, using effective communication that address various family structures and are translated into languages that parents understand (Van Roekel, 2008).

A collaborative culture promotes collaborative relationship among the parents and the school that have been designed primarily to produce positive educational outcomes for learners while being mutually beneficial to all parties involved. Partnerships assume mutual responsibility and share in the responsibilities. Partnerships recognise the importance and potential influence of all members who work with and invest in the education of the learners. Promoting a collaborative culture necessitates the establishment of mutuality that refers to common benefits and objectives required to succeed as a partnership. Without common benefits, information sharing will not lead to collaboration (Thomson & Perry, 2006; Kwibisa & Mayzoub, 2018).

Trust formation is a key component of building successful collaborative relationships (Daly, 2009; Tschannen-Moran, 2009). Trust can be defined as the reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone. Without trust there is less innovation, collaboration, creative thinking and productivity, and people spend their time protecting themselves and their interests using time that should have been spent helping the group to attain its goals. To build trust, role-players must be inclined to interact collaboratively, but only if other partners exhibit the same preparedness to adhere to collaborative commitments (Thomson & Perry, 2006; Kreibich, 2013).

The collaborative partners should show commitment in their words, collaborative actions, attitudinal norms and communal expectations of behaviour. The commitment must continually reinforce the practices that support a collaborative culture. This 'sharedness', or homogeneity of values, norms and practices is developed, expressed and performed in the day-to-day interactions of individuals working in the same context, facing the same challenges and goals (Dumay, 2009). Collaboration, however, does not just happen. Schools must be structured in such a way as to support collaborative efforts. However, constructive collaboration programmes will

differ from school to school, as individual schools tailor their practices to meet the needs and interests, time and talents, and ages and grade levels of learners and their families (Darling-Hammond, 2019).

2.6 CONCLUSION

South African schools are in a crisis. Statistics indicate that the educational system is characterised by underachievement and high dropout rates are apparent. Schools are not able to address learner difficulties in isolation and the current situation calls for the establishment of collaborative relationships between important role-players, namely parents, teachers and school counsellors. Collaboration is a dynamic process that requires careful planning, commitment and interdependency. It presents with numerous benefits and challenges, but it has the potential to address crucial problems effectively within our current school system.

In this chapter, the concept of collaboration was explored. It is evident that collaboration is essential for the provision of learner support to address the diverse needs of the learner. Collaboration should occur within a systems approach in order to be the most effective. Collaboration is demarcated as the direct interaction between at best two equivalent parties who willingly engage in communal decision-making as they work in collaboration to obtain a shared goal. It is described as a reciprocally advantageous and distinct relationship entered into by two or more cohorts to fulfil a joint goal. Collaboration is in addition described as a dynamic process and it is emphasized that partnerships should be promoted and encouraged amongst teachers, parents and school counsellors who are devoid of traditional 'turf issues'.

It was noted that the foremost objective of collaborative initiatives within schools should be the improvement of learners' performance and learner learning. The chapter elaborated on the process of collaboration that transpires in different stages of interactions. The stages comprise networking, partnering, merging, and unifying with groups, subsequently forming a merged and amalgamated collaborative identity. The pivotal role of teachers, parents and school counsellors is emphasised as they regularly and continuously engage with the learner within the ecosystem. It was established that they predominantly work within the microsystem to improve the school

as a whole. Their roles centre on supporting the systems learners are interlocked in.

The chapter presented the numerous benefits associated with effective collaboration. It aids problem solving, brings role-players together and creates opportunities for participants to learn from one another. Collaboration furthermore opens up new channels of communication, boosts morale and causes those involved to be more efficient. Teachers, parents and school counsellors can learn from one another and can draw from one another's expertise. It was ascertained that collaborative endeavours reduce the struggle for limited resources and also lessens the duplication of services.

The impediments of collaboration were correspondingly underscored. The most prominent factor inhibiting collaboration was found to be miscommunication. It was also stated that the socio-economic status of the role-players and the diversity of population groups have bearing on the realisation of collaboration. The process of collaboration will also be impeded if cultural and racial differences are not acknowledged. All parties should therefore be regarded as equal partners and community biases must be addressed. Consideration should also be given to other obstacles, which include lack of planning, personality conflicts, absence of administrative support, resistance to change and teacher discomfort.

It was acknowledged that collaborative affiliations cannot naturally produce flourishing learners, but collaborative efforts can be aimed to involve, lead, empower, and inspire learners to produce their own feats. The ultimate aim of family-school partnerships should therefore be to encourage sustainable and effective partnerships among teachers, parents and school counsellors where a collaborative culture can be cultivated. The compilation of policies, taking mutual responsibility and recognizing the important input of all involved are essential for successful home-school partnerships.

Chapter 3 will elaborate on the theoretical framework of this study that consists of Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the theoretical framework of the study will be discussed. The theoretical framework is deemed an imperative part of the research and it can be seen as the 'blueprint' or foundational plan for the dissertation (Grant & Osanloo, 2015).

The theoretical framework serves as the guideline on which to build and to support the research. Lysaght (2011:572) states,

A researcher's choice of framework is not arbitrary but reflects important personal beliefs and understandings about the nature of knowledge, how it exists (in relation to the observer, and the possible roles to be adopted, and tools to be employed consequently, by the researcher in his/her work.

It provides the framework to define how one will logically, epistemologically, procedurally, and analytically approach the study as a whole. In accordance with this, Eisenhart (1991:205) defines a theoretical framework as

a structure that guides research by relying on a formal theory ... constructed by using an established, coherent explanation of certain phenomena and relationships.

It is also described as the very foundation from which all knowledge is constructed for a research study. It functions as the structure and scaffold for the grounds for the study, the reason, the importance, and the research questions. The theoretical framework gives a basis or an anchor for the literature review and, first and foremost, the methods and analysis (Grant & Osanloo, 2014).

3.2 BRONFENBRENNER'S BIO-ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS THEORY (EST)

3.2.1 Overview of the theory

It was decided to use Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory as the framework for this research study, as it looks at a learner within the context of the

system of relationships that form his or her environment. This theory has been revised several times since its original exposition in 1979 to incorporate biological components and temporal concerns. The bio-ecological systems theory “began with the ecology of human development and evolved as a bioecological model including a process, person, context, time (PPCT) framework” (Griffore & Phenice, 2016:10). It is now more commonly referred to as the bio-ecological model of Human Development (Bronfenbrenner 1993; 1994; 1995; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1993; 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris 1998; 2006, Guy-Evans, 2020).

The bio-ecological model maintains a multi-layered approach (Guy-Evans, 2020). The child is at the very centre of the model and he or she plays an active role in his/her own world. Bronfenbrenner holds that the child's personality characteristics, temperament, inspirations, genetic attributes and tendencies affect and are in turn influenced by all the other levels of the bio-ecological system (O'Toole, 2016). Bronfenbrenner's EST emphasizes the importance of studying learners in multiple environments and to focus on the broader environment that has an effect on their development (Gray & MacBlain, 2012; Murphy, 2020).

The theory provides an understanding of human activity that takes place within a hierarchy of systems that operate independently and in relation to one another. Bronfenbrenner's systems thinking offers clear guiding principles regarding how learner challenges should be identified and addressed (Hayes, O'Toole & Halpenny, 2017).

According to Bronfenbrenner's EST, children typically find themselves enmeshed in various ecosystems, from the most intimate home ecological system to the larger school system, and then to the most expansive system, which includes society and culture (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The learner's development is influenced by a complex set of systems within the environment that include their family, peers, various social institutions such as schools or churches, neighbouring communities, and the numerous cultures within their surroundings (Chere, 2014; Shelton, 2019).

It proposes that, to truly understand individuals, one must reflect on all aspects of their experiences and the differential influences of these upon them (Beckley, 2012). Learners cannot exist in isolation from their adjoining systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979;

Makoelle, 2016). Each system presents with its own challenges and struggles that can impede a learner's ability to perform optimally at school and it can lead to underachievement (Disabil, 2020). It is therefore important to understand the dynamics of the various systems and how they are interconnected to truly recognise the effect it has on learners (Erikson et al., 2018).

Key stakeholders, like parents, teachers and school counsellors (who form part of the respective systems) can, however, have a buffering effect on the consequences of these ordeals learners might encounter. However, they will need to work in collaboration, as each stakeholder presents with a different set of expertise required to address diverse problem areas.

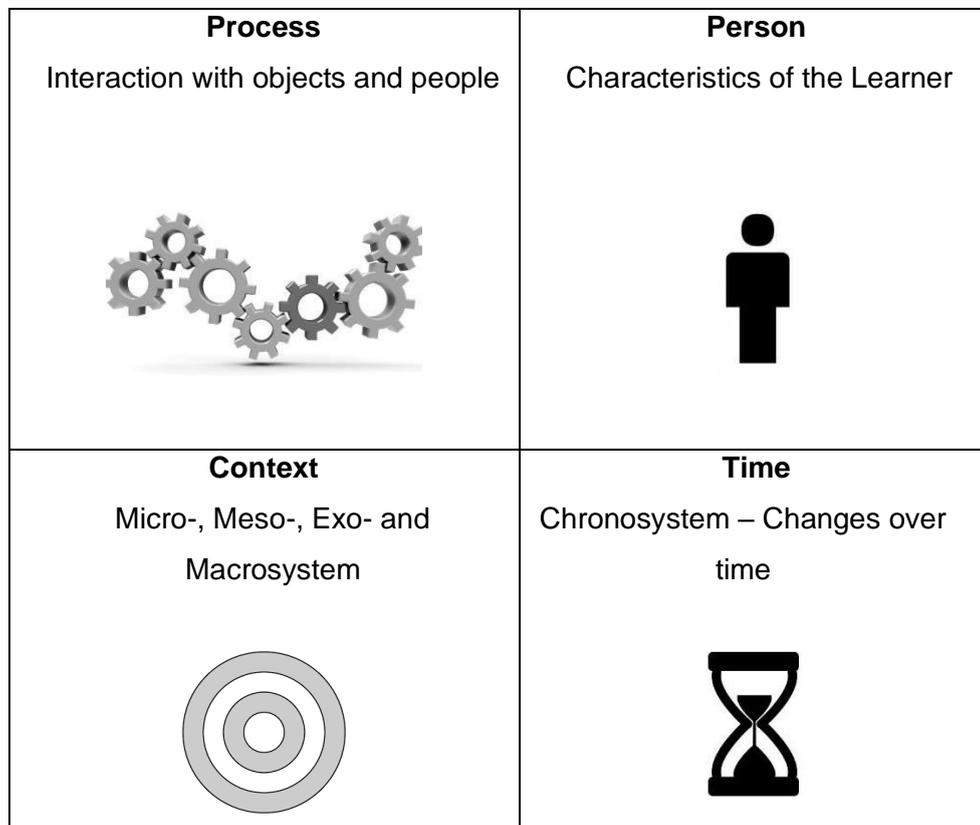
The ecological system can bring an all-inclusive, rounded understanding of the learner experiencing barriers to learning and development (Geldenhuys & Wevers, 2012; Darling-Hammond, 2019). The ecological systems theory has been used in educational settings to support school-based personnel in centring on learners' social, emotional and mental health needs (Bemak, 2000; Darling-Hammond, 2019). This eco-systemic perspective provides a holistic approach to the world in which the learner develops; to address their diverse needs successfully, a systemic approach should be adopted (Landsberg, 2005; Filander, 2015).

The bio-ecological model has been described as being in a constant and persistent state of expansion until Bronfenbrenner's death in 2005 (Tudge et al., 2009; O'Toole, 2016). The most comprehensive version of the theory was published in 2006. The theory integrated the systems (micro-, meso-, exo-, macro- and chronosystems) as well as the changeable interactions between them, into four key elements: Process, Person, Context and Time (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Xia, 2020). The PPCT model is, however, still considered to be incomplete and it is perceived as a 'work in progress'. Within this study, each component is explored separately (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Kardash, 2020).

3.2.2 Interactive dynamic components of the theory

The model includes four major interactive dynamic components. The four components are referred to as Process, Person, Contexts and Time (PPCT) (Bronfenbrenner &

Morris, 2006; Cassells & Evans, 2020). Cassells and Evans (2020) refer to the process-person-context-time (PPCT) model as the core of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model of human development. These four major interactive dynamic components are depicted in Figure 3.1 below.



*Figure 3.1: PPCT interactive components
(Adapted from Tudge et al., 2009)*

3.2.2.1 First interactive dynamic component: The process

One of the primary bases of the EST is that individuals tend to develop through their relationships. Bronfenbrenner refers to these important relationships as proximal processes (Guy-Evans, 2020). These processes or relationships are regarded as the very core of the model (Erikson et al., 2018), while Bronfenbrenner and Evans (2000:118) refer to them as “the engines of development”.

This interactive component embodies specific forms of interactions between the learner and his or her surroundings (Bronfenbrenner, 1995). Bronfenbrenner indicates that these processes function differently, depending on the specific person and the context. These interactions (not only with other human beings, objects and symbols)

must happen over periods of time to facilitate the necessary human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1995; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Development will take place once interactions take place. However, negative interaction can impede growth.

Bronfenbrenner moreover holds that the 'process' or relationships are more important than the 'context' within which they occur (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). In addition, Bronfenbrenner acknowledges the value of relations and states that a child's relationship with his or her primary caregiver is fundamental to his or her current and future functioning. He also notes that the Attachment Theory provides significant insights into that relationship (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) specifically identify teachers and early childhood professionals as probable partners with children in the development of relationships. The bio-ecological model incorporates teachers into the micro-system of the child. The researcher is of the opinion that school counsellors likewise also play a pivotal role in this interactive component.

O'Connor and Scott (2007) hold that the relationship between a parent and a child can affect various areas of their development. It has bearing on their emotional, behavioural, social, psychological and educational outcomes. It also impacts a child's intellect and their physical health. Parents' approaches pertaining to their child's education has an effect on the child's own attitudes and viewpoints about education (Ames, 1993). Shumow (1998) states that the nature of a child's relationship with his/her parents will also affect his/her overall enjoyment of educational responsibilities. It can influence a child's decisions about the amount of time and effort they are willing to spend on their education and their sense of personal responsibility to study, as well as their persistence in task completion (Cooper et al., 1998).

As indicated, Bronfenbrenner has also identified teachers as a key component of a child's micro-system (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). If learners do not have supportive relationships at home, they might often turn to teachers for the necessary emotional support whenever they struggle with difficulties. Positive relationships with teachers have been linked to school retention (Byrne & Smyth, 2010) and learners are less likely to drop out of school if they feel supported by their teachers (Croninger & Lee, 2001). Those who cultivate strong relationships with teachers are more likely to

report enjoying school, while the opposite is true for those who encounter negative interactions (Smyth & McCoy, 2011). Sparks (2019) reports that a review of forty-six educational studies affirms that favourable teacher-learner relationships are linked to greater learner participation, higher marks, better attendance, less disruptive behaviour in class and suspensions, and lower dropout rates. The researcher is of the opinion that school counsellors likewise also play a crucial role in this interactive component. They can provide learners with the necessary support and guidance and be instrumental in cultivating meaningful and much-needed relationships amongst the learners, teachers and parents. These strong 'proximal processes' can serve as a buffer in less than ideal 'contexts' (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

Bronfenbrenner also draws on the work of Rutter to show that the impact of protective forces such as strong, supportive 'proximal processes' with an important adult on the development of resilience in children are even greater in 'at-risk contexts' (Rutter et al., 1998). Bronfenbrenner accentuates the capacity of 'process' to overcome problems brought about by 'context', and repeatedly foregrounds the importance of relationships (O'Kane, 2015).

3.2.2.2 Second interactive dynamic component: The person

The second key component in the bio-ecological model is the person. It entails the characteristics of the person that can impact the form, power, content and direction of the proximal process and subsequently the developmental outcomes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Each learner is an exceptional and unique being who presents with distinguishing characteristics. These characteristics will have a notable impact on the proximal processes. Bronfenbrenner identified three distinctive personal characteristics (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; 2006).

The first characteristic is known as dispositions or force characteristics. It includes the individual's viewpoint of self, relating to the larger systems (Jackson et al., 2006). There are two types of force characteristics that constitute the characteristics that set 'proximal processes' in motion and those that tend to prevent it from occurring. Generative force characteristics can be seen as those characteristics that will initiate or sustain proximal processes and disruptive force characteristics are those that are

disruptive, which can impede or interrupt proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Generative force characteristics entail characteristics such as inquisitiveness, the propensity to initiate and participate in activities by oneself or with others, responsiveness to initiatives, and promptness to delay instant gratification to pursue long-term objectives (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; 2006). However, individuals who present with disruptive force characteristics lean towards impulsiveness, explosiveness, distractibility, and the inability to defer gratification, or they are prone to resorting to aggression and violence (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; 2006; Swart & Pettipher, 2016).

A child's disposition tends to influence the way he or she experiences the world and subsequently affects his or her behaviour. It has a reciprocal effect and an influence on how the world responds to the child as well. Dispositions function from infancy throughout an individual's life up to old age and therefore have relevance for the 'time' element of the model as well. Bronfenbrenner does not view dispositions as a solitary function of innate traits, but he considers how innate traits interact with experiences and processes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). However, dispositions are not unchanging and can be transformed by the actions of the school (Reynolds, 2010). This corresponds with Bronfenbrenner's viewpoints of the child reciprocally acting upon and being shaped by his or her surroundings, and the bio-ecological reconceptualization of the traditional nature-nurture dichotomy (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; O'Toole, 2016).

Dispositions can therefore be explained as a propensity to change, select, adapt and respond to the environment in a specific way (Carr & Claxton, 2002). This confirms Bronfenbrenner's ideas that dispositions determine a child's experiences, subsequently affecting how he or she interacts with the world. As a result, children develop directive belief systems based on their dispositions.

These belief systems then reflect their sense of self-efficacy. It influences their thoughts, motivation, feelings and the challenges or risks they expose themselves to (Bandura, 1994). Children with a strong sense of self-efficacy will approach difficult tasks head-on and see it as challenges to be mastered, rather than threats to be avoided. They will typically set high goals and will remain committed to them, even in

the midst of difficulty. They are inclined to recover quickly after setbacks and will be more prone to try again after experiencing failures. Such strong self-efficacy beliefs usually lead to high levels of personal accomplishments, which in turn reinforce the sense of efficacy.

However, children who present with lower self-efficacy beliefs habitually flinch at demanding tasks. They tend to focus on their own inadequacies and on the obstacles they encounter. They commonly present with low aspirations and weak commitment. These youngsters are vulnerable to anxiety and depression. Self-efficacy beliefs are very important, as it has an influence on a learners' overall achievement. Achievement, in turn, will also influence a learner's self-efficacy beliefs. This is known as 'reciprocal determinism' (Williams & Williams, 2010).

Force characteristics typically lead to exploration, manipulation, elaboration and imagination (Bronfenbrenner & Morris 2006), which consequently lead to development in interactions that support learning (Evans, 2003). However, the latter is obstructed by aspects like a lack of teacher expertise in education for learners necessitating added education or support. This may be due to poor qualifications and insufficient in-service training (Dreyer, 2017), or the unavailability of resources and sustenance of infrastructure.

The second characteristic is known as resource characteristics. It includes a child's ability or disability, experience, knowledge and skills that are required for the effective functioning of proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; 2006). The resource characteristics that activate beneficial proximal processes include things such as skill, capability, knowledge, and experience, as well as material and social resources (Jackson et al., 2006). Resources that limit or disrupt proximal processes include genetic defects, low birthweight, physical handicaps, severe and persistent illness, or damage to brain function (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Rosa & Tudge, 2013). Resources can therefore be described as biopsychological developmental assets or developmental liabilities (Jackson et al., 2006).

Participation in processes increases the learner's biological resources of "ability, motivation, knowledge and skills" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Disabil, 2020) to participate in interactions with other individuals within the school context. Within these

supportive interactions, the learner develops independence (O'Toole, Hayes & Mhathúna, 2014) and becomes a mediator and creator of his or her own development. However, in the absence of these resource characteristics, mediation does not take place, slowing down developmental outcomes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

The last characteristic entails 'demand characteristics' and is related to those characteristics that induce or deter reactions that can cultivate or interrupt the operation of proximal processes. Swart and Pettipher (2016) state that it refers to those actions that initiate or depress reactions from the social environment. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) indicate the following as examples: an agitated or calm temperament, attractive versus unattractive appearance, and hyperactivity and passivity. Other characteristics include age, gender, and skin colour (Tudge et al., 2009). All of these characteristics are subjected to prejudiced beliefs in particular circumstances that can have an effect on a learner.

3.2.2.3 Third interactive dynamic components: The context

Bronfenbrenner's third component of the PPCT model is context. The interrelated ecological human developmental systems by means of which an individual interacts with the environment whilst developing can be referred to as the contexts within which development occurs (Erikson et al., 2018). It refers to the environmental systems that has a direct or indirect effect on a learner's life and that support or hamper the proximal processes (Jackson et al., 2006). Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) stipulate that the development of a human being takes place through the process of progressively more complex reciprocal interactions between active, constantly evolving bio-psychological human beings and the individuals, objects and symbols in their environment. This involves the five interrelated, complex systems that are based on Bronfenbrenner's original model, the ecological systems theory – the micro-, meso-, exo-, macro- and chronosystem.

The microsystem consists of the individual's immediate environment (Disabil, 2020) and it embodies settings such as the school or home where learners spend a significant amount of their time interacting with others. The mesosystem involves the connecting interactions between one or more of the individual's microsystems (Disabil, 2020). The exosystem incorporates other formal and informal social structures that

influence a child indirectly (Guy-Evans, 2020). It represents the events that have a significant, secondary effect on a learner (e.g. a parent constantly working late). The macrosystem signifies groups (e.g. culture) that share mutual values and belief systems. Guy-Evans (2020) indicates that the macrosystem can also include the topographical position, ethnicity, socioeconomic status and values of the culture. The chronosystem includes all the changes that transpire over an individual's lifetime that influence them, like major life transitions and historical events (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). The different systems in Bronfenbrenner's model are depicted in Figure 3.2.

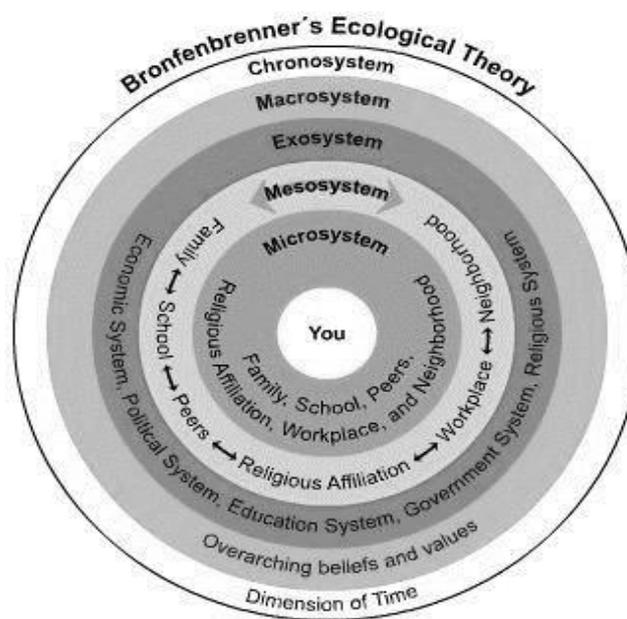


Figure 3.2: The systems in Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (Adapted from Davey, 2013)

Figure 3.2 indicates the various systems that form part of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System Theory. The systems include the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and the chronosystem.

a) *The microsystem*

The microsystem encompasses the environments consisting of parents, family, peers, childcare, schools, neighbourhood, religious groups and parks (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Morrison, 2012). It includes patterns, roles and relationships of daily activities that influence and shape a child's cognitive, social, emotional, moral and spiritual

development. The microsystem further entails relationships with the primary caregiver, family, school and neighbourhood (Sincerio, 2012). The interaction that takes place within this microsystem is always bidirectional and the behaviour of the learners will therefore be influenced by others in that system. The learners, in turn, will also influence the behaviour of others or the functioning of those settings. The developmental outcomes are influenced by proximal processes within microsystems or the direct environment that surrounds the developing person.

The proximal processes in the immediate environment can operate as resources to advance or hamper development (Erikson et al., 2018). Family life should provide the learner with the necessary support and quality of life for them to develop optimally.

Parents assume the most significant role in the microsystem, as they play an intricate part in the ecological human development of their children. The learner spends a great deal of their time at home with their family. Parents provide them with the necessary shelter and safety, and also offer them indispensable support. Parental support refers to the caring relationship between a parent and a child that is portrayed by a parent's involvement, emotional availability, affection, recognition and responsiveness (Cummings, Davies & Campbell, 2000). The way parents connect with their children will influence their overall development and optimal functioning (Bronfenbrenner, 2006). The parenting style a parent implements also has an effect on a child as it shapes the way a child will communicate with others, their self-esteem, and the attitude and behaviours they exude (Ulferts, 2020). It is postulated that "authoritative parenting is the most beneficial style" as it is associated with favourable results like "better academic achievement, a higher self-esteem, less bullying and a lower substance use" (Ulferts, 2020:25). Inconstant parenting and discipline methods will, however, aggravate challenging learner behaviour and affect learner performance (McPhee & Craig, 2009). Learners are more capable of meeting their full potential when they are engaged in positive interactions with their parents (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). When interactions are negative or absent, children's capacities are not realized and they demonstrate more difficulties.

Family structure also has an immense impact on a child's development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Children tend to copy observed behaviours (McPhee

& Craig, 2009). The microsystem can serve to support the learner in his or her development by creating an environment of acceptance and love, but it may also act as a risk factor, for example, in families who expose their children to domestic violence or drug abuse (Swart & Pettipher, 2015).

Some parents in South Africa fail to provide their children with the necessary emotional support or the opportunity to develop optimally. Emotional neglect by parents contributes to difficulties in a child's overall development (Spratt, Friedenbergr & Swenson, 2012). Child neglect has also been linked with a wide range of negative sequelae, and poor academic outcomes and problematic school performance are among the documented consequences these learners may face (Foster et al., 2017; Usakli, 2012). Studies show that those who are exposed to maltreatment may struggle with depression, anxiety and other stress-related disorders (Tillman et al., 2015). Neglected children appear to struggle with school maladaptation (Cicchetti & Valentino, 2006; Cicchetti et al., 2010). An ecological transactional approach relating to child maltreatment also links neglect to poor school performance (Masten & Cicchetti, 2010). The absence of a bond between the learner and his or her parents plays an integral role in the development of challenging learner behaviour. Children who are neglected at home find it difficult to adjust to or to adhere to societal norms. In 2016, a study of child maltreatment in South Africa was published that indicates that over 40% of our children have experienced some form of sexual abuse, physical abuse or neglect (Ward et al., 2016).

Family risk factors can furthermore contribute to child pathology and aggressive behaviour (Xiuyun et al., 2019), while family problems like domestic violence, divorce, custody battle can also affect a child's behaviour and academic performance within the microsystem. It has been stated that children from dysfunctional families are less likely to function successfully at school (Iarskaia-Smir Nova, Romanov & Antonova, 2008). Children exposed to familial conflict experience negative impacts on educational outcomes in both the short and long term. Those exposed to conflict or violence in the home also express a higher incidence of negative socio-emotional outcomes (Evans et al., 2008). Adolescents may transfer violent behaviours they witnessed into their own social networks and may be prone to experience provocations with their peers (Tschann et al., 2008).

High-poverty neighbourhoods will in addition create an environmental context that undermines successful development through increased stressors such as crime, limited housing, crowding, low social capital, toxins, less access to resources, and a confluence of risk factors across multiple settings, including school (Blair & Raver, 2012; Evans & Kim, 2013). As a result, neglected children who live in impoverished neighbourhoods may experience a heightened risk for maladaptive outcomes (Bright & Jonson-Reid, 2008) and neighbourhood poverty may interact with neglect in predicting academic achievement (Nikulina, Widom & Czaja, 2011). A study assessing both neglect and poverty suggests that neglect overshadows the effects of neighbourhood poverty in predicting academic achievement, and the impact of poverty on academic success is significant in non-maltreated children (Nikulina et al., 2011).

The school also forms part of the microsystem and is influenced by the contextual factors encapsulated within the local community structures, environment and organizations, as well as family and peer groups (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Learners live in microsystem settings and this is where development occurs. Logically, the stakeholders (e.g. parents, teachers and school counsellors) will have a more positive impact on learner development when they operate at the microsystem level in direct relationships. According to the ecological systems theory, if the relationships in the immediate microsystem break down, the child will not have the tools to explore other parts of his or her environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1990).

The South African Schools Act no 84 of 1996 (RSA, 1996b) states that it is compulsory for children from 7 to 15 years of age, or until completion of Grade 9 to attend school. Therefore, schools are good sites for care and support, and ideal spaces for implementing different models of collaboration to deliver integrated services on different tiers but with a focus on the promotion, prevention and early detection of psychosocial challenges experienced by learners.

b) The mesosystem

The mesosystem entails the interactions that occur among a learner's microsystems (Guy-Evans, 2020). There are the relationships and processes that take place between two or more microsystems (e.g. the relations between home and school) and the network of the supporting structures in the learners' immediate environment

(Bronfenbrenner, 1979). These systems interact with one another, and subsequently transforms one another. Processes are the result of the interactions that take place between a number of micro-settings in which the learner is a full participant (Ettetal & Mahoney, 2017). If negative things occur at home, it will spill over into the school and vice versa (Gray & MacBlain, 2012). The learner might not be directly part of the interactions that transpire, but other people within his or her microsystem, and the result of those interactions will affect his or her development (Ettetal & Mahoney, 2017; Bailey & Im-Bolter, 2018). Bronfenbrenner proposes that a child's development will be enhanced if two settings in which he or she is involved in are strongly linked.

Schooling is a good example of the connection between family and school in the mesosystem. Parental involvement has always been viewed as an important factor in a learner's education. It has been identified as one of the most agreed-upon principles of good educational practice (Kavanagh & Hickey, 2013; Gileece, 2015). Literature also confirms that there are clear linkages between parental involvement and improved mental health and behaviour of learners (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Gileece, 2015). Numerous studies affirm that parental involvement is a key variable associated with school effectiveness and learner performance (Flouri & Buchanan, 2004; Flouri, 2006). The more enmeshed the parents are with their child's educational process, the more probable it will be that the child will excel at school, obtain higher marks, and eventually attend a good college or university (Roy & Giraldo-García, 2018). He further notes that parental involvement can be "directed to improving cognitive gains" and to "foster parent-school relationships" (Roy & Giraldo-García, 2018:42). These outcomes are mutually reinforcing and it is evident that better school behaviour is plausibly connected to greater in-class attention and thereby to a higher likelihood of educational success (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

The involvement that the family has in the child's learning before he or she enters school creates a positive attitude towards their future learning (Van Voorhis, 2013; Okado, Bierman & Welsh, 2014). With regard to childrens' relationship with school, the more perceptive the family and teachers are in their engagement with children, the more this engagement engendering learning will affect children's educational experience. They will learn how to complete tasks, solve problems, and understand rewards and consequences (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

Uninvolved parents in school activities may have an influence on the learners' progress, resulting in them experiencing academic challenges. However, if the school promotes parental involvement, these two systems can work together to boost the learners' self-esteem and alleviate the challenges experienced by learners (Eggen & Kauchak, 2013). A learner from an unsupportive family or home may be vulnerable to developing barriers to learning, but this can be countered with the necessary therapeutic intervention and support. The necessary support or counselling services at school should therefore be available to the learner in times of need, as it can influence the mesosystem.

Learner development will be enhanced through participation in multiple, structurally different settings, particularly when there are relationships with others who are deemed more mature or experienced (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Learner development will increase as a function of the number of supportive links existing between that setting and other settings (such as home and family).

