

**IMPROVING SCHOOL-BASED SUPPORT TOWARDS ACCESS AND SUCCESS OF
RURAL LEARNERS**

by

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IMPROVING SCHOOL-BASED SUPPORT TOWARDS ACCESS AND SUCCESS OF RURAL LEARNERS

I declare that the above thesis 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 thesis to originality 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 at any other higher education institution.

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SIGNATURE

12 January 2024

DATE

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ABSTRACT

Rural learners encounter various barriers to learning some of which are context-specific challenges that impede accessibility of opportunities to learn and attainment of educational success. To address these impediments effectively, schools are mandated to establish and maintain functional support teams dedicated to employ specific intervention strategies. The sustainability of these teams relies on the support from all educational stakeholders. The study explored the effects of school-based support in education and how its improvement could influence access to education and success of rural learners. A qualitative approach and instrumental case study design were used. Participants' lived experiences were explored in their naturally occurring environment, i.e., schools and district office. Field notes, open-ended questionnaires, focus group and individual interviews were used to collect data. 35 individuals were sampled (15 teachers who were members of school-based support teams, 5 district-based support team members, 5 principals and 10 members of school-governing bodies). 5 focus group interviews (1 per school) with 6 participants and 5 individual interviews with district-based support teams were conducted. Questionnaires were completed by all participants. Pseudonyms were used for confidentiality and anonymity. Findings reveal that 3 out of 5 schools did not have functional support teams. Results highlighted the effects of resources, teachers' skills and capabilities and time constraints in effective implementation of support strategies. The study recommends strengthening collaboration and engagement with educational stakeholders, teacher capacitation and adequate resource allocation. Similar studies with large sample, using different methods and focusing on existing support interventions are recommended. The study proposes a school-based support strategy that focuses on 5 pillars of support, which are teacher development; parental, community and stakeholder involvement; resource mobilisation; policy alignment; and monitoring and evaluation to improve school-based support and promote access to opportunities to learn and success in education.

Keywords: School-based support, district-based support, barriers to learning, learner support, rural schools, inclusion, holistic approach, access to education, educational success and learning needs.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

Education in South Africa has undergone extensive transformation and evolution to redress the persistent apartheid legacy of educational inequality. The educational evolution has given rise to different versions of curriculum development and implementation, as well as educational policies. At the core of all these changes is ensuring that the education sector produces learners who are skilled to be active participants in the economic development of the country (Macur, 2020). To produce a generation that makes a meaningful contribution to its country, it is imperative to also prioritise the provision of support to all educational key players such as school principals, educators/teachers and other school personnel for them to improve their professional functions (Republic of South Africa, 1996c).

The study examined the effects of improving school-based support on the access to education and success of rural learners. It is imperative to first discuss the concept of school-based support in various contexts, through extant research that provides a perspective of different scenarios and highlights the research lacunae. Chapter 1 will introduce the topic under study in different sub-sections, which deal with the analysis of school-based support in various contexts and in different countries or educational systems. The research processes to be followed in undertaking the study are also briefly discussed.

1.2 An Analysis of School-based Support

In this section, school-based support is examined under different scenarios or contexts to cast light on different programmes, support services and approaches adopted by different countries to strengthen the provision of support. School-based support is described as those reinforcements or support mechanisms provided at school level by school-based

support teams. In South Africa, school-based support teams are initiated by schools with the purpose of laying down foundations for support services for schools, learners and teachers to improve teacher performance and learning outcomes (Department of Basic Education, 2014b). The provision of support at school level mentors and capacitates teachers by increasing their knowledge, learner self-awareness, aspirations, abilities and capacity-building towards attaining educational goals.

The provision of school-based support through intervention programmes provides learners with skills and knowledge required to manage and improve their education and other aspects of their lives. In addition, support enhances learner “participation and inclusion in school”(Department of Basic Education, 2014b) It also suggest that when teachers display supportive attitudes and behaviour towards learners, they fill learners’ emotional voids, address educational and social needs and contribute towards the overall improvement of their educational outcomes, which is a demonstration of the role of support in learners’ emotional and educational aspects.

Padayachee and Gcelu (2022), explored whether collaboration could be used in instilling discipline in schools. They suggest that including and collaborating with other stakeholders such as sister departments, that is, police and social development, and other community structures could assist in instilling discipline in schools. The knowledge and skills gained through networking and engaging with such stakeholders could be beneficial in the provision of support. Through such engagement, teachers who have just entered the teaching profession with no experience of classroom management, curriculum delivery and attending to diverse learning needs in classrooms can strengthen interaction among themselves.

Supporting new teachers during their induction period has been emphasised as essential in what Brown, Friesen, Beck and Roberts (2020), refer to as the critical stage of a teaching career. Their study revealed that new teachers found the support they gained through their interaction with experienced teachers beneficial, where such interactions improved their teaching methods and strategies. In addition, the support from experienced teachers

transformed how they observed their learners during teaching and learning, which assisted new teachers in identifying and addressing learning challenges. Supporting new teachers through mentoring programmes was also found to be instrumental in intensifying their ability to thrive and succeed in their new roles and responsibilities (Brown, Friesen, Beck & Roberts 2020).

According to Duncan, Punch and Croce (2021), providing teachers with continuous professional development through intervention programmes and other training improves their capacity to deliver inclusive education in their schools. Professional development improves teachers' ability to support their learners to acquire skills and competencies required by the changing world. Ackah-Jnr and Udah (2021), agree, asserting that capacitating teachers equips them with skills to implement inclusive education. Graham and Jefferson (2019), also found that the provision of school-based support through teacher mentoring programme improved learner performance.

Supporting teachers also involves the provision of educational resources, which assist in gaining learners' curiosity, appealing to their intellect and engaging them in classroom activities. Lack of teaching and learning resources can pose opposite consequences. As an example, inadequate educational resources have been linked to poor performance in some Namibian schools (Ndjangala, Abah & Mashebe, 2020). Furthermore, the availability of equipment, apparatus and other resources has also been linked to improved classroom engagements and attitudes towards subjects such as Mathematics and Science. The implication is that supporting curriculum implementation through the provision of resources is essential to school-based support.

Lack of or inadequate teacher support results in ill-prepared and poorly skilled teachers, who are unable to handle challenges presented by curriculum implementation or to execute innovative classroom strategies (Reiten, 2021). The combination of educational resources and teachers' skills and knowledge is essential in dealing with the demands of implementing any curriculum. It is challenging for teachers to support their learners when they themselves are not supported to adequately understand the diverse learning needs

presented by their learners and lack capabilities to handle with the obstacles faced by their learners (Cheung, Hui & Cheung, 2020).

Granger, Sutherland, Conroy, Dear and Morse (2023), also emphasise the importance of support among teachers and other school personnel in addressing challenges associated with emotional and behavioural disorders. Through support, teachers gain new knowledge to effectively manage overwhelming responsibilities towards themselves and learners in their schools. The knowledge gained through these engagements would be difficult to attain if not for their social networking interactions. Teachers reveal the necessity to access support from other teachers as it improves their confidence in themselves and strengthens their teaching practices (Brown, Friesen, Beck & Roberts 2020).

Effectiveness of school-based support is also reliant on the effectiveness of support structures or teams established by schools, their competence and their ability to identify and address problems. For example, support teams ought to be functional to the extent that they are able to assess needs and devise appropriate strategies or solutions necessary for learning improvements. A study conducted by Bowling and Ball (2020), found that the team established to support students' psychological motivation played an important role in the effectiveness of the implemented agricultural programme.

In Canada, studies have shown that, through regular interactions and engagements, support teams are able to assess learning needs, identify risks and apply appropriate interventions (Bartlett & Freeze, 2019). These authors further state that all the support-related activities are initiated by schools. Their study indicates that the implementation of various support strategies could result in improved teaching and learning behaviour and overall educational achievement. Todd, Algozzine, Horner, Preston, Cusumano and Algozzine (2019: 20), also argue that support teams should meet and engage on a regular basis with clear objectives to devise relevant support strategies that could yield positive results.

The earlier analysis of school-based support in varying contexts highlights the significance support teams in education. Support enhances teaching and learning (Department of Basic Education, 2014b), curriculum implementation, identification and addressing of learners' needs, inclusion (Department of Education, 2001) and, subsequently, attainment of educational goals. The provision of school-based support also plays an essential role in alleviating pressures presented by mental health resulting from inundating responsibilities. Additionally, the analysis demonstrates an association between school-based support and improved teaching strategies. Support has been found to be instrumental in enhancing the way new teachers observe their learners and identify and address challenges presented by them. Mentoring and continuous engagements or interactions with experienced teachers expose new teachers to different ways of improving their teaching, thereby enriching their professional development.

1.3 Background and Orientation to the Study

The provision of learner support can no longer focus on learners' shortcomings alone, but rather adopts a holistic approach, where external, intrinsic and environmental challenges that impede learning are considered (Department of Basic Education, 2014b). The policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) (Department of Basic Education, 2014b), is in line with the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 in that the focus should not be on learners alone, but also on the needs of teachers, school personnel and schools to ensure the improvement of curriculum implementation learning outcomes.

The main goal of education has always been the attainment of educational outcomes aimed at the achievement of economic and financial freedom. Although these goals have not shifted, the environments in which learners, schools, teachers and other personnel are required to attain these goals have, with unimaginable consequences for the circumstances surrounding teaching and learning and subsequent educational achievements. The shift calls for additional educational reform, whose success lies in properly identifying and addressing challenges impeding productive schooling and curriculum implementation.

Provision of support is aimed at changing learning behaviour, improve learning environments to attain better learning outcomes and evolve learners' capacity to learn (Haque & David, 2022). Learner development can only be attained through effective curriculum implementation. Effective curriculum implementation can only be enhanced by putting support programmes, activities, or initiatives in place aimed at identifying and addressing diverse learning needs. Schools and teachers require support that will elevate their abilities to create favourable learning environments that also encourage effective curriculum implementation, aimed at producing learners who are better equipped and positioned to face challenges of the 21st century.

It has been established that socio-economic, cultural, political and social factors create barriers to accessing quality education, thereby affecting educational achievements (Cekiso, Rabeleman, Jadezweni, Mandende & Dieperink, 2022). The challenge is even more prevalent in rural schools and for learners with learning disabilities. Challenges in rural schools are compounded by socio-economic conditions (poverty) as well as a lack of or inadequate teaching and learning and infrastructural resources. Although prevalence of socio-economic conditions does not negate the fact that all learners are exposed to a plethora of challenges in their educational journeys, rural learners have greater odds stacked against them, mainly due to their geographical location, which places them far from resources and amenities that could advance their learning experiences (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). Socio-economic conditions that characterise rural schools present them with unique sets of challenges that call for robust support services that may improve their conditions of learning.

To identify and address these challenges efficiently, schools are mandated to establish and maintain functional support structures at school and district level (Department of Basic Education, 2014b). These teams ought to be able to provide additional support to address environmental factors to which schools, teachers and learners are exposed, and which hamper successful teaching and learning. Cheung, Hui and Cheung (2020), assert that children have different learning needs and styles and learn at varying paces, which calls for different intervention strategies. The effectiveness of some of such strategies lies in

the kind of support available to schools, teachers, parents and school personnel that will enhance teachers' capabilities and equip them with skills and knowledge necessary to identify and address learning impediments through developing and implementing various support measures.

Interactions between schools and families or teachers and parents is one of the most highly researched areas in education. Some parents indicate that teachers do not have appropriate training regarding parental involvement in their schools, which they believe contributes to poor or a lack of parental participation in education (Anastasiou & Papagianni, 2020). Inadequate stakeholder participation is an indication that teachers, particularly new teachers, require support in managing and encouraging participation of all educational stakeholders. The importance of supporting teachers on how to engage and interact with parents is also emphasised by Cornett, Paulick and Van Hover (2020), when their study revealed that information gained from parents during home visits supported teachers when they had to develop and implement differentiation teaching strategies in their classrooms. The information gained through such engagements informs teachers' classroom management, lesson plans and presentation strategies.

Studies have been conducted on support, in particular school-based support, focusing mainly on supporting marginalised or rural learners or learners at risk of abandoning their studies (Georgakopoulos & Tsakirtzis, 2021). Others explored the provision of support through accessibility of educational resources in rural schools. Certain studies have also emphasised challenges that teachers experience in identifying and addressing barriers to learning, which hinders any prospects of provision of support that is challenge specific (see for an example McCorkle, 2021). The current study capitalised on the existing gap in the interconnectedness between improving school-based support and access to education and success of rural learners, in other words, how the improvement of school-based support could influence accessibility of learning and subsequently, learning and educational success, specifically in rural schools.

1.4 Motivation for the Study

Although the South African education sector has seen a tremendous amount of transformation since the inception of democracy, rural schools are still at the receiving end of inadequate provision of support, lack of educational resources and poor infrastructural facilities (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). COVID-19 exposed a huge gap in the provision of support, particularly in rural schools, where challenges experienced are exacerbated by a lack of or inadequate amenities vital for effective teaching and learning. Educational inequalities between urban and rural schools were exposed, with rural schooling crippled by a lack of technological resources to support virtual learning, as well as teachers' lack of preparedness to conduct virtual classes (Mbhiza, 2021). Lack of electricity in some rural schools forced teaching and learning to come to a standstill.

The Department of Basic Education has been implementing e-learning for some time, however, the pandemic exposed the level of unpreparedness of the education system, which is something that requires a major shift. Consequently, the Department of Basic Education (2020b; 2020c; 2021), had to revise its promotion requirements for certain grades (Circular S7 of 2020), implement the abridged version of Curriculum Policy Statements (Circular S4 of 2021), and develop and release the Curriculum Recovery Annual Teaching Plans (Circular S13 of 2020). The development of these prescripts indicates that there were no functional intervention strategies in schools that now address the unprecedented events caused by the pandemic. The Department of Basic Education is also attempting to intensify its school-based support efforts to recover learning losses.

In addition to challenges brought about by the pandemic, there are higher expectations on teachers to manage the challenges associated with learning content, which appears to be a 'one-size-fits-all' kind of curriculum that does not cater for differentiation teaching. Teachers should apply the differentiation teaching strategy in their classrooms (Department of Basic Education, 2014b). Differentiation teaching occurs at teachers' discretion, implying that teachers who are ill-equipped, overwhelmed, unsupported or lack the requisite skills might experience difficulties in applying differentiation teaching

strategies. Saeed and Akbar (2021), have shown that some teachers still lack appropriate professional assessment skills that could assist them in identifying underlying learning impediments, which raises the question as to how such teachers will employ differentiation strategies if they have no knowledge of challenges experienced by their learners. Such teachers require additional support to improve their capabilities.

Additionally, when it comes to existing challenges, the outbreak of the pandemic had a tremendous effect on schooling, particularly in rural schools, which experience shortages of resources and infrastructure. One of the benefits of educational research has always been to provide a basis for educational planning and although research cannot provide precise answers, it can be instrumental in guiding education and providing solutions to educational problems and improving methods and practices (Rathnakar, 2020). Similarly, the current study was motivated by the desire to obtain information regarding how the education sector could work to improve school-based support for the improvement of learning experiences and learning outcomes. It was therefore important to explore how the improvement of school-based support could influence accessibility to resources, learning opportunities and the success of rural learners.

1.5 Significance of the Study

Provision of education differs substantially according to the geographical location of schools in South Africa. Due to location, where they find themselves far from certain amenities and resources, rural schools are exposed to more complications that negatively affect teaching and learning (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). Consequently, there are disparities between different geographical locations regarding accessibility of equitable education and educational resources. The remoteness of rural communities in conjunction with unfavourable socio-economic conditions places rural schools at a greater disadvantage and exacerbates the accessibility of certain educational services and resources necessary for effective teaching and learning. Socio-economic conditions influence the access to and success of learning in some parts of the world, particularly disadvantaged and rural communities.

Socio-economic conditions intensify the difficulties associated with the attainment and maintenance of educational equity, which further creates an uneven balance between different schooling contexts when it comes to accessibility of learning opportunities. Schools in most parts of the continent are still faced with challenges associated with accessibility to information and resources that prove vital to learning, the development of skills and the enhancement of existing talents (Chemulwo & Ali, 2019). Accessibility of education has been linked to allocation of resources and infrastructure in schools (Etor, Ekanem & Sule, 2020). Resourced schools can provide their learners with opportunities to participate in education meaningfully, learn successfully and attain higher educational outcomes.

Curriculum does not always cater for diverse learning needs. As an example, gifted children are taught the same curriculum as those learners who are negatively influenced by barriers to learning (Cheung, Hui & Cheung 2020). Gifted children require more advanced learning content that appeals to their level of intellect, talent and ability (Cheung, Hui & Cheung, 2020). Classroom realities present teachers with learners who require additional support, and those who are exceptionally capable on their own, creating a diverse classroom with diverse learning needs, requiring teachers to possess certain skills and knowledge to manage these effectively.

When the curriculum is not designed to serve the needs of children with different needs, such as gifted or impaired learners with intellectual, environmental, physical or cognitive difficulties, the onus is placed on support teams to carry teachers and learners, and to converge efforts directed towards the improvement of educational outcomes. School-based support is crucial for strengthening teachers' abilities to fulfil their roles, improve their teaching approaches and alleviate the burdens associated with curriculum implementation (Brown, Friesen, Beck & Roberts, 20202020).

The disparities of quality and accessibility of education and opportunities to learning, socio-economic conditions, resource allocation and curriculum deficiencies necessitate the

improvement of school-based support. The prior discussion highlights the importance of support in catering for schools, teachers and learners' needs to enhance curriculum implementation. Furthermore, the discussion emphasises the importance of parental empowerment, which, according to Du Plessis and Mestry (2019), can potentially improve educational achievement.

It is therefore crucial for this study to determine the role of these and other highlighted factors that hinder the improvement of school-based support. Moreover, it is important to explore how these factors also influence access to learning and their role in the creation of learning opportunities that ultimately affect the success of rural learners. It is also significant to explore where school support structures and programmes feature in the improvement of school-based support and their subsequent effects on overall teaching and learning.

The current study sought insight into the effects of improving school-based support and the influence of school-based support on access to education and success of rural learners. Information gained through the current study will be crucial for policymakers in the education sector. South African educational policies do not cater for different contextual backgrounds (Tieken & Montgomery, 2021), and are not always accompanied by required resources for successful implementation. The current study highlights certain aspects that are beneficial to policymakers. The formulated recommendations could also assist the sector in its attempts to create an educational system that caters for diverse learning contexts.

The provision of support and the role played by support teams at all levels are widely researched areas. However, there are other facets of support, such as the improvement of school-based support and access to education and success of rural learners that still require extensive exploration. The current study intended to discover additional knowledge that adds to the existing knowledge in the field, and to build capacity, expand knowledge and skills, develop critical skills, highlight the importance of the improvement of support and encourage other researchers in extending the current line of enquiry. Knowledge

gained from the study will benefit school-based support and district-based support teams, assist teachers in conducting their support services, developing intervention strategies and involving various educational stakeholders. Policy makers will understand the significance of context and importance of involving policy implementers in policy development. Furthermore, knowledge gained from the current study will assist in addressing existing gaps in the literature.

1.6 Focus of the Study

Effective curriculum implementation requires conducive conditions that cultivate optimal participation and enhance the capabilities required to overcome obstacles that impede educational achievement. Some such obstacles are factors constraining the accessibility of quality teaching and learning, such as inadequacies in teacher training and skills in areas of support. Teachers require mentoring, support, encouragement and training to improve their teaching strategies. They need to acquire the requisite skills and competencies to identify learning needs and to address and reduce learning barriers. Some studies found that accessibility to education can be enhanced through the creation of favourable environments and changes in educational policies (Milošević Radulović & Marković Krstić, 2022). Creating a healthy teaching and learning environment implies that various factors that interfere with access to education are considered.

Instead of approaching support from the perspective of critical skills, curriculum content, emotional and learners' social needs, the holistic approach presents an alternative. A holistic approach includes various aspects of learning such as schools, teachers and learners to affect all educational facets. It involves the provision of support in terms of providing counselling and guidance through collaboration between all educational stakeholders. It is an approach that considers teachers and learners' needs (Gentile & Oswald, 2021). Furthermore, a holistic approach equips teachers, principals, schools and learners with those tools necessary to improve classroom strategies, management and experiences. It also enhances the utilisation and accessibility of resources and assists in the identifying learning needs and resolution of educational barriers.

In addition to challenges associated with curriculum implementation, teachers experience a higher degree of pressure, due to the expectations placed upon them by the education sector in general, including learners, school, communities and parents. Combined with other challenges such as lack of content knowledge, skills, effective classroom management and experience necessary to cater for diverse learning needs in their classrooms, lack of or inadequate support exposes teachers to insurmountable pressures (Cheung, Hui & Cheung, 2020). The provision of appropriate support is dependent on an accurate diagnosis (Department of Basic Education, 2018/19). The discussed complexities call for teachers to be adequately equipped to make appropriate assessment and provide the necessary support. It would be inadvisable to assume that every teacher is adequately skilled and knowledgeable in classroom intricacies.

The study examines the complexities of school-based support from a holistic perspective and its effects or influence on the access to education and success of rural learners. The study explores support from various dimensions such as contexts, stakeholder involvement and resource provision, all of which have a bearing on the overall educational success to answer the research problem. This study focused on the experiences, practices, views and knowledge of individuals who are critical to school-based support. Their perceptions and knowledge were the focal point of the research. Exploring these aspects aided the determination of the extent that their practices affects access to learning opportunities and educational success.

1.7 Problem Statement

The South African democratic government inherited several deficiencies from the previous education system, some of which are discrepancies between teacher demand and supply, as well as a proliferation of underqualified and unqualified teachers (Republic of South Africa, 2007). These inadequacies placed schools, particularly in disadvantaged and rural communities, in dire straits to provide quality education that allows for optimal learner performance. Coupled with the technological demands of the 21st century, schools find

themselves struggling to attain and retain suitably equipped teachers capable of handling the demands posed by this era.

Cardichon, Darling-Hammond, Yang, Scott, Shields and Burns (2020), reveal that despite America's role in global geopolitics schools in rural and/or disadvantaged communities of America likewise lack suitability qualified and experienced teachers compared to schools in urban or semi-urban areas. Inadequate provision of suitably qualified, experienced, skilled and knowledgeable teachers compromises the quality of learning and enhancement of learning performance. It is therefore crucial that the extent of these disparities and their consequences on the effectiveness of teachers be determined to close the gaps.

Teachers are both untrained and ill-prepared to handle inclusivity and diversity in education, which intensifies barriers to learning. Teachers' training influences their ability to promote holistic approaches aiming to improve learning and development (Bawani & Mphahlele, 2021). Teachers' ability to cater for diverse needs in their classrooms is, to a certain extent, dependent on the advancement of support. One way that the Department of Basic Education sought to address the apparent inadequacies challenge through partnering with non-government organisations to strengthen its means of support. For example, partnership with the South African Council of Educators (SACE) was created to establish and maintain teacher quality and support of professional learning communities (SACE, 2011).

Persistent challenges facing education, more so in schools in both disadvantaged and rural communities, include learners' inability to perform at expected levels when compared to their counterparts in other countries (Republic of South Africa, 2008). These learners do not perform as well as they would have had their learning conditions, such as accessibility of learning opportunities, resources and infrastructure, been different. The assertion that environmental and systematic conditions influence educational success is reiterated in the report of the National Education Evaluation and Development Unit (Department of Basic Education, 2018c), which states that learners are at risk of achieving

poorly if they are not adequately supported or their learning impediments or learning needs are not properly addressed.

The discussions in prior section centred on educational deficiencies and incompetence that require support towards the improvement of learner support. Some of the issues raised were intensified by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which also exposed the extent of the incompetence and inequalities of education. The various recovery and support programmes that the education sector embarked upon to address complications arising from the pandemic are indicative of the kind of support required to place our education system on par with that of our counterparts. An example of such an intervention is the employment of teaching assistants in schools to support teachers, schools, learners and learning (Department of Basic Education, 2020a). The programme provided relief to teachers and exposed new and inexperienced teachers to practical classroom experience, building their skills, knowledge and teaching experience in the process.

Learners who have negative attitudes towards schooling and display behavioural challenges require additional support. The provision of support will assist in regaining their interest in attending school and ultimately prevents them from dropping out of school. Furthermore, support motivates marginalised learners and assists them in discriminatory situations (Buthelezi & Maseko, 2023). School-based support is essential in increasing the likelihood of learners staying in school. To enhance their skills, close gaps on subject knowledge and remain abreast of new educational developments, teachers require continuous professional training (Maboya, Jita & Chimbi, 2022), to uphold the promotion of inclusivity and provide them with competencies necessary in the identification of learning needs and other challenges experienced in schools. Fruitful support also depends on the degree it addresses access to resources and opportunities for learning.

