Towards developing a cyberbullying policy for private schools in South Africa: Policy considerations at a private school in Gauteng province, South Africa

by

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submitted in accordance with the requirements
for the degree of
MASTER OF EDUCATION

in the subject of
EDUCATION MANAGEMENT

at the
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

SUPERVISOR: PROF. SA COETZEE

SEPTEMBER 2023

DECLARATION

I, Ignatius Michael van Rooyen, declare that: TOWARDS DEVELOPING A CYBERBULLYING POLICY FOR PRIVATE SCHOOLS IN SOUTH AFRICA: POLICY CONSIDERATIONS AT A PRIVATE SCHOOL IN GAUTENG PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I submitted the dissertation to originally checking software and that it falls within the accepted requirements for originality.

I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at Unisa for another qualification or any other higher education institution".

Ignatius Michael van Rooyen **Student number: 61434132**

Date: 3 September 2023

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation entirely to my family and God. I am grateful to my loving wife, Margaret, for her words of encouragement and push for tenacity. My two sons, Logan and Cayden, for always understanding why I missed "playtime" and always having a cup of coffee ready when I needed it. I will always be grateful to you three for what you have done for me and how you have supported me on this journey. My last and most significant dedication is to Almighty God. As a result of His love, I was given the strength, mental power, protection, skills, and a healthy life so that I could complete my dissertation.

"Education is our passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today"

Malcom X

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to every role-player who helped me finish my research project successfully. I especially want to thank the following people:

- My wife Margaret, and two sons, Logan, and Cayden for their unconditional love.
- Professor SA Coetzee, who guided me throughout this dissertation. Her commitment to her students and their success is inspiring and greatly appreciated.
- The participants who so graciously made themselves available.
- I would also like to thank my editor for always being willing to help whenever she can, even with very tight deadlines.
- I want to thank God Almighty for being the One that granted me the opportunity and ability to be able to complete my dissertation.

ABSTRACT AND KEY WORDS (ENGLISH)

Cyberbullying is a growing problem in schools, posing unique legal and management challenges. I conducted a qualitative, case study grounded in the critical realism paradigm and employed multiple data-collection methods, such as a document study, document analysis, semi-structured interviews, focus groups and qualitative questionnaires. Using criterion-based, purposive sampling, I recruited information-rich participants such as the principal, deputy-principal, school counsellor, educators, and learners. A document study of the legal framework governing cyberbullying brought to the fore an absence of a departmental policy regulating cyberbullying in schools and thus the need to consider various general and education specific law and policy when adopting a school cyberbullying policy. The empirical study confirmed the need to follow a whole-school approach during policy development. Using both the legal framework and the findings from the empirical study, I compiled a prototype cyberbullying policy for private schools; so doing, realising the aim of the study.

Key words: cyberbullying; cyberbullying policy; legal framework; policy development; private schools; qualitative; South Africa; whole-school approach

ABSTRAK EN SLEUTELWOORDE (AFRIKAANS)

Kuberafknouery is ’n toenemende probleem by skole en hou unieke regs- en bestuursuitdagings in. Ek het ’n kwalitatiewe gevallestudie gedoen wat in kritiese realisme gefundeer is en veelvuldige data-insamelingsmetodes gebruik, soos ’n dokumentstudie, dokumentontleding, semigestruktureerde onderhoude, fokusgroepe en kwalitatiewe vraelyste. Deur kriteriumgebaseerde, doelbewuste steekproefneming te gebruik, het ek deelnemers wat oor baie inligting beskik, soos die skoolhoof, adjunkskoolhoof, skoolberader, opvoeders en leerders van die deelnemende skool, gewerf. ’n Literatuurstudie van die regsraamwerk wat kuberafknouery reguleer, het die afwesigheid van ’n departementele beleid vir die regulering van kuberafknouery in skole uitgewys, en derhalwe die behoefte om verskeie algemene en onderwysspesifieke wetgewing en beleide te oorweeg wanneer ’n beleid ten opsigte van skoolkuberafknouery aangeneem word. Die empiriese studie het die behoefte bevestig om ’n geheelskoolbenadering tydens beleidontwikkeling te volg. Deur die regsraamwerk en die bevindings van die empiriese studie te gebruik, het ek ’n prototipe kuberafknouerybeleid vir privaat skole saamgestel om sodoende die doelwit van die studie te bereik.

Sleutelwoorde: Beleidontwikkeling; geheelskoolbenadering; kuberafknouery; kuberafknouerybeleid; kwalitatief regsraamwerk; privaat skole, Suid-Afrika

KAKARETSO LE MANTSWE A SEHLOOHO (Sesotho)

Cyberbullying ke bothata bo ntseng bo eketseha dikolong, bo bakang mathata a ikgethang a molao le tsamaiso. Ke entse phuputso ya boemo bo botle, e thehilweng ho bonnete ba nnete ba ditaba le ho sebedisa mekgwa e mengata ya ho bokella dintlha, jwalo ka boithuto ba dingolwa, hlahlobo ya ditokomane, dipuisano tse hlophisitsweng hantle, dihlopha tse tsepamisitsweng maikutlo le dipotso tsa boleng. Ke sebedisa mehlala e thehilweng ho melaotheo, e nang le morero, ke ile ka thaotha barutehi ba nang le boitsebelo bo bongata ba kang mosuwehlooho, motlatsi wa mosuwehlooho, moeletsi wa sekolo, barupelli le baithuti ba tswang sekolong se neng se nka karolo. Boithuto ba lingolhwa mabapi le moralo wa molao o laolang bompodi ba marangrang bo hlakisitse ho ba siyo ha leano la lefapha le laolang bompodi dikolong, kahoo e totobatsa tlhoko ya ho nahana ka melao le maano a fapaneng a akaretsang le a tobaneng le thuto ha ho amohelwa leano la sekolo la bompodi ba marangrang. Boithuto bo matla bo netefaditse tlhoko ya ho latela mokgwa wa sekolo kaofela nakong ya ntlafatso ya maano. Ka ho sebedisa moralo wa molao le diphumano tsa boithuto bo matla, ke ile ka hlophisa leano la mohlala la bompodi ba marangrang bakeng sa dikolo tsa poraefete, ka hona ke ile ka hlokomela sepheo sa thuto.

Mantswe a bohloka: Afrika Borwa; boleng; cyberbullying; dikolo tse ikemetseng; leano la cyberbullying; moralo wa molao; mokgwa wa sekolo kaofela; ntshetsopele ya maano

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LIST OF ABBREVIATED TITLES OF LAWS AND POLICIES

Constitution of the Republic of South Africa of 1996	Constitution
Guidelines for the consideration of governing bodies in adopting a code of conduct for learners	Guidelines for a code of conduct for learners
South African Schools Act 84 of 1996	Schools Act

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CJCP	Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention
CRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
EHRC	European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms
ISHP	Integrated School Health Policy
UFS	University of the Free State
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
WHO	World Health Organization
SRC	Student Representative Council
SMT	School Management Team

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

DEFINITION

Cyberbullying is disseminating harmful or cruel speech or engaging in other forms of social cruelty using the internet or other information communication technologies (Willard 2005:1).

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In front of her parents and grandparents in their Texas home, United States of America (USA), an 18-year-old raised a gun to her chest and pulled the trigger. Brandy Vela had had enough of the merciless abuse from cyberbullies (Naik 2017:1). She was not only harassed on Facebook, but also encouraged to commit suicide because she was “fat” and “ugly”. It is a truism that incidents of cyberbullying, such as those that Vela was subjected to, is a common form of bullying in South African schools. The *Institut de Publique Sondage d’Opinion Secteur* (Ipsos 2018:4, 11), for example, found that in the 28 countries surveyed, most of the cyberbullying is done by classmates and this trend is especially prevalent in Great Britain, followed by Canada and South Africa. A recent study by Cilliers and Chinyamurindi (2020:1) also confirms that cyberbullying is a serious issue at several primary and secondary schools in the Eastern Cape Province in South Africa.

As is evident from the case of Vela, cyberbullying can result in victims committing suicide. In fact, John et al (2018) conducted a review of 26 separate studies on cyberbullying, revealing that individuals subjected to cyberbullying face an elevated susceptibility to both self-harm and suicidal tendencies compared to those who have not experienced such victimisation. This type of bullying can be distinguished from other forms of bullying by its extreme cruelty, a flexible and indeterminate audience and bullies who can hide behind anonymity. As a result, experts believe that cyberbullying can have a more severe impact on its victims than other more traditional forms of bullying (Bauman & Yoon 2014:253; Wood 2018). In fact, it is evident from news reports that the deaths of several teenagers are linked to cyberbullying. Lallitto (2017) reported on Megan Meier’s (see discussion below) and 14 other cases in the USA where a young person’s suicide was linked to being cyberbullied. South Africa is also not spared from young people committing suicide because of being cyberbullied. For example, Khumalo (2021) reported on the suicide of

a 15-year-old learner from Limpopo following a video of her being repeatedly slapped in the face went viral on social media. A mob of her peers cheered and filmed the whole incident. In a similar vein, a 13-year-old Pretoria girl killed herself after suffering a barrage of abuse and bullying after a private photo of her was shared on WhatsApp with other learners (Gous 2019).

Cyberbullying brings to the fore unique legal questions that affect school policy. For example, schools are unsure when they can (or must) respond to instances of cyberbullying; whether they may search private laptops or cell phones; how to deal with cyberbullying, which constitutes a crime; and under which circumstances can they limit learners' right to freedom of expression (Patchin 2010). Considering current national and international legislation, and after conducting a case study of policy considerations at a selected private school in the Roodepoort area, in Gauteng Province, South Africa, I developed a prototype cyberbullying policy.

The research was designed as a qualitative case study and the data collection methods included a document study, document analyses of court reports, the school's Policy on Cyberbullying, and Policy on the Development, Implementation and Review of Internal Policies, semi-structured interviews, a focus group discussion, and a qualitative open-ended questionnaire.

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Although the use of the internet and social media platforms are associated with a multitude of benefits, the ubiquity of internet and social media is also associated with considerable negative implications (Safaria 2016:82). Traditional bullying has moved into the technological realm and this type of bullying is a growing problem (Schenk & Fremouw 2012:22).

Cyberbullying is a hidden problem because many cases go unreported. In a 2017 study it was concluded that 63% of learners do not report cyberbullying to their parents (Young Minds, 2018). I also refer to cyberbullying as a "hidden problem" because victims do not have physical scars such as bruises or cuts.

Cyberbullying is also a growing problem. For example, in the United Kingdom, cyberbullying has grown to be an alarming problem for children of all ages. The National

Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) in the United Kingdom released a report on online bullying that indicated that over a five-year period, between 2011 and 2016, counselling in relation to online bullying increased by 88% – in 2015/16 alone, it was up by 13% (NSPCC 2016:7). Recently, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the USA conducted a survey of learners across the country called the Youth Risk Behaviour Surveillance (YRBS) and found that in 2015, 15.7% of learners reported that they were bullied electronically (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2019). Ipsos (2011:1) surveyed 24 countries in 2011 and repeated the survey in 2018 in 28 countries. The 2018 survey showed a 12% increase in children who had experienced cyberbullying in the 24 countries surveyed in 2011 and a 10% increase in cyberbullying among children in South Africa in particular (Ipsos 2018:4). In a 2022 study conducted by the Pew Research Center, it was found that nearly half of US teens aged between 13 to 17 have experienced cyberbullying.

In South Africa, a **child** is defined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa of 1996 (hereafter the Constitution) (RSA 1996a, s 28(3)) and in the Children's Act 38 of 2005 (hereafter Children's Act) (RSA 2005, s 1) as a person under the age of 18. Juvonen and Gross (2008:1) conducted an anonymous online study with 1454 American children between the ages of 12 and 17 years old and found that the prevalence rate of cyber victimisation in this age range is a staggering 72%. The South African Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention (hereafter CJCP) found in its National School Violence Study 2012 that the age group mostly affected by cyberbullying is children between the ages 15 to 18 (Leoschut 2013:87). Since children of this age group typically still attend school, schools have an obvious vested interest to attend to cyberbullying because it interferes with the education of both bullies and victims.

Given the complexities of policy development, schools need guidelines on how to provide reasonable boundaries when it comes to cyberbullying (Shariff 2005:462). To understand a school's legal obligation regarding policy development for the protection of learners' physical and mental well-being against cyberbullying, it was crucial to investigate the national and international legal frameworks that facilitate school policy development. Below is an introduction to the legal framework that guided the research and framed the adoption of a prototype school cyberbullying policy. A more detailed discussion is included in sections 2.3 and 2.4.

The South African legal system does not function in isolation and must take cognisance of international law (Coetzee 2012:5). The need to consider international law is provided for in section 39(1)(b) of the Constitution, which reads “When interpreting the Bill of Rights, a court, tribunal or forum must consider international law” (RSA 1996a, s 39(1)(b)).As long as international law is in line with the provisions outlined in the Constitution, it will be deemed valid. This signifies that when the Education Labour Relations Council interprets the rights of children, they are obligated to take international law into account, and when international law is incorporated into domestic legislation, it is to be applied in the same manner as any other national law (RSA 1996a, s 39(1)(b), 231(4)). The Convention on the Rights of the Child is one such law that provides for an international legal framework that would apply to South Africa (Coetzee 2012:5). The Convention is domesticated, that is, made part of South African national law inter alia through the Bill of Rights included in chapter 2 of the Constitution and the Children’s Act (RSA 2005, preamble), which means South Africans have a legal obligation to protect children from mental violence which may result from cyberbullying. In interpreting the Convention of the Rights of the Child (2011, par 21(g)), the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child emphasises that cyberbullying will constitute mental violence because mental violence includes “(g) Psychological bullying and hazing by adults or other children, including via information and communication technologies (ICTs) such as cell phones and the internet (known as ‘cyberbullying’).” The term "hazing" pertains to assorted actions that encompass harassment, aggression, or humiliation. There is an element of anonymity and distance created by the virtual world. Cyberbullies’ motivations for engaging in this wrongdoing may differ from the actual hurt inflicted on victims since the virtual environment creates distance and a disconnect between the cyberbullies and their victims (Badenhorst 2011:2).

The Bill of Rights affirms the democratic values of human dignity, equality and freedom as forming the cornerstone of democracy in South Africa (Coetzee 2012:35). Section 10 states that everyone has inherent dignity and the right to have their dignity respected and protected (RSA 1996a, s 10). In other words, the victims of cyberbullying have a constitutional right to dignity and for that dignity to be protected. Section 28 relates specifically to children and in subsection (1)(d) it is stated that children must be protected from maltreatment, neglect, abuse, or degradation (RSA 1996a, s 28). Moreover, the Children’s Act (RSA 2005, s 6(2)(b)(c)) reaffirms a child’s inherent dignity and that

children are to be treated fairly and equitably (RSA 2005). The Regulation to Prohibit Initiation Practices in Schools (RSA 2002, reg 61(5.2)) assigns the principal primary responsibility to ensure that learners are not subject to *crimen injuria,* assault, harassment, maltreatment, degradation, humiliation or intimidation from teachers or learners.

While the above guarantees the right to protection of the dignity, mental health and social development of learners, section 14(d) of the Constitution protects the privacy of a person's communications (RSA 1996a, s 14). Section 16(1)(c) makes provision for freedom of artistic creativity (RSA 1996a, s 16). Thus, within the confines of sections 14 and 16, the Constitution diligently safeguards an individual's entitlement to uninhibited self-expression and their entitlement to privacy. This protection remains valid on the condition that such forms of communication do not instigate imminent acts of violence, endorse discriminatory sentiments rooted in race, ethnicity, gender, or religion, or constitute incitement to inflict harm (RSA 1996a, s 14 and 16).

Considering the above, legal questions about the extent to which schools can be expected to intervene when learners cyberbully co-learners arise.

1.3 MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY

In this section I elaborate on the factors that motivated me in selecting this specific topic as the focus of my study. By using the heading "Motivation for the study", I indicate that I have intentionally separated the discussion of motivation from the rationale, and that I will focus specifically on the factors that motivated me to conduct the research. These factors include personal and professional interests and gaps in existing literature and aspects other than what motivated the choice of topic traditionally included in the "Rationale" section. The rationale is the logical framework that supports and explains the reasons behind decisions, actions, beliefs, or arguments, helping us understand why something is done or believed and ensuring logical and valid ideas, plans, or actions by considering different factors and evidence (Cambridge Dictionary [s.a.] sv," Rationale"). The reasons or justifications for the research from a scholarly or theoretical perspective are given in the section on the "Statement of the problem" (cf. section 1.4).

As a school principal, I should be familiar with education law and be able to assist staff and learners with their concerns. To better prepare myself, I attended law workshops in

matters concerning school management. One of the topics presented in a workshop, which sparked attention, was on cyberbullying and it was brought into sharp focus when I was not able to provide answers to the parents of a victim. In South Africa there is no education-specific legislation, policy, or guidelines for dealing with cyberbullying on or off campus, with little to no guidelines on how to deal with cyberbullying (Badenhorst 2011:7). With a better understanding of cyberbullying, schools, parents, and the community can work more effectively to create safer environments for learners (Stevenson-Welker 2010:1).

As a father of two small boys and knowing how easily they could become victims of cyberbullies, I became determined to find a solution. The hurt and fear a child must feel, knowing that there is a story or a picture of them spreading across the internet creating an everlasting digital footprint as a reminder of their hurt and embarrassment must be devastating.

1.4 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The University of British Columbia in Canada compared traditional bullying with cyberbullying and found that the constructs of online bullying are different from traditional schoolyard bullying, and as such require different approaches, suggesting that current anti-bullying programmes need to provide for specific interventions to target online aggression (Law, Shapka, Hymel, Olson, & Waterhouse 2011:230). In fact, in the 2018 Ipsos survey (2018:3), 71% of the South African respondents indicated that cyberbullying needs special attention and only 29% felt that it can effectively be dealt with through existing measures for traditional bullying. Traditional responses to bullying are largely ineffective because of the unique characteristics of cyberbullying such as its anonymous nature and capacity to allow many to participate in the bullying (Shariff & Hoff 2007:77). With modern technology, cyberbullying can occur at the ‘‘speed of thought’’ and within much larger “audiences” than traditional bullying at school, which is generally confined to the schoolyard.

Kaltiala-Heino and Fröjd (2011:1) indicated that they found that a concurrent association between bullying and depression in adolescents is well documented. Victims of cyberbullying indicated higher levels of depression symptoms than victims of traditional bullying (Erdur-Baker & Tanrikulu 2010:2771). In their research, Mishna, McLuckie and

Saini (2009:111) reported confusion, guilt, shame, as well as self-harm and withdrawal from peers and family as symptoms of cyberbullying. In fact, cyberbullying is seen to be so destructive that the US government introduced the Megan Meier Cyberbullying Prevention Bill during the 111th Congress in 2009. During the introduction of the Bill the argument was made that cyberbullying causes psychological harm, including depression; negatively impacts academic performance, safety, and the well-being of learners; forces learners to change schools; and in some cases, leads to extreme violent behaviour, including murder and suicide (United States 2010, s 2). Although the Bill was never passed into an Act, it has brought attention to the dangers of cyberbullying and has as such contributed towards the advocacy against cyberbullying.[1]

The anonymity and distance offered by the online environment, which create the perception of invisibility for cyberbullies, are key factors setting cyberbullying apart from traditional in-person bullying, resulting in a variety of consequences that render it distinctly impactful and harmful (Brighi, Melotti, Guarini, Genta, Ortega, Mora-Merchán, Smith, & Thompson 2012:34).

Cyberbullying is not just a problem for its victims, but also for the school and the staff. Teachers have a constitutional, professional, and common law duty of care. As functionaries of organs of state (schools), teachers have a constitutional duty to protect learners' fundamental rights (RSA 1996a, ss 7(2), 8(1), 239), which includes their right to human dignity and their children's rights. Furthermore, teachers must keep learners safe in terms of their professional duties as set out in the South African Council for Educators (hereafter SACE) Code of Professional Ethics (SACE 2016, item 3.13). Furthermore, teachers also has a common law duty because they are acting *in loco parentis* (RSA 2002, reg 5(3)). Coetzee (2023:9–11) asserts that teachers set themselves apart from other professionals because of their critical role in forming future leaders and model citizens. They have been given a special responsibility mantle and are committed to offering a service that advances the general public good. Therefore, regardless of their in locus parentis status, the public has a legitimate expectation that teachers will honourably carry out their professional duties in a legal, ethical, and dedicated manner.

[1] A federal law was proposed but never passed. *See* United States Megan Meier Cyberbullying Prevention Act, H.R. 1966, 111th Cong. (2009).

Bullies claiming their actions are merely an exercise of their right to freedom of expression, causes teachers to be reluctant to act in fear that they may breach the bully's freedom of expression rights (Shariff 2005:462). This reluctance is exacerbated by what Shariff (2005:458) describes as a “policy vacuum”, which leaves schools confused about their rights, obligations, and limitations regarding harassment by learners in cyber-space. Unfortunately, this “policy vacuum” exists in South Africa, because of a lack of policy or legislation directly aimed at cyberbullying (Hills 2017: v).

South Africa has already seen its first court case based on cyberbullying. In *Le Roux and Others v Dey* 2011 (3) SA 274 (CC) *(*hereafter *Le Roux v Dey),* three schoolboys created a computer-generated image of Dr Dey in an undignified way and distributed it to their friends. A learner printed the image and placed it on noticeboards throughout the school. The court ruled in favour of Dr Dey claiming that the image is an actionable injury to his dignity (*Le Roux v Dey* at par 203). However, Smit (2015:7) emphasises that the true challenge with cyberbullying does not lie with the application of legislation, but in the actual prevention of cyberbullying in a school environment, where one would want to limit or prohibit acts that could lead to civil or criminal action against children. Despite the problems caused by cyberbullying, there are those who argue that schools do not have the responsibility or the authority to regulate the online engagement of learners on their personal smartphones, tablets, or computers (Austin 2015:1).

The biggest challenge facing schools when it comes to cyberbullying is the confusion as to how far the responsibility of teachers and the school reaches (Harding 2021:219). Willard (2007:64) stresses that incidents involving off-campus online speech, which either create or have the potential to create disruption at school for the victim, place schools in a challenging situation as to whether they can intervene and to what degree. The questions arise, can or should schools search a learner’s cell phone, laptop, or tablet, or stop a learner from sending messages or harmful content from home, using their personal computer off school property and afterhours (Goodno 2011:3)? The finding of Payne and Van Belle (2017:6) that almost three times as many of their respondents reported cyberbullying occurring outside than inside school hours, is consistent with national and international trends, confirming that this is an issue that deserves attention. Parents undeniably have a responsibility to monitor their children’s online actions (Cilliers & Chinyamurindi 2020:6). This is not to say that school administrators should be passive;

rather, they must adapt to the rapidly changing technological landscape and set appropriate limitations for their learners online social interactions (Shariff 2005:462). For parents, school administrators and policy makers (committees, governing bodies) the reduction of the risk of cyberbullying requires comprehensive and collaborative efforts among all the stakeholders (Sabella, Patchin & Hinduja 2013:2707).

As Smit (2015:4) correctly stresses, school administrators are increasingly called upon to understand and respond to cyberbullying, and to create a framework against which to assess cyberbullying and its impact on learners. According to Hinduja and Patchin (2009:118) a comprehensive cyberbullying policy is one of the critical ways a school can protect itself and its learners from legal action. Schools are advised not to ignore challenges such as a lack of policy or legislation against cyberbullying, as this could result in civil litigation (Hinduja & Patchin 2009:119). Schools must consider all the challenges in relation to regulating cyberbullying indicated above when adopting cyberbullying policies and ensure that their policies cover all such issues.

With no specific legislation or policy directly aimed at regulating cyberbullying, principals need to rely on the existing legal framework when adopting a school cyberbullying policy (Hills 2017: v). The adoption of a code of conduct for learners is mandated by the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 (hereafter the Schools Act) (RSA 1996b, s 8(1)). In terms of section 8(2) the code must aim at establishing a disciplined and purposeful school environment that is dedicated to the improvement and maintenance of the quality of the learning process (RSA, 1996b). A cyberbullying policy must conform to the standards set in the Constitution and safeguard against any form of unfair discrimination (Mansfield-Barry & Stwayi 2017:83).

MacEwan (2010:31) contends that much research was done on the importance of policy development and implementation but the “how” did not receive the same attention. This is certainly true of school policies and even more so of school cyberbullying policies. Buckland (2011), Du Toit and Stilwell (2012), Engelbrecht (2006), Mpunzana (2017), and Steyn (2011), to name a few, focus on policy implementation and, more specifically, policy implementation of national and provincial policies rather than school policies. There is little written about the actual development of school policies in South Africa. The available policy development literature (Govender 2008; Govender 2015) does not focus on policy development at school level. Although Hills (2017) discusses cyberbullying policy at

school level, she focuses on the legal framework within which such a policy should be developed rather than the process itself. Furthermore, scholarship on policymaking in schools as such is scant. Although referring to policymaking in the Arts, Shieh (2023:13) mentions the need for research of policymaking at local (school) level. In his article Shieh (2023:14) argues that teachers are commonly seen as becoming involved at the end of policymaking process when there is a need "to people" a policy; thus, a need for appointing implementers. Shieh (2023:17, 23) further mentions that policies are transported down the hierarchy to teachers who are expected to act on a policy's arrival, furiously scamper with immediacy to implement the policy. As such, there is a clear need for a study that focuses on the development of a school cyberbullying policy.

1.4.1 Research question and sub-questions

Through this study, I answered the following question: What research-based prototype cyberbullying policy can be developed to ensure effective regulation of cyberbullying at private schools in Gauteng, South Africa?

To make the research question more practicable and manageable it was broken down into the following research sub-questions:

- What does the literature reveal as best practices for developing an effective school cyberbullying policy within a whole-school framework?
- Which legal framework should South African private schools consider when developing a school policy on cyberbullying?
- What lessons can be learned from reviewing policymaking practices and current policy(ies) used to regulate cyberbullying at a private school in Gauteng Province, South Africa?

As I sought to answer the research question, I formulated a research aim and developed specific research objectives.

1.5 AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The aim and objectives of a study refer to what a researcher hopes to achieve and provide a framework for choosing the specific methods and techniques for data collection (Cheek 2008:762). Thomas and Hodges (2010:38) describe the term "research aim" as the main

goal or overarching purpose of a research project, and the objectives as specific statements indicating the key issues to be focused on.

1.5.1 Aim of the study

The aim with this study was to develop a research-based prototype cyberbullying policy for private schools in Gauteng, South Africa that will ensure effective regulation of cyberbullying.

1.5.2 Objectives of the study

As with most research projects, this study had specific research objectives (Thomas & Hodges 2010:38). To be able to develop a prototype school policy on cyberbullying for private schools in South Africa, I had to achieve the following objectives:

1. To establish best practices for developing an effective school policy on cyberbullying regarding three key areas: (1) best practices for a whole-school approach to policy development, (2) best practices for the policymaking process, and (3) best practices for policy content – generic elements that ensure effective policies.

2. To determine the legal framework South African private schools should consider when developing a school policy on cyberbullying.

3. To investigate cyberbullying in a private school in Gauteng, South Africa with the focus on the following:

    3.1 How does the school go about developing their school's policies?

    3.2 How is cyberbullying handled in current school policies?

    3.3 What are participants' perspectives on cyberbullying and the school's regulation thereof?

By having clear objectives, I could ensure that I stay within the boundaries of what the purpose of the research is and not deviate from that purpose.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The significance of this study rests in the importance of bridging the gap between the lack of legislation directed at cyberbullying and cyberbullying policy development. In the absence of specific legislation aimed at cyberbullying, there was a need for research into the current legislative framework within schools' cyberbullying policies that should be developed. The school at first did not have a cyberbullying policy but drafted one after I interviewed the principal. During the interview, the principal became so convinced of the need of such a policy that the school drafted one and made it available to me for analysis.

The school could thus improve their drafted policy with my input and by using my prototype policy. Using the prototype policy allowed the school to ensure it developed a cyberbullying policy that meets the needs of not just the school (from a legal standpoint), but also those of the learners (from a social perspective).

Because all schools' cyberbullying policies must adhere to the same legal framework, the prototype policy is applicable to more than just the participating institution. The prototype policy can be used by private schools to check that their cyberbullying policies comply with the existing statutory framework for the regulation of cyberbullying incidents.

The prototype cyberbullying policy is a useful tool for teachers as it contains guidelines on how to recognise and deal with cases of cyberbullying. For the learners, the benefits are that they get a clear and concise school cyberbullying policy. The study brought cyberbullying as a real problem with real-life consequences to learners' attention.

Participating in the study gave the participating school the opportunity to critically evaluate its policy development process. In addition, I made a valuable contribution to the body of knowledge on the very complex phenomenon of school policy development, which includes practical guidelines on good practices for policy development. Additionally, since I focused on policy development within a whole-school approach and provided detailed descriptions, this policymaking approach is transferable to other schools.

1.7 DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

Delimitations are boundaries the researcher sets to control the range of a study (Franklin 2016). These boundaries are set by indicating the scope of the study, conceptualising key concepts, outlining the theoretical framework, and discussing the limitations of the study.

1.7.1 Scope of the study

The focus of my study was the development of a prototype cyberbullying policy grounded in a whole-school approach. The main ideas encapsulating the whole-school approach are “that a school is a multidimensional and interactive system that involves all community members working together” (Wellbeing@School 2010:1).

The research took place at a selected private school in Roodepoort in Johannesburg West, Gauteng Province. Roodepoort dates to the 1884 Gold Rush and as a result has a unique blend of industrial and suburban areas. It is home to many private and public pre-primary, primary and secondary schools, as well as institutions of higher learning (Joburg.co.za 2021). My choice for a single case study design was based on the fact that I wanted to investigate cyberbullying in-depth in one bounded system, that is one case (one school).

I opted for a private school because as a principal at a private school, I have a unique insight into private education regulation and the formalities needed to obtain consent from the relevant parties to conduct the research and to interview people. The school’s hierarchy is as follows:

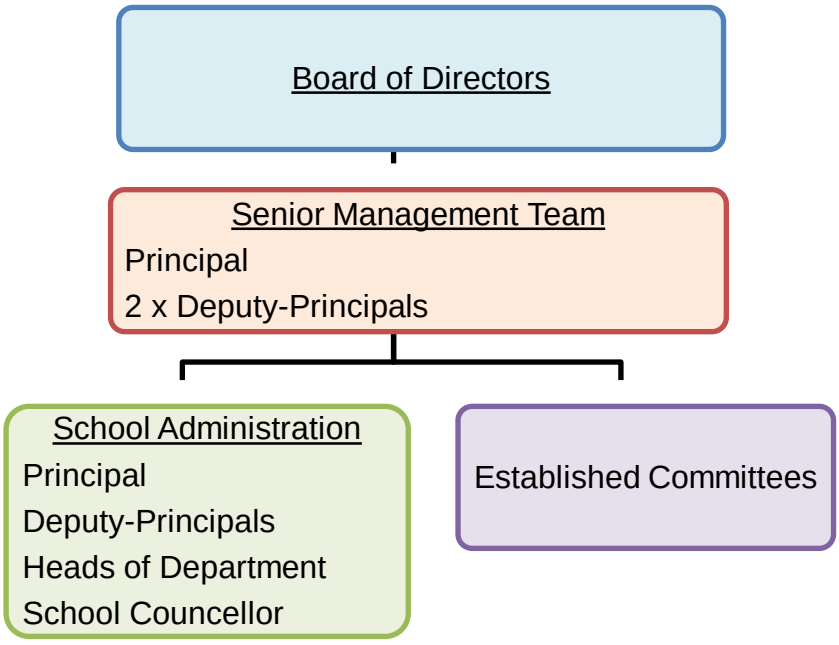

Figure 1: Schools’ hierarchy

Source: Compiled by the researcher (IM van Rooyen December 2022)

As an independent school, the school's Board of Directors established a senior management team for the day-to-day management of the school. The senior management team consists of the principal and two deputy-principals. The school also has a school administration team that includes the principal, two deputy-principals, heads of department and the school counsellor. The senior management team may establish other teams or sub-committees of the management team as the need arises. For instance, the senior management team may establish sub-committees to draft school policies. Prior to a draft policy being adopted and implemented as school policy; it must also be approved by the senior management team.

Purposive, criterion-based sampling was used to provide the best chance of selecting participants who could contribute to the study. My target population comprised three groups. The first group selected for semi-structured interviews included the principal, deputy-principal, and counsellor. The second group included a focus group discussion with the register class teachers, and the third and final group comprised the grade 8 and 9 learners. I focussed on information-rich participants whose inputs would be useful to inform the development of a cyberbullying policy. The participants are discussed in detail in chapter 3.

1.7.2 Conceptualisation and operationalisation of key concepts

LeFebvre (2017:1837) contends that concepts can be ambiguous, and researchers need to be specific and precise about the meanings attached to specific concepts. To highlight the limits and what is important to the field of cyberbullying and policy development, it is necessary to clarify the key concepts that were used in the research.

1.7.2.1 Cyberbullying

As can be deduced from the discussion above, cyberbullying has to do with the use of technology. Willard (2005:1) defines **cyberbullying** as disseminating harmful or cruel speech or engaging in other forms of social cruelty using the internet or other information communication technologies. This is then also the meaning attached to the concept in this study. Cyberbullying and its unique characteristics are discussed further in chapter 2.

1.7.2.2 Legal framework

The **legal framework** denotes the boundaries set by law and policy wherein a prototype cyberbullying policy for a private school in South Africa must be developed. For this study, it was important to keep the focus on the law and policy that regulate cyberbullying and that should be considered when developing a cyberbullying policy within a school environment. The legal framework included the human rights framework as well as the framework for managing cyberbullying at schools. The legal framework is further discussed in chapter 2.

1.7.2.3 Policy development

To comprehend **policy development** fully, one should look at the essence of both **policy** and **development** separately. According to the Oxford Dictionary, **policy** is a course of action or principle adopted or proposed by an organisation or individual (Oxford Dictionary [s.a.] sv, “policy”). For this study, policy denotes the operational document that a school uses to regulate and manage cyberbullying. According to Merriam-Webster, **development** is defined as the act, process, or result of developing (Merriam-Webster [s.a.] sv, “development”). For this study, the **development** is focused on cyberbullying policy development and indicates the process and actions used to create an operational document that private schools can adopt or adapt to regulate and manage cyberbullying.

1.7.2.4 Private school

A **school** is an institution for educating children (Oxford Dictionaries [s.a.] sv, “school”). For this study, **private school** refers to an independently owned school, established or recognised as such in terms of section 46 of the Schools Act (RSA 1996b).

1.7.2.5 School administration

An **administration** refers to a body of persons who administers and performs duties (Merriam-Webster [s.a.] sv, “administration”). The body of persons who administers and performs day-to-day duties in a school will include the senior management team members, heads of departments, and the school counsellor (cf. figure 1). For this study **school administration** refers to the principal, deputy-principal, and the school counsellor.

1.7.2.6 Senior management team

The **senior management team** refers to managers at the highest level of a company or organisation (Cambridge Dictionary [s.a.] sv, “senior management”). Team members of the senior management team are individuals who are responsible for the day-to-day management of an organisation and who administer and perform executive duties. The senior management team consists of the principal and deputy-principals.

1.7.3 Theoretical framework

A theoretical framework is a structure that guides research by relying on a formal theory, constructed by using an established, coherent explanation of certain phenomena and relationships (Grant & Osanloo 2014:13). Botha (2013:11) explains that the term “theory” relates to ideas and views, as formulated by individuals, regarding a certain scientific area (in this case policy development). A theory usually consists of several assumptions and presuppositions, which are established as a theory by means of research (Botha 2013:11). A “whole-school approach” was used to frame the research. I introduced the whole-school development approach briefly here but expound further in section 2.5. Whole-school development is more than improving buildings or material resources, it focuses on the all-inclusive, collaborative development and improvement of all aspects of a school (Rabichund 2011:83). According to Smith, Schneider, Smith, and Ananiadou (2004:547), whole-school programmes with multiple mechanisms that operate concurrently can be more effective than single component programmes. A recent study conducted by Gabrielli, Rizzi, Carbone and Piras (2021) confirmed this. These researchers discovered that whole-school interventions like class rules, sanctions, teacher training, and counselling are effective in preventing bullying.

Because cyberbullying shares some of the elements of traditional bullying (Coffman 2011:1) initiatives from traditional bullying programmes may be used to reduce cyberbullying. Friendly Schools (2014) have identified six elements as part of a multi-component, whole-school initiative to reduce bullying.

The six elements are:

- *Building capacity* – This component deals with the features that will sustain progress over time.

- *Supportive school culture* – Safety, security, and open communication between all the stakeholders in the school environment requires a supportive school culture.

- *Proactive policies and practices* – This component provide schools with a framework to guide members of staff on dealing with incidents of bullying.

- *Key understandings and competencies* – Raising understanding about bullying is essential to build effective skills to deal with bullying.

- *Protective physical environment* – Considering the functional, structural, and built features of a school is a component that reinforces the importance of schools being safe but functional spaces.

- *School-family-community partnerships* – This part underlines how important it is for family and community service providers to take responsibility for the problem of cyberbullying. These service providers include a range of organisations, such as the local police, hospitals and clinics, and other departments that have crucial roles to play in preventing and in helping and educating those who have been impacted by cyberbullying.

One can thus conclude that schools can boost their chances of successfully mitigating the risk of cyberbullying by integrating all stakeholders, offering training for school staff, and formulating and defining policies through a whole-school approach.

1.7.4 Assumptions

According to the University of Louisville (2023), assumptions are ideas, beliefs, or "guesses" that the researcher makes without realising it and which the researcher attempts to prove through research. Simon (2011), describe assumptions as representing elements that lie beyond the researcher's direct influence. Assumptions should not merely be presented as declarations but instead demand substantiation, grounded in the plausibility that each assumption possesses a reasonable degree of validity (Simon 2011).

The following assumptions were made in this dissertation:

1. Principals are aware of cyberbullying as a problem in their schools.

2. Cyberbullying is dealt with by using a policy of some kind; either cyberbullying is covered in the general bullying policy or there is a separate cyberbullying policy.
3. Schools do not know how to handle “off campus” incidents of cyberbullying.

Because assumptions are the foundation of research, they must be used for research to be credible and valid. Taking assumptions into account has a direct impact on your ability to draw reasonable conclusions from your research, therefore the research problem cannot exist without assumptions.

1.8 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Brynard, Hanekom and Brynard (2015:30) describe **research methodology** as the strategy for the research. Research methodology refers to the various specific procedures or techniques used to plan and conduct research (Keenan 2020:2). Because a literature review frames the research and provides a point of reference when collecting and analysing the data, it provides the best starting point in the exposition of research methodology.

1.8.1 Literature review

A literature review is a systematic review of previous works on a specific topic (Card 2012:726). Except for the obvious emphasis on cyberbullying, the literature reviewed included:

- policy development theories, with an emphasis on the whole-school approach
- current available literature on school policy development including best practices for developing a new school policy
- generic elements for an effective school cyberbullying policy

Whereas the literature review frames the current research within the framework of existing literature on the topic, the research paradigm frames the researcher's approach and methodological choices. As a result, it makes sense to start with the research paradigm before delving into my research methodology choices.

1.8.2 Research paradigm

A **paradigm** is a pattern of commonly held theories or assumptions, which serve as examples or patterns to guide the researcher (Brynard et al 2015:5). De Vos, Delport, Fouché and Strydom (2011:40) define a **paradigm** as a model or pattern containing a set of legitimate assumptions, and a design for collecting and interpreting data.

Every researcher will have his or her own views of what constitutes “true” knowledge, and as a researcher my assumptions about the world and knowledge in general receive direction from critical realism. Critical realism sees truth as existing (alethic truth), but sometimes unknowable. Knowledge, therefore, is our best approximation of the alethic truth. When it comes to education it is argued that critical realism’s conception of truth provides the most useful basis for democratic education in a multicultural context, such as South Africa (Higgs & Smith 2017:117-123). Critical realism acknowledges the fact that social reality is often flawed and in need of change, and it claims that educational endeavour (including educational research) can help to critique and bring about social change (Higgs & Smith 2017:130). Wynn and Williams (2012:789) describe critical realism as an existing reality whether we are aware of it or not and it may or may not be measurable or observable. Critical realists argue that our view on reality is based on our beliefs and current knowledge and, therefore, is fallible and subject to revision (Wynn & Williams 2012:789).