Learner development will also be enhanced if the roles, activities and relationships with which the learner engages in both settings encourage the growth of mutual trust, positive orientation, goal consensus between settings and an evolving balance of power (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Supportive communication between the settings will also promote learner development. The relationship between school and home is therefore of key importance in learner performance (McPhee & Craig, 2009). These two systems interact with each other and in the process also impact each other (Swart & Pettipher, 2015).

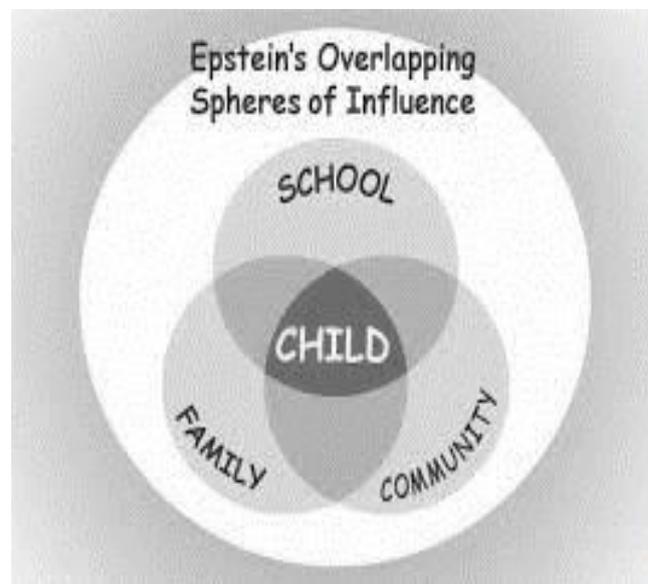
Involvement of families and the community in the learning process can also contribute to the development of a more inclusive system (Meresman, 2014). However, while these partnerships may be beneficial to the development of individuals, they may also give rise to many challenges. For individuals to contribute actively to communities, an environment characterized by respect, belonging, diversity, trust and collaboration needs to be created (Swart & Pettipher, 2001).

It is apparent that schools and families influence one another, but they also influence and are influenced by the surrounding community (Swart & Pettipher, 2001). In order to understand the influences of these interacting systems on the development of

individuals better, Epstein's theory of overlapping spheres of influence, which is informed by Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model, is discussed next.

Epstein holds that the model emphasises the cooperation and complementarity of schools and families and encourages communication and collaboration between the two institutions (Epstein, 1987; 1995). Deslandes (2001) indicates that there are aspects that can push or pull a school and family together or apart. These include time and the characteristics, philosophies and practices of the family and those of the school. These may help to create occasions for shared activities, or it may impede relationships between the school and the family.

Epstein developed her theory of overlapping spheres of influence, theorising that learners learn more when parents, teachers, and others in the community work cooperatively to steer and support learning and development (Epstein, 2011b). In this model, three contexts – home, school, and community – overlap with unique and combined influences on children through the interactions of parents, teachers, community partners, and students across contexts, as indicated in Figure 3.3.



*Figure 3.3: Epstein's overlapping spheres of influence
(Adapted from Feasey, 2017)*

Epstein's theory of overlapping spheres of influence (as illustrated in Figure 3.3) indicates the overlapping spheres of influence between families, communities and schools, and how these areas of influence can be affected by the actions of the

participants within particular systems (Epstein & Sanders, 2000). Epstein divides the influences on individuals into two sectors: the internal and external sectors of influence.

The external sector or sphere of the model of overlapping spheres identifies the “three major contexts in which students learn and grow” as “the family, the school, and the community” (Epstein et al., 2002:8). The extent of overlap is in interaction with and affected by forces of time and forces associated with the experience, philosophy and practices of every sphere. The internal sector or sphere of the model of overlapping spheres shows “where and how complex and essential interpersonal relations and patterns of influence occur between individuals at home, at school, and in the community” (Epstein et al., 2002:8). Areas of interdependence are shown as non-shaded areas, while dependence is shown in the shaded areas (see Figure 3.3). The overlapping spheres represent family, schools, teachers and communities that work together to effect change. However, if collaboration is not successful, these spheres and their influences can also have a negative impact on individuals (Epstein et al., 2002).

Good communication, support and collaboration within these spheres offer great benefits for the individual at the centre of the model, since they may contribute to enhanced self-esteem, motivation, academic skills and independence. Epstein (2001) holds that if teachers endeavour to include parents more, the parents will increase their interaction with their children at home and they will accordingly feel more optimistic about their own capability to assist their children. It will subsequently improve the learners’ attitudes and their achievement. The support from the teachers may, however, become less if they encounter situations where they do not receive support and backing from parents. The lack of parental involvement in a child’s development will demotivate and discourage teachers (Prinsloo & Gasa, 2011).

Parental involvement can additionally have an encouraging or motivating impact on teachers and can even cause them to turn their attention even more to a child (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994). Parental involvement has also been associated with greater school retention rates (Malone & McCoy, 2003). Several studies indicate that schools where learners succeed (either due to achievement or behaviour) are typified by good

home-school relationships (Bastiani, 1993). Parental involvement can also have advantages for the school and teacher in terms of building bridges between the learners' homes and the school (Hart, 2011). Parental involvement in education has also been associated with improved parent-teacher relationships, teacher morale and school climate (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). It has been stated that parents play a vital role in a learners' lives and schools would be unwise not to make use of the parental capacity that is available to them (Hartas, 2008). Involvement in a child's education can similarly be advantageous for parents, as research shows that it causes improved parental assurance, fulfilment and an interest in their own education (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011).

The attitudes and behaviour of teachers and school principals can also play a crucial role. School principals who show a lack of interest in the needs of learners or teachers may exacerbate challenging behaviour in schools (Leithwood & Beatty, 2008). Teachers who do not have the skills needed to cope in an inclusive education system, or the ability to manage challenging learner behaviour will often feel insecure and lack the motivation and enthusiasm to educate their learners, which again can lead to an escalation of challenging learner behaviour in classrooms (Prinsloo & Gasa, 2011).

In the mesosystem, the microsystems interrelate and interact and the learner is concurrently involved with different microsystems (e.g. school, family, peers and community) (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). The mesosystems, in addition, support developmental characteristics in the form of processes (teaching, interventions, learning and counselling) (Engeström, 2016). Actions, relationships and roles occurring across settings accentuate active involvement of the learners in these settings, resulting in learning experiences (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). However, when the learner is denied the opportunity to participate, outcomes (the result of activities) are not reached.

c) The exosystem

The exosystem involves of the broader social settings which the child does not participate in directly, but it has an influence on the child's experiences. (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In the Bronfenbrenner model, the exosystem focuses primarily on the coexisting environments of significant others, for example, the parents'

work environment that may leave an impression on the developing individual. The exosystem can include the economic, social, educational, legal and political systems that structure culture or sub-culture for the learner (Seals, 2010).

The exosystem has a secondary impact on a learner's development and the learner does not have any control over these circumstances. The exosystem typically includes problems outside school, for example, poverty, malnutrition, drugs, and gangs, and it includes societal influences, such as parents' jobs, school systems and workplace conditions like healthcare that influence both the micro- and mesosystem (Sontag, 1996; Eggen & Kauchak, 2013).

The exosystem can also involve family social networks, and neighbourhood-community contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Many aspects in this system can have a negative effect on a learner's academic performance (Bronfenbrenner, 1994) and it includes all the influential forces in the external environment (Bryan & Simmons, 2009). Two or more microsystems interact directly with the environment and it influences how the proximal processes will develop and influence the individual (Donald et al., 2014). The development of an individual is not only influenced by the environment with whom he or she interacts, but less immediate external environments can also play a role (Bronfenbrenner, 1986).

Learners' behaviour may also be influenced by their communities. Families reside in particular neighbourhoods that present with physical and social characteristics that can affect children's development. "One of the major constraints influencing student success involves the socio-economic status." (Van Zyl, 2016:1) A poor socioeconomic state may result in a lack of support, which in turn could lead to increased challenging behaviour (McPhee & Craig, 2009). Poverty manifests itself in the deprivation of privileges, limited social status, malnutrition, infirmity, unaccommodating environments, informal settlements or squatter camps, language deficiencies, and a negative view of the future (Prinsloo & Gasa, 2011).

Living under conditions of poverty may often lead to specific difficulties in learning. (Jensen, 2010; Donald et al., 2014; McKenzie, 2019). Learners growing up in conditions where their parents are absent and where they have to assume the responsibility of taking care of their siblings, or where they are deprived of

opportunities to develop, do not consider treating their teachers with respect as a primary concern, which can contribute to academic difficulties (Prinsloo & Gasa, 2011). Wolhuter and Van der Walt (2020), Niccols (2009) and Osofsky and Chartland (2013) state that uninvolved parenting can cause behavioural disorders and absent parenthood can give rise to disruptive behaviour and anxiety in learners.

d) The macrosystem

The macrosystem can be seen as the utmost system of the ecosystem. It is typically related to the belief systems and culture from which the community derives its values and principles. (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). The macrosystem consists of the learners' cultural and societal values and can also include the legal structures in which he or she develops (Erikson et al., 2018). It entails

the overarching pattern of micro, meso, and exosystems characteristic of a given culture or subculture, with particular reference to the belief systems, bodies of knowledge, material resources, customs, lifestyles, opportunity, structures, hazards, and life course options that are embedded in each of these broader systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1994:40).

Macrosystems influence all the other systems, and Bronfenbrenner affirms that it includes the multitude of attitudes, beliefs, laws, customs and resources of a particular culture. All these aspects of the broader society have an enormous impact on a learner.

This system can moreover be portrayed as a type of looking glass through which the future and life opportunities of a learner can be observed or anticipated (Ettekal & Mahoney, 2017). The religion, socioeconomic context and culture typically determine the teachings and doctrines that are employed to shape the value system of its citizens. The macrosystem seems to be the most influential system that provides the other systems with the groundwork or foundation for all their practices (Ettekal & Mahoney, 2017).

Various cultures differ from one another. Some cultures focus on the individual and emphasise autonomy and self-sufficiency, whereas other cultures focus more

intensely on social control and conformity (Eggen & Kauchak, 2013). Fundamental standpoints like these will shape a society. Views of the various roles citizens are required to fulfil, such as gender roles, will also determine the associated behaviours that will be expected of an individual. Different values and lifestyles can likewise have an influence on a child (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

Mass media also have a profound effect on a society's culture. Dakroury (2014) states that media and culture are interconnected, given that cultures influence media contents and media platforms impact cultural practices. Mass media have grown exponentially with the advancement of technology and it has bearing on the values and beliefs people harbour. The influence of media is widespread and comes in a variety of forms, such as screen media, print media, audio media and interactive media. The media have a profound effect on a society's values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviour. At least one form of media can be found anywhere in the world and are used to communicate and spread information to a large group of people simultaneously. Screen media as in television form spread quickly and easily influence young and impressionable minds (Berns, 2010).

Societal and media violence may as a result alter children's development, resulting in many becoming violent or fearful and feeling threatened (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; O'Toole, 2016). At the macrosystem level, many learners in South Africa are exposed to conditions of violence and poverty on a daily basis. It is consequently difficult for them to thrive in such devastating circumstances.

In the South African context, the macrosystem can also refer to the level at which legislation and policy can be made. It provides the provinces with guidelines to implement a particular policy according to their needs (Mahlo, 2011). After 1994, many new legislation and policies were introduced in the country. The South African yearbook of 2016/2017 (RSA, 2016/17) states that education in South Africa is currently governed by the following key policies and legislation:

- The White Paper on Education and Training in a Democratic South Africa: First Steps to Develop a New System. This document was first published in February 1995 (DoE, 1995).

- The National Education Policy [NEPA] Act 27 of 1996 (RSA, 1996a) stipulates the responsibilities and tasks of the Minister of Education and the national and provincial leaders.
- The South African Schools [SASA] Act 84 of 1996 (RSA, 1996b). It was compiled to ensure access to quality and mandatory schooling for learners between the ages of 7 to 15. It was later amended by the Education Laws Amended Act 24 of 2005 (RSA, 2005) that permits schools in impoverished areas to operate as “no-fee schools” and by the Education Laws Amendment Act 31 of 2007 (RSA, 2007) that stipulates the responsibilities of school principals.
- The Employment of Educators Act 76 of 1998 (RSA, 1998). This act regulates the ethical, moral and professional responsibilities of teachers.
- The Adult Basic Education and Training [ABET] Act 52 of 2000 (RSA, 2000a) provides for the establishment, governance and funding of adult learning centres.
- The Education White Paper on Early Childhood development [ECD] (RSA, 2000c) endorses the involvement of five-year-olds in preschool and it aims to improve the quality of programmes and for the necessary teacher development for birth to four-year-olds and six- to nine-year-olds.
- The Education White Paper 6 on Inclusive Education (DoE, 2001b) entails the inclusion of vulnerable learners in mainstream schools and aims to reduce barriers to learning by means of targeted support systems that will assist with learner retention.
- The General and FET Quality Assurance Act 58 of 2001 (RSA, 2001) ensures the provision of quality education.
- The Education Laws Amendment Act 50 of 2002 (RSA, 2002) determines that children should be enrolled in Grade 1 the year they turn seven.
- The National Curriculum Statement (NCS) Grade R-12 outlines the curriculum in each grade (DBE, 2012).
- The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) was revised with the publication of the Higher Education Qualifications Framework in the *Government Gazette*

in October 2007 to provide 10 NQF levels.

- The NQF Act 2008 Act 67 of 2008 (DoE, 2008).
- The National Development Plan (NDP) is a plan set to be accomplished before 2030 that includes the plans and programmes for the basic education sector (RSA, 2012).

All of the above influence the schools and the learners who form part of them. It has provided greater access to the mass population and it is continuously revised in order to improve education for all learners in South Africa.

The ecological theory is of considerable importance in researching methodology when addressing questionable conduct within the school environment. The ecosystem is not disconnected from individuals. Learners are not surrounded by an ecosystem; they form part of the ecosystem. Each individual child is embedded in a number of systems, notably family and school, and the individual's behaviour can only be viewed meaningfully in that context (Charlton & David, 1993, Sincerio, 2012; Guy-Evans, 2020).

The ecological model is furthermore grounded in two vital ideologies: firstly, ecosystems are continuously seeking to establish a state of equilibrium. As a consequence of the intricate configuration of the diverse components of the ecosystem, enduring balance is by no means achievable. The system constantly pursues equilibrium, even though it can only be attained on a transitory basis.

Disruption ensues when the different parts of the ecosystem are not synchronised and the stability of the setting is as a result at risk. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) state that four processes are indispensable to addressing the disturbance. These include adaptation (one component tends to change in order to fit in more efficiently with the remainder of the other components), assimilation (the ecosystem adapts by creating a new function for the component or expelling it from the system completely – if any of the two mentioned processes are unsuccessful, then ecological succession will take place), expulsion, and succession (the entire ecosystem is transformed in a rudimentary way, together with related changes in relations and prospects).

Secondly, the components of the ecological model are interrelated and unified. Each part of the ecosystem impacts the other parts. The transformation of one component has an effect on another component within the same environment. The ecosystem must therefore be perceived as a unit and not as isolated, detached components. This accentuates the sophistication and convolutedness of realising any form of equilibrium or stability within an environment where transformation has become the standard rather than the exception to the rule (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Guy-Evans, 2020).

Schools are systems that are in continual, unceasing interface with other systems in the environment. The overall feat of a school can be determined by how well it can sustain a state of steadiness or equilibrium, while operating and adjusting to the perpetually changing needs of society. A school's success will furthermore be subject to its capability to acclimate its products in terms of fulfilling the needs and requirements of society, while concurrently serving the needs and problems of staff, learners and parents (Ahrweiler, 2011). This reality yet again draws attention to the significance of the ecological model for South Africa, given that South Africa is a society in transition and the country's diverse needs are in a constant state of change.

The bio-ecological approach therefore presents with several advantages in the context of this study, which include the following:

- An ecological approach will allow for a learner to be evaluated within his or her environment and will provide the teacher and the school counsellor with an all-embracing and unpretentious portrayal of the learner compared to the conventional evaluations of the past. The learner is not viewed separately from his or her environment.
- An ecological approach to learners will disclose system problems that might have bearing on a learner's performance or conduct in class.
- This approach will prevent stakeholders from merely labelling a learner and will consider contributing factors from the learner's home, school and community milieus to address learner's difficulties.
- An ecological approach will emphasise the importance of a holistic approach,

compared to a fragmentary approach that merely focuses on the problem behaviour.

- Stakeholders who utilise an ecological approach will focus on the interaction between a learner and the environment and will acknowledge the importance and value of relationships.

Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory implies that learners must be viewed within their environment to understand how they develop and how they are influenced (Taylor & Gebre, 2016). Once a learner is seen within his or her context, the importance of collaboration becomes apparent as a crucial component to enhance school performance and to facilitate school growth.

3.2.2.4 Fourth interactive dynamic components: The time

The final component of the PPCT model is time. Conventional human development research reports time as an alternative word for chronological age. This interactive component was termed the chronosystem in Bronfenbrenner's original ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). It is indicated that

a chronosystem encompasses change or consistency over time not only in the characteristics of the person but also of the environment in which that person lives, for example, changes over the life course in the family structure, socioeconomic status, employment, place of residence, or the degree of hecticness and ability in everyday life (Bronfenbrenner, 1994:40).

In a chronosystem, change or consistency over time is not only in the characteristics of the person, but also in the environment in which that person lives (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). In the bio-ecological theory, the concept of time was extended to include what happens over the course of both ontogenetic and historical time. Bronfenbrenner states that the individual's developmental life course is perceived as being entrenched in and strongly moulded by environments and events taking place during the historical period through which the person lives (Bronfenbrenner, 1995; Guy-Evans, 2020).

The chronosystem refers to the developmental timeframe that crosses through the

interactions between the other systems and their influences on an individual which, in turn, interact with a child's progressive stages of development (Landsberg, 2005). Teachers must understand that, whilst they are busy interacting with the various learners in the classroom and school environment, these learners are also active participants in their own development and have their own perceptions of the environment in which they live. The way learners perceive their circumstances influences the way they respond to their human and physical contexts (Landsberg, 2005; Erikson, Sanders & Stevens, 2018).

Changes in time can occur in two spheres, namely the normative or the nonnormative spheres. In the normative sphere, change in entering a new learning environment or different psychological stage can bring about generative or disruptive development. The nonnormative transitions relate to the loss of a loved one, severe illness in the family, marital discord leading to divorce, and moving into a new environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). The chronosystem is made up of the environmental events and changes that occur throughout a child's life, including any sociohistorical events.

On the level of macro-time in South Africa, examples could include the impact apartheid (1948–1994) had on learners or the implementation of a new curriculum in the South African education system. The different systems influence the development of each individual and it is crucial to determine which system needs an intervention to support the developmental process. The ecological model concentrates on the interface amongst the learner and the diverse systems that are part of his or her milieu (Erikson, Sanders & Stevens, 2018). The more advanced bio-ecological model draws heavily on the work of Elder, who maintains that the impact of experiences depends on when they occurred. The bio-ecological model postulates that the magnitude of personal experiences will depend on the age of the learner when significant events occurred (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; O'Toole, 2016).

Bronfenbrenner divided time into three levels: micro-, meso-, and macro-time. Micro-time represents what takes place during particular episodes of proximal processes. Meso-time denotes the extent to which the processes occur in the person's environment (e.g. over the course of days, weeks or years). Macro-time (or the chronosystem) focuses on the changing expectancies within the broader culture. It

operates within and across generations and influences proximal processes across lifespans (Guy-Evans, 2020).

Within the context of this study, the Process, Person Context and Time in Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model are of central importance. The study emphasises the importance of significant relationships known as proximal processes (e.g. parents and teachers) and the individual learner is seen as an active agent in his/her own world who present with various characteristics that have an effect on the proximal processes necessary for development.

This PPCT model provides information concerning the various ecosystems that have an effect on a learner – the microsystem (home or school), mesosystem where home and school interact, and the exosystem that includes the economic, social, educational, legal and political systems that structure culture or subculture that can cause various external difficulties like poverty, malnutrition, drugs, and gangs. It includes societal influences such as parents' jobs, school systems and workplace conditions like healthcare that influences both the micro- and mesosystem. The macrosystem includes the cultural and societal values, and legal structures (laws and policies, etc.). Lastly, the model considers time as a vital component affecting learners performance and development.

3.3 RELEVANCE OF BRONFENBRENNER'S BIO-ECOLOGICAL SYSTEM THEORY FOR THIS STUDY

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory enabled the researcher to achieve the objectives of the study. By looking through the lens of this theory it was possible to identify the ecological systems that form part of a learner's milieu and to uncover related problems that influence learning negatively. It enabled the researcher to explore the benefits of collaborative partnerships between teachers, school counsellors and parents.

The theory furthermore aids researchers in divulging the difficulties of collaborative partnerships between teachers, school counsellors and parents and it provides guidelines on how the roles of teachers, school counsellors and parents can be infused

to support learners to reach their full potential and to ultimately bring about school development.

3.4 CONCLUSION

South African schools are in crisis and most learners perform significantly below the curriculum standard. Underachievement is evident in the annual pass rates and scores obtained in international benchmark tests. Learners present with numerous barriers to learning that further impede their ability to perform optimally. Moreover, the implementation of the inclusive learning policy has added to the load on teachers' shoulders, who present with a lack of skills to address the wide variety of needs presented by their learners.

In Chapter 3, emphasis was placed on the theoretical framework that laid the foundation of this study. Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory (EST) was explored and it was emphasised why learners should be viewed within their context to truly understand their overall development. It was noted that learners grow up in the midst of numerous, interconnected systems that have an influence on their development, ultimately impacting on their academic performance. Various systems were explored, including the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem as well as the chronosystem. Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model, which constitutes four important interactive components – process, person, context and time – was considered.

Chapter 4 will focus on the research aim, research paradigm and approach of this study. Specifications will be provided pertaining to the target population and sampling techniques. Chapter 4 will elaborate on the various data collection instruments that were used, the data analysis and the data presentation. In addition, the trustworthiness and validity of the study will be explored and consideration will be given to the various ethical considerations. Chapter 4 will conclude with a brief overview of the limitations of the study.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 4 demarcates the research design and methodology of the study. The chapter commences with an outline of the objectives and the research design, paradigm and approach is stipulated. The population and sampling procedures as well as the data collection techniques are discussed further in this chapter. The methods of data analysis are reviewed, measures to warrant the trustworthiness of the study are considered and aspects regarding ethics that need to be taken into consideration when research is conducted are explained. Lastly, the limitations of the empirical investigation are acknowledged.

4.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The aim of the study, as set out in Chapter 1.4, was to determine if collaboration between teachers, school counsellors and parents in Limpopo secondary schools can enhance learner performance and school development. The specific objectives of the study were to:

- explore the ecological systems that form part of a learner's milieu with related problems that influence learning negatively;
- identify the benefits of collaborative partnerships between teachers, school counsellors and parents;
- determine the challenges with collaborative partnerships between teachers, school counsellors and parents; and
- provide guidelines on how the roles of teachers, school counsellors and parents can be infused to assist learners to optimal learning engendering school development.

The analysis and discussion of research data will be addressed in Chapter 5 according to these objectives.

4.3 RESEARCH DESIGN, RESEARCH PARADIGM AND RESEARCH APPROACH TO BE FOLLOWED

4.3.1 The research design

As indicated in par. 1.6.1, a research design can be defined as a plan that provides the overall framework for collecting data for a study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). Polit and Hungler (1991:653) define a research design as “the overall plan for collecting and analysing data including specifications for enhancing the internal and external validity of the study”. It entails ‘procedures for collecting, analysing, interpreting and reporting data in research studies’ (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007:58). Blanche et al. (2006) state that a research design is a strategy that guides a particular research project. The research design stipulates the objectives of the study, the participants, the specific size of the sample, the area where the study will be conducted in, the particular data tools that will be utilised, the type of data needed to answer the research questions and the way in which data analysis will transpire. The research design can furthermore be seen as a deliberate and strategic outline for action that serves as a connection between the research questions and the execution, or implementation of the research strategy (Durrheim, 2004). The overall goal of a sound and thorough research design is to provide outcomes that are deemed credible (MacMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

The study explored the learner’s ecological systems that may impede learner performance and the researcher aimed to determine the benefits and challenges associated with collaborative partnerships and how roles can be infused to enhance learning and cultivate school development. A qualitative and explorative design was implemented.

The researcher focused on qualitative research (cf. par. 1.6.1). Qualitative research entails “an interpretative, naturalistic approach” where the researcher study the participants “in their natural settings” with the sole purpose to interpret the identified phenomena “in terms of the meanings people bring to them”. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005:2). Unfortunately, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the researcher was not able to physically observe participants within their work environment.

Burns and Grove (2001:237) moreover define qualitative research as “a systematic,

interactive subjective approach used to describe life experiences and give them meaning". According to Creswell (1998:15), "qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem". The researcher endeavoured to provide a holistic depiction of the phenomenon being studied and to provide detailed views of the participants' experiences within their natural setting. A qualitative research design was selected as it enabled the researcher to obtain the necessary information to understand the phenomenon under investigation better.

Exploratory research is typically conducted when there is not sufficient information available regarding a specific phenomenon and when a particular problem has not been well-defined (Saunders et al., 2007). According to Brink (2000:11), an exploratory research design is used "to explore the dimensions of a phenomenon, the manner in which it is manifested and the other factors with which it is related. It provides more insight about the nature of a phenomenon".

The researcher deemed exploratory research suitable in order to gain a greater understanding of the topic being studied. In this study the researcher endeavoured to explore whether or not collaboration between parents, teachers and school counsellors would be effective in addressing underachievement in secondary schools in the Limpopo Province and if it could ultimately contribute to school development. The research was conducted with participants who were able to provide a wealth of information with reference to collaboration. Data were collected by means of semi-structured telephonic interviews and open-ended questionnaires. Once the data had been obtained, the researcher made use of thematic analysis to review and to categorise the information. The researcher was required to employ complex reasoning skills in order to uncover the meaning participants ascribed to the topic being studied.

4.3.2 The research paradigm

Research paradigm is a wide-ranging term (as indicated in par. 1.6.2) that refers to an understanding of the development of knowledge and the very essence of that information (Ponterotto, 2005; Saunders et al., 2016). It can also be defined as a rudimentary set of principles that direct research proceedings, or a standpoint that encompasses certain theoretical conjectures about the nature of knowledge

(Terhoeven, 2009). Guba and Lincoln (1994:105) state that it is “the basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator, not only in choices of method but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways”.

The word ‘paradigm’ originally came from a Greek word that means pattern. Thomas Kuhn (1962) first made use of the term to refer to researchers who share the same philosophical way of thinking that guide the way they examine problems and seek solutions. A research paradigm can therefore be seen as a framework of views, ideals and a common stance that elucidates a particular theory that guides research (Mekonnen, 2017).

This study is grounded within the interpretivism paradigm (as stipulated in par. 1.6.2). It has been stated that the use of interpretivism in education can be traced back to the 1970s (Taylor & Medina, 2013). Interpretivism supports the importance of qualitative data in pursuit of knowledge (Kaplan & Maxwell, 1994). The predominant conviction of this approach is that “to understand this world of meaning one must interpret it” (Schwandt, Denzin & Lincoln, 1994:118). The fundamental purpose of interpretivism is therefore to understand individual experiences, with the persuasion that reality is subjective and that it is constructed by the individual (Lather, 2006).

From an interpretivist outlook a researcher cannot comprehend behaviour without understanding how people interpret and make sense of their world and the researcher should as a result also consider the distinctive nature of their own beliefs and attitudes. The focus of an interpretivist researcher should always be on the participants’ experiences. It is therefore imperative for the researcher to acknowledge human differences and to consider the context in which participants live and work, to be better able to comprehend their historical and cultural backgrounds (Creswell, 2013). Interpretivists moreover sees people as intricate and complex beings and they are the sum of their experiences. For the purpose of the study the researcher assumed an exploratory and investigative orientation and the data were structured as little as possible by the researcher’s own prior expectations and assumptions. Research was established on naturalistic methods that included telephonic interviews and open-ended questionnaires.

4.4 POPULATION AND SAMPLING

4.4.1 The population of the study

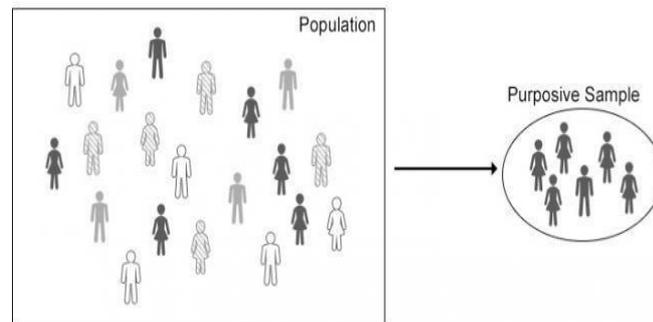
The research population refers to the whole group or target group from whom the researcher endeavoured to draw inferences (Salkind, 2010; Polit & Beck, 2012). In this study, the target population comprised principals, deputy principals, HoDs, teachers, parents and school counsellors within or associated with the selected schools located in Polokwane, Limpopo Province (cf. par. 1.6.3). Research sampling refers to a group of people who are specifically selected from the larger population in order for the researcher to understand a specific phenomenon or research question.

4.4.2 Sampling techniques used in the study

The researcher opted to utilise two types of non-probability sampling techniques. Randomisation is not deemed important in non-probability sampling, and subjective methods were therefore employed to determine which elements were integrated into the sample (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016). As a result, the researcher made use of both purposive and convenience sampling (cf. par. 1.6.3).

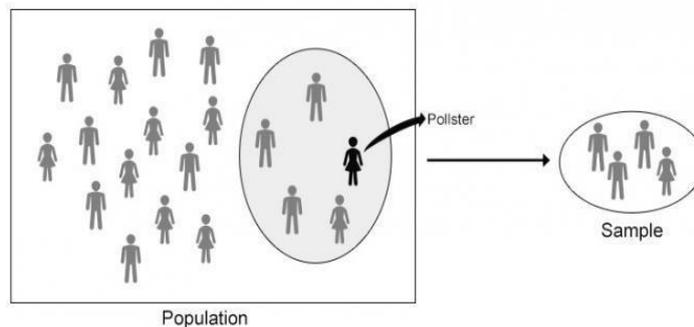
Purposive sampling is a sampling technique in which researchers depend on their own discernment when selecting participants for the study. It involves the recognition and selection of individuals or groups of individuals that are proficient and well-informed about the phenomenon of interest to the researcher (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The purposive sampling method made it possible for the researcher to choose participants based on their distinctive attributes or expertise (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). Individuals who were chosen provided the required information that was needed to meet the research objectives (Saunders et al., 2016; Leedy & Ormrod, 2015).

Figure 4.1 provides a visual presentation of purposive sampling.



*Figure 4.1: Purposive sampling
(Adapted from Saunders et al., 2012)*

The second sampling technique employed was convenience sampling. By means of convenience sampling the researcher included participants who were available, prepared to participate and who were accessible or within physical proximity (Etikan et al., 2016). Convenience sampling proved to be relatively inexpensive (Creswell, 2005; Blurtit, 2009). Figure 4.2 provides a visual illustration of convenience sampling.



*Figure 4.2: Convenience sampling
(Adapted from Saunders et al., 2012)*

Participants had to comply with the following criteria:

- Principals and deputy principals had to be employed at their specific school for at least five years and be familiar with the school's policies with reference to learner support and parental involvement.
- HoDs or school counsellors had to be actively involved in the emotional welfare of the learners.
- Teachers were required to be employed at their particular school for more than two years and have sufficient knowledge about the learners and parents and it

was required that they had a working relationship with the HoDs or the school's counsellor.