All the aspects outlined in this section indicate literature gaps in the improvement of school-based support for access to education and success of learners particularly in rural schools. These aspects create performance gaps between learners in different contexts, i.e., rural and urban contexts, which places the former in precarious position in attaining

educational goals. It is imperative for each child to receive equitable education and opportunities to learn to ensure their contribution towards economic development of the country (the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996). Impediments to realisation of this goal should be identified and addressed to allow all children equal opportunities to succeed irrespective of their circumstances.

1.8 Purpose of the Study

The goal of the study was to gain a comprehensive understanding of the effect of improving school-based support on teaching and learning, as well as access to and success in education. Furthermore, the study serves to highlight the importance of improving our school-based support, noting how it can enhance learning opportunities and educational outcomes.

1.8.1 Aims of the study

The Department of Basic Education initiated different measures to deliver and strengthen support services in all schools, particularly those in rural and disadvantaged communities. Different frameworks, strategies and programmes were initiated to capacitate teachers in curriculum implementation and inclusion in their classrooms. The frameworks for the establishment of school-based and district-based support teams are one such measure (Department of Basic Education, 2014; Department of Education, 2001).

According to the mentioned frameworks, schools and districts have been mandated to establish such structures to maximise support in schools. It is important for the current study to examine the effect that these support structures have on education and how improving their support could influence success and success of rural learners. These issues require a deeper understanding, which can be successfully acquired through examining teachers, principals, and support teams' experiences, views, practices, and knowledge. Exploration of lived experiences will further allow the description of school-based support in relation to access and success of rural learners. ***The aim of the study***

was to explore the effect of school-based support in education and how its improvement could influence the access and success of rural learners.

1.8.2 Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study were as follows:

- To explore the teachers' understanding of the role school-based support play in teaching and learning.
- To establish factors that determine the provision of school-based support.
- To determine the approaches that rural schools employ to provide school-based support.
- To establish the contribution of improving school-based support towards access and success of rural learners.
- To establish potential strategies that can be developed to enhance school-based support in rural settings and how these strategies can be effectively implemented to promote access to education and success of rural learners.

1.8.3 Primary research question

The primary research question that the current study intends to answer is as follows:

How does the improvement of school-based support in education affect access and success of rural learners?

1.8.4 Secondary research questions

Secondary research questions assist the researcher in answering the primary research question, and were formulated for the study as follows:

- How do teachers understand the role that school-based support plays in teaching and learning?

- What factors determine the provision of school-based support?
- What approaches do rural schools employ in the provision of school-based support?
- How does the improvement of school-based support contribute towards access and success of rural learners?
- What potential strategies can be developed to enhance school-based support in rural settings? How can these strategies be implemented effectively to promote access to education and academic success of rural learners?

1.9 Overview of School-based Support in Rural Context

In this section, limited studies that relate to the current study were reviewed to establish what has already been written, identify gaps in existing knowledge and avoid repetition (Garrod, 2023). The overview assisted in establishing what has been written about the topic and solidified my intention to further explore this area of study. It assisted in establishing a need for additional research (Neupane, 2021). It also aided in familiarising me with the existing body of knowledge, identify gaps, avoid duplication and provide reasons for justification for choosing a particular line of research. In this section, the literature related to the topic of the study will be briefly discussed.

1.9.1 School-based support in varying contexts

Mabasa-Manganyi (2023), examined factors influencing Foundation Phase rural teachers' practices regarding inclusion in the South African context, revealing that inadequacies in professional development and other practices that impart skills and knowledge influence their classroom practices. That study further suggests that teachers should be supported through training to enhance continuous professional development. The finding is in line with Schaffler, Nel and Booyen (2021), who state that inaccessibility of equitable education and opportunities to learn are aggravated by teachers' inability to provide required support, due to limited capabilities and lack of training. Kasap and Gönüldaş (2022), share similar views that insufficiently qualified teachers in some Turkish schools are incapable of providing specialised support. A systemic literature review of studies in

various contexts conducted by Gómez-Marí, Sanz-Cervera and Tárraga-Mínguez (2022), brought teachers' attitudes towards inclusivity into the spotlight. Attitudes influence the implementation of inclusive programmes.

Thessin (2021: 6), found that "continuous professional development, efficient communication and setting of clear expectations" enhance the productivity of support teams in the mid-city schools of the United State of America. The study also illuminates the importance of partnerships and collaboration between schools and various educational stakeholders, which, according to Foster (2019), assist schools in the improvement of support. Furthermore, mutual trust between schools and parents nurtures trust and the positive relationships necessary for the improvement of school-based support (Akinyemi, Rembe & Nkonki, 2020).

1.9.2 Accessibility of equitable education and educational resources in rural schools

Accessing education and for children to reach structural school facilities is key to attaining educational goals. Socio-economic conditions are a major contributor to inaccessibility of education and learning opportunities. According to Cekiso, Rabeleman, Jadezweni, Mandende and Dieperink (2022), children from poor families, particularly in rural communities, experience difficulties of accessing education due to poverty and long distances between homes and schools. Most families are characterised by parents with low levels of income who can only provide basic needs. Such families are unable to afford the cost of transportation, resources and school uniforms. Johnson (2019), also asserts that poverty exacerbates intrinsic or psychological barriers to learning, thereby affecting children's accessibility to quality learning.

Educational resources, including teachers and other teaching and learning aids, enhance access to education (Barendse, 2020; Chauke and Tabane, 2021). Cardichon, Darling-Hammond, Yang, Scott, Shields and Burns (2020), reveal that rural and disadvantaged schools suffer due to teachers who are not satisfactorily trained and their skills do not

match the demands of the 21st century. Resources and services such as computers, science laboratories, libraries and career guidance are vital for the educational success of all learners (Thaba-Nkadimene, 2020).

1.9.3 The constraints to the educational success of rural learners

Educational success is measured by learner performance and academic achievement. Du Plessis and Mestry (2019), found that lack of school infrastructure and resources and adequately qualified teachers avert educational success in remote schools. In addition to refining their skills, support develops teachers and improves their support strategies (Buabeng & Akuamoah-Boateng, 2019). Lumadi (2020), concurs and notes that retaining teachers in rural schools is also linked to exploiting available support opportunities such as financial incentives. Through teacher retention, rural schools continue to have suitably experienced teachers for longer periods. These studies focused on the inclusion of intellectually impaired learners and did not explore school-based support in relation to teachers and other school personnel. However, issues emanating from these studies are universal and pertinent to various contextual backgrounds in the education sector.

1.10 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework is about a theoretical perspective used to underpin the study. It is a perspective, an overview or lens that guides the direction of the research, providing foundation and connecting researchers with existing knowledge (Chukwuere, 2021). A theoretical framework provides researchers with a stance, viewpoint or worldview in which research is based, directs the kind of data to be collected and is also essential in directing data analysis and interpretation phases. It is the structure that holds the study together.

In the current study, Wenger's community of practice theory was adopted, which was developed by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (Hyder, Adcock & Brown, 2020). Hoyert and O'Dell (2019), describe a community of practice as a group of people with similar common goals, interest, experiences and challenges. The group also meet regularly to discuss their

shared concerns, devise solutions and, in the process, share ideas on how to utilise available resources optimally and enhance opportunities to attain common goals. The Community of Practice theory claims that meaningful learning is attained through members' participation through which they learn from each other (Smith, Kempster & Wenger-Trayner, 2019).

Communities of practice theory is rooted in the American pragmatist concept of community of inquiry, which was first introduced by an American philosopher, Charles Sanders Peirce. American pragmatists claim that learning is collaborative and involves social participation and engagement. Learning is not considered an individualised event, but situational, bounded by historical and cultural context (Cydis, Haria & Meyers, 2021). Hoyert and O'Dell (2019), state that engaging in a community such as collaborative learning improves learner attendance and performance.

Communities of practice theory consists of mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire (Glaze-Crampes, 2020). In mutual engagement, community members build collaborative and partnership relationships through their regular participation in the community. Through participation, community members also establish their concepts, rules and expectations to which members adhere. Members have a sense of belonging as they commit to their roles and responsibilities (Irving, McPadden & Caballero, 2020).

Brinton, Chilmonik, Echelberger, Koi and Monh (2021), state that the structure of communities of practice comprise a **domain** (schools), which provides members with a sense of common identity and **community** (support teams), where ideas, knowledge and experiences are shared and **practised** (support activities, policies, regulations and other resources), as necessary to address challenges experienced in schools. Through regular interaction, members share experiences and expertise, thereby capacitating each other and improving their efforts of needs analysis, problem identification and development resolutions.

The relevance of Wenger's (1998), theory of communities of practice to the current study lies in its assertion that educational goals can be achieved when parties concerned work as a team with common interests. Educational role-players involved in school-based support exert positive influence when they collaborate, which Hindi, Willis and Schafheutle (2022: 1), refer to as "authentic learning". They build partnerships on their common goal of supporting education through addressing learning challenges and improving classroom intervention strategies and the management of schools. School-based support teams conduct routine engagements such as meetings, workshops and other related events at regular intervals, which are consistent with Wenger's communities of practice theory. Through these interactions, members support each other in their efforts to identify and address teaching and learning needs.

1.11 Research Design and Methodology

Research design and methodology involve the way in which a study is conducted, processes are followed and steps are taken to answer the research question. It involves procedures, methods and processes followed to produce the results of the study (Clark-Carter, 2019). In this section, the research approach, design and paradigm followed to undertake the study will be briefly outlined.

1.11.1 The research approach

An approach to research involves a detailed data collection process, analysis and interpretation, a procedure and broad assumptions. It is a plan of the way in which researchers study a given phenomenon and includes the justification of the methods chosen (Dawadi, Shrestha & Giri, 2021). The choice of one of these approaches to an enquiry depends on the research question and what researchers intend to enquire, study or discover. The current study intended to study people's perceptions, knowledge and experiences of improving school-based support for access to education and success of rural learners, and a qualitative research approach was therefore adopted. The approach was most suited to the line of inquiry because it produced believable findings.

There are three approaches to conducting research, namely quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods (Pawar, 2020). Initially, a quantitative research design was believed to be the only credible mode of enquiry that could be used to acquire knowledge because it is scientific in nature. Knowledge was gained and transmitted through what was considered real forms, namely experimentation and testing, conducted repeatedly (Dawadi, Shrestha & Giri, 2021). Knowledge gained through the quantitative approach postulates that knowledge can only be considered true when it is acquired objectively and can be quantifiable (Haradhan, 2020). The credibility of quantitative studies is also attributed to the use of standardised tests or questionnaires and experiments as some of data collection tools, which need to produce reliable results.

A deeper understanding of the effects of improving school-based support on teaching, learning, access and success would not have been sufficiently realised through deductive reasoning or a scientific mode of inquiry. The quantitative approach is no longer sufficient to offer an understanding or explanation of relationships between phenomena. It cannot offer an understanding of the laws of the universe (Balwan, Balwan & Saba, 20220). The phenomenon of the current study needed to be explored in its natural setting or context; it called for a deeper understanding of how people view their experiences, practices, challenges, expectations and meanings they ascribe to these variables.

Qualitative research permits undertaking in-depth studies that provide sufficient data to draw conclusions and produce a report that enables readers to clearly understand the phenomenon studied. It provides an opportunity to explore participants' views, experiences, knowledge and understanding of how improving school-based support could influence the access to education and success of rural learners. These aspects were explored in their natural context where they occur. Consequently, a qualitative approach was deemed more appropriate and relevant to the current study.

1.11.2 The research design

Research design is a strategy used to study a particular phenomenon. It is a structure of gathering evidence (Dawadi, Shrestha & Giri, 2021), and a plan for research (Leavy, 2022), and outlines the sample, site and research tools. It is a plan of systemic collection of evidence or information relevant in answering a given research question. The design employed should be able to provide clarity regarding the kind of information to be collected, methods of collecting data and its analysis. The research question usually guides the researcher regarding the method of research to be employed. Pawar (2020), also describes research design as a plan of conducting a study that outlines the processes involved in drawing the conclusions.

A case study design was adopted for the study. Mishra and Dey (2021), explain that a case study design affords opportunities for researchers to undertake extensive examination of phenomena and presents opportunities to study events, experiences or objects in their natural environments. Exhaustive exploration allows researchers to study phenomena in detail and offers extensive clarity of participants' experiences. The design could be a single case or multiple cases, depending on what the researcher plans to study (Quintão, Andrade & Almeida, 2020). Data was collected from a school-based and district-based support group, to examine their knowledge, experiences, views, understanding and beliefs regarding the improvement of school-based support, access to education and success of rural learners.

Data was collected interactively through face-to-face collection techniques, which presented unique opportunities to probe further and retrieve data that might not be readily available on the surface. Data was collected in participants' natural surrounding or setting (schools and district office), which participants were familiar with and where they felt safe. People are more likely to behave normally when they familiarise themselves with their surrounding environment and objects. Focus group interviews were conducted with school-based support teams, principals and members of school-governing bodies. One-on-one interviews were conducted with district-based support teams.

1.11.3 Research paradigm

The research paradigm is a verified approach, an ideology, mind-set, model, or a way of conducting research that has been previously used. It represents a shared understanding of reality (Junjie & Yingxin, 2022), and informs a given study. The two main research paradigms are positivist and interpretivist. Positivist applies a scientific methodology of research, relies on quantitative data and, according to Junjie and Yingxin (2022), originates from the belief that the truth should be verifiable, confirmed or backed by evidence. Positivists are of the view that the true nature of theories lies in their objectivity, measurability, predictability and controllability.

The interpretivism research paradigm was adopted to attempt to understand people in terms of their experiences, views, knowledge and thoughts (Junjie & Yingxin, 2022). Interpretivism strives to understand participants through the value and meaning they attach to their world and experiences and allows researchers to capture participants' experiences and perspectives regarding the phenomenon being explored in its natural setting or environment. Interpretivism questions the nature of knowledge, that is, whether knowledge is acquired or experienced, and how it is communicated to others (Khatri, 2020).

Participants' knowledge of the topic and the meanings they attach to their knowledge were critical to the current study and, as such, I found interpretivism to be relevant for the study. Participants' knowledge, understanding, experiences, beliefs and actions that the study explored were intuitive, unverifiable, and could not be measured to determine their worth and authenticity. They had to be studied, described and interpreted from the researcher's point of view, hence the subjective nature of the interpretative paradigm.

It was important that the study to examine teachers' interaction with each other, learners, parents, community, stakeholders, their environment and how these interactions and connections enrich teaching and learning, promote access to opportunities to learn and improve educational success. Interpretivism allowed the interpretation and description of

knowledge from participants' subjective stance. I understood that my underlying values and beliefs might interfere with the interpretation of participants' perspectives, because researchers use their own understanding or experiences when analysing data and interpreting the results. I was aware of my underlying values and kept them in check to maintain a neutral stance. I was also aware that any personal bias that influenced the interpretations of results should be reported. Highlighting and addressing personal bias that may have an influence on the interpretation and presentation of results enhances the credibility of the study. These issues are discussed in detail under the section on ethical considerations.

Through the interpretivism paradigm, I was able to draw insight from different perspectives of people who form part of support structures at school and district levels, which provided a holistic perspective (Khatri, 2020). The relevance of interpretivism also lies in that it affords opportunities to study events, situations, behaviour or experiences in their natural context, without manipulating any variable of the study. In addition, I gained meanings of participants' views and experiences through their daily interaction with their learners, fellow teachers and other educational stakeholders without making any assumptions or taking anything away from their expressions. I used multiple data collection tools for triangulation and rigour (Leavy, 2022). Data collected through focus group interviews was corroborated by data gathered through individual interviews, a questionnaire and field notes.

1.11.4 Site selection

Site selection is determined by data collection methods applied in conducting a study. Leavy (2022), describes site in terms of choosing between a more natural or artificial setting, depending on where data is most available. Choosing a research site is also dependent on the kind of study to be undertaken and the questions that the study aims to answer. The researcher decides on the setting of the study, where data will be collected. Site selection informs the research sample. The current study required multiple sites to reach participants. Data was collected from support teams in schools and districts. The reason for the choice was that it could be difficult to convene focus group interviews with

both schools and district officials, given their busy schedules and the COVID-19 alert level at the time of data collection. Schools are natural settings in which the phenomenon that was studied was like to occur.

I sought and obtained permission to use schools as research sites from the provincial Education Department, district and school principals. Using schools as research sites was beneficial in maximising time optimally. Participants who were teachers or other school personnel, including principals, were not removed from their core functions, thus minimising disruptions. Schools are familiar sites to teachers, which reduced challenges and discomfort brought about by being in unfamiliar settings.

1.11.5 Sample selection

A sample refers to a number of participants or objects selected to take part in a study (Bhardwa, 2019). It represents a larger number of people or population and is essential in instances where there is a large group of potential individuals or objects eligible to take part in a study. Sampling is a procedure used to choose individuals from a large group or population and involves making decisions regarding who the participants of the study will be, as well as how many people, objects or items will be observed and interviewed. It is a decision regarding whether part or the whole population will participate in the study.

Aspects such as the amount of time it will take to conduct a study, resources required and accessibility of participants should be taken into consideration when deciding on a sample, size and its location (Scholtz, De Klerk & De Beer, 2020). A population is a larger group of people, who might be eligible and relevant to participate in a study, but could not be sampled due to time, cost and accessibility factors. To gather sufficient data regarding participants' experiences, practices, knowledge and views regarding school-based support and the effects its improvement has on the access to education and success of rural learners, a suitable sample size of 35 individuals was selected.

Purposeful sampling involves choosing participants that are most likely to yield sufficient and analysable data to answer the research question (Leavy, 2022). The researcher selects a sample that could yield required information because of the relevance of their views and opinions to the study, which could achieve representation. The choice of the number of participants, research sites to be used to conduct the study and the appropriate sampling strategy are informed by the research problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). Participants of the current study were purposefully selected, and their experiences, perceptions, knowledge and practices were studied to answer the research question.

Purposeful sampling involves choosing a small number of people who are presumed to have relevant knowledge to yield sufficient and relevant data. The purposeful sampling technique was applied in the selection of schools and the actual participants. A sample was selected from a population of teachers and was compatible with the research purpose. These participants were believed to possess the characteristics and knowledge sought by the study (Clark-Carter, 2019). There was no pattern involved in acquiring the sample of the study. Selected individuals were deemed suitable to provide rich information due to the nature of their work, which placed them at the centre of the provision of learner support in schools. One province, one district and five rural schools were selected based on their suitability for the study.

The list of participating schools was obtained from the Department of Basic Education's website. Participating schools are categorised by the Department of Basic Education as quintile 1, based on their socio-economic status of the rurality of the communities they serve. These schools are referred to as no-fee schools, meaning that learners are not required to pay school fees to attend school. The sample was composed of both male and female individuals from different age groups and with varying educational backgrounds to mitigate challenges associated with bias and representation to a certain extent (Clark-Carter, 2019).

Five secondary schools and one district were sampled. Thirty-five participants were selected from these schools and district to participate in the study. Fifteen teachers, ten

school-governing body members, five principals and five district-based support team members were sampled. There were five focus groups, one per school, and each group consisted of six participants, which was a manageable size. The number of participants in each group allowed each participant's voice to be heard. Five individual interviews were also conducted with district-based support teams at the district office. The number of participants was enough to yield sufficient and analysable data.

1.12 Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection is the procedure used for gathering information that enables researchers to answer research questions and may be in the form of questionnaires, tests, notes, interviews or observations (Clark-Carter, 2019). The choice of instruments or tools is based on their suitability and appropriateness for data collection. Selected data collection tools produced optimal results that addressed the aims and objectives of the study because they were matched with the research question. The choice of data collection tools was influenced by what I as the researcher wished to explore and address.

There are different data collection instruments for a qualitative study, such as observations, interviews, field notes and open-ended questionnaires. Multiple data collection tools were used in the current study, which aided in triangulation and rigour and thus enhanced the believability of the findings. Johnson (2019), describes triangulation in terms of using multiple sources of data, verifying data collected through one tool with the other for validation, enhancement and trustworthiness of the results.

1.12.1 Data collection methods

These are various methods or techniques used to collect data for a study. Adopting appropriate data collection methods is vital in ensuring that correct data is gathered to address the research problem (Taherdoost, 2021). For this qualitative study, focus groups, individual interviews and an open-ended questionnaire were used to collect data.

1.12.2 Focus group interviews

Focus group interviews or discussions are used to gain a deeper understanding of the research problem. They were primary data collection tools to elicit data that might not be produced through other modes of enquiry. Five focus groups were conducted in total, one in each school. Each group consisted of six participants, namely three teachers, one principal and two members of the school-governing bodies. Inclusion of school-governing bodies gave a voice to stakeholders such as parents and community members.

The duration of each focus group interview session was 45 minutes, which minimised disruptions for the schools and teachers. These sessions were scheduled for after school when teaching and learning had been concluded for the day. Although group discussions can be unsettling, particularly to people who are not confident in expressing themselves, participants were encouraged to express their opinions freely. There were open-ended questions in a simple language easy for participants to understand (Leavy, 2022).

Questions were developed in such a way that they avoided ambiguous responses, enabled participants to provide answers and elicited data that addressed the research topic. Biased or leading questions were avoided. Questions were not steered towards a particular answer but were a true reflection of the study. All sessions were an interactive mode of inquiry, which provided an opportunity to also observe participants' interactions, body language and other aspects that might not be evident through other instruments. All sessions provided insight into the group dynamics and the way they carried out their responsibilities of providing school-based support in their respective schools. Participants spoke freely without unnecessary interruptions. There were opportunities to ask participants follow-up questions.

Each session was started with brief introductions and outlined the reason of the research. I requested written consent from participants to before they could participate in the study to demonstrate that they were not coerced. I also requested permission to record the proceedings through an audio recorder. I assured participants of the protection of their

identity and anonymity. The use of their names, those of their schools or any identifying feature was avoided. Instead, participants and their schools were allocated pseudonyms. I also informed participants of their freedom to terminate their participation in the study at any time should they wish to do so, without fear of any consequence, including victimisation or intimidation.

Participants were encouraged to speak freely without fear and were assured that there were no right or wrong answers. They engaged in discussions with minimal or no disruptions and were given opportunities to comment, ask questions or seek clarity throughout the session. Field notes were used as instruments during the process of conducting focus group interviews.

1.12.2.1 Field notes

Initially, field notes were not considered an essential part of field research but merely researchers' private thoughts, perceptions and ideas written down during the process of conducting research (Khan, 2020). Field notes have grown to become an essential part of data collection and analysis, due to their nature of providing additional information required for the research. In addition, field notes enhance data collected and lend rigour to the study. Field notes are described as a process of systematically taking notes in a systematic way (Leavy, 2022).

I included field notes as a data collection instrument for the current study because they provided information that could not be obtained through other modalities. They assisted in maintaining a systematic, chronological record of events, observations and refining ideas. I took notes when entering school premises to conduct interview sessions. These notes provided thick descriptions of the school's surrounding environment. I also took notes during the focus group interviews to record any information that might not be produced by participants' responses.

The notes also assisted in addressing researcher bias during the data analysis and interpretation stages, maintaining a systematic, chronological record of events and observations, refining ideas and refreshing my memory regarding certain aspects of the interview that I might have forgotten (Khan, 2020). I was able to refer to my notes whenever there was uncertainty during data analysis stages.

1.12.2.2 Audio recordings

There are different forms of recording the information from individual or focus group interviews, such as writing down, audio or video taping, depending on researcher preference. Recording preserves data, particularly when using recording devices, as it ensures that data stays in its original state during analysis stages. Recording devices in interviews or focus group sessions may influence the way participants engage in the discussion and respond to questions (Rutakumwa, Mugisha, Bernays, Kabunga, Tumwekwase, Mbonye, & Seeley, 2020). It is the responsibility of the researcher to assure participants that recording is only for gathering data and will not be used outside of the study.

The presence of a recorder might unsettle some participants, particularly in studies that are personal in nature, where for example responses might provoke fears of victimisation, exploitation and exposure. On the other hand, lack of recording in interviews could add to the limitations of the study, because proving adequacy and accuracy of data collection might be difficult, due to difficulties associated with writing down participants' responses. Audio recording was used during the data collection process with participants' consent. Where consent was declined, a recording device was not used.

1.12.3 Individual interviews

Interviews are data collection tools that elicit responses through questions and answers between researchers and participants. They are social interactions between researchers who source information and participants who provide required data. Interviews afforded

participants the freedom to engage in open discussions through expressing their views and experiences related to the topic of the study. Interviews can be conducted online, face-to-face, individually or in a group setting.