For this study, critical realism was the best paradigm as it focuses on two realities. The reality of the objective world, (laws, policies, governing bodies, and organisations that govern the natural order of events) and the subjective reality of human thought and action (the perceived reality of the objective world by everyone). Both are very important in developing a prototype cyberbullying policy. It enabled me to research current knowledge on law related topics, the school, policy development and cyberbullying that is accepted in a social world but acknowledges that it is just our best approximation of what society deems to be true or correct. The “critical” part in critical realism allowed me to critically analyse current policies and their perceived acceptance by a particular society, as well as current policy development practices, and to further develop new policies and determine best practices in developing a prototype cyberbullying policy.

1.8.3 Research approach

Creswell (2014:31) defines **research approach** as “the plans and the procedures for research that span the steps from broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection, analysis and interpretation”. Researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection methods, for example semi-structured interviews, focus group, open-ended questioning and so on that need to be analysed for multiple or overlying themes by means of inductive or deductive data analysis, and finally making an interpretation, asking “What were the lessons learned?” (Creswell 2014:31).

Qualitative research refers to an in-depth study using face-to-face or observation techniques to collect data from people in their natural settings (McMillan & Schumacher 2014:26). The face-to-face techniques I used during my interviews included establishing rapport with the participants, actively listening, asking open-ended questions, using probing techniques, being flexible and adaptable, taking notes, respecting confidentiality, and practising ethical considerations.

The following table by McMillan and Schumacher gives a summary of some of the key characteristics of qualitative research.

Table 1: Key characteristics of qualitative research

Characteristic	Description
Natural setting	Study of behaviour as it occurs or occurred naturally
Direct data collection	Researcher collects data directly from the source
Rich narrative description	Detailed narratives that provide in-depth understanding of behaviour
Inductive data analysis	Generalisations are induced from synthesising gathered information
Participant perspectives	Focus on participants’ understanding, descriptions, labels, and meanings.
Emergent design	Design evolves and changes as the study takes place.

Source: McMillan & Schumacher (2014:345)

By using an exploratory qualitative case study research design, I was able to collect data in a natural setting directly from the principal, deputy-principal, school counsellor, register class teachers, and learners. From the collected data I provided a contextualised

understanding of the school's approach to policy development, cyberbullying, and the regulation thereof. Following the first interview, I was already a driving force behind the creation of a cyberbullying policy, which was then further developed during the research.

1.8.4 Researcher's role and positionality

As a qualitative researcher I was an active participant in my own research. Even though I used different techniques and tools to collect data, I remained the primary data collection "tool" that decided what should be included in the research report. I decided what questions to ask, remained involved in discussions, probed deeper into complex situations, and collected any data relevant to my research. As a principal involved in policy development and managing cyberbullying cases, I had to set aside any biases and suppress my own beliefs to allow participants to express their own opinions. As a qualitative researcher seeking to ascertain the participants' perspectives, I needed to remain as objective as possible.

One way for social researchers to stay objective during research is to be reflexive. Researchers need to aspire to detach themselves from the research and at the same time to accept that it is impossible. Thus, qualitative researchers are expected to reflect on their own position in their research with the aim to stay objective. Berger (2013:220) defines reflexivity as an "continual internal dialogue" that requires the researcher to critically self-evaluate his or her positionality during the research process. It thus refers to how a researcher reflects on personal experiences and relationships that may influence how he or she reacts to a research situation (Jamieson, Govaart & Pownall 2023:2) and interprets participants' responses. Jamieson et al (2023:2) refers to reflexivity as the idea that something or someone that is being studied is naturally affected by the act of observation.

When gathering and analysing data and formulating results, I achieved reflexivity by constantly and critically self-evaluating my position, personal opinions, and knowledge of the topic. To conclude: To ensure objectivity, ethical integrity of the research process and findings that are not compromised by self-interest, I acknowledged my own self in the study and sought to understand my part in the study by being critical about my research methods, values, and presumptions about my research topic. I continually referred to my objectives to make certain I stayed on topic.

1.8.5 Research design

McMillan and Schumacher (2014:6-28) state that a **research design** includes the plan for conducting research, specifying the necessary measures, and describing procedures for collecting and analysing data, emphasizing both the setup and the conditions of the study. Fouché and Delport (2011a:73) define a research design as the plan or the "logical arrangements" developed to meet the unique requirements of a study. A research design must be clear and detailed enough that if someone wants to conduct the same research under the same conditions, would know exactly what to do (Fouché & Delport 2011b:109-110). It thus plays an essential role in ensuring transferability (cf. section ??).

As mentioned above, an exploratory qualitative case study design was used, which is naturally descriptive and immersive and afforded me the freedom needed to be immersed in the research and answer the how and why questions. Rashid et al (2019:1) describe a case study design as a qualitative design that has the advantage of allowing researchers to examine intricate phenomena within a specific context. Fouché and Schurink (2011:321) explain that a case study is the exploration and description of a case that takes place through detailed, in-depth data collection methods that include a multitude of sources that are rich in context. The following are some of the advantages of a case study described by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018:379) and relevant to a study focused on the development of a cyberbullying policy:

- There is a strong correlation between the case study data and the researcher's own experience.
- Using a case study design, the researcher can gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied.
- It is 'a step to action' approach. Insights from the case may be directly interpreted and used for educational policymaking.
- Case studies allow for a simple presentation of data.

A qualitative case study design was suitable to conceive my research, as it afforded me to explore the social phenomenon of cyberbullying through the participants' perspectives within their natural environment (Saxena 2021:39).

The term **case study** refers to a research design that involves closely studying one or a few cases (Tight 2017:6). In this study, a single case study design was used. The specific

case was the school, which was examined in detail within its context, focusing on its complexity and limitations (Tight 2017:6). Understanding the case thoroughly is crucial in case study research because it provides contextual information to interpret results, provides a comprehensive view, helps identify patterns and relationships, and informs the practical consequences and decision-making in the policy development context.

In the participating school, the school's Board of Directors established a senior management team to govern the school. One of the functions allocated to this senior management team is to establish sub-committees, as the need arises, to draft school policies. The senior management team also has the responsibility to approve the final policy. Just like the school governing body of a public school (RSA 1996b, s 8), the sub-committee and senior management team of the participating school are tasked with the adoption of the school's Code of Conduct for learners. They are required to follow the same legal prescripts and to ensure the code aims to create a structured, purposeful learning atmosphere that is committed to enhancing and maintaining the quality of the educational experience and provides for due process during disciplinary proceedings (RSA 1996b, ss 8(2), (3), (5)); thus, giving expression to the learners' right to just administrative justice (cf. section 2.3).

1.8.6 Population, sampling, and research setting

Gray (2014:688) defines a **research population** as "the totality of people, organisations, objects or occurrences from which the sample is drawn". Or as Brynard et al (2015:57) explain, a group of individuals in the universe that share the same specific characteristics for the research the researcher is doing. The target population for the study included the principal, deputy-principal, school counsellor, the grade 8 and grade 9 educators, and learners between the ages of 14 and 15 years of age.

Sampling is a technique employed to select a small group that display the same characteristics as the population (Brynard et al 2015:57). To make the research more manageable and practical, I used purposive sampling to select the participants from the research population. Purposive sampling enabled me to select a sample that, as Strydom and Delport (2011:392) and Brynard et al (2015:56) recommend, represents the population, best displays the characteristics or properties of the population, and serves the purpose of the study.

Using purposive sampling allowed me to select participants that were fit for purpose and provided me with rich data; thereby increasing the authenticity of the research. In qualitative research, the sampling process requires purposeful selection. To substantiate the notion of "purposefulness," different sampling techniques are employed. To ensure that participants were fit for purpose, I used criterion sampling to select what Cohen et al (2018:219) described as participants that match a specific criterion being studied. Also, Palinkas et al (2015:1) are of the opinion that participants that meet the specific criteria by virtue of their experience will make information-rich participants.

Information-rich participants in this research included policy makers, victims of cyberbullying, cyberbullies and the counsellor. The principal and deputy-principal were selected as part of the sample as they are responsible for the school's day-to-day functioning and the management of the staff and the policies. Central to school governance is the Board of Directors. Unfortunately, none of the board members opted to participate in the research, they felt that since they are not involved in school policy development, they would not be able to make a valuable contribution to the research. The participation of the school counsellor was essential because he had to support participants who exhibit emotional distress or problems related to the research. The inclusion of the counsellor was further important because counsellors have a wealth of knowledge to support victims of cyberbullying, as well as how to rehabilitate cyberbullies, which is essential for any cyberbullying policy.

The register class teachers are in direct contact with the learners and build special relationships with them that have a direct influence on learner behaviour and motivation (Murray & Greenberg 2000:424). As such, learners often disclose personal or private matters related to their lives to register class teachers, which is very important in identifying issues related to cyberbullying.

Finally, the learner participants were sampled from the grades 8 and 9 classes (ages 14 to 15). Research conducted by Smit (2015:3) has shown that the highest percentage of learners involved in cyberbullying, either as victims or perpetrators of cyberbullying, are in this age category. I included the learners' views on cyberbullying to develop the prototype cyberbullying policy not just for the school but also for the learners.

In a study of this nature, one should also consider the participants' ability to provide information on the school's policymaking process. According to the South African Standard for Principalship (RSA 2014:12), one of the obligations of a principal is to ensure that all school policies, including those adopted by the school governing bodies, comply with current educational legislation and policy. However, Shieh (2023:14) argues that there is limited understanding of how teachers participate in the policymaking process within everyday school settings. Although teachers are essential to policy implementation and enactment, their involvement in policymaking remains a contradiction. To promote democratic governance, Umoh (2022:9-27) advocates for the inclusion of all stakeholders, including teachers, counsellors, and learners, in the policymaking process. This is also emphasised in the National Policy Framework (2020:19), which recognises that participation in policymaking is a constitutional right.

According to Bhattacharya (2008:787) the **research setting** is the physical site where the research takes place. Bailey and Burch (2011:23) describe a "research setting" as a place where the researcher can achieve his or her research objectives. The setting for this study was in a natural environment at the participating school in Roodepoort, Johannesburg West, South Africa.

1.8.7 Data collection methods

Following the suggestions of Trigueros and Sandoval (2017:1) on the questions that a researcher must reflect on when selecting data-collection methods, I asked myself the following questions:

- What am I really planning to find out? – Without knowing what I was trying to discover, my research would have had no purpose. As a result of asking this question, I was able to decide on the direction and outcome of my research.
- How am I going to observe the target population? – As a result of asking the "how" question, I was able to plan when, where, and how information would be gathered from participants.
- What is the best tool to observe certain variables or indicators? – When conducting research, a variety of tools can be used to collect information. By asking this question I could plan well in advance what methods and tools would be most appropriate to use to gather the information I needed for my research.

I used the following data collection methods: Document study, document analysis of court reports, the school's Cyberbullying Policy, the policy according to which the internal policies at the school are developed, implemented, and reviewed, semi-structured interviews, qualitative open-ended questionnaires, and a focus group discussion. Though I analysed the Policy for the Development, Implementation and Review of Internal Policies and the Cyberbullying Policy, I also had to consult the Discipline Policy, Counselling Centre Policy, Social Media Policy, Staff Matters Policy and the Computer and Network Usage Policy during this analysis. This had to be done to determine whether the school's policies talk to each other as is required by a whole-school approach (cf. section 4.5.2). Table 2 below summarises the objectives in relation to the data-collection methods.

Table 2: Data collection methods

Objective	Literature review, data collection methods and instruments	Participants
Objective 1: To establish the essential elements of and best practices for developing an effective school policy on cyberbullying within a whole-school framework.	Literature review.	None.
Objective 2: To determine the legal framework South African private schools should consider when developing a school policy on cyberbullying.	Document study of law and policy relevant to the regulation of cyberbullying and development of a cyberbullying policy in private schools. Document analysis of court reports.	None.
Objective 3: To investigate cyberbullying in a private school in Gauteng, South Africa with the focus on: **3.1** How the school went about developing their school's cyberbullying policy. **3.2** How cyberbullying is dealt with in current school policies. **3.3** How participants perceive cyberbullying and the school's regulation thereof?	Document analysis of the school's Cyberbullying Policy and its Policy on the Development, Implementation and Review of Internal Policies, Staff Matters Policy, Counselling Centre Policy, Computer and Network Usage Policy.	None.
	Semi-structured interviews.	School principal, deputy-principal, and school counsellor.
	Qualitative open-ended questionnaire.	49 Learners.
	Focus group discussion.	5 Register class teachers.

Source: Compiled by the researcher (IM van Rooyen August 2019)

Document study: I conducted a document study on human rights laws with particular focus on national and international children's rights law that private schools in South Africa must consider when developing a cyberbullying policy for their schools. The document study included the Constitution, relevant national laws and policies and International Human Rights Instruments that were domesticated into South African law.

Document analysis: Document analysis can be defined as a systematic procedure of analysing documentary evidence to answer specific research questions, especially questions about policy, cultural context and organisations and is often used to triangulate findings with other data sources (Gross 2018:545). Bowen (2009:31) lists some of the advantages of document analysis:

- *Efficient*: Document analysis involves examining existing documents, records, or data that have already been created or collected. This eliminates the need for researchers to spend time and effort on collecting data from scratch, such as conducting interviews or surveys, which can be time-consuming and resource-intensive.
- *Accessibility:* Many documents are in the public domain and are obtainable without the authors' permission.
- *Cost-effective:* Document analysis is less costly than other research methods and is often the method of choice when the collection of new data is not feasible.
- *Unobtrusive:* Documents are 'unobtrusive' — that is, they are unaffected by the research process.
- *Stable:* As a corollary to being non-reactive, documents are stable. The researcher's presence does not alter what is being studied.
- *Exactness:* The inclusion of exact names, references and details makes documents advantageous in the research process.
- *Coverage:* Documents can provide a broad coverage of information.

For this study, I analysed the school's Cyberbullying Policy and its Policy on the Development, Implementation and Review of Internal Policies. This provided me with additional data on the school's policy development process and how the school regulates cyberbullying.

In the absence of a legal framework for policy developers to guide them, and for the comprehensive coverage of a cyberbullying policy, I analysed court case reports related to human rights – the right to freedom of expression in particular, and cyberbullying. I analysed relevant case law to determine how courts interpret cyberbullying and the right to freedom of expression.

Semi-structured interviews: Cohen et al (2018:502) describe interviews as enabling participants to discuss their interpretations of the world, and how they regard conditions from their point of view. In other words, an interview is to gather the participant's understanding on a given topic and not necessarily facts (Warren 2011:83). The interview process is an important data gathering technique, generally used in survey designs and in exploratory and descriptive studies (Mathers, Fox & Hunn 2000:1). Interviews are conducted with a representative sample of a larger population, drawn methodically so that the findings will be generalisable to that population (Warren 2011:88). Semi-structured interviews are especially suitable in gaining the views or perceptions on complex topics (Greeff 2011:351) like cyberbullying or policy development. Semi-structured interviews worked best for my study, since I could structure the interview questions to suit the research, at the same time allowing participants to elaborate on issues I had not initially thought of. Semi-structured interviews were done on an individual basis. Using a series of predetermined but open-ended questions, typical of qualitative, semi-structured interviews (Ayres 2012:811), to interview the principal, deputy-principal, and the school counsellor, aided me in extracting data that are aligned with the research sub-questions and related objectives.

Focus group discussion: A focus group discussion is a technique used by qualitative researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of complex social issues (Nyumba, Wilson, Derrick & Mukherjee 2018:20). "A focus group helps to better understand how people feel or think about an issue; therefore, focus group members are selected based on the certain characteristics that they have in common related to the topic" (Greeff 2011:360). In this case the focus group participants have the common characteristic of being register class teachers for the grades 8 and 9 learners. The grades 8 and 9 register class teachers see the learners daily, giving them valuable inside information on learners' struggles with cyberbullying.

During a focus group, the participants interacted with one another rather than with the researcher. That way the views of the participants emerged unspoiled by the views of the researcher (Cohen et al 2018:532). Focus groups are less formal than interviews and are usually unstructured (Baral, Uprety & Lamichhane 2016:1). Focus groups still require careful planning for participants to feel comfortable and open to discuss the planned topics. According to Cohen et al (2018:532), focus group discussions are useful because it allows for:

- developing guides with flexible themes and topics to use during subsequent discussions
- generating data quickly and at low cost
- gathering data on attitudes, values, and opinions
- empowering participants to speak out, and in their own words
- encouraging groups, rather than individuals, to voice opinions
- providing greater coverage of issues
- triangulating with other forms of data

One other form of data with which I triangulated the focus group data, is the data extracted by way of open-ended questionnaires.

Qualitative open-ended questionnaire: In a school setting, where learners could be in the same room as the cyberbully, it could prove to be very difficult to extract information from the learners by means of data-collection methods such as focus groups. Also, conducting interviews on a sensitive topic such as cyberbullying may result in learners not being willing to participate. For these reasons, a qualitative open-ended questionnaire was regarded the best suited method to collect data from learners. Open-ended questions were preferred because, as Roulston (2008:582) indicates, these questions allow research participants to select how they want to contribute to the research topic. Open-ended questions provide participants the opportunity to construct their descriptions and researchers cannot make presumptions about the participants' answers (Roulston 2008:582). When participants answer open-ended questions, they have the freedom to elaborate on topics the researcher might not have considered, thus providing valuable information (Kumar 2014:186).

1.8.8 Data analysis and interpretation

Schurink, Fouché and De Vos (2011:397) define data analysis as a process that brings order, structure and meaning to the collected data. It is central to the credibility of any qualitative study (Maguire & Delahunt 2017:3351). McMillan and Schumacher (2014:395) further characterise qualitative data analysis as an inductive process of organising data into categories and identifying patterns and relationships among these categories. One of the approaches to data analysis is content analysis. Hsieh and Shannon (2005:1277) explain that content analysis can be used deductively to test a theory in different scenarios or to compare categories. It is a method that ranges from analytical to systematic textual analysis (Hsieh & Shannon 2005:1277). I decided to use content analysis as my method for analysing the data because, as Cohen et al (2018:675-675) indicate, it is a reliable, objective, versatile, and time-efficient method of data analysis. As such it enabled me to analyse large amounts of data in a systematic and consistent manner. Content analysis involves reducing text into categories and emerging themes, categorising, comparing, and drawing theoretical conclusions from the collected data (Cohen et al 2018:675). Because of the large volume of information, I collected during the study, I used predetermined codes that I developed from existing literature (literature review, court reports) to code the data I collected during the semi-structured interviews, focus group discussion and with the qualitative open-ended questionnaire. The codes were used to develop categories and only by analysing the categories carefully, was I able to see emerging themes as discussed in chapter 4.

1.9 STRUCTURE OF THE FINAL RESEARCH REPORT

Chapter 1 contains an overview of and orientation to the study. In this chapter I discuss the background and motivation for the study, describe the research problem and objectives, explain the research method, and clarify the delimitation of the study.

In chapter 2, cyberbullying literature is reviewed. I consider the question: What do we know about cyberbullying and what is missing from the literature? A document study was done to establish the legal provisions (law and policy) that a private school in South Africa must consider when developing its school's cyberbullying policy. Furthermore, I studied literature on policy development with the focus on a whole-school approach, the policymaking process and generic policy elements.

Where I focus on introducing and explaining my choices regarding the research methodology in chapter 1, I explain how I implemented these methods in chapter 3.

Chapter 4 deals with the data presentation, analysis, and interpretation and contains my research findings.

Chapter 5 contains the conclusions, recommendations, and limitations of the study. Conclusions were drawn, and the main findings have been reported. A recommendation for further research was made.

1.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations are concerned with beliefs about what is right or wrong from a moral perspective (McMillan & Schumacher 2014:129). These authors explain that research ethics are focused on what is morally proper and improper when engaging with participants. Firstly, I obtained permission from the school principal to conduct research at the school and to approach the prospective participants.

McMillan and Schumacher (2014:3) define **consent** as obtaining agreement from individuals to participate in research before the research begins. However, the consent will not be legally binding if it is not informed. As Parsons (2018:822) states, informed consent is the bedrock of ethical procedure. To ensure the consent was “informed”, the school and the prospective participants received clear and detailed information about the study. Seeking informed consent from minors entails a dual process of first obtaining consent from the learners’ legal guardians and then assent from the prospective learner participants themselves. Participants were informed that participation was not compulsory, and that they could withdraw without any consequences at any time during the study. Participants must be protected, and this was achieved by the following three means suggested by McMillan and Schumacher (2014:133): 1) ensuring anonymity, 2) protecting confidentiality, and 3) appropriately storing the data.

The qualitative open-ended questionnaire used for the learners were depersonalised. To ensure that there was no link between the information and the participants through which participants could be identified, I assigned numbers to the participants so that I am the only one who could link the biographical information to the specific learner. All the data was captured in a password protected Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. I applied for, and

ethical clearance was granted by the Unisa College of Education's Research Ethics Committee (Appendix A).

The table below is a summary of the steps I took to obtain consent and assent from the research participants to conduct the research.

Table 3: Summary table for obtaining consent and assent

Consent / assent	**Consent / assent granted**
Information letter with permission request and consent form for the principal	**(Appendix B)**
Consent form for interviewees	**(Appendix E)**
Consent form and confidentiality agreement for register class teachers	**(Appendix G)**
Assent forms	**(Appendix I)**
Consent form for parents of minors	**(Appendix K)**

Source: Compiled by the researcher (IM van Rooyen August 2019)

Plagiarism is defined as using someone else's work and presenting it as your own (Brynard et al 2015:96). Every effort was taken to ensure authors were referenced and acknowledged. I adhered to all Unisa's policies regarding plagiarism, ran the dissertation through Turnitin to check for unoriginal content and received a score within acceptable bounds.

1.11 TRUSTWORTHINESS

The Oxford Dictionary (2018, sv "trustworthiness") defines "trustworthiness" as the ability to be honest or truthful. In other words, making the process acceptable and credible.

Smit (2012) lists the following as pre-requisites for trustworthiness:

- Transferability – be aware of the scope of the study and its applicability to other contexts.
- Credibility – accurately and richly describe the phenomenon in question and make sure the data have been accurately represented.
- Dependability – lay out the procedures and research instruments for other researchers to attempt similar results under similar conditions.

- Confirmability – ensure interpretations and findings are supported by the data.
- Coherence – deliver quality research that is consistent and logical.
- Sampling adequacy – ensure the sample relates to the purpose of the research.

By, inter alia, defining the parameters of the research, indicating the research methodology, following the Unisa guidelines, submitting the research for peer review to be evaluated by qualified experts, and providing feedback and recommendations I achieved the expected level of trustworthiness (cf. section 3.6).

1.12 CHAPTER 1 CONCLUSION

With the continuing growth and integration of technology into our daily lives, principals will need comprehensive policies to regulate and prevent cyberbullying at their schools. When schools must consider a policy for the regulation of cyberbullying, they face a tremendous obstacle in having to balance one individual's human rights against another's rights. In this chapter, I focused on the overview and orientation of the study. In the section on the background, I briefly discuss the complex nature and devastating effects of cyberbullying and deliberate the motivation for the study as well as the problem statement. The discussion of the research design and methodology in this chapter serves only as an introduction and framework. A more detailed discussion on the implementation of such is offered in chapter 3.

CHAPTER 2: DOCUMENT STUDY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I present the data from the document study and the information from the literature review on the development of a cyberbullying policy for private schools in South Africa in an integrated manner. The document study and literature review were integrated to improve cohesion and flow of argument because my research focuses on the development of one specific policy; the development of which will be framed by both the legal framework and existing literature. An integrated approach was thus logically called for.

A document study is the systematic process of reviewing legal literature on a specific topic or theme that will frame the researcher's study (Card 2012:726). I studied legal literature to establish the legal requirements (law and policy) that a private school in South Africa must consider when developing its school's cyberbullying policy. The Constitution, pertinent legislation and policies, and international human rights instruments that were domesticated into South African law were all included in the document study.

The literature review framed the research and provided a point of reference when data was collected, analysed, and interpreted. While conducting a review of the literature, I researched best practices for developing an effective school policy on cyberbullying within a whole-school framework. This approach involves considering best practices for the policymaking process, best practices for policy content – generic elements that ensure effective policies.

I researched a whole-school approach to policy development, which highlights the importance of involving all stakeholders in the policymaking process. This includes engaging learners, parents, teachers, and other school staff in the development and implementation of policies related to cyberbullying. This collaborative approach ensures that the policy is comprehensive, inclusive, and reflects the needs and perspectives of the entire school community.

I also examined best practices for the policymaking process, which involve using evidence-based strategies and aligning policies with relevant laws, regulations, and

guidelines. Policies should be clear, concise, and easily understandable to all stakeholders.

Furthermore, I researched best practices for the generic content and elements of effective cyberbullying policies. Generic policy development elements refer to the essential elements that are commonly included in the process of creating or developing a policy. These elements typically include stating the purpose or intent of the policy, defining the scope or applicability of the policy, providing clear definitions of key terms or concepts, establishing guiding principles or values, outlining responsibilities and roles, detailing procedures, or actions to be followed.

By doing a document study and a literature review I established the framework I needed for the policy development process.

2.2 CONCEPTUALISING CYBERBULLYING

In the following section, I discuss the definitions and characteristics of cyberbullying. Conceptualising cyberbullying involves researching the definitions, characteristics and understanding and effects of cyberbullying. Understanding the definition and effects of cyberbullying is crucial in developing effective strategies to prevent, detect, and manage cyberbullying. The effects of cyberbullying can be far-reaching and detrimental, resulting in psychological, emotional, and social harm for the victims.

2.2.1 Definitions and characteristics of cyberbullying

The advancement of technology has transformed the way today's youth interact with one another and the world around them (Noah 2012:1). The so-called "digital generation" has embraced all the new technologies, becoming both users and producers of digital content (Montgomery 2007:8). Although the use of the internet and social media platforms is associated with a multitude of benefits, the ubiquity of internet and social media is also associated with considerable negative implications (Safaria 2016:82). The negative implications are closely related to the unique nature of cyberbullying, e.g., the differences between traditional and cyberbullying.

Even though cyberbullying can be defined using terms typically associated with traditional bullying (such as repeated negative behaviours and efforts to inflict hurt or harm), there are still critical distinctions to be made between the two types of bullying (Coffman

2011:1). The main difference between cyberbullying and traditional bullying can be found in the fact that cyberbullying includes the use of technology as an instrument to harass via email, in chat rooms, on social networking websites, and with text messaging through their computer or cell phone (Patchin & Hinduja 2011:727). Donegan (2012:34), Payne and Van Belle (2017:3), and Shariff and Hoff (2007:77) distinguish between traditional bullying and cyberbullying in that the cyberbully can strike anytime of the day or night with complete anonymity and the capacity to reach a large audience instantaneously. The anonymity of cyberbullying, as well as the fact that the victim cannot isolate and protect himself or herself as easily as in traditional bullying, generates a sense of being imprisoned and powerless (Cohen-Almagor 2022:9). Cyberbullying has a greater propensity to become group bullying than traditional bullying and even a person who does not know the victim can become involved. An extreme level of harm can be caused in a much shorter time than in the instance of traditional bullying (Cohen-Almagor 2022:8). Baraldo and Chetty (2018:30) investigated the dynamics of traditional bullying and cyberbullying, and the overlap between the two and discovered that cyberbullying frequently begins offline in a face-to-face manner before moving online.

Though there are numerous definitions of cyberbullying (Camacho, Hassanein & Head 2014:133), all include some form of violence or harassment (Burton & Mutongwizo 2009:1). The CJCP defines **cyberbullying** as repeated, hostile, and deliberate acts against someone, that may include one or more people using electronic media (Burton & Mutongwizo 2009:1). Kift, Campbell and Butler (2010:62) describe **cyberbullying** as "the use of information and communication technologies to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behaviour by an individual or group that is intended to harm others". Drawing from the aforementioned definitions, for the purpose of this study, cyberbullying is defined as a deliberate exploitation of technology to harass, harm, intimidate or humiliate another individual, which can manifest in various forms such as spreading false rumours, sharing private or embarrassing media content, or sending threatening messages or emails, and can transpire across several digital platforms including social media, email, text messaging, and online gaming. It must be mentioned though, that in a more recent study it was concluded that the criteria of repetition in the definition of cyberbullying must be eliminated, and that one incident is enough to have an emotional impact on the victim (Walker 2016:105). This is a contention that I support since, as Slonje and Smith (2008:154) indicate, taking a picture or video and distributing it only once has the potential

of being forwarded to multiple people in cyberspace, creating a new incident of cyberbullying every time it is shared. Due to the potential harm that one act can cause, repetition should be excluded from cyberbullying. Cyberspace allows sharing and forwarding, there is a potential harm associated with it. Thus, a learner may have committed only one cyberbullying act when he or she cyberbullied. This is because others then shared or forwarded the post. Therefore, the harm inflicted by the one cyberbullying act, is the same as if the cyberbully has repeatedly bullied him or herself. In this case, only one act qualifies as cyberbullying, so repetition is either going to occur or has the potential to occur and should not be considered a prerequisite for cyberbullying. Based on the premise that a single act could be considered repetitive each time it is accessed or watched, Langos (2012:286) supports the idea of eliminating repetition as a constituting element of cyberbullying.

The two main divisions of cyberbullying are direct and indirect cyberbullying. “Direct” cyberbullying occurs privately, for example, when the bully sends messages to the victim via private messages, such as SMS messages or emails. “Indirect” cyberbullying occurs where the bully does not post directly to the victim but rather enlists the help of others to abuse the victim by posting to websites like MySpace, Facebook, Instagram, or another public cyberspace area (Langos 2012:286). Both direct and indirect cyberbullying can take the following forms (Badenhorst 2011:2; Willard 2005:1):

- **Flaming** – Sending angry, rude vulgar messages
- **Harassment** – Repeated sending of offensive messages
- **Cyberstalking** – Repeated sending of threats of harm
- **Denigration** – Posting untrue or rude comments, posting altered photos (as was done in *Le Roux v Dey*). The purpose with these posts is to harm the victim’s reputation and/or relationships.
- **Impersonation** – Masquerading as someone else. This could also include instance where a victim’s information is digitally stolen and used by another to pose as the victim.
- **Outing and trickery** – Distributing material that contains sensitive, private information or engaging in tricks to solicit embarrassing information that is then made public.
- **Exclusion** – Intentionally excluding a person from an online group.

From the above cyberbullying contains enough unique characteristics that it cannot be placed completely in the same category as traditional bullying and therefore needs to be regulated with a separate set of rules and guidelines.

2.2.2 Effects of cyberbullying

Maurya et al (2022) demonstrated in their study that individuals who experience cyberbullying exhibit an increased propensity for experiencing feelings of sadness and harbouring self-harm ideation. Furthermore, the deleterious consequences associated with cyberbullying persist over an extended duration. Cyberbullying can have a negative impact on victims. Victims might experience feelings of depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, physiological problems, concentration problems, school failure and avoidance by peers. In a study done on the prevention of cyberbullying among learners and college students, Hackett (2016) concluded that cyberbullying is associated with a wide range of negative consequences, including emotional distress, mental health issues and even heart disease. Johnson (2011:116) determined that there is a positive correlation between being cyberbullied and suffering from anxiety and depression. Interestingly, the review of studies dealing with self-harm, suicidal behaviours, and cyberbullying by John et al (2018) referred to above, brought to light that not just the victims of cyberbullying but also the perpetrators of cyberbullying are at greater risk of self-harm and suicidal behaviours than those not involved in cyberbullying at all. Hence, empowering cyberbullying victims with the necessary tools to cope with the negative effects, such as depression and self-harm, is crucial. Prevention programmes that emphasise coping self-efficacy, including assertiveness skills and fostering healthy self-esteem, can play a vital role in equipping victims with resilience and strategies to navigate the psychological and emotional challenges associated with cyberbullying.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2021) define healthy development as the holistic well-being of a child, including those with special needs. It emphasises that children should be able to grow up in an environment where their social, emotional, and educational needs are met, regardless of their abilities.

Healthy development is dependent on school completion and regular school attendance (Dube & Orpinas 2009:87). In her study on the effects of absenteeism on learners' performance, Khalid (2017:166) concluded that poor class attendance has a negative

effect on learners' academic performance. Since absenteeism is high among learners who are victims of cyberbullying, it is reasonable to conclude that academic performance and healthy development will be negatively impacted (Johnson 2011:12-13).

Another effect of cyberbullying is "loneliness". Dussault and Frenette (2014:94) established that feelings of isolation and loneliness are positively related to being bullied. Furthermore, current research discovered a notable and favourable connection between being a target of cyberbullying and experiencing social anxiety among university students. Additionally, the overall impact of cyberbullying victimisation on social anxiety was found to be significant. These findings validate the influence of cyberbullying victimisation on social anxiety, as learners who are bullied tend to feel less confident in social situations and encounter greater challenges in their interactions with others (Xia, Liao, Deng & Li 2023:9).

Kowalski and Limber (2012:514) report that in some cases social anxiety may be a signal to others that the learner is an easy target. Social anxiety is a prevalent negative psychological characteristic observed in individuals during both face-to-face and online social interactions. It specifically refers to irrational fears that individuals experience when engaging with others, stemming from their apprehension about receiving attention, being observed, scrutinised, or evaluated by others (Xia et al 2023:2). The importance of developing a policy to regulate cyberbullying cannot be overstated and is a must for any school. Of course, no policy can be developed outside the legal framework. The next section considers the legal framework regulating the management of cyberbullying that must be considered when a cyberbullying policy is developed.

2.3 LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR SCHOOL CYBERBULLYING MANAGEMENT AND POLICY DEVELOPMENT

Given the complexities of cyberbullying involving children, schools need to develop guidelines to help deal with issues concerning cyberbullying (Shariff 2005:462). To understand a school's legal obligation regarding policy development for the protection of learners' physical and mental well-being against cyberbullying, it was crucial to investigate the national and international legal framework for managing cyberbullying, which will need to be considered when a cyberbullying policy is developed. The

framework includes the Constitution, legislation, common law, international law, and national and foreign case law.

The Constitution is the supreme law of South Africa, and no other legislation or source of law has the same legal status (RSA 1996a, s 2). The Constitution aims to provide equality among all citizens to exercise and enjoy their basic rights and freedoms. It sets out the structure of the state and its organs, provides for its organisation, and determines its powers and functions (Coetzee 2006:93-94). One such function is that the state and its organs "must respect, protect, promote and fulfil the rights in the Bill of Rights" (RSA 1996a, s 7(2)). Also, when courts interpret the Bill of Rights, relevant international law must be considered. International law governs the relationships between states by, *inter alia,* overseeing the protection of human and children rights (Coetzee 2012:5). As such, South African law cannot function in isolation and must take cognisance of international law (Coetzee 2012:5). I considered the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) (hereinafter CRC) and African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (hereafter ACRWC) (1999). Section 39(1)(c) further requires that relevant foreign case law may be considered, which I also did.

Alongside statute law, South Africa also has common law (Coetzee 2012:23). When established statutes or laws cannot be used to determine the outcomes of a case, common law is used for the decision-making process. Legal problems that cannot be resolved by statute law may still be resolved in terms of common law (section 27 [s.a.]). In most cases, common law has been incorporated into case law. Hence, the principles of common law can be found in cases in which they have been applied. As a primary source of law, common law is the foundation of modern South African law (Kleyn, Viljoen, Zitzke & Madi 2019:112-113). There are several common law principles that has bearing on the management of cyberbullying. Common law principles include *in loco parentis*, which literally translates to "in the place of the parent" (RSA 2002, reg 5(3)) and the rules of natural justice (*audi alteram partem* and *iudex in sua causa*) (Kleyn, et al 2018:317).

2.3.1 The human rights framework

Human rights - droits de l'homme, derechos humanos, Menschenrechte, "the rights of man" – is a literal concept that means the rights one has because one is human (Donnelly 2013:7). According to the United Nations (United Nations [s.a.]) human rights are inherent

to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status.

Chapter 2 of the Constitution contains the Bill of Rights in which the state undertakes to protect the individual's basic human rights such as dignity, equality, and privacy. All public schools are juristic persons (RSA 1996, s 15) and are bound by the Bill of Rights; both as juristic persons and as organs of state (RSA 1996a, s 8(2)). Section 2 of the Children's Act (RSA 2005, s 2(b)((iii), (b)(iv), (d)) contains the objectives of the Act, including the protection against maltreatment, abuse, and neglect, that the best interest of a child is of primary importance, and the establishment of structures that promote physical, psychological and the social development of children. These objectives give expression to the children's rights guaranteed in section 28 of the Constitution. One can agree with Laas and Boezaart (2014:2681) that there is a direct correlation between the Children's Act's objectives and the need for eliminating or limiting cyberbullying.

Teachers and school managers are all required by international and national law to promote basic human rights (Coetzee & Mienie 2013:77). To avoid legal action schools should protect both the cyberbullies' and the victims' rights to equality and human dignity, freedom of expression and freedom and security of the person (Hills 2017:5).

2.3.1.1 Right to equality

Section 9(1) of the Bill of Rights deals with every individual's equality status and establishes that everyone is equal before the law with an equal level of protection. To overcome stigmatisation, discrimination, and exclusion, article 3(k) of the UN General Assembly's Resolution on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Children: Protecting children from bullying, calls upon member states to pay particular attention to promote mutual respect and tolerance for diversity. McConnachie (2017:94) suggests that there are at least three valuable forms of equality that schools must keep in mind:

- All learners are required to receive basic education.
- Equality is about valuing differences, rather than treating everybody the same.
- Learners must not suffer stigma, stereotyping, socio-economic disadvantage or violence because of their race, gender, or disability.

In a study on hate speech, the anti-bullying charity “Ditch the label” (2016:3) analysed almost 19 million tweets and the findings showed that gender, religion, and sexual orientation are some of the most targeted topics for cyberbullies. Cyberbullying acts focussing on the victim’s gender, religion or sexual orientation can constitute unfair discrimination. As such, these acts constitute a violation of sections 9(3) and 9(4) of the Bill of Rights, which protects against unfair discrimination from any person or the state based on the grounds of race, gender, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language, and birth. According to Article 2(2) of the CRC, parties should take relevant steps to ensure that the child is safeguarded from all types of degrading or inhuman discrimination. Equality is not just about having mutual respect for diversity, opportunity, race, gender, disability or being free from any form of stigma or stereotyping, it also extends to privacy.

2.3.1.2 Right to privacy

Article 16 of the CRC states that there should be no interference with a child’s privacy and that the child has the right to be protected under the law should there be such an interference (UN 1989). Article 10 of the ACRWC similarly underlines that every child has a right to privacy (ACRWC 1999) and guarantees that neither a child nor their family home or correspondence shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference, nor shall they be subjected to attacks upon their honour or reputation. A child has the right to be protected by law against such interference or attacks. However, parents or legal guardians may exercise reasonable supervision over their children to protect children from hazards or harm that may arise from daily routines.

The importance of privacy is emphasised in section 14 of the Constitution, which covers a variety of topics including protection against unlawful property seizures, and invasions of communication privacy. This privilege serves as a safeguard to ensure individuals' freedom from unwarranted intrusion into their personal lives.

Section 14 is not without its limits. In *Mistry v Interim National Medical and Dental Council and Others* (CCT13/97) [1998] ZACC 10; 1998 (4) SA 1127; 1998 (7) BCLR 880 (29 May 1998) par 27 (hereafter *Mistry v Interim Medical Council of South Africa)* Chaskalson P, stressed that “the more public the undertaking and the more closely regulated, the more attenuated would the right to privacy be and the less intense any possible invasion”.

Moreover, the right to privacy, like all rights, are not absolute and it may in some instances, be reasonable and justifiable to intrude into the personal and private realm of the individual (Joubert, Sughrue & Alexander 2013:116). If the school, therefore, wishes to search learners in a case of cyberbullying for a mobile device that allegedly was used in the cyberbullying of another learner, it must be done in terms of legislation, and only if it is reasonable and justifiable (Joubert et al 2013:116). The applicable legislation in this case will be section 8A of the Schools Act read in conjunction with Schedule on Devices to Be Used for Drug Testing and the Procedure to be Followed, Annexure B: Guidelines for Random Search and Seizure and Drug Testing at Schools (RSA, Department of Education 2008).

In 2008 the South African Human Rights Commission (hereafter SAHRC) concluded in a matter between *Karl Günsche and the German International School* File ref: WC/2008/0448 the allegation was brought that the school has violated the learner's privacy rights such not to have one's property searched and not to have the privacy of one's communications infringed. The school conducted a random search of learners' phones and found pornographic material on the leaner's phone. The school justified their actions relying on the "in loco parentis" principle (SAHRC 2008: par 5.1) as there was no provision in the school's Code of Conduct that covered such search at that stage. The argument was that the limitation was justified in terms of the section 36 of the Constitution as the *in loco parentis* principle is a "law of general application". The SAHRC held that it was not because the *in loco parentis* principle is a vague term that needs to be clarified in the school policy and in this case it wasn't (SAHRC 2008: par 4.10–4.11). Thus, an important lesson for school policymakers is that to rather rely on statutory provisions (as law of general application) when adopting provisions that may limit a human right. Should it be necessary to rely on common law, to ensure the rule is "so vague as to be susceptible to arbitrary enforcement" if it is the school must set in its policy "clearly defined boundaries so that all parties – the school, parents and students (sic) – know exactly what powers the school can exercise, and when it has overstepped its authority".