- Parents had to have a school-going learner in the school and they had to be actively involved at the school or be part of the school board.
- All participants had to reside in Polokwane in the Limpopo Province.
- Participation had to be voluntary.

A total of 27 participants took part in the data collection process. They consisted of four principals, two deputy principals, six HoDs, five teachers, five parents and five school counsellors. As indicated in par. 1.6.3, the researcher decided to include principals, deputy principals and HoDs in the study, as it was evident that stakeholders would not be able to collaborate without the approval or guiding hand of these specific individuals. It was decided to include them to obtain their objective opinion of the phenomenon from a leadership position. The principals, deputy principals and HoDs who participated were also teachers or parents at the respective schools.

The researcher made an appointment with the principals of the identified schools to discuss the research and its rationale. Permission was requested to conduct the research at their school (Appendix C). Once permission had been granted, an invitation letter (Appendix D) was sent per e-mail to the selected participants in person. Participants received an information letter containing details about the research topic, the background of the study, the overall purpose and the procedures. It included the study's benefits, risks and the subjects' rights (Appendix F). All the information was provided to ensure that participants were able to give informed consent (Appendix G). The researcher included contact details to provide participants with the opportunity to make enquiries. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. All participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Initially, arrangements were made to meet participants for the interviews, but due to the Covid-19 pandemic, various restrictions were introduced and all face-to-face contact was prohibited. Participants were thereafter requested to complete the open-ended questionnaires on online platforms. Forms had to be submitted and interviews were thereafter conducted telephonically.

4.5 DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

The overall goal of data collection is to acquire quality data that can be translated into credible answers to research questions (Kabir, 2016). The data collection process was always selective, given that the researcher was not able to collect all information about the subject being studied (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004; Harris & Brown, 2010). The data collection methods that were selected included open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured telephonic interviews (cf. par. 1.6.4).

4.5.1 Open-ended questionnaires

The researcher decided to compile an open-ended questionnaire (Appendix C) as it would urge participants to respond spontaneously and to express themselves in their own words. Patton's (2002) interview typology served as a useful guide in developing the questions. These questions served as an interview guide. According to Patton (2002), there are several types of questions that are typically included in an interview. Background and experience questions were used at the beginning of the telephonic interviews to establish rapport and the remainder of the questions were incorporated into the questionnaire.

- **Background or demographic questions:** Participants were asked personal questions about their age, race, years of experience, etc.
- **Experience or behaviour-type questions:** The researcher asked the participants questions about their work, experiences or general doings.
- **Opinion or value-based questions:** Enquiries were made about the participants' beliefs about the topic being studied.
- **Feeling questions:** Participants were in addition requested to elaborate on their opinions, attitudes and views about the topic.
- **Knowledge questions:** Participants were requested to share the factual knowledge they have pertaining to the topic

The researcher moreover complied with suggestions made by Jacob and Furgerson (2012) while questions were formulated.

- The researcher made use of open-ended questions in order to gain insightful knowledge on the participants' understanding of collaboration.
- The questionnaire commenced with easy questions and moved to more intricate questions. The researcher began by asking verifiable questions, such as whether or not the participants had prior knowledge of the concept of collaboration, what their understanding were about school-home partnerships, etc.
- The researcher thereafter proceeded to ask questions that were more complex, for example, how roles of stakeholders could be infused and how collaboration could be improved upon to facilitate school development.

The number of questions was restricted. Ten well-formulated questions with the option of further probing were adequate for the purpose of the study (Creswell, 2014).

4.5.2 Semi-structured telephonic interviews

Interviews bring about a rich understanding of the 'lived experience' of the participant and sheds light on how they ascribe meaning to those experiences (McDermid et al., 2014). The Covid-19 pandemic, however, prohibited face-to-face contact and interviews were subsequently conducted telephonically. A telephone interview permitted interpersonal communication without a face-to-face meeting (Carr & Worth, 2001). However, telephonic interviews were not the ideal. It was impossible for the researcher to observe the participants' body language and nonverbal cues of communication. The length of the interviews was also limited. For this reason, the researcher decided to send the open-ended questionnaires to the participants prior to the interviews for them to have enough time to consider the questions and to formulate their responses. Another disadvantage of the telephonic interview was that there was the possibility of data loss as the researcher could not observe the participants in their work environment (Holt, 2010).

During the telephonic interviews the completed questionnaires were used to prompt participants to elaborate on answers provided. The researcher took notes and included additional information on the forms submitted. The interviews were seen as a conversation with a purpose that could lead to a better understanding of the context in

which the participants operate (Rossman & Rallis, 2012; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The researcher employed a colloquial style in the gathering of the data, as it was considered to be more accommodating and more likely to yield information that the researcher had not planned to ask for (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015).

The interviews were guided and directed by the research questions and the objectives of the study. It offered a versatile and flexible way of collecting data to gain a detailed picture of the participants' beliefs and perceptions and it enabled the participants to verbalise their thoughts, concerns, solutions and recommendations. The interviews furthermore provided information that ensured the comparability of data (Bless & Higson-Smith, 2000; Sutton, 2015).

While conducting the interviews, the researcher was able to establish rapport with the participants and their trust was earned. All efforts were made to exhibit highly attentive behaviour, courteous behaviour (honesty, civility, empathy), connecting behaviour (using humour, pleasant conversation, friendly interaction), and information-sharing behaviour – giving advice, sharing knowledge and asking questions (Bell, Fahmy & Gordon, 2016). The interviewer endeavoured not to impose her own influence on the participants. Throughout the semi-structured telephonic interviews, the researcher intentionally referred to the topic and themes associated with the subject being studied, changed the order of the questions asked and probed for increased understanding (Saunders et al., 2016). This made the type of interview a favourable data collection technique, as it allowed for thorough exploration of the topic (Gray, 2014).

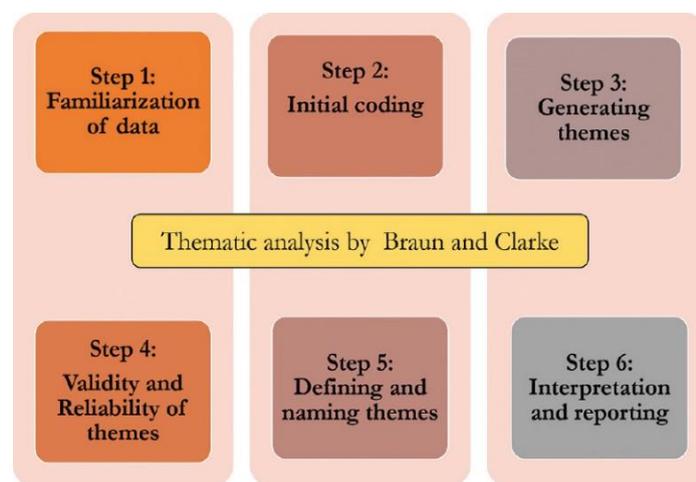
4.6 DATA ANALYSIS AND DATA PRESENTATION

4.6.1 Thematic Analysis

Analysing data is a very important process to ensure the integrity of research (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Numerous fields of study make use of qualitative methods, as indicated by Divan et al. (2017) and there is immense appreciation for these methods (Rosenthal, 2016). In this study the researcher decided to make use of thematic analysis as a means to analyse the data obtained through the telephonic interviews and open-ended questionnaires. Thematic analysis is concerned with analysing the

themes within the data set to identify meaning. Peel (2020:7) states that it is to “organise and simplify the complexity of data into meaningful and manageable codes, categories and themes”. Peel (2020), in addition, cites Merriam (2009:165, 175), who emphasizes that the “analysis begins with the first interview, the first observation, the first document read” and that it involves “consolidating, reducing and interpreting in the process of making meaning”.

Braun and Clarke (2006) developed a six-phase guide that was used to direct the process of thematic analysis in this study. Nevertheless, they stress that this type of analysis tends to have a recursive nature; it was not a linear process and the researcher was required to move back and forth through the phases (cf. par. 1.6.5). Figure 4.3 provides a visual representation of the phases of thematic analysis.



*Figure 4.3: Phases of thematic analysis
(Adapted from Braun & Clark, 2006)*

Once the data had been obtained, the researcher was required to transcribe the information. The transcribed extracts of these interviews are included as Appendix H.

Phase one: “Familiarizing yourself with your data, is focused on reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.” (Braun & Clarke, 2006:87) Braun and Clark (2006) indicate that the first phase requires of the researcher to be well acquainted and familiar with the data. The researcher is required to read through the transcripts a few times. During this process initial thoughts and first impressions about the data are written down. The researcher took note of Lincoln and Guba (1985), who indicate that researchers can record their speculative and reflective thoughts and considerations,

interests or appeals, budding insights and values, about the research topic that develop while they familiarize themselves with the data. In this phase the researcher took note that most participants felt that South African schools were in a dismal state. References were made about the low pass rate and prevalence of underperformance. Several social ills were identified that contributed to the low pass rates and many provided their stance on whether or not collaboration will be an effective method of addressing the diverse needs of learners. Challenges pertaining to collaborative partnerships were emphasized and the importance of role infusion was explored. Participants highlighted criteria that would be needed before collaboration could facilitate the necessary school development.

Phase two: “Generating initial codes: coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.” (Braun & Clarke, 2006:87) The second phase identified by Braun and Clark (2006) requires of a researcher to discover primary codes. The researcher endeavoured to organise the data in a systematic manner. The coding process required careful consideration and reflection. Codes were ascribed to all the interesting aspects that stood out and that emerged from the data obtained. The researcher focused on reducing the data and producing initial codes (Attride-Stirling, 2001; Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher attempted to code the data into “meaningful and manageable chunks of text, such as passages, quotations or single words” (Attride-Stirling, 2001:391). Coding was done manually. The establishment of codes was very important as it laid the foundation for the identification of initial themes that were identified in phase 3. The researcher made use of the deductive approach to thematic analysis. This entailed starting the process with a set of themes that were expected to be found in the data and then used it to analyse the information obtained from the participants. Table 4.1 depicts the themes the researcher initially used.

Table 4.1: Initial themes used at the onset of phase 2

Poor performance	Underachievement	Barriers to learning
Learner support	Collaborative Partnerships/ Teamwork	Functioning within scope of practice
Parental involvement	Pragmatic constraints	School Development

Phase three: “Searching for themes, collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.” (Braun & Clarke, 2006:87. The third phase identified by Braun and Clark (2006) necessitates a researcher to organise the relevant data obtained from the participants according to the most dominant themes. Maguire and Delahunt (2017:3356) specify that there is no set indication of what a theme entails and “there may be considerable overlap” between stage two and stage three. Numerous categories and subsequent themes were identified while working through the participants’ responses.

Six main categories were identified, which included the condition of schools, systemic problems, outcomes of underperformance, teamwork as a possible solution, impediments inhibiting partnerships and facilitating school development. Each category presented with subsequent themes. The researcher examined the multiple emerging themes and endeavoured to group them under the identified categories. Some themes related to the conditions of schools in South Africa, while other themes could be associated with systemic problems and dire conditions that contribute to underperformance.

Some themes could be grouped under teamwork and shared responsibilities, while other themes portrayed the impediments and pragmatic constraints obstructing collaboration. There were several sub-themes that could be linked to school development. Participants presented with numerous perspectives pertaining to the topic being studied. Some were very optimistic, while others focused on the harsh realities and impracticalities associated with fostering collaborative partnerships. It was, however, evident that all harboured a desire to act in the learners’ best interests and to work towards possible school development. Table 4.2 provides an indication of the categories and subsequent themes as identified by the researcher.

Table 4.2: Categories and subsequent themes identified in phase 3

<p>Category 1: Conditions of schools</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performing below par/ below standard • Educational system is flawed • Declining educational standards • Not achieving goals • Behavioural problems • Underperformance • Unsafe environments • Privileged vs underprivileged schools • Lack of resources • Covid-19 Pandemic worsened the situation • Low levels of accountability • Over-extended teachers • Education in SA can improve • Reflection of communities • Uninvolved parents • Lack of motivation 	<p>Category 2: Systemic problems</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Misconduct/Disciplinary problems • Dysfunctional system • Poor socio-economic status/ poverty • Escalation in bully behaviour • Gangsterism and violence • Truancy/absenteeism • Domestic Abuse • Unsafe home environments • Drug and alcohol abuse • Teen pregnancies • Absent parents/Single-parent homes/divorce • Child-headed households • Inequalities • Resources lacking • Sense of entitlement • Negative media/social media influences • Negative political influences • Peer pressure • Lack of discipline • Cultural clashes • Community unrest 	<p>Category 3: Outcomes of underachievement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low pass rates • Increase in drop-out rates • Declining self-image • Sense of hopelessness • Low morale • Negative future prospects • Disruptive behaviour • Misconduct • Losing confidence
<p>Category 4: Teamwork as a possible solution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unified Allies • Building partnerships • Shared/entwined responsibilities • Focused attention • Eliminate duplication of tasks • Sharing expertise • Different perspectives • Mutual goals specific purpose • Open communication/ reciprocal approach • Regular contact and feedback • Assist with conflict resolution • Effective interventions • Adequate learner support • Conducive school climate • Accountability – function within scope of practice • Greater understanding of learners • Benefits for learners: higher grades, emotional stability, boosts self-confidence, sense of safety and security, improve holistic development 	<p>Category 5: Impediments inhibiting partnerships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of parental involvement • Fragmented personal beliefs • Covid-19 pandemic • One-sided decision making • Deficient communication • Pragmatic reasons e.g. time, busy lifestyles, work commitments, lack of childcare • Cultural differences • Fragmented approaches • Lack of knowledge and proper skills • Lack of proper training or staff induction • Lack of trust or inadequate communication • Not enough counsellors • Poverty (unable to travel) • Negative attitudes/no respect • Unequal treatment of stakeholders • Unfamiliar about role requirements • Unclear specifications • Refusal to ask for help or work in a team 	<p>Category 6: Facilitating school development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivated facilitator and core group • Well established policies (include mission, role specification, procedures, available resources) • Enhance communication (digital platforms, zoom, WhatsApp groups) • Developing skills to work jointly • Voluntary participation • Provision of training • Favourable environment – trust, respect, acknowledgement, equal voice, transparency • Collaboration incorporated into the ethos of the school • Regular contact, updates, feedback, events, social gatherings • Commitment of all stakeholders • View learners within their environment • Developing common goals • Maintain interdependence. • Establish safe, conducive environments • Lead by example • Extent collaboration beyond the school • Adequate support from principals, deputy principals and HoDs

Phase four: “Reviewing themes, checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic ‘map’ of the analysis.” (Braun & Clarke, 2006:87) During this phase, the researcher endeavoured to revise the coded data extracts for each theme to deliberate if they form a logical pattern. During this phase the researcher was required to decide whether or not to fuse, refine, split, or to thrust aside initial themes. Coherence, consistency as well as distinguishable features between themes were however of the utmost importance. Data associated with each of the themes had to present with sufficient cohesion and consistency, and data between themes had to be noticeable enough to warrant separation (Attride-Stirling 2001; Braun & Clarke 2006). The researcher examined the themes in relations to the initial codes and mind maps were constructed that illustrated the various relationships between the themes and sub-themes. Figure 4.4 provides a rough draft of the first mind map constructed.

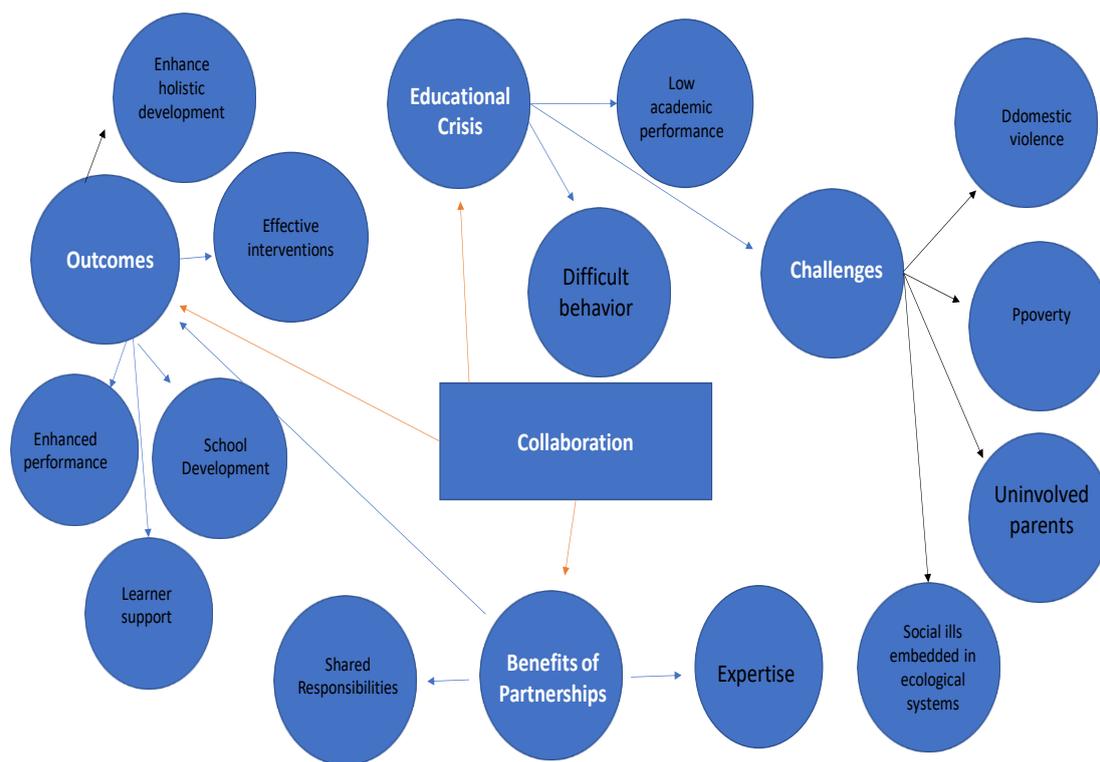


Figure 4.4: First mind map illustrating the key themes and interrelated relationships

Figure 4.5 provides a depiction of the second mind map that was constructed in an attempt to review the various categories and subsequent themes.

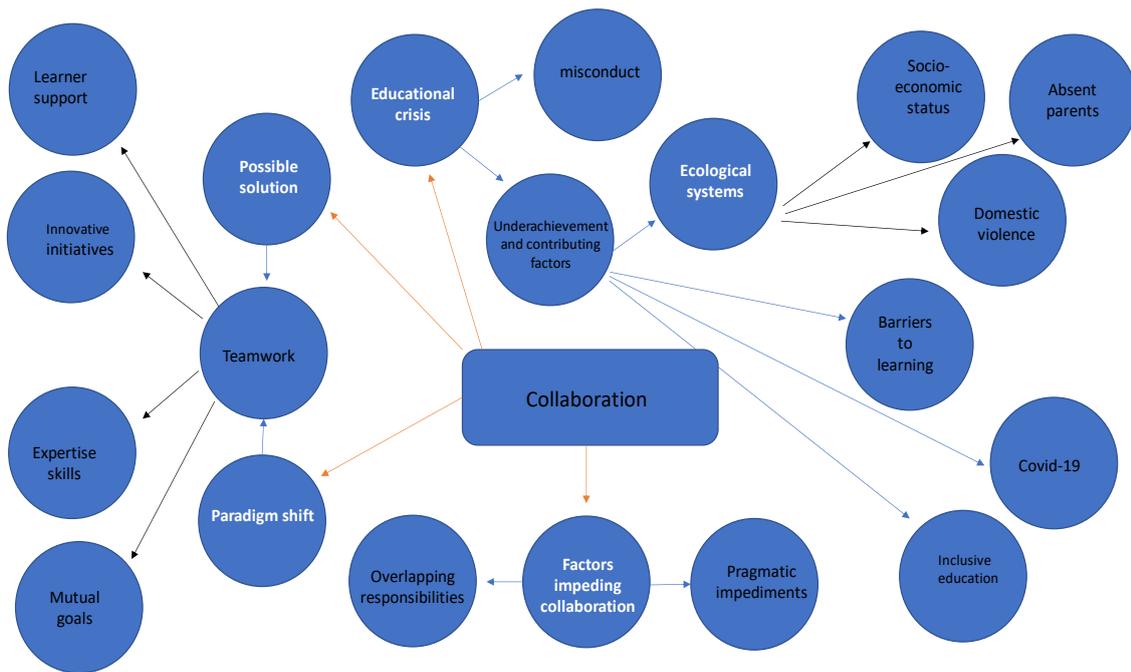


Figure 4.5: Second mind map illustrating key themes and interrelated relationships

The mind maps were used to refine and to establish the main categories and subsequent themes of the study. The researcher finally decided to focus on four main categories that coincide and correspond with the four objectives and sub-questions of the study. These include systemic ills, ideal collaborative outcomes, impediments and school development criteria.

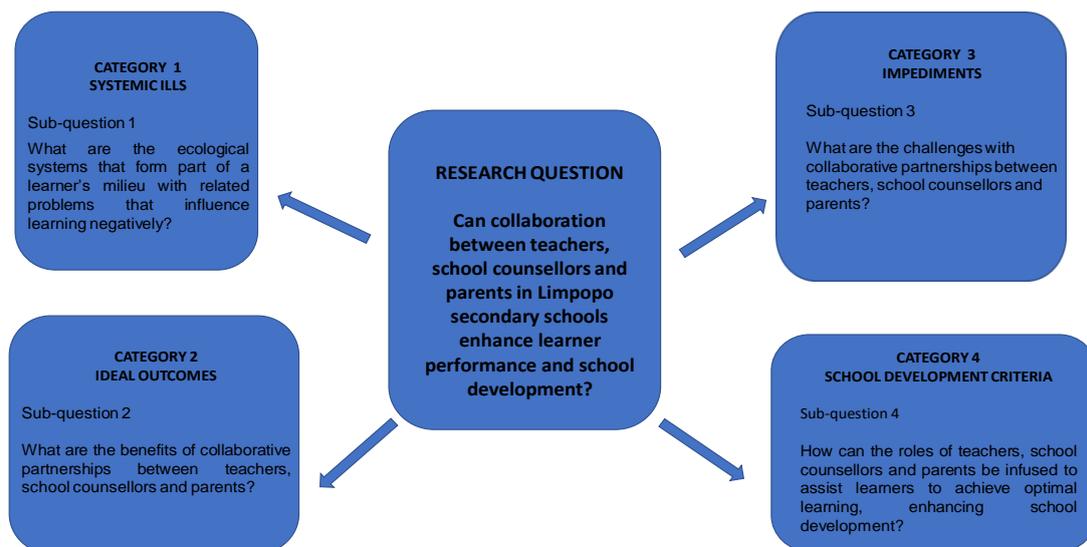


Figure 4.6: Indicating how categories fit into the research questions

Each category presented with several subsequent themes as indicated in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: Refined categories and subsequent themes

CATEGORY 1: SYSTEMIC ILLS	CATEGORY 2: IDEAL OUTCOMES	CATEGORY 3: IMPEDIMENTS	CATEGORY 4: DEVELOPMENT CRITERIA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Microsystem • Exosystem • Mesosystem • Macrosystem • Chronosystem 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced performance • Role description for learner support • Effectual intervention strategies • Conducive environments • Strong bond between home and school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Available time • Uninvolved parents • Deficient communication • Insufficient motivation • Unclear expectations • Undistinguishable directives • Interpersonal challenges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skill development and training • Ample communication • Foster relationships • Acknowledge differences • Trust formation • Policy formulation • Facilitator and core committee • Prioritise collaboration • Promote parental involvement • Available accommodations • Voluntary participation • Leading by example

Phase five: “Defining and naming themes, ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definition and names for each theme.” (Braun & Clarke, 2006:87) The goal of this phase was to “clearly define” the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006:92). To accomplish this objective, the researcher attempted to define each main category clearly to pinpoint the very core of the theme and to establish under what part of the information and research questions the theme fits (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The following definitions were formulated.

Systemic ills can be described as all the exertions, difficulties and struggles that stem from a learner’s bio-ecological systems that have a negative effect on their overall development and academic performance.

Ideal outcomes refer to the standard or excellence collaborative efforts should strive to attain. Impediments denote the everyday, concrete aspects that can hinder collaborative efforts and that should be contemplated when planning an initiative or when deciding to take action.

Developmental criteria specify the measures that should be in place and the norms and standards that ought to be adhered to before the required transformation and

growth can occur within a school.

The thematic map in Figure 4.7 assisted the researcher to organize the categories and subsequent themes in a logical manner.

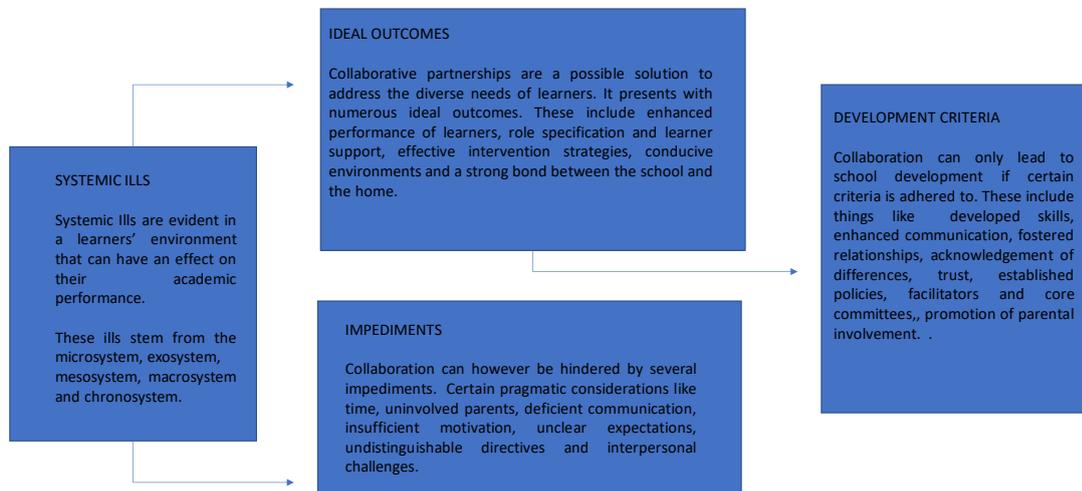


Figure 4.7: Thematic map containing the categories and subsequent themes

Phase six: “Producing the report: the final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, completing extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research questions and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.” (Braun & Clarke, 2006:87). This phase focused on the analysis of the data and writing a narrative about the data that “goes beyond description of the data and make an argument in relation to the research questions”; while it also “provides a concise, coherent, logical, nonrepetitive and interesting account of the story the data tell-within and across themes” (Braun & Clarke, 2006:93). Chapter 5 will elaborate on the findings of this study.

4.7 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY

In qualitative research, validity and reliability are termed through aspects of trustworthiness (cf. par. 1.6.7). Trustworthiness can be explained as the extent to which others deem the results believable and credible (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). Trustworthiness is the extent of certainty qualitative researchers have in their data, using assessment standards of legitimacy, transferability, reliability and conformability

(Botma et al., 2010). It is stated that “qualitative research is trustworthy, when it accurately represents the experience of the study participant” (Streubert & Carpenter, 1999:333). Lincoln and Guba’s framework was used to verify the truth value of the qualitative research (Polit & Beck, 2012). Their model takes the following four strategies for trustworthiness into account: credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Credibility or authenticity signifies the researcher’s confidence in the accuracy of the data and the interpretations thereof. It entails two important aspects: conducting the study in a manner that augments the plausibility of the results and taking the necessary steps to validate credibility to external readers. Krefting (1991) notes that qualitative studies can be deemed credible when the portrayals of individuals’ experiences are applicable to others within their particular setting that have comparable characteristics to the setting where data were gathered. The following strategies were employed to enhance the credibility of the qualitative research:

- **Voluntary participation.** Shenton (2004) recommends that to ensure credibility of a study a researcher should allow participants to choose whether or not they want to be part of a study. The researcher briefed each participant about the study and provided them with an information sheet before it was established if they were willing to participate. This was done to ensure that they made an informed decision.
- **Method triangulation.** It implies utilising a combination of data collection methods (De Vos et al., 2011; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Polit & Beck, 2012). The researcher made use of both telephonic interviews and open-ended questionnaires.
- **Member checks.** Once the researcher had received the open-ended questionnaires the participants were contacted telephonically for the interviews. The questionnaires were used to facilitate the conversation. Some of the participants’ responses were paraphrased and they were asked to elaborate on their answers. This was done to ensure that there was no misinterpretation of what they stated. Interactive questions or probing methods were used to avoid any confusions (Shenton, 2004). This was considered an important technique

to establish the credibility of the qualitative data. The researcher provided feedback to the participants concerning emergent interpretations and reactions. Follow-up discussions were also conducted with some of the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

- **Detailed descriptions of collaboration:** Shenton (2004) suggests that detailed descriptions be provided of the phenomenon being studied to convey the actual situations and context so that the overall findings will “ring true”. The researcher endeavoured to provide detailed descriptions of collaboration and elaborated on the nature thereof, important components, the processes involved, the role of collaborative partners and other related aspects like benefits, challenges and requirements to sustain a collaborative climate.

Credibility could, however, not be affirmed through extended engagement and continued observation in the field, as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Due to social distancing and imposed restrictions the researcher was not able to devote ample time to the participants in their natural environment during the data collection process.

Dependability signifies the constancy (reliability) of data across the course of time (Polit & Beck, 2012). The dependability of research is established by discovering whether or not research conducted can stand the test of time (Major & Savin-Baden, 2010). To attain dependability in this study, the researcher ensured that the research process was logical, traceable, and clearly documented (Tobin & Begley, 2004; Nowell et al., 2017). The researcher aimed to record all the processes systematically in order to leave a well-defined audit trail that will allow any external auditor to have clarity about how the study was conducted.

Transferability reveals the extent to which the outcomes of the research can be transferred to a comparable location with other participants. In the context of this study it was important to remember that each participant provided an account of their own subjective experience and results of the study are not typically generalisable to the remainder of the population (Tobin & Begley, 2004; Nowell et al., 2017). There might be some transferability, given that participants were selected purposefully and they therefore share some commonalities with one another. Transferability in this particular

research study was attained by providing comprehensive explanations and descriptions so that other researchers would be able to judge for themselves if this particular study will have merit for their studies. Information was provided with reference to the number of schools that participated, the criteria used to select participants, the number of participants who formed part of the study and the data collection methods employed. It is, however, important to know that similar studies, using the same methods but conducted in different settings may yield other findings.

Confirmability refers to the idea that research findings and interpretations are linked to data in ways easily understood by others. The researcher attempted to provide information that was clear and well demarcated. According to Hays and Singh (2012), confirmability requires impartiality and objectivity in qualitative research. Shenton (2004) assumes that a fundamental measure for confirmability is the degree to which researchers are willing to acknowledge their own biases. The researcher tried to be open-minded and upfront about any possible personal biases – past experiences, various roles fulfilled and current working environment may however have contributed to researcher bias. Throughout the process the researcher nevertheless aimed to provide an accurate account of the participants' responses and to remove any form of partiality or predetermined views concerning the subject matter from the analysis and interpretation of the research (Major & Savin-Baden, 2010).

4.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Research ethics are the standards of the researcher's behaviour in relation to the rights of those who become the subject of the research project, or who are affected by it (Saunders et al., 2016). Vilma (2018:40) indicates, "Ethics are the norms or standards for conduct that distinguish between right and wrong." Ethical compliance was deemed of great importance in this study (cf. par. 1.9). The following was considered to ensure that ethical standards were upheld:

- Permission to conduct the research was obtained from relevant others. Ethical clearance with the endorsement or approval of the Research Ethics Committee of the University of South Africa was obtained, as well as written permission from the Limpopo Department of Education to conduct research at schools

around Polokwane. The permission to conduct the research in the Polokwane area was obtained from the Department of Education (Capricorn District), the principals of secondary schools and the teachers, school counsellors and parents who participated in this study before the start of the research project.