The different types of interviews that could be used are structured, unstructured and semi-structured interviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). Semi-structured interviews provide more flexibility and freedom to investigate a phenomenon under investigation. Structured interviews are systemic, sequential in nature, limit participants' responses, allow for replication of tests and are more suitable for quantitative studies.

The current study used unstructured interviews through a face-to-face modality, which is an interactive mode of data collection that relies on participants' responses on their views, experiences or beliefs regarding the research topic. Individual interviews were conducted with district-based support team members. Open-ended questions were designed to elicit specific information from the participants. Interview questions were not too specific; questions that required 'yes' or 'no' responses, or that were too general or too broad were avoided. Questions were designed to elicit sufficient information to answer the research question. Interview questions started with the word 'how' or 'describe', and questions that produced limited answers such as those that started with 'why' and 'where' were avoided. During the interviews, I refrained from giving my opinion, views, or knowledge regarding the phenomenon being studied and minimised or avoided interruptions.

1.12.4 Open-ended questionnaires

For depth, triangulation and rigour, an open-ended questionnaire was used as a data collection tool. Usman and Audu (2021), describe triangulation as the use of different sources of data such as interviews, focus groups, questionnaires, etc. to enhance the quality of the study. In qualitative research, a questionnaire is regarded as a data collection tool that can assist in effectively capturing participants' experiences regarding a particular phenomenon and meanings they attach to those experiences because it is in participants' own written words.

Open-ended questionnaires were distributed to all 35 participants after focus group and individual interview sessions to self-administer in their own time. Completed questionnaires were collected at a date agreed with participants. Using an open-ended questionnaire assisted me in collecting information regarding participants' views, how they relate to the study in terms of their beliefs, values and attitudes towards the phenomenon being studied. in relation to the research question (Pitura, 2023). The questionnaire offered participants latitude to provide responses to questions in their own words and in their own time without restrictive answers and timeframes. A questionnaire was suitable for the current study because it yielded information regarding participants' perceptions, knowledge, experiences, beliefs and values concerning the effects of improving school-based support on access to education and success of rural learners.

Questionnaires can be online or e-mail surveys. A link is provided to participants to download or access the survey or questionnaire for completion. A printed questionnaire was chosen for the current study because participants were from rural schools and might not have had access to e-mail, the internet or other technological tools to complete the questionnaire. Questionnaires can be problematic because participants can only provide brief responses compared to other data collection tools such as interviews. The shortcoming was addressed in the study by using different data collection methods.

1.13 Data analysis and interpretation

Data analysis is an essential aspect of conducting a study. Employing effective data analysis processes and methods improves the trustworthiness of the study (Shava, Hleza, Tlou, Shonhiwa & Mathonsi, 2021). Data analysis involves classification and interpretation of data obtained through observation or conversations with participants. It is a procedure used to arrange data into categories, and immersion within data, to find patterns, relationships and themes (Leavy, 2022). The initial process of data analysis in the current study assisted me in bringing order to raw data, which was more helpful because there was a sizeable amount of data collected through multiple data collection tools.

I categorised and organised data by extracting meaning from raw data, which assisted in the formulation of meaningful patterns and simplified the interpretation of findings (Kalman, 2019). As indicated earlier, the current study adopted a qualitative approach, which produces a considerable amount of data, and this can be daunting to go through. It was essential that the great volume of collected data be organised and summarised. The process reduced large volumes into a summary of key information and findings.

Data was analysed through content analysis. Content analysis involves reducing or summarising data into smaller content. Reduction of data made it easier to manage it and identify themes and interpret meanings (Roller, 2019). Recordings of focus group and individual interviews were analysed and transcribed into manuscripts. I scrutinised the data to establish the frequency with which participants used certain phrases or statements. Data was divided into parts and organised into categories to establish similarities and contrasts between responses. Meanings and relationships in phrases and themes were identified and emerging themes were grouped together. After this stage, there was additional intensive reading of transcripts, which provided me with a general understanding of participants' responses and allowed the building of patterns, categorisation of information and development of themes.

Themes that were grouped together during the initial analysis stage were compared to establish similarities, contrasts and relationships. Notes made during the initial readings were also reviewed to identify different kinds of information and to develop coding schemes. Similar patterns were grouped together and allocated codes. Unique codes were developed, reviewed, revised and combined to develop more cohesive themes. Data was coded and different categories that shared similarities were identified. Relationships between emerging themes and patterns were identified. Interpretations and implications were drawn and conclusions made. Participating schools and individuals were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identities and any identifying features.

Data for the study was saved in an easily retrievable manner. For example, field notes were typed and filed electronically in Word format, and audio recordings were downloaded from the audio recorder into a computer and filed. Transcribed data was also filed in MSWord format. All electronic data has been filed on a personal computer and an external hard drive.

1.14 Trustworthiness of the Study

Aligning the research approach and design with the phenomenon that one intends to study is instrumental in enhancing the trustworthiness of a study and further increases the rigour of the study and is beneficial in determining its credibility and trustworthiness (Pieridou & Kambouri-Danos, 2020). There are various issues that may arise from the study including tensions, reflections and questions. The ability of the researcher to address these issues assists in maintaining credibility and trustworthiness of the results.

Trustworthiness relates to the likelihood that repeating the same processes will yield similar results, thus attaining consistency. The main concern of the current study was not replicating the results but to understand the effects of improving school-based support in access to education and success of rural learners. The research methodology, data collection and analysis methods and other processes followed enhance trustworthiness of the study. Qualitative studies are subjective and rely heavily on researchers' interpretation. It is therefore important to always remain objective to produce trustworthy findings.

Stahl and King (2020), describe credibility of a study in terms of consistency or compatibility of its findings with reality. The credibility of the current study was attained through triangulation, which entails collecting data from multiple sources using multiple data collection methods. Data collected from the main instrument, that is, the focus group interviews, was corroborated by data from other methods such as individual interviews and the questionnaire (Usman & Audu, 2021). By using multiple sources of data, I was able to gather sufficient data to establish patterns and identify themes. Member checking was conducted after each session since I transcribed during the interviews, which

minimised travel costs, disruptions and afforded participants with opportunities to validate, confirm and amend their statements accordingly. The findings of the current study are only applicable to those rural schools in which the study was conducted.

There are certain aspects or occurrences that researchers encounter or experience during fieldwork that might evoke emotions. For example, participants' negative experiences might evoke sympathetic emotions that might interfere with data analysis. It was important that I recognise that the participants were social beings and their work might be influenced by or influence data collection and analysis processes (Pieridou & Kambouri-Danos, 2020). There were no instances of emotions and their possible interference in the study. The topic of the study did not evoke any emotional outbursts. I kept myself and my emotions in check and did not allow my personal feelings, opinions, experiences and views to interfere in the study. I maintained objectivity and remained neutral throughout the research process, irrespective of issues raised by participants or conditions encountered during field research.

1.15 Ethical Considerations

According to Kuzior (2021: 15), the word 'ethics' originates from the Greek *ethos* and it refers to "traditions, customs, norms, and values adopted by people". Ethics are applicable in various aspects of life such as professional and personal lives. These aspects of life present us with ethical dilemmas that are also applicable to the research process. Research studies are influenced by researchers' views of life and also presented ethical dilemmas that I as the researcher was obligated to manage. Ethics in research implies the obligation to adhere to codes of conduct as set by institutions and other organisations involved in the study, to protect against the exploitation and harming of the subjects of studies. Researchers are therefore ethically bound to report their truthful observations and findings, protect the environment and subjects of the study and always uphold the integrity of the study.

Before undertaking the research, I, being ethically and legally compelled, sought and was granted ethical clearance from the Ethics Committee of the Department of Education (Psychology of Education) of the University of South Africa (UNISA). I also sought permission in writing from the Gauteng Department of Education and Tshwane North district as mandated by the prescripts of the Education Department. I adhered to all ethical regulations and codes of conduct as prescribed by schools and the Department of Basic Education.

Interviews were conducted in a secure environment to maintain the safety of participants and confidentiality of all recordings. I treated participants with respect and dignity the entire time, recognising their humanity and way of doing things. Cultural belief systems were recognised, observed and always respected to uphold participants' integrity. People of different statuses such as teachers, members of school-governing bodies, school principals, district officials and directors were addressed appropriately. Pieridou and Kambouri-Danos (2020: 23), highlight "the influence that power and interaction dynamics has on the kind of data collected". The implication is that researchers have powers that can influence the data collection process and the choice of what is included or dismissed. It was crucial that I adhered to ethical guidelines and principles and ensured that my personal bias did not influence the kind of data collected.

1.16 Key Concepts

In this section, key concepts of the study will be briefly explained.

1.16.1 District-based support

District-based support is the support provided to schools by district officials responsible for promoting inclusive education. The support is provided through training, curriculum delivery, distribution of resources, identifying, assessing and addressing barriers to learning, leadership and general management (Department of Basic Education, 2014 b).

1.16.2 School-based support

School-based support refers to support at school level that is provided by support teams established in schools by schools. The primary role of school-based support teams is to coordinate school, learner and teacher support services in place to improve learner and teacher performance, as well as attain educational goals. The purpose of the provision of support at school level is to mentor and improve teachers' knowledge, skills and teaching strategies, and identify and address learning challenges. School-based support has been found to increase learners' self-awareness, aspirations, abilities and capacity building, which are all related to positive learning outcomes.

1.16.3 Barriers to learning

The Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001), describes barriers to learning as those challenges that arise when the education system fails to cater for diverse learning needs. They are factors caused by physical, neurological, sensory or cognitive, environmental, socio-economic and geographical limitations and that impede the learning process. Landsberg, Krüger and Swart (2019), define barriers to learning as factors that impede effective learning. Barriers to learning are also described as challenges that arise within the learner that prevent learning and achievement (Department of Basic Education, 2014b). For purposes of the current study, barriers to learning are defined as the intrinsic and extrinsic challenges confronting and hindering learners' educational performance and self-actualisation.

1.16.4 Learner support

Nadiahan and Cabauatan Jnr (2021), describe learner support in terms of educational support services designed to respond to learners' learning needs in all areas of their education. Ouma (2020), describes learner support in terms of the provision of infrastructure, technology and teacher skills to enhance learning experiences and performance. It is support provided to learners to mitigate learning and social challenges

that they are unable to manage on their own. Learner support is aimed at the enhancement of learner performance. It is defined as activities or programmes aimed at addressing challenges confronting learners in their school, social and family lives. The support activities or programmes are designed and implemented to create an environment that fosters learning and addresses learning difficulties hindering learner performance and well-being.

1.16.5 Rural schools

Cheung (2021), describes rural schools as those schools that are located in remote areas, far from cities. Rural schools are defined in terms of the communities in which they are located, which are scarcely populated and characterised by family isolation, low economic activity and lack or remoteness of resources and amenities (Department of Basic Education, 2018b). Both definitions correspond regarding the geographical location of rural schools, which places them far from amenities and resources. The current study defines rural schools as those schools that are isolated from urban areas and whose geographical location complicates their ability to access amenities and resources.

1.16.6 Inclusion

Inclusion implies educating, accommodating and valuing all learners irrespective of their differences in race, abilities, appearance, needs, belief systems and ways of doing things (Francisco, Hartman & Wang, 2020). Inclusion ensures that learners have equal opportunities to learn and are provided with quality education despite their circumstances that might hinder their learning process. Learner diversity is embraced and celebrated. Teachers strive to meet their learners' individual needs through support (Bradley-Levine, 2021). Inclusion is therefore defined as the ability of schools and teachers to embrace all learners with diverse learning needs irrespective of their abilities or disabilities towards accessibility of quality education and opportunities to learn.

1.16.7 Holistic approach

A holistic approach is followed in the provision of counselling and guidance in terms of collaboration between all educational stakeholders. Landsberg, Krüger and Swart (2019), define a holistic approach in the provision of support in terms of collaboration between parents, schools, teachers and other available support services. Gentile and Oswald (2021), assert that a holistic approach implies that both teachers and learners are considered when planning, developing and implementing support programmes. A holistic approach is therefore described in as a convergence of different frameworks in the provision of school-based support to enhance teaching and learning.

1.16.8 Access to education

Factors such as segregation, discrimination, socio-economic conditions, disability and other educational needs contribute to learners' ability to access education, infrastructure and educational resources (Broer, Bai & Fronseca, 2019). Addressing these and other contributing factors increases learners' ability to access quality education. Access to education implies learner ability to acquire education without discrimination. For the current study, access to education is described in terms of learners' ability to acquire opportunities to learn despite limitations posed by economic, cultural, environmental and physical barriers. The education system is responsible for eliminating barriers to learning presented by various exclusionary factors.

1.16.9 Educational success

Osman, Ydhag & Månsson (2021), describes success in terms of grades, that is, learners who obtain good grades in their subjects, implying that it is measured by achievement (Kachur and Barcinas, 2020). Educational success is therefore described as the attainment of educational goals through achievement and academic excellence. The effectiveness or success of an educational programme is measured by evaluating or assessing its ability to produce intended outcomes. Educational success is influenced by

various factors such socio-economic conditions, teachers' professional competencies, school and home environments (Ozcan, 2020). The level of support offered by these facets influences the of attainment of educational success.

1.16.10 Learning needs

At the core of attainment of educational success lies identification and addressing of learning needs. Creation of positive teaching and learning environments that promote inclusion relies on assessing and identification of learning needs (Dawson, Kilgore & Rawcliffe, 2022). Learning needs can be defined as the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that influence learners' ability to access opportunities to learn and achieve their educational goals. Learning needs may arise because of intrinsic, extrinsic or systematic factors Both home and school environments should assess, identify and address needs effectively to offer children equal opportunities to learn.

1.17 Division of Chapters

Chapter 1: This is an introductory chapter, in which the topic of the study is introduced to the reader. The chapter provides detailed background information in different contexts, highlighting different perspectives and scenarios regarding school-based support, access to education and success of rural learners. The main goal and purpose as well as the focus of the study were also presented. The chapter provides clarity on what the study set out to explore and the way the aims and purpose of the study were realised.

The literature related to the current study was briefly reviewed to highlight what has already been written about the topic and to expose existing literature gaps. A brief description of the methodology used to address the research problem was provided. The intention was to convince the reader as to the authenticity and trustworthiness of the results. The description of the research processes included how the study intended to address ethical dilemmas to uphold the credibility of the results.

Chapter 2: In Chapter 2, literature relevant to the topic in varying contexts was reviewed. Recent literature related to the current study is extensively reviewed. Findings or crucial aspects related to the current study are presented to inform the reader of what has already been studied about the topic. Findings of prior studies regarding the improvement of school-based support, access to education and success of rural learners to assemble extant findings are highlighted, thereby avoiding duplication and providing justification of the importance of the current study.

Chapter 3: The theoretical framework , that is the theory through which the improvement of school-based support for access to education and success of rural learners can be analysed and interpreted is outlined in chapter 3. The adopted theory serves as a lens through which the improvement of school-based support for access to learning and success of rural learners was explored.

Chapter 4: Research processes employed to undertake the study are outlined in this chapter to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of results. Chapter 4 details the precise research procedures, designs and tools used to conduct the study. Research process includes the number of people, objects or aspects involved in the study and the selection processes followed. For example, decisions on sampling methods or techniques, the sample and data collection methods are presented. There are discussions on the processes employed in data analysis to assure the reader that the appropriate data analysis procedure was followed.

Each study is presented with ethical dilemmas that researchers should address to produce credible results. Chapter 4 contains a section on ethical considerations to assure the reader that proper care was taken in undertaking the study and participants were not exposed to physical or emotional harm. The researcher has a responsibility to assure readers that the study was not conducted at the expense of humans, animals or the environment, and that participants' well-being was prioritised above anything else. A study that places participants at risk or harm will not yield acceptable and trustworthy results. Furthermore, the chapter covers issues related to falsification of data, plagiarism and the

provision of unverifiable data. Addressing these aspects will uphold the integrity of the study and ensure the believability of results.

Chapter 5: The chapter discusses data analysis, interpretation and presentation of findings. The results obtained after data analysis are reported. The chapter outlines how data analysis was approached from transcribing, sifting, organising and grouping, through the amount of data obtained from different collection tools. The processes and stages followed to analyse data are clearly discussed to present the reader with coherent results. Results are narratively described to demonstrate the extent to which the research question was answered.

Content analysis was used for the current study and is described in detail to demonstrate that data was analysed accordingly, without taking anything away from participants' views and perceptions. Examples of participants' statements are cited verbatim to support the interpretation. Although researchers apply their own understanding when interpreting the results, the findings of the study will represent their views and find expression in this chapter.

Chapter 6: The final chapter will outline the results of the study. The chapter comprises of sections that address the limitations of the study, what the study was unable to uncover and implications of findings for the theory used. The summary of the study highlights its important revelations. Recommendations for future research, policy development and other regulations related to improving school-based support are made. The study is concluded by summarising major findings, challenges and the contributions of the study to extant knowledge or literature.

1.18 Conclusion

The first chapter provided an overview of school-based support, accessibility of equitable education and the factors influencing the success of all learners. The literature related to the title was reviewed briefly to familiarise myself with existing studies, identify gaps and

avoid repetition. A brief theoretical framework underpinning the study was also presented. The aim and objectives of the study, research questions, methodology, data collection, data analysis and ethical considerations were outlined. The next chapter will deliberate on existing body of knowledge related to the topic of the current study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW – SCHOOL-BASED SUPPORT

2.1 Introduction

Chapter 1 introduced the study, its purposes and the research processes employed to answer the research questions. The literature on existing studies in relation to the topic and the theory that underpins the study were briefly discussed. In chapter 2, existing literature related to the current study will be broadly discussed to provide the reader with a synopsis of existing studies that focused on the improvement of school-based support. The literature review will be discussed under subsections to cover various aspects that relate to the topic.

2.2 The Improvement of School-based Support for Access to Education and Success of Rural Learners

A literature review exposes researchers to what has been written regarding the topic as well as the existing gaps that still need to be covered. Reviewing existing literature does not only provide insight into the topic in terms of knowledge and gaps, but also assists researchers in strengthening and improving their research questions (Garrod, 2023). A literature review involves searching for prior studies related to the researcher's current topic, reading the related literature extensively and summarising and synthesising the main points of prior research findings (Leavy, 2022). In addition to familiarising oneself with existing knowledge, the review assists in avoiding conducting repetitive and aimless studies and positions one's study within the existing body of literature (Garrod, 2023). The discussions will be divided into subheadings to outline an overview of literature correlated to different aspects of the topic.

2.2.1 The role of school-based support in teaching and learning

School-based support is defined as the provision of care or support at school level that is provided by teams towards teachers, learners and school management. Schools establish support teams for their schools in different phases, such as general, further and higher education, and according to the policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) (Department of Basic Education, 2014b), is responsible for evaluating educational needs and make necessary provisions to ensure access and academic success. School-based support is usually provided by support structures established by schools in terms of the policy prescripts. In South Africa, the policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) provides for the establishment of school-based and district-based support teams to provide support to learners and teachers.

School-based support teams are responsible for organising school, learner and teacher/lecturer support services to improve teaching and learning and attain educational goals. District-based support teams are responsible for the provision of support to schools, teachers and learners at district level. School-based support should mentor and capacitate teachers to increase their knowledge and overall improvement of educational achievements (Department of Education, 2001). According to the policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) (Department of Basic Education, 2014b), the role of the district-based support teams is to train, address learning barriers and distribute educational resources, among other things.

The provision of support improves teachers' skills and knowledge and builds their capacity towards positive learning outcomes. The Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001), further states that teachers should be capacitated to an extent that they can identify, assess and address learning impediments. In addition, the policy emphasises the strengthening of support teams through collaborating and partnering with parents, communities and other stakeholders, which coincides with prescripts of the policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) (Department of Basic Education, 2014b), which maintains that schools and their support teams should be

capacitated by equipping them with the necessary tools to manage various educational challenges in their schools. Reskilling support teams can be attained through in-service training, conducting workshops and enrolling on programmes on a continuous basis. Through training, teachers are reskilled and equipped with new skills and knowledge that allow them to accommodate learners with diverse learning needs who are confronted with barriers to learning (Makhalemele & Payne-Van Staden, 2020). Kheswa (2020), shares similar views when he states that school-based support improves teaching and learning and stimulates teachers' involvement in dealing with educational challenges in their schools.

Moreover, training allows teachers to initiate and apply their own differentiation and other teaching strategies necessary to address challenges associated with curriculum implementation or presented by diverse learning needs (Makhalemele & Payne-Van Staden, 2020). Supporting teachers is essential in capacitating them to implement inclusive education and address barriers to learning (Duncan, Punch & Croce, 2021). Mentoring educational leaders also enhances their abilities to support teachers to the extent of improving their knowledge and skills, which in turn improves effective curriculum implementation (Mpayipheli & Kheswa, 2020). Krasniqi (2021), also mentions out that school principals have a critical role to play, which is to encourage teachers' participation in activities that enhance their capabilities. Furthermore, principals are partly responsible for the creation of school conditions conducive to the enhancement of teaching strategies and partnerships with other stakeholders.

Graham and Jefferson (2019), found that the provision of support through teacher mentoring programmes enhances learner performance, social and emotional development. Tran and Smith (2020), support the finding when they suggest that mentorship programmes improve teachers' teaching strategies. In addition to improved educational outcomes, the provision of support through mentoring programmes addresses psycho-social challenges that are found to exacerbate stresses related to curriculum implementation and teaching and learning in general (Mpayipheli & Kheswa, 2020). A study conducted by Smit and Du Toit (2021), had mixed findings. On one hand, pre-service

teachers (mentees) found being mentored beneficial because they gained classroom management skills and contributed towards their professional development. On the other hand, teachers (mentors) found the process challenging due to their views that mentees were far from prepared for classroom realities.

The South African government has intensified its learner support through developing and implementing various policies, programmes and strategies, one of them being the National School Nutrition Programme (1994). The programme developed for rural and poor communities was aimed at the removal of certain barriers to learning that interfere with teaching and learning. For example, some children did not attend school due to poverty and hunger, and by removing the barrier, government aimed to increase learner attendance and punctuality and enhance learning capabilities (Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluations, 1994). The introduction of nutrition programmes in schools assists in the creation of an educational environment conducive to learning, where learners are fed and therefore can become actively involved in their own learning.

The Department of Basic Education has implemented a policy framework that regulates and standardises the identification and assessment of learning needs and addresses all forms of learning barriers. The policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) (Department of Basic Education, 2014b), also mandates the accessibility of education and opportunities to learn by all learners, irrespective of their physical and/or environmental circumstances. Coincidentally, Mayimele and Makhalemele (2020), demonstrated that school-based support increases access to education and opportunities to learn, as well as learners' self-awareness, aspirations and abilities. Providing support to vulnerable and orphaned learners will address their social, psychosocial and emotional needs to improve their participation in education in a meaningful manner and will allow them to achieve their educational goals.

Providing support to teenage mothers and fathers gives them relief to overcome their challenges that impede the likelihood of completing their high school education (Harper, Hopper, Keating & Harding, 2020). Kwatubana and Ebrahim (2020), found that vulnerable

learners such as those from child-headed families who were provided with basic needs attended school frequently. These authors maintain that direct approaches informed by challenges experienced by these children worked well as compared to other forms of support. Teachers informally adopted learners, supported them to address their basic, psychosocial and emotional needs that allows learners from child-headed homes to worry less about certain aspects of their lives and focus more on their education, subsequently improving their educational outcomes.

Despite the positive role that support plays in education, its effectiveness is largely influenced by availability of resources, teachers' skills and knowledge that are necessary in the provision of such support. Mpayipheli and Kheswa (2020), cite the lack of in-service training and expertise services such as psychosocial or psychological services to provide the necessary support in schools. Duncan, Punch & Croce (2021), concur citing difficulties in accessing expertise services as a barrier to provide support to teachers. Lack of certain skills impedes teachers' ability to improve various aspects in education, including the development of differentiation teaching strategies. Duncan, Punch & Croce (2021), also mentions inadequate resource provision, including human resources (school counsellors) and lack of training to reskill and capacitate school counsellors to enhance the effectiveness of support measures for teachers and schools.

2.2.2 The role of district-based support teams in school-based support

The Education White Paper 6 recommends that to strengthen the support offered to education in general, each province and district should establish and maintain district-based support teams. These teams should be comprised by officials and experts such as psychologists, special needs specialists, therapists, remedial learning specialists, teachers and other relevant officials (Department of Education, 2001). District-based support teams are required to initiate the creation of school-based support teams and provide support thereafter (Department of Basic Education, 2005). The support provided affords schools and teachers with the capacity to recognise, accommodate and support learners experiencing learning difficulties (Department of Education, 2001). Support

empowers teachers to execute their duties efficiently. It is therefore important that chapter 2 also address the role of district-based support teams in supporting education.

The policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) (Department of Basic Education, 2014b), describes district-based support teams as a support structure that put systems in place to support schools in curriculum implementation. The structure is also responsible for providing expert support services that reside at the district-level and ensure that schools are adequately supported in their efforts towards inclusivity and enhancement of learner performance. In the policy, members of the district-based support team are referred to as leaders in terms of their responsibilities. In addition to their role described, they make critical decisions on tailored support strategies for supporting teachers and learners.

The Conceptual and Operational Guidelines for District-based Support Teams describes district-based support teams as providers of professional guidance and support services at district-level (Department of Education, 2005). The National Education Policy Act 27 of 1996 refers to district-based support teams as multidisciplinary support teams whose main purpose is to capacitate teachers and schools in effectively handling a range of learners' educational and psychosocial needs (Republic of South Africa, 1996). The common thread connecting all the descriptions of district-based support teams is the improvement of educational outcomes through support services for schools, teachers and learners.

Effectiveness of school-based support relies heavily on the availability of resources, services and school infrastructure. Schools should be allocated adequate resources to afford them opportunities to support their learners, teachers and teaching and learning effectively (Department of Basic Education, 2005). The policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) (Department of Basic Education, 2014b), states that certain support, expert services and resources are located at district level. These are professionals with different expertise in different fields of learning and who are not usually in the employ of schools, especially rural schools. Ojeme (2019), agrees, finding a lack of and insufficient counselling services in some Nigerian schools. The implication is that

district-based support teams are well placed to support schools through the provision of specialised services (Ndou & Omidire, 2022), as ensuring that they are easily accessible (Aktan, 2021).

Human resources are a key element in the improvement of education and learner success (Kawuryan, Sayuti, Aman & Dwiningrum, 2021). Tsotetsi and Omodan (2020), state that school-based support teams alone experience difficulties in supporting schools and teachers in the implementation of certain programmes and policies without the support of district-based support teams. The lack or inadequate provision of support could impede the effectiveness of intervention strategies aimed at the improvement of educational success (Aktan, 2021). Findings by Ndou and Omidire (2022), reveal a lack of teachers with certain expertise in assisting learners with developmental language disorders, which impedes any intervention efforts.

In most rural and poor South African communities, teachers are faced with a multitude of challenges, such as overcrowding and multi-grade classes, which are exacerbated by a lack of or inadequate provision of resources and support (Msimanga, 2019). These inadequacies become an added burden particularly for new teachers who, according to Erawan (2019), experience difficulties transitioning into their new teaching roles, which compromises their capabilities of assessing and addressing diverse learning needs. Ndou and Omidire (2022), agree when they state that unfavourable or hostile school conditions also cynicism towards challenged learners. It is the responsibility of districts and their support teams to employ teachers who have a broader understanding of diverse learning needs and who can implement certain policies and intervention strategies. Findings by Msimanga (2019), suggest that district-based support teams are not providing sufficient support to schools with specific challenges. Teachers use their own resources to improve curriculum implementation and offer learners learning experiences.

In addition to educational learners' needs that teachers are required to address, there are social, emotional and behavioural needs. According to Brandi, Karen, Meyer, Freeman, Everett and Feinberg (2021), additional learning needs requires skills, knowledge and

experience, which are usually attained through training. Aktan (2021) echoes the previous authors' statement, stating that district-based support teams play a critical role of reskilling and capacitating. Ndou and Omidire (2022), share similar views, explaining that the improvement of teachers' competencies raises their confidence necessary to assist learners with developmental language disorders. Vural, Pişkin and Durmuşoğlu (2021), add that district-based support teams play a supportive role through capacitating new teachers with in-service training and induction courses.

Training is a support mechanism that renews teachers' knowledge and skills, which allows them to assess, identify and address barriers to learning or make relevant referrals. Aramburo and Rodl (2020), suggest that teachers who lack skills and expert knowledge of educational barriers desire additional support from their districts. Ndou and Omidire (2022), agree when they maintain that training and skills development programmes improve teachers' confidence in assessing and addressing learners' needs. District-based support teams are obligated to provide flexible support that enhances teachers' capabilities and abilities and motivates them to respond to their learners' needs effectively.

One of the factors affecting the success of rural learners discussed later in this chapter is the attraction and retention of teachers (see section 2.2.4.2). The support provided by district-based support teams plays a role in teachers' decisions to stay or leave their professions. Ndou and Omidire (2022), clearly demonstrate the importance of teachers' capabilities when they indicate that teacher retention is also influenced by their efficacy, the enhancement of which is reliant on the support provided by district-based support teams. Harrington and Walsh (2020), agrees with Ndou and Omidire (2022), by stating that support offered by district-support teams improves teachers' capabilities, which influences their decision to leave or stay. Stewart, Rotheram-Fuller and Liou (2021), share similar views when they reveal that support provided by district-based support teams for teachers does not only improve their focus on teaching and learning, but it also influences their retention. Those findings are in line with another key function of district-based support teams, that of promoting authentic teaching and learning as set out in the Conceptual and

Operational Guidelines for District-based Support Teams (Department of Education, 2005).

Responsibilities of district-based support teams also extend to supporting parents through sharing information, skills, knowledge and provision of guidance and counselling, whenever such needs arise (Department of Education, 2001). The Conceptual and Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of Inclusive Education: District-based Support Teams advocates parental involvement in all aspects of their children's education, including assessing and addressing their learning needs (Department of Education, 2005). The National Education Policy Act 27 of 1996 encourages the inclusion of parents in education rather than for districts and their support teams to work in isolation (Republic of South Africa, 1996b). Continuous parental support is essential for meaningful collaboration, partnerships and involvement in school activities including teaching and learning.

Weixler, Valant, Bassok, Doromal and Gerry (2020), found minor intervention to support parents to complete verification processes to enrol their children in early childhood development centres extremely helpful. Their study demonstrated that parents require guidance and support in certain areas of their children's education. The support that parents were given in the completion of verification processes involved communication through texts, which, according to these authors, overcame barriers such as misunderstandings of what was expected from parents. Weixler, Valant, Bassok, Doromal and Gerry (2020), conclude that any form of intervention provides much required support and relief to parents, who are usually unaware of schools' expectations, roles and responsibilities regarding the education of their children (Tsetetsi & Omodan, 2020). Although the study focused on the verification process in the enrolment of learners in early childhood development centres, it highlighted the importance of supporting parents through communication.

Support offered to parents by district-based support teams encourages active parental involvement in education and according to Sibanda (2021), the effectiveness of such

support is evident in the level of learners' success. Bachman, Anderman, Zyromski and Boone (2021), agree that supporting parents stimulates cooperative participation and provides skills to encourage learning at home that subsequently improves educational achievements.

Studies conducted by Harrington and Walsh (2020), Aktan (2021), and Vural, Pişkin and Durmuşoğlu (2021), reveal that district-based support teams have key roles to play in providing school-based support. District-based support teams are tasked with the even allocation of such resources. In instances when districts do not have the required resources or services at their disposal, they are well positioned to outsource same. Capacity building is another role played by district-based support teams through initiating in-service training, professional development courses and workshops to revive teachers' skills and knowledge. Districts also play a role in supporting parents and revitalising engagement with schools in all educational matters.

2.2.3 Factors influencing accessibility of learning in rural schools

Section 29(1)(a) (Republic of South Africa, 1996) of the South African Constitution states that "everyone has the right to a basic education". Section 29(2) further provides for access to education by all. The Department of Basic Education's 2003 Action Plan describes access in terms of children's ability to access school infrastructures, quality education and educational resources. Access means different things in different contexts and could be described in terms of gaining admission or being able to approach organisations, institutions or people (Etor, Ekanem & Sule, 2020). For example, in health it applies to the ability of people to gain access to health services, the ability to reach clinics or hospitals and related services. In education, access applies to the reachability of educational infrastructures, resources and opportunities to learn.

Ama, Moorad and Mukhopadyay (2020), describe access to education as the inability of physical, social, socio-economic, school conditions and environmental factors to interfere with or hinder children's ability to learn and be exposed to opportunities to learn. In this

context, access means the ability of rural learners to obtain equitable education and resources that enhance their growth and educational achievements. Etor, Ekanem and Sule (2020: 79), state that access is the “ability to gain access to learning opportunities” by all who need education at all levels of learning. Both access to education and opportunities to learn and success in education are influenced by various factors.

Sapiets, Totsika and Hastings (2020), reveal that there are various factors that impede access to equitable education, particularly for physically impaired learners who are also in remote and impoverished areas. Among such barriers are lack of parental knowledge, families’ economic status and unavailability of information and resources to improve access. These and other factors hamper children’s ability to access education, resources and educational services that are necessary to improve their learning outcomes. Segregation, discrimination, socio-economic conditions, disability and inadequate provision of other educational needs contribute to challenges of accessing education, infrastructure and educational resources. Factors that influence accessibility of education, resources and opportunities to learn will be outlined below.

2.2.3.1 Collaboration and participation

Collaboration can be beneficial to teachers, learners and schools, and it motivates teachers and enhances their effectiveness in curriculum implementation and supporting their learners. Kammer, King, Donahay and Koeberl (2021), indicate that collaboration is not just a partnership between two educators. It is rather a group of teachers who are equal partners and work together through coordinated activities, integrated instruction and shared responsibility. Collaboration promotes cooperative learning, which, according to Berzener and Deneme (2021), promotes the achievement of collective goals. Their study revealed that collaboration and collective learning contributed to the success of Turkish learners in reading English as a foreign language.

A study conducted by Ama, Moorad and Mukhopadyay (2020), in Nigeria revealed that the improvement of access to equitable education in rural schools is highly dependent on

collaboration and participation of various educational stakeholders. The authors assert that collaboration and participation could alleviate the impediments to accessibility of equitable education and opportunities to learn such. Cooperating and partnering with others equip teachers with capabilities to identify resources independently and assist in the creation of favourable learning environment (Ama, Moorad & Mukhopadyay, 2020). A mixed method design was used in their study and the significance is that the research methods applied complemented each other, thereby strengthening reliability and trustworthiness of the results.

Findings of Saka (2021), suggest that collaboration among teachers improves their quality of teaching and learner achievements in Mathematics. Saka attributes the improvement to the fact that teachers observed each other during their classroom activities and later held discussions to give each other feedback about their observations. Teachers also shared their varying experiences, knowledge, ideas and intervention strategies during their briefing sessions. Teacher collaboration aids professional development through information and knowledge sharing, which supported struggling teachers.

Wambugu, Stutchbury and Dickie (2020), agree, indicating that teachers who collaborated with others or participated in group activities designed to enhance teaching and learning experienced professional growth. White (2021), supports Wambugu, Stutchbury and Dickie (2020)'s, findings and emphasises the necessity of collaboration, partnership, participation and the involvement of educational stakeholders when pursuing access to equitable education and, subsequently, success in education. Participants who prepared their lessons or presentations collaboratively were found to present instructional videos of higher quality than those that prepared individually (Kobayashi, 2021).

Collaborative teaching and learning nurtures communication and parents, guardians and the community involvement. Effective parental participation and collaboration requires teachers and schools to guide collaborative initiatives and create welcoming environments that advocate for children's learning and development (Chan, Shu & Xiao, 2021). Parental participation is strengthened by schools' willingness and openness to welcome parents in

their domain (Sekamoto, 2021). Stroetinga, Leeman and Veugelers (2021: 269), add that applying an “approach of equality”, which is when teachers do not undermine but recognise and respect parents’ views and approaches to child rearing and upbringing, strengthens collaborative efforts. The equality approach gives parents assurance that their concerns and views are valid and valued and that they matter. Kirss, Säälük, Leijen and Pedaste (2021), echo Stroetinga, Leeman and Veugelers (2021),’s claims and assert that involving parents and keeping them informed of school programmes and initiatives creates awareness and fosters involvement.

Although parental participation is usually constrained by factors such as sociocultural and economic circumstances, Sibanda (2021), says that, when maintained efficiently, it strengthens parents’ trust in teachers, improves effective communication and support that both teachers and parents require in educating their children and guides parents on how to provide support at home (Chan, Shu & Xiao, 2021). Parental participation is crucial in children’s learning development; it contributes to the establishment and maintenance of a teaching environment that supports learning and promotes school-based support. Effective parental participation requires commitment from both sides, but valuing parental contribution and efforts is the foundation of its success (Stroetinga, Leeman & Veugelers., 2021).

Through collaborative approaches, teachers develop support strategies, strengthen their instructional support, share their experiences and expertise and enhance the general support they provide to their learners (Mofield, 2020). Parental and stakeholder participation strengthens school-based support and validates the value that parents add to the schooling system. All these aspects enhance access to education, resources and opportunities to learn. Teachers gain opportunities to discuss their learners on how best to support them and exchange ideas to strengthen their pedagogic skills through collaborative efforts (Heine & Gebhardt, 2019). All these studies mentioned demonstrate that collaboration and participation are instrumental in the improvement of school-based support.

2.2.3.2 Teacher training and professional development

Teacher training can be described as the improvement of teachers' knowledge, capabilities and skills (Ahmed, Pasha & Malik, 2021). Nzarirwehi and Atuhumuze (2019), explain that teacher training is intended to update skills in line with new trends and developments. For example, after attending a training course (in-service training) and completing a portfolio of evidence, a certificate is awarded which adds to the person's existing qualifications, boosts their career and adds more value in career advancements. Professional development can act as an upgrade of academic qualifications. Teachers who receive training are motivated and inspired and, in turn, inspire their learners and improve their teaching methods and support they provide to their learners (Horvat, Wiener, Schmeling & Borowski, 2019).

Fatih (2020), defines professional development as a strategic process in which teachers acquire new skills or knowledge to increase or renew their expertise in teaching and learning and improves teachers' competencies and aligns their skills set with the current environment. Teacher training can be attained through attending workshops, seminars and conferences (Nzarirwehi & Atuhumuze, 2019), and it is largely influenced by principals' and fellow teachers' support and guidance. In this section, the influence of training and development on access to education will be outlined.

Teachers are referred to as the "most influential socialising agents" in both social and educational contexts (Wanders, Dijkstra, Maslowski, Van der Veen & Amnå, 2021). They are central to the enhancement of quality of education, creation and reduction of barriers to educational accessibility and opportunities to learn (Kawuryan Sayuti, Aman & Dwiningrum, 2021). Learner success is influenced by "the quality of teachers, schools and the education system" (Gneezy, List, Livingston, Qin, Sadoff & Xu, 2019: 291), teaching methods or strategies (Berzener & Deneme, 2021), as well as adequate provision of other resources vital to curriculum implementation. Evidently, teacher training and professional development are key in access to education.

The education department outlined its plan for improving education and learning outcomes in its Sector Action Plan of 2011-2014. One of the priority areas is the improvement of teacher competence and professionalism through in-service training that addresses teachers' specific needs (Department of Basic Education, 2011b). Despite the important role that teachers play, they encounter numerous challenges that influence curriculum implementation. For example, teachers' inability to recognise and address barriers disrupts the provision of learner support, thereby impeding learner performance.

The South African education system is continuously evolving. Such transformation or evolution should be complemented by teachers who are continuously trained to meet the demands of educational evolution. Teacher training will ensure that teachers' skills, knowledge and qualifications are on par with new developments (Nevenglosky, Cale & Panesar, 2019). Teachers are equipped with skills and attributes necessary to improve support and are better positioned to enhance teaching and learning.

There are various challenges facing teachers today, particularly new teachers in rural schools. These challenges act as impediments towards access to learning and success of teaching and learning and could be alleviated through appropriate needs analysis and school-based support. For example, Makuya and Sedibe (2021), recommend training on inclusion to align them with the requirement of inclusion or any other current educational trends. Some studies recommend the development and overhaul of policies to support inclusion (Okech, Yuwono & Abdu, 2021), and (Shevlin & Banks, 2021). Chauke and Tabane (2021), agree with Makuya and Sedibe (2021), that teacher training is at the heart of teachers' ability to successfully implement inclusion in schools. Furthermore, lack of educational resources has been found to contribute to challenges of implementing inclusion in schools (Chauke & Tabane, 2021).

Erawan (2019), agrees with other scholars that initial teacher training received from colleges and universities does not prepare new teachers for school realities. As such, teachers should be exposed to in-service training programmes, seminars, workshops or courses to improve their capabilities to handle educational challenges. Studies have

demonstrated that initial teacher education policies that inform initial teacher training are largely to blame because they are not context specific, but highly influenced by urban experiences (Ledger, Masinir, Delgado & Murdoch, 2021). New teachers need support to adapt to their new environment, more so in rural contexts than any other setting. Such support could be in the form of mentorship or training programmes (Komar, Kolisnichenko, Derkach & Kapeliushna, 2021). Equally, Mabena, Mokgosi and Ramapela (2021), cite lack of pedagogical content knowledge, skill and appropriate professional training as contributors to declining learner performance in certain subjects such as Mathematics.

Teacher training influences teachers' classroom practices and schools' effectiveness (Özgenel & Mert, 2019), learner achievements and interest in certain subjects (Gardee, 2021). The role of teachers in children's social, personal and education lives necessitates the provision of adequate and relevant training to keep them abreast of their learners' diverse and changing needs. Teacher training affords teachers opportunities to renew their knowledge. It is key that teachers' skills in classroom or intervention strategies, knowledge and understanding of learning content are on par with the developing world and as such, necessitates the improvement of support such as training aimed at the enhancement of their ability to identify and address challenges that negatively affect teaching, learning and performance.

There are inadequate policies that address school-based support for teachers. Bawani and Mphahlele (2021), echo similar sentiments to Okech, Yuwono and Abdu, (2021) and Shevlin and Banks (2021) that policy transformation is required. Even though Bawani and Mphahlele's (2021), views were regarding policies on conducting in-service training, the essence is that inadequate policy frameworks can impede the improvement of school-based support, thus failing to influence curriculum implementation.

Studies referred to previously suggest that the revisiting of policy frameworks on teacher training and professional development could contribute to suitably skilled and qualified teachers, leading to the success of learners, particularly those in impoverished and remote areas. It was established in the earlier discussions that teacher training equips teachers

with instructional knowledge and improves their skills in curriculum implementation (Nzarirwehi & Atuhumuze, 2019). Teachers become highly competent in creating opportunities to learn and in implementing educational policies.

Effective teacher training is occasionally hindered by teachers' attitudes towards attending workshops, seminars, any form of training or implementing what they have learned in training. Teachers' perceptions are also prevalent in implementing inclusive education where some teachers become pessimistic towards educating learners with special education needs. Eroglu and Kaya (2021), agree with the Nzarirwehi and Atuhumuze, (2019), and add that effective teacher training is hindered by various factors such as inadequate resources, time constraints due to heavy workloads, unsuitable trainers and teachers' attitudes towards certain programmes. The provision of support to teachers through training and professional development affect their ability to enhance the accessibility of quality education to their learners.

2.2.3.3 Policy development and implementation

The role of policies is to address identified educational needs to expose learners to enriching and effective learning experiences (Jolly & Robins, 2021). Policies are usually influenced by politics and embody the views and beliefs of those who are in power. For example, the apartheid educational policies in South Africa embodied the values, beliefs and culture of the then ruling party; so do those of the democratic education system. Since the beginning of democracy, the influence on the South African educational policy shifted to the values of democracy, redress, consultation, success, provision of quality education and lifelong learning (Department of Education, 1995).

Policy development is prompted by needs analysis and identification of learning gaps. The National Policy Development Framework states that through policies, government communicates or gives directives of its goals that each sector should achieve and how they could be achieved or what should be done to achieve those goals (The Presidency, 2020). Policies are usually developed and implemented at different spheres of

government. Schools develop their own guidelines within the prescripts of the policy from the national sphere, which could create some discrepancies in terms of aligning school guidelines with the policy prescripts. For the current context, policies are sets of guidelines that schools put in place and use as a basis for decision-making processes for effective teaching, learning, school management and achievement of educational goals.

The South African education system has numerous policy frameworks and guidelines. However, they are not usually informed by contexts which they are intended for or complemented by resources necessary for effective implementation. The disjuncture between policy and contexts complicates the implementation process, thus affecting negatively on the provision of school-based support for education access and success of rural learners. Some of these challenges are lack of thorough guidelines for the implementation processes and lack of support for teachers who implement policies (Mbewe, Kamchedzera & Kunkwenzu, 2021). Without proper support, teachers fail to follow policy prescripts thoroughly.

Mogale and Modipane (2021), share similar views and further add that poor communication and teachers' negative attitudes towards the learner progression policy contribute to its ineffective implementation. Ineffective policy implementation negatively affects the improvement of education and learning outcomes. Teachers' lack of understanding of policies they are required to implement hinders effective implementation of these policies (Barnett & Maarman, 2020). Some studies found that teachers' self-efficacy was the root of negative attitudes towards implementing certain educational policies (Mogale & Modipane, 2021). Teachers who doubt their abilities to carry out certain tasks tend to exhibit their displeasure through a display of attitudes and behaviours. In addition, other factors such as overcrowded classrooms also play have an effect on policy implementation.

The National Education Policy Act (NEPA) 27 of 1996 also emphasises the enhancement of quality education that should be accessible to all. In addition, the South African Schools Act (SASA) 84 of 1996 is responsible for encouraging parental, community and other

educational stakeholders' involvement. All these policies and Acts give rise to different educational policies aimed at the improvement of school-based support through accessibility of quality education by all. The Draft Rural Education Policy (2017), was developed to address challenges that are context specific, that is, rural schools. The aim of the Policy on Improving Access to Free and Quality Education for all is to address curriculum imbalances through enhancing “curriculum diversity, unqualified and ill-prepared teachers, shortages of learner and teacher support materials” and the overall teaching and learning environment (Department of Basic Education, 2010: 3-10).

The policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) (Department of Basic Education, 2014b), is intended to improve accessibility of quality education by vulnerable learners, including those experiencing barriers to learning. The goal of the policy is to intensify the provision of support to teaching and learning in general, particularly disabled or intellectually challenged learners, and it provides for inclusion and support of all learners irrespective of their physical or environmental circumstances. The support provided to teachers and other personnel through training and other support initiatives is one of the issues that I address in the current chapter (**see the discussion on, “Teacher Training and Professional Development”, section 2.2.3.2: 68**). The South African education system has sufficient legislative framework that provides the basis for policies related to different aspects of teaching and learning such as teacher training, support and the general management of school operations.

Jolly and Robins (2021), analysed policies on gifted children and found imbalances between policies and the guidance or guidelines provided regarding the needs of gifted children. The imbalances are attributed to the values and beliefs embedded in policies that are usually a reflection of those in power. Consequently, policymakers are unable to provide clear guidelines on the processes that could lead to effective implementation. Although Jolly and Robins (2021), only analysed policies related to gifted children and did not conduct an actual investigation into the implementation processes of different educational policies, their findings suggest a disjuncture between development and implementation. The misalignment could be a result of policies that are developed in the

national sphere of government implementation at school level. For the South African education system, it would imply that policies cascade through various spheres such as provinces and districts.

In their study conducted in South Africa, Kabeya, Chigona and Osman (2022), found that policies do not always relate to the circumstances in which they are implemented, which results in disjuncture. The finding demonstrates that policymakers do not always consider contextual realities of rural schools. There is no recognition or consideration of other factors that could negatively influence and complicate policy implementation, such as the availability of resources. Consequently, teachers and principals are faced with decisions on which policy to implement or leave out. Such decisions hinder schools' ability to provide effective school-based support. It should be noted that Kabeya, Chigona and Osman (2022), focused on the South African e-Education White Paper 7 and how contexts influenced its implementation. Policymakers appear to assume a smooth implementation process, which is not always the case given various extenuating circumstances that derail effective implementation.

Tieken and Montgomery (2021), indicate that there are disparities in terms of support, access and success between rural learners and those in urban or semi-urban contexts, with rural learners on the unfavourable spectrum. They attribute these disparities to different causes, including misalignment of policies to rural contexts (Tieken & Montgomery, 2021). They further assert that policies make certain provisions that do not fit rural schools because such policies were designed with urban or semi-urban contexts in mind. They also highlight the complexities of policy mandates, for example when a policy prescribes the recruitment of teachers with specific expertise. However, it is usually difficult in rural schools to attain due to a limited pool of suitably experienced and knowledgeable teachers who are willing to relocate or travel to rural areas.