The school amended its Code. Section 1.3 of the school's amended Code of Conduct reads:

> The school retains the right to view and copy information that has been stored on electronic devices / cell phones to ensure that no undesirable communication, in particular pornography or other material, is distributed or exchanged among students[2].

The SAHRC ruled that section 1.3 of the school's amended Code of Conduct contained may muster the requirement to cover the *in loco parentis* principle as law of general application but that it then my fall because of "undefined terms". Terms, such as "undesirable communication" and "other material" were too broad and not specific enough to warrant the search of the learner's cell phone (SAHRC 2008: par 5.1). This is an important ruling for schools; it sets a standard as to how important word choice is and if too vague, it could lead to litigation. To comply with the discourse expectations within the school and society at large, Cushing (2021:321) emphasises the necessity of "critical language awareness" within the policymaking framework. The ruling effectively points to the fact, that even though schools have a duty of care, such duty should be exercised within the law.

Another point to acknowledge is that the SAHRC held that although the school acts *in loco parentis* the responsibility rests on the school to develop a code of conduct with clearly defined terms, boundaries, and limitations (SAHRC 2008: par 6). This view is supported by the argument of Coetzee (2015:2126–2127) that because of compulsory school attendance – in terms of section 3(1) of the Schools Act – and teachers' professional status, teachers' duty of care cannot be seen as based solely on the *in loco parentis* principle anymore. By law, all teachers must belong to SACE and as such are bound by the SACE Code of Professional Ethics. Item 3.13 of this Code mandates that all teachers must take reasonable steps to ensure the safety of all the learners under their care (SACE 2016, item 3.13).

2.3.1.2 Right to freedom of expression

Section 16 of the Bill of Rights guarantees freedom of expression to everyone in the country, which includes the freedom of speech, to have artistic freedom and be able to receive information or convey knowledge to others (RSA 1996a, s 16). Freedom of expression is viewed internationally as a prerequisite for any democracy (Van Vollenhoven 2015:2299). Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (UN 1976) acknowledges individuals' rights to have their own views and convey

[2] Private school might refer to their learners as students in its policies.

themselves through any means available to them. The Freedom of expression is further protected in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN 1948), stating that:

> Having freedom of opinion and expression involves the freedom to hold opinions without interference as well as the ability to receive, share, and transmit information and ideas in any medium and regardless of borders.

Freedom of expression implies that, in addition to speech, any manner of human expression is protected as a fundamental right (Mawdsley, Smit & Wolhuter 2013:153). Article 12(1) of the CRC specifically affords children the right to express their views and that those views be given consideration that is in line with the child's age (UN 1989). Furthermore, Article 13(1)(2) of the CRC establishes that a child has the freedom to express information and ideas in a manner of the child's choosing and will only be restricted as necessary by law.

The above-mentioned principles from the CRC are further supported by the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child in Article 7. A child may express his or her opinions freely; such expression is only subject to the restrictions set out in the law (ACRWC 1999). In a school, freedom of expression is critical to promoting open and honest sharing of ideas and viewpoints. However, such sharing should not jeopardise school discipline or unlawfully injure a person's reputation (Smit 2013:61). The guidelines governing bodies should consider when adopting a code of conduct for learners support the right of freedom of expression. In terms of paragraph 4.5 (RSA, Department of Education 1998, par 4.5):

> 4.5.1 Freedom of expression is more than freedom of speech. The freedom of expression includes the right to seek, hear, read and wear. The freedom of expression is extended to forms of outward expression as seen in clothing selection and hairstyles. However, learners' rights to enjoy freedom of expression are not absolute. Vulgar words, insubordination and insults are not protected speech. When the expression leads to a material and substantial disruption in school operations, activities or the rights of others, this right can be limited as the disruption of schools is unacceptable.

A school's code of conduct for learners, must not go against what the Constitution deems as basic human rights (RSA, Department of Education 1998, par 1.3).

Although the laws of a country like the USA differ primarily from South African law, the wealth of US case law on freedom of speech in the education context is informative

(Mawdsley et al 2013:153). The right to freedom of speech is not limited to speech but is interpreted broadly and has a similar meaning as the South African freedom to expression. In *Tinker v Des Moines Independent Community School District 393 U.S. 503, 508-9 (1969)* (hereafter *Tinker v Des Moines)* the US Supreme Court declared that "learners do not shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate". The *Tinker v Des Moines* case has become the constitutional benchmark for determining the extent to which school officials can restrict learners' freedom of speech and expression (Mawdsley et al 2013:134). The *Tinker v Des Moines* case highlights the "material and substantive disruption" test, whereby one must decide if one person's freedom of expression is causing significant disruption (Van Vollenhoven 2006:75). The material and substantive disruption test is a core principle that policy developers must take in consideration when establishing a policy for on and off campus cyberbullying. In *Tinker v Des Moines*, it was established that if the school can establish a link between what the cyberbully is posting and disruption at school, the school will be able to act against the cyberbully regardless of whether the cyberbully was at school or not.

Tinker v Des Moines sets a benchmark for freedom of speech and expression, but the right to freedom of expression is not absolute. Under appropriate circumstances, freedom of expression could be limited. Firstly, by the fundamental rights of others and secondly, in terms of the general limitation provision, section 36 of the Constitution (Smit 2013:63). In another case involving protected speech, *JS v. Bethlehem Area School Dist.* 757 A.2d 412 (Pa. Commw. Ct. 2000), (hereafter *JS v. Bethlehem)* 14-year-old Jason Swidler was expelled from school after creating a website titled "Teacher Sux", that consisted of several pages of derogatory comments about the teacher, Kathleen Fulmer and the school principal, Thomas Kartsotis. Swidler appealed the expulsion, but Friedman SJ upheld the expulsion and ruled that the website did not constitute protected speech and created enough of a disturbance at school to warrant an expulsion, even though the website was created off-campus (*JS v. Bethlehem).* Freedom of speech is not absolute, and in a democratic society, an individual's rights as set out in the Bill of Rights may be limited if it is reasonable and justifiable to do so in terms of the law of general application and all relevant factors have been considered (RSA 1996a, s 36(1)a-e (2)). The right to freedom of expression is subject to limitations under subsection 16(2) of the Bill of Rights when it is used to incite violence, promote war, or express hatred.

Whether or not a school can discipline a learner for online speech that occurred off-campus is determined by combining the "nexus test" and the "reasonably foreseeable test". The combined test will entail two steps, namely: considering how closely the offending content is connected to the school and considering whether it was reasonably foreseeable that the content will reach the school (Towslee 2020:3).

Parents have an essential role to play in bringing to their children's attention the legal restrictions to their freedom of expression. Cohen-Almagor (2022:17) advocates the importance of parental involvement in the lives of their children, teaching them about inappropriate internet behaviour, encouraging and modelling responsible internet behaviour, contributing to debates and discussions, and raising awareness regarding potentially harmful internet expression.

2.3.1.3 Right to human dignity

When an individual's right to human dignity is violated by hate speech or defamation, he or she might end up suffering emotional damage (Van Vollenhoven 2015:2303). A term that needs to be defined and is central to human rights is "human dignity" (McCrudden 2008:656). Human dignity must be a major consideration when developing legislation or policy (McCrudden 2008:656). But what does "dignity" mean, can it be the basis for all human rights or is it a right in itself? In *Egan v Canada* 1995 29 CRR (2d) 79 106 (hereafter *Egan v Canada)*, L'Heureux-Dubé J, acknowledged that dignity is "a notoriously elusive concept that needs precision and elaboration" (*Egan v Canada* at par 40). Brand AJ, in *Le Roux v Dey* (at par 138) describes dignity as a concept with a wide meaning that covers several different values. Human dignity is defined in section 10 of the Constitution as an inherit attribute of every human being that must be respected by the government and fellow men alike (Steinmann 2016:24).

Both article 28(2) of the CRC (UN 1989) and article 11(5) of the ACRWC (AU 1990) mandate schools to take appropriate measures to ensure that disciplinary measures do not violate children's dignity. The general principles set out in section 6(2) of the Children's Act, include all the fundamental rights of a child as preserved in the Bill of Rights and promote an inclination towards corrective measures rather than punishment. In a school environment, the dignity of everyone from the victim to the cyberbully and the school staff is protected under the Bill of Rights. With the Children's Act establishing principles for the

care and protection of children, the school, as an organ of state and a juristic person with a legal capacity, must ensure that the schools' cyberbullying policy protect both offenders' and victims' dignity (RSA 2005). Section 6 of the Children's Act acknowledges the dignity of children and their right to be heard and treated as people (Laas & Boezaart 2014:2682).

2.3.1.4 Right to freedom and security of the person

As mentioned above, victims of cyberbullying commonly experience symptoms of depression (Erdur-Baker & Tanrikulu 2010:2771), confusion, guilt and shame, as well as self-harm and withdrawal from peers and family (Mishna et al 2009:111). Abuse, whether it be online or offline, plays havoc with the mental and physical health of young people and generates surges of stress (Hackett 2016). It is thus understandable why Hills (2017:232) identifies the right to freedom and security of a person as one of the rights violated by cyberbullying. Section 12 of The Bill of Right aligns with the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (hereafter ECHR) and guarantees that in addition to the right to security, individuals have the right to freedom, which includes the right to be free from all forms of violence, the right not to suffer cruel or degrading treatment, and to maintain psychological integrity (RSA 1996a, s 12(1-2)). Article 19(1) of the CRC requires governments to take all suitable legislative measures to protect children from harm or abuse (UN 1989). Article 39 of the CRC emphasises the need for state parties to facilitate the physical and psychological recovery of children after they have been exploited or abused (UN 1989). The protection provided by the right to freedom and security of person is echoed in the section ensuring children's rights in general.

2.3.1.5 Children's rights

Nel v Byliefeldt and Another (27748/2015) [2015] ZAGPPHC 386 (hereafter *Nel v Byliefeldt*) par 26, Basson J referred to the child's best interests as a "golden thread that runs through our entire child-related law". The importance of this "golden thread" is further illustrated by the CRC (UN 1989). It is emphasised by Article 3(1) that all institutions, courts, and administrative bodies must act in the best interests of the child (UN a3(1)). South African courts are obliged, in terms of international and national law, to apply the 'best interests' standard in all cases where a child's or children's rights and interests will

be affected by their decisions (Coetzee & Mienie 2014:90). This, of course, also applies to schools when taking disciplinary action against cyberbullies.

The Constitution, section 28(1)(d) guarantees protection to every child against maltreatment, abuse, or degradation. Furthermore, section 28(1)(g) of the Constitution also acknowledges the rights of all learners against unfair treatment (RSA 1996a, s 28(1)(g)).

2.3.1.6 Right to just administrative action

The punishment that schools administer must be fair, procedural, within reason and fitting in relation to the transgression (Coetzee 2006:96). Article 40(1) of the CRC recognises the entitlement of every child accused of legal transgressions to receive treatment that preserves their dignity, respects their human rights, takes their age into account, and seeks to facilitate their reintegration into society (UN 1989). Article 5 of 2012 of the ECHR asserts that the security of a person manifests in the procedural mechanisms through which rights are protected (EU 2012:8). In the framework of cyberbullying, Article 5 of 2012 of the ECHR maintains that there need to be a process in place to deal with incidents of cyberbullying in a fair manner that protects the rights of both the victim and the cyberbully (EU 2012, s5(1a)). Therefore, a cyberbullying policy must contain reporting mechanisms and processes for handling cyberbullying allegations.

In the South African context, it is important to note that there exist established measures designed to uphold procedural fairness in the context of cyberbullying. Furthermore, these measures are consistent with the provisions outlined in section 33 of the Bill of Rights (Coetzee 2006:123). Procedural safeguards are expressed by the twin principles of natural justice: *audi alteram partem* (both parties should be heard) and *nemo iudex in sua causa* (no one should be a judge in his own case) (Sahu 2015:2). Procedurally fair and just administrative action is a constitutional right of every learner accused of cyberbullying (Sahu 2015:2). For the development of a school cyberbullying policy, it is imperative that schools should make provision in their cyberbullying policy for the principles of natural justice.

2.3.2 Law framework for managing cyberbullying

Even though the Schools Act does not regulate private schools' governance, private schools can opt to follow the same management structures along the lines of the Schools Act. The Schools Act (RSA 1996b) grants a considerable amount of authority and responsibility to schools for their own decision making (Mestry 2006:27). The governing body is regarded as the valid "government" of the school, and section 8(1) of the Schools Act highlights the importance of including all stakeholders in the governance of public schools (Bray 2005:133). This argument is supported by the prescribed composition of public schools' governing bodies (RSA 1996b, s 23). See section 1.8.5 for a discussion on why and how the provisions on school governance of public schools, as set out in the Schools Act, apply to this specific private school.

By virtue of the principal's legal status, various responsibilities are vested in this position and accredits the principal with the responsibility for the implementation of legislation and policies (Coetzee 2012:57-58). In terms of the Policy on the South African Standard for Principals (RSA 2016, par 3), the responsibility for professional management is allocated to principals irrespective of whether it is a public or independent school. The Policy on the South African Standard for Principals further highlights various key areas of principals' core purpose (RSA 2016, par 5):

d) Developing and empowering self and others

e) Managing the school as an organisation

f) Working with and for the community

It is thus evident that the South African Standard for Principals provides support for the involvement of all relevant stakeholders. Therefore, one might draw the conclusion that adopting a whole-school strategy is not only a desirable option but rather an absolute need.

Furthermore, there are key areas in which the principal must demonstrate leadership and management abilities to fulfil the core purpose of principalship, and these areas are guided by the following educational and social values that the principal must adhere to (RSA 2016, par 1):

a) All learners have the right to have access to relevant and meaningful learning experiences and opportunities.

b) The school community has the right to active participation in the life of the school.

c) All members of the school community must be treated with respect and dignity and with recognition of their diverse natures.

d) The school community has the right to a safe and secure learning environment. e) The well-being of all learners must be fostered within the school and the wider community.

The considerations highlight the reality that the principal, as the school manager, is responsible for protecting the rights of all the learners. It is also quite clear that a school's strategy to prevent cyberbullying must involve the entire school community.

It is the responsibility of private schools to create an action plan under regulations 9(5) to 9(7) of The Regulations Relating to Safety Measures at Independent Schools (RSA 2004) that prevents the threat of violence from disrupting school activities and ensures the safety of all learners, staff members, and parents. One can argue that adopting a policy to ensure school safety should be an aspect to be included in such action plan.

Schools that allow initiation practices that undermine the value of a learner, whether physical or psychological, will be at risk of possible civil action, and this will also extend to cyberbullying. As previously stated, under paragraph 5 of the Policy on the South African Standard for Principals (RSA 2016), the principal, as the leader of the institution, has the primary duty of safeguarding the safety of all stakeholders. By looking at the definition of initiation practices we can see that initiation practices may take the form of cyberbullying. It is also evident that peer pressure may very well lead to initiation practices (RSA 2002, reg 5.2). The Regulations to Prohibit Initiation Practices in Schools (RSA 2002) defines "initiation practices" in regulation 2 as:

any act which in the process of initiation:

(a) threatens the mental or physical well-being of a person

(b) treats some as inferior to others, thereby destroying their intrinsic worth;

(c) a person that is subjected to acts of humiliation or violence that violate the Bill of Rights guarantee of dignity;

(d) infringement on the fundamental rights and values anchored in the Constitution;

(e) acts that hinders the development of a democratic culture that values each person as a sovereign individual.

(f) actions that damages or destroys property, whether public or private

The Regulations to Prohibit Initiation Practices in Schools (RSA 2002), further provides that, as part of their professional management duties, principals must ensure that learners are not subject to *crimen injuria* when it comes to initiation practices (RSA 2002, reg 5.2). *Crimen injuria* is the "unlawful and intentional violation of the dignity or privacy of another" (RSA 2002, reg 2), and includes assault, harassment, maltreatment, degradation, humiliation, and intimidation.

School management also need to consider law and policy when dealing with the bullies. The Child Justice Act 75 of 2008 (hereafter Child Justice Act) provides for a separate criminal justice system for children in South Africa (RSA 2008). Through diversion, the Child Justice Act aims to keep children away from the formal criminal justice system (Terblanche 2012:438). This is a very significant point to consider when developing school policies. The most important aim of the Child Justice Act is to uphold a child's constitutionally protected rights; therefore, focus is placed on rehabilitation and support rather than on ostracising a child offender (Laas & Boezaart 2014:2685-2686). With the focus on rehabilitation, section 6 of the Child Justice Act categorises offences in terms of their perceived seriousness as is illustrated in table 4 below (RSA 2008):

Table 4: Offence categories in terms of the Child Justice Act

Offence schedule	Offence description	Description of offence
Schedule 1	Minor Offence	Theft of goods valued at less than R2500, intentional damage to property valued at less than R1500, and common assault.
Schedule 2	More serious offence	Theft of items worth more than R2,500; robbery, but not robbery with aggravating circumstances; assault resulting in serious bodily injury; public violence; culpable murder; and arson.
Schedule 3	Most serious offence	Among the crimes include robbery, rape, murder, and kidnapping.

Source: RSA (2008, s 6).

However, if a child is accused of more than one crime that is being prosecuted concurrently, the more severe crime is considered when determining how the child will be handled under the rules of this Act.

The Protection from Harassment Act 17 of 2011 (hereafter Protection from Harassment Act) consolidates the rights of complainants by offering legal recourse against behaviour that may be considered harassment, including cyberbullying, and aims to protect individuals from various forms of unwanted behaviour, ensuring their well-being and promoting their rights (Batchelor, Mota Makore 2021:271). Harassment is then defined as (RSA 2011, s1):

> Any means directly or indirectly engaging in conduct that the respondent knows or ought to know causes harm or inspires the reasonable belief that harm may be caused to the complainant or related person unreasonably.

In section 1(a)(ii)(iii) of the Protection from Harassment Act the following is interpreted as forms of harassment (RSA 2011):

> (ii) engaging in verbal, electronic or any other communication aimed at the complainant or a related person, by any means, whether or not conversation ensues; or
>
> (iii) sending, delivering, or causing the delivery of letters, telegrams, packages, facsimiles, electronic mail or other objects to the complainant or a related person or leaving them where they will be found by, given to. or brought to the attention of, the complainant or a related person

According to the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development (2023) the Protection from Harassment Act, enacts an order prohibiting the harasser from continuing any harassing behaviour towards the victim. School principals or parents may have a legal avenue to pursue when acts of cyberbullying are suspected or verified under the Protection from Harassment Act thanks to its broad definition of harassment that can cover bullying at schools and cyber-stalking (Department of Justice and Constitutional Development 2023).

2.4 BEST PRACTICES FOR POLICY DEVELOPMENT FOLLOWING A WHOLE-SCHOOL APPROACH

Guidelines for the formulation, development, and review of policy at the University of the Free State (hereafter UFS) (UFS 2005:1) describe the purposes of a policy to promote actions and practices that enhance strategy execution and assist in:

- **Proper policy guidance**: How should the policy be used? When is the policy applicable?
- **Policy efficiency:** How will it enhance efficiency or improve a situation?

- **Consistency:** In terms of consistency, how can a policy be applied consistently to what it is meant to regulate?
- **Legal compliance:** What is the legal framework on which the policy is based? Due to the school's temporary sub-committee structure (cf. section 3.4.5), these four "non-negotiable" requirements will set a standard for all future sub-committees when developing a policy.

The involvement of all stakeholders in the decision-making or policy development process is a fundamental democratic principle (Lewis, McGann & Blomkamp 2020:112). As noted by Lewis et al (2020:112), those affected by design decisions, including policy development, must be included in the process. Umoh (2022:23) also emphasises that increased stakeholder engagement with diverse perspectives, fosters a sense of responsibility among stakeholders. By adopting a collaborative or whole-school approach, the policy's quality can be improved, and its acceptance among stakeholders beyond school management can be increased (Lewis et al 2020:119). Wurf (2021:199) underscores the significance of collaborative efforts and consultation with all stakeholders in devising comprehensive bullying policies and measures that foster awareness, prevention, and restorative justice in schools, as highlighted in his guide to a whole-school approach to preventing cyberbullying. According to Lewis et al (2020:126), a user-centred approach is always the best approach, which highlights the importance of involving all stakeholders in the policy development process. Therefore, to uphold democratic principles and promote better policy outcomes, it is essential to incorporate a collaborative approach that engages all relevant stakeholders and those who will be using the policy, either by implementing or being subjected to it.

The adoption of a whole-school approach in education requires a strategic design that involves interconnectedness among stakeholders. As Lewis et al (2020:119) argue, this design, referred to as "multi-actor collaboration", entails a concerted effort from the entire school community aimed at improving learning, behaviour, and well-being, while also creating conditions that foster such action. The Department of Education Western Australia (2009) emphasises the importance of this collaborative approach for achieving positive educational outcomes.

A whole-school approach is a comprehensive approach that considers all the factors that contribute to a learner's well-being, as noted by Wellbeing@school (2012:1). Through this

inclusive approach, the unique perspectives of all stakeholders can be considered, which ultimately leads to better policy outcomes that benefit the entire school community. Therefore, the adoption of a whole-school approach is necessary for promoting a holistic and collaborative approach to education that considers the complex and interconnected factors that affect learner well-being.

Because policymaking must fit within the framework of the Constitution, flexibility is a fundamental and central principle to consider when developing school policy and a policy may not be interpreted or implemented in a manner that will disadvantage any stakeholder. This was confirmed in the case of *MEC for Education in Gauteng Province and Other v Governing Body of Rivonia Primary School and Others* (CCT 135/12) [2013] ZACC 34; 2013 (6) SA 582 (CC); 2013 (12) BCLR 1365 (CC) (3 October 2013) (hereafter *MEC for Education v Rivonia Primary*), where an instruction given by the Head of Department from the Gauteng Department of Education to Rivonia Primary school's principal for admission of a learner was denied because the maximum capacity stated in the school's admission policy had been reached. What followed was a lengthy court battle that eventually ended up in the Constitutional Court where the judgment was made that the school had to take the extra learner because the Constitution as the supreme law of the country requires that school policy not be so inflexible that it is to the disadvantage of any of the stakeholders.

It is evident that various scholars support a whole-school approach to bullying in general. According to Wurf (2021:198), research indicates that anti-bullying programmes that encompass the entire school community have demonstrated efficacy in reducing school bullying and mitigating the deleterious health and well-being consequences stemming from victimisation. In support of evidence-based intervention strategies for preventing bullying, the US Department of Education (2013:2) emphasises the importance of utilising these strategies within a comprehensive multitiered behavioural framework that engages the entire school community. This approach has been shown to be most effective in reducing incidents of bullying and its negative impacts on learners. Recent research by Gabrielli et al (2021:2) highlights the effectiveness of whole-school cyberbullying interventions that incorporate a range of measures, including school rules and sanctions, teacher training, classroom activities, and individual counselling. These interventions

were found to be considerably more effective than curriculum-based interventions alone, demonstrating the need for a comprehensive approach in curbing cyberbullying.

Figure 2 depicts the findings of a study conducted with international schools to determine the extent to which various role players influence a learner's learning. According to the study, teachers and co-learners have the greatest influence on a learner's learning (Knight & Benson 2014:24). Therefore, including teachers and learners into a whole-school approach for the management of cyberbullying would be imperative to the success of the programme.

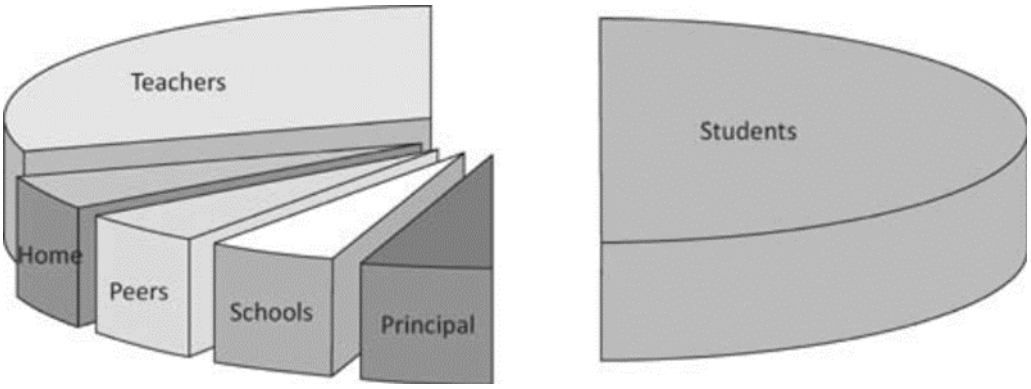

Figure 2: A depiction of various role-players influencing learners' learning

Source: Knight & Benson (2014:22)

The best method for schools to establish and implement an effective cyberbullying policy is to include everyone who plays a part in the school environment. Schools that take a whole-school approach recognises the importance of the school's interconnectedness with the community (Gabrielli et al 2021:2). Furthermore, principals have an obligation to involve the school community as indicated in the Policy on the South African Standard for Principals (RSA 2016, par 5). This interconnectedness between all stakeholders can be further nurtured through collective activities such as displaying posters and practising mindfulness towards one another (Gabrielli et al 2021:13).

Umoh (2022:21-23) acknowledges that while South Africa has a framework for public participation in policymaking, there are obstacles that impede meaningful engagement. These challenges include insufficient follow-up opportunities for public input, a lack of feedback mechanisms, and socio-economic conditions that exclude disadvantaged

populations from the policymaking process. Power imbalances, such as those related to wealth, age, education, and connections, often act as barriers to public participation. Additionally, the formal nature of parliamentary democratic innovation platforms may hinder illiterate citizens from participating due to language barriers. Furthermore, limited time provided by Parliament for public preparation of oral and written comments can restrict the ability of citizens to make meaningful contributions to policy discussions. At the school level, challenges arise in the process of policy formulation, including inadequate mechanisms for parental and community engagement. In poor communities, parents are likely to face barriers in effectively expressing their views due to limited means of communication. Power differentials may also manifest, wherein affluent, and highly engaged parents expect their opinions to hold greater influence across all school-related matters. Language barriers further compound the issue, potentially hindering comprehension of policies and inhibiting effective expression of viewpoints, particularly among older parents. Additionally, parents with unconventional work schedules may face time constraints that impede their attendance at school meetings or engagement in policy discussions.

Egan, Dunton and Judson (2014:3-4) highlight the following benefits of a whole-school approach.

- A whole-school approach increases learners' emotional participation and involvement. • Learners are exposed to new ideas and concepts and a whole-school approach provides them with a systemic understanding of how different elements interact and work together.
- Teachers engage in cooperative planning.
- Teachers recognise that cyberbullying should be viewed as a comprehensive school concern, encompassing policy, discipline, safety, human rights, and school culture.
- It significantly contributes to fostering a sense of community within the school.
- It assists learners, teachers, and administrators in realising how their individual contributions to a unified large-scale project can yield significant outcomes.
- It promotes the recognition and inclusion of others, allowing everyone to actively engage and take part.

In 2012 the South African government initiated the Integrated School Health Policy, (ISHP) and again pledged its commitment to the CRC's call to "put children first" (RSA 2012). The ISHP recognises the World Health Organization's (WHO) model of a school health programme that includes the mental, physical, and social well-being of a learner (RSA 2012:6). The four-level triangle model from the WHO illustrates the need of a whole-school approach to improving health and provides an appropriate model for cyberbullying policy development (Figure 3). The CJCP agrees that a whole-school approach is the preferred option to ensure that safer schools are created (CJCP 2013:3).

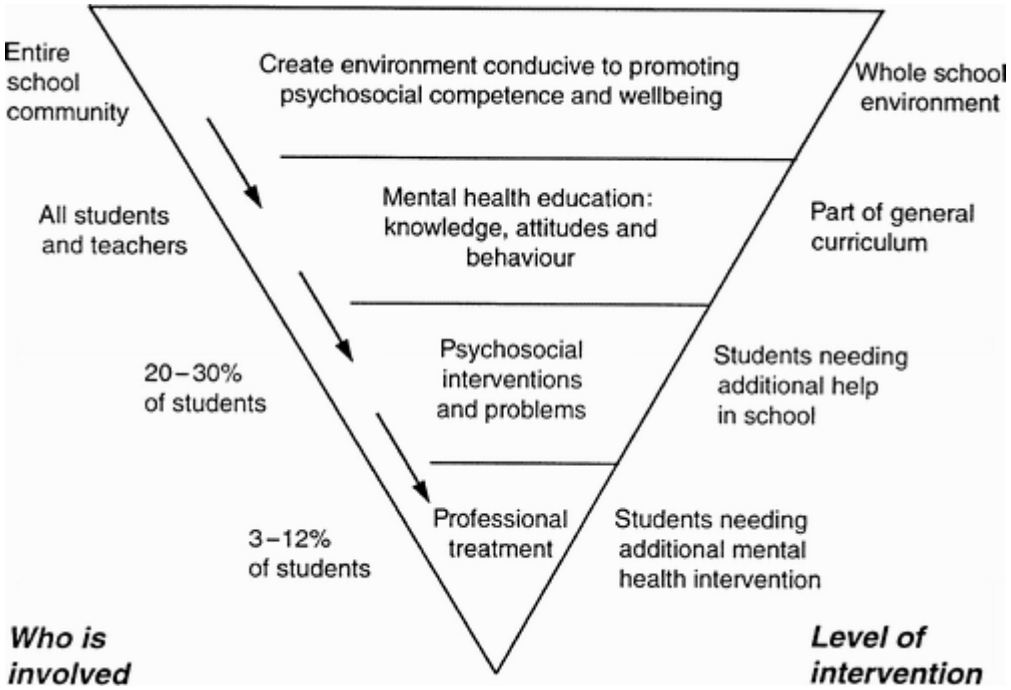

Figure 3: The World Health Organization's four-level, whole-school approach to school change

Source: Wyn, Cahill, Holdsworth, Rowling & Carson (2000:596)

Wyn et al (2000:595) illustrate how the whole-school community, parents, teachers, and learners work together to achieve a common goal. Incorporating and promoting health education through the Life Orientation curriculum that covers topics on abuse, whether it be sexual, physical, emotional or any other form of bullying or violence is a definite way to help raise awareness of cyberbullying (RSA 2012:12). Through the ISHP, issues regarding cyberbullying could now be brought to light in the classroom, further

strengthening a whole-school approach to cyberbullying. The CJCP highlights the following main elements of a whole-school approach (CJCP 2012:3):

- **Developing the curriculum**: Respect for human rights and skills to help create a safer school including e-safety need to be incorporated into all relevant curricula. Providing education and training to all stakeholders on the impacts and consequences of bullying can promote awareness and understanding, leading to the development of effective policies and measures.

- **Establishing a positive ethos and environment**: Ensuring that all members of the school community feel included in the policy development process can promote ownership and adherence to the policies and measures. The creation of an inclusive, respectful culture that supports and promotes respect for human rights and complies with South Africa's constitutional and statutory requirements.

- **Involving communities**: As mentioned earlier, consultation with all stakeholders, including learners, parents, teachers, and school staff, is crucial in developing comprehensive bullying policies and measures. The identification and establishment of links with relevant community stakeholders can help schools provide targeted and specialised interventions and support.

- **Offering Support:** Offering support services to victims and perpetrators of bullying can help promote a restorative justice approach, which can inform the development of effective policies and measures.

- **Monitoring and evaluation:** Regularly monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the policies and measures can help identify areas that need improvement and inform future policy development.

Yell, Katsiyannis, Rose and Houchins (2016:281) provide the following recommendations when dealing with cases of bullying that can be adapted and adopted for cyberbullying:

Recommendation 1: *Develop, publicise, and implement policy for preventing and dealing with cyberbullying* – Schools need to develop strong policies to combat cyberbullying. It is important to include all stakeholders in the development of the cyberbully policy.

Recommendation 2: *Adopt a research-based cyberbullying programme* – Schools need to do needs-analyses so that their cyberbullying programmes are based on research and evidence.

Recommendation 3: *Provide professional development on dealing with bullying* – All stakeholders must receive up-to-date professional development to be able to deal with cases of cyberbullying. Learners can receive talks from community support institutions like clinics, hospitals or the police support units.

Recommendation 4: *Be alert for incidences of bullying* – It is important that all school staff are on the alert when any suspicion of cyberbullying is detected. All verified incidents of cyberbullying must be investigated.

Recommendation 5: *Respond quickly and effectively* – It is of vital importance that school staff respond to acts of cyberbullying without delay. Any reported cases must be investigated immediately. Schools must develop an environment where learners, the staff and the community can feel free to report incidents of cyberbullying.

Recommendation 6: *Document all investigations and keep all parties informed* – All parties involved must be kept informed about actions taken in response to the reported allegations of cyberbullying.

The Department of Basic Education (RSA s.a.) provides the following guidelines for the prevention and intervention of cyberbullying:

- Include clearly defined guidelines on ethical and legal standards when using the internet in the school policy.
- Ensure cyberbullying is a transgression in the school's Code of Conduct for learners and that consequences for cyberbullying and online cruelty are clearly stated.
- Make reporting of cyberbullying and online cruelty incidents mandatory.
- Provide a mechanism to ensure confidential reporting.
- Put procedures in place to ensure learners' internet use on school computers are monitored.
- Educate learners on cyberbullying and explain techniques for responding to cyberbullying as a victim or as a bystander.

- Encourage learners to have empathy, ethical decision-making abilities, and respect for one another.
- Make sure that both learners and their parents are made aware of internet safety strategies.
- Put procedure in place on how to handle cyberbullying incidents, including investigation (assessing the nature and scope of the problem), deciding on appropriate action, and securing relevant evidence, such as WhatsApp or email messages.
- Inform the local police station to which the school is linked if internet communication is such that it constitutes harassment or stalking or contains threats of violence.

We can observe that both the Department of Basic Education (2015:5-6) and Yell et al (2016:281) argue for a policy to prevent cyberbullying. However, one key difference is that Yell et al (2016:281) advise developing a cyberbullying policy based on prior and confirmed research, rather than merely adopting one.

From the above one can conclude that a whole-school approach to policy development is based on the assumptions that it promotes:

- proper policy guidance because the policy is reinforced by many and in various ways
- research-based policies
- consistent policy application because all policies are grounded in the same values as set out in the school's vision and mission
- stakeholder involvement and diverse inputs, which produce comprehensive, inclusive and flexible policies
- a multi-actor collaborative, inclusive approach that increases acceptance and effectiveness
- democracy, collective activities, and unity
- school policies with the same structure and containing the essential elements required for policies to be effective

What is evident from the above is that following a whole-school approach to policymaking requires a collaborative process. In the next section, I discuss the best practices regarding the policymaking process.

2.5 BEST PRACTICES FOR THE POLICYMAKING PROCESS

In any school, new policies and revisions to current policies play a vital role. As previously mentioned, well-crafted policies aid in the coordination of actions, behaviour, decisions, and practices (cf. section 2.4).

To ensure successful policy development and implementation within the school, Whitehall, and Rutter (2011:14) advised that, first, a robust formulation process is followed, and second, that all stakeholders engaged in the policy's administration and execution are informed of their respective duties. Whitehall and Rutter (2011:14) further identified seven questions that a policy developer should ask and be able to answer to ensure a successful policy development process:

- What must be done to achieve policy goals?
- What evidence was used to inform the development of the new policy and has previous policies been evaluated for their success?
- Were those to whom the policy will apply, involved in its development?
- What is the benefit of the policy and does the benefit outweigh the risks?
- Who are responsible to execute the policy?
- How will the new policy be gauged to determine whether it is executed properly and by whom?
- Are there effective policy evaluation and feedback mechanisms in place to assess the success of the policy?

Blakeney's (2019) cyclical approach (figure 4) to policy development highlights the importance of a continuous and iterative process that starts with identifying policy issues or policy vacuums. This step involves recognising a problem or a gap in existing policy and determining the need for a new policy or a policy review. Once the need has been established, the next step is to conduct diagnoses and analyses of the situation or the policy to understand the root causes of the problem or the areas that need improvement.

The findings of the diagnoses and analyses stage help in identifying policy objectives. This involves setting clear and measurable goals that the new or revised policy aims to achieve. These objectives are important as they help in defining the scope and focus of the policy development process and provide a basis for evaluating the effectiveness of the policy once it is implemented.

With the policy objectives in place, a list of policy options and tools is developed. This involves considering a range of possible policy interventions that could address the problem or the policy gap. The options are evaluated based on their feasibility, effectiveness, and potential impact on various stakeholders. This step is crucial in identifying the best policy option that can effectively achieve the desired objectives.

Once a list of policy options and tools is available, the consultation process begins. This step involves engaging with relevant stakeholders to get their input and feedback on the proposed policy interventions. This process helps to identify consultation needs and manage coordination between stakeholders, ensuring that their voices are heard, and their interests are considered.

After consultation, a decision is made on whether to proceed with a particular policy intervention. This decision is based on the results of the consultation process, as well as the feasibility, effectiveness, and potential impact of the intervention. Once a decision has been made, the policy is implemented, and its effectiveness is evaluated through ongoing monitoring and assessment.

By adopting this approach, policymakers can ensure that their policies are evidence-based, and supported by empirical evidence, and are ultimately effective in attending to the problems and issues they were designed to do (Wurf 2021:199).

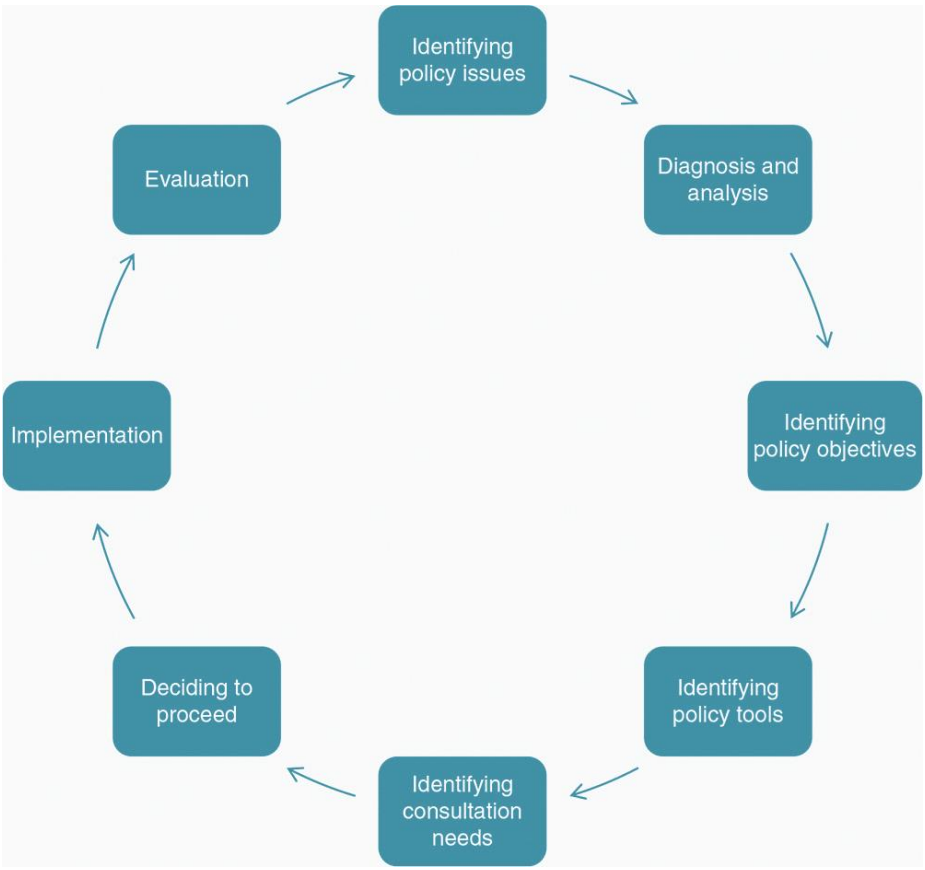

Figure 4: The policy development cycle

Source: Blakeney (2019:180)

The UFS and Amathole District Municipality suggest very similar processes regarding policy development. These similar aspects are determining whether a policy is required, identifying and involving stakeholders, disseminating the draft to stakeholders, and finally disseminating and implementing the policy.