- Participants participated voluntarily and they were thoroughly informed about the nature and purpose of the study, as well as of their rights to withdraw from the study at any time. Informed consent was acquired from all participants. The participants were provided with information pertaining to how the results would be employed and published. They were furthermore presented with the opportunity to ask questions and to make comments about the research study.
- Confidential information provided by the research participants was treated as such by the researcher. Participants' names were not mentioned in the writing up of the findings and the anonymity of the data source was therefore guaranteed. The schools' names were also not disclosed.
- None of the participants were harmed on account of the research study. Within the realm of educational research, ethics are concerned with ensuring that the interests and well-being of people are not affected as a result of the research being done (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004; Pillay, 2014).
- Data were collected, managed and kept in a responsible manner. Only the researcher had access to the obtained data, which were destroyed once the research project was finalized.
- Necessary precautions were taken to ensure that the qualitative findings were not misinterpreted and that they met the intended purpose of the research study.
- Participants had the right to the information and were notified of the conclusion of the study and its key findings.
- No participants received any monetary profit from participating in the study.
- The researcher endeavoured to attest to the integrity of the research process by ensuring that:
 - the research was trustworthy (valid and reliable);
 - findings were based on evidence;

- the arguments can be justified; and
 - acceptable guidelines for conducting research within the chosen research paradigm were followed.
-
- The researcher endeavoured to uphold scientific integrity and excellence, social empathy and responsibility, and recognize the dignity of the individual.
 - The research was conducted with the sole purpose to benefit others. It is the moral obligation of researchers to act in the best interests of others. In order to maintain beneficence, the researcher endeavoured not to violate the rights of participants, but to respect their welfare. The researcher undertook to respect the dignity of people, such as their public reputation, psychological and physical integrity, and their uniqueness. The researcher attempted to safeguard that all participants were treated without unfair discrimination or favouritism (Allan, 2008; Haahr, Norlyk & Hall, 2014).

4.9 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study presented with certain limitations (cf. par. 1.10). Limitations involve the prospective drawbacks or difficulties that are usually out of a researcher's control and are closely related to the selected research design (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019).

The Covid-19 pandemic hampered the data collection process of this study. In response to the restriction measures, the researcher changed from standard face-to-face contact to remote data collection in support of continued research. Remote data collection is defined here as the collection of data via the phone, online or other virtual platforms, with study participants physically distanced. According to a notice received from the university, researchers were urged to employ a responsible approach to human participants. It was emphasised that limited social contact was allowed in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. In the interests of participants and researchers, consensus was therefore reached that no face-to-face contact with participants could be embarked upon. All scheduled face-to-face interviews had to be cancelled and the interviews and completion of questionnaires were conducted via remote data collection methods, specifically telephonically and via online platforms. The duration

of the data collection process was as a result delayed and extended. Some participants did not have access to the internet and were unable to respond to online questionnaires. This had an effect on the participants who were able to participate in the study.

The researcher was obliged to make use of telephonic interviews. Telephonic interviews were not the ideal, as the researcher was not able to observe the participants' body language or facial expressions. Participants could also not be observed within their work environment. Data loss could therefore have occurred and credibility could not be affirmed in this particular section of the study. The interviews were also subjected to a time constraint and in-depth exploration and as a result, probing was impeded.

The researcher made use of thematic analysis during the data analysis process and results could easily have been affected by the researcher's personal biases (Riyami, 2015). The researcher was therefore required to be aware of her own predispositions and preconceptions in order to focus solely on the views and perceptions of the participants

4.10 CONCLUSION

Chapter 4 gave an overview of the research aim, research paradigm and research approach with the empirical investigation and elaborated on the research population and sampling. The chapter addressed data collection, analysis and interpretation with reference to thematic analysis.

Trustworthiness was explored in terms of the credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of the study. The ethical considerations were stipulated and the limitations were acknowledged. The next chapter elaborates on the presentation, analysis and discussion of the research data obtained throughout the study.

CHAPTER 5: PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH DATA

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter outlined an overview of the research aims, paradigms and research approach. It elaborated on the population and sample and provided information pertaining to data collection. Chapter 4 also outlined the data analysis strategies and trustworthiness of the study. Ethical considerations and limits were explored. Chapter 5 contains information pertaining to the data analysis and presentation of the data obtained. In the qualitative phase the researcher made use of information obtained from the initial conversations, open-ended questionnaires and telephonic interviews with the principals, deputy principals, HoDs, teachers, parents and school counsellors. Questions posed to participants focused on the role of collaboration between teachers, school counsellors and parents at secondary schools in Polokwane, Limpopo Province.

5.2 THE RESEARCH PROCESS

The researcher made use of a qualitative and exploratory design in order to explore collaboration in secondary schools situated in Limpopo, Polokwane (cf. par. 1.6.1). The researcher aimed to understand if collaboration between stakeholders (specifically teachers, parents and school counsellors) could address the escalation of underperformance in the local schools. Principals, deputy principals and HoDs were also included in the sample, as it is apparent that parents, teachers and school counsellors cannot function as unconnected entities and they will need the input and guidance of those in leadership positions. Note that two of the principals who participated are also teaching and all the deputy principals and HoDs are also both teachers and parents as well. With this in mind, principals, deputies and HoDs can therefore be regarded as part of the stakeholders in the study. The study commenced in 2020 and the original design was altered as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Due to imposed restrictions and social distancing the researcher was not able to conduct face-to-face interviews with the identified participants.

5.2.1 Methods used to collect data

Data collection methods were changed from face-to-face, in-depth interviews to online, open-ended questionnaires and telephonic interviews (cf. par. 1.6.4). As a result, participants were initially briefed about the study via conversations, telephone calls or e-mails and they were requested to complete the open-ended questionnaire on Google Forms. It consisted of ten well-formulated, open-ended questions. Once completed, participants were required to submit the forms and they were thereafter contacted for a telephonic interview. The open-ended questionnaire served as an interview guide. The researcher paraphrased some of their answers and asked interactive questioning as a means of probing to ensure that all responses were understood clearly and that there were no misunderstandings about their responses. Participants were able to elaborate on the answers they initially provided.

The interviews commenced and the researcher endeavoured to establish the necessary rapport. This was done by asking personal questions pertaining to the participants' background, age, race, current employment, years' experience and qualifications. The conversation then focused on the ten questions posed that explored their views on the condition of schools in South Africa, performance at their own schools and possible systemic causes contributing to low pass rates. They were asked to express their sentiments about home-school partnerships and to share factual knowledge they were familiar with about the topic being studied. Participants were furthermore requested to elaborate on whether or not they believed that collaboration would be an effective method to address the diverse needs of learners and the ensuing educational crisis and what they regarded as important criteria for collaboration to ultimately contribute to school development in Limpopo.

5.2.2 Challenges experienced during the research process

The Covid-19 pandemic had an immense effect on the research process. The original design had to be altered to adhere to imposed restrictions and social distancing. Some participants did not have access to Wi-Fi and could not participate as a result. The process was also extended as data collection was delayed.

5.3 BIOGRAPHICAL DATA OF PARTICIPANTS

This section analyses the various demographic characteristics of the participants. Supporting tables and figures are provided.

5.3.1 Number of participants

A total of twenty-seven participants were part of the study. They consisted of four principals, two deputy principals, six HoDs, five parents, five teachers and five school counsellors. Each participant was given a unique code to ensure their anonymity. Table 5.1 provides an outline of the codes allocated to the participants.

Table 5.1: Codes used for participants

Principals	P1 Participant 1	P2 Participant 2	P3 Participant 3	P4 Participant 4	---	---
Deputy principal	DP1 Participant 5	DP2 Participant 6	---	---	---	---
HODs	HoD1 Participant 7	HoD2 Participant 8	HoD3 Participant 9	HoD4 Participant 10	HoD5 Participant 11	HoD6 Participant 12
Teachers	T1 Participant 13	T2 Participant 14	T3 Participant 15	T4 Participant 16	T5 Participant 17	---
Parents	Pa1 Participant 18	Pa2 Participant 19	Pa3 Participant 20	Pa4 Participant 21	Pa5 Participant 22	---
School Counsellors	SC1 Participant 23	SC2 Participant 24	SC3 Participant 25	SC4 Participant 26	SC5 Participant 27	----

5.3.2 Gender of participants

Nine males and eighteen females participated in the study. More females were included in the sample, as they presented with a greater willingness to participate.

5.3.3 Race of participants

Participants from different races were included in the study. Participants consisted of seventeen White participants, six Black participants and four Coloured participants. No Indian or Asian participants participated.

5.3.4 Age of participants

Three participants were younger than 40 years, thirteen participants were between 40 and 50 years of age, six participants were between 50 and 60 years of age, and five participants were older than 60 years.

5.3.5 Highest academic qualification of participants

Five participants have a diploma, fourteen have a Bachelor's degree, two are in the process of completing their Honours degree and six participants have Master's degrees.

5.4 DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

This section presents an analysis of the research findings. The findings are based on the responses obtained from the open-ended questionnaires and the telephonic interviews. Data obtained from the participants were transcribed and a thematic analysis was used to organize the data into categories and themes, while patterns and relationships were identified among the categories and subsequent themes. Braun and Clarke (2006) developed a six-phase guide that was used to direct the process of thematic analysis in this study (see par. 4.6). Data obtained and categories and subsequent themes identified will be discussed in accordance with the four objectives of the study as indicated in Chapter 1 (par 1.4).

In Chapter 4 the researcher identified four main categories. Systemic ills were linked with objective 1; ideal outcomes were associated with objective 2; impediments were in accord with objective 3; and development criteria were connected with objective 4 (see Fig 4.6 and Table 4.3).

5.4.1 Data obtained with regard to objective 1

Exploring the ecological systems that form part of a learner's milieu with related problems that influence learning negatively (Category 1: Systemic ills)

The initial questions posed to participants were used to obtain information about their general perception pertaining to the condition of schools, barriers to learning and how learner performance is affected as a result of the dynamics between the various ecological systems. The researcher initially focused on obtaining information about the participants' general view of the conditions of schools in South Africa. The majority seemed to be rather pessimistic, as 14 participants described the schools as performing below par. P4 and P3 mentioned that schools have declining educational standards and that learners are not challenged enough or prepared for the world outside the school gates. DP1 emphasized that the educational system is flawed and that a vast majority of teachers have poor work ethics, that parents are disinterested in their children and that schools lack general accountability. DP2 made mention of South African school's deplorable performance when considering benchmark tests. He stated,

South African schools are performing below par. When compared to international and national benchmark tests it is evident that there are some areas within our school system that must be addressed before school development can be facilitated.

HoD1 indicated that

schools in South Africa are underperforming ... a lot has been done to address underperformance in schools but it is apparent that we have not yet won this battle.

This was affirmed by HoD2 and T1, who indicated that even though learners are trying they are still not performing up to standard. HoD4 frankly indicated that "*learners in general are not achieving their goals*". HoD6 also shared this outlook and mentioned that "*performance of learners is still below expectations and is something that requires attention*". T2 emphasised yet again that schools in general is in a bleak state. It was

in addition evident that some participants, T2 and Pa5, felt that the whole situation was aggravated by the Covid-19 pandemic, given that schools were closed and learners had to engage in online schooling that presented with endless challenges obstructing optimal learning. Regardless of the pessimistic outlook some participants (P3, HoD3, T4 and SC5) still believed that something can be done about the situation and they felt that there were room for improvement. Participants presented with a sense of hope that change is possible.

Individual participants like P1 felt that IEB schools have obtained a reasonable level of operationality and he held that *“the top 10% of said schools countrywide can be favourably compared with similar schools in 1st world countries”*. Pa4 felt that schools are *“performing on an average level”*. However, this participant touched on a very important and noteworthy aspect in this study when commenting that *“each school is unique and should not be generalized”*.

Quite a few participants affirmed this by indicating that many schools present with both top achievers and underachievers. Pa1 and Pa2 both agreed with this statement. Pa3 elaborated on the appalling occurrences in schools (e.g. violence, bullying, misdemeanours, disrespect, etc.), but recanted that *“there are, however, a handful of schools that are excelling and making a difference”*.

Many felt that the socio-economic status of a particular area where a school is situated in plays a significant role in whether or not learners perform. T5 stated

Schools in affluent or well-off areas tend to thrive while schools in the disadvantaged rural or impoverished areas are inclined to fall behind because of inadequate resources, lack of motivation and negative future expectations.

Pa5 mentioned that some schools are in a worse condition than others. He noted that

schools in wealthy neighbourhoods tend to be more ideal than those in rural areas. Some have enough resources and access to top of the range technology, while other schools do not even have sufficient ablution facilities for their learners or electricity.

SC3 affirmed that some schools are excelling while others are performing way below standard and also referred to the inequalities present in different schools. Other underlying causes were identified as the shortage of teachers (P3), lack of parental involvement (T4) and school-related problems (Pa5; Pa5).

It is important to note that when the question about the conditions of schools were directed at the participants' own specific schools that their viewpoint changed slightly. They were inclined to be much more optimistic and considerate towards their learners' underlining problems that contribute to underperformance and low pass rates.

Some participants indicated that their learners were performing on an average level or that they were performing satisfactorily (DP2; HoD4; T4; HoD5; T1, Pa5). They listed reasons why they felt that their condition was different from most other schools. P1 indicated that their learners' *"overall performance academically can be regarded as conforming to the norms of being average"*. He stated that they did not have any top achievers but they continuously presented with a 100% pass rate. P3 indicated that their learners performed between average and moderate as they strived to maintain *"rigorous learning"* and maintain a *"child-centred approach with a low pupil-teacher ratio"*. HoD6 indicated that their school was doing well as they had ample learner support measures in place. It was also expressed that they have dedicated teachers and involved parents. T3 believed that their learners were performing better due to smaller classes and the fact that learners were receiving individual attention. Pa2 held that their learners were excelling, as they had all the needed resources and assets available on their premises. It seems to affirm that affluent schools are in a more probable position to excel.

Participants who indicated that learners did not perform on par provided numerous reasons for their failure to excel. The Covid-19 pandemic was singled out as a major contributing factor of low academic performance for the past two years by P1. P2 stated that many learners *"were not able to engage in zoom meetings or MS teams as they did not have laptops"*, given the high prevalence of poverty. DP1 emphasised that learners did not have data or access to Wi-Fi when most schools incorporated online classes. Pa5 was of the opinion that the pandemic caused many learners to fall behind and they now present with enormous learning gaps that affect their overall

performance. Participants further identified social ills that the researcher categorised under the different ecosystems.

5.4.1.1 Systemic ills within the microsystem

Underperformance are ascribed to problems that stem from a learner's various ecosystems. Problems identified in the various microsystems (involving the learners, parents, families, peers, schools and neighbourhoods and the various relationships between these systems) included some of the following, of which broken homes were a recurrent subject. P4 and Pa1 identified the occurrence of domestic violence in numerous homes as a potential cause of low performance. SC2 affirmed that "*some learners are subjected to volatile home environments*" that contribute to their failure to thrive. HoD5 made it clear that "*learners will struggle if there is no safe and secure home waiting for them in the afternoons*". P4 indicated that "*learners lack inspirational role models in their homes*". HoD2 also stressed that learners "*need adults who will guide and steer them in the right direction and who will motivate them to work hard and to do their best in life*". This, however, seems to be a void in our local communities. It was also stated by P4 that some parents had passed away. P3 and DP2 emphasised the impact of absent parents or single-parent homes on their learners. This seems to be a huge concern in Limpopo that is escalating at a distressing rate.

HoD1 addressed a very important aspect when referring to lenient parental styles where learners are "*left to do as they please*" and that there is "*no accountability*" or necessary "*structure provided*" to learners. These learners will most certainly struggle to adjust in a school situation where discipline, routine and structure are upheld. A vast majority of learners also reside with their grandparents or other relatives (T3, SC5). T3 indicated that grandparents might not have the strength to implement the necessary discipline or to provide the required supervision. HoD5 made mention of the occurrence of child-headed households in local communities. Learners are left unattended and the lack of supervision leaves them susceptible to added social ills.

Schools within a child's microsystem also present with numerous problem situations, as indicated by the participants. Over the past few years there has been an acceleration of bully behaviour and school violence within the local schools as mentioned by DP2, Pa4 and Pa2. Teen pregnancies have increased in schools and

drug abuse under learners are also a “*mounting concern*” according to Pa4. T4 stated that

class management tends to be very demanding given the dissimilarities of learners and some unruly learners keep others from benefiting from the learning process.

HoD2 indicated that teachers lose their passion when they feel overwhelmed and that can also affect the quality of schooling being provided to the learners. SC1, in correspondence, mentioned that some learners struggle with learning problems and they are just not able to cope with the workload. They require a lot of the teacher’s time and will have an effect on the other learners as well. Many teachers evidently do not have the expertise to assist learners with learning difficulties and their efforts are not specialised. Valuable time can be lost and attention misdirected.

Poverty also has an immeasurable influence on households, schools and communities at large (DP1; DP2). T5 stated that learners who come from poor households do not eat good nutritional meals and it can affect their ability to concentrate in class. SC1 were of the opinion that poverty has led to house crowding and alleged sexual abuse amongst some learners. SC5 pointed out that neglect is also evident in learners from poor households, while substance abuse amid parents is also a social ill within the communities. Underprivileged schools also do not have the necessary resources or infrastructure, as pointed out by T5, and HoD2 indicated that they were not able to keep up with all the “*technological advances*” due to limited funds. T5 moreover felt that learners who are subjected to lack on a continuous basis are prone to resort to petty crime and they get involved with the wrong crowd. Several local communities are also known for gangsterism, according to Pa3. Pa1 stated that “*peer pressure is a big problem as some learners are pressured into doing things they will not normally do.*” More recently, the community has seen a rise in cases of child abduction and human trafficking, as specified by Pa4, and it is affecting learners’ sense of security and wellbeing. Learners within the local community are bombarded by social ills in their home and school life, some in a more direct way than others. These social ills have bearing on their overall functioning and it should be recognised in order to understand their behaviour and to support them constructively.

5.4.1.2 Systemic ills within the mesosystem

According to the participants, the most prominent problem in the learner's mesosystem is the lack of parental involvement. HoD1 listed it as the foremost problem occurring in their school. HoD2 described it as being "*an ongoing struggling*". T1 affirmed that "*parental support is lacking*", while SC4 felt that this is an area that needs attention, given that "*parents are very important in the lives of learners and they have a direct impact on a learner's performance*". SC5 felt that the lack of parental immersion can be due to the fact that parents are separated, divorced or widowed and some parents are required to work in other provinces. Pa5 believed that deficient channels of communication also impact the relationship between the home and the school. This is evidently a current and continuing struggle within the local schools.

5.4.1.3 Systemic ills within the exosystem

Social ills identified in the learner's exosystem include the aspects that have a secondary influence on the learner's development and it again implicates references made to matters pertaining to wide-scale poverty, prevalence of malnutrition, increasing gang-related activities, and the abuse of drugs within the community at large.

5.4.1.4 Systemic ills within the macrosystem

Within the macrosystem it was indicated that some schools struggle with cultural clashes according to Pa1 and Sc1. T2 proclaimed that the

schools are a reflection of a country's social, economic and political structure and that a country's struggles will unavoidably have an impact on a learner.

Learners within the Limpopo Province are also affected by the corruption in the country (P1); community unrest (P4, Pa4); political problems (HoD1); and negative political influences (HoD3). Protests by unions (SC2) also affect the learners. Mass media and social media also have an immense influence on the learners. Pa4 was of the opinion that social media have "*expanded a child's world*" but have had a negative impact on their young minds as they are "*exposed to different values, mindsets and immoral and*

questionable behaviours". P2 indicated that learning is affected by them spending too much time on their electronic devices and engaging for hours on end on social platforms. Learners are not only affected by their immediate environment, but also by the milieu created by digital and technological advances and there is even less control over these external influences.

5.4.1.5 Systemic ills within the chronosystem

Within the chronosystem learners are affected by changes that occur throughout their lifetime. Participants indicated several aspects that could have bearing in this specific system. P1 stated that development had taken place in our country – the previous disadvantaged are now in a privileged state. This can, however, cause entitlement and a preoccupation with possessions and rampant demands.

Tertiary students are often seen protesting and demanding more and more privileges that can influence learners' perception of working towards something or just claiming it. Other life changes can also affect learning. DP2 made mention of divorce that inevitably changes a family's structure and requires numerous disruptive alterations. HoD1 pointed out that the economy is also subjected to constant change that causes job loss that can also affect a child. Learners whose parents are required to work in other provinces are also exposed to numerous changes, especially if they are required to live with other relatives (HoD5). These were all identified amongst their learners.

Participants identified numerous systemic ills within the local community. It is apparent that it has a great impact on the learners and that it causes concerning behaviour. These behaviours include low motivation (Pa3), a sense of hopelessness (HoD2), emotional distress, pessimism about future prospects and low morale (HoD3). Some participants mentioned that learners even exhibited feelings of depression and anxiety (Pa4). These behaviours in itself are troubling and should be carefully monitored.

In general, participants seemed cognisant of the confounding affects and the repercussions that the systemic ills have on a learner's performance. There are multiple and compound factors that perpetuate these ills and many of the identified problems are interrelated. Some learners may be burdened with several systemic ills simultaneously. Stakeholders should consider each learner as a unique individual.

5.4.2 Data obtained with regard to objective 2

Identifying the benefits of collaborative partnerships between teachers, school counsellors and parents (Category 2: Ideal outcomes)

Most participants were familiar with the term 'collaboration' and were able to identify key characteristics that lie at the very heart of this initiative. P4 and DP2 recognised that collaboration entails shared tasks and SC1 noted that it is "*when people entwine their responsibilities*". P3 acknowledged that collaboration is all about "*working together in partnerships*". This was supported by P4, DP1, T1 and HoD1. HoD3 referred to collaboration as individuals "*working as allies*". HoD5 and HoD6 stressed that it was about teamwork and taking hands to provide learners with the necessary assistance. A collaborative partnership was referred to as being a "*united group*" or a "*unified team*" (SC1). It was also stipulated that this group of individuals focused on obtaining mutual goals (P3; DP1 & HoD1). Pa5 asserted that it was "*when people work together within a specific location with the sole purpose of accomplishing common goals and solving problems*". Participants comprehended that collaboration was all about cultivating affiliations (DP1; HoD3) and building "*beneficial, co-active relationships*" (Pa4). P1 agreed and indicated that collaboration would "*cultivate better teacher-parent and parent-child relationships*". It was evident that the participants understood that collaboration is not contingent on single events that transpire on occasion but that it is a process that ought to be maintained on a continuous basis, as pointed out by HoD1. Participants acknowledged that collaboration is a dynamic method that is member orientated and goal driven.

Participants identified several ideal outcomes or benefits of collaboration but some topics emerged recurrently throughout the data analysis process. These include the participants' belief that collaboration will ultimately enhance learners' overall performance. They held that collaboration would define various roles and stipulated expectations that are needed to provide the most effective assistance and support to learners. Participants further indicated that collaboration would create conducive environments where learners will feel safe and where they will be able to thrive. Lastly, participants were convinced that collaboration would ultimately strengthen the bond between the home and the school and cultivate communication channels that will

cement the established relationships.

5.4.2.1 Enhanced performance

DP1 stipulated that “*positive connections between parents and teachers have been shown to improve children’s academic attainment and social capabilities*”. HoD2 added to it by mentioning that learners’ “*work habits, attitudes and grades will improve if collaboration is maintained*”. HoD4 was of the opinion that

learners who are educated and raised in collaborative environments will exhibit improved social skills, present with fewer behavioural problems and have a greater capacity to adjust to circumstances.

Enhanced performance was one of the most anticipated outcomes. Collaboration is a burgeoning partnership that has the potential to achieve this goal.

5.4.2.2 Role description for learner support

Participants highlighted that collaboration is about fulfilling a specific role to provide learner support. DP2 accentuated that

each of these individuals plays a different role in the life of a learner and can address those identified problem areas much more accurately. Parents can provide care, support and guidance at home; teachers can focus on the academic functioning, while a school counsellor can home in on emotional and behavioural problems. Each brings a different type of expertise to the table – inasmuch that the weight of this responsibility is shared and not placed solely on only one stakeholder’s shoulders.

Participants understood that collaboration requires specific role specifications for those who are involved. P4 concurred that

each collaborative partner (parent, teacher and school counsellor as focused on in your study) will play a different part in the lives of learners and each one can provide their own input and expertise to assist a child adequately.

Distinct, well-defined role description was deemed inevitable for learner support to be effectual.

5.4.2.3 Effectual intervention strategies

HoD4 mentioned that collaboration would ensure that learner difficulties are addressed effectively and that intervention strategies will be more focused. P1 was of the opinion that “*stakeholders will understand the child much better and will subsequently be able to provide the learner with the right help and support*”. HoD5 affirmed this by noting that “*those involved in the process can bring their own knowledge and expertise to the table*”. The participant also stated that “*all stakeholders are involved in shaping the child*” and they provided unique contributions. T5 recognized that collaboration would provide learners with the much-needed learner support and that their needs will be better met as a result of teamwork. According to T2, collaboration would also improve the services rendered by teachers and school counsellors. Pa5 indicated that repetition of work should be avoided and SC5 pointed out that joint approaches would make the task of helping learners easier. All stakeholders have an obligation to do their part and to offer their expertise advice and input to ensure successful involvement. It calls for commitment on behalf of all the stakeholders.

5.4.2.4 Conducive environments

It was indicated by P2 that learners would feel safe in a collaborative milieu and P3 noted that “*collaboration will foster favourable environments for learners to grow and to perform in optimally*”. SC3 agreed and stated that these partnerships would guarantee “*them a safe environment in which development and progress can take place*” and that it would also “*ensure that learners’ emotional well-being is nurtured*”. A conducive environment is of the utmost importance as it presents with a range of benefits for learners. It contributes to their academic functioning, emotional security and their ability to address challenges. A favourable learning environment can be a leading antecedent for desired motivation and accountability amongst learners.

5.4.2.5 Strong bond between the school and home

HoD1 held that “*collaboration will strengthen the bond between the school and the*

home". T12 agreed and indicated that all stakeholders would benefit from collaboration as they would communicate more effectively, develop stronger relationships and develop their own skills during this process to support children's behaviours and learning. Pa2 pronounced that

the workload and responsibilities required to assist all the learners will be shared and stakeholders will not feel overwhelmed by the magnitude of the task set before them.

Collaboration would also improve parental involvement in a school, according to Pa4, who further elaborated by stating that parents could be involved by volunteering at events and by serving on parent committees or the school board. SC1 also believed that collaboration would improve parental involvement and claimed that it would require of parents to be involved in helping their children with their homework, communicating with the school, volunteering at school, and participating in school decision-making. The Covid-19 pandemic has furthermore accentuated the need for parental involvement and the importance of collaboration to take place between the home and the school. Parents were required to fulfil both the role of parent and teacher during lockdown and it is unclear what the future may hold in the light of pending waves.

SC5 indicated that the main benefit of collaboration for teachers and parents alike would be to see a learner reach their full potential and to perform optimally in school. SC4 reflected that schools and families sometimes operated as two separate entities and that, at times, there was no connection between the two, even though they have an enormous effect on one another. SC4 elaborated and maintained that

both schools and families want their children to do well and this is a shared goal that both have. Schools and homes should therefore work together to reduce problems and to increase results. Addressing interconnected problems such as violent behaviour, misdemeanour, safety, poverty, child development, schooling etc requires several solutions. Finding the best solutions will require collaboration. Collaboration will in essence promote a learner's welfare and resilience and it will empower families, communities, and schools.

DP1 concurred that collaboration would be essential to resolve conflict and to solve problems when they arose. Participants felt that collaboration had the potential to make a difference in the lives of learners and that it could contribute to the attainment of better marks, providing the required support system, addressing diverse needs holistically and cultivating an environment that is safe and conducive for optimal performance. It was, however, noted that participants realised that authentic collaboration would not come easy and that its success would depend on sacrifices and investing time and effort on a continuous basis.

5.4.3 Data obtained with regard to objective 3

Determine the challenges with collaborative partnerships between teachers, school counsellors and parents (Category 3: Impediments)

Data analysis revealed that the participants were aware of manifold challenges that have the potential to curb all collaborative efforts, but it was evident that the potential positive outcomes outweighed the looming impediments.

5.4.3.1 Available time

Pragmatic aspects were some of the most prominent challenges that were identified. P4 mentioned that time is a major obstacle given that “*we live in a fast-changing environment where people are too busy to interact with one another due to their work conditions and intricate lifestyles*”. DP1 also agreed that time was a problem by stating that

teachers teach during the day; parents work and learners must be in class and school counsellors are not always on the school's grounds due to other commitments and appointments.

HoD4 reflected that

people in general are caught up in a rat race and so focused on specific agendas that they tend to speed through life without taking notice of that which should be our priority.

HoD5 and T2 also specified time as an impediment. T5 noted that setting aside time

for collaboration was sometimes just not practical. Pa3 was of the opinion that parents worked long hours and they were not always sure about when it would be convenient to make an appointment. SC1 and SC2 also indicated time as a hurdle obstructing the process of collaboration. The researcher acknowledges that time is a big impediment, but collaborative teams should consider their school's unique context and find ways to combat this obstacle. Collaborative efforts will have to be prioritised and the calendars and time schedules of all involved ought to be considered. It will necessitate thorough and meticulous planning to accommodate all stakeholders.

5.4.3.2 Uninvolved parents

Non-involvement of parents was identified as a challenge by P3. Pa1 also felt that parents are not involved and mentioned that "*a lot of learners live in hostels*" and "*parents who work in other provinces only come home during school holidays*". This is a universal concern and numerous studies have been conducted to identify ways to improve parental involvement. The researcher acknowledges that this is a challenge that will continuously require a school's full attention. Schools must, however, understand that lack of participation by parents does not necessarily mean that they are neglecting their responsibilities. Several reasons can be pinpointed in this regard that should be considered. Some parents might not have resources or a means of travelling to the school. Some might lack sufficient childcare for smaller children or they might feel insecure about their own competency to provide any input. Collaborative teams should identify these specific reasons and endeavour to address each reason accordingly.

5.4.3.3 Deficient communication

Communication is a setback, according to Pa2. It was mentioned that communication between the school counsellor and parents is non-existent at times. Teachers tend to refer learners to the counsellor, but parents are not always available for feedback sessions. Teachers also seldom follow up on learners they referred for assistance. In addition, Pa2 believed that school counsellors also tended to withhold information as it is seen as confidential. HoD5 felt that faulty communication between teachers, school counsellors and parents would lead to ineffective endeavours. T2 also noted that lack of communication could contribute to misunderstandings and confusion. Pa1

was of the opinion that communication is typically limited to the occasional newsletter or a SMS message on a parent group. AS a result, parents are not always aware of programmes or training or meetings. Data obtained clearly indicate that communication is a vital component in collaborative partnerships and all effort should be made to ensure that two-way communication is maintained. Maintaining effective communication might, however, be more challenging in larger schools than in small private establishments.

5.4.3.4 Insufficient motivation

Participants indicated that people did not always have the intrinsic motivation to commit to home-school initiatives. Pa4 related that parents were not always enthusiastic about the prospect of committing to home-school initiatives and it was stated that it would require an inspirational individual to initiate the process and to motivate other stakeholders to be dedicated. HoD6 said that *“since people are at the core of collaborative partnerships, emotional intelligence should be considered when individual key players are required to head collaboration in a school”*. SC1, in accordance with this, mentioned that the success of collaboration would ultimately depend on the motivation and capabilities of the stakeholders who take the lead. The researcher is of the opinion that strong leadership is required to steer the process of collaboration and that the leaders will have to focus on motivating stakeholders on a continuous basis by establishing personal rapport between the school and home.