The role of policies in strengthening support towards accessibility of equitable education and subsequent success of rural learners was analysed under this section. It emerged in prior discussions that the South African education system is complemented by policies

that guide the provision of school-based support. It also became apparent that the success of policies depends on effective implementation, and effective implementation is reliant on the availability of resources (Mbewe, Kamchedzera & Kunkwenzu, 2021), attitudes and self-efficacy of policy implementers (Mogale & Modipane, 2021), and appropriate knowledge and skills of the prescripts of policies (Barnett & Maarman, 2020). The improvement of school-based support relies heavily on policy frameworks that are context specific, and on resources, capable teachers and school personnel.

2.2.4 Factors influencing success in rural schools

Different fields measure their successes differently. For example, in medicine, the success of medication or a procedure is measured by evidence of patients' state of improvement; in business, it is measured through attraction and retention of customers who are satisfied with the services provided. In education, success can be measured through standardised tests, monitoring and improved learner performance (Rennie Centre for Education Research and Policy, 2020). Evaluation is also used in measuring the success of educational approaches, policies and other systems put in place to improve educational achievements. Wareing (2021), indicates that evaluation is necessary to identify best practices, improve systems and approaches put in place and obtain information to share with others within the sector.

Some measure educational success through comparisons of learner performance between countries that have a similar economic standpoint. The Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) is also used to measure and assess the conditions of teaching and learning environments among participating countries (Department of Basic Education, 2018a). Kachur and Barcinas (2020), maintain that success is measured by achievement. The effectiveness or success of an educational programme is measured by evaluating or assessing its ability to produce intended outcomes.

South African rural and urban schools do not have similar opportunities regarding access to education and educational resources that could be due to the decentralisation of

services, where each province is responsible for the operations of its schools. Although all provinces and schools are governed by the same policies that are developed at national level, accessibility to education and resources still differs significantly. Van Zyl, Webb and Wolvaardt (2021), established that all schools in Tshwane South District, Gauteng, were adequately resourced whereas Dube and Ndaba (2021), found lack educational resources in rural KwaZulu-Natal. Both schools are in South African provinces but in different environments, which is an indication that the allocation and accessibility of educational resources is also determined by the location of schools. Factors influencing success of learners in rural schools will be outlined below.

2.2.4.1 Educational resources

The South African education sector usually operates in a responsive instead of proactive manner and it is reflected in how the system develops some of its policies and addresses certain challenges. For example, the Draft Learner and Teacher Support Materials (LTSM) Policy (2014), was developed after an outcry about textbook shortages in rural schools. The pressure also gave rise to the establishment of the Learner and Teacher Support Unit within the education department. The root of all these developments was the amount of pressure applied to the Education Department.

The LTSM Policy describes learning and teaching support materials as the different resources, such as textbooks, apparatus, teaching aids and stationery, that are used in classrooms. The provision of educational resources in schools has been found to positively influence teaching and learning and improve learner attendance and performance in schools (Tsakeni, Munje & Jita, 2021). Other scholars such as Asano, Amponsah, Baah-Yanney, Quarcoo and Azumah (2021), concur that, combined with access and quality teaching and learning, the provision of resources influences learning outcomes in Ghana. Educational resources alone cannot be effective in educational success; they should be supplemented by successful teaching methods or effective curriculum implementation.

One of the critical educational resources is human resources, such as teachers and other school personnel. The shortage of suitably qualified and experienced teachers has been a widespread challenge around the world. Teacher shortages have negative effects on rural education reform. In rural Colorado, the state resorted to various strategies to attract and retain teachers such as the provision of funding to study teaching, the creation of professional learning communities and mentorship programmes (Kirk, 2021). The United States of America and Japan for an example, resorted to increasing teachers' salaries and allowances and providing them with additional incentives to attract and retain them (Cheung, 2021). Tessaro, Landertinger and Restoule (2021), mention that strategies such as the provision of ongoing support is effective in increasing teacher retention.

Studies have shown that new teachers join and leave the teaching profession sooner than expected and this places schools, particularly rural schools which, according to Frahm and Cianca (2021), do not attract teachers, in a difficult predicament. The challenge has forced various countries such as Japan, America (Cheung, 2021), and South Africa (through the National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa (2006), to rethink their recruitment and retention strategies. Both Cheung (2021), and Frahm and Cianca (2021), addressed different aspects in their studies, that is, rural education reform and teacher retention, but their findings highlight the importance of human resources on teaching and learning. However, these studies did not indicate how the availability of teaching and learning resources or lack thereof influences success in education. Instead, Cheung (2021), focused on reforming rural education compared to other contexts. Frahm and Cianca (2021), studied the impact of leadership behaviours on increasing teacher retention.

In the National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa (2006), the Department of Education indicates that there are discrepancies between supply and demand of teachers. The policy cites a decline in teacher enrolment and general interest in the teaching profession, death, retirement and change of careers as some of the contributing factors to these discrepancies. In response to these challenges, the Department of Basic Education adjusted teachers' conditions of service, enhanced

initial teacher education through the establishment of the Funza Lushaka Bursary Programme to fund student teachers (Republic of South Africa, 2006), established a database for the registration of unemployed teachers and provided incentives for teachers, particularly those in rural schools (Republic of South Africa, 2006).

Ndjangala, Abah and Mashebe (2021), reveal that inadequate provision of educational resources such as laboratories, textbooks and infrastructure are some of the challenges affecting improved educational outcome in Natural Sciences subjects in Namibia. The finding concurs with Du Plessis and Mestry (2019), who indicate that rural learners face many severe challenges that are context specific, such as lack of resources, which impede curriculum implementation. Unavailability of educational resources influences accessibility to education; it limits enrolment numbers in schools. School intake becomes less to ensure that the available resources can accommodate the capacity of learners enrolled (Etor, Ekanem & Sule, 2020). By implication, some learners will be denied access to education due to schools' inability to accommodate them and allocate them resources. Alternatively, schools experience overcrowding to accommodate all children.

In a study conducted in rural KwaZulu-Natal, Dube and Ndaba (2021), explored factors contributing towards poor performance of progressed learners. Poor performance was attributed to various factors, including inadequate provision of educational resources. Imbalances in the allocation of school resources between rural schools and other schools in different contexts was cited as a contributing factor to lack of educational resources. The study was conducted within the context of COVID-19 and it is unclear whether there were other contextual factors that influenced their findings.

Naidoo and Hajaree (2021), explored learners' perceptions of using technology in Mathematics and established that employing technology in some subjects inspires and appeals to learners and also influence subject choices in that it increases the likelihood of learners choosing certain subjects such as Mathematics. Dube and Ndaba (2021), also explored the availability of technology to conduct online lessons in rural schools and found that the lack of technology and connectivity to enable rural schools to conduct online

learning as necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in learning losses, more so in rural schools. Shortage of educational resources influences school improvement opportunities, particularly in Mathematics and Science subjects, which require the use of apparatus, laboratories and other equipment (Tsakeni, Munje & Jita 2021).

Different kinds of educational or teaching and learning resources were discussed in the preceding section and the findings were consistent regarding the importance of resources in educational success, the effects of lack of resources on learner performance (Dube & Ndaba, 2021), and the disparities in resource allocation between rural, urban and sub-urban schools (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). Studies have also shown that rural schools struggle to access connectivity and technology necessary in curriculum delivery in the wake of the pandemic, which could influence their subject choices (Naidoo & Hajaree, 2021). Human resources are also critical in attaining success in education, which is compromised by difficulties in recruiting and retaining (Frahm & Cianca, 2021).

Studies reviewed in the preceding section did not delve deeper into the success of rural learners. For example, Frahm and Cianca (2021), dealt with rural education reform and teacher retention and Cheung (2021), explored reforming rural education. In addition, these studies did not reveal how resources influence success in education. The current study therefore capitalised on these gaps to gain insight of factors contributing to the educational achievement of rural learners.

2.2.4.2 The attraction and retention of suitably skilled teachers

Although teachers are categorised as resources, the section on attracting and retaining suitably skilled teachers will be discussed separately from the other resources to unpack the relatedness of this aspect to success in education independently. Teachers are key to the improvement of education and access to effective teaching (Kawuryan, Sayuti, Aman, & Dwiningrum, 2021). It is a huge challenge because some countries, including South Africa, struggle to recruit and retain teachers, more so in rural schools. Du Plessis and

Mestry (2019), cite working conditions in schools in remote areas as one of the factors contributing to an inadequate supply of teachers.

The working environment is exacerbated by the geographical location of rural schools, which are in remote areas where there are no amenities. Another factor that contributes to difficulties in attaining suitably skilled or qualified teachers is the decline in the number of people choosing teaching as a profession, especially in avoided subjects (Banghart, 2021). Most people do not take mathematics, science and technology subjects as their majors in tertiary institutions because they (subjects) considered difficult. Different countries have devised ways of making the teaching profession attractive again and ensuring that teachers who are already on the system remain there if the system allows.

The response of the South African Education Department to these challenges was to introduce the National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development (2006). As stated earlier, the policy addresses challenges of teacher recruitment, improvement of conditions of service and revision of incentives to attract and retain teachers. Until recently, the Department of Basic Education increased salaries of teachers in rural areas to motivate their retention. In addition, the Department introduced the Funza Lushaka Bursary to attract prospective teachers into initial teacher education (Department of Basic Education, 2006).

The South African Council for Educators (SACE) Act 31 of 2000 was also introduced to improve the quality of the teaching profession through appropriate registration. Through the registration process as required by the policy, the education department can maintain a record of teachers and address the issue of supply and demand. The teacher database also assists government with planning such as supporting teachers. Supporting teachers is deemed necessary to keep them and retain their interest in the profession (Stewart, Rotheram-Fuller & Liou 2021).

The Michigan Department of Education introduced the provision of financial support through financial incentives in addition to salaries, provision of housing or accommodation,

mentoring and induction programmes for new teachers (Study Snapshot, 2021). Cameroon is one of the African countries that also experiences teacher shortages, especially in rural schools (Guiaké & Tian, 2021). Their study explored centralisation and decentralisation of teacher recruitment in China and Cameroon and revealed that recruitment challenges do not stem from centralising or decentralising the recruitment system alone, but from recruitment and placement processes and practices (Guiaké & Tian, 2021). Due to poor management practices, the education system is not considerate towards teachers and their careers, leading to many teachers leaving the profession for better opportunities.

Some studies suggest that policy development and implementation is an answer to address the problem of teacher attraction and retention (Sulit, 2020). Although it was a limited study, its findings offer policy as an alternative to support teacher retention and attraction. Shuls and Flores (2020), are of the view that although policies could provide frameworks on the retention of teachers, providing support and developing new teachers could yield more positive results. School principals should strive to create schooling environments that are conducive to effective schooling. The focus should be on supporting and developing teachers, particularly new teachers who struggle to fit in their new roles and environment (Shuls & Flores, 2020).

Sulit (2020), suggests that challenges of attracting and retaining teachers are widespread across countries, but more prominent in schools that are in rural and disadvantaged communities. The main factor contributing to challenges of teacher attraction and retention is a limited number of new intakes in educational courses resulting from lost interest in the profession. Other factors that exacerbate the situation are inadequate policies that address teacher retention strategies (Sulit, 2020), and lack of support for new and experienced teachers to improve retention (Shuls & Flores, 2020). The inability of education departments to recruit and retain adequately skilled and qualified teachers affects access to education and subsequently, the success of rural learners (Opoku, Asare-Nuamah, Nketsia, Asibey, Asibey & Arinaitwe, 2020).

2.2.5 Addressing the challenges impeding school-based support

The Education White Paper 6 states that schools should establish and maintain functional school-based support teams to capacitate teachers and schools to address educational challenges and support learners with additional learning needs (Department of Education, 2001). School-based support entails supporting teachers, learners and general teaching and learning to enhance educational achievements. The support is also critical in alleviating pressure on teachers who experience barriers to support their learners due to overwhelming workloads (Wulyani, Widiati & Khoiri, 2022), and other challenges associated with curriculum implementation.

There are various challenges impeding school-based support such as lack of support from government (Wulyani, Widiati & Khoiri, 2022), inappropriate application of intervention strategies, ill-informed and inadequately skilled and knowledgeable teachers who are unable to recognise or identify barriers to learning as well as lack of or poor school infrastructure. These challenges combined or in isolation hinder school-based support teams' efforts to offer effective support to teaching and learning.

Some of today's educational challenges stem from teachers' inability to implement certain programmes in their schools, some of which are intervention strategies aimed at addressing identified barriers to learning and other educational challenges. Kim and Wynne (2021), found that lack of information and understanding of what certain programmes entail was the main deterrent in the successful implementation of extensive reading programmes in Indonesian schools. Their study further revealed that sometimes teachers have different perceptions of how certain things should be done, which influence the way they undertake certain support activities in their classrooms and schools.

Kim and Wynne (2021), suggest that in addition to training to capacitate teachers with new skills, support teams should provide teachers with information to make "pedagogical modifications" in their classrooms and address other challenges as well. Teachers who lack information on learners' sexual diversity, for example, were found to be among the

perpetrators of violence or homophobic bullying of learners whose sexual orientation differed from the accepted norm (Brown & Buthelezi, 2020). Lack of information hampers capacity building and teachers' ability to recognise or identify challenges, which in turn contributes to ineffective implementation of certain programmes. Unavailability of information will render any intervention strategy or approach ineffective. These findings suggest that arming teachers with knowledge of challenges they are required to address, intervention programmes and activities places them in a better position for effective and successful implementation thereof.

The provision of school-based support is usually impeded by poor or lack of school infrastructure, which is usually inaccessible to all learners and unsuitable to address diverse learning needs. Availability of infrastructure allows schools to leverage and draw from their source whenever the need arises to successfully implement intervention and support strategies. Evidently, COVID-19 pandemic, which necessitated remote schooling. Schools and families that had technology and connectivity in place drew from their existing resources, whereas others found it extremely difficult to conduct remote lessons. Pollack, Theodorakakis and Walsh (2021), share similar views that after the closure of schools due to the pandemic, there were a higher number of schools and families who struggled due to lack of technology and connectivity to support their learners.

School buildings should accommodate learners' needs, particularly mainstream schools that implement inclusive education. A study conducted by Lingolwe, Chirwa, Wellington and Naidoo (2021), found that some schools had minimal infrastructure to cater for diverse needs, which infringed the rights of disabled learners. It is therefore necessary that certain school modifications be made to ensure easier accessibility of facilities by all learners.

Schools are not only mandated to establish and maintain support teams, but they are also required to ensure the functionality of such support teams (Department of Basic Education, 2001). Functional support teams are better positioned to identify challenges, assess learning needs, allocate resources and successfully address such challenges (Hlalele,

Jiyane & Radebe, 2020). To be functional, effective or successful, such teams require support from all educational stakeholders (Hlalele, Jiyane & Radebe, 2020). In Indonesia, studies found that the initiatives to implement some strategies such as reading programmes were hampered by insufficient educational resources, inadequate support from government and school administrators, and teachers who were overwhelmed by tremendous workloads (Wulyani, Widiati & Khoiri, 2022).

Lack of or inadequate support by district-based support teams is cited by Mpanza and Govender (2022), as another challenge that influence the functionality of school-based support teams and the quality of support provided. Their study explored the experiences and practices of support teams at school-level when supporting teachers, and participants revealed that the inadequacies of district-based support teams compromised their efforts regarding school-based support. Participants felt that support teams at district-level provided insufficient support for capacity building and they questioned the effectiveness of the support provided. Their study also revealed that teachers felt ill-prepared to adequately support learners with additional needs and their requests for placements and referrals were not prioritised (Mpanza & Govender, 2022). District-based support teams should be able to address referral and placement cases swiftly to ensure educational continuity.

The effectiveness of school-based support relies on early detection of learning needs, development and implementation of intervention strategies. The ability to carry out early detection is reliant on the availability and accessibility of certain expertise support services. Although there are mixed views on the effectiveness of certain special services offered in schools such as counselling, it is evident that these experts contributed to identify and address educational challenges. Aluede and Adubale (2020), question the appropriateness of the activities undertaken by school-based counsellors. Their main concern is whether school counsellors are conducting activities that are in line with their responsibilities. Another study emphasise that training support teams is necessary as it keeps them abreast with emerging trends in terms of specialised supports towards learners who require additional support (Ozcan & Uzunboylu, 2020). Results of the study by Ozcan and Uzunboylu, suggest that school counsellors were not adequately equipped

to address the needs of gifted learners. Besides these mixed findings, the underlying tone of these studies is that school counsellors are major players in support services.

Some rural schools solely rely on their circuits and district offices for certain specialised services required to address challenges impeding school-based support. Some schools utilise Life Orientation teachers trained in basic counselling skills to provide schools, learners and teachers with guidance (Mathikithela & Wood, 2021). Lack of school counsellors places teachers under enormous pressure that adds to their already overloaded schedules, which in turn robs learners of opportunities to maximise teachers' full potential. School counsellors play a critical role in the provision of counselling to assist learners in managing their problems and subject selection (Harbola, 2021). Support reduces teachers' workload, enabling them to allocate more time to teaching. To address this challenge, the Education Department should make provision for adequate specialised support in schools to facilitate the functionality and success of support teams.

Hlalele, Jiyane and Radebe (2020), suggest that school-based support teams should not only rely on the support from districts and support teams, but should outsource additional support from other educational stakeholders such as communities and parents. For example, through volunteering, parents who have counselling credentials could offer their services to schools. Rural and impoverished schools struggle to outsource support from families and communities for various reasons, and according to Heyward, Jochim and Casimere (2021), one of these reasons is the inability of schools to exploit available resources in the community and empower families and communities for successful engagement and participation. The finding is consistent with those by Runhare, Ouda, Vele and Mudzielwana (2021), that some South African rural schools in Vhembe district resorted to encouraging parental and community involvement as a strategy to curb learner drop-out from schools. These schools outsourced available support and resources from parents and the community to address challenging behaviour exhibited by their learners.

It is crucial to create school environments that are both conducive to effective curriculum implementation, welcoming, inviting, hospitable and enabling for the provision of holistic

support from parents, community members and other supporters (Mathikithela & Wood, 2021). Schools should adopt a multi-dimensional approach to address challenges impeding school-based support by creating a school environment that welcomes participation and communication, and one that makes the accessibility of support from various groups possible. Creating a healthy school environment promotes learners' overall well-being and improves educational achievement (Yidiz, 2021).

Various challenges impeding school-based support were highlighted. It is evident from the earlier discussion that the improvement of school-based support relies on addressing these challenges effectively. Teachers should be knowledgeable about the policies and intervention strategies they are required to implement (Bipath, Tebekana & Venketsamy, 2021). Teachers can only be achieved if they are armed with the necessary information and provided with training that allows them to carry out their duties effectively. Since it has been indicated that schools can no longer rely solely on the support provided by government, they should independently outsource certain support services from their surrounding communities, parents and other stakeholders. The requirement is to create a healthy school environment that attracts all stakeholders.

2.2.6 Policy context

Policy is important because they communicate goals and values of a particular sector to maintain certain standards and achieve goals (Jolly & Robins, 2021). Education is no different; there should be guiding principles, frameworks and guidelines to enable the system to maintain certain standards necessary to attain educational achievements and to put education on par with that of other countries. Even though the South African education system tends to develop policies in a reactive manner, there are various policies and legislative frameworks designed to guide the system, define roles and responsibilities and redress the inequalities of the past. Policy documents that inform the accessibility of equitable education, the provision of school-based support and the theoretical framework that underpins the study will be discussed. These are the policies that address issues of access to equitable education and school-based support.

2.2.6.1 Policy regarding access to equitable education

The National Education Policy Act (NEPA) 27 of 1996 provides for access to equitable education by all South African children. The policy is grounded on principles of accessibility of equitable education and educational resources necessary to improve learning outcomes, cooperation with other departments and entities on educational matters, accessibility of support services and the creation of opportunities to learn to promote lifelong learning. All these aspects are connected to the improvement of school-based support for access to education and success of learners, particularly rural learners. Policy is crucial in education, particularly in providing frameworks, prescripts and parameters within which the education sector is to operate effectively.

Although the prescripts of National Education Policy Act (NEPA) (27 of 1996) tick all the boxes regarding the explored phenomenon, challenges have always been with the implementation phase, which usually adopts a top-down approach in the South African education sector and across the globe. The approach has negative implications due to its nature of excluding role players who are usually located in the implementation phase. Yildirim (2021), agrees and stated that the top-down approach hampers the morale and teachers' attitudes, which in turn affects their policy implementation efforts. Policy implementers are not always consulted or involved in the decision-making processes. Such decisions are made at the top and escalated down to school level for implementation, which usually poses challenges since policies do not always take rural contexts into account.

Policy development is not always accompanied by the provision of resources necessary to ensure effective implementation. Madondo (2020), found that some of the challenges of effective curriculum implementation are lack of resources, support and knowledge or skills necessary for successful implementation. NEPA provides for accessibility of equitable education by all children, but it does not make explicit provision for resources for "cultivating skills necessary for reconstruction and development". Rural schools are

usually characterised by a lack of resources and suitably skilled teachers and use resources at their disposal that might not be suitable to remedy past inequalities.

In assessing the implementation of the learner progression policy in Limpopo, Mogale and Modipane (2021), found various challenges that impede its effective implementation. Among such challenges are lack of support, teachers' attitudes towards the policy and inadequate skills and knowledge regarding its successful implementation indicating that teachers usually do not understand the policies they are supposed to implement. Furthermore, schools do not always establish support structures necessary for effective policy implementation. In their case, one school did not establish a support team as prescribed in the learner progression policy. Findings by Mogale and Modipane (2021), are in line with those of Mavrogordato and White (2020), who state that sometimes school principals unwittingly obstruct policy implementation due to failure to understand the policy itself and poor implementation approaches adopted.

As indicated earlier, attracting and retaining teachers in rural schools has a fundamental significance on the accessibility of equitable education, the creation of opportunities to learn and the provision of support to learners. It was also stated that attracting and retaining teachers in rural schools is a universal challenge, one which different countries have attempted to address. See, Morris, Gorard, Kokotsaki and Abdi (2020), indicate that there is insufficient empirical evidence of successful intervention strategies for teacher retention. However, there is some evidence that financial incentives motivate teachers in rural schools to continue with their profession, even though it does not retain them longer than the system would have anticipated. Formulation of policies is the foremost strategy that education departments across the globe focus on to retain teachers in rural schools (Shuls & Flores, 2020).

The National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa (2006), was introduced to address teacher recruitment, retention challenges and management of skills required for effective teaching. Within the policy framework is the provision of incentives to encourage professional development. There is insufficient

evidence to suggest the significance of the policy in attracting and retaining teachers. However, there is some evidence to suggest that policies do not always bring intended changes. Ledger, Masinir, Delgado and Murdoch, 2021 (2021), argue that policy directives usually reflect urban or semi-urban contexts, which are totally different from the rural context. The misalignment of policy directives and contexts presents implementation challenges, rendering policies ineffective. As indicated in the preceding chapter, the one-size-fits-all kind of policy development does not produce the intended results.

It is undeniably clear that the South African education department develops policies in a reactive manner. For example, the Policy on the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy in Schools (2021), was introduced because of the spiking number of teenage pregnancies reported in schools. The policy directives include accessibility of certain services such as counselling and healthcare, which are not always accessible to rural learners indicating misalignment of directives and resource allocation as mentioned by Ledger, Masinir, Delgado and Murdoch (2021). The provision of support prescribed by the policy might require that training be provided to all parties concerned, which might be challenging given the resource constraints that characterise rural schools.

2.2.6.2 Policy related to the provision of school-based support

Makhalemele and Nel (2021), determined the success of school-level supports and reveal challenges such as ensuring that initiated support produces the desired results and assigning roles and responsibilities, among other things. Their finding indicates that despite the intentions of any policy, there will always be challenges in the implementation stages, particularly when policymakers do not take different contexts into consideration.

The policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) was introduced to identify educational barriers and provide interventions for all learners who require additional support (Department of Basic Education, 2014b). The policy also directs the establishment of support teams at school and district levels to support teachers, learners and education in general. In addition to the provision of support, the policy is aimed at the

improvement of accessibility to education by all children, irrespective of their physical and environmental barriers. The policy provides that the established support teams should determine learners' support needs and apply appropriate measures, either addressing identified challenges through support interventions at school level, referrals of challenges to districts or other relevant bodies to address them or sourcing expertise support outside of schools' ambit implying that collaboration with other stakeholders such as the health department to provide the necessary support to learners in need is required.