The UFS (2005:2-3) recommends the following steps when setting out to develop a new policy:

- Consult with the affected stakeholders and consider whether a policy is needed.
- Determine the legal framework for the relevant policy.
- Establish the fiscal viability, thus what will be the cost implications to implement the policy and what resources are needed?
- Develop the policy by identifying those who will be affected and involve them in the process.
- Distribute the draft to all stakeholders for feedback.

- Obtain approval.
- Plan the distribution and implementation.

Amathole District Municipality (2014:3-5) takes the following two-phased, seven-step approach to policy development:

PHASE ONE – Getting started: The process of policy development.

Step 1 – The policy justification: It is critical to be clear about the purpose of the policy and how it will help to regulate a desired outcome at the outset of policy development. It is critical to understand the limits of what a policy will and will not be able to resolve. Depending on the nature and scope of the policy, it may be useful to form an advisory group to help with the initial scoping of the policy.

Step 2 – Research, analysis and direction setting: It is critical to devote time to acquiring and analysing data regarding the nature of the problem to be solved. Investigate lessons learned and best practices from other organisations that can be implemented.

Step 3 – Policy design: This step normally entails identifying the policy's guiding ideas, defining the vision, specific purposes, and objectives. See section 2.6 where I have investigated and determined the essential elements of effective policies.

PHASE TWO – The policy options: The link between strategy and policy

Step 4 – Consultation: A draft policy should be produced and presented to the senior management team for feedback. The intricacy of the problem that the policy is aiming to solve will define the scope of the consultation. All policies that necessitate a significant change in practice must be communicated to all stakeholders.

Step 5 – Finalise the policy and complete an impact assessment: An impact assessment should be conducted following the consultation. If found that the policy will have no foreseeable detrimental consequences, the policy is forwarded to the senior management team for final approval.

Step 6 – Getting approval: An electronic paper trail will be established, and the senior management team should be held accountable for consulting on, adopting, or accepting the final text of the policy.

Step 7 – Planning for publication: A plan to communicate the policy to all stakeholders should be included in the policy.

The Presidency of the Republic of South Africa (2020:19) has emphasised the importance of evidence-based policy development. This means that in addition to stakeholder consultation, policymakers must provide evidence to support the motivation, history, and reasons behind their policies. This evidence can be drawn from trends and statistics, existing knowledge and research, stakeholder consultations, and evaluations of existing policies. However, it is important to note that this emphasis on evidence should not be seen as diminishing the importance of stakeholder consultation, which is still considered crucial (Presidency of the Republic of South Africa 2020:14, 20).

In the context of South Africa's post-apartheid society, stakeholder participation in policymaking is especially important because, as argued by Umoh (2022:12), it promotes democracy and legitimacy. Therefore, policymakers must ensure that parents, teachers, learners, and school staff are included in discussions about policy development, and that they are kept informed of school policies through various communication channels, such as email blasts, voice mails, posters, and letters. This inclusive approach to policy development and communication increases stakeholders' ownership and understanding of policies, which can ultimately lead to greater success in achieving policy goals. Policies that are entrenched among stakeholders have the potential to bring about long-term improvements and positively impact the functioning of society, including schools (Rutter, Marshall & Sims 2012:9).

The development of school policies is widely recognised as a crucial component in establishing a safe and effective learning environment for learners. Several best practices have been identified for policy development, which include involving all relevant stakeholders such as teachers, administrators, parents, and learners, and by prioritising safety and well-being, considering cultural sensitivity, ensuring clarity and simplicity of policies, and regularly reviewing and revising the policies. Effective communication and education are also crucial elements in policy development, as they promote understanding and compliance with the policies. By following these best practices,

schools can develop policies that foster a positive and inclusive learning environment, benefitting all stakeholders.

2.6 BEST PRACTICE REGARDING GENERIC POLICY ELEMENTS

Ordinarily, policies are communicated through official written papers. Institutional documents frequently include the endorsement or signature of the executive authority to validate a policy and ensure that it comes into effect. The institution that issues such documents frequently specifies standard formats for them. While policy documents vary in format, certain elements are usually consistent (MacEwan 2010:37):

- A statement describing the policy's applicability and scope, so it only reaches the intended targets.
- A date when the policy will come into effect.
- A section describing responsibilities, as well as identifying relevant oversight and governance mechanisms.
- A statement of what the policy, regulations, requirements, or modifications to organisational behaviour are intended to accomplish.
- Motivations for creating the policy, such as reasons, histories, and intentions that may have motivated its creation.
- A definition of every term and concept found in the policy, providing clear and unambiguous meanings.

Yell et al (2016:281) share what they found to constitute elements for an effective discipline policy, which could be used to guide the content of a cyberbullying policy:

- Statements of purpose
- Scope of the policy
- Behaviours that the policy prohibits
- Specific procedures for reporting complaints
- Processes to investigate complaints
- Recordkeeping of actions taken
- Consequences for the offender
- Support for the victim

The purpose of a policy is to align operations, set behavioural expectations across the school system, and communicate policy roles and responsibilities.

As part of an effort to ensure consistency across all policies at the University of Colorado, the following key elements are highlighted (University of Colorado: [s.a.]):

- Policy title – In as few words as possible, the title should describe the policy's key purpose.
- Brief description – A short summary of the policy is given.
- Applicability – Stating who the target group is that the policy is intended for.
- Reason for the policy –This is a brief description of the policy, why it exists, what it is intended to resolve, its benefits, and what the regulatory framework is.
- Introduction – This section describes the steps that were taken to develop the policy and who was involved.
- Policy statement – This section is by far the most significant of all because it gives the intended audience specific directions. Strong action words need to be used in sentences that are clear and understandable.
- Definitions – To enhance the reader's understanding, terms should be clearly defined.
- History – If a significant change has been made to the policy, dates must be included.
- Key words – A list of related terms or phrases must be included.

The Presidency of the Republic of South Africa (2020:26) emphasised that an essential part of the context description should be to indicate how the policy will link up with other policies. This point is, of course, critical to a whole-school approach to policy development.

In this chapter, the fundamental elements essential for a well-crafted and effective policy development process were presented and explained. The generic elements that should be included in every policy, regardless of its application, is presented below:

- **Title**: A policy title serves as a brief, yet clear and concise, summary of the policy's purpose, content, and scope. It enables readers to quickly understand what the policy is about and whether it is relevant to them. A well-crafted policy title can also enhance the policy's readability and accessibility, making it easier for stakeholders to locate and refer

to it when needed. Additionally, a policy title can provide a consistent and recognisable reference point for the policy within an organisation or community. Ultimately, including a title in a policy document can contribute to its effectiveness and usability by enabling stakeholders to easily identify, locate, and understand its content (University of Colorado: [s.a.]).

- **Summary**: A policy summary should be concise, clear and informative, providing readers with a quick and accurate understanding of the policy's purpose, scope, content and those who were involved in the adoption process (University of Colorado: [s.a.]).
- **Applicability and scope**: The applicability and scope of a policy refer to the extent to which the policy applies and the specific areas or activities it covers. The applicability of a policy specifies the intended targets or audiences of the policy, such as specific groups, organisations, or activities. It is important to clearly define the applicability of a policy to avoid confusion or misunderstandings about who is affected by it. The scope of a policy defines the boundaries of the policy's coverage. Defining the scope of a policy helps to ensure that it is appropriate and relevant to the intended audience and that it does not go beyond its intended purpose (University of Colorado: [s.a.]).
- **Effective date:** An effective date when the policy will come into effect (MacEwan 2010:37).
- **Governance mechanisms:** The governance mechanisms of a policy involve overseeing and enforcing the policy's implementation through structures, processes, and systems, ensuring accountability, transparency, and fairness (MacEwan 2010:37).
- **Purpose of the policy:** A statement that defines what the policy aims to achieve, and identifies the regulations, requirements, or modifications to organisational behaviour that will enable the organisation to function effectively and efficiently while fulfilling its mission and vision. A clear statement of purpose provides a foundation for effective policy implementation, communication, and evaluation, and helps to ensure that the policy aligns with the organisation’s goals and values (Yell et al 2016:281).
- **Motivations for the policy**: Motivations for a policy encompass the reasons, history, and intentions that led to its creation, including the need to respond to changes in external circumstances or internal operations, legal or regulatory requirements, best practices, and ethical considerations, with a focus on establishing the policy's legitimacy and relevance to the organisation's mission and values (MacEwan 2010:37).
- **Key words:** Key words in a policy are specific terms and concepts that require clarification or explanation, and providing clear and unambiguous definitions of these

words is essential to ensure that stakeholders understand the policy's scope and requirements and can apply it effectively in their work (MacEwan 2010:37).

- **Policy statement:** A policy statement should provide a clear and concise overview of the policy's purpose, goals, responsibilities, guidance, consequences, and language accessibility, and should be reviewed regularly to ensure continued relevance and effectiveness (Yell et al 2016:281).

A well-structured policy captures the attention of the intended audience by being clear, easy to read and provides the necessary level of information to the persons directly affected by the content (Yell et al 2016:281). A policy that users understand is more likely to be followed and incorporated into their daily routines.

2.7 CHAPTER 2 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the prescripts related to human rights laws and cyberbullying have been outlined. National and international laws serve as guides and establish legal boundaries for cyberbullying policies. Human rights laws, including the Children's Rights law and other domesticated international human rights instruments, form an integral part of the legislative framework in South Africa for regulating cyberbullying policies.

A literature review was conducted to understand the nature of cyberbullying and its impact on learners and schools. It was found that while cyberbullying shares some similarities with traditional bullying, it also presents unique challenges for schools to address. The review shed light on the distinctive characteristics of cyberbullying and its implications for the school environment. In my investigation of a whole-school approach to policy development, I found that involving all stakeholders in the policy development process was crucial for successful policy development and implementation in schools. Best practices for policy development were identified, including determining the need for a policy, conducting thorough research, establishing the legal framework, involving stakeholders in the development and review process, and planning for dissemination and implementation. Additionally, I stressed the importance of viable feedback mechanisms to assess policy success. Furthermore, I highlighted the generic elements that should be present in any policy, regardless of its structure, to ensure its effectiveness.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

3.1 INTRODUCTION

I reported on the document study of law and policy relevant to the management of cyberbullying and what must be considered when cyberbullying policy is developed, in the previous chapter. Additionally, I conducted a literature review on cyberbullying, policy development in general, and policy development within a whole-school development framework. In this chapter, I explain how the research methodology introduced in chapter 1 was implemented.

The research methodology refers to the decisions the researcher makes, and the steps taken to execute the research to find answers to the research questions (Brynard et al 2015:38). In this chapter I describe the various stages of the research, which includes the selection of participants by using specific criteria for inclusion in the study, the data collection procedure, development and implementation of the data-collection instruments and the data analysis process. I then concluded the chapter with a discussion on how I ensured trustworthiness and good ethical research.

3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

As mentioned previously, this study is positioned in a critical realist paradigm. The focal point of critical realist ontology is not just on what the world is but on what makes the world the way it is (Kozhevnikov & Vincent 2019:4). Critical realism offered me a lens for understanding human *ontology* (being in the world), *epistemology* (how knowledge is constructed, and reality evaluated), *methodology* (methods and strategies used) and *axiology* (our moral compass) (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller 2014:219). When it comes to policy development, policy developers can only develop policies based on structures, mechanisms and knowledge that exist in the real world, and what is considered as “true” knowledge. For this reason, I used critical realism, acknowledging that human rights exist independently of my thoughts or what I may or may not understand regarding human rights, policy, and whole-school development theories. Therefore, I had to be reflective about my position towards the research to mindfully prevent my own views or emotions from influencing what data I captured and how I analysed and interpreted such data (cf. sections 1.8.4 and 3.5).

Critical realism adopts a three-level stratified ontology. The “real”, where entities have properties to activate casual mechanisms, normally these entities cannot be directly observed (human rights) but their effects might be observable because of the power the mechanisms have (Haigh, Kemp, Bazeley & Haigh 2019:1571). The “actual” (events caused by the casual mechanisms, for example the Cyberbullying Policy, the school’s Code of Conduct for learners, Policy Developing Policy) and the “empirical”, events observed (semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, open-ended questionnaire) can deal with a wide range of themes that are important in social research (Heeks & Wall 2018:161). Critical realists use underlying structures, in this case, policy and whole-school development theories and human rights law, to disclose causative processes. They further use triangulation to legitimise the perspectives of various types of participants (Heeks & Wall 2018:161). By employing critical realism as a theoretical framework, my aim was to facilitate progressive societal change through the development of a new cyberbullying policy to combat this practice. Critical realism provided a philosophical foundation that allowed for a refined understanding of the social structures and mechanisms underlying cyberbullying, while also acknowledging the need for practical and actionable policy solutions. Through this approach, I sought to uncover the underlying causes of cyberbullying and propose policy considerations, leading to positive social change and the reduction of cyberbullying in the school setting.

The "critical" element of critical realism enabled me to evaluate current policies and their perceived acceptance by a certain culture to further build new policies and techniques to establish best practices in developing a prototype cyberbullying policy. I used the practical suggestions for planning and executing a critical realist case study as set out in Saxena (2021:52).

The first suggestion is that research questions should be posed in either a "what" or "how" format, and they should always include a direct request for a mechanism as a means of explanation. The "what" questions I asked in my study included the following:

- What are the findings and implications of existing research on cyberbullying policy development?
- What legal frameworks or structures should be considered when developing effective cyberbullying policies?

- What lessons can be learned from previous experiences with cyberbullying policy implementation in schools?

The “how” questions I asked in my study included the following:

- How can schools effectively develop and implement policies to address cyberbullying?
- How do schools manage incidents of cyberbullying and provide support to stakeholders?

By using clear and specific "what" or "how" questions, I ensured that my research questions were focused on the information or mechanisms I aimed to explore in my study.

The second suggestion is that the researcher must triangulate. Triangulation requires the employment of many data collecting techniques. Documentation and archive data, as well as interviews, observation and artifacts are examples of the types of data sources that could be used in a critical realist case study. As part of my study, I analysed documents, conducted semi-structured interviews, led a focus group, and distributed a qualitative open-ended questionnaire. My data was triangulated thanks to the use of data sources.

The third suggestion is that the critical realist researcher should focus his or her data analysis on extracting meaningful insights, patterns, or trends that will allow him or her to draw conclusions or make interpretations based on the findings. The process of data analysis is a crucial step in the research process as it enabled me to make evidence-based decisions and interpretations based on the data collected. Instead of trying to theorise, my attention was placed on giving a detailed account of the data. Rather than offering theories, I focused on providing in-depth explanations of the data.

The fourth recommendation is to ensure that the suggested procedures effectively describe the order of events. In a critical realist case study, the analytical method involves going back and forth between the evidence and the explanation in an iterative way. My data analysis involved some "retroduction" as Saxena (2021:48) terms it or circling back and forth between data and interpretation. As a result, I did not only provide a descriptive narrative but converted that into what is called an "analytic causal explanation" (Saxena 2021:49).

3.3 RESEARCH APPROACH AND DESIGN

A “case” in qualitative case studies can be a person, a classroom, a bounded system or in this study, a school (McMillan & Schumacher 2014:1). My study involved a case study of the school and data were collected through the methods set out in chapter 1 (cf. section 1.8.5). Because a policy is written for a particular situation, group of people, company or school, a case study is a perfect option to witness the unique features associated with that situation, or in this case, the school.

As a social researcher it was necessary to have a comprehensive understanding of the views and opinions of the school staff and learners on what they perceive as cyberbullying and how cyberbullying is regulated in current school policies. As indicated before, qualitative research is concerned with the subjective (emotional, social) view of things and provides in-depth, descriptive data. I was able to experience the school’s daily struggles in a real-life situation and see first-hand how the school regulates cyberbullying. As Brynard et al (2015:39) describe it, “qualitative research is a commitment to see the world through the eyes of another”.

I conducted my case study research, following a four-phased approach as suggested by Rashid et al (2019:2).

- Foundation phase – The foundation phase is subdivided into the philosophical consideration, the inquiry techniques I considered and used and the research logic I applied to this study. When exploring inquiry techniques, I considered the effectiveness of various approaches. In this regard, I considered conducting a qualitative case study that is firmly grounded in the critical realism paradigm. To ensure comprehensive data collection, I employed multiple methods, including document study, document analysis, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and qualitative questionnaires. By incorporating these diverse approaches, I believe I was able to effectively address my research question. I further considered that abductive research logic would allow me to go back and forth between empirical material (by interviewing participants, conducting a focus group, and completing a qualitative questionnaire with the learners) and the literature (to establish the research purpose and idea generation).

- Pre-field phase – During the pre-field phase I decided on the operational details of the research as explained in chapter 1 (what techniques and tools will I use to gather data). Because I had to describe a real-life phenomenon, by collecting people's opinions, listening to their actions and interactions towards the learners and how they respond to cyberbullying made it clear that a case study would be the preferred research design.
- Field phase – During the field phase I visited the school to introduce myself to the principal and the members I had selected as prospective participants for the research. I discussed with them the research I had planned, the research aim and the role I foresaw them playing in order for them to determine where and how they fit into the research. This initial meeting with the principal, deputy-principal and school counsellor helped me to establish rapport with the potential participants before the research commenced. I further obtained informed consent and arranged with the participants a day and time for the fieldwork. During the actual research I used semi-structured interviews, focus groups and qualitative open-ended questionnaire as data collection methods.
- Reporting phase – Due to the distinct characteristics of qualitative research, my primary emphasis was on ensuring the authenticity and consistency of the data I gathered. During the reporting I gave a description of the case, who the participants were, how I interpreted the data and drew a conclusion from the findings.

By carefully following these four phases, I was able to organise my study in a logical manner and acquire the relevant data.

3.4 DATA COLLECTION

Data is information gained from the research, and from which understandings and conclusions are drawn (McMillan & Schumacher 2014:17). In this section I discuss the research population, how I selected and sampled the participants and the reason for selecting the specific research setting from which I collected the data.

3.4.1 Research population, selecting and sampling participants and setting

Here, I elaborate on my exposition of the research population, selecting and sampling participants and setting provided in section 1.8.6. But first, a brief recapture of the main

points. My target population consisted of three groups. I used criterion sampling for the selection of the participants. The criteria for selecting participants for semi-structured interviews encompassed individuals who hold responsibility for the daily operations of the school and oversee managing staff, policies, and learners. The target population for the interviews consisted of the school administration, which includes the principal, deputy principal, and the school counsellor. The second criterion focused on selecting participants who closely interact with the learners, establishing themselves as trustworthy individuals with whom the learners feel comfortable sharing openly. Consequently, the second target population chosen for a focus group discussion comprised the register class teachers. The third and final group to be included were those who, according to the research, are predominantly affected by cyberbullying: the grade 8 and 9 learners. For this group, a qualitative questionnaire was employed.

All three groups were from the same private secondary school in Roodepoort, Gauteng, South Africa. I used the criterion that the learners had been exposed to social media to draw a sample of 49 grade 8 and 9 learners between 14 and 15 years of age. I used this criterion because the participant learners were required to draw upon their experience or knowledge of cyberbullying to complete the qualitative open-ended questionnaire.

Table 5: Number of participants

Participants	**Number of participants**
Semi-structured interview with principal	1
Semi-structured interview with deputy-principal	1
Semi-structured interview with school counsellor	1
Focus group discussion with register class teachers	5
Open-ended questionnaire with learners	49
Total:	57

Bhattacharya (2008:787) describes the **research setting** as the physical site where the research takes place. A defining feature of qualitative research is that it is conducted in a natural setting, which is required for case study research, without any modification or interference from the researcher (McMillan & Schumacher 2014:345). As previously alluded to, the natural setting for the research is a private high school in Roodepoort West,

Gauteng, South Arica. I chose this location as it is the natural environment for learners and staff. I selected a private school in my immediate area so that the participants and I could conveniently travel to and meet at the school.

3.4.2 Data collection procedure

The data collection procedure was divided into five phases. The first phase was to conduct a document study. A document study was done on the law and policy relevant to the regulation of cyberbullying and development of a prototype cyberbullying policy for private schools in South Africa (cf. section 2.3).

The second phase was to conduct a document analysis of court reports, the school's cyberbullying policy and the policy used for developing new policies. Analysing court reports was very important to help me understand how the courts interpret cases of cyberbullying. The court reports gave valuable insights into what principles the courts apply, what standards are used and how they are used, for example *Tinker v Des Moines* (freedom of speech rights), and *JS v. Bethlehem, Le Roux v Dey* (sufficient disruption in school). By analysing school policies, I could triangulate my findings with other data sources to enhance their credibility.

During phase three, I conducted semi-structured interviews with the principal, deputy-principal, and the counsellor with the aim of discovering:

- the schools' definition of cyberbullying
- the perspectives of the participants on the constituting elements of cyberbullying
- the strategies the senior management team use to regulate cyberbullying.

After understanding how the principal, deputy-principal and the school counsellor defines and regulates cyberbullying, I needed to understand the teachers' involvement in the policy development process, how register class teachers interpret the "school's" definition of cyberbullying and what they understood cyberbullying to be. This led to phase four where I held a focus group discussion with the register class teachers. The information the teachers provided, highlighted the challenges teachers and learners (from the viewpoint of a teacher) experience when being confronted with incidents of cyberbullying.

Phase five involved a qualitative open-ended questionnaire with the learners. I used the questionnaire to identify issues that learners felt should be addressed in a cyberbullying policy and to give the learners an opportunity to make suggestions on the policy development procedures. When developing a cyberbullying policy for learners it is important to also understand learners' struggles and challenges, not just with cyberbullying but also with how the policy is developed and disseminated. Figure 5 contains the data collection procedure and the order I followed for this research.

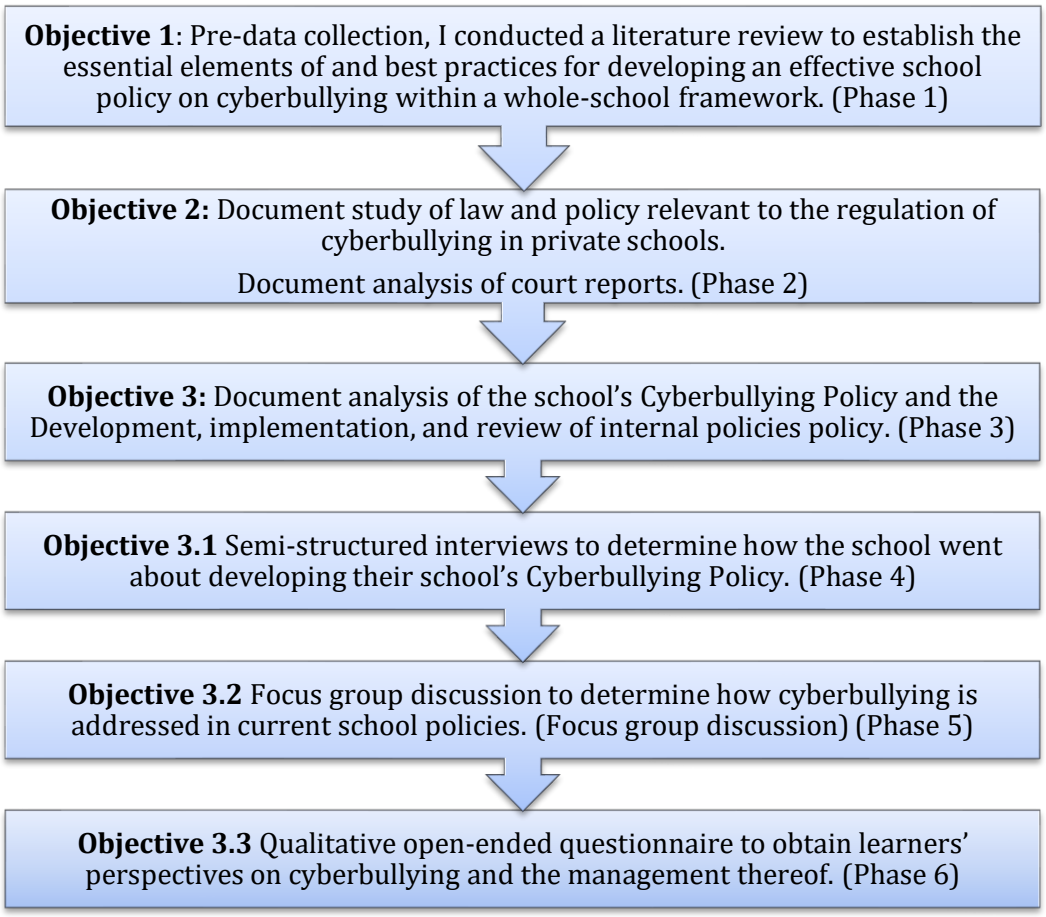

Figure 5: Flow diagram of data collection procedure

Source: Developed by the researcher (IM van Rooyen August 2021)

3.4.3. Data collection methods and instruments

Data collection is a process of collecting information by using a combination of various data-collection methods (McMillan & Schumacher 2014:369). The correct data-collection instruments must be selected in conjunction with the selected research methods to

achieve your research objectives (Trigueros & Sandoval 2017:1). For this purpose, I compiled table 2, linking objectives and data-collection methods.

With the document study as a starting point, I next elaborate on the implementation of the data-collection methods introduced in chapter 1.

3.4.4 Document study

With socio-legal research a “law-in-context” approach is the best approach to frame the legal portion of the research. Legal research requires data collection methods such as a document study, document analysis and/or discourse analysis, while the “socio” part requires methods such as semi-structured interviews, focus groups discussion, and a qualitative open-ended questionnaire (Hills 2017:12-13). Regarding the legal part of my research, I opted to conduct a document study to determine the legal prescripts a school must consider when developing a cyberbullying policy (cf. chapter 2). During the document study, consideration was given to the Constitution, relevant cyberbullying legislation, policies, and international human rights instruments.

3.4.5 Document analysis

Bowen (2009:27) defines **document analysis** as a systematic process of evaluating both printed and electronic documents. I used the following checklist, developed by Bell and Waters (2014:137–138), to analyse the selected documents:

The analysis of documentary evidence checklist		Result of analysis
Decide how you want to use documentary evidence.	Will it be used to supplement other sources of evidence, or will you use it as the exclusive method of gathering data?	Documents were used as one source of data collection in addition to a document study, interviews, focus groups, and a qualitative questionnaire.
Undertake a document search to ascertain the existence of different sources of information.	These may be found in different places in an organisation, so it is important to be persistent. Always negotiate access to the documents and do not assume that you can consult them; some information may be confidential.	Access to policies were requested and granted by the school principal. The school's principal noted that various policies are in place to deal with cyberbullying incidents if they arise. There were three policies in place at the school to deal with cyberbullying at that time. According to the principal: "Staff matters policy", "Counselling centre policy", and "Computer and network usage policy", but no specific policy dealing with cyberbullying incidents.
If the documents are bulky, it may be necessary to decide on a sampling strategy.	Try to read a balanced selection of documents in the time you have available. The strategy must be appropriate to the purposes of your search and be capable of being justified in the report.	I used key words in my research as a strategy when I searched for relevant documents. Key words included “Cyberbullying” and “Bullying” and I only focused on the policies that contained these terms.
Subject each document to the “what does it say?” Critical method and ask a range of questions.	Who wrote it? Why? How did it come into existence? Is it typical of its kind? Is it complete?	By using a document analysis guide with pre-determined questions, I subjected all documents to external and internal criticism for proof of authenticity.
Compare the document with another source to see if it is accurate.	Analyse case reports to check whether the law and policy referred to were correctly indicated and interpreted. A comparison should be made where precedents are cited.	I used various court reports to compare the findings. This helped to identify a norm that the courts look for to justify a form of cyberbullying.

Figure 6: Checklist for analysing documentary evidence

Source: Bell & Waters (2014:137–139)

The following documents were analysed:

- court reports
- the school's Policy on Cyberbullying
- the school's policy on the Development, Implementation and Review of Internal Policies

Document analysis can be divided into external and internal criticism (Bell & Waters 2014:134). External criticism refers to the challenge of proving that a document is authentic and internal criticism refers to the process of analysing the content of a document (Bell & Waters 2014:134). Court reports can be considered authentic as they were written by professional bodies within the law industry. All the South African case reports I used were published by Juta in the South African Law Reports (abbreviated as SA or ZA in citations), which is a recognised law repository of South African judicial jurisprudence. The court reports are on record and available online if further authentication is needed. As for the school's policies they may also be considered authentic. According to the school's Policy on the Development, Implementation and Review of Internal Policies, "The development of internal policies shall be the responsibility of the Management Team or a designated sub-committee of the Management team" and obtain input from stakeholders in a collaborative fashion to develop a draft policy. Sub-committee members are chosen, based on their expertise and experience. The school's senior management team then receive the draft policy for final approval and disseminate it among all stakeholders through the official channels (cf. section 4.4.1). The school's policies that I analysed (Cyberbullying Policy and the policy on Development, Implementation and Review of Internal Policies) were drafted and implemented by the school's senior management team.

After proving the authenticity of the reports, I had to determine how I would gain access to the documents before I could conduct the actual analysis. Case reports are available online and the principal of the identified school was asked to share a copy of the school's Cyberbullying Policy and the school's Policy on the Development, Implementation and Review of Internal Policies.

The procedures followed in the document analysis follow below. I explain why a document was selected for analysis and the questions that guided the analysis of such document.

1. The school's Cyberbullying Policy – I analysed this policy to evaluate it with regard to the best practices for policy content – generic elements that ensure effective policies. The following questions were used to guide the analysis of this policy:

1. How is cyberbullying defined in the policy?

2. Are provisions made in the policy for off-site cyberbullying? If so, how does the policy regulate off-site cyberbullying?

3. In cases of suspected or confirmed cyberbullying incidents, does the policy contain steps to follow in cases of suspected cyberbullying? If so, what are these steps?

4. What relevant legislation is considered in the policy to deal with cyberbullying on or off school grounds?

2. **The school's Policy on the Development, Implementation and Review of Internal Policies** – I analysed this policy to evaluate it with regard to the best practices for policy development. The following questions guided the analysis of this policy:

1. How is the process for developing new policies explained to stakeholders?

2. Which individuals are identified as participants in the development of new policies?

3. To what extent are different stakeholders, such as parents and learners, involved in the development of new policies?

4. Who is involved in the review of a new policy and to what extend are they involved?

5. What opportunities are there for stakeholders to raise concerns and receive feedback regarding new policies?

3. Analysis of foreign and national court judgments on matters involving human rights, freedom of speech, and cyberbullying – As part of my analysis of relevant case law, I examined how courts have interpreted cyberbullying and its relationship with freedom of expression. This analysis served as a valuable source of guidance for ensuring legal compliance in the development of a cyberbullying policy. By studying the legal interpretations of cyberbullying and freedom of expression in case law, I gained insights into the legal framework and principles that should be considered when

developing an effective cyberbullying policy. This helped me to better understand the legal landscape and to formulate a policy that aligns with relevant legal requirements, thereby promoting legal compliance in addressing the issue of cyberbullying.

Below are the questions that guided me when I was analysing court reports to develop a comprehensive cyberbullying policy (cf. sections 1.4 and 2.3.1):

1. How did the court define cyberbullying?
2. Who were the parties to the case?
3. What arguments were made by the counsel?
4. How did the court apply the “substantial disruption” test?
5. What was the decision and the reasons for the decision?
6. Which standards (e.g., Tinker standard) were applied to reach the decision (cf. sections 1.4 and 2.3.1)?

Analysing the selected documents and triangulating the information with the other datasets to a point of convergence increased the trustworthiness of the research (cf. sections 1.11 and 3.6).

3.4.6 Interviews

I conducted semi-structured interviews with the principal, deputy-principal, and school counsellor. One set of questions was used for the principal and deputy-principal, and another for the school counsellor. Before discussing the planning and execution of the semi-structured interviews, I review the development of the interview guide.

3.4.6.1 Developing the interview guide

For this study semi-structured interviews were the best option to ensure all participants could give their own views on and experiences regarding policy development and cyberbullying (cf. section 1.8.6). Adams (2015:494–495) suggests, semi-structured interviews should be used in research where the researcher asks open-ended questions to probe deeper into the thoughts of the individual, especially if you are exploring territory with significant issues, which cyberbullying of course is. Despite using the same set of

questions for all interviewees, the semi-structured nature of the interviews enabled me to gather distinct responses from each participant.

The open-ended questions used in the interviews allowed the participants to highlight issues that I had not considered and that could be explored in further research (cf. section 5.7).

Adams (2015:496) provides the following guidelines when preparing semi-structured interviews, which I followed:

1. Spend enough time planning, editing, testing, and perfecting the interview questions. Conduct a pilot test to ensure that everything is in order and prepared for the research. I conducted a pilot test with five learners from the target group, a principal, and a teacher. This gave me the opportunity to test my questions and topics for discussion in the main study. It further gave me a good indication of the timeframe needed for the interviews.

2. Avoid cramming the interview guide with too many topics, put important questions first, and watch out for questions that elicit easy information. A pilot study (cf. section 3.7) afforded me the opportunity to test which questions were relevant to the study and would deliver quality data.

3. Do not ask dichotomous-response questions that only lead to yes/no answers. Instead, I asked open-ended questions that may lead to follow-up questions. I followed the suggestion of McMillan and Schumacher (2014:383) to use an interview guide with predetermined questions and themes. I compiled such interview guide and included questions that ensured that I would be able to extract rich information related to the objectives. I had a list of keywords to listen for and as soon as one of these words came up, I would probe a little deeper. The following keywords were included:

    - Cyber threats
    - Harm
    - Trolling
    - Flaming
    - Policy development

- Harassment

4. Use ordinary phrases that the target audience would understand and avoid talking down to them.

5. Ask questions in such a way that participants will not feel interrogated, and their integrity will not be compromised. Ask about "areas where improvement is needed" instead of asking them to identify what is "bad".

6. Do not regard the interview guide as a static document that must be followed to the letter. For example, consider what question order will best ensure a seamless interview.

7. Establish an emotional connection with the participants. Begin by saying hello and asking general questions, gradually progressing to the most uncomfortable questions at the end. Xu (2009:225) identifies the use of small talk and appropriate self-disclosure as two common, but effective, methods of creating an emotional bond with participants. I tried to keep the conversation informal and light-hearted while making small talk about the weather, kids, the newest technology, and a few other random topics before sharing some personal, but appropriate, information about my past to demonstrate that I am honest and open about my intentions.

I developed the following interview guide for the semi-structured interviews for use with the principal and deputy-principal.

Semi-structured interview guide for principal and deputy-principal

Biographical information collected

1. Number of years as a principal, deputy-principal
2. Number of years at current school

Section 1: The school's understanding of cyberbullying and its occurrence

3. How would you define traditional bullying?
4. In your opinion, what do you think is the difference between traditional bullying and cyberbullying?
5. How big of a problem is cyberbullying at the school?
6. What is your perception of the effect of cyberbullying on a learner?

Section 2: Current policy(ies) used to regulate cyberbullying incidents at school

7. Does the school have policies other than one on cyberbullying, e.g., policies for internet etiquette, information technology, or cell phone use that address cyberbullying or other forms of cyber harassment?
8. How does a cyberbullying policy differ from other policies such as the disciplinary and information technology policies?
9. How does a cyberbullying policy require you to respond to an incidence of cyberbullying that occurred
   9.1 inside the school premises but learners used their own devices?
   9.2 inside the school premises and learners used the school's equipment?
   9.3 outside the school premises and learners used their own devices?
10. To what extend do you think parents expect you to intervene in cases of cyberbullying that occurs outside of school?
11. How does the school support the victims of cyberbullying?
12. How does the school support the cyberbully?
13. In terms of teachers, why would you say are the teachers prepared or unprepared to implement school policies that regulates cyberbullying?

Section 3: To establish best practices for developing a school policy on cyberbullying within a whole-school framework

14. Please explain the school's procedure for developing new policy.
15. How does the school include the parents in the development of new policies?
16. How does the school include the learners in the development of new policies?
17. Please explain the measures that are in place to ensure learners are educated on cyberbullying.
18. How do you educate parents on aspects of cyberbullying?
19. What do you think are the best strategies to reduce cyberbullying incidents at your school?

Semi-structured interview with school counsellor

Biographical information collected

1. Number of years as a counsellor?
2. Number of years at current school?

Section 1: Understanding of cyberbullying and its occurrence

3. How would you define traditional bullying?
4. In your opinion, what do you think is the difference between traditional bullying and cyberbullying?
5. How big of a problem is cyberbullying at the school?

6. What is your perception on the effect of cyberbullying on a learner?

Section 2: Current policy(ies) used to regulate cyberbullying incidents at school

7. Other than a cyberbullying policy, which other school policies are used to regulate cyberbullying?
8. How does a cyberbullying policy differ from the information technology policy?
9. How does a cyberbullying policy require you to respond to an incidence of cyberbullying that occurred:
   9.1 inside the school premises but learners used their own devices?
   9.2 inside the school premises and learners used the school's equipment?
   9.3 outside the school premises and learners used their own devices?
10. To what extend do you think parents expect you to intervene in cases of cyberbullying that occurs outside of school?
11. What is your involvement when a learner is identified as a victim of cyberbullying?
12. How does the school support the cyberbully?
13. As the school counsellor, how do you support the school personnel to deal with cyberbullying?
14. In terms of teachers, do you feel that they are confident to deal with incidents of cyberbullying?

Section 3: To establish best practices for developing a school policy on cyberbullying within a whole-school framework

15. Please explain the measures that are in place to ensure teachers, learners and parents are educated on cyberbullying.
16. What do you think are the best strategies to reduce cyberbullying incidents at your school?
17. Please explain the measures that are in place to ensure teachers, learners and parents are involved in the policy development process.

3.4.6.2 Planning and executing interviewing

Thorough preparation of the interview was needed to ensure I structured the interviews to accommodate the participants' schedules. Bryman (2012:217) stresses that before anyone is interviewed the interviewer should be fully conversant with the participant's schedule. Knowing participants' schedules made it easier to establish interview timeslots.

I contacted the school beforehand to obtain a copy of their Covid-19 protocols for visitors, which I used to ensure that I comply with the school's protocols. The semi-structured interviews with the principal, deputy-principal and school counsellor were conducted in their offices.

As previously mentioned, building rapport with participants is crucial in conducting interviews. Prior (2017:3) emphasises that it is the responsibility of the interviewer to establish and maintain rapport with interviewees, starting from the initial approach towards prospective participants and not just during the actual interview process. Bryman (2012:218) also underscores the significance of friendliness in establishing rapport. In my study, I prioritised building rapport by being honest, friendly, and open about the research objectives during the interviews. I aimed to create a comfortable and trusting environment for participants, which facilitated open and candid responses. By establishing and maintaining rapport throughout the interview process, I sought to foster a positive relationship with participants, which in turn enhanced the quality and validity of the data collected.

Field notes and recordings were used throughout the interviews to ensure that no information was lost or forgotten. By recording the interviews on my cell phone, I was able to accurately recall what was said during the interviews, and I was also able to later listen for things I might have missed during the interview.

Because I was not relying solely on field notes and did not have to worry about capturing every word, I was able to concentrate on the interview itself. Regardless of the convenience of recording the interviews, taking field notes was still a necessity. Bryman (2012:450) describes such notes as “scratch notes”; brief notes that need to be written down inconspicuously. My field notes provided another data source that I used to increase the measures of validity and strengthen the credibility of my research findings. For example, I could make notes on facial expressions or sounds that I then used to ensure accurate analysis of data.

3.4.7 Focus group discussion with register class teachers

In a focus group, the emphasis is on a “focus” of a topic and interviewees are selected because they are known to have been involved in a particular situation (Bryman 2012:501). A focus group discussion was conducted to gather information from the register class teachers because they are of one mind (teachers with similar experiences in education), and they have a collective knowledge of the learners, cyberbullying, and the way the school develops policies. Encouraging open and candid discussions among teachers about their perceptions, beliefs, and opinions on cyberbullying, as well as the school's policy adoption process, lead to a very enriching and in-depth discussion. Again,

I first discuss the development of the data-collection instrument before elaborating on how I went about planning and conducting the focus group.

3.4.7.1 Developing the focus group guide

A researcher can collect in-depth information quickly by utilising predetermined topics, as suggested by Baral et al (2016:2). To ensure I extract data required to realise my research objectives, I carefully selected topics to include in my focus group guide that were aligned with these objectives. Those topics were to establish what cyberbullying is, how the school regulates cyberbullying and the school's policy development within a whole-school approach. I further developed a list of probing questions that I kept on hand. I used the probing questions when a teacher mentioned something, and I wanted more detail. I also used these questions to stimulate conversation among the teachers themselves to generate discussion and acquire greater clarity. The list included the following questions:

- Could you elaborate further?
- Could you give me an example?
- Could you give me more detail?
- What factors make this difficult?
- What are the difficulties that need to be dealt with?
- Why is this the most important problem to consider?