5.4.3.5 Unclear expectations

HoD3 pinpointed another challenge by mentioning that stakeholders were not always aware of what is expected of them and they might as a result choose not to get involved. SC1 mentioned that new parents and newly appointed staff were not always briefed on this important aspect and lack of training would further hinder collaboration within a school. SC3 also raised concerns about the lack of proper induction of new teachers that could lead to a laissez-faire attitude towards the development and maintenance of a collaborative organizational culture. SC4 emphasised the importance thereof that all involved should be knowledgeable about their specific roles and the significance of teamwork. SC5 also stressed that each stakeholder should fulfil his/her specific role and not get involved in tasks that fall beyond their scope of

practice, as it usually causes more harm than good. Collaboration will improve when roles are clearly defined and when all stakeholders clearly understand what is required of them. Without the necessary clarity they might squander valuable time and energy trying to negotiate responsibilities or by protecting their own turf and subsequently they will not focus on the task at hand.

5.4.3.6 *Undistinguishable directives*

Several participants felt that collaboration occurs when a need arises or when an event should take place, but there is no specific plan in place that directs the process (P3). If collaboration is more than just the occasional working together of individuals to organise an event, there should be a policy in place, but this seems to be lacking, according to Pa4. If stakeholders are unclear about what collaboration entails, they will be inclined to work mindlessly, which would significantly hinder productivity, motivation, and efficiency. Stakeholders will in all probability also be averse to collaboration when they are not provided with clear indicators, or if they do not understand what the rest of the team does to contribute to the overall success of their endeavours.

5.4.3.7 *Interpersonal challenges*

There are also interpersonal aspects that will inhibit collaboration if not adhered to. SC1 highlighted the devastating effect of disrespect or any negative attitudes amongst stakeholders that will eliminate all collaborative efforts. If stakeholders feel that they are treated unequally due to their socio-economic state, or colour, or even due to their education they will not commit to any partnership. T4 stated that all stakeholders should have an equal voice and that one-sided decision making would also cause some to withdraw. Mistrust between stakeholders will also cause collaboration to be ineffective (Pa2). Not acknowledging the impact of language and cultural differences can also become a challenge to some collaborative partners (SC1). Stakeholders may furthermore not have the same perspectives or working styles. Some might prefer to work on their own, while others will thrive within groups. Collaborative partnerships should nevertheless consist of a diversity of people from different backgrounds and contexts. Diverse teams will increase innovation. Infusing roles

and making everyone feel included will however not be a leisurely feat when fostering avenues for collaboration.

It is evident from the data obtained that pragmatic aspects like time constraints are a major challenge to those who participated in the study. Faulty or lacking communication furthermore impedes proper partnerships between teachers, parents and school counsellors. They feel that parental involvement is nonetheless lacking and that parents and school counsellors are still the only ones who take the necessary responsibility to address learner needs, but even the existing cooperation between teachers and counsellors is limited. Participants indicated that collaborative efforts should not be left to a large body of stakeholders; competent facilitator and core committees managing initiatives are lacking. Participants' own insecurities and uncertainties can also impact on the implementation and preservation of successful collaboration. A detailed working plan is also not available at most schools and there are subsequently no clear directives that guides the process of collaboration.

5.4.4 Data obtained with regard to objective 4

Provide guidelines on how the roles of teachers, school counsellors and parents can be infused to assist learners to optimal learning engendering school development (Category 4: Development criteria)

Participants were in agreement that collaboration can be an affective measure to address diverse needs of learners to facilitate school development. However, they made it very clear that there are definite criteria that need to be adhered to before successful collaboration will take place. Participants were practical in their approach and they exhibited an understanding that collaboration goes beyond mere positive connections with others.

5.4.4.1 Skills development

An important observation by one of the participants was that collaboration should be seen as a skill that needs to be developed and an initiative that will require due effort and time. This was emphasised by P1, who remarked that

some believe that stakeholders have the necessary proficiencies to work

together and this is not necessarily true. Working together takes skill and effort and it is developed over time. Stakeholders can only work together successfully if they are in it for the long haul. Throughout the process they will learn how to develop their communication and listening skills.

The necessary skills development will add to the success of collaboration.

5.4.4.2 Ample communication

Most of the participants agreed that communication is crucial for collaboration to be truly successful. P2 held that there should be regular teacher-parent consultation meetings where parents can be informed about their child's progress and any potential problems. The participant recommended that there should be a set date once a term where parents are invited to come to the schools to meet with the teachers and school counsellors. It is important for stakeholders to have the opportunity to communicate and to be heard. Pa3 agreed that parents should be informed about their children's progress on a regular basis and be provided with ample opportunities to be involved in their schooling. HoD1 remarked that collaboration can only be improved upon when stakeholders choose to listen to one another and consider others' input as well.

P1 expressed the prospect that communication can be enhanced upon by "*improving the digital milieu*". It was mentioned that their school have embarked on a complete upgrade of their website and Facebook account and they are expanding into telegram as an additional communication medium. However, the researcher questions if this is practical for all schools, given that many are underprivileged and some do not have access to all the new technological advances, the internet or Wi-Fi. Pa1 felt that communication is sometimes hampered, as parents are not informed about meetings or events well in advance. Learners occasionally tend to forget to give letters to their parents and important information as a result is not conveyed to them. The suggestion was therefore made that schools should consider WhatsApp parent groups, as it might be the most accessible and available medium to most parents.

SC2 suggested that digital as well as conventional means of communication should be used to accommodate all stakeholders. It was noted that communication can be maintained through social media platforms, information evenings, flyers, short articles

in the school newspaper, letters to parents and telephone conversations. HoD5 stressed the importance of “*events, parent evenings, social gatherings, team-building initiatives*”. Communication can be both an impediment and a benefit. Stakeholders will yet again have to consider the best means of communication that will suit the unique needs and requirements of their own school.

5.4.4.3 Foster relationships

Pa3 made an invaluable comment that collaboration will ultimately improve communication and that open communication will, in return, develop strong relationships characterized by trust and respect. These relationships will establish a sense of community. If stakeholders feel that they are part of a community they will be more invested in working towards obtaining their goals. T5 confirmed this by asserting that “*the only answer for true change is the establishment of strong relationships that will stand the test of time*”. The participant emphasised that stakeholders should make every effort to build these types of relationships. Suggestions conveyed stipulated that other people’s perspectives must be valued and conflict should be dealt with constructively. T5 furthermore specified that stakeholders will be required to deal with issues that will be emotionally draining and that it can cause conflict, but conflict is not necessarily a negative thing, as it should unite people and contribute towards breakthroughs. Pa5 agreed and declared that “*relationships will be the very building blocks that will transform a school and contribute to school development*”. Fostering strong relationships will ultimately form the very foundation for successful collaborative efforts.

5.4.4.4 Acknowledge differences

An important fact to remember when working with people is that they are different. It was already established in the previous question that individual differences can impede collaboration. Pa4, again, touched on the subject and noted that “*stakeholders must be sensitive towards differences between one another and should develop the skills or ways to deal with it*”. In collaborative partnerships one will work with individuals who come from different sociocultural and economic backgrounds, their languages may be different, their race and gender may be different. Stakeholders must therefore guard against any form of prejudice. Stakeholders must realize that being different is

not always a setback, but it is something that can be complementary to the process. All must therefore aim to maintain respect for one another. Pa5 acknowledged the importance of considering others and emphasised that positive working relationships should be developed. The participant also recommended that it can be done by *“avoiding judgemental attitudes, investing time into building relationships, focusing on the desired outcomes, and by acknowledging the benefits of working together”*. Pa5 noted that stakeholders ought to acknowledge one another’s contributions and show due respect and it was pointed out that communication should be directed to one another and not at one another. Stakeholders differ and they present with diverse personalities, characteristics and worldviews, all needed to be a unique group that can provide a sundry of contributions and wisdom.

5.4.4.5 Trust formation

In all relationships trust is of immense value. DP1 highlighted the importance of trust formation between stakeholders and T2 also affirmed its significance. SC1 furthermore felt that trust is essential for relationships to be effective and beneficial. Stakeholders will be required to work in unison and trust is a vital component that brings people together. SC5 emphasised how stakeholders should be transparent in their dealings with one another in order to ensure trust. It was highlighted that all should act in the child’s best interests and it was highlighted that trust is earned. SC1 noted that trust and interdependence are connected. Pa1 pointed out that interdependence is important in collaboration and the school and home should be seen as a complete unit and not as separated or detached parts. Trust will bring stakeholders together and unite them for the task at hand.

5.4.4.6 Policy formulation

P4 stressed the importance of having an active working program or policy in place that will stipulate and guide the process of collaboration. The participant was of the opinion that the policy should be compiled by the stakeholders themselves as they will be the ones who will have to implement it. The policy should also be communicated to all new staff members and parents. HoDs and board members should be familiar with the policies. DP2 agreed and felt that a policy would provide the necessary direction. HoD6 also affirmed the necessity of a policy.

These policies should include important information. Pa4 recognised that the policy should provide clear information and details pertaining to procedures, type of collaborative efforts, available resources, frequency of meetings and ways to deal with obstacles and challenges. SC1 felt that the goals of collaboration should be listed. Pa4 agreed and alleged that when people understand the importance of collaboration and its objectives it will propel them to do everything in their power to be actively involved. Pa4 also suggested that stakeholder's roles and expectations should be clearly described and outlined in these policies. DP1 was adamant that all stakeholders should be aware of their function and expectations in order to assume the responsibility for it and to avoid the overlap and duplication of tasks. SC4 corresponded and said that

teachers, parents and school counsellors will only be able to work together if they have clarity about what is expected of them and if all parties agree to work together as a team.

DP1, however, stressed that these school policies must be made available to all stakeholders, given that it is deemed instruments that will in due course guide the expectations of those involved and of the learning environment. DP1 also stated that these policies would communicate and steer the expectations of stakeholders and provide them with the acceptable norms and standards that had to be adhered to. DP2 noted that writing a policy can be challenging and time consuming but is of imperative value as it lays the very foundation of an initiative before it can be constructed. It was also emphasised that these policies should be reviewed on a regular basis. The researcher endorses the compilation of policies, as it provides the required guidelines and rules that will increase the efficiency of the collaborative processes. It will set a standard of quality and outline expectations and accountability. A policy will provide structure that is key for the success of all collaborative efforts to be implemented.

5.4.4.7 Appoint a facilitator and core committee

Another important aspect was addressed by Pa5, who suggested that the school should appoint a facilitator and establish a core committee that will take the lead of all collaborative initiatives. It was underscored that "*strong leadership is necessary to ensure success*". P3 shared this belief and stated that "*it will be imperative to have a*

dedicated, knowledgeable person who will assume responsibility to drive this process". HoD4 remarked that the facilitator should be a *"capable person who is ambitious and highly motivated and who will be able to maintain that passion over time"*. It was also stated that this person will be *"required to provide constant direction and support to the rest of the stakeholders in order to deal effectively with challenges and frustrations that may occur"*. HoD3 commented that *"successful efforts to establish an effective collaborative depends on stakeholders' motivation and capability"*. It was stressed that *"change is most likely when high levels of positive energy can be mobilized and appropriately directed for extended periods of time"*. HoD3 indicated that stakeholders can be motivated by helping them to understand that the benefits of change outweigh the sacrifices they will be required to make. It was also stipulated that sufficient time should be spent to motivate stakeholders and to develop their capacity and skills. A facilitator and core committee will therefore fulfil a crucial role.

5.4.4.8 Provide training

Training is yet another important criterion that will ensure the success of collaboration. HoD2 held that all new parents and staff members (teachers or counsellors) should receive training with reference to the importance of collaboration and what it entails. HoD4 also endorsed the provision of training stakeholders and P3 affirmed that all stakeholders as well as the management of the school should receive the necessary instruction. The training will ensure that all the stakeholders are aware of what collaboration entails, the processes involved, the benefits and challenges and practical ways to ensure its effectiveness. It will also clarify the goals of collaborative efforts and give clear information about what will be expected and required of the stakeholders. Training can also focus on the specific problems a school encounters and how partnerships can address it in an effective way.

5.4.4.9 Prioritising collaboration

HoD5 was of the opinion that the significance of collaboration should be reflected in the school's vision and mission. HoD6 affirmed that it should be deemed a priority and that it ought to be part of a school's ethos. HoD3 declared that *"collaborative communities hold immeasurable unparalleled hope for schools and for the*

improvement of learning and it should be upheld as such". P2 supposed that school management should assume responsibility to raise awareness of the importance of collaboration and held that leadership should support collaborative efforts. It must be modelled and communicated by them. T3 also considered that collaboration should be seen as a priority and stated that

the capability to work collaboratively with others is becoming an essential component of contemporary school reform. Collaboration should be the priority of each stakeholder who wants learners to excel. No one is an island and we are stronger if we work together. Unity will accelerate school development.

5.4.4.10 Promote parental involvement

Throughout the study it was observed that parental involvement is viewed by all as extremely vital to a learner's success. Stakeholders should therefore continue to promote parental involvement on a continuous basis. HoD2 were correct when he said,

children tend to become gradually more independent as they grow older. Despite an increase in autonomy, collaboration between parents and teachers is still expected. Parents should remain involved in their child's life whether or not the child tends to pull away from them. If parents are excluded from school events or programmes then learners are left with an imperfect support system.

HoD5 also commented that

collaboration tends to be more evident in primary schools than in secondary schools. Some parents and teachers believe that students should be given greater freedom and responsibility when they start high school and parents therefore withdraw to allow children to become more independent.

Parents should be made aware of the fact that their presence and involvement is needed in secondary schools and so much more within our fragile communities. Studies are unmistakeable in confirming that parental involvement makes a significant

difference to learners' educational achievement. Parent involvement should therefore be promoted at all times. It can range from something as undemanding as replying to a letter from the school to parents joining workshops explicitly customised to support them in their parenting role. Children need to know that their parents are interested in them, in their schoolwork and in their activities, no matter how old they are. Parental involvement will enhance their sense of self-worth and motivate them to work harder, to accomplish their goals and improve the school as a whole.

5.4.4.11 Allow practical accommodations

HoD4 indicated that the school should make the necessary means available to promote the cultivation of these partnerships between stakeholders. These can include resources or a designated classroom for parent-teacher-counsellor meetings. HoD4 suggested that parents should be allowed to meet teachers and school counsellors during specific times during school as some parents are not able to make appointments after hours due to other responsibilities, ensuring that each school has an office or room available for these meetings.

5.4.4.12 Voluntary participation

Another consideration of importance is voluntary participation and including learners who are also willing to be part of the collaborative partnerships. Pa2 felt that participation in collaboration should always remain voluntary. The participant noted that *"collaboration imposed on people will only result in frustration, and anger and efforts will be half-hearted and there will not be any true commitment"*. Participation in collaborative efforts should not be mandatory, but stakeholders should rather be inspired to participate. They should be informed of the importance of their involvement and the beneficial effects it has on learners. This can be done by making stakeholders feel secure and appreciated, by emphasising the importance of their involvement, and by highlighting the prospective outcomes.

5.4.4.13 Lead by example

SC1 commented that stakeholders should lead by example so that learners can learn from them. It was expressed that the stakeholders should model effective collaboration

partnerships and that learners should form part of these partnerships. In doing this they will develop higher-level thinking, communication, self-management and leadership skills.

Collaboration is in essence a complex term that consist of several processes and it presents with numerous benefits but also with challenging impediments. It demands teamwork and SC3 rightly indicated that

collaboration will only be successful if the following conditions prevail: mutual cultural respect, an understanding of living conditions and challenges, emphasis of a common vision, developing common goals to reach in specific time frames, successful identification of available resources, heavy dependence on open, reliable communication, creative problem-solving strategies from all stakeholders (including the learner), and ensuring that all stakeholders have access to sufficient means to reach the common goals that was set.

P1 also highlighted an important consideration when he remarked that

collaboration is not a transient and simple process but it is one that demands much of participants in terms of tension and conflict, time, energy, and new abilities and understandings. The complicated nature of collaboration and the influence of the above-mentioned dynamics that come into play in the process have made it difficult to follow a step-by-step recipe for the implementation of collaboration.

Regardless of its intricacies, collaboration is still a valuable method that can make a difference. In light of the Covid-19 pandemic, collaboration will increasingly become even more necessary as teachers, parents and school counsellors will have to rely on one another to ensure the well-being of learners and to assist them appropriately in order to maintain and to improve acceptable learner performance.

SC4 was convinced of this statement and declared that

collaboration can contribute to school development as each effort employed by stakeholders will have a ripple effect. No step taken to assist a child is

ever futile and it will have good results in the end if it is maintained.

The researcher wants to conclude with a remark made by a participant that encapsulates what collaboration should be all about. SC5 stated that

collaboration is needed, but it requires something from those who embrace it. Nothing in life just happens – most successes require hard work and endurance. Each parent, teacher and school counsellor will have to keep the bigger picture in sight and work through the unavoidable challenges they will face. Walking away from a child or giving up on them should never be an option. Each child no matter how difficult or how troubled should not be left behind. Each one should be treated as an individual with worth, who has the potential to learn and to excel, regardless of their background or mistakes they have made. When learners understand that stakeholders are committed to help them it will spark something in them to also believe that they are capable of more and that they can rise above their circumstances.

5.5 CONCLUSION

Chapter 5 provided information pertaining to the data that were collected. Participants conveyed their opinion and experiences of the condition of schools and identified factors within the learner's environment that contribute to underachievement. It was evident that participants agreed that collaboration has the potential to address the diverse needs of learners and that it can contribute towards school development. However, collaboration presents with both benefits and challenges. The participants felt that the benefits outweighed the challenges and suggested several practical ways to improve collaboration in schools and to ultimately affect the necessary change that will contribute to school development.

Chapter 6, the final chapter, presents with the main conclusions of the research. The limitations of the research study are highlighted, and recommendations are provided to address collaboration, and to indicate areas identified for further research.

CHAPTER 6: SUMMARY, FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Learners encounter numerous challenges and are bombarded by an array of difficulties that stem from the various systems they are part of within their ecological milieu. These may include domestic violence, widespread poverty, escalating crime rates, economic instability, drug abuse, teen pregnancies, lack of resources, academic difficulties, and barriers to learning. These struggles can have a direct effect on their academic performance and future aspirations. Schools and the pedagogic environment must be conducive to learners. They should address problem areas adequately and contribute to the holistic development of these youngsters for them to ultimately become healthy, secure and contributing citizens. However, many schools in South Africa have been identified as unproductive, underperforming and even dysfunctional. Schools in the Limpopo Province specifically present with low pass rates.

This study looked at the learner within their various ecological systems (micro-, macro-meso-, exo- and chronosystem) as stipulated by Bronfenbrenner and the impact it has on their academic performance. The researcher endeavoured to explore whether or not collaboration between stakeholders, specifically teachers, school counsellors and parents will be able to address the identified problems and to enhance learner performance and school development. Moreover, the research centred on the benefits and challenges that might surface when these parties pursue a collaborative relationship and criteria were identified that will be needed for collaborative partnerships to facilitate school development.

6.2 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

This study was driven by a desire to find a practical solution to improve learner performance and to facilitate school development specifically within the Limpopo Province.

Chapter 1 provided an overview of the study. An introduction and background to the study were given (cf. par. 1.1) and the rationale of the study (cf. par. 1.2) was specified. The researcher furthermore provided a statement of the problem and research question (cf. par. 1.3) and stipulated the aim and objectives of the study (cf. par. 1.4).

Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory was identified as the theoretical framework of the study (cf. par. 1.5) and the research methodology was outlined (cf. par. 1.6). This model of the ecology of human development acknowledges that a learner cannot exist in isolation from surrounding systems. Moreover, it was stipulated that the study is grounded within the interpretivist research paradigm (cf. par. 1.6.2). A qualitative research approach was employed (cf. par. 1.6.1).

Chapter 1 also provided information with reference to the research population and research sample (cf. par. 1.6.3). The researcher made use of two non-probability sampling methods and a total of 27 participants took part. Data collection techniques were outlined (cf. par. 1.6.4) and data analysis and interpretation were briefly demarcated (cf. par. 1.6.5). The researcher furthermore provided brief remarks on the trustworthiness and credibility in qualitative research (cf. par. 1.6.6). Ethical considerations (cf. par. 1.7) and definitions of key concepts (cf. par. 1.8) were identified. The researcher concluded the chapter with chapter outlines (cf. par. 1.9) and the limitations of the study (cf. par. 1.10).

Chapter 2 explored the learner performance and standards in South African schools (cf. par. 2.2). The researcher further looked at underachievement due to barriers to learning in our country's schools (cf. par. 2.3). The chapter also elaborated on the concept of school development (cf. par. 2.4). In addition, the term 'collaboration' was considered (cf. par. 2.5) and information was provided on definitions of collaboration (cf. par. 2.5.1), the nature of collaboration (cf. par. 2.5.2), the purpose of collaboration (cf. par. 2.5.3), collaboration and learner support (cf. par. 2.5.4), key components of collaboration (cf. par. 2.5.5), collaborative processes (cf. par. 2.5.6), and collaboration with partners and their different roles (cf. par. 2.5.7). Collaboration as family-school partnerships was also explored (cf. par. 2.5.8) The chapter further examined the benefits of collaboration (cf. par. 2.5.9) and considered the various factors that might inhibit the process (cf. par. 2.5.10). The chapter concluded by looking at various

practical ways to sustain a collaborative culture (cf. par. 2.5.11).

Chapter 3 focused on the theoretical framework of the study. Information was provided on Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (cf. par. 3.2) The interactive dynamic components of the theory were identified and discussed and each of the components – process, person, context and time were considered (cf. par. 3.2.2). The chapter furthermore provided comments on the relevance of Bronfenbrenner's theory (cf. par. 3.3).

Chapter 4 outlined the research objectives (cf. par. 4.2) and provided information pertaining to the research design (cf. par. 4.3.1) and the research paradigm (cf. par. 4.3.2). The population and sampling employed were stipulated (cf. par. 4.4) and data collection instruments were identified (cf. par. 4.5). In addition, information was provided on data analysis and data presentation (cf. par. 4.6). The chapter also elaborated on the trustworthiness (cf. par. 4.7), ethical considerations (cf. par. 4.8), and the limitations of the study (cf. par. 4.9).

Chapter 5 presented a précis of the research process (cf. par. 5.2) and an outline of the various methods that were used to collect the data (cf. par. 5.2.1). The chapter also particularised on the challenges the researcher encountered throughout the process (cf. par. 5.2.2). Biographical data of participants were provided (cf. par. 5.3). Participants' information included the number of participants, their gender, race, age and their highest academic qualification (cf. par. 5.3.1). The chapter furthermore included details pertaining to data presentation and data analysis (cf. par. 5.4). Data obtained, categories and subjective themes (identified during the thematic analysis) were discussed in accordance with the four objectives of the study (cf. par. 5.4.2).

Chapter 6 provides information with reference to the findings and the recommendations of the study.

6.3 FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The findings from the study will be discussed below. It is based on the data that were analysed and interpreted. The findings will be discussed based on the four objectives of the study.

A total of 27 participants took part in this research study. They consisted of 4 principals, 2 deputy principals, 6 HoDs, 5 parents, 5 teachers and 5 school counsellors (cf. par. 5.3.1.1). They were required to complete an open-ended questionnaire consisting of 10 questions that were posted on Google Forms. Next, a telephonic interview was conducted with each individual participant (cf. par. 1.6.4). The researcher explored several important aspects. Participants were required to provide their view on the general condition of schools in South Africa and to reflect on the circumstances within their own specific schools.

The researcher endeavoured to identify systemic ills that contribute towards the prevalence of underperformance in the country and specifically in the Limpopo Province. Participants were asked to express their opinions about whether or not they believed collaboration would be an effectual means to address the diverse needs of learners and if collaboration could contribute to school development. Participants were thereafter requested to particularise specific benefits and challenges associated with collaboration and to provide criteria considered necessary to ensure that collaborative undertakings are successful. The study yielded the following results.

6.3.1 Findings with regard to objective 1

Exploring the ecological systems that form part of a learner's milieu with related problems that influence learning negatively

It was evident that most participants felt that South African schools are performing below par and that our country still has a long way to go to address the dilemma facing our educational system. It was, however, perceived that participants believed that the academic performance in their schools can improve, and they provided numerous reasons for the current underperformance of learners. Participants identified various systemic ills that stem from the learners' environment (cf. par. 5.4.2.1).

Within the microsystem it was noted that many learners come from broken homes and are subjected to volatile domestic settings where they do not feel safe or secure. It was also indicated that numerous homes present with absent parents due to divorce, separation, parents who passed away or parents who are required to work in other provinces. As a result, many learners are without inspirational role models and they

are inclined to look to the wrong crowd for the necessary guidance. Many learners reside with grandparents and there was an indication of several child-headed households. These learners do not have the necessary supervision, as they are often left to care for themselves. Bully behaviour, school violence, teen pregnancies and substance abuse amongst learners are also prevalent in the local schools. Some participants pointed out that unruly, uncontrollable behaviour in classes is a foremost cause of concern as it affects teachers' morale, confidence and passion. This has repercussions for the quality of schooling offered. Some learners struggle with learning problems and immense learning gaps and they require intense, prolonged assistance, which prevents the teachers from giving equal attention to all learners.

Wide-scale poverty in the province also contributes to the fact that learners do not have nutritional meals every day, which affects their ability to concentrate optimally. Poverty has also been associated with home crowding, potential abuse and neglect amongst some learners. It is apparent that substance abuse amongst parents is escalating at an alarming rate and it can cause numerous associative challenges.

Many schools are underprivileged and subsequently lack the necessary resources and proper infrastructure. During the Covid-19 pandemic this proved to be an immense problem, as many learners were not able to engage in online schooling. Some learners who are subjected to continuous scarcity and hardship tend to resort to petty crime and they mingle with the wrong crowd. Peer pressure has caused many to take part in questionable behaviour. Human trafficking and child abductions have also increased in Limpopo, having a huge impact on learners' sense of wellbeing (cf. par. 5.4.2.1a).

Problems identified in the mesosystem mostly centred on lack of parental involvement. It is evident that some schools and homes function as separate entities and there is still a great chasm between the two microsystems (cf. par. 5.4.2.1b). There are, however, numerous variables that can be listed as possible reasons for this occurrence. Many learners also reside in school hostels and they only see their parents over school holidays and some weekends. The only contact with these parents tends to be telephonic conversations (cf. par. 5.4.2.1c). The socio-economic status of families, escalation of gang-related activities and manifestations of moral decline all have bearing within the learners' exosystem (cf. par. 5.4.2.1c).

Within the macrosystem it was noted that cultural clashes, corruption, community unrest, political strife and incessant protests in the province impacted learners. It was pointed out by participants that mass media and social media enlarged learners' worlds but affected their impressionable minds negatively (cf. par. 5.4.2.1d).

Learners are also affected by countless changes that have occurred in South Africa over the past few years, which are reflected in their chronosystems (cf. par. 5.4.2.1e). Participants furthermore stipulated that many experienced other changes with reference to family structures that were altered due to death or divorce. The province also faced many economic hardships during the past two years due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Countless parents have lost their jobs and businesses were closed, having a direct impact on their home circumstances.

6.3.2 Findings with regard to objective 2

Identifying the benefits of collaborative partnerships between teachers, school counsellors and parents

Most participants were knowledgeable about the term 'collaboration' and they were able to identify some of the core characteristics that encapsulate this phenomenon. Participants noted that this entailed working together as a team, that responsibilities are shared and that stakeholders have joint or communal goals. Collaboration was also acknowledged as a dynamic process (par. 5.4.2.2). Several benefits were identified by the participants. It was stipulated that collaboration contributes to enhanced learner performance and allows for clear role descriptions that will improve learner support and ensure effectual intervention strategies. It was established that collaboration also has the potential to cultivate safe, conducive environments needed for optimal functioning. In the long run it will bridge the gap between the school and the home environments. Participants also stated that all stakeholders would benefit from collaboration. Collaboration would provide those who participate with a sense of belonging. It would strengthen communal expectations, resolve conflict and be a valuable and applicable means of solving problems (cf. par. 5.4.2.2). It was evident that most participants agreed that collaboration presented with numerous advantages and that it could prompt transformation, but participants were fully cognisant of the impediments that could counter and frustrate all their efforts.

6.3.3 Findings with regard to objective 3

Determine the challenges with collaborative partnerships between teachers, school counsellors and parents

Several challenges were identified by the participants. The most prominent impediment identified by the majority was lack of time. Many participants held that parents and teachers maintain busy lifestyles and therefore they cannot commit to collaborative partnerships. Participants also made mention of parents who did not have a desire to be part of their children's schooling. It was noted that some parents had not been actively involved since the time their children had initially been enrolled at the school. Many learners subsequently live self-regulating lives. It was further stressed that lack of communication and insufficient motivation amongst stakeholders also hindered collaborative initiatives. Some participants felt that individuals did not want to be part of collaboration, given that there is no clear indication of roles or expectations and directives tend to be undistinguishable. Interpersonal challenges also obstruct the success of individuals working together (cf. par. 5.4.2.3).

All these impediments have merit. It will require conscientious, careful consideration and planning from the stakeholders at each school to find ways to address and to overcome the difficulties and complications that each impediment causes.

6.3.4 Findings with regard to objective 4

Provide guidelines on how the roles of teachers, school counsellors and parents can be infused to assist learners to optimal learning engendering school development

However, participants in general felt that the benefits of collaboration tended to outweigh the numerous challenges. They stipulated that certain criterion needed to be adhered to for collaboration to truly contribute to school development (cf. par. 5.4.2.4). Participants emphasised the importance of skills development and training of stakeholders and commented on the fundamental significance of ample means of communication that will cater to the needs of all stakeholders. It was emphasised that every effort should be made to foster co-active relationships and that differences

amongst stakeholders should be acknowledged and respected. Trust formation was yet another significant criterion that should not be underestimated. Participants emphasised that trust was earned and was closely related to successful and productive interdependence.

Participants accentuated the need for policies that will guide the collaborative partnerships. Information obtained indicated that there is also a great need for a facilitator and core committee to be appointed that will assume the necessary responsibility for the collaborative efforts at a school. A continued need to promote parental involvement was also emphasised. Most participants further felt that collaboration should be prioritised and that it had to be reflected in a school's vision, mission and ethos. Leaders of a school should be supportive of collaborative initiatives to ensure that these alliances are fruitful. Some pointed out that collaboration should never be mandatory as it would only lead to frustration and half-hearted commitments. The participants assumed a practical approach in an attempt to identify ways to ensure successful collaboration in their schools. Suggestions were tailored to their specific needs and unique contexts.

6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

The main aim of this research study was to explore the notion that collaboration between stakeholders will enhance learner performance and facilitate school development. The researcher emphasised that the learners should be considered within their ecological systems and that the impact their environment has on their performance ought to be acknowledged. It was postulated that learner behaviour is complex and will require the expertise and interconnectedness of key stakeholders to deal effectively with all the challenges and difficulties they face on a continuous basis. Collaboration was deemed a crucial aspect to improve learners' performance and to facilitate school development. The study was conducted in the Limpopo Province, one of the provinces that present with the lowest pass rates in South Africa (cf. par. 1.1). A qualitative research design was implemented (cf. par. 1.6.1). Twenty-seven participants from five schools participated in this study. Data were gathered by means of open-ended questionnaires and telephonic interviews (cf. par. 1.6.4). Data were analysed by means of thematic analysis (cf. 4.6.1).

In view of these findings, recommendations can now be made. The following recommendations suggest that the researcher has achieved the main objective:

To determine how collaboration between teachers, school counsellors and parents in Limpopo secondary schools can enhance learner performance and school development (cf. par. 1.3).