Equivalent to other policies in the education sector, the policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) presents implementation challenges (Department of Basic Education, 2014b). Makhalemele and Payne-Van Staden (2020), found that although school-based support teams understood the intent of the policy, they lacked collaboration and knowledge necessary to effective fulfilment of their roles and responsibilities. Similarly, Makhalemele and Tlale (2020). Some studies found that although support teams understand the intent of the policy, they lack collaboration and the knowledge necessary to effectively fulfil their roles and responsibilities found that support teams understood and recognised the importance of support in education, however, continuous capacitation is key in enhancing their capabilities. Some studies indicate that the attitudes of support teams towards certain support needs impede the efforts of providing effective support due to people's perceptions of learners' different sexual orientation, which, according to Brown and Buthelezi (2020), calls for extensive teaching training.

The implementation of any policy is hampered by inadequate or lack of resources necessary for effective implementation. Tsotetsi and Omodan (2020), maintain that lack of resources and support from district offices presents challenges in implementing the policy. They further state that lack of parental participation in the provision of school-based support exacerbates implementation challenges. Parental involvement reinforces effective communication, thus improving learner educational success (Bachman, Anderman, Zyromski & Boone, 2021). Moorhouse, Lee and Herd (2021), add that effective teacher support requires collaboration, building of relationships, demarcation of roles that each

player is required to play and assigning of responsibilities. The available policies do not explicitly cater for school-based support. Instead, most of the policies on inclusion refer to support services for learners and teachers. A search of various journal sites did not yield policies that addresses specifically with school-based support.

2.3 Conclusion

The literature related to the topic was reviewed in chapter 2 to provide an overview of the importance of school-based support in teaching and learning, factors influencing accessibility of equitable education and success of rural learners and policy context. The review revealed existing studies that spoke to the topic of the current study and exposed gaps in literature. Most of the studies focus on support for learners with physical impairments and delivery of inclusive education. The current study capitalised on the literature gaps by determining existing approaches that schools use to improve school-based support. In the next chapter, the theoretical framework underpinning the study will be discussed.

CHAPTER 3

WENGER'S COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE AS A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR SCHOOL-BASED SUPPORT

3.1 Introduction

In chapter 2, existing literature related to the current study was reviewed to provide an overview of findings of studies that explored similar phenomena. The review of existing literature also presented an opportunity to determine what has already been studied as well as literature gaps. The literature reviewed covered various aspects that relate to the topic such as school-based support, policy context and access to education and success of all learners. In chapter 3, a theoretical framework through which the improvement of school-based support for access to education and success of rural learners can be analysed and interpreted will be discussed. The adopted theory provided a lens through which the phenomenon for the current study can be explored.

3.1.1 The role of theory in research

Theory is an important aspect of research because it guides researchers on how studies ought to be conducted, it holds the study together and guides the research design and methodologies. Theoretical framework refers to a theoretical perspective that underpins the study, an overview that is used as a lens to explore the research problem. It comprises “relevant literature, theories, concepts, beliefs, assumptions and expectations” (Heng, 2020: 799), which are intertwined to form a theoretical perspective that guides the undertaking of research, provides a foundation for research (Chukwuere, 2021), informs research, affects data analysis processes and provides researchers with knowledge of existing studies related to the topic.

3.1.2 Rationale for choosing Wenger's community of practice theory

I chose Wenger's (1998), community of practice as a theory to underpin the current study. The choice was based on the view that the provision of support is not an isolated phenomenon and is less effective when done in silos. The rationale behind the choice of the theory to underpin the study lies in that education is a societal issue, which requires contribution of each member of a society. The community of practice theory advocates for regular interactions, sharing ideas, views and possible solutions to challenges. The current study aligns with the chosen theoretical constructs (Luft, Jeong, Idsardi & Gardner, 2022), in that the latter focuses is interactions, collaborations, participation and engagements. Support is usually conducted by school-based support and district-based support teams which are at the centre of supporting teaching and learning activities. Parents cannot succeed in providing effective support to their children on their own; they rely on additional support from schools, other parents and community members. Partnership with others can mitigate various educational challenges or needs that impede access and performance. All these aspects are core to Wenger's community of practice theory.

Parents and schools collaborate with mental health professionals, which increases the accessibility of mental health services to children. Studies also found that regular engagement or meetings with and securing support from relevant stakeholders can lead to educational success (Kammer, King, Donahay a& Koeberl, 2021). Berzener and Deneme (2021), reiterate the importance of partnering and found that cooperative and collaborative learning methods were more effective in Turkish English First Language learners' success of reading comprehension than the traditional method of individual learning. Collaborative efforts address individual and group needs of each participant, thus increasing the intensity of support and productivity at the end (Kammer, King, Donahay & Koeberl, 2021).

Success in education is influenced largely by collaboration (Krasniqi, 2021), participation (Sibanda, 2021), training or professional development and resource provision (Chauke & Tabane, 2021). According to Krasniqi (2021), the establishment of professional

communities provides platforms for collaborative learning through members' participation in events and mentoring opportunities. Communities promote learning from each other through information sharing and collaborative learning, which in turn provide professional development. I deemed it necessary to explore the improvement of school-based support for access to learning and success of rural learners through Wenger's community of practice theory, which allows members to share best practices that they can employ in respect of similar challenges in their schools or professional development. Wenger's community of practice theory (1991,) will be discussed from the perspective of its inception, roots and its significance in education.

The current study is underpinned by the concept that the creation of support networks aimed at integrating knowledge, skills, ideas and experiences could negatively affect the improvement of school-based support for access to education and success of rural learners. As indicated earlier, the study is underpinned by Étienne Charles Wenger's theory of community of practice, formulated in 1991, in its endeavour to answer the research question. A community of practice is defined as a group of people who are brought together by their shared goals, interests or concerns and have regular interaction to discuss and share ideas as well as learn from each other. Brinton, Chilmonik, Echelberger, Koi and Monh (2021), explain that a community is established by members themselves and its purpose and functions also determined by its members. Furthermore, they indicate that members of a community collaborate on tasks in accordance with their abilities or competencies.

The fact that communities are organised by members for members allows members to be vulnerable, exposing their strengths and limitations; according to Brinton, Chilmonik, Echelberger, Koi and Monh (2021), opening doors for support, guidance and assistance by fellow members. Community of practice theory provides a basis for the current study because it nurtures collaboration, communication, continuous professional development and engagements, all of which are basic elements of effective school-based support.

3.2 Background to Wenger's Community of Practice Theory

The roots of Wenger's community of practice theory can be traced to various worldviews such as situated learning, pragmatism and social learning. The theory describes learning as a "process of situated cognition, legitimate peripheral participation in communities of practice" (Buch, 2021: 130). Community of practice theory was developed as a theory that seeks to understand how a group of people brought together by common denominators learn from one another, evolve and achieve their common goals (Prefontaine, Mullen, Güven, Rispler, Rethman, Bergin, Hinko & Fracchiolla, 2021). These ideological constructs promote collaboration, engagement, experience and partnerships. Theories that influenced the theory will be discussed in the sections that follow to fully grasp the origins of community of practice theory.

3.2.1 Situated learning theory

Situated learning was introduced by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger in 1991 (Chang, 2021). The authors introduced a new way of learning, one that entailed the contribution of social contexts in learning. Situated learning focused on learning through processing information into knowledge in what is deemed authentic learning settings or contexts (Yildiz, 2020). Knowledge cannot be acquired apart from its context; it occurs gradually in conjunction with its social context (Spanellis, Pyrko & Dörfler, 2021). The contexts are viewed as authentic because learning takes place in simulated real-life contexts in which people or learners can immerse themselves and participate in learning. Knowledge is developed through authentic experiences and interaction with others.

Cydis, Haria and Meyers (2021), describe situated learning as the acquisition of knowledge in its natural or authentic setting, which increases the likelihood of effective assimilation. Situating learning in foreign contexts, for example, has been found to expose students to different knowledge and culture-rich contexts (Chang, 2021). Situated learning is rooted in the notion that a thorough understanding of knowledge requires that we "immerse ourselves in a context where knowledge is originally generated" (Chang, 2021:

6). By using foreign sites as learning contexts, students are exposed to different social and economic settings, allowing them to acquire new experiences from such knowledge and culture-rich environments.

There are three principles of situated learning, which are authentic context, social interaction and authentic learning. Authentic context refers to learning that involves real-world contexts and their problems and that are relevant to the learner, trainee or student. It implies that learning is effective and successful when it occurs in authentic situations with authentic problems or challenges to gain authentic experiences. For example, trainees are exposed to real assignments with similar intricacies and trials to those that they would encounter in real work situations (Yildiz, 2020). Furthermore, Yildiz (2020), asserts that exposing trainees in similar contexts to their envisaged work environments builds character and competence. Through the situated learning approach, teachers are exposed to simulated classroom intricacies, with the intention of bridging the gap between college experiences and classroom realities. Contextualising prospective teachers' training prepares them for classroom realities.

Another principle of situated learning is social context. The principle is based on the notion that people are interconnected to each other in various aspects of their lives. Carmona-Medeiro and Cardeñoso Domingo (2021), indicates that interconnectedness is key to sustainable development, particularly in teacher training due to its nature of creating an environment that allows people to interact, connect and learn from each other. Through social interaction, people in a similar field share ideas and knowledge, thereby exposing each other to different ways of viewing and understanding things. Social interaction promotes effective learning because knowledge acquisition takes place through a community where members actively participate in meaningful activities, which encourages collaboration and participation.

Learning through social context originated from a Russian psychologist named Lev Vygotsky (1978). In terms of Vygotsky's (1978), sociocultural theory, contexts, society or environmental conditions influence people's development. Learning is not based on

consumption of content only, but through a combination of various social activities that progress to form knowledge or knowing. People rely on experiences derived from social contexts, communities or relationships to formulate an understanding necessary for learning (Sibanda & Kajee, 2019). People can draw from their experiences as a source of learning and share their practices with each other. Their social interaction acts as a learning hub, which they draw from to enrich their teaching and learning environments.

Vygotsky's (1978), sociocultural theory states that learning takes place because of the interaction between people and their surrounding environments and that people's intelligence originates from their experiences in society and culture (Ameri, 2020).

Social interaction is an extension of Vygotsky's (1978), sociocultural theory in that it accentuates the role that social context and interaction play in learning. Social interaction is instrumental in capacity building because it allows knowledge and skill acquisition and the embracing of different viewpoints or understanding. Social interaction stimulates collaboration, which creates exposure to collaborative learning experiences that could contribute to greater acquisition of knowledge. Through social interaction, people consider others' perspectives and imitate others' behaviours, which exposes them to new skills and knowledge (Calinog, Kugel, Krpalek & Salamat, 2021), indicating the significance of social interaction exerts in any learning situation.

Authentic contexts provide opportunities to learn through authentic projects and activities, which in turn lead to authentic learning. Learners, for example, can apply the knowledge and experiences acquired in authentic contexts in their real life (Shadiev, Hwang & Ghinea, 2022). Authentic learning involves authentic learning activities within a particular context (Jopp, 2019). Authentic learning is described as an approach that encourages the application of activities that occur within authentic contexts (Jopp, 2019). The approach affords members opportunities to acquire new knowledge and skills necessary to improve themselves and their work environments. The authentic learning approach is rooted in constructivism theory, which encourages learning through real experiences, experiments and problems (Shah, 2019).

Constructivists believe that teachers, for example, are not only responsible for transmission of content, but play a role in guiding and facilitating learning activities, steering them towards authentic knowledge acquisition. Similarly, constructivists assert that learners are not only required to reproduce learning content but are guided towards knowledge construction based on learning that occurs in authentic contexts and through social interaction (Shah, 2019).

When studying the impact of authentic learning on mathematics success, Uzunboylu, Tezer and Yildiz (2020), found that the authentic learning approach positively influenced performance in Mathematics. It is worldview that influences people conduct, viewpoint and exposes individuals' authentic experiences (Aynas & Aslan, 2021). The principle of authentic learning also advocates sharing of ideas, experiences and collaboration and bridges the gap between classroom and real-life experiences for learners and prospective teachers.

Situated learning theory focuses mainly on learning experiences through real-life context and problems, and its principle of social interaction affords engagement opportunities, which improve knowledge, skills and understanding. The theory proclaims that learning is situated not only in an individual's brain, but also in his or her interpersonal interaction with others (Zheng, 2020). In addition, learning is situated within authentic contexts and allows for effective knowledge acquisition because of constant social interactions, which produces authentic learning. The emphasis is on learning through exposure to authentic context, social interaction, authentic learning and learning through experiences (Schrum, Majury & Simonelli, 2021), and learning should not only occur through imparting and grasping of learning content without real-life references. The thread that connects Situated learning, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), and Wenger's community of practice theory is learning through social interaction, engaging with others who share similar experiences, views and challenges.

3.2.2 American pragmatism concept of community of inquiry

The roots of Wenger's theory of community of practice can also be traced to the American pragmatism concept of community of inquiry, which was founded by an American philosopher called Charles Sanders Peirce in the 18th century (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). Peirce considered pragmatism as a "theory of meaning" (Ormerod, 2020: 799). Pragmatism is based on the Greek word *pragma*, which refers to action (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019: 3). Pragmatism was advocated by various scholars, among them William James and John Dewey, who were the major contributors to the philosophy. American pragmatism emphasises practical learning, in other words, the application of practical approaches when addressing actual challenges (Maarouf, 2019). The main premise of pragmatism is that effective learning takes place through human experiences and interaction with others and the environment (Firmanto, Rahmawati, Degeng & Chusniyah, 2019).

Pragmatism maintains that social contexts contribute towards learning. It rejects traditional forms of learning because they are viewed as distanced from social realities, imposing teachers' ideas and views in teaching and learning, and do not promote cooperation and learner developments (Nweke & Owoh, 2020). Instead of constructing their own knowledge, learners are fed teachers' knowledge laden with the teachers' perceptions and interpretations. Pragmatists maintain that education should promote learners' growth and development and should therefore be learner centred. Villadsen (2022), affirms that pragmatism's main stance is that moral convictions are connected to social context and lived experiences, implying that any form of learning cannot be separated from contexts in which they occur. The success and effectiveness of learning also rely on the kind of knowledge emitted by the environment in which they take place. Villadsen (2022), emphasises the importance of experiences derived from social contexts in learning.

Furthermore, pragmatism was based on the notion that meanings are construed from the relationship between received ideas and practical experiences (Firmanto, Rahmawati, Degeng & Chusniyah, 2019). Constructing meaning is influenced by our contexts, past

and future practices. Pragmatism is embedded in the premise of getting things done sequentially and functionally (Ormerod, 2020). The theory further asserts that people are not passive receptors of stimuli but are actively involved in the construction of knowledge and derive their meanings from their experiences as well.

In highlighting its contribution to education, Rai and Lama (2020), state that pragmatism promotes efficiency in education. They further argue that education should provide real-life experiences and be planned around and centred on learners' capabilities. Pragmatists claim that knowledge and truths lie in practical and observable contexts. Pragmatism's claims is in line with Wenger's community of practice theory, which maintains that knowledge and skills are easily and effectively transferrable through social interaction and engagement within the constructs of communities. American pragmatism concept of community of inquiry relates to community of practice through its emphasis on learning through interacting and engaging with fellow humans. These theories share similar sentiments that learning is not an isolated phenomenon, it occurs within the constructs of participation, engagement and interaction with others withing similar domain.

3.2.3 Social learning theory

Social learning theory was developed by a Canadian psychologist named Albert Bandura in 1963 (Bandura, 1977). Bandura (1977), was interested in learning through observation and modelling of others. Social learning theory asserts that learning is influenced largely by observing, modelling and experiencing others' behaviour (Deri, 2022), insinuating that learning occurs not only cognitively, but also by observing others through social interaction in social contexts. Social interaction exposes people to experiences that influence their behaviour. Gedzi, Dumbé and Ahenkora (2019), suggest that the same applies to teaching and learning or education in general.

Social learning theory consists of four phases, which are attention, retention, reproduction and motivation (Stanley, Banks, Matthew & Brown, 2020). The retention phase is characterised by paying close attention, focusing on the surrounding environment and

interacting with others. During the retention phase, acquired knowledge or information is stored for retrieval whenever required. Learned and stored knowledge and strategies are applied in real situations and their effectiveness is assessed in the reproduction phase. Some of the characteristics of retention phases is engagement, collaboration and general assessment of the effectiveness of the applied strategies and the likelihood of applying them in similar contexts or challenges. During the motivation phase, learned or observed behaviour, knowledge or strategy is modelled or repeated. Stanley, Banks, Matthew and Brown, (2020), state that the motivation phase is an eye-opener, as it makes people realise that they are more effective when they collaborate, partner or combine their efforts.

According to Gedzi, Dumbé and Ahenkora (2019), learning through mentoring, for example, implies that mentees will observe and model their mentors' behaviour or teachings and embrace those as their own experiences to the extent that they apply them in real-life contexts. Similarly, the relationship between superiors and subordinates is characterised by adopting the observed behaviour and mannerisms as one's own, applying them in one's context to resolve challenges or achieve goals. Constant interaction with each other results in adopting observed and experienced traits and behaviours that people find suitable to apply in their daily lives. Seyyed, Howell, Muniz, Cochran, Kabiri and Fontaine (2020), also found that when youths associate or interact with their peers who are cyberbullies, they emulate such behaviour and become cyberbullies themselves. Seyyed, Howell, Muniz, Cochran, Kabiri and Fontaine (2020), is emphasising the power of observing and modelling the behaviour of those with whom we are in constant contact.

The most crucial aspects of social learning theory that relate to community of practice theory are engagement, social interaction and participation. Seemingly, Deri (2022), reveals that PhD students' self-efficacy and academic writing improved dramatically when they interacted with fellow students in social context where they exchanged ideas and knowledge and modelled learned behaviour, experiences or strategies. The findings of that study suggest that when people step outside of their comfort zones and interact with others with whom they share common interests, goals and concerns, they improve their capabilities to absorb more knowledge and are more efficient and effective in their

endeavours. Social learning and community of practice theories advocate for learning through collaboration, interaction and participation, all of which lead to direct experience.

In addition to enhancing learners' ability to learn through modelling and observing others (Yildirim, Isik, Gulcek & Aylaz, 2020), studies reveal that the application of social learning theory in various contexts enhances self-efficacy, skills and practices in the workplace, which are important in the improvement of school-based support (Koutroubas & Galanakis, 2022). The improvement of school-based support also relies on team members' belief in themselves and their capabilities to make the right decisions in identifying barriers to learning, assessing learning needs and addressing challenges efficiently. Social contexts can provide grounds for school-based and district-based support teams with opportunities to observe and model other members' behaviour and experiences. Both Social Learning and Wenger's community of practice foster interaction and advocates for acquisition of knowledge and practices through connecting with one another (Wenger, 2018). Engagement between people allows them opportunities to gain insights regarding certain issues from each other through observation and modelling others behaviour.

3.3 Wenger's Community of Practice Theory

The focus has shifted from situated learning in social contexts to collaborative learning, participation and sharing ideas, knowledge, experiences and expertise to enrich the learning process. Whereas situated learning focused on informal learning in social contexts as opposed to formal and planned learning, community of practice focuses on the creation of formal structures that act as informal learning hubs outside normal contexts such as classrooms (Romero & Vasilopoulos, 2020). A group of people share ideas, concerns, resources, skills and knowledge on identifying, assessing and addressing challenges associated with teaching, learning and provision of support.

The expansion of community of practice theory involves participative and collaborative learning through communities within organisations, thus situating learning within existing organisational communities. The theory of community of practice focuses on learning

through a dedicated group of people with a collective interest, who share common goals or interests and meet on a regular basis to discuss, learn from each other and improve their common goals (Lave, 2019). These people may also develop strategies on how to improve learning, identify and address challenges and share ideas on how to utilise available resources optimally. It is the relationship between learning and a social situation in which learning occurs (Hindi, Willis & Schafheutle, 2022). Communities are available in all organisations, including schools, and they could be formal or informal.

Community of practice theory is rooted in the notion that learning is a collaborative process that involves social participation and that meaningful learning is influenced by the participative and collaborative nature of members of a particular community in organised and structured activities. Through such participation, members capacitate, enrich and learn from each other because they share their knowledge, ideas and expertise (Ghamrawi, 2022). Through expanding situated learning and pragmatism theories, the concept of community of practice was born. Community of practice was developed as an alternative to other learning theories that consider learning as an individual process that takes place separately from contexts, other people and processes.

Ceran and Bahadir (2019), describe communities of practice as a group of people who have common interests, desires, concerns or problems in a specific subject or field and wish to enhance their knowledge, skills and experience in that subject or field through regular engagements and interaction. A community of practice is the basis of knowledge development because it promotes participation, collaboration and interaction (Romero & Vasilopoulos, 2020). The common thread that connects community of practice, social learning and situated learning is that learning is inseparable from the social context in which it occurs. When people engage in structured activities, it opens participation and mentoring opportunities, which subsequently lead to gaining substantial knowledge and skills applicable to real-life settings (Jaiswal, Magana, Lyon, Gundlach & Ward, 2021).

Initially, community of practice was described as a group of people who, in the same profession and social context, come together to support learning through exchanging and

sharing ideas, knowledge and expertise (Lave, 2019), but was revised to indicate that people within the community of practice do not necessarily have to work together or be in the same profession or field. They could be people in different fields who are brought together by their shared interests, concerns, beliefs and desires and who spend time together through regular meetings, sharing information to solve common problems that they encounter in their working environments (Delgado, Siow, De Groot, McLane & Hedlin, 2020). Bergan, Krwempig, Utsi and B ee (2021), describe community of practice as a network or group of people who are friends or co-workers and who are brought together by their shared interests.

Eslahchi and Osman (2021), point out that although a community of practice requires some level of organising, for example meeting schedules, venues, it is not mandatory to establish an organised structure or entity which is governed by certain rules and laws. It is an informal forum where, in educational contexts, teachers and other school personnel are brought together by their shared goals to engage in the community with the intention to enrich and capacitate one another. Instead of strict rules, regulations and laws, there could be guiding principles established for continuity and sustainability of the community.

The community of practice approach provides members with a mentoring platform, with experienced teachers mentoring and supporting new teachers who are just entering the profession. Mentoring programmes enhance mentors' experience and leadership abilities. Teachers can assess and identify their own needs, which could lead self-reliant and actualisation (Brinton, Chilmonik, Echelberger, Koi & Monh, 2021). When considering establishing a community of practice, initiators should gauge people's support and interest in joining the community to garner their support (Brinton, Chilmonik, Echelberger, Koi & Monh, 2021). A community of practice should have its mission and goals that it intends to accomplish, and it should be able to promote knowledge management once established and engage in regular communication. Keeping records through management plans will ensure sustainability of gained information even if the community is disbanded or no longer functional.

Community of practice theory entails mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire (Hyder, Adcock & Brown, 2020). In mutual engagement, community members build collaborative and partnership relationships through their regular participation in the community. Through participation, community members also establish their concepts, rules and expectations that members adhere to. Community members are bound and guided by these concepts and rules on their journey to achieve their goals. A joint enterprise is a common purpose shared by community members that binds them together. They share a common understanding and are bound by the commonality; hence the name 'joint enterprise'. Another aspect of Wenger's theory of community of practice is shared repertoire, which is a common practice through which the community produces a set of common resources necessary to achieve its goals.

In addition, collaborations have been found to enhance communication and socialising skills, which are essential in the improvement of school-based support. These collaborations and partnerships are built on the need to improve support aimed at addressing barriers to learning and enhancing classroom intervention strategies, methodological approaches and general management of schools. Findings of Runhare, Ouda, Vele and Mudzielwana (2021), suggest that collaboration between school leadership and communities was effective in curbing learner drop-out in some of the South African secondary schools that participated in their study, indicative of the important role that a functional community of practice plays in the improvement of school-based support. Wenger's community of practice theory comprises domain, community and practice components and these will be discussed in detail in sections that follows.

3.3.1 Components of community of practice theory

The structure of a community of practice consists of three dimensions, which are **domain**, **community** and **practice**. Bergan, Krwempig, Utsi and Bøe (2021), indicate that the founding principle of a community of practice is a belief that people's substance is ingrained in their roles within the community they belong.

3.3.1.1 Domain

Members of a community learn together and from each other through their mutual engagement, collaboration and interaction. A community provides members with the opportunity to participate and demonstrate their commitment, which gives them a sense of identity and belonging (Irving, McPadden & Caballero, 2020). In the context of the study, these parties strive to ensure accessibility of learning by all learners and attain success through the improvement of learning outcomes. Their passion for educating the nation is a shared common interest that brings and binds them together.