Topics for discussion

What is cyberbullying

1. What is cyberbullying? Can you give me some examples?
2. How does cyberbullying differ from traditional bullying?
3. In what way do you believe cyberbullying is a problem for learners?

The school's regulation of cyberbullying

4. Why do you regard yourself as competent / not competent to handle incidents of cyberbullying?
5. How does the school policy help you to know what do you do in cases of suspected cyberbullying at the school?
6. What do you do when you become aware of an incident of cyberbullying where a learner used his or her private laptop to cyberbully a co-learner while not on school property?
7. In your opinion, who should take responsibility for handling acts of cyberbullying either on or off the school grounds?

Policy development within a whole-school approach

8. Explain the school's procedure for developing new policy.
9. As teachers in a non-management position, how much are you involved in the development of the disciplinary/cyberbullying policy?
10. How could the school improve its processes and practices to develop, review, disseminate and evaluate its policies?
11. What three things do you wish policymakers, and/or the community knew about cyberbullying?
12. Which strategies to reduce cyberbullying incidents at your school would you suggest should be included in the school's cyberbullying policy?

3.4.7.2 Conducting the focus group

I followed the steps suggested by Baral et al (2016:3) to plan the focus group discussion with register class teachers:

- Identify the participants needed for the study (cf. section 3.4.1)
- Develop a guide and method of recording (see below)
- Pre-test the instruments that will be used (cf. section 3.7)
- Conduct focus group discussion (see below)
- Transcribe, analyse, and interpret the responses (cf. section 4.10)

I opted to conduct the focus group discussion in the school staff room. Not only was it big enough to allow for social distancing to comply with Covid-19 regulations but it also provided a familiar setting for the teachers that is less formal than a classroom. Nyumba et al (2017:23) suggest that the venue should be a familiar setting where the participants can feel comfortable and at ease. The chairs were arranged in a circle to allow all the participants to see one another and stimulate conversation. In keeping with Covid-19 regulations, all participants had to sanitise their hands and wear a mask before they were allowed to enter the staff room. I also sanitised the chairs before the group arrived.

Good ethical practice is critical and an essential part of research, especially in focus groups where there is close interaction between multiple participants (Liamputtong 2011:25). I started the discussion like Smithson (2007:360) suggests, with "dos and don'ts". I reminded the participants of the study's aim and their role in the study as set out in the information letters (Appendix F), which I distributed before they consented to participate. I again highlighted my undertaking to safeguard their confidentiality and

anonymity. After reminding them that they have signed confidentiality agreements (Appendix G), I prompted them to respect each other's rights to privacy and confidentiality by not sharing anything that was said and not recording the discussion.

I used software on my cell phone to record the focus group discussion.

3.4.8 Qualitative open-ended questionnaire with learners

A qualitative open-ended questionnaire is a research instrument used when the researcher wants to collect data through open-ended questions that allow participants to provide subjective and detailed responses in their own words. Qualitative open-ended questionnaires allow for free expression and elaboration, providing rich and in-depth insights into participants' thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and experiences. The data I collected from the qualitative open-ended questionnaire was used for inductive analysis to generate themes, patterns, and interpretations, providing a deep understanding of human experiences and perspectives.

3.4.8.1 Developing a questionnaire

When composing a questionnaire, the aim and objectives should be considered because the aim and objectives guide the questionnaire format, the type of questions and the order in which it should be included (Holyk 2008:656–657).

The questionnaire should not be at a level that discourages participants to participate but rather encourage participants to actively join in (Holyk 2008:656). Participants who do not understand a poorly designed questionnaire may not provide answers aligned with the research objectives (Sreejesh, Mohapatra & Anusree 2014:143). McMillan and Schumacher (2014:212) provided the following guidelines on writing effective questions:

- Make sure the **questions are clear**. This will ensure that all participants interpret them in the same way.
- Avoid **double-barrelled questions**. Each question should have only one "subject".
- Ask questions that participants can answer **reliably and competently**. Asking about details that happened long ago or about which the participants may not have any knowledge of will draw unreliable answers.

- Ask **questions relevant to the participants**. This way they will feel more invested in the research and not just brush off the questions.
- Keep questions **short and simple**. Complicated questions will let participants lose interest.
- **Avoid negative items** such as, for example, “not” or “doesn’t”. If they must be used, make them either in bold, capital letters or underline them.
- Avoid questions that make participants emotional because that will lead them into an emotional response and not a true response. This type of question is known as a **loaded or leading question** because a specific response is suggested.
- Avoid questions or terms that may elicit a **biased** answer.

Sreejesh et al (2014:143) suggest researchers consult previous studies on similar topics. I was able to gain valuable insight into common themes present in cyberbullying through my literature review and the legal framework necessary for policy considerations through my document study.

Roulston (2008:582) defines an open-ended question as a type of question that researchers pose to research participants that allows them to select how they want to contribute to the research topic. Open-ended questions provide participants the opportunity to answer in their own words and describe their own experiences and, eliminate the possibility of researchers making presumptions about participants’ answers (Roulston 2008:582). Open-ended questions gave the learners a chance to express their views on topics of prevention, development, implementation, and incidents of cyberbullying without them having to worry about being judged by another learner or ending up as a victim afterwards. Open-ended responses might contain the ‘gems’ of information that otherwise might be lost during a quantitative questionnaire (Cohen et al 2018:475). According to Ballou (2008:547-548) a researcher would prefer open-ended questions when he or she wants to do the following:

- **Build rapport and encourage participation**. Asking an easy-to-answer question at the beginning of the questionnaire engages the participant.
- **Explain a prior answer**. An open-ended question can deepen the understanding of the response to a preceding question by obtaining additional details on the reason for the answer choice.

- **Establish knowledge**. A test question allows the researcher to distinguish between participants who are more and those who are less informed.
- **Clarify terminology**. Asking participants to define a key word, documents their level of understanding.
- **Explore new topics**. The questionnaire can be an opportunity to get suggestions for future survey topics that are especially salient to the participant.

To ensure the effectiveness of a qualitative open-ended questionnaire I piloted the questionnaire. The pilot study provided valuable feedback and insight into which questions were aligned or not with the research objectives (cf. section 3.7).

To enable me to achieve the necessary research objectives I had to ask the learners certain information related to cyberbullying and about the learner's definition of cyberbullying, how frequent cyberbullying happens and the school's regulation of cyberbullying. The following questions were presented to the learners.

Qualitative open-ended questionnaire for learners

Section 1: Biographical information collected:

1. Gender.
2. Age.
3. Race.
4. Where do you normally access the internet from? (school, home, friend's house)
5. Is your internet access supervised? If so, by whom?
6. Number of hours a day spend on the internet/social media.
7. Social media platforms you use.
8. Do your parents supervise your social media use?

Section 2: What is cyberbullying?

9. In the table below, tick the options you think is a form of cyberbullying.

Definition	This is a form of cyberbullying	This is **NOT** a form of cyberbullying
Online fights using private messaging via a social media app (WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram) containing angry or vulgar language.		
Repeatedly sending nasty, mean and insulting messages.		

Threats of harm or intimidation through repeated online harassment and threats.		
"Dissing" or disrespecting someone; sending or posting gossip or rumours about a person to damage his or her reputation or friendships online.		
Sharing someone's secrets or embarrassing information or images online.		
Pretending to be someone else and sending or posting material online to get that person in trouble or damage their reputation.		
Intentionally or cruelly excluding someone from online groups.		

10. What would you regard as more embarrassing; traditional bullying (for example where you are physically attacked or taunted in front of other learners at school), or cyberbullying (for example when another learner posts something on the internet or sends an embarrassing text message that is distributed among other learners?
11. Do you consider one incident (posting a nasty comment, embarrassing photo) on a public group as cyberbullying? Please explain.
12. From your own understanding of cyberbullying, do you think you have been a victim of cyberbullying? Please explain why you think so.
13. If you were cyberbullied, where did it start? (school, home).
14. If you reported the cyberbully, to whom did you report it and if you did not report it, why did you not report it?
15. What steps were taken to help you?
16. If you have cyberbullied a co-learner, please describe the cyberbullying and pay attention to how you did it, why, for how long and the outcome for you and the co-learner you bullied.

Section 3: The school's regulation of cyberbullying

17. Where did you first learn about cyberbullying?
18. What did the school do to educate you on the dangers of cyberbullying?
19. Do you think your school successfully protect and support learners against cyberbullying? Kindly explain your view.
20. To whom should cyberbullying be reported?
21. What transgressions do you think will constitute cyberbullying in your school?
22. If you are cyberbullied outside of school, to what extend should the school get involved?
23. Who should be held responsible when you are being cyberbullied? Should it be the bully, the school, your teacher, your parents, the internet service provider, yourself? Please justify your answer.
24. What changes would you like to see in the school's cyberbullying policy?

I was able to get vital data from the learners by giving them the opportunity to answer the anonymous open-ended questionnaire and elaborate freely.

3.4.8.2 Planning and having the questionnaire completed

Because of the Covid-19 pandemic I had to take precautions in the printing, handling, and distribution of the questionnaires. To protect myself and others I wore sterile, single-use gloves during the printing and distribution process. The printed questionnaires were sealed in plastic, sprayed with sanitiser, and locked in my office until they were needed.

After my meeting with the school counsellor, I approached the parents and learners for their consent and assent, respectively. The learners whose parents gave consent and who assented themselves were contacted via the school to communicate the arrangements for the day when the questionnaires would be completed. The school principal agreed that the learners could complete the questionnaire in the morning just after school has started during their administration period. Because the questionnaire was completed during school hours, we followed the school's Covid-19 protocols.

On the day, I placed one qualitative open-ended questionnaire on each learner's desk before they entered the hall. Learners had to use their own stationery to complete the qualitative open-ended questionnaire. After the questionnaires were completed, the learners handed in their own questionnaires. As required, we all wore masks, and I also wore gloves when handling the papers and the school counsellor and I kept the learners under constant supervision.

3.5 CONTENT DATA ANALYSIS

Content analysis is a method of data analysis that involves systematically examining and interpreting the content of different data sources to gain insight and understanding to find a point of convergence. It is often used in qualitative research as a means of analysing text-based data, such as interview transcripts, open-ended questionnaires, or other written or verbal data (Vears & Gillam 2022:113–114).

According to Lindgren, Lundman, and Graneheim (2020:1–2), qualitative content analysis is characterised by its descriptive and interpretative nature. They assert that when the data permit interpretations of latent content, qualitative content analysis has the potential to uncover depth and meaning in participants' statements.

McMillan and Schumacher (2014:395) describe qualitative data analysis as primarily an inductive process of arranging data into categories and identifying patterns and connections among categories. In qualitative content analysis, data is categorised using categories generated mostly inductively (recognising or observing patterns and drawing conclusions). Bell and Waters (2014:132) describe content analysis as a “research tool” that can be used to detect words, terms, or concepts in a source and evaluate its importance. According to Busch et al (2005) content analysis offers the following advantages and disadvantages as set out in Table 6 below.

Table 6: Advantages and disadvantages of content analysis

Advantages of content analysis	Disadvantages of content analysis
Data is being analysed directly to get to the core of the matter	Time consuming
May be used in both quantitative and qualitative processes	Could be too crude, particularly when dealing with intricate texts
Provides important cultural insights through analysis of texts	Sometimes just used to count words
It is unobtrusive in analysing interactions	Does not always look at the reason why the text was produced (the bigger picture)
Offers insight into complex human thought	Can be difficult to be computerised

Source: Content Analysis adapted from Busch et al (2005:17-18)

Qualitative content analysis method is defined as "the systematic reduction of content, analysed with special attention to the context in which it was created, to identify themes and extract meaningful interpretations of the data" (Roller & Lavrakas 2015:232). But, for content analysis to be credible a scientific approach should be followed (Neuendorf 2012:40-41). Roller (2019:3) suggests using the following two-phased approach as a methodical approach to content analysis:

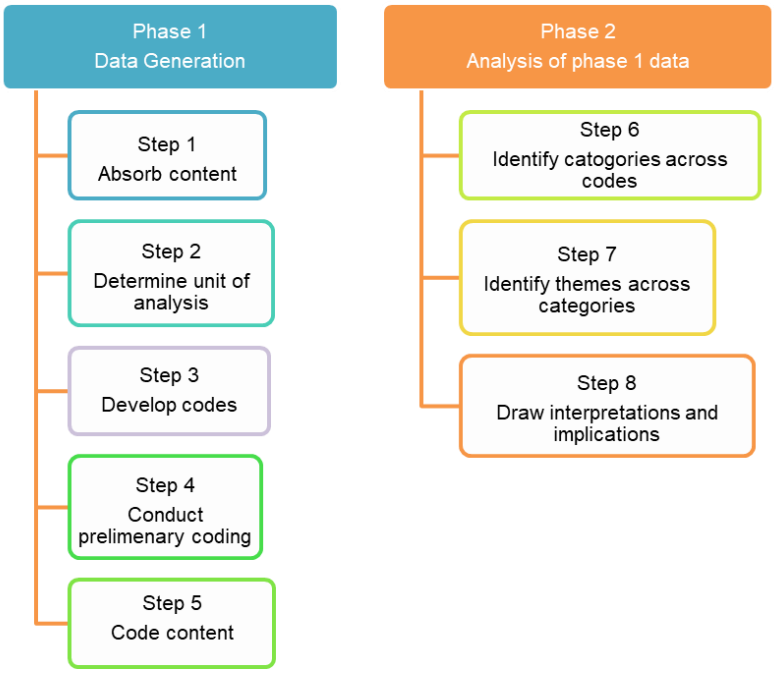

Figure 7: Phases and steps in qualitative content analysis

Source: Roller (2019:2)

Step 1 – Gathering data and familiarising myself with information related to the research topic (cf. section 1.8.6).

Step 2 – The "units of analysis" were identified through the documents studied and analysed, the semi-structured interview transcripts, focus group discussion transcript and the completed questionnaires.

Step 3 – From the gathered data I developed codes. As the research progressed during the semi-structured interviews, focus group discussion and qualitative open-ended questionnaires, I further developed codes that was used in step 3.

Step 4 – By reading and listening to the transcripts and analysing the questionnaires I started with the preliminary coding of the data.

Step 5 – Having coded the data, the next step was to read it several times to look for details that had previously been missed.

Step 6 – The development of categories across the coded data was identified.

Step 7 – Identifying themes across the categories from where I was able to draw conclusions and interpretations.

Step 8 – As a final step in content analysis I was able to draw interpretations from the data and highlight some of the implications of the data.

By applying the above two-phased, eight-step approach to content analysis I was able to systematically reduce the content into themes and extract meaningful interpretations from the data in a sound scientific manner.

3.6 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE RESEARCH

Trustworthiness is crucial in evaluating qualitative research. As mentioned in chapter 1, quality qualitative research requires compliance with the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Toma 2011:264). In the next subsection I indicate how I went about ensuring compliance with these criteria.

3.6.1 Credibility

Research credibility is the extent to which the results align with those of other researchers in the same field (McMillan & Schumacher 2014:2). Toma (2011:271) explains that credibility is established if the researcher's findings "resonate" with the reality of the participants. The key to credibility is to carefully bring all the information together and explain it as richly as possible (Toma 2011:271). Two techniques used to establish credibility is *triangulation* and *participant validation* (Bryman 2012:390).

Triangulation helps strengthen the validity and reliability of qualitative research by reducing the likelihood of biased and increasing the confidence in the results (Adler 2022:601). Triangulation involves using multiple methods to collect data for the research to triangulate the data across all datasets. To triangulate my data, I used a variety of methods to gather data that included document analysis of court reports, the school's Cyberbullying Policy, and their Policy on the Development, Implementation and Review of Internal Policies, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussion, and qualitative open-ended questionnaires. I was only able to achieve the level of credibility necessary for the study after I triangulated all the datasets.

Participant validation is the practice of submitting research findings to the members of the participants and obtaining feedback about the accuracy of the data they have given (Bryman 2012:390). During the research study I continually verified with the participants whether I understood their answers correctly by repeating what they said.

3.6.2 Transferability

A case study must be useful in illuminating another context if it is to be deemed transferable, and it should also be applicable to another setting or group (Toma 2011:272). In other words, does the research offer usable knowledge, does it offer change, does the research let its "users," make better decisions by being better informed (Toma 2011:273)? By purposively selecting the participants and the location of my study I was able to expand the scope of the specific information needed for the study (cf. section 1.8.6). I further provided a thick description on the concept of cyberbullying, human rights, the legal framework that needs to be considered during policy development and whole-school development (cf. sections 2.2, 2.3, 2.4 and 2.5). Thus, I have included what Delport and Fouché (2011c:426) call detailed descriptions whereby readers can extrapolate information relating to their own situation.

3.6.3 Dependability

To establish dependability, researchers should adopt an auditing approach whereby they keep complete records of all the phases of the research process that includes everything from the "problem formulation, selection of research participants, fieldwork notes, interview transcripts and data analysis decisions" for peers to 'audit' during the research and establish if proper procedures are being followed (Bryman 2012:392). Toma (2011:274) lists several elements that contribute to dependability:

- A study design congruent with clear research questions (I stated the research question, sub-questions, and a qualitative case study design; see sections 1.4.1 and 1.8.4).
- An explicit explanation of the status and roles of the researcher within the site (I explained my role as critical realist conducting a qualitative case study; see sections 1.8.2 and 1.8.4).
- Findings showing meaningful parallelism across data sources (I used multiple data collection methods for triangulation, see sections 3.4.8 and 3.6.1).

- Specifying basic theoretical constructs and analytical frameworks (I constructed a theoretical framework, and conceptualised and operationalised key concepts; see sections 1.7.2 and 1.7.3).
- Collecting data across a full range of settings, or participants or periods (I set out the selection of the research site, sampling of participants and data collection methods; see sections 1.8.6, 3.4.1 and 3.4.3).
- The presence of peer or colleague review (I submitted my research for peer review; see section 3.6).

Consequently, if a researcher does not achieve confirmability during his or her research, the research cannot be trusted. Research findings will not be valid regardless of how well the researcher formulates a research question, selects participants, performs fieldwork, conducts interviews, or analyses the information.

3.6.4 Confirmability

A researcher must ensure that the research is confirmable, that he or she acted in good faith, and that personal values did not influence the research (Bryman 2012:392-393). Confirmability, according to Amankwaa (2016:121), is a degree of researcher neutrality in which the outcomes of a study are shaped by the participants rather than researcher bias. It concerns how closely the study's findings adhere to its purpose and are not distorted by researcher bias (Jensen 2008:112).

Three techniques that I used to establish the confirmability of my research is providing data-evidence, an audit trail and reflexivity. Making raw data and data tables available, enhance the confirmability of research because it allows others to independently verify my findings, conduct further analysis, or assess the quality of my research (Adler 2022:601).

An audit trail is a transparent description of all the research steps taken from the start through to the reporting to the findings (Amankwaa 2016:122). Both Adler (2022:600) and Aviram (2023:5) highlight the need to make study procedures and protocols available to reviewers, enabling thorough evaluation of methodology, validity, biases, and limitations, thereby promoting a rigorous peer-review process, and upholding the integrity and credibility of scientific research.

Reflexivity entails a sensitivity to the researcher's cultural, political, and social context and as such, is always a reflection of a researcher's location in time and social space (Bryman 2012:393). Berger (2013:2) defines reflexivity as an internal dialogue that consists of self-evaluation and critical examination of the researcher's position and that actively acknowledges that the researcher's position might influence the research process and outcome. I was therefore essentially a key component of my research. Bryman (2012:394) describes the researcher as "implicated in the construction of the knowledge" because of his or her view of and attitude towards life. Consequently, qualitative researchers are expected to reflect on their own position in the research and acknowledge and disclose their own self in the research seeking to understand his or her part in the research (cf. section 1.8.4). Therefore, I was critical about my research methods, values, and presumptions and continually looked back at my objectives and made sure that I am still on target. By being aware of my own perspectives and potential influence I might have on the research, I could take steps to, as Adler (2022:600) advise, minimise bias and ensure the credibility of my findings.

3.7 PILOT STUDY

The same study methods, instruments, and procedures that will be used in a larger study are used during a pilot study (Horigan 2019:591). The data generated from a pilot study is not the focus of the study but rather the practical lessons learned (Horigan 2019:591).

A pilot study was conducted over a period of two days to pre-test the semi-structured interview guides, learner questionnaires, and focus group guide. The pilot participants were chosen in the same manner as in the main study. Nine grade 8 and nine grade 9 learners, the principal, and two grade 8 and 9 teachers participated in the study. I conducted a semi-structured interview with the principal, a focus group discussion with the teachers and had the learners complete a qualitative, open-ended questionnaire.

The only adjustment I needed to make was the length of the semi-structured interview guide. In the main study the aim was 45 minutes per interview, but during the pilot study it was closer to an hour. Some questions duplicated information and after careful review, I removed some questions, reducing the interview time to 45 minutes.

The data from the pilot study was not included in this research report.

3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Cohen et al (2018:111-113) define ethics as a concept that is concerned with that which is “right, and wrong” (Cohen et al 2018:113). Merriam and Grenier (2019:25-27) insist that a good qualitative study is one that was conducted in an ethical manner. In other words, a link between trustworthiness and ethical research will enhance the quality of the research if good ethics was followed. From the vast field of ethical issues, I will be discussing the following:

- Informed consent
- Adverse consequences and risk of harm
- Anonymity and confidentiality
- Plagiarism

When partnerships between researchers and participants are built on trust, it is possible for researchers to proactively resolve challenges that arise in the study (Cwick 2021:197). To build trust, it is necessary for both the participants and the researcher to take on an equal role as partners (Cwik 2021:198).

3.8.1 Informed consent

Informed consent concerns a participant’s freedom to choose, after being informed of facts that would be likely to influence their decisions, if they want to be part of a study or not (Cohen et al 2018:122). According to Anthony (2013:3-22), there are three factors to valid consent, namely capacity, information, and voluntariness.

Capacity – This has two components, age, and decision capability. This suggests that the person/s who is chosen for the research can make decisions by themselves in a mature way (Anthony 2013:13). In South Africa full legal capacity means a person is 18 years or older and it is assumed that they have the capacity to make choices, unless there is a mental disorder. Since the learners were all below the legal age, I also had to consider their capacity to consent to the research (cf. section 3.4.6). The learners who gave their assent to participate in the research were additionally required to obtain parental consent for their involvement in the research.

Information – Prospective participants’ decision to participate must be based on comprehensive and accurate information about the nature of the study, any diagnostic

procedures, proposed treatment or if there are costs involved (Anthony 2013:11). All prospective participants received an information letter (Appendices F, H, J) before the research started, describing in detail what the study is about, what their participation will entail, the possible risks and their rights as participants. During the semi-structured interviews with the principal, deputy-principal and school counsellor, the focus group discussion with the register class teachers and qualitative open-ended questionnaire with the learners, they were reminded about their rights as research participants and what the study was about, what information I was gathering and how it would be used. I referred them to the information letter they received.

Voluntariness – Verbal and written consent must be obtained before research may begin (Anthony 2013:28). Consent must be given freely, without coercion. It is the freedom to choose if a person wants to be part of the study or not. They must also have the freedom to withdraw from the study should they want to at any given time.

3.8.2 Adverse consequences and risk of harm

Determining what constitutes an acceptable level of risk may be difficult (Nebeker, Bartlett Ellis & Arigo 2021:42). According to federal guidelines, "minimum risk of harm" means that the likelihood of injury and the quantity of discomfort expected in the research are not larger than those typically experienced in daily life or during the conduct of regular medical or psychological exams or tests (Nebeker et al 2021:42).

Bryman (2012:135) describes harm as any action that may cause physical harm, emotional harm, harm to development, stress or inducing participants to perform unacceptable acts. Strydom (2011:115) labours the point that the researcher has an ethical obligation to protect participants from any form of physical or emotional discomfort. Therefore, participants should be informed of all possible risks involved when they participate in the research (Strydom 2011:115). I mention possible risks in my information letter (Appendices F, H, J). As seen in the evidence provided in this study, cyberbullying is particularly harmful, especially mentally and/or emotionally. It was crucial to maintain the anonymity of the learners in the study to protect them from potential retaliation by cyberbullies. Ensuring participant anonymity is a fundamental ethical consideration in research, particularly when studying sensitive topics like cyberbullying. By keeping the learners anonymous, their identities are protected, and the risk of any negative

consequences or reprisals from cyberbullies are minimised. This allows the learners to feel safe and comfortable in sharing their experiences and perspectives without fear of potential harm. It was for this reason I decided to make use of a qualitative open-ended questionnaire.

Learner participants could complete the qualitative questionnaire anonymously without having to speak-up in front of a possible cyberbully. If there were any questions that the participants did not want to answer because it made them feel uncomfortable, they were free to leave such questions out.

3.8.3 Anonymity and confidentiality

Anonymity is the tool that researchers must use as a way of ensuring privacy and to protect the participants from harm (Cohen et al 2018:129). The anonymity of those who participate in the research should be respected and the information the participants share, kept confidential. In some cases, it might be necessary to decide whether it is appropriate to record sensitive information (cost / benefit ratio) (Bryman 2012:144). To protect the identities of the participants I used pseudonyms for the school and the participants in all my reports. During the focus group discussion, I reminded all participants that everything being discussed is confidential and that it may not be discussed with anyone outside of the group. All participants in the focus group had to sign a confidentiality agreement (Appendix G).

3.8.4 Plagiarism

According to the University of Oxford (2020), plagiarism is taking someone's work and presenting it as your own, regardless of if it was intentional or unintentional. For my study, I always acknowledged the original source and gave credit where the original source was available. If the original source was not available, I referenced the source material. Furthermore, my dissertation was run through Turnitin that checked my work for originality and the unoriginality score was within what is regarded as acceptable. The Turnitin digital receipt is attached (Appendix Q).

3.9 CHAPTER 3 CONCLUSION

In chapter 3 of my research report, I focused on elaborating on the research techniques I described in chapter 1 and how those were implemented throughout the investigation. I

took great care in explaining the participant selection method and criteria, as well as the construction of the data gathering instruments. Providing detailed information about these aspects was crucial in ensuring the transparency and rigor of my research. I further discussed the methods I followed for data analysis, emphasising the steps I took to analyse the data accurately and to ensure the reliability of the study. I used appropriate and rigorous analytical techniques to derive meaningful conclusions from the data I collected.

Ethical considerations were also of utmost importance in my study, particularly as I dealt with young participants. As a researcher working with young participants, I recognised the importance of considering ethical factors in every step of the research process. I wanted to ensure that my study was conducted ethically and with the highest level of integrity. I made sure to obtain parental authorisation for the learners to participate, and I also sought assent of the learners themselves. I took extra caution and implemented measures to protect the well-being and rights of the young participants, as their age and vulnerability required special attention.

By highlighting these ethical considerations in chapter 3, I aimed to convey my commitment to upholding ethical standards in my research.

CHAPTER 4: DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION AND RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

In chapter 3, I discussed the implementation of the chosen data collection methods and instruments, the steps I took to ensure the trustworthiness of the research and the ethical considerations considered during the research process.

In this chapter the data is presented, analysed, interpreted and the research findings formulated. Before I attend to the data extracted during fieldwork, I summarise the findings in relation to my theoretical objectives covered in chapter 2. I gathered empirical data for this study by conducting a document analysis of the school's policies related to cyberbullying prevention and management, as well as the policy they follow to develop, implement, and review the internal policies. The analysis involved carefully reviewing official school documents to identify key themes, patterns, and trends in the data, using content analysis. Additionally, I collected data through three semi-structured interviews, a focus group discussion, and a qualitative open-ended questionnaire. Based on the empirical data collected, I conclude this chapter by interpreting the findings that emerged regarding the effects of cyberbullying on victims.

4.2 Best practices for developing an effective school policy on cyberbullying within a whole-school framework

Developing successful policies requires a robust formulation process and the involvement of all stakeholders. It is critical not to view policy development as a linear process, but rather as a cyclical process, where previous steps are revisited to maintain policy effectiveness (cf. section 2.5). In the process of policy development, several essential practices have been outlined to ensure successful policy development, namely identifying a need for a policy, researching the policy topic, determining the legal framework, and involving all stakeholders in the development and review process. In addition, the dissemination and implementation of policy strategies must be considered (cf. section 2.5). I also identified clear communication, a balance between rigidity and flexibility, and the commitment of all stakeholders as important elements of a successful policy development process (see section 2.6). Policies are intended to align operations across the school system and set behavioural expectations. By being clear, easy to read and

providing the necessary information to the people directly affected by the policy, a well-structured policy can capture the attention of the intended audience.

As highlighted previously, engaging all stakeholders is a crucial element of an effective policy development process. To ensure a comprehensive and well-rounded approach, involving the entire school community is essential (cf. section 2.4). A whole-school approach to policy development lies at the core of a successful process, where all relevant parties contribute and collaborate towards policy formulation. The whole-school approach necessitates schools to strategically design interconnected and concerted action involving the entire school community aimed at improving learning, behaviour, and well-being, as well as creating conditions conducive to such action. In a whole-school approach, all the factors that influence a learner's well-being are considered. Proving to be effective, a whole-school approach that incorporates multiple inputs (stakeholders) as part of their policy development process is far more effective in mitigating the threats of cyberbullying than single input policies. A whole-school strategy must include three essential elements: curriculum development that incorporates cyberbullying into all curricula, a positive ethos and environment that fosters a respectful culture among all stakeholders at the school, and community involvement. To this one can add the inclusion and/or collaboration with community members with specialised skills, interventions, or support programmes that can aid the school.

4.3 Legal framework to consider when developing cyberbullying policies

Cyberbullying is a complex phenomenon that places a significant legal burden on policy developers and even more so when it involves school children. It, therefore, requires schools to be very cautious when developing a cyberbullying policy. There is a significant legal framework that must be considered when cyberbullying policies are drafted. To help schools deal with cyberbullying issues when it involves children, guidelines need to be developed to address these complexities. As part of understanding a school's statutory obligation regarding policy development to protect learners from cyberbullying, victimisation, discrimination, or unfair due process, it was necessary to examine the legal framework for addressing cyberbullying on a national and international scale. I included the Constitution, legislation, common law, international law, and national and foreign case law in the framework. From my examination I found there is no law against cyberbullying per se, and that policy makers need to rely on individual acts or policies to develop a

cyberbullying policy to manage cyberbullying. The Constitution, being the supreme law in the country, provides opportunity for equality among all citizens (cf. section 2.3). Therefore, policy makers must be very careful that when they develop cyberbullying policies, the rights of both the cyberbully and the victim are protected. Schools are required by law to promote and uphold the human rights of their learners. Furthermore, the process followed when adopting school policies must promote democracy.

To ensure that procedures are reasonable and fair, schools should study relevant legal and policy texts such as the Constitution, the Schools Act, the Children's Act, The Regulations Relating to Safety Measures in Independent Schools, circulars, and pertinent policies. In accordance with section 8(5) of the Schools Act, which refers to due process in disciplinary matters, the participant school's Discipline Policy clearly informs learners of the procedures during disciplinary hearings as well as the appeal channels that exist within the school structure so that learners' grievances can be heard and resolved.

4.4 Biographical data

The biographical data includes participants information regarding their experience and skills related to their position at the school.

Table 7: Participants' biographical data

Participants Key	Years of work experience	Years in position	Qualifications / Grade	Gender	Age
Principal	34	16	BSc	Male	59
Deputy-principal	18	9	BSc (Hons) Mathematics PGCE	Male	43
Counsellor	25	5	BA Theology	Male	51
Teacher 1	12	6	BEd (Hons) Educational Psychology PGCE	Female	38
Teacher 2	5	5	BEd	Male	25
Teacher 3	37	6	BSc	Female	63
Teacher 4	3	3	BEd	Female	25

Teacher 5	21	2	BA Theology PGCE	Male	46
Learners	**Grade**	**Age**	**Number of learner participants**		
Boy	Grade 8	14 years	9		
Boy	Grade 9	15 years	4		
Boy	Grade 9	16 years	1		
Girl	Grade 8	13 years	2		
Girl	Grade 8	14 years	21		
Girl	Grade 9	15 years	10		
Girl	Grade 9	16 years	2		
Total			49		

4.5 Research sub-question / objective with relevant category(ies) and theme(s)

For clarity, I organised the identified categories and themes under the research sub-questions and related objectives.

Research sub-question: What lessons can be learned from reviewing current policy(ies) used to regulate cyberbullying at a private school in Gauteng, South Africa? **Objective:** To investigate cyberbullying in a private school in Gauteng, South Africa with the focus on: how the school went about developing their school's cyberbullying policy.
Category 1: Policy development
Theme 1.1: Policy development process
Theme 1.2: Role-players
Research sub-question: What lessons can be learned from reviewing current policy(ies) used to regulate cyberbullying at a private school in Gauteng, South Africa? **Objective:** To investigate cyberbullying in a private school in Gauteng, South Africa with the focus on how cyberbullying is dealt with in current school policies.

Category 2: Current policy(ies) used to regulate cyberbullying incidents at the school
Theme 2.1: Existing policies
Theme 2.2: Procedure in dealing with cyberbullying
Research sub-question: What lessons can be learned from reviewing current policy(ies) used to regulate cyberbullying at a private school in Gauteng, South Africa? **Objective:** To investigate cyberbullying in a private school in Gauteng, South Africa with the focus on participants' perspectives on cyberbullying and the school's regulation thereof.
Category 3: Participants' perspectives on what cyberbullying entails and the school's regulation thereof
Theme 3.1: Defining cyberbullying
Theme 3.2: Forms of cyberbullying
Theme 3.3: Differences between traditional bullying and cyberbullying
Theme 3.4: Cyberbullying repetitive or once off
Theme 3.5: Occurrence of cyberbullying at the school
Theme 3.6: Effects of cyberbullying

4.5.1 Category 1: Policy development

To determine how the school goes about creating policies, I analysed their Policy on the Development, Implementation and Review of Internal Policies. I further included questions on the school's policy development process in the interview and focus group guides. I was able to triangulate all the data sets by organising my data according to the emerging themes as indicated above.

4.5.1.1 Theme 1.1: Policy development process

The principal's description of how decisions regarding policies are made at the school indicates that much thought goes into the process. The literature review revealed that determining a need for a new policy is regarded as the first step in policy development (cf. sections 2.5 and 2.6). It is then also, according to the principal, the first step of the school's policy developing process. Section 3.2 of the Policy on the Development, Implementation and Review of Internal Policies states that policies are adopted if standard, repeatable protocols are "required". One can argue that if a policy is required to regulate something, then there is a need for such a policy. As part of determining a need for a policy, consideration must be given to whether a policy review of existing policies will suffice or whether a new policy is needed (cf. section 2.5). The school's Policy on the Development, Implementation and Review of Internal Policies provides for this consideration as can be deducted from section 3.5, "Care should be taken not to duplicate an existing policy, where a simple revision of an existing policy would be adequate".

Thus, there will not be a need for a new policy if an existing policy can merely be revised to include the matter that requires regulating. The need for a policy could come to the fore during the regular review of existing policies.

Section 2.5 of the Policy on the Development, Implementation and Review of Internal Policies states that "The existence of policies, and particular the cyclical review of policies, facilitates a culture of quality control and quality management, leading to continuous improvement of the institution".

The school conducts a review of its policies every other year to determine whether the policies continue to serve the school's intended purpose. Even while a policy may be in existence at any one time, this does not necessarily indicate that it is well received by the various stakeholders.

Following the identification for the need of a new policy and according to section 3.1 of the Policy on the Development, Implementation and Review of Internal Policies the senior management team, for the purpose of the new policy, establishes a sub-committee that will be responsible to conduct the necessary research and draft the policy.

This is provided for as follows:

> Development of internal policies shall be the responsibility of the Management Team or a designated sub-committee of the Management Team. They will conduct the necessary research, obtain input from stakeholders in a collaborative fashion, and reference policies to the current protocols being practised at the school.

The approach suggested in the policy is commendable. Policymakers should avoid relying solely on their personal views and opinions when developing policies, and instead incorporate evidence-based research into the process. This approach ensures that policies are credible and effective, as they are informed by reliable information and data (cf. section 2.4). Evidence-based research is an essential tool for policymakers, as it promotes transparency, accountability, and informed decision making. By grounding policy decisions in sound evidence rather than personal biases or opinions, policymakers are more likely to develop policies that can achieve their intended outcomes.

When it comes to how the school disseminates new or revised policies, the principal mentioned that the school has a standing item on the staff meeting agenda that focuses on policy matters to discuss new policies or highlight standing ones for amendment. He remarked, “All revisions on operational policies are communicated to staff at a staff meeting and are updated on the school’s local server”. The principal’s account is confirmed by section 4.1 of the Policy on the Development, Implementation and Review of Internal Policies that all staff meetings should include an item on the agenda that focuses on policy:

> A standing item on the agenda of every staff meeting shall be "Policy Focus". That is to say that every staff meeting will deal with the subject of policy. During this segment, any new policies will be discussed and read through with the staff, or the importance of an existing policy will be reiterated and debated.

Furthermore, policies relevant to the parents and learners are published on the school’s website, in the school newsletter, and discussed during assemblies. The school’s Policy on the Development, Implementation, and Review of Internal Policies contains elements of a good policy development process as indicated in the literature (cf. sections 2.5, 2.6 and 2.7) such as the participation of all stakeholders, as it requires that, “Policy development should elicit broad participation from all stakeholders and interested parties within the school” (see sec 3.3). It also affords the review of old policies: “All policies must be reviewed at least once every two years” (see sec 3.5).

Unfortunately, the policy only contains some of the elements required for a comprehensive policy formulation procedure (cf. sections 2.5 and 2.6). The policy does not provide for the consideration of the relevant legal framework or for doing a fiscal viability analysis to determine the potential financial ramifications of the new policy (in the case of cyberbullying installing firewalls or network security devices or monitoring systems could be costly). Assessing the financial implications of a new policy is of utmost importance. The literature review, specifically section 2.5, highlights the significance of conducting such assessments to ensure that the school can implement the policy without jeopardising its financial stability. The purpose of a financial viability assessment is to project the long-term financial effects of the policy and identify potential funding sources, if necessary. In essence, the need to thoroughly understand the financial consequences of a policy before implementing it by conducting a comprehensive assessment, the school can determine whether it has the necessary resources and funding to sustain the policy in the long run, thereby safeguarding its financial stability. Careful consideration of the financial aspects is critical for successful policy implementation.

The analysis of the Policy on the Development, Implementation and Review of Internal Policies further brought to light that though it contains a provision on the purpose of the policy, it does not contain any reference to the intended target audience or the scope of the policy, which are essential elements of a good policy (cf. section 2.5). One can deduct that since these essential elements are not included in the policy dealing specifically with policy development, that these elements are also not considered during the development of any other policies.

Including a "policy impact assessment" as part of the policy development process is essential for schools. Unfortunately, no provision is made for this in the Policy on the Development, Implementation and Review of Internal Policies. A policy impact assessment is a valuable tool for schools to proactively identify and mitigate potential risks and challenges associated with policy implementation. It ensures that policies are developed with a thorough understanding of their potential impact on finances and stakeholders, leading to more effective and sustainable policy outcomes (cf. section 2.5).

Furthermore, the Policy on the Development, Implementation and Review of Internal Policies only mentions a basic step-by-step plan for policy distribution and no process for the implementation of a new policy. The advantages of implementing Blakeney's cyclical

approach (cf. section 2.5) to policy development in a school setting are that it ensures alignment between a school's policies and their visions and goals. It creates the best possible opportunity that the policy will be fit for purpose and cover identified issues, and that it will be supported by stakeholders because their input and perspectives are considered. Furthermore, by regularly analysing and updating policies based on data and feedback schools ensure that their policies are responsive to changing demands; thereby supporting effective decision making and policy implementation.

4.5.1.1a Summary of findings Theme 1.1

1. Prior to the adoption of a new policy, the policy development process at the school requires that the school's existing policies be taken into consideration.

2. The process of developing school policies adheres to the industry standard of performing regular policy reviews as part of the best practice.

3. The process of formulating school policies begins with identifying a need for a policy.

4. The policy of the school for the development of policy includes provision for the involvement of stakeholders, which is a recommended practice for the development of policies in general and for the development of policies within a whole-school approach.

5. When comparing the school's process for policy development against the literature, it is evident that the school falls short in the following respects, namely justifying the policy, considering the policy scope and intended target audience, defining the purpose and objectives of the policy, considering relevant law and policy frameworks and allowing for a policy impact assessment.

6. There is a disconnect between what the school's Policy on the Development, Implementation and Review of Internal Policies prescribes and how policies are in fact developed at the school. The policy titled "Development, Implementation and Review of Internal Policies" makes use of good policy development aspects; nevertheless, such good policy development features are not transferred to the policies of the school that I analysed.