6.4.1 Recommendations with regard to objective 1

Explore the ecological systems that form part of a learner's milieu with related problems that influence learning negatively

Participants acknowledged that learners are part of a bioecological system that has an impact on their behaviour and performance at school (cf. par. 6.3.2.1) and that a lot of problems that arise from those systems contribute to the prevalence of underachievement (cf. par. 6.3.2.1). Schools are viewed as a product of their communities and deemed a reflection of their societal ills and difficulties.

According to Bronfenbrenner, the child is central in the ecosystem. As such, the child does not live in solitude, but within an immediate social environment and society that embrace them. For collaboration to be effective it will be important for all stakeholders to understand that learners should be viewed within their specific context. To truly understand individuals, one must reflect on all their experiences and the differential influences of these upon them (cf. par. 3.2.1). There are some similarities between Bronfenbrenner's theory and Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and Albert Bandura's social learning theory where the environment is regarded as a crucial part of an individual's overall development.

Collaborative partners should consider Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model that comprises process, person, context and time. When working together to enhance learner performance and facilitating school development, stakeholders should be aware of the processes learners engage in that influence their various relationships (cf. par. 3.2.2.1). Moreover, they should take note of the learner as a unique individual with particular characteristics that have an effect on their relationships (cf. par. 3.2.2.2).

The contexts or systems in which they live should also be viewed as important and all

systems should be considered (cf. par. 3.2.2.3). These include the microsystem (the learners' school or home environments), the mesosystem (interrelationships and liaisons between the microsystems), the exosystem (situations beyond the learners' control that have a secondary effect on them, e.g. a parent who is constantly required to work late). The macrosystem is of importance as it entails learners' culture that shape their values and belief systems (cf. par. 3.2.2.3). Time entails the chronosystem that is made up of the environmental events and changes that occur throughout a child's life, including any socio-historical events (cf. par. 3.2.2.4).

Learners in Limpopo are evidently subjected to numerous systemic ills. The problems that arise from the systems unquestionably have an effect on them and it ought to be taken into consideration. The researcher, however, holds that learners must be taught how to assume responsibility and not to blame their failure to perform solely on their circumstances. They should not be endowed with excuses and justifications why they fail but be given incentives to overcome and to rise above their struggles.

Bronfenbrenner's theory provides voluminous insights into the environment and how it has an influence on a learner, but it does not delve into an individual's inherent capacity for resilience. Resilience is one's ability to recover from difficult circumstances, setbacks and one's capability to adapt, move forward and to experience growth. A significant determinant of resilience is the quality of close relationships. A learner's relationships with parents, teachers and school counsellors can ensure resilience. It should also be emphasised and elucidated by the collaborative partners that learners can succeed, despite numerous challenges and hardships. Bronfenbrenner's theory clearly states that the individual is an active participant in his/her own development. Learners must accept responsibility for their learning. Collaborative partners can assist by teaching them self-regulation skills. Self-regulation in this context refers to a learner's ability to control his or her reaction to various situations in order to pursue and to accomplish set goals. Self-regulation skills can include setting targets, controlling impulses, monitoring progress, and conducting self-evaluation and reflection. Learners are not helpless victims, but there is greatness inside them that must be unearthed and cultivated. Once they accept responsibility change can be accomplished.

6.4.2 Recommendations with regard to objective 2

Identify the benefits of collaborative partnerships between teachers, school counsellors and parents

Numerous advantages of collaboration were recognised. This most prominent or desired gain is that collaboration will ultimately improve learners' academic attainment and performance. Some were of the opinion that stakeholders should be afforded well-defined role descriptions that would enhance learner support and contribute towards more successful learner interventions. Collaboration will ensure that stakeholders understand learners better and the repetition of tasks will not occur. In general, collaboration will foster favourable settings where learners will be able to flourish and in which they will feel safe. This will reinforce the affiliation between the school and the home (cf. par. 5.4.2.2).

Collaboration presents with several benefits, but it requires sacrifice and effort for those benefits to be acquired. It is not an easy process that is attained by occasional events or intermittent, sporadic meetings. Collaboration is not about having positive, colloquial or superficial connections between people within a school setting. It goes beyond an occasional conversation or mere parent-teacher consultation. It hinges on the commitment of all stakeholders and the joint contributions of each and every stakeholder. It is furthermore contingent upon continuous co-active planning of initiatives, development of stakeholders and evaluation of efforts. It requires the input of an assortment of individuals who can provide the different perspectives, expertise and resources needed to address the diverse needs of learners. Leadership should be supportive and ought to encourage and model collaborative partnerships.

Collaboration entails that all stakeholders should assume the necessary responsibility to create conducive environments and to bridge the gap between the school and the home. It is not a one-sided venture. Stakeholders should establish a community of belonging, maintain open communication, and strive to attain mutually agreed-upon goals by means of joint decision-making and shared responsibility. Teamwork is essential and requires that each stakeholder should accomplish his/her specific roles and responsibilities in unison. Effective teamwork will establish the development of home-school collaboration that fits the unique needs of the stakeholders and the

learners and it will provide an ongoing mechanism to address home-school concerns about learners' performance.

Studies in general indicate that there are strong correlations between collaboration and favourable outcomes, but it must be stressed that there is not a clear causative, primarily given that both the school and home contexts are complex and there are a myriad of factors involved that have an impact on learner achievement.

6.4.3 Recommendations with regard to objective 3

Determine the challenges with collaborative partnerships between teachers, school counsellors and parents.

The results of the study indicate that stakeholders encounter a diversity of challenges when attempting to work in collaboration. Time, uninvolved parents, lacking communication and unclear role descriptions are among some of the challenges identified. Some stakeholders do not have the necessary intrinsic motivation and there are not established plans in place that direct collaboration efforts. Stakeholders moreover present with many differences that complicates these partnerships (cf. par. 5.4.2.3).

Each school will present with a unique combination of challenges that will impede stakeholders from collaborating. A school must therefore attempt to evaluate all the various challenges or impediments and assess the stakeholders' ability to collaborate. One effective way of doing this would be to conduct a survey to identify practical aspects as well as behaviours that hinder collaboration in each specific setting.

Lack of time is a universal problem (cf. par. 5.4.2.3a). The pace of life has increased rapidly and all stakeholders are affected by it. It is nevertheless evident that without invested time collaboration will not succeed. Stakeholders will have to prioritise collaborative undertakings and emphasise the importance of commitment and dedication of stakeholders by focusing on the main objective; that is, to improve school development. Parents need to be reminded of the vital role that they play in the lives of their children and that the school sees them as equal partners. To address this problem, teachers and school counsellors can survey parents at the beginning of the

school year to determine parents' schedules and availability, and they can provide parents with information regarding how and when to contact them. Meeting times need to be flexible enough to accommodate working parents, including those working shifts and those who commute. Logistical constraints such as childcare and transportation create challenges for many parents. Providing childcare options at the school while parents attend meetings can make all the difference for some families.

Communication should be maintained. Communication will allow relationships to function optimally, and the functioning of those relationships will in return allow collaboration to take place and to be productive. The best way to evade misunderstandings amongst stakeholders is to have recurrent, transparent, established lines of communication (cf. par. 5.4.2.3c).

Communication can be improved upon by making use of parent information boards that ought to be in a central location. These boards may contain calendars, schedules, upcoming events, parenting resources and general news. The school can also send out a printed or digital newsletter that contains general information. Teachers, school counsellors and parents can be asked to write articles and to contribute to the publication. Communication can be maintained by means of e-mails, phone calls, WhatsApp groups, regular parent-teacher conferences and consultations. Stakeholders will have to adapt their distinctive means of communication to their school's need.

Stakeholders should be fully aware of their roles and the associated expectancies that come with those roles (cf. par. 5.4.2.3e). If they are well-informed about what is envisaged it will be so much easier to fulfil those expectations. Stakeholders can be provided with information pertaining to collaboration or with an established working plan that will ultimately provide the necessary guidance and structure needed to conduct and to manage collaborative efforts (cf. par. 5.4.2.3f).

Differences between stakeholders should be acknowledged and be seen as an advantage, not as an impediment. Diversity comes with a multitude of perspectives and a wealth of expertise. Mutual reverence and professionalism will be fundamental when addressing this specific challenge (cf. par. 5.4.2.3g).

6.4.4 Recommendations with regard to objective 4

Provide guidelines on how the roles of teachers, school counsellors and parents can be infused to assist learners to optimal learning engendering school development

Participants made several recommendations that can be employed to ensure the success of collaborative efforts (cf. par. 5.4.2.4). Collaboration does not come naturally. It is a skill that needs to be developed (cf. par. 5.4.2.4a). Stakeholders will have to work on their communication skills, active listening skills and be willing to develop their emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is essential to ensure that stakeholders present with the necessary flexibility, that they do not take criticism personally, or are offended and to ensure that they have the required empathy and compassion essential for the task at hand. Teachers, parents and school counsellors lack a general understanding of collaboration and training will therefore be essential to ensure effective collaborative partnerships (cf. par. 5.4.2.4.h). Participants furthermore ought to have a knowledge base and set of skills regarding collaboration methods. Training can focus on understanding the concept of collaboration and on developing the following essential skills: communication skills, emotional competencies, decision making, problem-solving skills, conflict management, and teambuilding. Stakeholders should become experts when it comes to collaboration within their own schools. The induction of new staff and parents should focus on increasing their overall understanding of the family backgrounds and community, the school's overall concept of caring and the framework of partnerships that is embraced by the school community.

Means of communication must be improved and should cater for all stakeholders. The use of both digital methods of communication and conventional methods should be used. Stakeholders can endeavour to develop communication channels that are tailored to the very needs of their specific school. Parent-teacher conferences can be held at least once a quarter and parents can be required to collect progress cards personally that will guarantee much-needed contact. Schools ought to send out regular notices, WhatsApp messages and school newsletters that convey clear information about the school's programmes and pending events or activities. All stakeholders

should be informed of occurrences well in advance and through a multitude of means. Contact can also be maintained via parent information boards, telephone conversations, homework hotlines, e-mails, social media networks and websites. Two-way communication should, however, be endorsed and encouraged, as it will increase understanding and cooperation between stakeholders. It will foster the required engagement where all stakeholders have the opportunity to share their ideas and preferences and where they are able to ask and respond adequately to questions (cf. par. 5.4.2.4b).

Collaborative partnerships should strive to foster relationships and a sense of community amongst stakeholders. No relationships are easy and it should continuously be attended to. Interaction between stakeholders might cause conflict and disagreements, but a firm foundation of respect and trust should be cultivated. Strong collaborative partnerships will be able to withstand resistance, inevitable conflicts and heightened emotions. Formidable co-active relationships will moreover provide the necessary structure that will maintain the processes and enhance problem-solving skills. Parents, teachers and school counsellors have a propensity to act in their children's best interests and the relationships should be built on this central and communal disposition. Stakeholders should learn how to operate as a team and they ought to learn from one another cf. par. 5.4.2.4c).

Recent statistics released by Stats SA indicate that Polokwane is home to a diverse population – 97,3% of the population are black, 2,4% are white and other population groups make up the remaining 0,3%. Approximately 80% of people in Polokwane speak Sepedi, 5% speak Afrikaans, 3% speak English and 11% constitute the other languages. It is in addition estimated that 17,9% of the population have some form of higher education; 29,6% have completed matric; and only 6,8% have no schooling. People differ in respect of gender, age, language, political beliefs, socio-economic status, physical and mental capabilities, religion and ethnicity. It is not easy to bring them together without due effort. School communities reflect this diversity. Some schools are more diverse than others, but all stakeholders should acknowledge that not everyone will have the same perspectives, working styles or outlook on life. Stakeholders should acknowledge diversity and have the necessary knowledge about the differences present amongst the parents, teachers and school counsellors. Mutual

respect is of the utmost importance and stakeholders should be aware of any prejudice and predispositions (cf. par. 5.4.2.4d).

Trust is at the very core of collaboration. It must be evident in the partnership, in how initiatives are implemented, how communication is done and how progress is accounted for. Collaborative efforts will fall apart if there is no trust amongst stakeholders. Trust is an essential element in sustaining a harmonious association between parents, teachers and school counsellors. Trustworthiness amongst stakeholders can be measured according to the presence of benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty and openness within relationships.

Benevolence signifies the degree to which stakeholders will show kindness towards one another. Reliability involves the extent to which they will be able to depend upon one another. Competence conveys the faith each stakeholder has in the others' ability to perform the tasks required of them. Honesty concerns the degree to which stakeholders demonstrate integrity, fairness and truthfulness; and openness involves the extent to which stakeholders will allow transparency in the relationships. Trust can furthermore be fostered by listening to and valuing other stakeholders' insights, concerns, and contributions. It can be cultivated by ensuring that all efforts implemented are in the best interests of the learner and the group as a whole. Trust is built when stakeholders understand that they need one another and when they can depend on one another's insight, talent, and capability to get a task done (cf. par. 5.4.2.4e).

Successful collaborative partnerships require strong leadership. Participants in the study indicated that a facilitator or core group should be appointed that can drive all collaborative efforts within a school. It is evident that collaboration is inspired best by leaders who are good at developing and maintaining relationships, who lead by example and who provide ongoing mentorship. They are required to build communities and this necessitates careful thought and meticulous planning. Leaders who collaborate must communicate tasks clearly and clarify roles and responsibilities. It was affirmed by participants that those assigned should be capable, ambitious and highly motivated individuals who would be able to provide direction and support to the stakeholders. It would in addition be ideal if these individuals were also part of the

school board or parent committees. Their primary task would be to organize and manage the collaboration between the stakeholders (cf. par. 5.4.2.4g).

The South African Schools Act [SASA], 84 of 1996 (RSA, 1996b) emphasises the crucial role of parents' involvement in schools. Stakeholders should therefore continue to promote parental involvement in secondary schools, regardless of a learner's age. Parents play a critical role in their children's education. Lack of parental involvement can be ascribed to numerous reasons, including poverty, single parenthood, language barriers, busy lifestyles, cultural differences, lack of knowledge and own insecurities. Parents should, however, be encouraged to participate in various areas. They should be able to communicate with the teachers and school counsellors on an ongoing basis. Parents ought to be assisted to establish home environments that will add to optimal learning and they should be encouraged to support their children with homework. They should moreover be part of decision making in a school and be given ample opportunities to volunteer at school (cf. par. 5.4.2.4j). Strategies should be employed that are inclusive and welcoming to parents.

Policies should be compiled by the stakeholders in consultation with the school management team and the parent committees. Values of collaboration can be included in the policy. These values must specify the significance of face-to-face interactions and stipulate the importance of creating safe environments where everyone is welcome and valued as an expert in their specific roles. It should furthermore promote teamwork to improve learner success and enable a range of voices in decision-making. The values of collaboration should, in addition, address the accessibility of all stakeholders and provision of sufficient resources to enable proper engagement. The policies also ought to include eminent information pertaining to the goals, various collaborative efforts, procedures, processes, role descriptions and stakeholders' expectations. These policies must be available to all and should be revised on an annual basis to ensure its relevancy (cf. par. 5.4.2.4f).

Principals, school governing bodies (SGB) and school management teams (SMT) should be supportive of collaboration between the stakeholders (cf. par. 5.4.2.4m). According to the South African School Act (Sections 20 and 21), the SGB and SMT form the two tiers of school leadership. The SGB tier provides oversight support,

whereas the SMT provides daily operational leadership and their guidance and input with reference to collaborative efforts will be of great value. They can assist by prioritising collaboration (cf. par. 5.4.2.4i), by raising awareness and by making certain accommodations available that will complement the process – this includes a designated classroom where stakeholders can meet (cf. par. 5.4.2.4k).

6.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study presented with several limitations as indicated in par. 1.10 and par. 4.9.

The Covid-19 pandemic additionally had a profound effect on the research conducted. Data collection had to be altered, given that face-to-face contact was prohibited. As a result, data were collected by means of open-ended questionnaires on an online platform, followed by telephonic interviews. It was not the ideal, as data loss could have occurred and time spent with participants was limited. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. Personal biases and peculiarities were potential limitations that could have impacted the outcomes of this study.

6.6 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The following recommendations are offered for further research:

- Learners were not included in the study. A focus-group study at the secondary level that includes the learners' voice might contribute further to the understanding of this topic.
- A case study research design that uses both a purposive sampling technique to identify a school that has a collaborative culture and research questions that are similar to this study could validate the research if the full set of factors associated with collaboration have been identified in this study.
- Studies designed to explore the correlation between learner performance and collaborative school cultures could be insightful.
- The theoretical underpinnings that guided the questions, formation, and analysis of this study were mostly based on Bronfenbrenner's theory; various other theories can be used to explore the motivation and synergy related to

participation in collaboration.

- A question that can be explored in more detail is not just, “How do we collaborate but, can we?” It would be worthwhile to explore the deeper dynamics and factors that influence a person’s preference for individual versus group involvement in schools. Such findings could shed further light on the potential of collaboration in the school reform process.
- A study can be conducted that explores collaboration beyond the borders of one school. Flourishing schools and struggling schools are often found within the same communities A study can be conducted that explores ways in which schools can take hands to support all the children from the same community. Teachers, parents and school counsellors’ willingness to assist other struggling neighbouring schools can be assessed and practical ways can be explored to build partnerships throughout a community.
- Future studies can also focus on whether or not stakeholders are ready to assume the necessary responsibility for collaboration in their schools to make it successful.

6.7 CONCLUSION

The overall aim of the study was to determine how collaboration amongst teachers, school counsellors and parents in Limpopo secondary schools can enhance learner performance and school development. The sub-objectives included:

- To explore the ecological systems that form part of a learner’s milieu with related problems that influence learning negatively
- To identify the benefits of collaborative partnerships between teachers, school counsellors and parents
- To determine the challenges with collaborative partnerships between teachers, school counsellors and parents
- To provide guidelines on how the roles of teachers, school counsellors and parents can be infused to assist learners to optimal learning engendering school development

The following recommendations are made with reference to fostering collaboration partnerships that can enhance learner performance and facilitate school development:

- Collaboration is a dynamic process that is participant driven.
- All key role-players must understand that learners should be viewed within their specific contexts and must reflect on all their experiences. Collaborative partners should consider Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model when working with or assisting a learner. This includes considering the relationships learner engage in, their unique characteristics, the contexts that form part of their lives (micro-meso-, exo- and macrosystems) and time that entail the environmental events and changes that occur throughout a learner's life.
- Collaborative partners should, however, emphasise that learners are active participants in their own development and are therefore required to assume the necessary responsibility for their academic attainment.
- Collaboration is a skill that needs to be developed and collaborative partners should be provided with the necessary training. Training can focus on increasing stakeholders' knowledge base of collaboration and developing people skills, communication skills, emotional competencies, decision-making, problem solving, conflict management and teambuilding skills. New staff and parents should receive proper induction or orientation concerning the school's policy on collaborative partnerships and information should be provided about the community and the systemic ills prevalent amongst learners.
- Maintaining communication is of the utmost importance to ensure the success of collaborative efforts. Leaders should assess their school's unique needs and consider the socio-economic situation of families when deciding on the type of communication channels to employ. Both digital and conventional methods should be used to cater for all stakeholders' needs. A multitude of methods of communication means will suffice. Effective communication should be cultivated amongst all the key stakeholders. It should be regular and clear, and there ought to be established lines of communication
- Collaborative efforts should endeavour to create conducive environments and to build communities where all stakeholders experience a sense of belonging.

Conflict should be managed constructively and building relationships should be a fundamental priority.

- All stakeholders should be given an equal opportunity to make their voices known and collaborative partnerships should encourage understanding and celebrate the diverse family forms, cultures, ethnicities, linguistic backgrounds, and socio-economic status of stakeholders. Diversity should never be disregarded, as it can lead to optimal group performance and improved outcomes. Mutual respect and trust must form the foundation of effectual relationships.
- Developing policies guiding the collaboration process will provide the necessary clarity with reference to aspects such as the purpose of collaboration, roles of participants, procedures, requirements and expectations. All participants ought to be regarded as equal partners and all stakeholders must have clarity about the equality in these partnerships and the importance of their roles. Role-players must understand that they need one another. Reciprocated respect and competence will be essential to cultivate esteemed parent-teacher-school counsellor relationships.
- Resources must be provided by the school to support the collaborative efforts (e.g. release time for teachers to meet with families, development of a family support room, school counsellor consultation or conference rooms).
- The collaborative process will require ongoing planning, development and evaluation.
- Schools should take the lead in providing opportunities for collaborative partnerships to be developed and sustained. They should foster conducive environments that are welcoming to partnerships between teachers, parents and school counsellors.
- Parental involvement should be promoted on a continuous basis. Teachers and parents should work together to develop opportunities for parents to participate meaningfully in their children's education. School counsellors need to advocate increased home-school collaboration and identify strategies to encourage family participation.

- To address pragmatic challenges like time, teachers and school counsellors can survey parents at the beginning of the school year to determine parent schedules and availability. Meeting times need to be slightly flexible to accommodate working parents, including those working shifts and those who commute. Moreover, providing childcare options at the school while parents attend meetings can make all the difference for some families.
- All stakeholders should understand that collaboration can only be successful if each individual stakeholder is willing to make the necessary sacrifices and to commit to the process. Joint contributions and shared responsibilities are essential, as teamwork requires interdependence and interconnectedness. Each role-player should be allowed to function within his/her scope of expertise to address the learners' diverse needs.
- Collaboration partnerships will lastly require the support of the SGB and SMT, and collaborative teams should be headed by strong leaders who are passionate and dedicated to make a difference in a school.

Over the past few years South African schools have been under scrutiny and many deemed that our country is facing a crisis, given the low pass rates and prevalence of underachievement. Since 1994, the government has employed numerous initiatives to address the dilemma facing the educational system and much has been done to improve the quality of schooling in our country. Still, it is evident that much must still be done to ultimately win this battle.

The study aimed to explore whether or not collaboration between stakeholders will address the diverse needs of learners and contribute to school development. Collaboration amongst teachers, parents and school counsellors are proposed as a possible means to deal with our country's unique challenges.

The researcher postulated that learners ought to be viewed and assisted within their bioecological system, as proposed by Bronfenbrenner. In light of this theory, learners are a product of their environment and all variables should be considered when addressing problematic or questionable behaviour. They engage in various relationships, present with unique characteristics, develop within numerous systems and are raised within a specific era. All of these have an effect on the learner and

ultimately on their academic performance.

Teachers, parents and school counsellors form part of a learner's milieu and are positioned strategically to provide the necessary expertise and knowledge to assist a struggling generation. They are some of the most prominent individuals in a learner's life who has a direct effect on their development. However, collaboration is necessary to provide holistic interventions and adequate learner support. Supportive networks will assist learners to overcome hardships and adversity and it will help them to thrive.

The study highlighted the concerning conditions schools face and the numerous benefits collaborations present with. Impediments to the process are surmountable, but it will require intentional design and appreciation for the nuances that make it a dynamic intervention. Collaboration for school improvement is adaptable and flexible to meet the changing contexts of school and to meet the specific needs of schools.

As mentioned previously, most participants held that collaboration can be an effective means to enhance academic performance and to facilitate school development. The study however highlighted an additional consideration and thought for deliberation. Collaboration can facilitate school development, but are the key stakeholders – teachers, parents and school counsellors truly ready and unswervingly committed to assume the necessary responsibility for collaboration in their schools to make it a successful endeavour?

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APPENDIX A: UNISA RESEARCH ETHICS CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE



UNISA COLLEGE OF EDUCATION ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

Date: 2020/08/12

Ref: **2020/08/12/33946655/05/AM**

Dear Mrs L Pretorius

Name: Mrs L Pretorius

Student No.:33946655

Decision: Ethics Approval from
2020/08/12 to 2023/08/12

Researcher(s): Name: Mrs L Pretorius
E-mail address: lianzapret@gmail.com
Telephone: 072 183 5980

Supervisor(s): Name: Professor HM van der Merwe
E-mail address: vdmerhm@unisa.ac.za
Telephone: 083 442 1503

Title of research:

**Enhancing student learning through collaboration of teachers, school counsellors
and parents in secondary schools of Limpopo province**

Qualification: MEd Education Management

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee for the above mentioned research. Ethics approval is granted for the period 2020/08/12 to 2023/08/12.

*The **low risk** application was reviewed by the Ethics Review Committee on 2020/08/12 in compliance with the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.*

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to the relevant guidelines set out in the Unisa Covid-19 position statement on research ethics attached.
2. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.



University of South Africa
Preller Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane
PO Box 392 UNISA 0003 South Africa
Telephone: +27 12 429 3111 Facsimile: +27 12 429 4150
www.unisa.ac.za

3. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee.
4. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.
5. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing.
6. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.
7. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data requires additional ethics clearance.
8. No field work activities may continue after the expiry date **2023/08/12**. Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.

Note:

*The reference number **2020/08/12/33946655/05/AM** should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.*

Kind regards,



Prof AT Motlhabane
CHAIRPERSON: CEDU RERC
motlhat@unisa.ac.za



Prof PM Sebate
EXECUTIVE DEAN
Sebatpm@unisa.ac.za



University of South Africa
Preller Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane
PO Box 392 UNISA 0003 South Africa
Telephone: +27 12 429 3111 Facsimile: +27 12 429 4150
www.unisa.ac.za

APPENDIX B: GDE RESEARCH APPROVAL



LIMPOPO
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

CONFIDENTIAL

Ref: 2/2/2 Enq: Mabogo MG Tel No: 015 290 9365 E-mail: MabogoMG@edu.limpopo.gov.za

Pretorius L
23 Tangelo Street ,Bendor
Polokwane
0699

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

1. The above bears reference.
2. The Department wishes to inform you that your request to conduct research has been approved. Topic of the research proposal: **"ENHANCING STUDENT LEARNING THROUGH COLLABORATION AT POLOKWANE SECONDARY SCHOOLS ,LIMPOPO PROVINCE "**
3. The following conditions should be considered:
 - 3.1 The research should not have any financial implications for Limpopo Department of Education.
 - 3.2 Arrangements should be made with the Circuit Office and the School concerned.
 - 3.3 The conduct of research should not in anyhow disrupt the academic programs at the schools.
 - 3.4 The research should not be conducted during the time of Examinations especially the fourth term.
 - 3.5 During the study, applicable research ethics should be adhered to; in particular the principle of voluntary participation (the people involved should be respected).

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH: PRETORIUS L

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

The heartland of southern Africa - development is about people!

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

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

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

Best wishes.



Mrs Dederen KO
Acting Head of Department

11/09/2020
Date

APPENDIX C: OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONNAIRE



Open-ended Questionnaire

- 1) What is your opinion about the condition of South African schools today and the implementation of inclusive education?
- 2) What is the overall academic performance of your learners and what are the contributing factors that impact their performance?
- 3) Are there any ecological systems (that form part of a learners' milieu – e.g. home, community, cultural, social, political environment, etc.) that are influencing learning negatively?
- 4) Do you have any prior knowledge of the concept of collaboration?
- 5) What is your understanding about school-home partnerships?
- 6) What do you think are the benefits of collaborative partnerships between teachers, school counsellors and parents?
- 7) What are the challenges with reference to collaborative partnerships between teachers, school counsellors and parents?
- 8) How can the roles of teachers, school counsellors and parents be infused to assist learners to optimal learning enhancing school development?
- 9) How can collaboration be improved on in your school?
- 10) How can collaboration between teachers, school counsellors and parents improve learner performance and ultimately facilitate school development?

APPENDIX D: COVER LETTER FOR THE OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONNAIRE



Dear PARTICIPANT

This questionnaire forms part of my master's research entitled: Enhancing learning performance and school development: Collaboration between teachers, school counsellors and parents at secondary schools in Polokwane, Limpopo province for the degree Med at the University of South Africa. You have been selected by a convenience *sampling* strategy from the population of Polokwane. Hence, I invite you to take part in this survey.

The aim of this study is to investigate collaboration between stakeholders within the educational system. It will in addition shed light on the challenges imposed on cultivating collaborative partnerships and ways to improve it in order to address learner difficulties more effectively and to ultimately facilitate school growth.

You are invited to complete this questionnaire as honestly and forthrightly as possible and in accordance with your personal outlooks and understanding. No conceivable risks are associated with the completion of the questionnaire which is conducted for research purposes only. The questionnaire will take approximately 30 minutes to complete.

Your name or surname will be kept confidential and will not appear in any of the recordings of the findings. However, an indication of your age, gender, occupation, etcetera will contribute to a more comprehensive analysis. All data acquired from

this survey will be used for research purposes only and information will be kept confidential.

Please note that your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you have the right to omit any question if so desired, or to withdraw as a participant at any stage. After the completion of the study, an electronic summary of the findings of the research will be made available to you on request.

Permission to administer this survey has been granted by the school principal and the Ethics Committee of the College of Education, UNISA. If you have any research-related enquiries, they can be addressed directly to me or my supervisors. My contact details are: lianzapret@gmail.com and my supervisor Professor R.J. Botha can be reached at 0824116361 at the Department of Educational Leadership and Management, College of Education, UNISA. By completing the questionnaire, you imply that you have agreed to participate in this research.

Please return the completed questionnaire to lianzapret@gmail.com before the end of September 2020.

Thank you for taking time to participate in this study. Arrangements will be made for the telephonic interview that will follow.

Kind regards

Mrs L. Pretorius

APPENDIX E: PRINCIPAL CONSENT FORM



Request for permission to conduct Research at a school (Example)

Title of the research: “Enhancing learning performance and school development: Collaboration between teachers, school counsellors and parents at secondary schools in Polokwane, Limpopo province.”

2020-07-12

The Principal

I, Lianza Pretorius am doing research under the supervision of Professor R.J. Botha from the Department of Education (Educational Leadership and Management) towards a MEd at the University of South Africa. We are inviting your school to participate in this study.

In this study, the importance of collaboration between teachers, school counsellors and parents will be explored. The research will be focused on understanding the challenges that emerge when collaboration is pursued and identifying ways to improve these partnerships to enhance learner performance and to facilitate school development. Apart from ascertaining improved learner performance thanks to collaboration, the aim is also to determine to what extent does collaboration contribute to school development.

Your school have been selected because of the school’s specific location and the diversity of learners, parents and staff you accommodate. The study will entail a qualitative approach that will consist of the completion of open-ended questionnaires

and telephonic interviews with you, the principal, deputy principals, HOD's, teachers, parents and school counsellors.

The benefits of this study are to identify the importance of collaboration between stakeholders and to pinpoint challenges and ways to enhance collaboration in order to address learner difficulties more effectively and to facilitate school growth as a result.

No potential risks are evident apart from possible inconvenience it may cause. There will be no compensation or any incentives for participation in the research. Feedback procedure will entail a feedback letter.

Yours sincerely

Mrs L. Pretorius

APPENDIX F: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET



Participation Information Sheet

Date: 2020-07-12

Title: "Enhancing learning performance and school development: Collaboration between teachers, school counsellors and parents at secondary schools in Polokwane, Limpopo province."

DEAR PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANT

I, Lianza Pretorius am conducting research under the supervision of Professor H. van der Merwe and Professor R.J. Botha – professors in the Department of Education (Educational Leadership and Management) towards a MEd at the University of South Africa.

We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled "Enhancing learning performance and school development: Collaboration between teachers, school counsellors and parents at secondary schools in Polokwane, Limpopo province."

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

This study is expected to collect important information that could assist in the facilitation of school growth.

WHY AM I INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

You are invited due to your involvement and role at the school. Five schools in the Limpopo Province will be part of this study.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

Each participant will be required to complete an open-ended questionnaire on Google Forms. Questions will focus on the importance of collaboration in schools

between key role players (e.g. parents, teachers and school counsellors). It will in addition focus on challenges and ways to cultivate collaborative partnerships in order to address learner difficulties more effectively and to ultimately enhance whole school development. Completion of the questionnaire will take approximately 30 minutes. Once the questionnaire is completed and submitted you will be contacted for a telephonic interview.

CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY EVEN AFTER HAVING AGREED TO PARTICIPATE?