3.3.1.2 The community

A community of practice is organised by members for members, and connects and allows them to acquire new ideas, knowledge and experiences. Bergan, Krwempig, Utsi and B e (2021), suggest that the establishment of a community of practice might or might not require a certain level of structure and leadership. For example, teachers and other educational stakeholders might organise themselves based on their common interest of teaching, learning, provision of support or subject matter. A community becomes a platform where its members engage, collaborate and participate in activities or meetings on a regular basis. It is an arena that allows members to be vulnerable, exposing their challenges, weaknesses and strengths and supporting each other in the process. Principals or some teachers with leadership qualities could assume leadership roles, depending on the structure of the established community. Since participation and engagement in the community is voluntary, each member takes full responsibility for their actions and participation.

3.3.1.3 Practice

Practice implies that members in a community of practice develop some form of a repository of resources through commonly developed and shared experiences (Bergan, Krwempig, Utsi & B e, 2021), learn through participation in the activities of the community

(Fracchiolla, Prefontaine & Hinko, 2020). Repertoire implies that members establish and maintain a common way of doing things and that could also translate to the way members use resources, participate in activities and their general approaches to identifying and addressing challenges. Members carry out their responsibilities in accordance with the concepts, frameworks or guidelines they developed during the establishment of a community. The repertoire dimension includes the prescribed activities that are carried out to achieve the goals set out for the group (Fracchiolla, Prefontaine & Hinko, 2020).

3.3.2 Community of practice theory in education context

Sharing knowledge and practices is one of the cornerstones of teaching and learning. It is a practice that helps members to resolve challenges they encounter. In educational contexts, sharing of practices could imply members supporting each other through sharing teaching strategies and intervention programmes necessary to uplift each other, their learners and parents and to address challenges experienced in their schools. Members who understand and relate to such practices are more likely to adopt them and apply them in their own contexts. Irving, Mcpadden, and Caballero (2019), assert that information sharing and applying shared knowledge to one's context builds members' identity, competency and acceptance by the community. The groups' regular interaction allows them to identify relevant resources to take their processes forward, which leads to capacity building necessary for the improvement of needs analysis and problem identification efforts.

Community of practice is an approach that encourages sharing of innovative ideas, developing new methods of addressing challenges and enabling members to learn from each other through their engagements. The effectiveness of any community relies heavily on members' interactions through continuous engagements and their willingness to involve other parties outside their immediate circle. When teachers are willing to interact inside and outside of their classrooms, they continuously share best practices, which acts as a support mechanism (Romero & Vasilopoulos, 2020). Voluntary participation is vital in

the provision of support as members assist each other through coordinated efforts of information and resource sharing.

The provision of effective school-based support also relies on the recognition that effective teaching and learning is influenced not only by social factors, but by cultural background, belief systems, ideas, thoughts and the environment. Wenger's theory of community of practice is also rooted in the notion that learning occurs through observing and imitating others within the learning context, be it at home, school or the community, and is therefore influenced by social contexts. Taking all these aspects into consideration when planning support strategies will improve school-based support that provides a holistic approach to identifying and addressing challenges that face the education sector.

Akin to other theories, Wenger's community of practice theory has its limitations, one of which is dysfunctionality of communities. Established communities might not function effectively or at all, which in turn might influence the impact that the community was intended to exert. There is also the probability of lack of regular and continuous interactions or engagements due to time constraints, which could result in the dysfunctionality of communities. Lack of regular engagement, interaction and communication by established school-based support teams have been found to hinder teachers' ability to address barriers to learning (Makhalemele & Tlale, 2020). Continuous interaction allows members to share emerging innovations and intervention strategies that can be applied to their school contexts. Communities that do not schedule regular engagements and activities are unable to generate and cultivate collaborative knowledge that they can apply in their respective schools (Glaze-Crampes, 2020).

Studies reviewed in chapter 2 revealed varied challenges that schools, particularly rural schools, are exposed to, one of which is accessibility of adequately qualified teachers and their retention. Since the quality of teachers is also influenced by continuous professional development, establishing and maintaining a community of practice can expose teachers to a certain level of professional development through continuous interaction with other experts or people who share similar views. Glaze-Crampes (2020), are also of the view

that a community of practice can be a hub for professional development, provided members play complementary roles that empower each other.

Saka (2021), also appears to agree when stating that engaging in a community of practice fosters teacher collaboration, which enhances learning outcomes. Other scholars who also concur that teacher collaboration activities improve teacher quality are Kammer, King, Donahay and Koeberl (2021), and Bergan, Krwempig, Utsi and B ee (2021), who indicate that a community of practice promotes learning and broadens teachers' perspectives on the value of collaboration. When members of a community of practice interact regularly, they experience growth due to exposure to certain information, skills, knowledge and materials, which expands their views and ways of doing things (Ching, 2021). All these scholars affirm that participating in community of practice activities generates collaborative knowledge, which is instrumental in professional development.

3.3.3 Creating and sustaining a community of practice

Communities of practice are created by members for members who share interests, goals and concerns. The creation of a community of practice involves an interest by potential members to create a community and an agreement that there are issues that require their attention and that the productive manner of addressing such issues is to create a discussion platform characterised by regular interaction. In the school environment, for example, teachers and other educational officials will assess their needs and those of their learners and come to an agreement that there is a need for a robust intervention to address those needs. Brinton, Chilmonik, Echelberger, Koi and Monh (2021), concurs and refer to as the potential stage, where members come to an agreement and understanding that they need to establish a community of practice.

The potential phase is also influenced by the group's interests, attitudes, knowledge, expertise and willingness to work and collaborate with others (Brinton, Chilmonik, Echelberger, Koi & Monh, 2021). It is a stage of creating a platform that serves as a learning environment characterised by mutual respect and trust, which, according to Irving,

McPadden and Caballero, (2020), affords members opportunities to engage freely and constructively. Although these communities are usually self-governed, Bergan, Krwempig, Utsi and Bøe (2021), stress that they still need strong foundation and leadership to flourish.

The community should consist of members who seek to improve their practices to address social related challenges and create favourable learning environments (Romero & Vasilopoulos, 2020). Members in a community play different roles and are assigned varying responsibilities. The importance of rotating roles and responsibilities, especially leadership roles, is also highlighted by Brinton, Chilmonik, Echelberger, Koi and Monh (2021), who indicate that rotation provides each member with an opportunity to acquire leadership skills and knowledge.

Although a community of practice within a particular organisation is normally initiated by members, there are instances where leaders initiate the creation of communities. In Cambodia, for example, Brinton, Chilmonik, Echelberger, Koi and Monh (2021), found that the government initiated the creation of a community of practice within the education system. The community started small but grew exponentially into a large community with many participants. Members had access to and used government resources. Although the community of practice was initiated by the government, its fundamental role was to create a platform for teachers and other officials to share ideas and address challenges associated with teaching and learning and professional development.

The initial point in the creation of a community of practice is to ensure that members have common ground, goals, concerns and intentions in the involvement of a community. This statement is supported by findings of Philander and Botha (2021), that teachers who were passionate about the improvement of their knowledge of Natural Sciences found it necessary to establish a community to sharpen their skills. The common denominator between these teachers was the fact that they taught the same subject and had an interest in improving their knowledge and skills around that specific subject. As Romero and Vasilopoulos (2020) point out, these people should be willing to work together and to share their knowledge and expertise with each other. Teachers in Philander and Botha's study

(2021), were willing to collaborate and participate in an enriching environment, thus creating a community of practice.

Once the potential stage is realised, the community of practice progresses to what Brinton, Chilmonik, Echelberger, Koi and Monh (2021: 137), term the “launching or coalescing stage” where members come together and begin to plan or design activities that the community will engage in. Chen, Kearns, Eaton, Hoffman, Leonard and Samuels (2022), explain that the coalescing stage is when members establish and share mutual connections and interests. They establish themselves and become known within their organisations. The community will begin to blossom when its activities and impact reach others outside of their organisations, resulting in more members joining and participating, sharing experiences and practices to improve their performance as teachers and that of their learners.

Some communities also establish schedules of meetings and activities to sustain the community and maintain continuity. The activities organised by leading members provide a platform for members to express their views, knowledge and experiences freely, thus promoting assertiveness and the ability to solve problems. The roles that members of a community play and their willingness to engage opens doors for certain opportunities, either regarding teaching and learning or professional development. Equivalently, Ching (2021), found that members were exposed to teaching opportunities that they would not otherwise have been exposed to had it not been for their affiliations and regular and meaningful interactions with fellow members. The effectiveness and functionality of a community of practice are determined and solidified by the frequency of engagements and participation. The insinuation is that the community of practice functions best when members meet or engage voluntarily and on a regular basis (Bergan, Krwempig, Utsi & Bee, 2021).

A schedule of meetings, as mentioned earlier, assists members in gaining and maintaining momentum, frequency and continuity. The sustainability of a community of practice depends largely on members’ dedication to participate and engage voluntarily in all

planned activities. Another aspect that sustains the community of practice is communication between members (Hyder, Adcock & Brown, 2020). Through communication, information regarding scheduled meetings and events is disseminated to members timeously. Communication between members could be face-to-face or via social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp and others, depending on members' preferences (Brinton, Chilmonik, Echelberger, Koi & Monh, 2021).

Sustainability and continuity of the community is dependent on members' willingness to share responsibilities and engage collaboratively (Hyder, Adcock, & Brown, 2020). Some of those roles and responsibilities that can sustain a community are planning, coordinating or facilitating engagements, events or meetings and leadership roles. Members who assume leadership roles are also responsible for outsourcing support from external stakeholders and organisations. Where human beings with varying ideologies, thinking processes, views and belief systems converge, disagreements, differing views and expectations are likely to emerge. Brinton, Chilmonik, Echelberger, Koi and Monh (2021), assert that to sustain a functional community of practice, members should be willing to put their differences aside and work towards the achievement of their common goals. In other words, the aims, mission and goals of the community should surpass any individual or groups' contentions.

A well-functioning community of practice will potentially grow into a bigger group since its impact has an overreaching and overarching effect. Coincidentally, in a study conducted by Brinton, Chilmonik, Echelberger, Koi and Moah (2021), the established community of practice group grew from 5-10 members to 297 at the end. Another aspect that contributes to the sustainability and continuity of a community of practice, as indicated by Hyder, Adcock, and Brown (2020), is the ability of members to identify and share resources with each other. Resources could be governmental, as was the case in Brinton, Chilmonik, Echelberger, Koi and Monh (2021)'s, study where government resources and expertise were availed to members of a community to advance the work of the group. Sharing resources also involves sharing expertise that will enable the group to thrive. Exchanging and sharing resources instils confidence in members that they can carry out certain

activities outside of their community (Bergan, Krwempig, Utsi & Bæe 2021), and can develop members' leadership competencies (Carswell, 2021).

A community of practice reaches its mature stage when its activities begin to have a positive effect on people who are outside of the organisation or produce intended outcomes. In other words, their activities, procedures or strategies become more responsive to needs and challenges. During the maturity stage, members will begin acceptance of each other and willingness to share their newfound knowledge and experience with others outside of their community (Brinton, Chilmonik, Echelberger, Koi & Monh, 2021). During the maturity stage strides made by a community of practice begin to address more complex challenges within and outside the bounds of the community. The community's best practices are implemented in real-life contexts, supporting teaching and learning.

The success of the community of practice is assessed or evaluated to determine which plan or activity is more responsive to educational needs. It is through such assessments that the community will identify fruitful processes or activities and determine which activities or strategies should be carried forward or discarded. For example, if Natural Sciences teachers embark on a different or new teaching approach or strategy to improve learner performance and they discover that the adopted approach is impacting learners' performance positively, they could decide on the continuation of that strategy. If the strategy does not produce positive results, members could discard it after careful evaluation. The assessment stage provides an opportunity to review its principles and its importance in facilitating change (Chen, Kearns, Eaton, Hoffman, Leonard & Samuels 2022).

Since members of a community of practice share similar interests and care about addressing challenges (Ruiz Rosendo, 2022), they find common ground that drives them to engage in collaborative teaching and learning that could lead to the expansion and evolution of the work done by a community of practice. In some instances, when a community of practice achieves its desired outcomes, members could lose interest in the

issue that bound them together during its creation, which could lead to its disbandment. Strategies developed, measures put in place, resources identified or gained and relationships established during the lifespan of a community of practice become a legacy in maintaining a solid foundation for various systems within an organisation or sector.

3.3.4 Improvement of school-based support, access to education and success of rural learners

In chapter 2 (**section 2.2.6, “Policy Context”: 86**), it was indicated that one of the roles of policies is to communicate the goals and values of a particular organisation or sector to maintain certain standards and achieve those goals (Jolly & Robins, 2021). To fulfil the role, there should be certain factors that stimulate and inform the development of policies. Policies are informed by research findings to a certain extent and in instances where there is no empirical influence, a functioning community of practice could play an important role in achieving organisational goals.

Brinton Chilmonik, Echelberger, Koi and Monh (2021), suggest that knowledge, expertise and resources accumulated by a particular community can help the sector to assess gaps, strengthen its existing strategies, support and rehabilitate the sector. They further maintain that the accumulated information could inform policy development, which could be applicable to the phenomenon of the current study. Information and best practices gained from a community of practice could be utilised to address challenges associated with the improvement of school-based support, access to education and success of rural learners.

As indicated earlier, the current study explored the improvement of school-based support for access to education and success of rural learners through the lens of Wenger’s theory of community of practice. The theory provides a lens to establish whether factors that influence the improvement of school-based support for access to education and success of rural learners could be addressed through the establishment and sustainability of communities that foster collaboration, participation, engagement, supporting and learning from each other.

Stakeholder collaboration is one of the pillars of the improvement of teacher development and is one of the aims of the Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development 2011-2025 in South Africa (Department of Basic Education, 2011a). According to Walton, Carrington, Saggars, Edwards and Kimani (2022), enhances the implementation of an inclusive education system, the one that recognises, addresses and caters for various learning needs. The improvement of school-based support is reliant on collaborative efforts of all educational stakeholders. Ama, Moorad and Mukhopadyay (2020), attributes the improvement of access to equitable education in rural schools to collaboration and participation of various educational stakeholders. The authors further assert that collaboration and participation could alleviate the effects that certain factors exert on the accessibility of equitable education.

Duncan, Punch and Croce. (2021), indicate that learner diversity influences implementation of inclusive education. One of the approaches that has been found effective in addressing diverse learning needs, particularly for learners experiencing learning difficulties, is differentiation teaching. In differentiation teaching, teachers try to accommodate learners who are at different levels of learning and who learn at a different pace compared to their counterparts. The possible implication is that those who are at a slower or faster pace of learning. Differentiation is applied after the assessment and identification of learning needs, difficulties and styles (Morina, 2019). Teaching is adapted to accommodate learners experiencing difficulties or who are at advanced stages of learning.

Effective application of the differentiation teaching approach promotes inclusivity, which contributes towards addressing diverse learning needs. Differentiation teaching strategies require experienced teachers with differentiation skills and a clear understanding of what it entails (Duncan, Punch & Croce, 2021). Lack of understanding, skills, experience and knowledge could yield negative results. Accordingly, Cheung, Hui and Cheung's study (2020), revealed that teachers' subject knowledge and professionalism hindered effective implementation of strategies designed to cater for diverse learning needs. Despite

differentiation's effectiveness in upholding inclusivity, teachers' lack of experience, expertise, understanding and ill-preparedness hinder its potential to address diverse learning needs. Duncan, Punch and Croce (2021), maintain that an effective differentiation teaching strategy can be achieved through collaborative efforts, mentoring programmes, engaging in professional learning communities and other team-related activities, all of which contribute towards teachers' capacity building.

Although the application of a differentiation strategy could benefit children experiencing some form of learning difficulties by mitigating their challenges (Morina, 2019), it could hinder progress if poorly implemented. Teachers' skills, experience and knowledge are mostly questioned when it comes to the implementation of intervention strategies such as differentiation teaching. Cheung, Hui and Cheung (2020), highlight the importance of training for teachers to support gifted learners through differentiated teaching. They found that teachers in their study lacked classroom management skills to apply differentiation teaching to effectively support their gifted learners. Classroom management skills could be acquired through training or collaborating with others who share similar concerns. Chauke and Tabane (2021), affirm that equipping teachers with the necessary tools either through training, workshops or mentoring is vital in the improvement of school-based support.

Access to equitable education is influenced largely by the Education Department's ability to attract and retain suitably qualified, experienced and skilled teachers who Opoku, Asare-Nuamah, Nketsia, Asibey, Asibey and Arinaitwe (2020), describe as key to enhancement of quality of education and access to effective teaching. Kawuryan, Sayuti, Aman and Dwiningrum (2021), affirm that teachers are key in effective curriculum implementation, which improves education and its accessibility. Among many challenges faced by rural schools are difficulties in attracting and retaining suitably qualified and experienced teachers, and Ratledge, Dalporto and Lewy (2020), are of the opinion that reinforcing a sense of community that fosters strong relationships will influence teachers' retention. It is therefore crucial for teachers to establish and maintain their identity within their professional circles and work towards the improvement of their self-efficacy.

Polizzi, Zhu, Reid, Ofem, Sara, Roehrig, Mohr-Schroeder, Sheppard and Rushton (2021), explain that teacher retention can be achieved through the development of teacher professional communities. In their study, participating teachers highlighted their engagements in communities of practice and stated that such constant engagement and communication focused on the subjects they taught and their learners' progress. Such interactions enhanced their pedagogical and classroom management skills. These teachers also reported finding constant engagements helpful in solidifying their retention in their teaching professions. Through these communities, new teachers in particular, are exposed to induction programmes and experiences through social interactions, which enables them to develop their own identities and self-efficacies. The juxtaposition of different knowledge and perspectives within a community of practice enhances support and collaboration and assists new teachers in transitioning into their new roles and responsibilities (Weinberg, Balgopal & McMeeking, 2021).

Studies have shown that learner success is also a result of individual and collective processes, which allows people to draw from others' experiences. According to Eslahchi and Osman (2021), certain learning experiences are embedded within organisational settings, which supports Wenger's assertion that knowledge and learning are socially and culturally constructed and effective learning relies on their intertwined dependencies. Eslahchi and Osman (2021), found that continuous participation in communities of practice allows participants to draw inspiration from each other's insights and experiences, thus developing innovative ways of doing things to become social entrepreneurs. Similarly, Swann, Sanzo, Scribner and Cromartie (2021), are of the view that a professional community of practice presents members with learning and networking opportunities, which contributes towards a positive outcome for both learners and teachers.

In conjunction with accessibility of equitable education, availability of educational resources has been found to influence teaching and learning (Asano, Amponsah, Baah-Yanney, Quarcoo & Azumah, 2021). Schools usually rely on resources from government and when those become short, the unintended consequences could lead to inappropriate

application of intervention strategies (Wulyani, Widiati & Khoiri, 2022). A community of practice is also characterised by a shared repertoire of resources, which implies that members do not have to solely rely on government to provide the necessary resources. Instead, they share the resources at their disposal, enriching and supporting each other.

In the study by Johnson, Bledsoe, Pilgrin and Lowery-Moore (2019), participants who were members of an online (Twitter) community of practice revealed that they shared resources with each other to improve their practices. Resources could be in the form of office space, developmental opportunities, skills, technical training, sharing best practices and other tangible educational resources (Swann, Sanzo, Scribner & Cromartie 2021). Sharing resources contributes to participants' identity formation, growth and development and heightens their sense of belonging (Brinton, Chilmonik, Echelberger, Koi & Monh, 2021). Members of a community of practice discuss their shared concerns, challenges or goals and link those with the resources that are available and more appropriate to resolve their challenges. Alternatively, members can develop their own resources to address their shared challenges (Goodhue & Seriamlu, 2021).

One of the prescripts of the Integrated Strategic Planning Framework (Department of Basic Education, 2011a) is to capacitate teachers through the establishment of support structures. The framework advocates for collaboration when it declares that the relationship between different support structures in different spheres of government should be strengthened to ensure proper identification and addressing of challenges associated with teacher development. Zulu and Mukeredzi (2021,) link the functionality and success of a community of practice to stakeholder involvement and collaboration with such communities. They further mention that communities stand a better chance of success and function well when initiated by members themselves and not by the education departments.

School-based and district-based support teams implement routine engagements such as meetings, workshops and other related events at regular intervals. Support strategies and programmes are developed to ensure that teachers and learners are optimally supported

and that resources are acquired and adequately allocated. Their shared interests, purpose and goals allow them to develop and maintain relationships among each other, rooted in the belief that teaching and learning are also influenced by their roles as members of a community (Zulu & Mukeredzi, 2021). Support teams learn from each other through sharing experiences and best practices and incorporating ideas and strategies to improve their support and, ultimately, learning outcomes.

Similarly, the policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) (Department of Basic Education, 2014b), mandates the creation of collaborative and participative environments that encourage the creation of improved classroom intervention strategies, assessment and allocation of the available educational resources towards the removal of barriers to learning. Although continuous engagements among educational stakeholders create opportunities for effective use of all educational resources, Zulu and Mukeredzi (2021), found that members might not always collaborate outside of their regular engagements or meetings. Nonetheless, Berzener and Deneme (2021), are of the view that support teams stand a better chance of changing the course of education through supportive activities when they engage, collaborate and participate in structured and framed structures.

Educational goals can be achieved when all parties work as a team, combining their efforts to achieve common goals. Similarly, educational role players involved in school-based support exert positive effects when their practices, experiences, expertise and knowledge are collaborative. Collective approaches are instrumental in addressing issues related to classroom interactions (Adejimi, Nzabairwa & Shivoga, 2021). The probability of access to learning and success of all learners is improved in the process. The establishment and sustainability of a functional community of practice could assist in capacity building, which Glaze-Crampes (2020), found instrumental in adequately arming teachers with skills and knowledge necessary to implement certain educational and support strategies, including policies.

3.4 Conclusion

Wenger's (1998), community of practice theory through which the phenomenon of the current study was explored was presented. The chapter provided a historical background of the theory and focused on its implications for the improvement of school-based support for access to education and success of rural learners. Studies that highlight the role that a community of practice plays within organisations were discussed. The chapter also demonstrated that components of a community of practice are applicable to the improvement of school-based support for access to education and success of rural learners. The importance of the establishment and sustainability of a professional community of practice that affords people with opportunities and platforms to find solutions to their shared concerns or challenges was highlighted. Wenger's community of practice theory demonstrates the significance of the commitment of a collective group of people with similar goals, concerns or interests in teaching and learning.

Collaboration, voluntary participation and learning through experiences were shown to empower members of a community with new skills, different ways of doing things, strategies, approaches and resources. Consequently, support teams are equipped with skills and knowledge to address barriers to learning and diverse learning needs in their schools. Furthermore, support teams can identify and share resources and not only rely on government to provide them.

Chapter 4 will focus on the research methodology that was employed during the research. Data collection and analysis, as well as trustworthiness and credibility of the study and ethical considerations will also be discussed.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

A theoretical framework through which the improvement of school-based support for access to education and success of rural learners can be examined and interpreted was presented in the previous chapter. The adopted theory was discussed in relation to how it provides a lens through which the improvement of school-based support for access to learning and success of rural learners could be explored. In chapter 3, the importance of theory in guiding researchers on how to conduct research in terms of design and methodologies was also discussed.

In chapter 4, the research methodology that was followed to explore the research topic will be outlined. Research methodology is one of the stages that a researcher needs to undertake before any research is conducted (Clark-Carter, 2019). Chapter 4 comprises three sections, that is, the research approach, paradigm, followed by design and methodology. It will outline processes, procedures and methods that were employed in exploring the improvement of school-based support for access to learning and success of rural learners (Leavy, 2022).

4.2 Research Approach

The purpose of research is to obtain answers to questions or reveal the truth that has not yet been found (Balwan, Balwan & Saba, 2022). The research approach guides researchers on what kind of information is relevant to address the research problem and how such data will be collected and interpreted (Clark-Carter, 2019). By following a certain plan, process and procedures, researchers streamline the information relevant to the study, consequently making the whole research process manageable. The success of any research project relies on researchers' ability to choose and apply appropriate methods, design and approaches (Asenahabi, 2019).

The research approach can be described as a detailed plan of gathering information, analysis and interpretation, a procedure and broad assumptions. Creswell and Creswell (2022), explain that the choice of research approach is determined by the type of phenomenon the researchers intend to study, what the phenomenon means to them and how their choices would inform the procedures of the study. The choice of a particular approach to study a particular problem also determines the data collection tools and analysis methods and techniques applied. The research approach guides researchers in the right direction regarding the kind of information or data to be collected and how to interpret it (Clark-Carter, 2019). The choice of approach to a study is dependent on the research question or what researchers intend to inquire or discover. I chose a qualitative approach to explore lived experiences of individuals involved in school-based support.