7. The school’s policies are developed by a sub-committee, established by the management team; a practice that prevents the inclusion of all stakeholders in the policy development process.

8. There is no provision in the school's Policy on the Development, Implementation and Review of Internal Policies for a feasibility study for a new or improved policy.

9. The procedure that the school uses to produce its policies does not include any consideration of the way the policies will be put into effect.

10. The school informs the teachers, parents, and learners of any new or changed policies by holding staff meetings, posting them on the school website, sending out newsletters, and discussing them during assemblies.

4.5.1.2 Theme 1.2: Role-players

As was indicated, the Management team or a designated sub-committee of the management team, oversees the drafting of the school’s policies. This, sadly, is an indication that there is not a very broad engagement of all stakeholders in the formation of policies as required by section 3.3 of the Policy on the Development, Implementation and Review of Internal Policies.

It became evident during the focus group that there is a conflict between the school’s Policy on the Development, Implementation and Review of Internal Policies and the teachers’ views on who the role-players in policy development process are. According to paragraph 3.3 of the policy, when policies are developed, all stakeholders and interested parties at the school should be encouraged to participate. Despite section 3.3, Teacher 3 (who has been with the school for 6 years) stated, while sounding very unsure, that sub-committees comprising people regarded as knowledgeable about the policy subject, are formed to develop policies. She stated, “They (school management) draw up committees that get very involved”. Teacher 5, who has been at the school for two years, stated, "I have not been involved". It is also clear from his comment "I don't know about us being involved", that he believes teachers and parents are excluded from policy development at the school.

It was further evident that not only are educators excluded from the policy developing process but parents as well. The principal was adamant that the responsibility for policy

development lies solely with the school and that parents are not involved in the process or have a say in the content of the school's policies. Unwavering in his view that as a private school, parents will not determine what is in the school policy, he stated, "We are not going to let you (referring to the parents) dictate what is in our school policy". This view is in direct conflict with section 3.3 (referred to above) of the Policy on the Development, Implementation and review of Internal Policies.

When I mentioned the school's Cyberbullying Policy during the focus group, it became clear that the teachers were not involved in or aware that the school had developed a draft Cyberbullying Policy. "We did not even know it exists," Teacher 4 explained. The other teachers were astounded to learn that there is a draft policy. Since teachers were unaware of the draft cyberbullying policy, it confirms that they were not involved in its development, regardless of the policy requirements or what the principal indicated.

Several teachers expressed their desire to be included in policymaking, to know more about the school's policy development process and to be informed of what was included in the school's Cyberbullying Policy. Teacher 1, for example, suggested that because teachers are closer to learners, they would be able to make insightful contributions during policy development. She commented:

> It is the teachers that understand the learners, more than the people setting up the policies, and I would not mind being part of that input (referring to the policy development process) because we are working on the ground with the learners, it is we that must deal with them the ones working on the ground getting involved, we can give a lot more insight.

Teacher 5 agreed and added that the more diverse the group developing the policies, the greater the chance that the policy will cater for everyone: "If it is a diverse group of teachers that's actually involved in the committee it will help". Teacher 3 agreed right away that the people involved in policy development policies should be more diverse and should even include different age groups. From a whole-school perspective, the teachers made an important point, namely that including stakeholders in the policy development process fosters stakeholders' buy-in to the policy (cf. section 2.4). As the literature review shows, having a diverse group of teachers involved in policy development increases the likelihood that the policies will cater to the needs of everyone. Different teachers bring different perspectives, insights, and expertise to the table, which can result in more well-rounded policies that are more likely to be effective in meeting the diverse needs of the

school community. Including teachers in the policy development process, as highlighted by the literature review, will result in various advantageous outcomes, as emphasised by the teachers themselves (cf. section 2.4).

By incorporating a wide range of viewpoints and involving stakeholders, policymakers can ensure that policies are more inclusive, effective, and reflective of the needs and interests of the people they serve. Furthermore, when teachers and stakeholders participate in decision making, they are more likely to understand and support the policies, leading to greater acceptance and implementation. This involvement promotes ownership and buy-in from those affected by the policies, ultimately resulting in more successful and sustainable policy outcomes.

One noteworthy recommendation extracted from the literature review pertains to the significance of inclusive participation and collaboration among stakeholders in the policymaking process (cf. section 2.5). However, the interviews and focus group discussion revealed that this is not the case at the participating school, and that there is very little to no stakeholder participation. The Policy on the Development, Implementation and Review of Internal Policies makes it abundantly clear that members of the management team will serve on the sub-committees. Although the teachers were aware that sub-committees are selected to engage in the policy formation process, they were unsure whether they are permitted to be on these sub-committees, as well as who exactly is allowed to give input, the type of input they are permitted to give, or how they will be involved when new policies are evaluated for their level of success. None of them had ever participated in policy development.

As proven by the fact that, after our initial encounter, he undertook the development of a cyberbullying policy, the principal has extensive knowledge of the school policies and the policymaking process, and he will assume responsibility when appropriate. Recognising the need of having a cyberbullying policy, he took the initiative and developed one. Unfortunately, the deputy-principal verified that the principal did this on his own. The deputy-principal was given a draft cyberbullying policy to review but was not involved in its creation. This is typical of a hierarchical policymaking approach (cf. section 1.4).

4.5.1.2a Summary of findings Theme 1.2

1. There is a disconnect between the prescribed policy adoption procedure described in the school's Policy on the Development, Implementation and Review of Internal Policies and the actual procedure followed.

2. Despite what is stated in the school's policy, stakeholders such as parents and teachers are excluded from the policymaking process.

3. In practice, a hierarchical rather than a whole-school approach is followed when policies are developed.

4. Teachers are confused about their role in the policy development process. They are unsure whether they are permitted to be on the sub-committees tasked with policy development, whether they are allowed to give input and if so, what type of input they may give and what role they could play when new policies are evaluated for their level of success.

5. Teachers declared their desire to play an active role in the school's policymaking.

6. The principal knows school policies and the policymaking process well and takes responsibility or initiative, when necessary.

4.5.2 Category 2: Current policy(ies) implemented to govern instances of cyberbullying within the school

Since my dissertation focuses on policy development, specifically the development of a cyberbullying policy, I have analysed the Policy on the development, Implementation and Review of Internal Policies, and the Cyberbullying Policy. However, I have also consulted the Discipline Policy, Counselling Centre Policy, and Social Media Policy during this analysis.

4.5.2.1 Theme 2.1: Existing policies

My first encounter with the principal was a get-to-know-you session, and during that encounter, the principal mentioned that the school did not have a particular cyberbullying policy in place to deal with cyberbullying. The principal noted that the school has a variety of procedures that can be implemented if it becomes necessary to deal with incidences

of cyberbullying. According to the principal, the policies that the school used to manage cyberbullying at that stage included the “Staff Matters Policy”, “Counselling Centre Policy” and a “Computer and Network Usage Policy”. But there was no specific policy dealing with instances of cyberbullying. The deputy-principal and the school counsellor referred to a widely accepted “rule” rather than a policy to regulate cell phone usage, “The learners are not supposed to use their phones in the class, but the teachers can change that rule” – Counsellor. “However, it is my understanding that if a cell phone is observed, it can be confiscated whenever there is a reasonable suspicion of improper usage, and learners are expected to willingly hand over their devices” – Counsellor.

The absence of a cyberbullying policy was also mentioned during the focus group. When I asked the teachers how comfortable they feel to deal with a situation where an inappropriate picture of a learner has been shared or a learner has been cyberbullied, Teacher 4 promptly responded by saying “If we talk about it, if I would be ready or equipped to deal with it? I will be honest, no”. The other teachers followed, and all answered “no” and said they do not feel comfortable handling cyberbullying incidents with no clear guidelines, but they do try their best to assist as part of their duty. “I do think everybody needs training and tools to be equipped to deal with cyberbullying, especially teachers”, Teacher 4 added. Unfortunately, the teachers’ willingness to help is constrained by their lack of confidence resulting from the absence of a clear guideline in the form of a cyberbullying policy.

However, after I concluded my “meet and greet” interview with the principal, seeking permission to conduct the research at the school, the principal realised cyberbullying needs to be comprehensively regulated in terms of a policy that contains definitions, steps to be taken, learner rehabilitation, and that the policy should be supportive and not just punitive. As a result of that initial meeting a draft cyberbullying policy was developed a couple of weeks before I started my data collection at the school.

The unique challenges schools face when dealing with cases of cyberbullying is briefly noted in the Cyberbullying Policy. However, the Cyberbullying Policy does not go into much detail on the unique elements of cyberbullying that differentiates it from traditional bullying (cf. section 2.2.1). Moreover, the Cyberbullying Policy lacks a clear and standardised definition of cyberbullying. In terms of the school's Code of Conduct and the law, cyberbullying is considered a form of harassment, though this statement is consistent

with the Protection from Harassment Act (cf. section 2.3.2), the school does not apply the Act itself. It rather advises victims' parents that the Protection from Harassment Act is an avenue they could pursue should the cyberbullying not stop. This unfortunately does not always limit criminal action against children to a last resort, as required (cf. sections 1.4 and 2.3.2).

Although the policy does not specifically distinguish between on-site or off-site cyberbullying, it encourages acceptable online etiquette whenever communicating online. For example, in a section titled "Protocol", it requires learners to "[b]e polite and use up-building language in written and oral online communication" (item 1), "[p]ractise integrity" in their communication by always communicating as if a teacher is present (item 2), "[b]e respectful" and not sharing hurtful comments (item 3) and "refrain from presenting themselves on any public platform (digital or otherwise) in a manner which is fragrantly in opposition to the school's values (item 7). Under the guiding principles of the Cyberbullying Policy (item 2), it is made clear that social media is a public platform and any postings made on social media can in no way be considered private, therefore staff and learners might be held liable for any harm caused by their online post.

Learners are encouraged to self-govern their online activities by being responsible citizens and always be aware of what they post online since it is not always private. Item 4 of the Protocol warns learners to take a second and think and use discretion before they post online. Item 5:

> Social media is public information and can be shared by others without your knowledge or permission. Be conscious of what you post online as you will leave a long-lasting impression on many different people and will create a digital footprint of yourself which can never be deleted.

Item 6, under "Protocol" of the Cyberbullying Policy contains a further warning that learners should note that there would be no privacy protection for any material that is uploaded on social media and that social media posts will be shared with the learners' parents upon request. The fact that learners have no privacy expectation regarding their social media use, is one of the guiding principles in the Cyberbullying Policy: "All social media is a public platform and as such any posting is by no means private". The school ensures that staff and learners understand that there is no guarantee of anonymity in their online posts and emphasises that they are legally responsible for their online behaviour.

Considering learners' privacy rights, I question whether item 6 under "Protocol" and item 1 of under "Guiding principles" of the Cyberbullying Policy do not violate these rights. Even while learners are allowed to post on social media, schools are not permitted to utilise these sites to "spy" on learners in any way. I argue that item 6 is too broad and not specific enough to justify any action from the school. As was held in the case of Karl Günsche and the German International School (cf. section 2.3.1), policy provisions should not be vaguely phrased. The school's draft Cyberbullying Policy does not adequately justify action when cyberbullying occurs from a private computer and off-campus.

4.5.2.1a Summary of findings Theme 2.1

1. The teachers' lack of confidence and the absence of a clear guideline in the form of a cyberbullying policy both act as barriers to the level of assistance they are willing and able to provide.

2. The Cyberbullying Policy does not differentiate between on-site and off-site cyberbullying in any way.

3. Some wording, such as "any material," in the school's Cyberbullying Policy is ambiguous and too vague.

4. The school policies cover various elements of cyberbullying, such as impersonation, denigration, outing, and trickery. However, these elements are dispersed among several policies.

5. The policy to regulate cyberbullying does not contain a definition for cyberbullying, nor does it contain an exposition of the myriad ways in which it can manifest.

6. The Cyberbullying Policy does not contain a section on the unique elements of cyberbullying.

4.5.2.2 Theme 2.2: Procedure in dealing with cyberbullying

The school believes that registered learners always represent the school, whether they are on the school grounds or not. As a result, learners are held accountable for their behaviour, and punitive measures are implemented, if necessary, regardless of where they were when they violated school rules.

> We have said to kids upfront, when you join the school, you are a part of the school whether you are here, whether you are offsite, whether you are in uniform, whether you are out of uniform, whether you are on the beach, you are still part of the school. – Principal

> As a Christian community the school expects their learners to be representatives of the school whether they are on or off the school property. – Deputy-principal

> We do as a school make it very clear that what you do away from the school, we don't consider that as private, you are a representative of the school wherever you are or wherever you go. – Counsellor

That the Christian culture is regarded as paramount in the school was not only expressed by the participants but also captured in the school's new Cyberbullying Policy. It provides in item 1 under the section "Guiding principles" that learners are expected to "use all social media in a way that reflects our culture" and this culture is described as "characterised by healthy relationships, social trust, submission to God's Word, carrying one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2) and considering others more important than oneself (sic) (Philippians 2:3)".

When I asked the principal if the school will go as far as to suspend a learner for cyberbullying that took place outside school hours and with the use of a private laptop, he made it clear that the school will act on it with immediacy regardless of where and when the cyberbullying occurred. He explained that it is the school's Christian duty to uphold the responsibility placed on them by God to not just be bystanders but to get involved when there is an injustice committed against another. "We can and we have". The principal mentioned that the first step is to print the threats or unacceptable communication and send that to the cyberbully' s parents. The school expects the parents to act at home while the school follows its disciplinary procedures.

The determination of the principal to take punitive measures contrasts with the views of both the deputy-principal and the school counsellor who indicated that a process of mediation is preferred and that they would rather negotiate with or inform all parties involved in the cyberbullying incident so that they can resolve the matter privately without getting involved in punitive measures.

> If any incidents of cyberbullying are reported to the school, the school will contact the parents of the suspected cyberbully to inform them of the situation. However, the school does not get involved in punitive measures, but rather aim to inform the parents and to get the cyberbully to stop. – Deputy-principal

The school uses a system of “restorative” discipline where the school will meet with the people involved with the aim of reconciliation between parties. Learners who are identified as victims or cyberbullies, are made aware that school-based counselling is available to them.

> There is no disciplinary action or bullying in the school that does not go through the counsellor. The counsellor needs to walk a road with the cyberbully and decide how many counselling sessions are assigned to the learner. – Deputy-principal

The focus of the counselling offered to cyberbullies is on helping them to change their ways and improve their behaviour. Cyberbullies who refuse the help or resist change are required to continue with the counselling sessions till such time that a positive change in behaviour is noticeable.

The focus of the counselling offered to victims and their parents is on training them on how to deal with cyberbullying attacks. If they prefer not to use the school’s counsellor, the school requires that they be kept informed of the learner’s progress. This is regarded as essential for the school to be able to understand and accommodate the learner.

During the focus group the register class teachers were not as confident regarding the procedure that the school or management follows. Teacher 5 mentioned that he deals with each case in on its own merit, depending on what was reported because there is no official procedure to follow. He explained:

> What I do is I deal with the specific situation for the specific learners, so you deal with it according to that specific child and how he or she have acted before. There is no one, two, three rule it all depends on who the learner is. I do think especially teachers need training or tools to deal with cyberbullying.

Several other teacher participants nodded in agreement with Teacher 5.

In section 3 of the open-ended questionnaire for learners I wanted to know if the learners knew how the school defines and regulates cyberbullying. Do they know when and to whom they must report cyberbullying? Regardless of the school’s efforts to educate the learners on cyberbullying, learners still lack information on the complete definition of cyberbullying and the procedures that should be followed when it does occur.

Although most learners who participated in the survey responded that the school did aid in the battle against cyberbullying, some learners suggested that the school could provide

even more assistance. The fact that cyberbullying sometimes occurs off-campus and the school may not be aware of it, is cited as one explanation. This statement correlates with the small number of incidents reported to the school. Another reason could be that the learners are not aware of the procedures in the school's Code of Conduct and therefore do not realise that there are avenues available for them at the school.

In cases of cyberbullying, regardless of whether it was on or off school property, the school endeavoured to involve the parents with the objective of resolving the issue amicably. Both the victim's and the cyberbully' s parents should be contacted, and a meeting facilitated either at school or privately to settle the situation. Parents are also offered the opportunity to see the school counsellor, this way the school can track and evaluate the progress of the victims and bullies. The counsellor stated that he has not met any parents who have flatly refused to have the school get involved, and that most parents support the school resolving the incident. "I can't remember a parent saying it's got nothing to do with the school". The deputy-principal's comment, "I think there is an expectation to get involved", suggests he agrees with the counsellor. The principal expressed that as a Christian school it would be the school's duty to care for all learners in all situations. "As a Christian school the overarching idea is that the school must care what the parents think but must care little because the school serve for an audience of One." - Principal

All the parties indicated that the parents get involved when cyberbullying is reported. Among the participants, I found that the school's procedure for dealing with cyberbullying is unclear. Where the principal is adamant that the school intervenes and punishes any cyberbullying, the deputy-principal and school counsellor indicate that the school does not get involved in punitive measures but rather attempts to repair the relationship between the cyberbully and the victim.

Under the section "Disciplinary action" of the Cyberbullying policy, cyberbullying is defined as an act of harassment. Although this is true in some circumstances it is not always the case. Even though harassment is a form of cyberbullying, it is not the only form of cyberbullying (cf. section 3.4.6). Also, in keeping with the CRC, harassment accusations should be used as a last resort and not as the "go to" accusation. Furthermore, under the section entitled "Disciplinary action" no disciplinary steps are indicated that can be

followed in cases involving cyberbullying and therefore the policy is insufficient to deal with cyberbullying.

4.5.2.2a Summary of findings Theme 2.2

1. The Christian ethos of the school plays a major role in how the school deals with cyberbullying.

2. It has become apparent that participants are either unaware of or under-informed about the school's cyberbullying policy.

3. Those involved in dealing with cyberbullying cases (principal, deputy-principal, and counsellor) disagree on the school's procedure.

4. Dealing with cyberbullying is hampered by the lack of a clear description of the various forms cyberbullying can take (cf. section 2.2.1) in the cyberbullying policy.

5. The analysis of the school's policy on cyberbullying revealed that it identifies cyberbullying as a form of harassment, which is in line with the school's Code of Conduct. However, the Code of Conduct does not explicitly give attention to cyberbullying, and the only mention of harassment in the Code of Conduct pertains to verbal or physical forms of harassment. This discrepancy indicates a lack of alignment between the Cyberbullying Policy and the existing provisions in the school's Code of Conduct regarding harassment.

4.5.3 Category 3: Participants' perspectives on what cyberbullying entails and the school's regulation thereof

In this section I assess how well participants understand cyberbullying and the school's actions to address it.

4.5.3.1 Theme 3.1: What is cyberbullying

The literature review (cf. section 2.2.1) indicates that the most prevalent aspects of cyberbullying involve deliberate and repeated harassment through digital means, taking advantage of the anonymity provided by the online environment. Social media platforms play a significant role in facilitating cyberbullying, intensifying the emotional distress experienced by victims. The presence of bystanders who do not intervene or report the abuse further compounds the harm caused. Cyberbullying transcends physical

boundaries and persists through a continuous stream of abusive content, resulting in severe emotional and psychological consequences for those targeted. It is crucial to acknowledge and comprehend these common elements to develop effective prevention and intervention strategies that deal with this pervasive issue in the digital era.

During the focus group it was clear that the teachers understood what cyberbullying is. The teachers immediately referred to cyberbullying as a form of bullying via the use of social media. Teacher 1 commented that cyberbullying is “like traditional bullying but online or over social media”. Teacher 2 nodded in agreement, adding the use of “electronic platforms”, as tools used for cyberbullying. Teacher 5 described cyberbullying as “anything with intent of hurting someone, but online”. The principal, deputy-principal and counsellor explained that for them cyberbullying happens by means of electronic devices via any social media platform and that can happen at any given time.

> Technology gets involved when it comes to cyber, so messages on cell phones especially, seems where it stems from. So, I would say technology makes it cyberbullying instead of person-to-person interaction and because cyberbullying can happen anywhere. – Counsellor.
>
> With cyberbullying there are no boundaries in terms of when it takes place. If a learner now starts a rumour, it is not just in the school community anymore, but it is spread further because of Instagram and the learners does not feel save anywhere. – Deputy-principal.
>
> With cyberbullying the platform is different. The platform lends itself to certain nuances in the cyberbullying itself, like anonymity, not being accountable because it is over the phone. – Principal.

The learner participants had to describe in their own words what they think cyberbullying is. They were all aware of the fact that cyberbullying exists, and that people use electronic devices to bully on an online platform. High-frequency words or phrases learners used to describe cyberbullying included: “online”, “intimidating”, “hurtful”, “hateful online comments” and “posting embarrassing pictures”.

The group had a broad grasp of the concept of cyberbullying, yet consensus on a singular definition remained vague. In the school's Cyberbullying policy, under "Guiding principles," it is implied that cyberbullying is connected to learners' use of "social media," "post," "online behaviour," and "online presence," and that it shares some characteristics with traditional bullying, but cyberbullying as such is not defined. The school’s Cyberbullying Policy thus lacks an essential component. As was established during the

literature review, a section containing clear definitions of key terms is a generic and essential component of any policy (cf. section 2.6). As came to the fore from the literature review (cf. section 2.6), using a generic format and including essential elements in all policies is characteristic of a whole-school approach and ensures the school policies are in line with the school's values (vision) and mission. Using standardised formats with generic elements was identified as best practice in policy creation because it promotes familiarity with policy structure and layout, makes policies easy to understand and helps to avoid missing or misinterpreting crucial information and ensures policy consistency across the board (cf. section 2.6).

4.5.3.1a Summary of findings Theme 3.1

1. All the participants understand what cyberbullying is and that cyberbullying is bullying that involves the use of technology to victimise someone online.

2. Cyberbullying is not defined in any of the policies that the school uses to regulate incidents of cyberbullying.

3. High-frequency words or phrases learners used to describe the phenomenon included "online", "intimidating", "hurtful" and "hateful online comments".

4. The school's policies are not standardised. No policy I evaluated had a standard framework or consistently included the generic elements.

4.5.3.2 Theme 3.2: Forms of cyberbullying

According to my literature review cyberbullying can be divided into two main categories, direct cyberbullying, and indirect cyberbullying. Both main divisions can take on various forms (cf. section 2.2.1). During my document analysis I found that the "Social media policy" and "Cyberbullying policy" distinguish between different forms of cyberbullying, namely impersonation, denigration, flaming, cyberstalking.

The school's Cyberbullying Policy provides for the following forms of cyberbullying:

> 1. Misrepresenting yourself online or creating a fake online identity.
> 2. Making a post or link (photos, videos, webpages, audio files, fan pages, etc.) on social media that may cause harm to self and others.

3. Using privileged or confidential information accessed from the school and sharing this on social networking media.

In the section “Social networking” of the Social Media Policy, impersonation, denigration and harassment are implied but not clearly identified as forms of cyberbullying. Although the section is supposed to deal with forms of cyberbullying, it also contains warnings about cyber threats and how to avoid them, information on what is acceptable online conduct, learner privileges and so on. The wording of this section is ambiguous and confusing. The provisions that do contain reference to forms of cyberbullying are formulated in such a way that these forms must be inferred. From item 11, which reads “When responding to others, be respectful and avoid comments that may be hurtful”, one can deduct that posting hurtful, disrespectful online comments will be regarded as a form of cyberbullying. Thus, referring to denigration (cf. section 2.2.1). Item 12, which provides “Do not use profane, obscene, or threatening language”, similarly deals with actions that will constitute denigration. A second form of cyberbullying can be deducted from item 15, which states “Cyberbullying is considered an act of harassment and will be dealt with in accordance with the law and the school’s Code of Conduct”, is harassment (cf. section 2.2.1). Item 4 warns that learners should not misrepresent themselves by using someone else’s identity, revering to impersonations.

Regardless of the above-mentioned forms of cyberbullying, the policies do not cover the whole spectrum of different forms of cyberbullying. Other forms of cyberbullying like outing or trickery, cyberstalking, flaming is not included in the Social Networking Policy.

When I conducted the open-ended questionnaire with the learners, I presented them with scenarios and in their own opinion they had to identify if the specific scenario is cyberbullying or not. Table 7 indicates which scenarios the learners view as representing a form of cyberbullying.

Table 8: Learners' views on the forms of cyberbullying

Scenario	A form of cyberbullying (%)			NOT a form of cyberbullying (%)		
	Boys	**Girls**	**Total**	**Boys**	**Girls**	**Total**
Online fights using electronic messages containing angry or vulgar language.	36	69	**59**	64	31	**41**
Repeatedly sending nasty, mean and insulting messages.	100	100	**100**	0	0	**0**
Threats of harm or intimidation through repeated online harassment and threats.	100	100	**100**	0	0	**0**
"Dissing" or disrespecting someone; sending or posting gossip or rumours about a person to damage his or her reputation or friendships online.	93	94	**93**	7	6	**7**
Sharing someone's secrets or embarrassing information or images online.	57	92	**81**	43	8	**19**
Pretending to be someone else and sending or posting material online to get that person in trouble or damage their reputation.	79	86	**84**	21	14	**16**

The results show that the boys and girls are mostly in agreement about what scenarios signify cyberbullying. Interestingly, 64% of boys do not consider online fights as a form of cyberbullying, compared to the girls 31%. Another result that was also of interest was how boys and girls perceive the sharing of someone's secrets, information, or images. Only 57% of boys saw it as cyberbullying compared to the 92% of girls.

The participants had some idea on the different forms of cyberbullying, especially that it is a form of harassment. Some of the learners did not understand that it is considered cyberbullying to give the impression that one is someone else online or to reveal private information about another person online. This is an indication that the learners have not been properly educated on the different forms of cyberbullying. The Social Media and Cyberbullying policies do however cover some of the forms of cyberbullying like,

impersonation, denigration, flaming, cyberstalking, and harassment. Unfortunately, there is not one policy that combines these forms of cyberbullying in one policy, which could lead to confusion or uncertainty if cyberbullying is happening. It is possible that learners do not always report occurrences of cyberbullying because they do not always recognise the numerous forms it can take.

4.5.3.2a Summary of findings Theme 3.2

1. Most participants acknowledged that cyberbullying could take several forms – harassment being the most mentioned form.

2. Not all learners are aware that cyberbullying also includes pretending to be someone else online or disclosing personal information about another individual.

3. Learners are not adequately briefed on the various forms of cyberbullying.

4. Impersonation, denigration, flaming, cyberstalking, and harassment are the only forms of cyberbullying covered in the Social Media and Cyberbullying policies.

5. There is a lack of a unified policy that covers all forms of cyberbullying.

4.5.3.3 Theme 3.3: Differences between traditional bullying and cyberbullying

During the interviews with the principal, deputy-principal and die school counsellor it was clear that they have a good understanding of the difference between traditional bullying and cyberbullying. The principal explained that “Traditional bullying is where a child is victimised repeatedly in a physical vindictive and harmful manner”. Describing traditional bullying as only “physical assault” does not make sense since traditional bullying can also take on non-physical forms. However, it could be that the principal has misspoken when he described traditional bullying as “physical assault” and that he may have meant to refer to “in-person” or “face-to-face” bullying because he added “The principles between [sic] traditional bullying and cyberbullying are all the same, but the platform is different”.

Both the deputy-principal and the school counsellor articulated that conventional bullying occurs in person, whereas cyberbullying involves the inappropriate use of communication technology and can transpire remotely and at any time.

The deputy-principal and the school counsellor referred to some shared (cf. section 2.2.1) characteristics but also indicated cyberbullying’s unique characteristics, which are in line with the literature (cf. sections 1.4 and 2.2.1), like 24-hours access to victims and the use of technology.

> With cyberbullying it is not just a rumour in the school community, but the rumour is being spread further because of social media. - Deputy-principal.

> Traditional bullying happens at school in the classes within the school borders, cyberbullying is when technology gets involved and can happen anywhere. – Counsellor.

It was interesting to note that the counsellor and deputy-principal commented that traditional bullying leads to cyberbullying or is an addition to traditional bullying. “I almost feel that cyberbullying is an addition to traditional bullying”. – Deputy-principal. “Cyberbullying happens everywhere, but mostly starts with traditional interaction; cyberbullying is an add-on” – Counsellor. This is consistent with the literature review, which showed that cyberbullying in schools typically begins with face-to-face bullying at school, and then when the bullying escalates, bullying acts eventually migrate to the cyber world (cf. section 2.2.1).

In one of the questions the learners had to give their opinion on whether traditional bullying (in-person “schoolyard” bullying) or cyberbullying, is more embarrassing. Except for one learner, everyone agreed that cyberbullying is more embarrassing.

Learners' perceptions indicate that cyberbullying is perceived as more socially distressing than traditional bullying, with significant detrimental effects on their schoolwork, mental health, and overall well-being. These findings align with existing literature, which highlights the severe consequences of cyberbullying, including the manifestation of depression, compromised academic performance, instances of violence, and even the potential for suicidal ideation (sections 1.4 and 2.2.2).

4.5.3.3a Summary of findings Theme 3.3

1. The participants demonstrated a good understanding of the differences between traditional bullying and cyberbullying. However, the principal's description of traditional bullying as "physical assault" was inaccurate, as traditional bullying can also manifest in non-physical forms (cf. section 2.2.1).

2. The deputy-principal and school counsellor highlighted the unique characteristics of cyberbullying, such as 24-hour access to victims, the use of technology and that cyberbullying can spread beyond the school community due to the unique nature of social media.

3. The deputy-principal and the school counselor perceive cyberbullying as an adjunct to traditional bullying. Their observation aligns with the existing literature, which posits the existence of an overlap between traditional bullying and cyberbullying (cf. section 2.2.1).

4. Learners identified several primary effects, namely heightened feelings of embarrassment, negative impact on their schoolwork, and the development of mental health issues (cf. section 2.2.2).

4.5.3.4 Theme 3.4: Cyberbullying repetitive or once-off

According to literature, it is traditionally believed that repetitiveness is an essential element of bullying, including cyberbullying (cf. section 2.2.1). The principal, deputy-principal and counsellor support this notion.

> A learner is targeted and victimised repeatedly in a vindictive and harmful manner on an ongoing basis - Principal.
>
> Bullying is consistent, it is a daily thing trying to bring someone down – Deputy-principal
>
> It is [that] repetitiveness and continued targeting that makes this bullying – Counsellor.

Though not wrong, these participants' view in favour of repetitiveness being regarded as an essential element of cyberbullying does not acknowledge the unique nature of cyberbullying and therefore, the repetitive element is questioned in acts of cyberbullying. According to the literature review, contemporary scholars argue that one cyberbullying incident is sufficient to be regarded as repetitive because one photo or message could be distributed to a much larger audience in one go (cf. section 2.2.1).

In contrast with the views of the principal, deputy-principal, and counsellor that cyberbullying requires repetition, the teachers indicated during the focus group that repetition is not essential for cyberbullying because a single offensive statement or image may be forwarded several times. Teacher 2 added, "One act can be forwarded repeatedly, that institutes bullying but by a larger audience". This view of the teachers is more in line with current literature that repetition should be removed as a pre-requisite, since one act online could be forwarded for an indefinite period (cf. section 2.2.1).

Interestingly, the learners indicated in their questionnaire that one harmful post on a public group should not be considered cyberbullying.

> “In my eyes one incident isn’t cyberbullying.” – Learner 3
>
> “No, unless it is happening repeatedly.” – Learner 17
>
> “No, I don’t think it is because I think bullying should be considered as over and over again.” – Learner 25

These learners never considered the possibility of the same harmful content being reposted multiple times by other people. I found this very surprising as the learners could not see “beyond” the fact that re-posting one image is just another person joining the cyberbully and creates a new incident every time the post is forwarded. As in the scenario above, learners only define repetition as ONE person continuously posting harmful content and not the sharing of the content repeatedly, as seen in the *Le Roux v Dey* (cf. sections 1.4, 2.3.1.3) where one image led to a lawsuit and had severe legal consequences.

The semi-structured interviews and questionnaires revealed differing perspectives on the importance of repetition in classifying an action as cyberbullying. While the interviewees and learners believed that repetition was required, the teachers believed that a single act may be considered cyberbullying. It is crucial to highlight that the teachers' point of view is more in line with existing literature, indicating that recurrence is not required for cyberbullying because a single incidence can be distributed or shared multiple times. As a result, it is suggested that the Cyberbullying Policy should reflect this understanding and recognise that a single act of cyberbullying can be classified as such, as supported by the literature (cf. section 2.2.1).

4.5.3.4a Summary of findings Theme 3.4

1. The principal, deputy-principal, and school counsellor all stated that repetition is required for cyberbullying to be considered as such.

2. Some learners believe that repetition is required before bullying can be deemed cyberbullying.

3. The teachers held the perspective that repetition is unnecessary in determining whether an action qualifies as cyberbullying. They argued that each time a post is forwarded or shared, it constitutes a new instance of bullying. This viewpoint aligns with the existing literature, which advocates for the removal of repetition as a requirement for categorising an action as cyberbullying.

4.5.3.5 Theme 3.5: Occurrence of cyberbullying at the school

Cyberbullying indeed exists at the school. All the interviewees confirmed that cyberbullying happens at the school and that at the time of the interview it was not a problem that was out of control but could potentially become a big problem. According to the principal, cyberbullying begins to manifest itself at the school and some learners have been affected by it, but it is not more of a problem than what society considers normal. He commented, “I don’t think it is a problem in the sense that its unexpected”.

The deputy-principal indicated that at managerial level he is not always informed about every cyberbullying incident so it would be very hard for him to judge if cyberbullying is indeed a problem at the school, but he is aware that it is happening: “For me I can tell you maybe not much that I am aware of.”

The deputy-principal mentioned that during a casual conversation with a learner on why the learner is leaving the school, the learner mentioned it is because of all the cyberbullying. This came as a surprise to the deputy-principal because the incidents were never reported. The deputy-principal’s unfamiliarity of how big of a problem cyberbullying at the school is, confirms what the learners have indicated in their open-ended questionnaire that they do not normally report incidents of cyberbullying to the school. An interesting point the deputy-principal made is that the clever cyberbullies will choose something about the victim that he or she almost believes about themselves and target that. This creates the self-doubt in the victims’ mind and leads to a loss in confidence and withdrawal from the people around them; a fact that is confirmed in the literature (cf. sections 1.4 and 2.3.1). The school counsellor also felt that cyberbullying is not a problem at school, but it does exist and holds a credible threat, “It is real, but it has not come to a point where we are in a definite crisis”.

During the focus group discussion, teachers confirmed that cyberbullying exists at the school and teachers deal with cyberbullying on a regular basis. What also became clear is that teachers as “frontline” workers must deal with cyberbullying or online confrontations that learners experience more regularly than school management. Cyberbullying has become a very frequent issue in the school that teachers must deal with, with some teachers dealing with it on a weekly basis “Honestly with me I deal with it (cyberbullying) on a weekly basis” – Teacher 5. Teacher 1, 3 and 4 nodded in agreement

with Teacher 5. As Teacher 4 mentioned, “[m]any times, the kids will come to you because they trust you”. Teacher 3 immediately recalled a conversation she had with a female learner where she had to “coach” the learner through a Facebook incident that involved nude photos. She recalled: “A grade 8 girl was involved with her nudes being send out by a guy, not from our school and now everyone is aware of that”. The teachers' involvement in cases of cyberbullying or awareness of cyberbullying incidents is indicative of the trust learners place in their teachers.

It is evident, teachers deal with cyberbullying more regularly than what the school management might realise. Throughout the discussion with the teachers, it became clear that teachers have much closer relationships with learners than school management would have. Teacher 5 expressed his opinion saying, “We are closer to them and for some of them their only chance of somebody helping them”. Teachers and learners spend more time together, they have more one-on-one discussions with each other, share WhatsApp and other social media platforms. Therefore, learners tend to share intimate information with teachers rather than with management or their parents. This deduction is also in line with the literature (cf. section 2.4) stating that teachers are important role-players in a whole-school approach because they have, after learners themselves, the greatest influence on learners’ learning and potentially their responses to cyberbullying.

Teachers are not in agreement about the occurrence of cyberbullying at school, but that is likely due to each teacher’s personal level of involvement with the learners. It is evident that learners tend to approach more senior, experienced teachers such as Teacher 3 who is 63 and has 37 years’ experience and Teacher 5 who is 46 and has 21 years’ experience. This deduction needs to be confirmed by further research.

The learners’ views on cyberbullying at the school were more aligned with that of the teachers. From the learners’ own understanding of cyberbullying, 41% of the sample learners felt that they have been cyberbullied in the past with 75% of the cyberbullying having started at school. Even though most of the cyberbullying started at school most learners never report the cyberbullying to the school. This leaves a serious question about how liable the school should be if most learners do not report cyberbullying incidents. The main reason learners gave for not involving the school was that they did not regard their situation as serious enough. “I didn’t report it, I just prayed until it goes away” – Learner 47. The reason why learners do not report cyberbullying incidents could be due to a lack

of education on the topic of cyberbullying. The learners might not know that they are being cyberbullied and just brush of incidents of cyberbullying as a joke. Learners may not know which channels or processes to follow if they become victims of cyberbullying and would want to simply forget about it. This tendency to ignore cyberbullying attacks could stem from the belief that confronting it may result in more severe and malicious attacks.

4.5.3.5a Summary of findings Theme 3.5

1. The school does have a problem with learners engaging in cyberbullying. The school's principal, deputy-principal, teachers, and learners have all concurred that there is a problem with cyberbullying at the institution.

2. The learners and the teachers reported a significantly higher incidence rate of cyberbullying compared to the principal and the deputy-principal of the school.

3. During the conversation with the teachers, it became evident that teachers have ties with the learners that are far closer than those held by members of the school management.

4. The percentage of learners who typically report cases of cyberbullying to their teachers or the management of the schools is low.

4.5.3.6 Theme 3.6 Effects of cyberbullying

On the topic of the negative effects of cyberbullying on its victims, the interviewees were all aware of the negative effects of cyberbullying, such as depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, physiological problems, concentration problems, school failure, and peer avoidance (sections 1.4 and 2.2.2).

> Cyberbullying can result in feelings of shame, learner withdrawal, and learners acting out as a result. – Principal
>
> Cyberbullying takes down confidence, it makes you doubt any social group you belong to, are you are really part of the group. Their (victims) sense of identity is tarnished. – Deputy-principal
>
> The confidence of the child takes a big nock, the withdraw from their social circles. – Counsellor
>
> The depression and isolation and victimisation are far greater, and the learner does not feel safe anywhere. – Teacher 5

> Sending pictures or making awful comments online, it is so much worse. Traditional bullying can be controlled easier. – Teacher 4

Half of the learners indicated that their schoolwork suffered because of cyberbullying with one learner writing “My grades dropped extremely” – Learner 29. Learner 37 said “It made me feel less of myself, my self-esteem went down. I was not communicating with anyone and soon after the incident I started having suicidal thoughts”. “It stressed me out and worried me so much I developed anxiety”- Learner 16. Other high frequency words used by the learners to describe how cyberbullying made them feel included “worthless, embarrassed, degraded, anxious, sad, depressed, stressed and suicidal”.

The negative effects of cyberbullying on its victims have been extensively documented. In a survey, half of the learners acknowledged that their academic performance suffered because of cyberbullying, with one learner stating that their grades plummeted significantly. When describing how cyberbullying affected them emotionally, learners used words like "worthless," "embarrassed," "degraded," "anxious," "sad," "depressed," "stressed," and even "suicidal". A particular learner, identified as Learner 40, expressed his/her cyberbullying experience as feeling like an outsider, unloved, and overwhelmed by sadness and pain. It was reported that learners experienced feelings of humiliation, degradation, and even contemplated suicide because of cyberbullying. The fact that cyberbullying violates learners' rights to human dignity, and freedom and security is obvious from their descriptions, thus corroborating the document study and review also in this regard (cf. sections 2.3.1.3 and 2.3.1.4).

Teachers in the focus group also expressed their concerns, noting that they had witnessed the emotional distress suffered by learners who were targets of cyberbullying. These findings are consistent with existing literature that has identified a range of negative effects associated with cyberbullying, including depression, anxiety, delinquent behaviour, and emotional distress (cf. section 2.2.2).

Self-blame is a common response among both victims of cyberbullying and cyberbullies (cf. section 2.2.2). Disturbingly, a substantial number of learners attribute blame to themselves for permitting cyberbullying to occur. Some learners commented that they believed they did something to deserve to be cyberbullied and others blamed themselves for not being strong enough to stop the cyberbullying and allowing it to continue. When the learners were asked who is to blame for them being cyberbullied, learner 34 wrote “I

feel like it could be the bully and myself because I allowed that person to bully me," "Yourself, at the end of the day you allowed it to happen" – Learner 7.