Participating in this study is completely voluntary and you are under no obligation to participate. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and you will be asked to sign a written consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time without providing a reason.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

This study will be beneficial in identifying ways to enhance collaboration to address learner difficulties and to enhance school development.

ARE THERE ANY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR ME IF I PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT?

There are no foreseeable risks associated with participating in this study apart from the fact that it might cause some inconvenience.

WILL THE INFORMATION THAT I CONVEY TO THE RESEARCHER AND MY IDENTITY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

No names of schools or participants will be indicated in the dissertation. Your answers will be given a code number or a pseudonym and you will be referred to in this way in the data, any publications, or other research reporting methods such as conference proceedings. *Only the researcher will have access to the obtained data.*

HOW WILL THE RESEARCHER(S) PROTECT THE SECURITY OF DATA?

Hard copies of your responses will be kept by the researcher for a period of five years. It will be stored in a locked filing cabinet for future research or academic purposes. Electronic information will be stored on a password protected computer. Use of the stored data will be subject to further research ethics reviews and approval

if applicable. *Hard copies will be shredded and electronic copies will be deleted from the hard drive of the computer through the use of a relevant software programme.*

WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

No payments or incentives will be provided for participation in this study.

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICS APPROVAL?

This study has received written approval from the Research Ethics Review Committee of the Unisa. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher if you so wish.

HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH?

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact L. Pretorius on (015) 297-3326. The findings will be accessible for one month following the finalization of the study.

Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact Professor R.J. Botha Tel: Cell: 0824116361

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

Thank you.

Mrs L. Pretorius

APPENDIX G: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM



CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY (Return slip)

I, _____ (participant name), hereby affirm that the researcher who invited me to participate in this research has informed me about the purpose, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated limitations of the study.

I have read the information sheet and has been familiarized with the study being conducted.

I have had ample opportunity to ask questions and I am fully prepared to participate in the study.

I furthermore understand that my participation is completely voluntary and that I have the right to withdraw at any time.

I am moreover aware that the findings of this study will be published in a research report, but my participation will be kept confidential.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

.....

Participant signature

Date

Researcher's signature

Date

APPENDIX H: EXTRACTS FROM TRANSCRIBED INTERVIEWS



1. What is your opinion about the condition of South African schools today and the implementation of inclusive education?

P1	Independent schools in general have managed to maintain what would seem to be a reasonable level of operationality and the top 10% of said schools countrywide can be favourably compared with similar schools in 1 st world countries.
P2	The South African schools are performing below par. Academic performance can be improved upon but it will take dedication and hard work of all involved. Inclusive education is still an ideal, a dream but it is not practical given our current condition.
P3	Learners are performing below standard and there is definitely room for improvement. Inclusive education implementation will require a paradigm shift but it is nevertheless a great initiative. It caters for all the children and cross cuts all barriers that can exist. However, there are underlying problems which include human resource shortage (teachers) and this hampers the outcome of the policy. This also fulfils the education for all in the Bill of Rights.
P4	In my opinion the education in schools is not up to standard and the current allowed pass % rate should not be accepted. Our children are not being challenged enough or motivated to think out of the box. Everything is given to them on a silver plate. The implementation of inclusive education could be considered, as long as one could control bullying and have sufficient trained staff members to deal with the special children, as well as seeing that the mainstream students do not get left behind in their curriculum.
DP1	The educational system still presents with many flaws. Some teachers present with poor work ethics, parental involvement is lacking, deficient resources and low levels of accountability. Misconduct among learners is also on the increase and disciplinary difficulties are escalating at an alarming rate. There is a low morale evident among learners that is affecting their academic performance

	immensely. Brutal violence, truancy, absenteeism and increased dropout rates are a matter of great concern. Socio-economic struggles moreover add to the identified problems that impede good school performance. Inclusive education will add to the responsibilities of already over-extended teachers who are struggling to keep their heads above the water.
DP2	The South African schools are performing below par. When compared to international and national benchmark tests it is evident that there are some areas within our school system that must be addressed before school development can be facilitated. Inclusive education has been the ideal for many years, but it still presents with numerous challenges that make it impractical at various schools
HoD1	In general, schools in South Africa are evidently underperforming. A lot has been done to address underperformance in schools but it is apparent that we have not yet won this battle. There is still a great deal that can be done to assist learners to reach their full potential.
HoD2	The majority of learners in our school are working hard to obtain good marks, but there are always room for improvement. South African schools in general do not perform up to standard compared to schools in other countries. Inclusive educations present with some challenges as our secondary schools are not equipped to accommodate learners with special needs. It will be extremely difficult for teachers to accommodate learners with special needs in a mainstream secondary school.
HoD3	Learners as a whole are not performing the way they should. They face diverse struggles that hamper their schooling. Teachers are committed to assist and there are a lot of parents also supporting them. There is however room for improvement. Inclusive education has not fully realised in schools due to lack of skills required to implement it successfully, insufficient resources and overcrowding.
HoD4	Learners in general are not achieving their goals. There is a continuous need for inclusive education in South Africa, as we are living in a diverse country with 11 official languages, including many foreign languages. Inclusive education however seems to be an ongoing struggle as it places more strain on schools to comply with the amended legislation and policies regarding education. It has bearing on the macrosystem that forms part of a learner's milieu.

HoD5	South Africa is facing a dilemma in their educational system. Each school will however be required to take the necessary steps to address problem areas effectively. Or school started a remedial programme that assists learners who present with barriers and challenges. Teachers attend regular training that has contributed to the successful implementation of inclusive education to some extent.
HoD6	Academic performance of learners is still below expectations and is something that requires attention. Inclusive education has led to a greater improvement in literacy, skills and qualified personnel in RSA. The conditions of schools can be improved in terms of infrastructure, accessibility and management thereof.
T1	Most South African schools are trying their best but the curriculum does not really allow for inclusion because it is too academic.
T2	The educational system is in a bleak state and the Covid pandemic has plunged it even deeper into this predicament. Inclusive education is still an ideal. There is a diversity of socio-economic statuses and not all learners have the same backgrounds. Some schools like Model C schools will be more prepared to implement inclusive education as they have the assistance or finances to put structures in place like qualified teachers and proper learning programmes.
T3	My opinion is that schools are not preparing children for the world of work. The standards are lowered to accommodate weaker learners. The strong learners are not challenged and with the larger classes special needs children take away from education excellence. The syllabus is also not teaching children to think creatively or to come up with solutions or develop opinions.
T4	Schools in South Africa can improve if parents were more involved and part of the learning process. Inclusive education is good as it includes all learners and no child will be left behind. Schools in South Africa can improve if parents were more involved and part of the learning process.
T5	There is a vast difference between various schools within our community. Schools in affluent or well-off areas tend to thrive while schools in the disadvantaged rural or impoverished areas are inclined to fall behind because of inadequate resources, lack of motivation and negative future expectations.

Pa1	Some schools are excellent while others are struggling. This is due to various reasons.
Pa2	Schools are facing many challenges that has an effect on the learners' overall performance. Some schools however do present with top achievers while other school have low pass rates. Inclusive education is an ideal that has not been fully realised in South African schools.
Pa3	Schools in our country faced many difficulties over the past few years. We have seen learners attack teachers and assault their fellow learners. There have been incidents where some learners committed suicide due to relentless bullying. Teachers have been subjected to abuse by children and children have been verbally abuse by teachers. Learners present with unruly behaviour and there has even been strikes in schools by teachers. Pregnancies are prevalent under young girls and there is a decline in moral behaviour. Teachers also struggle to manage classrooms and disrespect and defiant behaviour is causing many teachers to leave the profession. There are however a handful of schools that are excelling and making a difference. Inclusive education might make the problems worse as the schools will be required to address a greater scope of learner needs and if it is not addressed adequately then it will lead to more frustration and disruptive behaviour in the learners that will affect overall school performance even more.
Pa4	Schools are performing on an average level. Each school is however unique and should not be generalized. Every school differs with reference to their vision and mission and context. There seems to be a definite need for the implementation of inclusive education. Teachers must however be trained adequately to be able to implement it and to be able to assist learners.
Pa5	Much can be said about the conditions of schools in South Africa. The media constantly report on what is going on behind the school gates. Some schools are however in a worst condition than others. Schools in wealthy neighbourhoods tend to be more ideal than those in rural areas. Some have enough resources and access to top of the range technology, while other schools do not even have sufficient ablution facilities for their learners or electricity. Some schools are characterized by violent behaviour and it is not favourable environments for learning. Schools were also affected by Covid -19 and children did not go to school for many months. Some was able to learn online while others did not have

	access to a computer or WIFI and they fell behind and the learning gaps just broadened even more.
SC1	The condition of South African schools is in a serious state and the implementation of inclusive education has also proved to be a challenge. Classrooms are overcrowded and teachers are struggling to manage children who exhibit ill manners and who present with learning barriers. There also seem to be misunderstanding of what inclusive education involves.
SC2	Learners face many problems that cause underachievement in our schools. Inclusive education will require continuous dedication to drive it. On the other hand, no fee schools will find it hard or impossible to implement it due to the lack of necessary infrastructure.
SC3	Some schools are excelling while others are performing way below standard. Some schools have the necessary resources, technological advances and support, while others find it difficult to keep the lights on due to lack of basic necessities. This has a profound impact on the learners in those schools. Inclusive education may be implemented more easily into schools that are more affluent and that has financial resources but it will be extremely difficult to implement it in schools that have no assistance or resources available.
SC4	The condition of SA schools is a mere reflection of the state of our communities. It is clear that conditions prevailing include emotional poverty and physical distress. Inclusive education is a term that is no longer limited to identifying barriers to learning but also include the development of strategies to ensure collaborative and participatory teaching and learning take place in composite classrooms.
SC5	Academic performance in South African schools can improve more. Schools will have to be educated on the “Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System” before implementation can be successfully done.

2. What is the overall academic performance of your learners and what are the contributing factors that impact their performance?

P1	<p>At our school the overall performance academically can only be regarded as conforming to the norms of being average. We do not produce top achievers at present and whilst matric results can be viewed in a positive light (100% pass rate at a basic university entrance level), we do not have students able to easily enter the medical provision or the scientific community. Factors influencing their performance in the past two years would include Covid and further to this one can add the lack of these students in reading ability or the perceived need for them to engage in anything beyond the exercise of their thumbs on their digital phone. In general terms the student body has a parent support system which whilst it may be positive in terms of providing food and a safe environment does not have the will or understanding of the actual development of academics. They themselves are very often not well educated. The genuine involvement in any education per se outside of their schooling remains from the point of view of their DSTV screens and perhaps the Discovery/History channels at best.</p>
P2	<p>A number of students are struggling to perform scholastically. Many were not able to engage in zoom meetings or MS teams as they did not have laptops. Poverty and dire circumstances are an ongoing problem.</p>
P3	<p>Generally, our learners are performing between average and moderate. This is due to the fact that we maintain rigorous learning, employ a child centred approach and also ensure a low pupil-teacher ratio. The only conceivable problem at this stage contributing to questionable performance is lack of parental involvement.</p>
P4	<p>In my opinion the overall academic performance is not of a high standard. Children do not have the zeal to aim higher in their education and they are content with the middle line of pass. This year I believe COVID played a big role in it as the children have taken it upon themselves to worry about their parents' lack of money for everyday living or schooling. Domestic problems and the absence of inspirational role models can be considered potential aspects that affect learning.</p>
DP1	<p>P5: Many factors contribute to this – many learners come from disadvantaged homes and do not have access to all the technological resources, especially now in the midst of the Corona virus pandemic. Some</p>

	do not have Wi-Fi or data and this has had an effect on their ability to access school material. It is evident that some learners present with learning gaps that were never addressed and the lack of parental involvement is yet another problem area.
DP2	Learners are performing average. Social ills, single-parent homes, poverty and lack of resources have an effect on learner performance.
HoD1	Learners are, overall, uninterested to learn when confronted with challenges and work pertaining to levels 4–6 of Bloom's taxonomy. They prefer easy solutions to easy work and demand that guidance to solving challenges must be available on a whimper of minimal distress. Contributing factors include parents that struggled and do not want their children to struggle, a severe negative outlook towards the educator in contributing a professional service to the community and the fact that cell phones and technology is cultivating a consumer mentality under our learners, in other words, the answer is readily available, just ask the right person. Some parents are very lenient and learners are at times left to do as they please and there seem to be no accountability or structure provided to these learners.
HoD2	Learners from low social economic communities struggle to keep up with the technological advancements. This contributes to mounting frustration, and it subsequently causes a sense of hopelessness. Learners who lost hope seldomly excels academically.
HoD3	Learners are struggling to perform optimally – Learners today are under a lot of strain to perform and it causes unnecessary emotional distress and turmoil. The pandemic has in addition cause many to feel pessimistic about their future and a low morale was evident the last year.
HoD4	Overall, the learners are doing well in certain subjects. The challenge remains Mathematics and Science. Passion and dedication among teachers are lacking as they are overwhelmed by the workload and responsibilities they are required to carry.
HoD5	The academic performance is satisfactory. Poverty and lack of resources are contributing factors of underachievement
HoD6	Learners in our school are doing well as there is ample learner support available to them. Teachers are dedicated and constantly on the lookout for learners who

	might need extra assistance. Parents are hands on and they are willing to assist when necessary.
T1	Academic performance is fair to good.
T2	Learners are performing satisfactorily but some factors still affect their performance. Many learners come from disadvantaged homes and they do not have access to all the technological resources, especially now in the midst of the Corona Virus Pandemic. The prevalence of open political and media influences also has bearing on a child's performance.
T3	I am at a private school where the classes are smaller and individual attention can be given. Also, the learners are placed here due to Christian character of the school. Furthermore, all challenges are met on merit and solved using Christian principles. The performance on average is better than some government schools. Children with concessions are accommodated.
T4	School performance is average to above average. Learners are not always motivated regardless of extra lessons and strong teacher support.
T5	Some learners are performing well while others are underperforming. Some learners come from poor areas while others are growing up in well balanced and wealthy homes. Some have access to the internet and others do not even have Wi-fi. Some eat good nutritious meals while others do not get the necessary nutrition and then they cannot concentrate in class. Learners also have different perspectives on what is important in life. Some wants to get good marks while others want to play on their phones the whole day.
Pa1	Not very good. Not all the learners have access to Wi-fi and technology. Covid required online schooling for most of 2020 and learners did not use data for schoolwork but for their own personal reasons – social media, games, etc.
Pa2	The academic performance in our school is good in general – most learners have access to the internet and there is not a lack of resources.
Pa3	Our school have both learners who are excelling and learners who are underperforming. Those who excel are the ones who have appropriate intrinsic motivation and who are committed to reach their full potential. Some learners are not motivated or just distracted by their social lives and electronic devices. Some learners are lazy and have a 'don't-care' attitude.

Pa4	The school does a lot to ensure that learners, especially Grade 12 learners perform in their subjects. They have extra lessons and holiday school programmes. Teachers are available to assist learners. Learners are however not always motivated and some feel that the work is just too much. Learners sit in classes all day and then they do homework until late at night. There is not always time for anything else and that affects their mood. They should have a more balanced lifestyle and there should be time with recreational activities and family time as well. Balance is important to maintain a healthy body and mind.
Pa5	In our school I find that you have your top learners, your average learners and then the learners that is just failing miserably. The top learners are focused and motivated. They work very hard to accomplish their goals and they tend to go the extra mile – attend additional classes, ask for help, form student groups, etc. The average learner is concerned about passing and will do just enough to get by. Then there are learners who are failing – some have too much learning gaps, some chose the wrong subjects and they are not coping, their circumstances may be dire at home or they might be struggling with a learning problem. Covid-19 also increased some learning gaps.
SC1	Learner performance in our school differs between learners, depending on the support they receive. The home environment, society they live in, and availability of resources that surely affect them.
SC2	A few learners are struggling to perform academically – some are subjected to volatile home environments or absent parents, which contribute to their failure to thrive academically
SC3	Performance of our learners are much higher than average schools. As an IEB school learners are scrutinized before entering the school.
SC4	There are a couple of learners who struggle with barriers to learning and some have minor disabilities. There is not an affordable special school available in our province for these learners and they subsequently do not have any other choice than to be in a mainstream school. They find it difficult to cope and some have been subjected to bully behaviour. This has however been dealt with, but it affects the learners' emotional well-being.

SC5	Academic excellence is subjected to numerous variables. Some children thrive while some struggle to perform. Those who excel are usually the ones who have involved parents, those who have access to resources and the ones who have a positive outlook on life. Learners who struggle with problem home environments, poverty and negative attitudes struggle to perform.
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3. Are there any ecological systems (that form part of learners' milieu – e.g. home, community, cultural, social, political environment, etc.) that influence learning negatively?

P1	The development in general terms of the present student population being previously disadvantaged places them in a milieu in which possessions/ belongings remain the main focus and entitlement. One sees this in the attitude to the payment of university fees and/or anything else related to where the focus remains on getting to the goal without effort being involved. The average student is exposed to corruption across the country in all spheres.
P2	Learning is influenced by the following factors – lack of supervision from parents that are not at home, fatherless families, and TV times not scheduled and supervised. Learning is most definitely affected by learners spending too much time on their electronic devices and engaging on social platforms.
P3	Home life affects a child's school life and vice versa. The community at large also has an effect on learners. All their different experiences will mould them in a unique manner.
P4	Learners' home circumstances, school context, cultural, political and educational environments all have bearing on their development and should be considered when addressing identified problem areas.
DP1	I would say the biggest challenge in an independent school is the socio-economic background of a child. In our school there are 15 percent of the learners who receive full bursaries due to lack of finances at home. These learners are relying on the school mostly to assist with help as some parents are not capable to help or assist. The only way to overcome these challenges will be the heart and the attitude towards learning and the building of trust relationship between a teacher and his/ her learners.

DP2	Learners are affected by problems within their home environment, school environment and community at large. Divorce, domestic violence, bullies, poverty etc all are rooted in the different systems a child grow up in. Divorce changes the family structure completely. There has also been an increase in bully behaviour and school violence.
HoD1	Variances in academic performance typically signify social realities such as poverty, and political and socio-economic problems evident in the context a child is raised. Economic changes have caused great job loss. One of the foremost problems we are however facing is still parental involvement.
HoD2	The following can affect a child's performance – lack of parental support, wrong friends, lack of quality education and passionate teachers. Learners need adults who will guide and steer them in the right direction and who will motivate them to work hard and to do their best in life. Our learners lack the right role models and it is a great void in our local community. Teachers sometimes loose passion when they feel overwhelmed and that can have an effect on the quality of schooling being provided.
HoD3	Yes, learners are affected by all the environments around them, their home, the school and the community. Some learners come from struggling homes, some parents are divorced, others face domestic problems. Our communities also have many struggles that include poverty, high crime rates and drug abuse. It certainly has an impact on learner behaviour and on their motivation to do something with their lives.
HoD4	A learner's home life influences every aspect of their schooling. That is why parental involvement seems to be such an important component of healthy schools, but getting parents involved has been an ongoing struggle.
HoD5	Learners struggle if there is not a safe and secure home waiting for them in the afternoons. Parents who are absent or who have passed away leaves them feeling vulnerable and susceptible to other influences. These orphan children often have to then move to other relatives where they must adjust to live in alternative homes. A child who is moreover subjected to ill-treatment at school will also be likely to underperform. There have been occurrences of child-headed households that has come to our attention.

HoD6	The home and community a child grow up in has an effect on them holistically. Their friends, role-models all will form their behaviour and either motivate or discourage them from excelling in life.
T1	Parental support is lacking. Some learners do not get the support they need from home because some of the parents are not educated.
T2	Education does not exist in a vacuum. Schools are a reflection or a mirror image of a country's social, economic and political structure. The country's struggles have an impact on the learner.
T3	The most obvious problems include broken homes, lack of electronic devices, absence of parents due to work, no discipline at home and blended families. Many children are also in the care of their grandparents that are not able to assist with difficult subjects or they tend to be too lenient. Some grandparents just do not have the strength to enforce discipline or to provide supervision.
T4	Parental involvement will make an immense difference in the academic performance of the learners. Class management tends to be difficult given the dissimilarities of learners. Some unruly learners keep others from benefiting from the learning experience.
T5	Socio-economic factors within the community play an important role. Some schools do not have the necessary infrastructure. They do not have resources, Wi-fi or any electronic devices to aid the learning process. Learners are demotivated and if they are subjected to lack on a continuous basis some will often resort to petty crime and get involve with the wrong friends.
Pa1	The greatest problem evident is cultural differences within the community – Sepedi and Venda learners do not see eye to eye. There are numerous gangs in the community and peer pressure is a big problem as learners tend to be pressured into doing things they will not normally do. Broken homes and domestic violence are also a problem.
Pa2	Yes. Poverty is a major problem in the community. Other problems in our communities include substance abuse, a rise in teen pregnancies and domestic violence. Many areas are also known for gang related activities.
Pa3	The communities in which learners are raised in has a great effect on their behaviour. Some communities have gangs and they promote the use of drugs

	and alcohol and some learners are influenced by them to participate in the wrong behaviour. Some learners come from good neighbourhoods where learners are encouraged to go to church or to participate in sport or cultural activities that has a good influence on them.
Pa4	The development of social media has expanded a child's world. Social media however have a negative impact on young minds. It absorbs all their time and it exposes them to different values, mindsets and immoral and questionable behaviours. Some learners are chatting on social media for hours and not paying attention to their schoolwork. They also connect with the wrong friends and can even put themselves in harm's way. Another problem is community unrest. Some people get worked up about service delivery and then they form part of protests and strikes that can have an effect on learners. Poverty and social ills are rampant. Drug abuse and teen pregnancies is escalating and it is a mounting concern in our schools. Our province moreover has had an increase in child abduction cases and human trafficking. I also see an increase in depression and anxiety in many learners. Learners are assaulting one another and bringing weapons to schools. Children are not safe and parents and teachers have a great responsibility to support and to them.
Pa5	Covid 19 has had a big impact on schools the past two years. Schools were closed and learners fell behind. There is a lack of communication between the home and the school.
SC1	The condition of SA schools is a mere reflection of the state of our communities. It is clear that conditions prevailing include poverty and physical distress. Many learners have learning problems and they find it extremely difficult to cope. They require a lot of time and it affects the other learners as well.
SC2	Home – lack of supervision from parents; Cultural – differences in cultures; Social – income groups, and Political – at times there are influencing factors. E.g. during lock down, the unions, etc., were protesting for the private schools not to open.
SC3	Ecological systems refer to the real-time living world of the learner. Ecology of the learner is primarily seated in the households and direct community in which the learner functions. In our country the prevalence of open political and media influences has a direct adverse bearing on the household. Due to the spiral effect, learners are influenced negatively. Secondary to negative learning is insufficient

	learning resources available at the school as service provider. Insufficient resources cause negativity in the classroom and lead to frustration and poor learner performance
SC4	Parental involvement can be improved. Parents are very important and they have a direct impact on a learner's performance. They know their children very well and are able to provide accurate information that can be vital when addressing problem behaviour. Poverty in the community has led to house crowding that has led to alleged abuse.
SC5	Lack of involvement can be attributable to the fact that parents are separated, divorced or widowed. Some parents work in other provinces and children are often left with only one parent, or with grandparents. Neglect is often evident in many of these households due to poverty and an increase of substance abuse amongst parents or caregivers.

4. Do you have any prior knowledge of the concept of school collaboration?

P1	As an educator of some 40+ years in different countries and being exposed to gifted child education/co-ed/high/primary, etc., schools I believe I may know more than just a modicum about collaboration.
P2	When working in collaboration you do not carry the burden of the child's problem on your shoulders alone. Two heads are better than one.
P3	Collaboration is all about working together in partnerships and working towards mutual goals to enhance learner performance.
P4	Yes, this is the involvement and engagement of learner, teacher, parents and community in order to provide quality education to the learner. This can be achieved through homework assistance or monitoring by the family members and the checking of the same by the teacher and finally the learner writes corrections or gets feedback. It entails partnerships where individuals work together to achieve mutual goals.
DP1	Collaboration is a way to cultivate relationships between individuals who will work together to reach set goals. Positive connections between parents and teachers have been shown to improve children's academic attainment, social capabilities

	and emotional welfare Yes, it is not a new concept but I've only seen it as part of a disciplinary process.
DP2	If parents, teachers and school counsellors take hands they will be able to address learner difficulties more effectively and intervention strategies will be so much more focused. Each of these individuals plays a different role in the life of a learner and can address those identified problem areas much more accurately. Parents can provide care, support and guidance at home; teachers can focus on the academic functioning, while a school counsellor can home in on emotional and behavioural problems. Each brings a different type of expertise to the table – inasmuch that the weight of this responsibility is shared and not placed solely on only one's shoulders. Each fulfil a specific role in the partnership.
HoD1	Collaboration is all about working together – partnerships – working towards mutual goals to enhance learner performance. It should also be considered to be a process and not a single incident.
HoD2	Collaboration can effect change in a school. Children's work habits, attitudes about school and grades will improve when a relationship approach is evident.
HoD3	Collaboration is when individuals are working together as allies. It strengthens communication and foster relationships. Relationships are built by means of open and transparent communication. The necessary skills of those involved can be developed through the process of collaboration in order to support children with questionable behaviour and who need assistance with their learning.
HoD4	It concerns working together with other persons to achieve objectives more easily. In a school successful teamwork can be very beneficial for learners. Learners who are educated and raised in collaborative environments will exhibit improved social skills, present with fewer behavioural problems and have a greater capacity to adjust to circumstances. Adults will also benefit from collaboration.
HoD5	Collaboration equals partnerships or teamwork. Partnerships between parents, teachers and school counsellors will ensure that learners blossom.
HoD6	Collaboration will require of all involved to take hands to provide learners with the necessary assistance and to encourage them on all terrains.

T1	Yes, collaboration is when people work together. This can include staff, parents and pupils. The purpose of working together will depend on the specific need or problem that needs to be addressed.
T2	I do have knowledge of collaboration but specifically about collaboration between teachers and parents and amongst teachers themselves – collaboration between teachers in the same phases and between teachers who teach the same subjects. The school moreover strive to cultivate the necessary collaboration between parents and teachers. There tends to be collaboration with school counsellors but only when a learner is referred due to emotional distress or behavioural problems.
T3	Collaboration is a very broad concept. In education, collaboration between teachers, parents or children has been a given from the start of my career. Collaboration between schools that support one another is new but it is overdue. There are many private companies that specialise in progressive education and should be on board. Collaboration between schools and the Department of Education unfortunately are mostly hectic and it causes confusion.
T4	Collaboration is when different individuals work together in order to help or to assist or to solve a mutual problem.
T5	It is when the parents and teachers work together to ensure that the learner is performing in school. This can be to provide the necessary support either academically or emotionally or even spiritually as here are numerous faith-based schools in our community. Learners' needs are met as a result of teamwork.
Pa1	It means working in association with one another or working as a group.
Pa2	Not really. I think it is about working together – teachers helping one another, teachers and parents taking hands, SMT and parents on the school board that all work to better the school and to improve the school situation.
Pa3	I assume that it has something to do with teamwork. In a school it probably implies teamwork between teachers, the school management and parents.
Pa4	Collaboration is about building beneficial, coactive relationships. It is not about simply forming positive personal connections. If it is only about maintaining superficial relationships then the whole purpose of collaboration has been

	missed. Those involved must have a specific purpose and work together with due determination to accomplish the goal they have.
Pa5	Collaboration is when people work together in unison within a specific location with the purpose of accomplishing common goals and solving problems.
SC1	True collaboration is when people entwine their responsibilities and collective resources in order to create a united group who work together.
SC2	It is in essence the process of working as a unified team. The comprehensive emotional, educational and spiritual support will boost learners' confidence and ultimately enhance their performance
SC3	Collaboration between these sectors enlarges the living world of the child, guaranteeing them a safe environment in which development and progress can take place. It strengthens communal expectations and beliefs. Collaborative partnerships also ensure that learners' emotional well-being is nurtured. Communication is beneficial to conflict resolution and leads to solving problems and issues when they arise. The identity of the learner is developed as he or she develops a sense of belonging within a community.
SC4	I have not been formerly trained in school collaboration. Collaboration with school counsellors is only required when a learner presents with severe emotional distress or behavioural problems.
SC5	It is the working together of all stakeholders. Collaboration should however be ongoing and consistent in order for it to be effective.

5. What is your understanding about school-home partnerships?

P1	This is an extremely in-depth type of question and difficult to resolve within the context of merely responding to the question. It needs unpacking. At what level of partnership is the response required as this may involve student-teacher/parent-teacher at a basic level of communication or deeper via an actual contractual agreement. etc. I think in general it is about parents and teachers taking joint accountability for the learners of a school – not leaving it to the other to make a difference.
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P2	It is the partnership between parents and teachers. Parental involvement is a vital part of school-home partnerships.
P3	It is the positive connections between parents and teachers that have shown to improve children's performance, their different proficiencies and emotional welfare.
P4	It is when parents and school personnel work together to assist learners in their academic pursuits. Parents, teachers and school counsellors as focused on in your study will play a different role in the lives of learners and each one can provide their own input and expertise to assist a child adequately. Overlapping of assistance should however be avoided.
DP1	School home partnerships are vital to ensure that learners flourish. Parents must be informed about their children's progress and they must be actively involved in their education – providing the necessary support and guidance, especially now when online schooling is required.
DP2	It is the working together of the teachers, parents, close family members and community members by encouraging and assisting the child in every possible way. This practice boosts the confidence of the child and provides the necessary support each child needs. A child gets physical, emotional, educational and spiritual support and it enhances their performance.
HoD1	It is when teachers and parents work together. Teachers should be consistent in communicating with the parents with regards to their child's development and education. One should feel free to discuss a child's development and academics with the parents and come up with a solution to help where needed and to educate the parents where needed
HoD2	Teachers and parents work together – provide feedback and maintain open communication. It is a partnership where teachers and parents work closely together for the benefit of the learner.
HoD3	According to me this is one of the most crucial aspects in education. Education needs the partnerships of all stakeholders in order to make the process of learning possible. This is the process that occurs through the cooperation, and collaboration of stakeholders to enhance the educational system in order to accomplish success in student learning

HoD4	It is collaboration between the home and school. Collaboration would ensure that learner difficulties are addressed more effectively and that intervention strategies will be more focused.
HoD5	Teachers and parents are involved with each other where learners are concerned. As in parental involvement, the home must take hands with the school to enhance and reinforce school values. There should be an open communication line between the HOD`s, the register teachers from the school and the home (parents, and guardians).
HoD6	When all work together to help the learner excel. Parents can provide the necessary care, support and guidance at home, teachers can focus on academic performance while school counsellors can home in on emotional and behavioural problems and assist learners with career guidance
T1	I know this is vital because without the correct support on both fronts the learners won't be able to achieve their best.
T2	Alliance between parents and teachers will develop children's work habits, views about school and ultimately their grades. Learners will have better social skills, fewer behavioural troubles and be able to adapt to situations and they will be able to get along with others. Parents and teachers will benefit from collaboration as they will communicate more effectively, develop stronger relationships and develop skills to support children's behaviours and learning.
T3	Neither of the two will be successful if both do not have the child at the centre of their purpose. They break each other down if different value systems and discipline methods are followed. Also, if each one does not fulfil its core purpose e.g. parents to teach child manners and right from wrong, then both are strained. I strongly believe schools have gradually been loading parents with too many responsibilities regarding schoolwork due to their overload. On the other hand, with so many absent parents, the schools are left with the parenting role.
T4	It is the engagement of all stakeholders. Each party do their part and provide a unique perspective and take on dealing with problems.
T5	Parental involvement, volunteering, parent conferences, parent meetings, orientation evenings, being part of the school board, communication and working together.