The teachers' general feeling was that cyberbullying could be a big problem for learners if it is not dealt with early on. They feel that the effects of cyberbullying could be long-lasting with devastating negative consequences that could lead to low self-esteem, withdrawal, loss of innocence and learners ending up harming themselves. According to my research cyberbullying does indeed lead to psychological conditions that might have more devastating effects than traditional bullying (cf. section 2.2.2). Teacher 4 expressed her concern saying, "Kids start wondering who else knows and who does not know, once you are in that hole, they [sic] go so far as harming themselves [sic]".

4.5.3.6a Summary of findings Theme 3.6

1. The tendency for victims to blame themselves was a widespread phenomenon.

2. The participants were all aware of the harmful effects of cyberbullying, as evidenced by their use of phrases such as "depression," "anxiety," and "poor self-esteem," in addition to "physiological difficulties," "concentration problems," "school failure," and "peer avoidance".

3. Learners' perspectives confirmed the potential of cyberbullying to violate the rights of human dignity and freedom and security of the victims.

4.6 CHAPTER 4 CONCLUSION

This chapter presented the results of the theoretical research, followed by an analysis and interpretation of data obtained from the semi-structured interviews with the principal, deputy-principal, and school counselor, a qualitative open-ended questionnaire administered to learners, and a focus group discussion with register teachers. The findings of the investigation reveal the presence of cyberbullying incidents at the school. However, learners do not always disclose such incidents to the school authorities, and when they do, they tend to report them to teachers rather than to school management. Consequently, management and teachers may have slightly divergent perceptions regarding the frequency of cyberbullying at the school. Notably, the participant school adheres to Christian orientation, and its belief in the duty to prioritise learners' best interests, even if it entails unconventional activities and policies. The school upholds the

conviction that to maintain the authenticity of its Christian beliefs, it should minimise external influences, which is why parental participation in policy formulation is not encouraged.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In chapter 4, the data were presented, analysed, evaluated, and triangulated, and the findings from the research formulated. Among the material that I acquired was data from the school's Policy on the Development, Implementation and Review of Internal Policies, as well as data from the school's Policy on Cyberbullying. I made use of semi-structured interviews a qualitative open-ended questionnaire and a focus group discussion. In chapter 5, I provide an overview of the entire study, followed by a presentation of the main findings in relation to the theoretical objectives, before summarising the empirical findings and making recommendations based on the findings. This is followed by a discussion of the best practices regarding a 1) whole-school approach, 2) process of policymaking – which will include consideration of the legal framework, and 3) generic policy elements. After that, I discuss the assumptions that were made in chapter 1, go into more detail about the limitations of the study, and offer some suggestions for future investigations. The research ends with a conclusion and as indicated, a prototype cyberbullying policy.

5.2 SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH

As indicated in chapter 1, the report on the research was organised in five chapters. In the first chapter I presented a comprehensive overview of the research problem, the research objectives, and the methodology employed to attain these objectives. The aim of the research was to develop a research-based prototype Cyberbullying Policy for private schools in Gauteng, South Africa that will ensure effective regulation of cyberbullying. For me to be able to do that, I adopted the following objectives:

3.1 To establish best practices for developing an effective school policy on cyberbullying within a whole-school framework.

3.2 To determine the legal framework South African private schools should consider when developing a school policy on cyberbullying.

3.3 To investigate cyberbullying in a private school in Gauteng, South Africa with the focus on:

3.3.1 how the school goes about developing their school’s policies.

3.3.2 how cyberbullying is addressed in current school policies.

3.3.3 participants' perspectives on cyberbullying and the school's regulation thereof.

In chapter 2 the first and second objectives were considered, and the information extracted from legal literature through a document study is presented in an integrated manner with information obtained from the literature review. I first conceptualised cyberbullying, before sketching the legal framework that South African private schools should consider when developing a school policy on cyberbullying. This chapter is concluded with a discussion of the best practices for developing an effective school policy on cyberbullying within a whole-school framework.

To conceptualise cyberbullying, I defined cyberbullying and described its unique nature, characteristics, and the potential impact it could have on victims. Cyberbullying can be defined as the use of electronic communication technology, such as social media, texting, and email, to harass, intimidate, or humiliate another person (cf. section 2.2.1). The nature of cyberbullying is that it can occur at any time, in any location, and the perpetrator can remain anonymous (cf. section 2.2.1). Cyberbullying is distinguished by several unique characteristics, such as its potential to disseminate harmful content to a vast audience rapidly, and the anonymity that perpetrators can employ to conceal their identity as discussed in section 2.2.1. The impact of cyberbullying on the victim can be severe and long-lasting, including emotional distress, social isolation, and even physical harm. Victims of cyberbullying may also experience academic problems, such as a decline in grades and a lack of motivation to attend school (cf. section 2.2.2). By understanding the definition, unique characteristics, and impact of cyberbullying, I was able to conceptualise cyberbullying.

Next, I attended to the second objective, which was to determine the legal framework South African private schools should consider when developing a school policy on cyberbullying. The reason for attending to this before the best practices for developing an effective school policy on cyberbullying within a whole-school framework, is because the legal framework applies irrespective of the chosen policymaking approach. When developing a school policy on cyberbullying, South African private schools should consider the legal framework provided by the South African Constitution and other

relevant legislation, such as the Protection from Harassment Act (cf. section 2.3.2) and the Children's Act (cf. section 2.3.1). The Constitution provides for the protection of human dignity, privacy, and freedom of expression, but these rights are not absolute and can be limited in cases of harassment or harm (cf. section 2.3.1). The Protection from Harassment Act defines harassment broadly and includes electronic communication as a form of harassment. The Children's Act includes provisions on the protection of children from all forms of abuse, including bullying. Additionally, private schools can look to international legal frameworks, such as the CRC, for guidance on the protection of children's rights in relation to bullying and cyberbullying (cf. section 2.3).

As mentioned, chapter 2 was concluded with an identification of the best practices for developing a policy, with a focus on three key areas: a whole-school approach to policy development, the policymaking process, and policy content. Identifying best practices regarding a whole-school approach to policy development, the policymaking process, and generic policy elements not only provided me with a framework to use when considering the data on the school's policymaking but also gave me a framework to use when developing a prototype cyberbullying policy.

Regarding the first objective, a whole-school approach to policy development, I identified the assumptions underlying a whole-school approach to policy development that explain why the approach promotes effective policy development (cf. section 2.4). Since an effective policymaking process is critical in developing policies that are not only effective but also credible and authoritative, I chose the policymaking process as a second objective and determined the best practices regarding policymaking processes (cf. section 2.5).

The third objective was on best practices for policy content – generic elements that ensure effective policies. To achieve this, I identified clear, concise, and actionable elements that should be included in all policies (cf. section 2.6). These generic elements are essential to ensure that policies are effective, can be understood easily, and can be implemented.

In chapter 3, I provided detail on the implementation of the research methods I used and expand on the steps taken to ensure trustworthiness and ethical considerations when conducting the research. I further elaborate on how I have ensured my study was conducted in an ethical manner. Chapter 4 includes a triangulation between the case

study dataset and the document study on human rights laws. Through an analysis of the collected data and an extensive review of relevant literature, I synthesised the findings to offer a comprehensive understanding of the research subject.

For the third and final objective I conducted a study at a school to establish the process that the school follows in developing its policies. I also investigated how the school deals with cyberbullying, the participants' perspectives on cyberbullying, and how the school regulates confirmed or suspected incidents of cyberbullying (cf. section 3.4.1). The data extracted during this empirical study, is presented, analysed, and interpreted in chapter 4.

Lastly, in this chapter, I present a summary of the research findings, conclusions, and recommendations. Chapter 5 is a culminating point for the entire research work, where I provide a synthesis of the study's findings, elucidate the implications of the results, and offer recommendations for further research and practical application.

5.3 MAIN THEORETICAL FINDINGS

In this section I offer a succinct summary of the results obtained in relation to the theoretical objectives of the study.

5.3.1 Best practices for developing an effective school policy in three key areas

I had specific objectives aimed to establish best practices for developing an effective school policy in three key areas. These areas include the best practices for a whole-school approach to policy development, the policymaking process, and best practices regarding the content of policies. By attending to these key areas, I have contributed insights for the development of a comprehensive school cyberbullying policy. This policy has the potential to significantly enhance educational outcomes for learners.

5.3.1.1 Best practices for a whole-school approach to policy development

The whole-school approach requires schools to develop integrated and concerted activities engaging the entire school community with the goal of enhancing learning, behaviour, and well-being, as well as to create conditions favourable to such action.

A whole-school approach means involving everyone in the school community when creating policies (cf. section 2.4). This includes teachers, learners, and other people

involved in the school. It is important to consider everyone's needs and rights when making policies, and the policies should be flexible and fair to everyone. Teachers and fellow learners have a big impact on a learner’s learning, so it is important to include them when creating a policy to regulate cyberbullying (cf. section 2.4). The CJCP has identified some important elements of a whole-school approach to policy development. These include including human rights education in the curriculum, creating a positive and inclusive school environment, and involving the community in supporting the school's efforts. The whole-school approach requires the participation of all stakeholders, who need to work together to create strong policies that prevent and deal with cyberbullying.

5.3.1.2 Best practices for the policymaking process

Policy development is an important and complex process that requires careful consideration of best practices. Based on the existing literature, there are several key points to keep in mind. Firstly, the policy development process is characterized as a cyclical rather than linear process that includes identifying policy issues, diagnosis, and analysis, identifying policy objectives, identifying policy tools, identifying consultation needs, decision to proceed, implementation and evaluation. Secondly, it is crucial to include all stakeholders when developing policies. This means considering their safety, well-being, cultural sensitivities, and ensuring that the policies are clear and easy to understand. Thirdly, policymakers are expected to substantiate their policies with empirical evidence, while simultaneously upholding the importance of stakeholder consultation throughout the decision-making process. Fourthly, the overarching objective of policy development is to provoke enduring enhancements and positive transformations within the school environment. Lastly, policymakers are urged to foster transparency and disseminate pertinent information regarding school policies to all stakeholders via diverse communication channels.

5.3.1.3 Best practices for policy content – generic elements that ensure effective policies

Although all policies will share some generic elements the one-of-a-kind characteristics of cyberbullying (cf. section 2.2.1) call for the developers of school cyberbullying policies to take extra precautions to incorporate the characteristics specific to this form of bullying into their own policies. After analysing a variety of policies, the following essential

elements of a cyberbullying policy were determined to be necessary, some of which were developed specifically for this purpose (see to section 2.5):

Purpose – The policy's purpose is to provide a clear and structured collection of guidelines, rules, or principles to regulate individuals' or an organisation's behaviour, decision-making process, and activities.

Objectives – What are the objectives of the policy, and how will they be achieved? It is of the utmost importance to have a crystal-clear understanding of the objective of the policy as well as how it will contribute to the regulation of the intended result.

Scope – Mention the extent of what a policy will and will not be able to cover, as this is an extremely important component to include.

Definitions – Providing an explanation of the phrases that are utilised in the policy, particularly one that is especially unique like "cyberbullying" (cf. section 2.2.1)

Forms of cyberbullying – There are many various forms of cyberbullying, and these need to be specified so that there is no room for misinterpretation (cf. section 2.2.1).

Scope of applicability – Who will the policy affect and who is it directed at. If the school were to implement a policy against cyberbullying, all the school's stakeholders would be included.

Legislative framework – refers to the statutes and regulations that are applied to define the parameters of the policy.

Procedures – Procedures that clearly outline the course of action to be taken in incidents of cyberbullying.

Because of the specific characteristics of cyberbullying, schools are confronted with a one-of-a-kind set of obstacles when they are tasked with developing a cyberbullying policy to control instances of cyberbullying (cf. section 1.4). As a result, it will not be sufficient to merely adopt a policy on its own. By using an approach that encompasses the entire school, one should create a more nuanced policy that considers the individual characteristics of cyberbullying (cf. section 2.5).

5.3.2 Determining the legal framework South African private schools should consider when developing a school policy on cyberbullying

Having a comprehensive understanding of the existing regulatory framework in South Africa was crucial in determining the appropriate approach to deal with cyberbullying. In chapter 2, I identified the South African legislative framework in place to regulate cyberbullying (cf. section 2.3). The legal framework comprises numerous sources of law, including but not limited to the Constitution, legislation, common law, international law, as well as domestic and international case law. There is no specific legislation in South Africa that prohibits cyberbullying. Establishing a comprehensive cyberbullying policy based on the legal framework analysed is essential to effectively handle cyberbullying. An illustration of the legal framework is presented in figure 8.

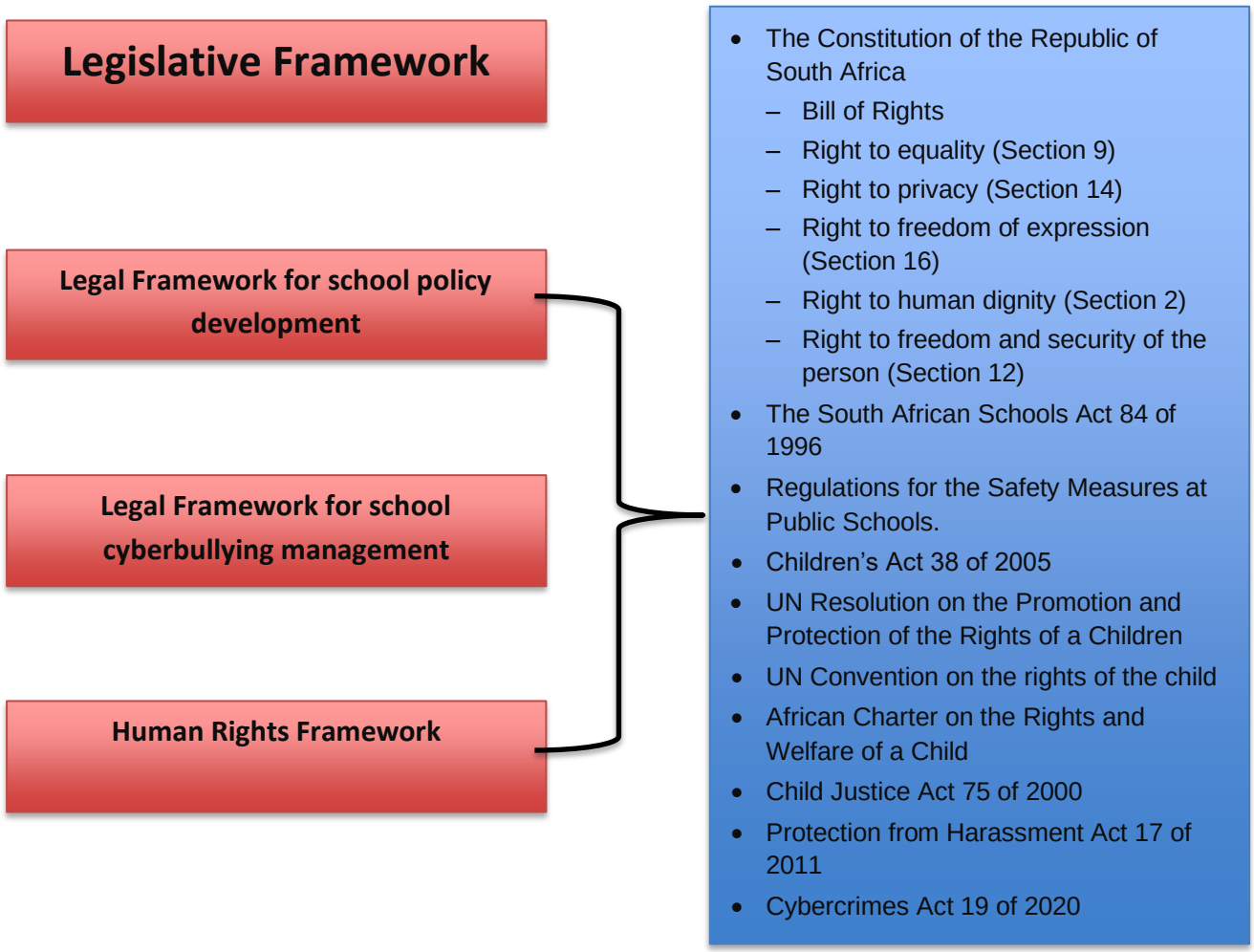

Figure 8: Legal Framework

Source: Compiled by the researcher (IM van Rooyen March 2023)

The Protection from Harassment Act can be utilised to prevent cyberbullying in situations where a learner engages in intentional activity that harms another learner through electronic communication. (cf. section 2.3.2). The Protection from Harassment Act allows schools and learners to deal with cyberbullying situations immediately (cf. section 2.3.2). Due to its broad definition, the Protection from Harassment Act includes cyber-stalking. The Protection from Harassment Act include safeguards such as preventing the harasser from continuing the harassment or from enlisting another's assistance in doing so, as well as any other actions the court considers appropriate, as well as safeguarding the complainant's identity (cf. section 2.3.2).

Criminal action should be the last resort when dealing with children. While schools must act against cyberbullying, it is important to approach the issue with caution and avoid resorting to legal action as the first option. Instead, schools should prioritise resolving incidents of cyberbullying within the school environment and take a restorative approach whenever possible. It is important to recognise that children who engage in cyberbullying may have experienced mistreatment themselves. However, in cases where cyberbullying persists despite interventions, involving the appropriate authorities may be necessary to ensure the safety and well-being of all learners involved (cf. section 2.3.2).

Cyberbullying falls within the scope of several education law specific provisions (cf. section 2.3.2). In South Africa, these provisions include the Code of Conduct for Learners as set out in the Schools Act, which requires learners to behave in a respectful and disciplined manner towards other learners and educators. Cyberbullying can also be dealt with under the Protection from Harassment Act, which prohibits harassment, stalking, and cyberstalking. In addition, the Cybercrimes and Cybersecurity Act provides for criminal penalties for certain forms of cyberbullying, such as online intimidation and revenge porn. Schools may also have their own policies and codes of conduct that provide guidance on how to deal with cyberbullying and how to prevent and handle such behaviour.

Schools face unique challenges in dealing with cyberbullying, as this form of misconduct involves the use of technology and can take place outside of school hours and grounds. Furthermore, cyberbullying has led to the emergence of new and unique forms of misconduct, such as the spread of rumours and false information online, the use of fake social media accounts, and the sharing of inappropriate images and videos. Schools may encounter challenges in balancing learners' right to freedom of expression, as established

in *Tinker v Des Moines*, with their responsibility to provide a safe and conducive learning environment. (cf. section 2.3.1.2). Although freedom of expression is a basic human right, it is not absolute and is subject to some limitations. The limitations on freedom of expression include, hate speech, defamation, obscenity, or incitement to violence. There is a delicate balance between maintaining the right to free speech and restricting damaging speech while upholding all parties' human rights. Schools may expose themselves to legal lawsuits if their policies do not include the right to freedom of expression. Although learners have the freedom to voice their views, they must also respect the rights and dignity of others. Schools must therefore find a balance between encouraging free speech and shielding learners from dangerous speech, such as cyberbullying.

The Schools Act mandates that all schools draft a complete code of conduct for learners with defined definitions, phrases, and limits (cf. section 2.3.1).

5.4 SUMMARY OF EMPIRICAL FINDINGS WITH RECOMMENDATIONS

In this section, I will elaborate on the research findings, recommendations, and best practices derived from the research investigation.

Table 9: Findings, recommendations, and best practices

Findings	Recommendations	Best practice supported
Neither the Cyberbullying Policy, Discipline Policy, Counselling Centre Policy, nor the Social Media Policy contains a definition of what cyberbullying is (cf. section 4.5.2.1).	The developers of the school's policy to include a workable definition of cyberbullying into the cyberbullying policy. I suggest the following definition: Cyberbullying is the intentional use of technology to harass, harm, intimidate, or humiliate another person. It can take many forms, such as spreading rumours or false information, sharing private or embarrassing photos or videos, or sending threatening messages or emails. Cyberbullying can occur through various digital	A clear and specific definition of cyberbullying is crucial for ensuring that all stakeholders, including learners and teachers, understand what behaviours constitute cyberbullying according to the school's policies. By providing a clear definition, the school can help prevent confusion or misunderstanding regarding what constitutes cyberbullying and ensure that all learners are protected from the negative effects of cyberbullying. This can also assist in creating a safer and more supportive learning environment for all learners.

	platforms, including social media, email, text messages, and online gaming. The school should consult with experts in the field of cyberbullying prevention and intervention. These experts can provide insight into the latest research on cyberbullying, as well as developing a comprehensive, clear, and concise definition of cyberbullying.	Best practice: Key terms must be defined in policies.
Cyberbullying and its unique elements are not covered in the Cyberbullying Policy (cf. section 4.5.2.1).	To ensure clarity and effectiveness, it is advisable for the school's policy on cyberbullying to provide a clear differentiation between traditional bullying and cyberbullying.	This will help prevent confusion and ensure that all members of the school community understand the different forms of bullying and the appropriate actions to take in response to each. Learners will also have the confidence to stand up for themselves because they are better informed. Best practices linked to the whole-school approach such as that: - linking policies to the context in which they will apply - policy developers consider both stakeholder views as well as current research.
Not all forms of cyberbullying are included in the existing school policies. Certain forms of cyberbullying are excluded from some school policies, while other policies offer some coverage of the different types (cf. section 4.5.2.1).	It is recommended that schools develop a well-defined and explicit cyberbullying policy that encompasses all manifestations of cyberbullying. This will be instrumental in effectively addressing and preventing cyberbullying incidents.	Adopting a whole-school approach in the development of a cyberbullying policy can enhance the school's preparedness to effectively resolve incidents of cyberbullying, benefiting both the victim and the cyberbully. This approach can also prevent any confusion or misinterpretation of what constitutes cyberbullying and the corresponding actions that will be taken. By including all forms of cyberbullying in the policy, the school can provide

		comprehensive protection to all learners against the harmful effects of cyberbullying. Best practice: A standard practice for the policymaking process will ensure all key terms are defined.
The Cyberbullying Policy is more of a “guideline” on online etiquette instead of a policy to regulate and deal with cyberbullying (cf. section 4.5.2.2).	The policy on cyberbullying should be more regulatory, with clearly defined terms, conditions, and punitive measures. The inclusion of clear reporting procedures for both teachers and learners should be included. These procedures should outline the steps that learners and teachers should take when they witness or experience cyberbullying and should provide guidance on how to report incidents to school authorities.	Adhering to proper policymaking procedures results in clear and unambiguous policies, instilling confidence in both learners and teachers in dealing with cyberbullying. The inclusion of clear regulatory measures, reporting procedures, and support resources in a cyberbullying policy could encourage learners and teachers to report incidents of cyberbullying, providing a clear and effective path of action. This promotes a safer and more supportive learning environment for all learners while preventing the long-term detrimental effects of cyberbullying on victims. Best practice: A standard practice for the policymaking process will ensure all key terms are defined.
Not enough effort goes into educating learners and teachers on the protocols that need to be followed. Without proper education and training, learners and teachers may not know how to recognise or report incidents of cyberbullying, or how to respond when incidents do occur. All the participants had a different view on how incidents of cyberbullying should be dealt with (cf. section 4.5.2.2).	Incorporating cyberbullying education and training into the school curriculum is one strategy to tackle this problem. This could include providing learners with age-appropriate information on cyberbullying, such as its definition, how to identify it, and how to report it. Teachers should also receive training on how to recognise and respond to incidences of cyberbullying. Involve stakeholders in discussions and activities that encourage effective digital citizenship, such as	By prioritising education and training and establishing well-defined and uniform policies for managing instances of cyberbullying, schools can adopt a proactive stance in mitigating and resolving such incidents. Implementing a whole-school approach to policy development will help ensure a safer and more supportive learning environment for all members of the school community, as staff and learners will have a more comprehensive understanding of how cyberbullying is handled by the school and the

	how to use social media responsibly, interact respectfully online, and secure their personal information.	consequences associated with it. By investing in such efforts, schools can foster a culture that encourages responsible online behaviour and promotes positive interactions among learners, thereby reducing the likelihood of cyberbullying incidents and mitigating their impact when they do occur. Best practice: A whole-school approach to policy development.
There is an obvious absence of a school-wide approach to policy formulation. The Policy on the Development, Implementation and Review of Internal Policies does encourage broad participation from all stakeholders. However, this policy is not being adhered to, as indicated by the lack of uniformity and standardisation throughout the reviewed policies (cf. section 4.5.3).	The school must adopt a whole-school approach to policy development for their cyberbullying policy. This approach should involve active engagement of all stakeholders in the policy development process, from initial consultation and research to drafting and finalising the policy. This inclusive approach will ensure that all perspectives are considered, and that the policy reflects the needs and values of the entire school community. To support this, the school should revisit their Policy on the Development, Implementation and Review of Internal Policies and ensure that it is consistently followed for all policies, including the Cyberbullying Policy.	When parents and learners participate in policy development, they will feel included, and the school will have a broader “buy-in” from the learners and parents to abide by the school policies. A whole-school approach to policy development will ultimately lead to more effective policies and a stronger school community. Best practice: A whole-school approach to policy development
When it comes to the formulation of its policies, the school does not adhere to a standard framework. There is neither a standardised framework nor the incorporation of generic elements across all school policies I have examined (cf. section 4.5.3).	It is recommended that the school make use of the same framework for developing all the policies.	A consistent policy structure will assist schools in maintaining consistency and clarity in all their policies. Using the same framework for all policies will assist the school in more efficiently and successfully developing and implementing policies, benefiting the entire school community. A uniform policy

		structure can also help to speed up policy development process by laying the groundwork for policy structure and content. Furthermore, a standardised framework can also help to align policies with the values, mission, and goals of the school. Best practice: Policy content – generic elements will ensure effective policies. The inclusion of generic elements across all policies will ensure that there is uniformity throughout the school.
The participants all have different views on the topic of repetition. The school management and some learners feel that repetition is needed where the teachers feel that one incident is enough (cf. section 4.5.3.4).	I would recommend that a cyberbullying policy omits the element of repetition because one shared image could be forwarded countless times, each forwarded image should be seen as a new incident.	To shift the focus to the impact of cyberbullying on the victim and the importance of preventing such behaviour, it may be beneficial to deemphasise repetition in the context of policy and education. By highlighting the potential harm caused by even a single instance of cyberbullying and emphasising the importance of preventing any form of negative online behaviour, learners may be more likely to reconsider engaging in cyberbullying. Additionally, it is recommended to base policy development not only on stakeholder views but also on current research to ensure best practices are followed. Best practice: Policy developers should not only rely on stakeholder views but also on current research.
Current school policies, including the Cyberbullying policy, do not contain the legal framework as an essential policy component (cf. section 4.5.1.1).	It is strongly suggested that the school incorporate these mandatory legal provisions into their cyberbullying policy. • The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa	Schools can demonstrate their commitment to promoting a safe and respectful learning environment by incorporating the legal framework into their policies. It is a best practice to include the legal framework as a generic and essential

	• The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 • Regulations for Safety Measures at Public Schools. • Children's Act 38 of 2005 • UN Resolution on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of a Children • UN Convention on the rights of the child • African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of a Child • Child Justice Act 75 of 2008 • Protection from Harassment Act 17 of 2011 • Cybercrimes Act 19 of 2020 • Policy on the South African Standard for Principals, 2016	component of policies. Doing so can prevent potential legal disputes and promote positive interactions among learners, both online and offline. Best practice: The legal framework is generic and essential component of all policies.

Source: Compiled by the researcher (IM van Rooyen November 2022)

5.5 ASSUMPTIONS

The assumptions made in chapter 1 were verified:

1. Principals are aware of cyberbullying as a problem in their schools (cf. section 1.7.4).

2. Cyberbullying is dealt with by using a policy of some kind; either cyberbullying is covered in the general bullying policy or there is a separate cyberbullying policy. (cf. section 1.7.4).

3. Schools do not know how to handle "off campus" incidents of cyberbullying (cf. section 1.7.4)

This study successfully validated the assumptions made regarding the awareness of principals about cyberbullying as a problem, the presence of policies dealing with cyberbullying, and the difficulties schools encounter in dealing with "off campus" incidents of cyberbullying.

5.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The limitation of a study refers to the “systematic bias” that the researcher could not control, and which could affect the research results (Price & Murnan 2004:66). Because of the time-consuming nature of qualitative research, it was only possible to do research in a single school. Unfortunately, I had to amend my data collection process slightly to not include the chairman, vice-chairman and SRC member of the Board of Directors since they declined to participate in the research. They simply felt that they would not be able to contribute to the research more than what the principal, deputy-principal, school counsellor, teachers and learners can contribute. As a result of Covid-19, scheduling also became a problem between the school and me. The focus group with the teachers was postponed on three different occasions. After my initial meet and greet meeting with the principal, I requested the school’s policy on cyberbullying. However, the school did not have a cyberbullying policy per se but relied on other policies to govern cyberbullying. After my interview with the deputy-principal, I was informed that the school drafted such policy, and the principal made it available for me to analyse. Even though the findings on cyberbullying cannot be generalised to other schools because of the nature of the study, it still provides a rich, contextualised understanding of cyberbullying trends in a typical private school in South Africa.

5.7 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

I conducted a comprehensive study focused on developing an effective policy to combat cyberbullying within the context of private schools. Even though I was able to provide a solution to my research question, I concluded that there are still other concerns and themes that need to be researched in further research. Among these are investigations into:

1. The reasons why learners are cautious and even unwilling to report cyberbullying incidents to the school.

2. Measures that schools can put in place that would make learners feel safe enough to report cyberbullying.

3. Learner victims' self-blame and how that can be addressed through counselling.

4. Learners' knowledge of their schools' codes of conduct.

5. Factors that influence learners' trust in teachers and make teachers more approachable to learners.

Further research in these areas could contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of cyberbullying and effective policy development for preventing and managing this issue in schools.

5.8 CONCLUSION

Given the continuous development and integration of technology in our daily lives, school principals must implement comprehensive policies to control and prevent cyberbullying in their schools. A delicate balance must be struck between protecting the rights of each learner while managing cyberbullying effectively. Due to the multifaceted nature of cyberbullying and the harm it inflicts on learners, schools face unique challenges when attempting to regulate it.

The impact of cyberbullying on learners can be severe, affecting their well-being and educational progress. It is the responsibility of schools and the state to protect learners from the harmful effects of cyberbullying. While South Africa has laws to regulate bullying, there is currently no specific legislation for cyberbullying in schools. To address this, it was necessary to establish a framework based on human rights laws and cyberbullying standards. National and international laws have been used as a guide to develop a policy that aligns with legal requirements. The policy includes provisions from children's rights and international human rights instruments that have been adapted to regulate cyberbullying in South Africa. By adopting a policy that adheres to these standards, schools can help to safeguard learners and create a safe and supportive environment for all learners.

I identified the nature of cyberbullying and its influence on learners and the school through a literature review. Cyberbullying has some similarities to traditional bullying, but it is also

unique and presents new issues schools need to handle. A whole-school approach to cyberbullying management was investigated. Clear communication that engages all stakeholders, active monitoring, education, and flexibility were determined to be critical for the successful control of cyberbullying in schools.

Setting clear goals for the policy, using evidence to inform a new policy, keeping the end user of the policy in mind, involving those affected by the policy, considering whether the policy is a benefit and not a risk, measuring the success of the policy and those who implement it, and having effective policy evaluation and feedback mechanisms in place were also identified as constituting elements for effective policy development (cf. section 2.5). In addition, I defined the general elements required for establishing a policy; while the structure of policies may vary, certain elements should always be present (cf. section 2.6).

Through the application of qualitative case study methodology and by utilising an interpretative paradigm and a range of data-collection methods including literature reviews, document analysis, semi-structured interviews, focus groups and qualitative questionnaires, information-rich participants such as the principal, deputy-principal, school counsellor, educators and learners were selected via criterion-based, purposive sampling. The gathered data revealed the existence of cyberbullying within the school, with a disparity between learners' reports and actual reported incidents, leading to different perspectives between school management and teachers regarding the prevalence of cyberbullying.

In the next section, I present a cyberbullying policy that can serve as prototype.

5.9 PROTOTYPE CYBERBULLYING POLICY FOR PRIVATE SCHOOLS

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1. **TITLE OF POLICY:** CYBERBULLYING POLICY
2. **EFFECTIVE DATE:** 1 January 2023
3. **DATE OF NEXT REVIEW:** 1 January 2024
4. **ACRONYMS**

SACE	South African Council for Educators
IHRL	International Human Rights Instruments
ACRWC	African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
SAHRC	South African Human Rights Commission
ECHR	European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly

5. DEFINITION

Cyberbullying is defined as a deliberate act to harass, harm, intimidate or humiliate another individual. It can manifest in various forms such as spreading false rumours, sharing private or embarrassing media content, or sending threatening messages or emails, and can transpire across several digital platforms including social media, email, text messaging, and online gaming.

6. FORMS OF CYBERBULLYING

Cyberbullying presents itself in two main forms, namely direct and indirect cyberbullying. “Direct” cyberbullying occurs privately, for example, when the bully sends messages to the victim via private messages, such as SMS messages or emails. “Indirect” cyberbullying occurs where the bully does not post directly to the victim but rather enlists the help of others to abuse the victim by posting to websites like MySpace, Facebook, Instagram, or other public cyberspace areas. Both direct and indirect cyberbullying can occur in the following forms:

- *Flaming* – Sending angry, rude vulgar messages
- *Harassment* – Repeated sending of offensive messages
- *Cyberstalking* – Repeated sending of threats to harm

- *Denigration* – Posting untrue or rude comments
- *Impersonation* – Masquerading as someone else
- *Outing and trickery* – Distributing sensitive, private information or engaging in tricks to solicit embarrassing information that is then made public
- *Exclusion* – Intentionally excluding a person from an online group

7. PREAMBLE

School violence and cyberbullying takes place throughout the world. In South Africa, cyberbullying is becoming increasingly frequent in schools and affects all schools irrespective of location or status. Cyberbullying has a detrimental influence on a learner's learning quality, making it a learning barrier that calls for attention. As a result of cyberbullying, victims lack dignity, access to decent education, and the ability to escape violence. Since cyberbullies cannot see the harm caused by cyberbullying, they may feel encouraged to continue or even intensify their bullying behaviour. Because social media platforms are open to the public, cyberbullying spreads quickly, and many learners may be participating in this sort of bullying. [School Name] is committed to providing an environment for the delivery of quality teaching and learning by:

- promoting the rights and safety of all learners, teachers, and parents
- ensuring learners take responsibility for their own actions and behaviours
- prohibiting all forms of cyberbullying

Through this policy, [School] intends to:

- adopt a zero-tolerance approach towards all forms of cyberbullying
- ensure that incidences of cyberbullying are reported to school authorities once they become known
- provide appropriate support for victims and perpetrators
- manage abuse with care, sensitivity, and confidentiality

The Cyberbullying Policy spells out the rules regarding cyberbullying at [School Name] and describes the steps to be followed when reporting and dealing with cyberbullying incidents. The Cyberbullying Policy applies to all learners while they are on the school premises or when they are away from the school representing the school or attending a

school function. All learners attending [School Name] are expected to sign a statement of commitment to the Cyberbullying Policy (Annexure A).

8. PURPOSE OF THE POLICY

The overall purpose of the policy is to ensure that the school is safe for all and that effective measures are employed to deal with issues related to cyberbullying. This policy is not a policy on disciplinary procedures. Learners found guilty of cyberbullying will be dealt with by disciplinary action as provided for in the Code of Conduct for learners.

9. OBJECTIVES OF THE POLICY

The policy seeks to:

- promote a safe school environment and declare the school a cyberbullying free zone
- put in place measures for the prevention of cyberbullying
- establish structures to coordinate school cyberbullying programmes and to sustain gains made
- clearly set out the roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders in the pursuit of a safe school environment
- stipulate clear protocols for the recording, reporting, and managing of cyberbullying incidents

10. SCOPE OF APPLICABILITY AND COMMUNICATION

This policy applies to all learners, of [School Name]. Effectively communicating a school policy to the entire school community involves a well-planned, inclusive approach. Key steps include early planning, identifying stakeholders, tailoring messages, using diverse communication channels that may include the school website, email newsletters, parent-teacher meetings, school assemblies, Social media, staff meetings or online portals. Considering language and accessibility, creating engaging content, providing a feedback mechanism, and ensuring policy documentation is accessible. Continuous evaluation and adjustment are crucial to ensuring understanding and compliance throughout the school community.

11. LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

- The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa
- The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996
- Regulations for Safety Measures at Public Schools, 2001
- Children's Act 38 of 2005
- United Nations General Assembly's Resolution on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Children, 2016
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989
- African Union's African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, ratified by South Africa in 2000
- Child Justice Act 75 of 2008
- Protection from Harassment Act 17 of 2011
- Cybercrimes Act 19 of 2020
- Policy on the South African Standard for Principals, 2016

12. CHILD PROTECTION AND CARE

In accordance with the Child Justice Act 75 of 2008, [School Name] will create awareness among staff members that when a child's well-being is being threatened, support is inadequate, and a child is experiencing maltreatment, abuse, neglect, degradation, or exploitation the said child is deemed to need protection and the matter must be reported to the school principal who should inform the relevant authorities. The principal must report the matter to the parent (if not the perpetrator), the SAPS and the Department of Social Development.

13. PREVENTING CYBERBULLYING

Most incidences that threaten school safety can be attributed to poor management, leadership, supervision, and accountability. The stakeholders of the school will endeavour to continuously monitor the school environment (internally/externally) to identify potential cyberbullying threats and mitigate such risks. While all school stakeholders must take responsibility for school safety, the school management team must lead from the front and constantly be on the lookout for threats to school safety. To combat cyberbullying, a whole-school approach will be followed. The school will work with teachers, learners, and

parents to strengthen the school-community partnership. As a result, preventative measures are provided below to alleviate cyberbullying's threat.

13.1 Principal

The principal will ensure that

- all incidents of cyberbullying both inside and outside school are dealt with immediately
- all staff know that they need to report any issues concerning cyberbullying
- staff are provided with training, so they feel confident to identify children at risk of being cyberbullied
- parents are informed, and attention is drawn annually to the cyberbullying policy
- cyberbullying is revisited at the beginning of each term
- all staff are aware of their responsibilities by providing clear guidance to staff on the use of technology at the school and beyond

13.2 Guidance for staff

If you suspect or are told about a cyberbullying incident, follow the protocol outlined below:

13.2.1 Mobile devices

- Ask the learner to show you the mobile phone.
- Note the inappropriate text message or image, record the date, time, and names.
- Transcribe voice notes, and again record the date, time, and names.
- Tell the learner to save the message/image.
- Inform the deputy-principal immediately and pass on the information.

13.2.2 Computers

- Ask the learner to show the material in question.
- Ask the learner to save the material.
- If possible, print the offending material as evidence.
- Make sure you have all the pages in the right order and that there are no omissions.
- Inform a member of the senior management team and provide them with the information you have.

- Follow the normal procedures to interview learners and to take statements; particularly if a child protection issue is presented.

13.3 Guidance for learners

If you believe you or someone else is the victim of cyberbullying, speak to an adult as soon as possible. This person could be a parent/guardian, or a member of staff.

- Do not answer to abusive messages but save them and report them.
- Do not delete anything until it has been shown to your parents or a member of staff at school (even if it is upsetting, the material is important evidence that may need to be used later as proof of cyberbullying).
- Do not give out personal details or contact information.
- Be careful who you allow to become a friend online and think about what information you want them to see.
- Protect your passwords. Do not share them with anyone else and change them regularly.
- Always log off from the computer when you have finished or if you leave the computer for any reason.
- Never reply to abusive emails.
- Never reply to someone you do not know.

14. INTERVENTION PROCEDURE

In all cases of cyberbullying the principal, deputy-principal or school counsellor must be informed. The principal, deputy-principal or school counsellor will inform the parents of the learners involved and will ensure the school is attending to the matter.

If an incident or incidents have been observed or reported the following procedures must be followed:

- Talk with the victim – get the victim to describe how they feel rather than trying to determine all information.
- Convene a meeting with all the learners who are involved.
- Share responsibility – try to solve the problem rather than blaming or punishing.
- Ask the learners for their ideas in solving the problem.
- Arrange a follow-up meeting (about a week later) to check on progress.

- Record the incident of cyberbullying in the school's disciplinary record.

If the cyberbullying persists the principal may feel it necessary to write to and/or invite parents to discuss further measures, which may involve suspension or expulsion in accordance with the school's Code of Conduct.

15. CONFIDENTIALITY

The stakeholders must ensure that reported cases and acts of cyberbullying are treated with confidentiality.

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APPENDIX A: UNISA ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

UNISA university of south africa

UNISA COLLEGE OF EDUCATION ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

Date: 2021/03/10

Ref: **2021/03/10/ 61434132/08/AM**
Name: Mr IM Van Rooyen
Student No.: 61434132

Dear Mr IM Van Rooyen

Decision: Ethics Approval from 2021/03/10 to 2024/03/10

Researcher(s): Name: Mr IM Van Rooyen
E-mail address: 61434132@mylife.unisa.ac.za
Telephone: 0832879814

Supervisor(s): Name: Prof SA Coetzee
E-mail address: coetzsa1@unisa.ac.za
Telephone: (012) 337-6170

Title of research:

Towards developing a cyberbullying policy for private schools in South Africa: policy considerations at a private school in Gauteng, South Africa

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 2021/03/10 to 2024/03/10.

*The **medium risk** application was reviewed by the Ethics Review Committee on 2021/03/10 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.

n Rubric

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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 **2024/03/10**. Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.

Note:

The reference number **2021/03/10/ 61434132/08/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
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APPENDIX B: INFORMATION LETTER WITH PERMISSION REQUEST AND CONSENT FORM FOR THE PRINCIPAL

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APPENDIX B: INFORMATION LETTER WITH PERMISSION REQUEST AND CONSENT FORMS FOR THE PRINCIPAL

Date: _____

Title: **Towards developing a cyberbullying policy for private schools in South Africa: policy considerations at a private school in Gauteng, South Africa.**

Request for permission to conduct research at your school and for your participation

Dear Principal

I, Ignatius Michael van Rooyen, am conducting a study entitled **Towards developing a cyberbullying policy for private schools in South Africa: policy considerations at a private school in Gauteng, South Africa**. I am a master's degree student at the University of South Africa under the supervision of Prof SA Coetzee, a professor in the Department of Educational Leadership and Management in the College of Education.

I hereby invite your school to participate in the study. You are invited because of the growing trend of cyberbullying among learners at home and in school. This creates an unsafe school environment and has a negative impact on teaching and learning. As a school principal myself I also understand the difficulties that a school faces when it comes to policy development to regulate cyberbullying on and off the school property.

The main aim of the study is to conduct a qualitative study on the development of a cyberbullying policy for private schools in South Africa. The information gained from the study will be used to develop a prototype cyberbullying policy for the effective regulation of cyberbullying among learners at private schools in South Africa. Should you accept my invitation, I will make the prototype policy available to your school. Other benefits that participation may hold for your school include (1) the opportunity to have the school's cyberbullying policy analysed in terms of legal prescripts and identifying possible errors or gaps, (2) raising awareness of cyberbullying as a real problem with real-life consequences.

This research will involve semi-structured interviews with you as principal, deputy-principal, selected members of the governing body and the school counsellor. As principal and the deputy-principal you are responsible for the school's day-to-day functioning and the management of the staff and school policies. Central to policy development and school governance is the governing body. Therefore, I have included the chair, and vice-chair of the governing body and the SRC chair of the governing body. The school counsellor's participation in the study is also very important as he/she forms part of the school's ongoing support structure.

Furthermore, I will host a focus group discussion with selected Grades 8 and 9 teachers. The class teachers build special relationships with the learners and have a direct influence on learner behaviour and motivation. As such, learners often disclose matters related to their lives to teachers which is very important in identifying issues related to cyberbullying.

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Based on their grades and ages I have decided to include the Grade 8 and 9 (ages 14 to 15) learners as part of my study. Research has shown that the highest percentage of learners that are both victims and perpetrators of cyberbullying are in this grade and age category. I will with the permission of the school provide information letters to the learners and the parents. Learners and parents will have the freedom to decide if they want to be part of the research or not. The learners' views on cyberbullying, the social and mental consequences and how it can be restricted, will provide information that will help me tailor the prototype policy not just for the school but for the learners as well.

I undertake not to disrupt the programmes or interfere with the regular duties of any staff member or governing body member. If necessary, I shall involve participants after regular school hours. All semi structured interviews and the group discussion with the teachers will be audio recorded alongside my fieldnotes.

I kindly ask for permission to access school documents related to my study; the school's policy on "Creating a policy" and the cyberbullying policy.

Due to the specific research design and methods for data collection, the study can be regarded as one where the element of risk is medium. The potential risk is emotional discomfort due to the sensitive nature of the topic. In order to help mitigate risk I will ask all participants in the study the following two questions to determine whether individuals might experience any significant stress or serious emotional problems (1) Would your participation in the study make you experience any emotional discomfort?" (2) Would participating in this study put you in any physical or emotional danger? If a participant affirms either question, he or she will not be included in the study.

I would like to assure you of the following ethical considerations:

- The participants will not be pressurised to answer any specific question on a matter that they might regard as confidential.
- Participation is voluntary and optional. Participants will be informed beforehand that they may withdraw at any stage during the study.
- Participant confidentiality and safety will be the number one priority but, in the instance of abuse or threat of harm by others or self-harm being discovered in terms of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act, 32 of 2007, the Children's Act 38 of 2005, and the Child Justice Act 75 of 2008, or similar pieces of legislation will I be obligated to report such abuse to the relevant authorities.

Feedback procedure will entail that the dissertation will be available in a library and should you wish, mailed to the school. All participants and the school will remain anonymous throughout the research study and in the analysis and the reports arising from the research. The data gathered will only be used for research purposes, including the dissemination through peer-reviewed publications and conference proceedings. I undertake to keep any information provided in the study confidential and not to let it out of my possession. All access to stored data will be subject to approval of the Research Ethics Committee should it be needed in future research. The records will be kept for five years for audit purposes, thereafter it will be permanently destroyed. Hard copies will be shredded and incinerated. All electronic versions will be permanently deleted from the hard drive of the computer using specialised software.

I will adhere and take all necessary precautions as prescribed by the school's Covid protocol.

There will be no reimbursement or any incentives for participation in the research.

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The research was reviewed and approved by the College of Education Ethics Review Committee. Should you require any further information, do not hesitate to contact me. The encouragement of your staff to participate in the research is invaluable to my research.

Yours sincerely

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Permission form for school's participation (Return slip)

I would appreciate it if you could sign below, thus indicating that you have granted permission for the research to take place at your school. Participant confidentiality and safety will be the number one priority but, in the instance of abuse or threat of harm by others or self-harm being discovered in terms of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act, 32 of 2007, the Children's Act 38 of 2005, and the Child Justice Act 75 of 2008, or similar pieces of legislation will I be obligated to report such abuse to the relevant authorities.

I _____ agree that the school can participate in the above-mentioned study. The details of this research and its purpose have been explained to me. I have received an information letter to keep. I consent to the following: (Tick to indicate your selection)

Participation of school:
Yes or No

The possible future use of the findings to inform government
Yes or No

Publication and/ or dissemination of findings:
Yes or No

_____ _____
Signature of principal Date

_____ _____
Signature of researcher Date

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Principal's consent form (Return slip)

Please further indicate by signing below that you as principal give consent to participating in the said research. I am aware that the interview will be audio recorded for research purposes only and that all ethical commitments apply. My confidentiality and safety will be the number one priority but, in the instance of abuse or threat of harm by others or self-harm being discovered in terms of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act, 32 of 2007, the Children's Act 38 of 2005, and the Child Justice Act 75 of 2008, or similar pieces of legislation will the researcher be obligated to report such abuse to the relevant authorities.

I consent to the following: (Tick to indicate your selection)

Being interviewed at some point during the study
Yes or **No**

A possible follow-up telephonic interview, the duration of which will not exceed 10 minutes
Yes or **No**

The interview can be audio recorded by the researcher for research purposes only.
Yes or **No**

Participant's non-disclosure agreement: I agree not to record the interview in any manner. I further agree not to divulge, publish, or otherwise make known to unauthorised persons or to the public any information obtained in the interview that could identify the persons who participated in the study.

_____ _____
Signature of principal Date

_____ _____
Signature of researcher Date

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APPENDIX C: INFORMATION LETTER FOR SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM MEMBERS

INFORMATION LETTER FOR SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM MEMBERS

Date: 16 April 2021

Title: **Towards developing a cyberbullying policy for private schools in South Africa: policy considerations at a private school in Gauteng, South Africa.**

Dear Prospective Participant,

You are invited to participate in a semi-structured interview conducted by me, Ignatius Michael van Rooyen under the supervision of Prof SA Coetzee, a professor in the Department of Educational Leadership and Management College of Education towards a MED at the University of South Africa. The study is entitled: **Towards developing a cyberbullying policy for private schools in South Africa: Policy considerations at a private school in Gauteng, South Africa.**

The aim with this study is to conduct a case study into the problems surrounding the development of a cyberbullying policy as to inform the development of a prototype cyberbullying policy for private schools in Gauteng, South Africa. It is intended that the findings of this study may have the potential to support the school, considering that successful development of a cyberbullying policy for the school contribute to the overall safety of learners on and off the school grounds. My expectation is that my research would be able to assist your school in the development of a cyberbullying policy or to improve the current cyberbullying policy so as to ensure full compliance with the legal framework. Furthermore, I want to raise awareness of the different forms of cyberbullying activities and the impact these have on affected learners and staff. As a school principal myself I understand the difficulties that a school faces when developing a policy for the regulation of cyberbullying on and off the school property.

If you agree to participate in the research, you will be asked to participate in an individual semi-structured interview, which should not take longer than 30 minutes. I undertake to keep your identity and any information provided in the study confidential, not to let it out of my possession and to report on the findings from the perspective of the participating group and not from the perspective of an individual. I will keep your personal information separate from the data from the interview so that you cannot be linked to the information you have provided.

The information you provide will only be used for research purposes, including the dissemination through peer-reviewed publications and conference proceedings. All access to stored data will be subject to approval by the Research Ethics Committee should it be needed in future research. In any publication emerging from this research, you will be referred to by a pseudonym. The records will be kept for five years for audit purposes thereafter it will be permanently destroyed. Hard copies will be shredded and incinerated. All electronic versions will be permanently deleted from the hard drive of the computer using specialised software. You will not be reimbursed or receive any incentives for your participation in the research.

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I do not foresee that you will experience any negative consequences by taking part in the study. However, should you experience any discomfort, you can withdraw from the study at any given time.

The research was reviewed and approved by the College of Education Ethics Review Committee and I would like to assure you of the following ethical considerations:

- You will not be pressurised to answer any specific question on a matter that you might regard as confidential.
- Participation is voluntary and optional. You will be informed beforehand that you may withdraw at any stage during the study.
- Your confidentiality and safety will be the number one priority but, in the instance of abuse or threat of harm by others or self-harm being discovered in terms of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act, 32 of 2007, the Children's Act 38 of 2005, and the Child Justice Act 75 of 2008, or similar pieces of legislation will I be obligated to report such abuse to the relevant authorities.

If you would like to participate, please indicate that you have read and understood this information by signing the accompanying consent form and return it to me.

Should you require any further information, do not hesitate to contact me.

_____

Researcher: IM van Rooyen

MEd Student in Educational Leadership & Management

BEd (Hons), ACE, TD:SP

Tel: (083) 287-9814

E-mail: 61434132@mylife.unisa.ac.za

Supervisor: Prof SA Coetzee

DEd, MEd, BEd, BA Ed, LLB, Certificate Programme in Law

Department of Educational Leadership & Management

College of Education

Tel: (012) 337-6170

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APPENDIX D: INFORMATION LETTER FOR SCHOOL COUNSELLOR

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INFORMATION LETTER FOR SCHOOL COUNSELLOR

Date: 16 April 2021

Title: **Towards developing a cyberbullying policy for private schools in South Africa: policy considerations at a private school in Gauteng, South Africa.**

Dear Prospective Participant,

You are invited to participate in a semi-structured interview conducted by me, Ignatius Michael van Rooyen under the supervision of Prof SA Coetzee, a professor in the Department of Educational Leadership and Management, College of Education towards a MEd at the University of South Africa. The study is entitled: **Towards developing a cyberbullying policy for private schools in South Africa: policy considerations at a private school in Gauteng, South Africa.**

The aim with this study is to conduct a case study into the problems surrounding the development of a cyberbullying policy as to inform the development of a prototype cyberbullying policy for private schools in Gauteng, South Africa. It is intended that the findings of this study may have the potential to support the school, considering that successful development of a cyberbullying policy for the school contribute to the overall safety of learners on and off the school grounds My expectation is that my research would be able to assist your school in the development of a cyberbullying policy or to improve the current cyberbullying policy so as to ensure full compliance with the legal framework. Furthermore, I want to raise awareness of the different forms of cyberbullying activities and the impact these have on affected learners and staff. As a school principal myself I understand the difficulties that a school faces when developing a policy for the regulation of cyberbullying on and off the school property.

If you agree to participate in the research, you will be asked to participate in an individual semi-structured interview, which should not take longer than 30 minutes. I undertake to keep your identity and any information provided in the study confidential, not to let it out of my possession and to report on the findings from the perspective of the participating group and not from the perspective of an individual. I will keep your personal information separate from the data from the interview so that you cannot be linked to the information you have provided.

The information you provide will only be used for research purposes, including the dissemination through peer-reviewed publications and conference proceedings. All access to stored data will be subject to approval of the Research Ethics Committee should it be needed in future research in any publication emerging from this research, you will be referred to by a pseudonym. The records will be kept for five years for audit purposes thereafter it will be permanently destroyed. Hard copies will be shredded and incinerated. All electronic versions will be permanently deleted from the hard drive of the computer using specialised software. You will not be reimbursed or receive any incentives for your participation in the research.

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I do not foresee that you will experience any negative consequences by taking part in the study. However, should you experience any discomfort, you can withdraw from the study at any given time.

The research was reviewed and approved by the College of Education Ethics Review Committee and I would like to assure you of the following ethical considerations:

- You will not be pressurised to answer any specific question on a matter that you might regard as confidential.
- Participation is voluntary and optional. You will be informed beforehand that you may withdraw at any stage during the study.
- Your confidentiality and safety will be the number one priority but, in the instance of abuse or threat of harm by others or self-harm being discovered in terms of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act, 32 of 2007, the Children's Act 38 of 2005, and the Child Justice Act 75 of 2008, or similar pieces of legislation will I be obligated to report such abuse to the relevant authorities.

If you would like to participate, please indicate that you have read and understood this information by signing the accompanying consent form and return it to me.

Should you require any further information, do not hesitate to contact me.

_____

Researcher: IM van Rooyen

MEd Student in Educational Leadership & Management

BEd (Hons), ACE, TD:SP

Tel: (083) 287-9814

E-mail: 61434132@mylife.unisa.ac.za

Supervisor: Prof SA Coetzee

DEd, MEd, BEd, BA.Ed, LLB, Certificate Programme in Law

Department of Educational Leadership & Management

College of Education

Tel: (012) 337-6170

E-mail : coetzsa1@unisa.ac.za

APPENDIX E: CONSENT FORM FOR INTERVIEWEES

INTERVIEWEE CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY (Return slip)

I, _____ (participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits, and anticipated inconvenience of participation. I have received an information letter containing all this information to keep and understand the study as explained in the information letter. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty.

I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential. I am aware that the interview will be audio recorded for research purposes only and that all ethical commitments apply. My confidentiality and safety will be the number one priority but, in the instance of abuse or threat of harm by others or self-harm being discovered in terms of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act, 32 of 2007, the Children's Act 38 of 2005, and the Child Justice Act 75 of 2008, or similar pieces of legislation will the researcher be obligated to report such abuse to the relevant authorities. I consent to the following: (Tick to indicate your selection)

Being interviewed at some point during the study

Yes or **No**

That the researcher may audio record the interview

Yes or **No**

Participant's non-disclosure agreement: I agree not to record the interview in any manner. I further agree not to divulge, publish, or otherwise make known to unauthorised persons or to the public any information obtained in the interview that could identify the persons who participated in the study.

_____

Name & surname of participant (please print)

_____ _____

Signature of participant Date

Ignatius Michael van Rooyen

Name & surname of researcher

_____ 16 April 2021

Signature of researcher Date

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APPENDIX F: INFORMATION LETTER FOR REGISTER CLASS TEACHERS

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INFORMATION LETTER FOR SCHOOL TEACHERS

Date: 16 April 2021

Title: **Towards developing a cyberbullying policy for private schools in South Africa: policy considerations at a private school in Gauteng, South Africa.**

Dear Prospective Participant,

You are invited to participate in a focus group discussion led by me, Ignatius Michael van Rooyen under the supervision of Prof SA Coetzee, a professor in the Department of Educational Leadership and Management College of Education towards a MED at the University of South Africa. The study is entitled: **Towards developing a cyberbullying policy for private schools in South Africa: policy considerations at a private school in Gauteng, South Africa.**

The aim with this study is to conduct a case study into the problems surrounding the development of a cyberbullying policy as to inform the development of a prototype cyberbullying policy for private schools in Gauteng, South Africa. It is intended that the findings of this study may have the potential to support the school, considering that successful development of a cyberbullying policy for the school contribute to the overall safety of learners on and off the school grounds. My expectation is that my research would be able to assist your school in the development of a cyberbullying policy or to improve the current cyberbullying policy so as to ensure full compliance with the legal framework. Furthermore, I want to raise awareness of the different forms of cyberbullying activities and the impact these have on affected learners and staff. As a school principal myself I understand the difficulties that a school faces when developing a policy for the regulation of cyberbullying on and off the school property.

If you agree to participate in the research, you will be asked to participate in a focus group discussion, which should not take longer than 45 minutes. I undertake to keep your identity and any information provided in the study confidential, not to let it out of my possession and to report on the findings from the perspective of the participating group and not from the perspective of an individual. I will keep your personal information separate from the data from the focus group discussion so that you cannot be linked to the information you have provided.

The information you provide will only be used for research purposes, including dissemination through peer-reviewed publications and conference proceedings. All access to stored data will be subject to approval of the Research Ethics Committee should it be needed in future research. In any publication emerging from this research, you will be referred to by a pseudonym. The records will be kept for five years for audit purposes thereafter it will be permanently destroyed. Hard copies will be shredded and incinerated. All electronic versions will be permanently deleted from the hard drive of the computer using specialised software. You will not be reimbursed or receive any incentives for your participation in the research.

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I do not foresee that you will experience any negative consequences by taking part in the study.

The research was reviewed and approved by the College of Education Ethics Review Committee and I would like to assure you of the following ethical considerations:

- You will not be pressurised to answer any specific question on a matter that you might regard as confidential.
- Participation is voluntary and optional. You will be informed beforehand that you may withdraw at any stage during the study.
- Your confidentiality and safety will be the number one priority but, in the instance of abuse or threat of harm by others or self-harm being discovered in terms of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act, 32 of 2007, the Children's Act 38 of 2005, and the Child Justice Act 75 of 2008, or similar pieces of legislation will I be obligated to report such abuse to the relevant authorities.

If you would like to participate, please indicate that you have read and understood this information by signing the accompanying consent form and return it to me.

Should you require any further information, do not hesitate to contact me.

_____

Researcher: IM van Rooyen

MEd Student in Educational Leadership & Management

BEd (Hons), ACE, TD:SP

Tel: (083) 287-9814

E-mail: 61434132@mylife.unisa.ac.za

Supervisor: Prof SA Coetzee

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Department of Educational Leadership & Management

College of Education

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E-mail : coetzsa1@unisa.ac.za

APPENDIX G: CONSENT FORM AND CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT FOR REGISTER CLASS TEACHERS

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TEACHERS CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY (Return slip)

I, _____ (participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits, and anticipated inconvenience of participation. I have received an information letter containing all this information to keep and understood the study as explained in the information letter. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty. I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential. I am aware that the interview will be audio recorded for research purposes only and that all ethical commitments apply. My confidentiality and safety will be the number one priority but, in the instance of abuse or threat of harm by others or self-harm being discovered in terms of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act, 32 of 2007, the Children's Act 38 of 2005, and the Child Justice Act 75 of 2008, or similar pieces of legislation will the researcher be obligated to report such abuse to the relevant authorities.
I consent to the following: (Tick to indicate your selection)

To participate in a focus group discussion
Yes or No

That the focus group can be audio recorded by the researcher
Yes or No

Participant's non-disclosure agreement: I agree not to record the discussion in any manner. I agree to keep all identifying information about the participants and their names and study sites confidential. I further agree not to divulge, publish, or otherwise make known any information obtained in the course of this research project.

_____
Name & surname of teacher (please print)

_____ _____
Signature of teacher Date

Ignatius Michael van Rooyen
Name & surname of researcher

_____ 16 April 2021
Signature of researcher Date

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APPENDIX H: INFORMATION LETTER FOR LEARNERS

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INFORMATION LETTER FOR LEARNERS

TITLE OF THE RESEARCH: Towards developing a cyberbullying policy for private schools in South Africa: Policy considerations at a private school in Gauteng, South Africa.

RESEARCHERS NAME: *IGNIS VAN ROOYEN*

CONTACT NUMBER: *0832879814*

Who is doing the research?

My name is Ignis van Rooyen, I am a master's student at the University of South Africa (Unisa) and also a principal at a private school in Gauteng. I therefore know the struggles that teens face when it comes to cyberbullying.

What is this research project all about?

I am doing a study at the University of South Africa on developing a policy to regulate cyberbullying among your age group. Your principal has given me permission to do this study at your school. I would like to invite you to take part in this study. I am doing this study so that I can find better ways to develop cyberbullying policies that can benefit everyone at the school. This study may help you and many other learners of your age in different schools.

Why have I been invited to take part in this research project?

Previous research by other researchers showed that children of your age group are most likely to suffer from some form of cyberbullying. Therefore, you are part of a specific group of learners who qualify to be part of the research study.

What will happen to me in this study?

If you decide to participate in the study, you will be completing an anonymous questionnaire. No personal or identifiable details will be collected or shared with anyone. The questionnaire should take you around 30 minutes to complete. There are no right or wrong answers, just your opinion.

Can anything bad happen to me?

I do not believe that you will be hurt or upset by being in this study. If you take part in the study and believe that you have been hurt or upset in any way, you may stop being in the study. I will not tell anyone else the things you answered in the questionnaire or anything about your participation.

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Can anything good happen to me?

This study will probably help you, but if you participate in this study, it will teach me important ways to help other children like you in the future and in other schools.

Will anyone know I am in the study?

The questionnaire that you will be completing will not contain any identifiable information about you. But I will use the information that you provide on the anonymous questionnaire to present my findings to the University of South Africa.

Who can I talk to about the study?

Please take this form home so that you can think about it and also show your parents or caregivers. They will be able to help you decide. You can also contact me, your principal, your teacher, the school counsellor, or any adult you trust if you need more information before you decide.

What if I do not want to do this?

Participation is voluntary, and you do not have to be part of the study if you do not want to take part in it. If you choose to be in the study, you may stop taking part at any time without any sort of penalty. You also do not have to answer any questions that you do not feel comfortable answering. Even if your parents have agreed for you to participate in the study, you can still refuse should you want to.

The research was reviewed and approved by the College of Education Ethics Review Committee and I would like to assure you of the following ethical considerations:

- You will not be pressurised to answer any specific question on a matter that you might regard as confidential.
- Participation is voluntary and optional. You will be informed beforehand that you may withdraw at any stage during the study.
- Your confidentiality and safety will be the number one priority but, in the instance of abuse or threat of harm by others or self-harm being discovered in terms of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act, 32 of 2007, the Children's Act 38 of 2005, and the Child Justice Act 75 of 2008, or similar pieces of legislation will I be obligated to report such abuse to the relevant authorities.

Do not sign the written assent form if you have any questions related to the study. Ask your questions first and ensure that someone answers those questions.

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APPENDIX I: ASSENT FORMS

UNISA university of south africa

ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY (Return slip)

I _____ have read this letter in which I am asked to be part of a study at my school. I understand the information about the study, and I know what I will be asked to do and that I can withdraw from the study at any time. I am aware that my confidentiality and safety will be the number one priority but, in the instance of abuse or threat of harm by others or self-harm being discovered in terms of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act, 32 of 2007, the Children's Act 38 of 2005, and the Child Justice Act 75 of 2008, or similar pieces of legislation will the researcher be obligated to report such abuse to the relevant authorities. I assent to the following:

I am willing to complete a questionnaire at some point during the study: (Please tick)

YES		NO

_____

Name & surname of learner participant (please print)

_____ _____

Signature of learner participant Date

Ignatius Michael van Rooyen

Name & surname of researcher

_____ 16 April 2021

Signature of researcher Date

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APPENDIX J: INFORMATION LETTER REQUESTING PARENTAL CONSENT FOR MINORS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT

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INFORMATION LETTER REQUESTING PARENTAL CONSENT FOR MINORS TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

Dear Parent

Your child is invited to participate in a study entitled: **Towards developing a cyberbullying policy for private schools in South Africa: Policy considerations at a private school in Gauteng, South Africa.**

I am undertaking this study as part of my master's research at the University of South Africa. The purpose of the study is to conduct a case study into the problems surrounding the development of a cyberbullying policy as to inform the development of a prototype cyberbullying policy for private schools in Gauteng, South Africa. The possible benefits include the potential to support the school, considering that a successful development of a cyberbullying policy for the school will contribute to the overall safety of learners on and off the school grounds. I am asking permission to include your child in this study because he/she fits within the age group in which studies have shown are the most prone to being cyberbullied.

If you allow your child to participate, I shall request him/her to complete an anonymous open-ended questionnaire that should take approximately 30 minutes to complete. I will protect his/her identity by only referring to your child as participant A,B,C etc., in any publication emerging from this research. The learners whose parents give consent and who assented themselves will be contacted via the school in order to communicate the arrangements for the day. The learners will complete the questionnaire in the morning just after school has started during their administration period. No audio or video recordings will be made.

There are no foreseeable risks to your child by participating in the study however, if he/she needs further counselling after he/she has participated in the study, it will be arranged for him/her with the school counsellor. The research was reviewed and approved by the College of Education Ethics Review Committee and I would like to assure you of the following ethical considerations:

- You child will not be pressurised to answer any specific question on a matter that he/she might regard as confidential.
- Participation is voluntary and optional. Participants will be informed beforehand that they may withdraw at any stage during the study.
- Participant confidentiality and safety will be the number one priority but, in the instance of abuse or threat of harm by others or self-harm being discovered in terms of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act, 32 of 2007, the Children's Act 38 of 2005, and the Child Justice Act 75 of 2008, or similar pieces of legislation will I be obligated to report such abuse to the relevant authorities.

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Neither your child nor you will receive any type of payment for participating in this study.

Your child's participation in this study is voluntary. Your child may decline to participate or to withdraw from participation at any time. Withdrawal or refusal to participate will not affect him/her in any way. Similarly, you can agree to allow your child to be in the study now and change your mind later without any penalty. In addition to your permission, your child must agree to participate in the study and you, and your child will also be asked to sign the assent form. If your child does not wish to participate in the study, he or she will not be included and there will be no penalty. The information gathered from the study and your child's participation in the study will be stored securely on a password locked computer for five years after the study. Thereafter, records will be erased. All access to stored data will be subject to approval of the Research Ethics Committee should it be needed in future research.

If you have questions about this study please ask me or my study supervisor, Prof Coetzee, College of Education, University of South Africa. My contact number is 0832879814 and my e-mail is 61434132@mylife.unisa.ac.za. The e-mail of my supervisor is coetzsa1@unisa.ac.za. Permission for the study has already been approved by the school principal and the Ethics Committee of the College of Education, UNISA.

You are deciding about allowing your child to participate in this study. Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to allow him or her to participate in the study. You may keep a copy of this letter.

Researcher: IM van Rooyen

MEd Student in Educational Leadership & Management

BEd (Hons), ACE, TD:SP

Tel: (083) 287-9814

E-mail: 61434132@mylife.unisa.ac.za

Supervisor: Prof SA Coetzee

DEd, MEd, BEd, BA.Ed, LLB, Certificate Programme in Law

Department of Educational Leadership & Management

College of Education

Tel: (012) 337-6170

E-mail : coetzsa1@unisa.ac.za

APPENDIX K: CONSENT FORM FOR PARENTS OF MINORS

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CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY FROM PARENTS OF MINORS (Return slip)

Towards developing a cyberbullying policy for private schools in South Africa: Policy considerations at a private school in Gauteng, South Africa

Researcher: IM van Rooyen (MEd Student)

Supervisor: Prof. Susanna A. Coetzee

I, _____ (parent name), confirm that the person asking my consent to allow my child to take part in this research has informed me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits, and anticipated inconvenience of participation. I received an information letter containing all this information to keep and understand the study as explained in the information letter. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions. I understand that my child's participation is voluntary and that he/she is free to withdraw at any time without penalty.

I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my child's participation will be kept confidential. I am aware that my child's confidentiality and safety will be the number one priority but, in the instance of abuse or threat of harm by others or self-harm being discovered in terms of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act, 32 of 2007, the Children's Act 38 of 2005, and the Child Justice Act 75 of 2008, or similar pieces of legislation will the researcher be obligated to report such abuse to the relevant authorities.

I consent to the following: (Tick to indicate your selection)

That my child may participate in the study by completing a qualitative open-ended questionnaire

Yes or No

_____

Name & surname of parent (please print)

_____ _____

Signature of parent Date

Name & surname of researcher

Ignatius Michael van Rooyen

Signature of researcher Date

_____ 16 April 2021

Signature of learner participant Date

_____ _____

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APPENDIX L: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR PRINCIPAL, DEPUTY-PRINCIPAL, CHAIR, VICE-CHAIR OF BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND CHAIR OF THE SRC

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APPENDIX L: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR PRINCIPAL, DEPUTY PRINCIPAL, CHAIR, VICE-CHAIR, AND CHAIR OF THE SRC

Biographical information

1. State the number of years as a principal, deputy principal, governing body chair, vice-chair, and chair of the SRC.
2. State the number of years at current school.

Section 1: The school's understanding of cyberbullying and its occurrence

3. How would you define traditional bullying?
4. In your opinion, what is the difference between traditional bullying and cyberbullying?
5. How big of a problem is cyberbullying at the school?
6. How do you perceive the effect of cyberbullying on a learner?

Section 2: Current policy(ies) used to regulate cyberbullying incidents at school

7. Does the school have policies other than a cyberbullying policy, for example policies on internet etiquette, Information Technology, cell phone usage that address cyberbullying or other forms of cyber harassment?
8. How does the cyberbullying policy differ from other policies such as the disciplinary and Information Technology policies?
9. How does the cyberbullying policy require you to respond to an incidence of cyberbullying that occurred?
   9.1 inside the school premises but learners used their own devices?
   9.2 inside the school premises and learners used the school's equipment?
   9.3 outside the school premises and learners used their own devices?
10. To what extent do you think parents expect you to intervene in cases of cyberbullying that occurs outside of school?
11. How does the school support the victims of cyberbullying?
12. How does the school rehabilitate the cyberbully?
13. With regard to teachers, why would you say are the teachers prepared or unprepared to implement a school policy that regulates cyberbullying?

Section 3: To establish best practices for developing a school policy on cyberbullying within a whole-school framework.

14. Please explain the school's procedure for developing new policy.
15. How does the school include the parents in the development of new policies?
16. How does the school include the learners in the development of new policies?
17. Please explain the measures that are in place to ensure learners are educated on cyberbullying.
18. How do you educate parents on aspects of cyberbullying?
19. What do you think are the best strategies to reduce cyberbullying incidents at your school?

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APPENDIX M: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR THE SCHOOL COUNSELLOR

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APPENDIX M: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SCHOOL COUNSELLOR

Biographical information

1. State the number of years as a counsellor.
2. State the number of years at current school.

Section 1: Understanding of cyberbullying and its occurrence

3. How would you define traditional bullying?
4. In your opinion, what do you think is the difference between traditional bullying and cyberbullying?
5. How big of a problem is cyberbullying at the school?
6. How do you perceive the effect of cyberbullying on a learner?

Section 2: Current policy(ies) used to regulate cyberbullying incidents at school

7. Other than a cyberbullying policy, which other school policies are used to regulate cyberbullying?
8. How does the cyberbullying policy differ from the Information Technology policy?
9. How does the cyberbullying policy require you to respond to an incidence of cyberbullying that occurred:

9.1 inside the school premises but learners used their own devices?
9.2 inside the school premises and learners used the school's equipment?
9.3 outside the school premises and learners used their own devices?

10. To what extent do you think parents expect you to intervene in cases of cyberbullying that occurs outside of school?
11. What is your involvement when a learner is identified as a victim of cyberbullying?
12. How does the school rehabilitate the cyberbully?
13. As the school counsellor, how do you support the school personnel to deal with cyberbullying?
14. With regard to teachers, do you feel that they are confident to deal with incidents of cyberbullying?

Section 3: To establish best practices for developing a school policy on cyberbullying within a whole-school framework

15. Please explain the measures that are in place to ensure teachers, learners and parents are educated on cyberbullying.
16. What do you think are the best strategies to reduce cyberbullying incidents at your school?
17. Please explain the measures that are in place to ensure teachers, learners and parents are involved in the policy development process.

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APPENDIX N: GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR REGISTER CLASS TEACHERS

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APPENDIX N: TEACHERS FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

Topics for discussion

1. What is cyberbullying? Can you give me some examples?
2. How does cyberbullying differ from traditional bullying?
3. In what way do you believe cyberbullying is a problem for learners?
4. Why do you regard yourself as equipped to handle incidents of cyberbullying?
5. How does the school policy help you to know what do you do in cases of suspected cyberbullying at the school?
6. What do you do when you became aware of an incident of cyberbullying where a learner used his or her private laptop to cyberbully a co-learner while not on the school property?
7. In your opinion, who should take responsibility for handling acts of cyberbullying either on or off the school grounds?
8. Explain the school's procedure for developing new policy.
9. As teachers in a non-management position, to what extent are you involved in the development of the disciplinary/cyberbullying policy?
10. Is there room for improvement on how school policies are developed, reviewed, disseminated, evaluated, and improved? Please explain your answer.
11. What three things do you wish policymakers, and/or the community knew about cyberbullying?
12. What do you think are the best strategies to reduce cyberbullying incidents at your school?

List of probing questions to gain more clarity and stimulate conversation:

- Could you elaborate further?
- Could you give me an example?
- Could you give me more details?
- What factors make this a difficult problem?
- What are the difficulties that need to be dealt with?
- Why is this the most important problem to consider?

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APPENDIX O: QUALITATIVE OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONNAIRE FOR LEARNERS

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APPENDIX O: QUALITATIVE, OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONNAIRE FOR LEARNERS

Section 1: Biographical information collected:

1. Gender.
2. Age.
3. Race.
4. From where do you normally access the internet? (School, home etc.)
5. Approximate number of hours a day you spend on the internet/social media.
6. Social media platforms you use.

Section 2: What is cyberbullying?

1. Give a brief description of what you think cyberbullying is.

2. In the table below, tick the block you think describes the definition. In other words, is it a form of cyberbullying or NOT a form of cyberbullying?

Definition	A form of cyberbullying	NOT a form of cyberbullying
Online fights using electronic messages containing angry or vulgar language.		
Repeatedly sending nasty, mean and insulting messages.		
Threats of harm or intimidation through repeated online harassment and threats.		
"Dissing" or disrespecting someone; sending or posting gossip or rumours about a person to damage his or her reputation or friendships online.		
Sharing someone's secrets or embarrassing information or images online.		
Pretending to be someone else and sending or posting material online to get that person in trouble or damage their reputation.		
Intentionally or cruelly excluding someone from online groups.		

3. If someone had an argument with you using a social media app (WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram etc.) via private messaging. Would you consider that to be cyberbullying? Please explain.

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4. What would you regard as more embarrassing: traditional bullying (for example where you are physically attacked or taunted in front of other learners at school), or cyberbullying (for example when another learner posts something on the internet or sends an embarrassing text message that is distributed among other learners)?
5. Do you consider one incident (posting a nasty comment, embarrassing photo etc.) on a public group as cyberbullying? Please explain.
6. From your own understanding of cyberbullying, do you think you have been a victim of cyberbullying? Please explain why you think so.
7. If you were cyberbullied, where did it start? (School, home etc.)
8. Please explain how it made you feel.
9. If you reported the cyberbully, to whom did you report it?
10. Was the issue resolved successfully?
11. What steps were taken to help you?
12. Do you think your schoolwork suffered as a result of the cyberbullying?
13. Has there been a time that you did not report the cyberbullying? Please explain why.
14.1 From your understanding of cyberbullying, do you think YOU have cyberbullied someone before? Please explain why you think so.
    14.2 If you indicated that you have cyberbullied before, answer the following questions:
        14.2.1 How does that make you feel that you have cyberbullied someone before?
        14.2.2 If you have stopped the cyberbullying, what made you stop?
15. Is there anything not mentioned above that you have a view on regarding cyberbullying?

Section 3: The school's regulation of cyberbullying

1. Where did you first learn about cyberbullying?
2. What did the school do to educate you on the dangers of cyberbullying?
3. Do you think your school successfully protect and support learners against cyberbullying? Kindly explain your view.
4. To whom should cyberbullying be reported?
5. What transgressions do you think will constitute cyberbullying in your school?
6. If you are cyberbullied outside of school, to what extend should the school get involved?
7. Who should be held responsible when you are being cyberbullied? Should it be the bully, the school, your educator, your parents, the internet service provider, yourself? Please explain your answer.
8. What changes would you like to see in the school's cyberbullying policy?

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APPENDIX P: DOCUMENT ANALYSIS GUIDE

APPENDIX P: DOCUMENT ANALYSIS GUIDE

Below I explain why each document is selected for analysis and the questions that will guide the analysis.

1. The school policy on cyberbullying - Analysing the school's cyberbullying policy will give a better understanding as to the shortcomings of the school's cyberbullying policy. The following questions will guide the analysis of the school cyberbullying policy:

- *How is cyberbullying defined in the policy?*
- *Are provisions made in the policy for off-site cyberbullying?*
- *In cases of suspected or confirmed cyberbullying incidents, does the policy set out clear steps to follow?*
- *Is relevant legislation included in the policy to deal with cyberbullying on or off school grounds?*

2. The school's policy on "creating a policy" - Every policy must have a purpose or there would be no need for the policy. Thus, when the school develops a new policy, there must be a clear goal and vision in the policy that can be achieved by those effected by the policy. For that reason, all stakeholders must be considered and consulted when a new policy is developed. A cyberbullying policy effects everyone, therefore, everyone should have an input when it is being developed and established. I also needed to conclude if the school is following sound procedures when developing new policies. By analysing the school's policy on "Creating a policy" I can highlight some issues in the school's approach to whole-school development regarding cyberbullying, which I will discuss further in the study. The following questions will guide the analysis of the school's policy on "Creating a policy":

- *What role does the school governing body play in the establishment of a school policy?*
- *Who may participate in the development of new policies?*
- *What procedures must be followed for the establishment of a new policy?*
- *Does everyone have a chance to review the policy before it is finalised?*
- *Are there opportunities for stakeholders to raise concerns and receive feedback?*

3. Court reports that included foreign and national court rulings on cases related to human rights, freedom of speech and cyberbullying - Analysing court reports are very important in the discovery of trends set by the courts. How the courts interpret different situations related to cyberbullying will give me a framework to work with when addressing cyberbullying within a policy. What standards do the courts use in cases that deals with cyberbullying? How do the courts weigh the rights of the cyber victim against the rights of the cyberbullies? These are some of the questions that need to be asked before any policy considerations could be made for any cyberbullying policy development. Below are the questions that will guide me in analysing the court reports and court rulings.

- *What is the courts' definition of cyberbullying?*

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- *Who was involved in the case?*
- *What arguments are being made by the counsel?*
- *How do the courts use the "Substantial disruption" test?*
- *What was the conclusion and the verdict of the case?*
- *Were any standards (Tinker standard etc.) applied to reach the verdict?*

By triangulating my findings with my other data sources, I will be able to increase the credibility of my research findings.

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APPENDIX Q: TURITIN DIGITAL RECEIPT

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File size:	5.88M
Page count:	251
Word count:	62,381
Character count:	374,347
Submission date:	21-Aug-2023 08:40PM (UTC+0200)
Submission ID:	2149051892

TOWARDS DEVELOPING A CYBERBULLYING POLICY FOR PRIVATE SCHOOLS IN SOUTH AFRICA: POLICY CONSIDERATIONS AT A PRIVATE SCHOOL IN GAUTENG PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA

by
IGNATIUS MICHAEL VAN ROOYEN

submitted in accordance with the requirements
for the degree of
MASTER OF EDUCATION

in the subject of
EDUCATION MANAGEMENT

at the
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

SUPERVISOR: PROF. SA COETZEE

SEPTEMBER 2023