Pa1	When schools and homes work together, they must be on the same page. Parents and teacher must be aware of what is going on in the child's life. Relationships should be built with the child and between the school and the home environment. A school counsellor should provide the necessary emotional support if problems are identified. When have support, they will perform much better in their schoolwork.
Pa2	It is parents and teachers supporting one another in order to act in the best interest of the child.
Pa3	A partnership is when two parties come together as one. Home-school partnership will therefore be when the school and the home (teachers and parents) decide to help and to support one another. By doing this they will benefit the children and help them to get better marks.
Pa4	It is all about involving parents in the schooling of the children. Parents can be involved by means of volunteering to assist at events. Parents can also become part of the school by serving on parent committees or the school board. They can assist with learners who needs assistance during exams (reading to them) or help with fundraising or training if they have specific knowledge about something of interest to young people. Teachers can support their children at home and maintain communication with the school and inform the school of any problems or concerns.
Pa5	Home school partnerships is when the school and the parents work side-by-side, supporting one another and providing the necessary assistance if needed.
SC1	It is the teamwork between the school and home. These include parental involvement that involves childrearing, assisting with homework, communicating with the school, volunteering at school, and participating in school decision-making.
SC2	Parents, teachers, principals and counsellors work collectively as a team. The school functions as a mere extension of the household as primary caregiver of the learner. Against this background it is detrimental that the educational view and expectation of the parent and school is identical.
SC3	Parental involvement is the foundation of school-home partnerships.

SC4	Collaboration between parents, families and school staff to ensure that a child is supported.
SC5	Partnerships between all adults involved in a child's life. These adults work together to provide the child with all the help he or she might need – academic support, parental care, emotional support, etc. The goal is to help the child to reach their full potential and to perform optimally in school.

6. What do you think are the benefits of collaborative partnerships between teachers, school counsellors and parents?

P1	Collaboration can bring about the emotional stability of learners and better teacher-parent and parent-child relationships. Learners will achieve higher grades and be more stable psychologically. Collaboration will in addition cultivate better teacher-parent and parent-child relationships and the learner will most likely present with more confidence. Teachers will understand the child much better and will subsequently be able to provide the learner with the right help and support.
P2	Learners will feel safe in a collaborative environment and it will in due course ensure their emotional well-being. Their self-identity will mature as they develop a sense of belonging to a community that cares about them
P3	Collaboration will foster favourable environments for learners to grow and to perform in optimally.
P4	If schools and homes decide to work together it will have an enormous influence on the learner. They will understand that there is enough support available to deal with difficulties and problems and they will be more motivated to address it. Parents and teachers can support and learn from one another.
DP1	Collaboration will be essential to resolve conflict and to solve problems when they arise.
DP2	Parents, teachers and school counsellors working together will be a force to be reckoned with. They will be much more effective and focused. They will provide numerous solutions and be able to select the most suitable means of mediation for the specific learner.

HoD1	Collaboration can have several benefits for the school and home alike. Learners' academic performance will be affected. They will be more emotionally adjusted due to the support they receive and relationships between the school and home will be improved. Children will even be more self-confident if they are championed by the adults in their lives who attempt to understand them.
HoD2	None of the accountable individuals are expected to carry the burden of presented problems on their own two shoulders. It is a shared endeavour and two heads are better than one. A collaboration will nurture a hopeful atmosphere. Open channels between learners-teachers-parents will be maintained for the benefit of the learner, where learning problems can be identified and learners can get help and be supported in a more applicable way.
HoD3	All of them could work together to assure the students' success during their school years. It will add to the growth of a learner's character and overall functioning within the school. More knowledge will be gained and a relationship of trust will be founded that will advance education. It develops a healthier setting for pupils.
HoD4	Collaboration is valuable. It establishes the groundwork to accommodate and understand learners.
HoD5	All stakeholders are involved in shaping the same child, they all build and contribute towards a child's rounded development. There should however be some coordination and sharing of notes.
HoD6	Various cultural groups view partnerships differently. Communication seems to be paramount.
T1	It allows for healthy minds, bodies and emotions.
T2	Collaboration will improve the services being rendered by teachers and school counsellors. It will also ensure that there is enough support for learners that will address any hinderance that may affect their learning process and it will also add to a child's progress. It can in addition establish new methods to strengthen the family, the school, and the community.
T3	Collaboration is a win-win situation for the child. All parties grow towards a better understanding of each other. Not everyone is trained, capable or available to fulfil

	the differences that exist in children – the child will benefit the most in the end. Tolerance and respect will also be developed.
T4	It will help stakeholders to deal with the learners' primary problems more efficiently.
T5	Strong relationships are cultured and parents and teachers see that they have a special role to fulfil. They do not have to carry the obligation alone and tasks and goals are shared
Pa1	If the school and homework together then problems can be identified and dealt with before it becomes a crisis. School counsellors can intervene and parents can be contacted in order to provide the necessary support.
Pa2	Collaboration will ultimately improve the critical thinking skills of those involved and provide them with a broader perspective on how to assist a troubled or struggling child.
Pa3	When people work together then the load tends to be lighter. Parents and teachers do not have to work alone when helping a learner. If a parent and a teacher and other relevant adults assist one another then the responsibilities will not be so overwhelming.
Pa4	It brings greater responsibility and accountability among the stakeholders. Collaboration tends to close the loophole that exists between a school's knowledge of a child and what his/her real circumstances at home look like.
Pa5	When key individuals work together as one, they will be more effective in their endeavours and repetition of work will be avoided. This will simplify and speed up the intervention process.
SC1	I think collaboration is extremely important in order to have a clear understanding of the background of each learner that is in our school. School counsellors play a huge role in these partnerships as they are professional people who are trained to help children in need.
SC2	Collaboration is always beneficial to those who decide to engage in it. People tend to be stronger, more resourceful and open-minded when working in association with others. When working with children who struggle it is always

	good to listen to the perspectives of others in order to get a greater grasp of the problem and to look objectively at possible ways to deal with problems.
SC3	Collaboration helps adults to work together effectively and to maintain focus as they strive to reach mutual goals. In this case it is to assist the learner. Learners will also feel safe where people work as a team.
SC4	Schools and families sometimes operate as two separate entities. There is at times no connection between the two even though they have an enormous effect on one another. Both schools and families want their children to do well and this is a shared goal that both have. Schools and homes should therefore work together to reduce problems and to increase results. Addressing interconnected problems such as violent behaviour, misdemeanour, safety, poverty, child development, schooling etc requires several solutions. Finding the best solutions will require collaboration. Collaboration will in essence promote a learner's welfare and resilience and it will empower families, communities, and schools.
SC5	Working together makes the task easier. Each person can focus on their field of expertise and provide focused assistance. Teachers focus on academics, parents on support and care and counsellors can focus on emotional and behavioural problems.

7. What are the challenges with reference to collaborative partnerships between teachers, school counsellors and parents?

P1	Anything that keeps the school from collaboratively focusing on the child and his or her performance can be seen as a potential challenge.
P2	More attention offered by teachers and parents do not necessarily guarantee that the child will excel. Increased dependency by the child will produce an irresponsible adult who will be a burden to family or community. The child may end up involved in criminal activities as he or she would require help and guidance throughout their life.
P3	The biggest problem for me is non-involvement from parents in the well-being and academic progress of their children. There is also no plan in place that directs the process.

P4	Time because we live in a fast-changing environment where people are too busy to interact with one another due to work conditions and intricate lifestyles. The CAPS program of the department is only work driven and not focusing on the wellbeing of the child.
DP1	Practical matters – time – teachers teach during the day; parents work and learners must be in class. School counsellors are not always on the school's grounds and must come in from outside organizations. It can be difficult if transportation is an issue.
DP2	Historical repercussions and successes are held upfront when new challenges emerge and this can lead to stagnation of development with reference to collaborative partnerships.
HoD1	Greater sensitivity to listen to educators on ground level should be cultivated.
HoD2	Teachers should be more actively involved in the collaboration process. Teachers are merely informed of problems and the solution is spiralled down to the classroom through the vice-principal.
HoD3	Collaboration should lead to optimal personal functioning within a nurturing organisational structure. Many involved however are not aware of expectations and they then decide not to get involved.
HoD4	Time is a major concern because we live in a fast-changing environment where people are too busy to interact with one another due to work environments.
HoD5	Practical aspects have a negative impact on whether or not collaboration can be implemented effectively. The challenges are the time factor and effective communication channels between the teachers, school counsellors and parents. Faulty communication between parents, teachers and school counsellors will lead to ineffective attempts to help a learner.
HoD6	Challenges with reference to collaborative partnership primarily stems from the fact that all parties might want to enforce their way of dealing with a problem on others. Each person has their own perception on what they think is best. Emotional intelligence must be considered when individual key players are involved in collaboration or required to head collaboration in a school.

T1	Some schools don't have access to counsellors and some parents think it is purely the school's responsibility.
T2	The most obvious challenge to collaboration is time. Parents work late or they are out of town and are too tired to commit to any other activities. Lack of communication can also be another challenge as it can cause misunderstandings and confusion.
T3	Acknowledging that there is a need for collaboration. Nobody is an expert and some just wants to be in charge. Lack of knowledge about availability of expert help. Cost of expert help. Identification of the type of assistance that is needed. Archaic ideas of some schools, parents and teachers.
T4	One-sided decision making and when confidentiality is not maintained. Each person involved in collaboration should have an equal voice otherwise it will cause some to withdraw.
T5	Time is definitely a big problem. Parents and teachers alike are very busy and making time for collaboration is sometimes just not practical. Some parents live in the rural areas and travelling is just not possible. Many children reside in the school's hostel and they only go home during the school holidays.
Pa1	Parents are not involved in their children's lives. A lot of learners live in hostels and are left to their own devices. Some parents even work in other provinces and only come home during school holidays or some weekends. Communication between the parents, the child and the school are typically limited to an occasional newsletter or SMS on a parent group.
Pa2	Communication is a setback. Communication between the school counsellor and parents are almost non-existent. Teachers refer children to the counsellor. The child is counselled but no feedback is provided to the parents. Teachers seldom follow up or talk to the counsellor as they view that as confidential information. Parents and teachers do speak on occasion as they school tend to arrange parent evenings and other events.
Pa3	Parents do not always have the time to see a teacher at the school. Some parents work long hours and other work in other provinces. Some parents are very poor and they cannot afford to travel up and down. Teachers are busy during the day teaching and parents do not always know when it will be possible to make an

	<p>appointment with a teacher. After school children need to go to various activities and then parents must also see to younger children if they are at home. Time is definitely a challenge.</p>
Pa4	<p>If collaboration is more than an occasional event then there should be a policy in place. Schools sometimes have policies that stipulate the importance of collaboration but the policies do not specify the actual process. Policies should include information about procedures, type of efforts, resources, frequency of meetings and dealing with obstacles.</p>
Pa5	<p>When collaboration undertakings are not well formulated and carefully developed, then it will not succeed. Some parents or teachers do not always have the motivation to commit to home-school initiatives and they need an inspirational individual who will drive the process.</p>
SC1	<p>There are several things that can stop collaboration between stakeholders. These include things like negative attitudes and lack of knowledge and skill. Busy work schedules, lack of transportation and childcare and language and cultural differences can also make working with others difficult. The success of collaboration will also depend on the motivation and capabilities of stakeholders who take the lead. Sufficient resources and time can be a challenge as well. When new parents or teachers join then there should be a well-designed plan in place to inform them about collaboration in the school. All collaborative stakeholders should be treated equally, especially if they are from low-income families or if they do not have all the qualifications others have. New parents and new staff members are not briefed on the importance of collaboration.</p>
SC2	<p>The challenges are the time factor and effective communication channels amongst the teachers, school counsellors and parents. These hurdles are obstructing the process.</p>
SC3	<p>The lack in induction of new teachers faced with a multicultural institution leads to ignorance, impaired self-confidence and result in a laissez-faire attitude towards the development and maintenance of a collaborative organisational culture. Greater sensitivity to listen to educators on ground level, historical repercussions and successes are held upfront when new challenges emerge, which lead to stagnation of personal development.</p>

SC4	Those involved in a collaborative relationship should be knowledgeable about their specific role and the importance of teamwork. Policies should be compiled to guide the process and training ought to be provided, as a lack of knowledge will further impede the process.
SC5	In the school system teachers think that they can handle problems that they are not qualified to handle and it ends up making things worse. Sometimes expert advice is needed to address a problem. Stakeholders should not get involved in tasks that is beyond their expertise and they should stick to their scope of practice otherwise it does more harm than good. More often stakeholders' viewpoints may differ or even clash. Values systems from home may not necessarily be in line with the school and vice-versa.

8. How can the roles of the teachers, school counsellors and parents be infused to assist learners in optimal learning enhancing school development?

P1	Some believe that stakeholders have the necessary skills to work together and this is not necessarily true. Working together takes skill and effort and it is developed over time. Stakeholders can only work together successfully if they are in it for the long hall. Throughout the process they will learn how to develop their communication and listening skills. They must also understand that there should be a team approach.
P2	It may be infused through provision of platforms where they are eager to seek help voluntarily. They also need assurance of privacy of the details discussed. By communicating on a regular basis and coming up with ideas on how to assist on issues or development that is needed.
P3	Regular teacher-parent consultation meetings to discuss a learner's progress. They can convene once a term where they can see both the teachers and school counsellors.
P4	Regular meetings and updates, open communication channels. There should be an active working program and policy that has been worked out between school counsellors, teachers and the school, that will be communicated to the new parents and staff.

DP1	These individuals should work together and maintain communication. Trust between them will be essential and each one should be clearly aware of his/her role, and responsibilities should not overlap in order to avoid repetition of work.
DP2	Policies should be compiled that can guide the process.
HoD1	Collaboration can be cultivated by encouraging communication between parents, listening to parents' perspectives and to move beyond event-based engagements. Others' input should be considered.
HoD2	Training can be provided to new parents who enrol their children and to teachers and school counsellors once they are employed at the school. Policies should be implemented and all staff including principals and HoDs should be familiar with the importance and procedures associated with collaborative endeavours.
HoD3	Collaboration among teachers should be viewed as of great importance as it influences the whole school community. Such collaborative communities hold immeasurable, unparalleled hope for schools and the improvement of learning and it should be upheld as such.
HoD4	Training should be provided to the key role players and practical accommodations should be made to allow them to cultivate a collaborative environment in the school, e.g. resources, room allocated, time, etc.
HoD5	It should be written into the school's vision and mission statement and there should be ample opportunities to build these partnerships by means of meetings, events, parent evenings, social gatherings, team-building initiatives and appropriate communication platforms, etc.
HoD6	Collaboration should form part of the ethos of the school and be a natural part of day-to-day activities.
T1	In my experience there are not enough counsellors – with more it will be a better infusion.
T2	Key role-players should work together and maintain the necessary contact and ongoing communication. Trust between them will moreover be essential.
T3	Communication! Information and exposure to the knowledge of deviation is child development. Help parents deal with the needs of children. Train teachers to think outside the box.

T4	By means of maintaining communication and building trust
T5	Open communication is of the utmost importance.
Pa1	A learner who feels safe and loved will be secure in who they are and in their own capabilities. They are not afraid to ask for help when needed and they have enough confidence to take risks. Parents, teachers and social workers need to make sure that children feel supported and of value.
Pa2	Communication can be improved between parents, teachers and school counsellors.
Pa3	Parents are important in a child's life and they should be involved in their lives. They want to be able to hear about problems they have and ways to help them. Parents must have the opportunity to speak to the teachers on a regular basis and must be informed if the child was referred to a school counsellor. At times it would be necessary to have a meeting with both a teacher and a counsellor to get both perspectives on the child's problem.
Pa4	Before roles can be infused every stakeholder ought to know what is expected of them to ensure that there are no misunderstandings. If they are aware of their expectations then they can fully apply themselves in the areas that is needed. The stakeholders will also have to inform one another of what is being done and provide feedback. For example, if a child is sent to the school counsellor – the counsellor should provide feedback to both the parents and the teachers so that all work together to help the child. The teachers and parents must in return also keep the school counsellor informed about progress or problem behaviour that persist.
Pa5	Collaboration within a school will require a strong committed facilitator or someone who will be willing to direct and manage all the collaborative efforts. Strong leadership is necessary to ensure success. It will take sacrifice and commitment of teachers, counsellors and parents and each stakeholder should assume the necessary responsibility and do their part. Stakeholders must be able to trust one another and to count on one another for the relationship to work. There will be conflict if some are required to do all the work while others only remain passive bystanders.

SC1	Assurance of confidentiality is essential. Feedback was deemed of great importance and it was specified that the involvement of more counsellors should be considered
SC2	Stakeholders can work together if there is a mutual understanding and foundation of trust.
SC3	<p>Infusion will only be successful if the following conditions prevail: mutual cultural respect, an understanding of living conditions and challenges, emphasis of a common vision, developing common goals to reach in specific time frames, successful identification of available resources, heavy dependence on open, reliable communication, creative problem-solving strategies from all stakeholders (including the learner), and ensuring that all stakeholders have access to sufficient means to reach the common goals that was set.</p> <p>Collaboration develops higher-level thinking, oral communication, self-management and leadership skills in the learner. It also stimulates and encourages the learner's interaction with his ecology.</p>
SC4	Teachers, parents and school counsellors will only be able to work together if they have clarity about what is expected of them and if all parties agree to work together as a team.
SC5	Infusion of roles can take place if goals have been determined and each person involved are able to function within their scope of practice. Regular meetings and open communication should be maintained in order to ensure that there are no misunderstandings.

9. How can collaboration be improved on in your school?

P1	<p>This can be done by improving the digital milieu – our school have embarked on a total upgrade of our website and Facebook/WhatsApp sites with, in addition the possibility of expanding into telegram as an additional communication medium. If I reflect on my personal experience as a young teacher in very different circumstances, it was possibly and required that as a teacher I visited the parents of each child in their own homes ... it helped build relationships and gave me a greater understanding of the child.</p>
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P2	<p>School Management can enhance awareness of the importance of collaboration. Teacher-parent consultation should take place at least once a term. School activities should allow for parental participation.</p> <p>Stakeholders must be challenged to move beyond conventional standards of independence to unlock each other's' capabilities and to foster growth.</p>
P3	<p>Collaboration can be improved by setting up a strong team that will focus on initiating collaboration within a school.</p>
P4	<p>All the stakeholders should be aware of the program at the school to assist learners in optimal learning enhancing school development. During parent meetings these roles can be explained.</p>
DP1	<p>Command chains and channels need to be developed and accompanied by boundaries. The severe lack in induction of new teachers faced with a multicultural institution leads to ignorance, impaired self-confidence and result in a laissez-faire attitude towards the development and maintenance of a collaborative organisational culture. Greater sensitivity to listen to educators on ground level, historical repercussions and successes are held upfront when new challenges emerge, which leads to stagnation of personal development. Collaboration can also be improved by having educators be the first stop in the chain of collaboration. In our school, teachers are merely informed of problems and the solution is spiralled down to the classroom through the vice-principal, yet he/she is not in command of the classroom or physical and emotional learning process that is taking place. In other words, ultimately collaboration must lead to optimal personal functioning within a nurturing organisational culture. School policies must be made available, these are instruments to guide expectations and the learning environment, which will also communicate and guide expectations and acceptable standards and norms.</p>
DP2	<p>Collaboration can be cultivated by encouraging communication between parents, listening to parents' perspectives and to move beyond event-based engagements.</p>
HoD1	<p>Establish collaboration policies and provide the necessary training to incorporate it into the school.</p>

HoD2	Establish a committee that will arrange all collaborative efforts and that will function as a bridge between the school management team, teachers and parents.
HoD3	Promote parental involvement in the school and encourage parents to be part of the school board.
HoD4	Allow parents to meet teachers and school counsellors during specific times during school as some parents are not able to make appointments after hours due to other responsibilities. Ensure that each school has an office or room available for these meetings.
HoD5	Ensure that there is no overlapping of responsibilities and ample opportunity for feedback when dealing with specific learners who are experiencing difficulties.
HoD6	Teachers, parents and school counsellors should have a policy of what the collaboration partnership entails, at hat includes an outline of their specific roles, indication of what procedures to follow when faced with a crisis, when to refer and when to seek assistance from the school management team.
T1	Parents must keep the school updated with their contact details and inform them if their child have a problem.
T2	Teachers, parents and school counsellors should be made aware of their roles and the significance thereof when working as a team. Communication can be improved and a policy can be set into place in order to stipulate procedures when a learner has been identified who are in need of assistance.
T3	Shortage of time is a huge challenge. Especially seeing that parents are so busy and not able to make or keep an appointment
T4	All involved should understand that is it about teamwork.
T5	Collaboration is something that is attempted when there is a need for it, for example when a child exhibits questionable behaviour or when funds are needed or when an event is being organized. Collaboration should not be a once in a while occasion. Collaboration should be part of the daily functioning of a school. Parents and teachers should be aware of the importance of working together on a continuous basis and they should be involved at all times.

Pa1	Collaboration should be made a priority. Specific time should be set apart for parents to meet with school personnel and there must be appropriate opportunities to build relationships. It will require commitment from both the parents and the teachers and they will have to be prepared to make some sacrifices for the benefit of the children.
Pa2	There must be a system put into place that direct the correct procedures to follow when a child is referred to the school counsellor or when a teacher picks up on an academic challenge or barrier to learning.
Pa3	Inform the parents well in advance of events or meetings so that the necessary arrangements can be made by parents. Create a WhatsApp group for parents and teachers so that they are aware of any programmes or training or meetings that will be held. A bridge must be built between the schools and the homes and both the school and the parents must be willing to build that bridge together. It cannot be one-sided.
Pa4	Stakeholders must be sensitive towards differences between one another and should develop the skills or ways to deal with it. In collaborative partnerships one will work with individuals who come from different sociocultural and economic backgrounds, their languages may be different, their race and gender may be different. Stakeholders must therefore guard against any form of prejudice. They must realize that different is not always a problem but something that can be complimentary to the process. All must try to maintain respect for one another.
Pa5	Positive working relationships should be developed. This can be done by avoiding judgemental attitudes, investing time into building relationships, focusing on the desired outcomes, acknowledging the benefits of working together. They must moreover acknowledge each other's contributions and show due respect. Communication should be directed to one another and not at one another. Stakeholders should also have an expectation that their efforts will bear fruit.
SC1	The first step would be to create or to establish the goals of collaboration, to identify key individuals who will form part of a managing committee and to formulate a practical plan containing procedures and ways to cultivate collaboration within the school community.

SC2	Start with raising awareness of the importance of collaboration and the impact it will have on the learner. This can be done by means of information evenings, flyers, short articles in the school newspaper, letters to parents, etc.
SC3	Collaboration speaks to the heart of everyone who cares about a learner. Those who are passionate about them will be willing and able to take hands with one another. A platform must be created for those to meet and to formulate a policy that will guide the process involved.
SC4	Build strong relationships with new parents from the first day they enrol their children – maintain contact, inform them of difficulties, ask for their help, involve them in events and provide opportunities for them to make their voices known. Acknowledge parents as the ones who know their children best and ask for their advice when necessary. Draw from other partner’s expertise and share responsibilities.
SC5	Cultivate a relationship of trust with other teachers, parents and counsellors. Maintain open communication and be transparent in dealings with others. Ensure that the child’s best interest is always the priority and be prepared to deal constructively with conflict and misunderstandings if they arise. Acknowledge other individual’s field of expertise and be willing to be teachable when necessary.

10. How can collaboration between teachers, school counsellors and parents improve learner performance and ultimately facilitate school development?

P1	<p>When collaboration is maintained then learners will not fall through the cracks. Parents, teachers and school counsellors can work together with the learner to address problem areas and to provide the necessary assistance whether it is academic support, emotional support or guidance of some sort. They can moreover provide the necessary feedback and monitor the learner in the various areas – home, school, etc.</p> <p>In summary, a successful collaboration depends on the personal interaction of the participants. Several key elements characterize the collaborative process including trust, respect, and effective interpersonal communication. Collaboration is not a quick and easy process but one that demands much of participants in terms of conflict and tension, time, energy, and new skills and understandings. The complex and contextual nature of collaboration and the influence of the</p>
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	<p>above-mentioned dynamics that come into play in the process have made it difficult to follow a step-by-step recipe for the implementation of collaboration. Studies such as the one referenced in this paper that provide rich descriptions of participants' collaborative experiences may lead to new understandings of the process and in turn to improved student learning.</p>
P2	<p>Through highlighting problem areas so that they get more attention in order to cope. The parents may also communicate if the child is having personal challenges so that the teacher may help adequately. Effective communication between the teacher, parents and learner. However, leadership of the school must support collaborative efforts. It must be modelled and communicated by them. Principals must delegate some responsibilities to the stakeholders and trust them to do it without looking over their shoulders.</p>
P3	<p>I think schools in general do not want to change. Progressive education is desperately needed to prepare children for success, so if children can benefit from collaboration all parties involved should be aware of what the latest trends are, what is available in the form of diagnostic and support systems and if this is a place we will cultivate a child that is ready for a successful adult life, while being a balanced and productive citizen, friend or parent.</p>
P4	<p>Training to parents and teachers is essential in order to help them to understand the dynamics of the processes involved. Cultivating strong responsibilities, setting mutual goals and working as a team is also important. Trust and mutual respect are indispensable.</p>
DP1	<p>Communication is the answer. Without communication no growth in relationships will take place. Other important skills necessary in collaboration will be to develop Stakeholder's emotional competencies, decision making and problem-solving skills, conflict management and, teambuilding.</p>
DP2	<p>Schools should never disregard the importance of collaboration and it should be regarded as an important contributing factor of school development. That is why established policies will play an important role. Writing a policy can be challenging and time consuming but it lays the very foundation of an initiative before it can be constructed. These policies should stipulate the overall purpose of collaboration, the managing committee and their tasks and roles, various collaborative efforts</p>

	to be implemented, practical considerations, ways to deal with challenges, etc. These policies should be reviewed on a regular basis.
HoD1	Collaboration will improve a learner's academic achievements, improve their work habits, social skills and emotional well-being and that will then lead to school improvement.
HoD2	Children tend to become gradually more independent as they grow older. Despite an increase in autonomy, collaboration between parents and teachers is still expected. Parents should remain involved in their child's life whether or not the child tends to pull away from them. If parents are excluded from school events or programmes then learners are left with an imperfect support system.
HoD3	Successful efforts to establish an effective collaborative depends on stakeholders' motivation and capability. Substantive change is most likely when high levels of positive energy can be mobilized and appropriately directed for extended periods of time. communicating essential information to key stakeholders using strategies that help them understand that the benefits of change will outweigh the costs and are more worthwhile than the status quo or competing directions for change. The strategies used must be personalized and accessible to the subgroups of stakeholders (e.g. must be "enticing," emphasize that costs are reasonable, and engage them in processes that build consensus and commitment). Sufficient time must be spent creating the motivational readiness of key stakeholders and building their capacity and skills.
HoD4	Collaboration can only be effective if it is guided by a core team who drives the process. These must be capable persons who are ambitious and highly motivated and who will be able to maintain that passion over time. These individuals will be required to provide constant direction and support to the rest of the stakeholders in order to deal effectively with challenges and frustrations that may occur.
HoD5	For some collaboration has become more of a saying than an authentic practice. This will not advance partnerships in schools. It is evident that collaboration tends to be more evident in primary schools than in secondary schools. Some parents and teachers believe that students should be given greater freedom and responsibility when they start high school and parents therefore pull away to allow children to become more independent. Parents should be made aware of the fact that their presence and involvement is needed in high schools and so much more

	<p>within our fragile communities. Parent involvement should be promoted at all times – children need to know that their parents are interested in them, in their schoolwork and in their activities. No matter how old they are. This will improve their sense of self-worth and motivate them to work harder, to accomplish their goals and it will improve the school as a whole.</p>
HoD6	<p>Collaboration among teachers should not be disregarded. It should also be considered as important. It has an influence on the whole school community. These collaborative communities are of immeasurable, unparalleled value as it holds out hope for schools and it contributes to the improvement of learning.</p>
T1	<p>It will help the learners have a better learning experience because they will have the support they need.</p>
T2	<p>Cultivating partnerships will be the key priority. It can serve to strengthen, support, and to transform individual partners, and it will result in improved program quality, more efficient use of resources, and better alignment of goals</p>
T3	<p>The capability to work collaboratively with others is becoming an essential component of contemporary school reform. Collaboration should be the priority of each stakeholder who wants learners to excel. No one is an island and we are stronger if we work together. Unity will accelerate school development.</p>
T4	<p>Collaboration could extend beyond the borders of one school. In one community we find that there are thriving schools and then within a few kilometres we find schools that are falling apart. Schools within a community should take hands in order to support all the children from the same community. Teachers can help teachers from other schools that are struggling. They can create support groups and advice one another. Those schools who do not have access to a school counsellor can make use of the services of a school counsellor at a school who has one. Representatives of various schools can meet on a quarterly basis and discuss ways how they can assist or support one another. When one school commits to assist another school then it might even improve the collaboration of stakeholders within a specific school.</p>
T5	<p>The only answer for true change is the establishment of strong relationships that will stand the test of time. Stakeholders must make effort to build these relationships. Other people's perspectives must be valued. Conflict should be dealt with constructively. Many problems stakeholders will have to deal with will</p>

	<p>be very emotional and draining – and it can cause conflict. The conflict should however unite people and not cause separation. Conflict can contribute to breakthroughs. A climate of trust, respect, and openness must also be created. Without trust and respect equality cannot exist between stakeholders.</p>
Pa1	<p>Interdependence is important in collaboration. The school and home should be seen as a complete unit and not as separated or detached parts.</p>
Pa2	<p>Participation in collaboration should always remain voluntary. Collaboration imposed on people will only result in frustration, and anger. Efforts will be half-hearted and there will not be any true commitment.</p>
Pa3	<p>Collaboration improves communication, communication develops relationships, trust and respect and it can lead to a sense of community. If stakeholders feel that they are part of a community they will be more invested to work towards obtaining their goals.</p>
Pa4	<p>Collaboration focuses on achieving goals. Those goals bring people together. When people understand how important collaboration is for their children then it will drive them to do everything in their power to be actively involved.</p>
Pa5	<p>Relationships will ultimately contribute to school development. It will be the very building blocks that will transform a school.</p>
SC1	<p>Collaboration can increase student retention as it will help to increase a students' self-esteem and sense of responsibility. Through the efforts of collaborative partners learners are provided with the necessary support that will help them to deal with their challenges in a safe environment. How will this contribute to school development? A child who is supported will believe in themselves, will take risks, will strive to do more.</p>
SC2	<p>Children learn by example. If the adults in their lives model effective collaboration partnerships, then they too can learn from it. They can become part of these partnerships and commit to dealing with their struggles effectively while asking for help and by doing their part. Collaboration will develop higher-level thinking, communication, self-management and leadership skills in the learner.</p>
SC3	<p>Collaboration will address problem areas more effectively as each stakeholder play a different role and are able to provide a different perspective when dealing with identified problems. It will also help stakeholders to set realistic goals for</p>

	each child that will serve as a route map to individual success. Each individual success will contribute the success of the school.
SC4	Collaboration can contribute to school development as each effort employed by stakeholders will have a ripple effect. No step taken to assist a child is ever futile and it will have good results in the end if it is maintained.
SC5	It is a complex question. Collaboration is needed, but it requires something from those who embrace it. Nothing in life just happens – most successes require hard work and endurance. Each parent, teacher and school counsellor will have to keep the bigger picture in sight and work through the unavoidable challenges they will face. Walking away from a child or giving up on them should never be an option. Each child no matter how difficult or how troubled should be left behind. Each one should be treated as an individual with worth, who has the potential to learn and to excel, regardless of their background or mistakes they have made. When learners understand that stakeholders are committed to help them it will spark something in them to also believe that they are capable of more and that they can rise above their circumstances.