The current study is not intended to generalise its findings to other similar contexts. Rather, it aimed to gain an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the influence that the improvement of school-based support has on access to learning and success of rural learners. The phenomenon required exploration of lived experiences of those involved in the provision of school-based support, teaching and learning, and therefore the qualitative approach was appropriate for the study.

The qualitative research approach originated from anthropology, sociology and the humanities when quantitative design failed to study, produce evidence and reach conclusions that explain certain universal laws (Asenahabi, 2019). The qualitative approach refers to research that is not based on statistical procedures or quantification. The researcher is an observer of that which is to be studied (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). The researcher therefore interprets meanings that participants ascribe to their experiences, problems and events. Data for the study was derived from the real world or environment where participants acquired their experiences or encountered their challenges. Data was sourced interactively through spoken words and observation of non-verbal cues.

The qualitative approach allowed an extensive exploration of intricacies around improving school-based support, how participants viewed their experiences, understood their world and constructed meaning based on those lived experiences (Hong & Cross Francis, 2020). It offered me an opportunity to gain a true understanding of human nature because it allowed me to study their behaviour, experiences and views in the wider context of their experience as well as their interaction with one another. Participants expressed their viewpoints and understandings in their own words.

My expectation when undertaking the research journey was to gain knowledge on how improving school-based support could promote inclusion and access and contribute towards improved performance. Furthermore, I wanted to understand the effect that the activities of school and district-level support teams have on teaching and learning and how improving such practices could enhance educational achievements. All these required that I explore insiders' viewpoints, knowledge, practices and beliefs. A qualitative approach allowed me to explore multiple viewpoints and perceptions of those at the centre of the research problem.

4.3 Research Paradigm

The word 'paradigm' was coined in the 1960s by a philosopher called Samuel Thomas Kuhn who described it as a "philosophical way of thinking" (Khatri, 2020: 1435). A paradigm is a philosophical perspective through which a study is undertaken. It provides an opportunity to view and understand phenomena from different perspectives or viewpoints (Berrell, 2023). A research paradigm is a verified approach, a worldview or model of conducting research that has been previously used and a shared understanding of reality. A paradigm influences researchers' thinking processes about the topic, guides their approach towards the phenomenon under exploration and how they view, study or investigate the research problem in terms of choice of methodology and data collection tools (Haigh & Withell, 2020). It is a verified approach, a worldview or model of conducting research that has been previously used; it is a shared understanding of reality and informs a study.

4.3.1 Main research paradigms

Three main research paradigms are positivism, critical theory and interpretivism. Positivism applies a scientific methodology of research (Johnson, 2019), maintains that there is one reality and that knowledge is rigid or fixed and can only be generated through accurate scientific processes (Turyahikayo, 2021). It is usually used in quantitative studies. Positivism paradigm cannot understand social phenomena due to its objective nature. Critical theory challenges other worldviews and their underlying structures and principles and exploits certain aspects of society and their political views. In critical theory, researchers are influenced by their own experiences and perceptions.

Qualitative studies use the interpretivism paradigm to understand values, beliefs and meanings of social phenomena in participants' natural environment. I used interpretivism paradigm because it gave an allowance to capture participants' experiences and perspectives in the phenomenon being explored in the context in which they occur (Turyahikayo, 2021). The interpretivism paradigm was used in the current study and will be discussed in the next section.

4.3.2 Interpretivism paradigm

Interpretivism emphasises studying human actions through the exploration of meanings important to them, their behaviour and their interactions with others (Ugwu, Ekere & Onoh, 2021). Interpretivism is in the same school of thought as naturalistic and constructivism paradigms and is more appropriate in qualitative studies (Ugwu, Ekere & Onoh 2021). Interpretivism argues that knowledge is based on personal experiences and how one views or understands such experiences and the principle that the only source of true knowledge is the ability to think (Turyahikayo, 2021). In addition, interpretivism maintains that data collection cannot be removed from its context.

I used interpretivism to study the phenomenon in the current study because it supported my attempt to understand values, beliefs and meanings of social phenomena in the

participants' natural environment. I engaged and interacted with the subjects of the study to understand their perceptions of improvement of school-based support and the effects on teaching and learning (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022). The interaction involved observing their non-verbal cues, listening to their responses to questions posed and assigning meaning to their responses and behaviour. It gave me the latitude to obtain an extensive comprehension of participants' viewpoints, experiences, knowledge and practices regarding the effects of improving school-based support for access and success within the phenomenon's rural context. The current study involved studying human actions through meanings important to them, their experiences and meanings they ascribe to school-based support, access and success and their own interactions with others in relation to the phenomenon (Junjie & Yingxin, 2022). These meanings are considered subjective because they are influenced by participants' feelings, opinions and understanding. Interpretivism is subjective and allowed me to interpret and describe participants' expressions on school-based support from their perspective with no intention to generalise the findings to a broader population.

Interpretivism questions the nature of knowledge, that is, whether knowledge is acquired or experienced and how it is communicated to others (Ugwu, Ekere & Onoh 2021). Participants' knowledge of the topic and the meanings they attach to their knowledge were critical, which made interpretivism more relevant to the study. In addition, interpretivism also studies interactions between individuals and their environments, in this case, teachers' interaction with other teachers, learners, community, parents, other stakeholders and their environment. I was able to interpret and describe participants' knowledge from their subjective stance. Furthermore, interpretivism allowed me to use multiple data collection methods, which were all suited to the research problems (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019).

School-based support, district-based support teams and school-governing bodies were rich sources of data and, as such, I explored their knowledge, experiences, perceptions and views in relation to the topic through direct statements or responses. People construct their own views and understandings of situations or events in their lives and attach

meanings to these views, and the interpretivism paradigm was found to be most appropriate to explore these views and meanings in answering the research questions (Leavy, 2022). Interpretivism allowed for an examination of the views and perceptions that participants constructed regarding the phenomenon being studied.

Through the interpretivism paradigm, I was able to draw insights from different perspectives of people who formed part of the support structures at school and district levels, explore issues under study, gain meanings of participants' views without making any assumptions or taking anything from their expressions and gain a holistic perspective of school-based support (Ugwu, Ekere & Onoh, 2021). The collection of data through multiple data collection tools enhanced corroboration, triangulation and rigour. Data collected through focus group interviews was corroborated by data gathered through individual interviews, the questionnaire and field notes.

Through applying an interpretivism paradigm, I focused more on the interconnectedness of research problem and the subjects, assigned meanings to situations, viewpoints, thoughts and experiences related to the research problem (Ma Junjie & Ma Yingxin, 2022). The paradigm was suitable to explore this study, it provided latitude of studying various complexities of school-based support from participants' perspectives (Van Schie, 2023). Participants were given voices to share the experiences, practices, perceptions and knowledge regarding the topic of the study. In the process of conducting this study, I was also able to assess possible weaknesses in the interview style for possible modifications to ensure that the entire process yield valuable information to answer the research question (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022). It was critical for the current study to adopt an interactive mode of inquiry because it was a limited scope study in terms of subjects, time and resources. The nature of the problem required exploration of other people's perceptions, knowledge and personal experiences. Interpretivism is considered subjective due to its nature of relying on researchers' interpretations, which could lead to researchers' biases (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022). The matter of researcher's bias was addressed in detail in **section 4.9. (See section 4.9": 146).**

4.4 Research Design

The research design is a plan of a study and a structure of gathering evidence (McNamara & Plonsky, 2020), a research plan that outlines the sample, site and research tools (Leavy, 2022). It is a plan of the systematic collection of data and it clarifies what kind of information should be collected, methods should be used and data analysis processes to be followed. Creswell and Creswell (2022), also describe research design as a plan of conducting a study that outlines the procedures involved in reaching the conclusions. The research design outlines the research sample, site and tools to be used to address the research problem. Research design is a process that provides researchers with clarity on who the participants of the study will be (Clark-Carter, 2019), the kind of data to be collected, methods of data collection and the process of data analysis.

The initial steps in identifying a research design are to understand different designs available and how to decide which one is more appropriate for one's study (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). The choice of design for the current study depended on what I needed to know about the improvement of school-based support for access to education and success of rural learners and the way knowledge would be acquired. The research question, aims and purpose guided the choice of methodology to be employed to explore the research problem and to add to the existing knowledge (Asenahabi, 2019). In choosing the design for the current study, I also considered that it should meet or address the trustworthiness and credibility requirements, in other words, the extent to which readers are satisfied that appropriate processes were followed to arrive at the results, thus enhancing the believability of findings.

The improvement of school-based support for access to education and success of rural learners is a social phenomenon. It involves the behaviour of and actions carried out by individuals and the influence these have on others (Cacciattolo, 2022). The act of improving school-based support involves human behaviour and interactions that has an influence on others' lives and actions. The exploration of the phenomenon called for a research design that would discover people's first-hand experiences of the provision of

school-based support, their views, knowledge, experiences, practices and their significance on access to education and success of rural learners. I found a case study to be the most appropriate design for the study because it explores human beliefs, actions and opinions and employs multiple data collection tools to source deep and rich information sufficient for analysis and interpretation.

4.4.1 Case study design

According to Mishra and Dey (2021), a researcher's interests, beliefs, worldviews and reasoning of how things happen or ought to happen inform their choices of conducting research in a particular way. What intrigues them or what they would like to explore and their beliefs regarding how to answer research questions add to those influences. It is when researchers are true to their worldviews and philosophical beliefs that they can truly undertake a satisfactory study, one that not only answers their questions but assures them that they have done all that needed to be done to reach a particular conclusion or finding. A case study design was used to conduct the study. There were various aspects of the research problem such as establishing and sustaining school-based support, access to learning opportunities, success of rural learners, all of which required to be addressed. Information gathered through a case study design encompassed all aspects of the phenomenon studied (Asenahabi, 2019).

There are different case study designs, such as descriptive, exploratory, intrinsic and instrumental case studies (Hancock, Algozzine & Lim, 2021). Descriptive case studies are also referred to as illustrative case studies (Patnaik & Pandey, 2019). Exploratory case studies are used on a smaller scale before conducting a full-scale study and assist in identifying questions prior to the main or full investigation or inquiry. An intrinsic case study focuses on the case itself, participants' preferences and perceptions and not on the broader theoretical perspective (Reynolds & Zhang, 2023). Furthermore, the results of an intrinsic case study design may be generalised to broader situations with similar contexts. I used an instrumental case study design because it needed to explore the research problem through participants' perspective or point of view.

Through an instrumental case study, I gained comprehensive insight of the phenomenon under study through the exploration of participants' experiences, knowledge, viewpoints and practices, which were relayed through a question-and-answer modality. Participants offered their insights into improving school-based and district-based support through district and schools' perspectives. I studied the effects that the improvement of school-based support could have on access to learning and success of rural learners through multiple data collection tools (Beasley & Bernadowski, 2019). The improvement of school-based support is a lived phenomenon and an instrumental case study design afforded me an opportunity to explore the effect of school-based support in education and how its improvement could influence access to learning and success of rural learners within a real-life context (Lauzière, Fletcher & Gaboury, 2021).

My choice of an instrumental case study design was influenced largely by the view or belief that a deeper and clear understanding of lived experiences such as the improvement of school-based support could be obtained through studying the perceptions, understanding, experiences, practices and knowledge of those who live through it on a regular basis. It is through studying how they relate to and interact with the phenomenon, manoeuvre constant complexities they encounter in their efforts to improve teaching and learning, promote inclusivity and success in education that I could truly grasp their practices and experiences. An instrumental case study design allowed me to study, understand and describe participants' interpretations of the meanings they ascribed to their experiences about school-based support and all its intricacies (Ugwu, Ekere & Onoh, 2021).

The study aimed to explore the effect of school-based support in education and how its improvement could influence the access and success of rural learners. I envisaged that the understanding gained through studying participants' experiences, views, knowledge and practices would provide a clear picture of the relationship between these variables. Employing an instrumental case study design in research implies conducting a comprehensive study that yields detailed data or information about the research problem. An instrumental case study design allows for the collection of data through multiple data

collection tools, which strengthens the validity of information gathered and subsequent results. Employing multiple sources of data also yielded comprehensive information sufficient to address the research problem. There were different viewpoints, perspectives and understanding surrounding the topic of the study because people with varied experiences who were directly involved in the provision of support at various levels were sampled.

A case study allows researchers to study people in real or authentic situations or environments (Beasley & Bernadowski, 2019), which provides extensive knowledge of participants' experiences, views and knowledge of the phenomenon under study. It focuses on individuals, organisations, events or phenomena (Hancock, Algozzine & Lim, 2021). In the current study, the case study focused on the experiences, knowledge, views and understanding of the effect of improvement of school-based support on access to education and success of rural learners. These were individuals who represented their organisations, namely schools and the district office.

I explored the improvement of school-based support for access to education and success of rural learners in the natural setting or environment where it is more likely to occur, which allowed for an extensive study of participants' experiences, views and perceptions (Hancock, Algozzine & Lim, 2021). Studying an event in its natural setting implies that the case will be bound by space (schools), time (a particular academic year) and activities (support activities) (Hancock, Algozzine & Lim, 2021).

Qualitative studies rely on researchers' interpretation and understanding. Therefore, researchers should gather substantive information to make valid interpretations. Because case study design allows the use of multiple collection tools, I was able to gather sufficient and analysable data through focus groups, individual interviews, a questionnaire and field notes. Participants provided direct quotations or statements, which provided rich descriptions of various aspects of the research problem. The collection of data from various sources provided a deeper understanding of support teams' perspectives, experiences and knowledge of school-based support. The result was convergence of data

from various sources, which strengthened the results (Quintão, Andrade & Almeida, 2020). In addition, limitations of each collection tool were complemented by advantages of others, which balanced the advantages and disadvantages of each data collection tool.

Usman and Audu (2021: 55), differentiate between types of triangulations, that is, “data, investigator [using more than one researcher or investigator], theoretical [employing two theories as a lens to study a phenomenon] and methodological triangulation” [using two research methods]. Triangulation improved the quality and reliability of the results of the current study, strengthened the research findings and enhanced confidence in that the study depicted participants’ views, experiences and perceptions accurately. Different data collection tools such as focus groups, individual interviews and a questionnaire were used in the study to enhance the results.

4.4.2 Site selection

Research would be difficult to conduct without an appropriate site where data will be collected. Researchers should ascertain the feasibility of the study in terms of sites during the planning stages. Researchers should be able to determine whether it will be feasible to obtain access to sites and participants before undertaking the study. Certain studies require prolonged access to research sites and the accessibility and permitted period should be established beforehand (Creswell & Creswell, 2022).

Selecting a research site was influenced by the nature of information or data required to answer the research question as well as the types of individuals who would participate in the study (Leavy, 2022). Site selection also comes with ethical issues that researchers should manage and address to maintain the credibility of the study. Site selection is a part of research design, which involves the process of negotiating the possibility of accessing a site suitable for the research problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). The researcher decides on the setting of the study where data will be collected. Site selection informs the research sample. For example, the researcher must determine whether the chosen site will pose physical harm to participants. Data collection process is also another factor that

should be considered. Experimental and observational studies might require a different site, depending on their nature of inquiry (Creswell & Creswell, 2022).

The current study required multiple sites to reach participants. A single site would have required participants to travel from one place to another, which would have been a great inconvenience. It would have been difficult or impossible to conduct focus group and individual interviews with both schools and district officials simultaneously, given that they were not located in the same sections and had busy schedules. Another reason was that I did not know what COVID-19 alert level would be in place at the time of data collection. Consequently, each focus group was conducted in each school and individual interviews at the district office. Schools were more viable because they are natural settings or contexts where activities of school-based support occur. Acquiring multiple sites minimised disruptions caused by possible delays due to time constraints, road closures and time management. In addition, multiple research sites reduced the risk of inconvenience, which would have been higher if participants had had to travel to research sites. Five sampled schools and one district office were used as research sites. Data was collected in participants' environments where the phenomenon being studied occurred.

Using schools as research sites required that I seek permission from the Gauteng Department of Education, which is the custodian of schools in the province. The request for permission to use schools as research sites was submitted to the Gauteng Department of Education in writing in accordance with the Department's Research Protocols (Department of Basic Education, 2017b). All application procedures to follow in all protocols were applied to gain access to schools. The value of the research and potential benefit to education was clearly outlined to strengthen the motivation for the request. I clearly indicated in the application that collection of data would not disrupt teaching and learning and that data would be collected after school hours or whenever the school principal determined to be appropriate.

Since data was also collected from district-based support teams, one district office was used as a research site for individual interviews. District officials are also part of teaching

and learning teams and it would have been unethical to disrupt their responsibilities by requesting to meet them elsewhere for data collection. I therefore requested the district manager to visit the district on dates agreed with participants to conduct individual interviews. Conducting interviews at participants' workplaces minimised disruptions because they were not required to travel to a remote site or be removed from their core functions. Both research sites chosen for the study, that is, schools and the district office, were contexts where the improvement of school-based support for access to learning and success of rural learners occurs, which is consistent with the qualitative research approach.

4.4.3 Sample selection

Research quality is not only determined by the suitability of methodology and instruments used, but also by the appropriateness of the sample and sampling strategy used for selecting participants. Since there might be constraints in reaching the entire population for the study, it is vital that the appropriate sample and size be selected, enough to yield sufficient data for analysis and interpretation. A sample is a minimum number of people or smaller group of a population that is assembled to participate in research (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). A sample is the number of participants less than the total population.

Sampling for the current study involved deciding on who the participants of the study would be, and how many people would complete the questionnaire, be interviewed or participate in focus groups. Adopting appropriate sampling techniques for a study is critical to enhance the legitimacy of interpretations of data. It is important that participants, situations or events most likely to yield fruitful data are sampled to participate in a study. The study adopted a qualitative approach and explored participants' experiences, perceptions and practices, and these aspects determined the sample size and sampling strategy used to source participants. The main concern of the current study was not about representation and generalisation of findings, but rather to gain a deeper understanding of participants' experiences, practices, knowledge and views regarding school-based support and the effect of its improvement on access to learning and success of rural learners. To achieve

the goal, a certain number of participants (35) were selected from a population by employing an appropriate sampling technique chosen from various sampling methods.

The different sampling methods in qualitative studies are quota, snowball and purposeful/purposive sampling. Quota sampling is used when researchers need to equal the number of males and females (Clark-Carter, 2019). The current study did not require equal numbers of samples, it only required information rich individuals who are involved in school-based support irrespective of their gender. This sampling technique can also be used for sub-groups such as socio-economic status. Clark-Carter (2019), describes snowball sampling as a process of using subjects identified for the study to identify other potential participants. Participants can also suggest other participants or connect the researcher with other potential participants and these individuals can suggest others as well (Creswell & Creswell, 2022).

It was not the intention of the current study to obtain participants through referrals by other participants. Participating schools were only chosen because they were in one district of a particular geographical location. Purposeful sampling, on the other hand, is a smaller number of a larger population and it is used when the whole population is too large to be used. Purposeful sampling is also used in studies when participants are easily accessible. Quota and Snowball sampling techniques were excluded because they were not suitable for the study. The current study adopted purposeful sampling procedure because it provided me with opportunities to select schools and participants aligned to the aim of the study. Purposeful sampling technique will be extensively discussed in the next section.

4.4.3.1 Purposeful sampling

Purposeful sampling is the selection of a small group of participants likely to be knowledgeable and informative about the topic. It allows researchers to select participants who fit into the research problem (Shaheen, Pradhan & Ranajee, 2019). Purposeful sampling was applied in the selection of schools and the actual participants. Convenience

sampling is a procedure used to select a group of people that are easily accessible or conveniently reachable (Bos, 2020).

I used purposeful sampling to select participants for the current study because it allowed me to select an information-rich sample (Subedi, 2021), located in similar context. Sampled individuals are at the heart of school-based support and their positions allow them to be actively involved and knowledgeable in the phenomenon of the study. Only purposeful sampling technique was used in this study for all participants. Participants were members of support teams at school and district-level and were easily identifiable. Since these individuals were rich sources of data, they provided sufficient information for an in-depth exploration of the research problem. Relevant and sufficient data could only be obtained from sampled individuals and no other individuals outside of the selection could produce such information. It was also during the sampling stage that I determined the appropriate sample size and these aspects will also be discussed in the upcoming paragraphs.

Selecting individuals from different schools whose jobs were related to the aim of the study provided a larger pool of participants to choose from. Each school is required to have enough school-based support team members (Department of Basic Education, 2014b), which implied sufficient sample for each focus group interview. When I contacted selected schools to introduce myself, establish rapport and request appointments, I indicated to principals the number of people that would be required in each group. School principals indicated that they have sufficient individuals to participate in the study.

Members of school governing bodies are both parents, community members or school staff. They have versatile roles including the provision of support to schools. They were selected based on their availability in schools. According to the guidelines for Capacity Building for School Governing Body Members (Department of Basic Education, 2018: 9), school governing bodies are also responsible for “administering and controlling the school’s property, and buildings and grounds occupied by the school, including school hostels”. This implied that there are members of school governing bodies in schools on a

regular basis. I requested the names of such members in each school and selected them as participants of the study. The same questions were posed to all participants.

The responsibilities of selected individuals in schools made them more suitable to the research. Teachers, principals, support team members and members of school-governing bodies have knowledge, experience and expertise in school-based support and I envisaged that the information they possessed would assist in answering the research question (Ames, Glenton & Lewin, 2019). Their work put them at the centre of the provision of support, thus connecting them to the research problem (Thomas, 2022).

Employing the purposeful sampling method allowed me to select participants according to the aim and objectives of the study, which also contributed towards collecting reliable, sufficient, consistent and useful data to draw conclusions (Shaheen, Pradhan & Ranajee, 2019). I had access to these individuals, which is one of the characteristics of purposeful sampling. It was not difficult to reach the selected sample. There was no predetermination of whether all the selected schools have functional support teams in place. Instead, the main determinant was the geographical location of schools and the sampling technique employed was relevant to this factor.

Selection of participants through purposeful sampling also has its disadvantages, such as susceptibility to researcher bias. Researchers rely on their own interpretation and evaluation of data, and bias could interfere with the research process. Researchers also bring their own personal experiences, views and prejudices, which, if unaccounted for, could interfere with the interpretation of data. To address the challenge of selection bias, only individuals who met the aim of the study were sampled. Personal biases were kept in check to eliminate or minimise their interference with the interpretation and evaluation of data.

There is also a challenge of people's tendency to alter their behaviour when they are being interviewed or watched, which could result in altering their responses. Although the challenge could not be eliminated entirely, encouraging participants to be honest and to

engage freely without any fear, assuring them that there were no wrong or right responses and that their views were not going to be subject to criticism, assisted. Participants engaged freely and had open discussions, which resulted in information-rich responses.

4.4.3.2 Research sample size

There is no consensus regarding the precise number of participants for qualitative studies. According to Mocănașu (2020), factors such as research questions, processes, access to sites and participants determine a sample size. A sample size is also determined by credibility of research output as well as transferability of findings to other similar contexts. Even though there is no criterion to determine sample size, what the study intends to inquire and the sampling method used should determine the number of individuals or objects to be studied. Any sample size that does not exceed 30 participants was acceptable (Subedi, 2021).

Research sample size was determined by what the study wished to explore and what I considered credible in research. Kumar, Kumar, Govindaraj and Prabhu (2020) found that there are processes that researchers can use to determine sample size, such as the principle of saturation. The principle means adding participants in a study until data collection is complete or more data does not yield any information. The challenge with the approach is that other research problems including the current study, have unlimited information and could lead to a prolonged research process. The current study was a limited scope, which needed to be undertaken within timeframes specified in the ethical clearance. My sample size was determined by what I could attain within the specific period and with available resources. If the research sample was too large, it could have overwhelmed in terms of time and resources.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria are applied in sampling. Inclusion criteria are key features or aspects that define the population that researchers use to gather research data, and exclusion criteria are characteristics of the population that interfere with the success of the study (Hornberger & Rangu, 2020). An example of an exclusion criterion is potential

participants who might provide inaccurate data or might not honour appointments for data collection. Inclusion and exclusion criteria in research samples help researchers to avoid sampling large numbers of participants who might have a negative influence on the results of the study or compromise its credibility.

Males and females were sampled as participants of the current study. No socio-economic or cultural backgrounds were used as criteria for inclusion or exclusion. Participants were selected based on their work as support team members at schools and district office, principals and school-governing bodies. Individuals who were not members of school-based, district-based support teams or school-governing bodies were excluded from the study.

Since it was impossible to sample the entire population for the current study due to its magnitude, only a certain portion of the population believed to be representative of the entire population was sampled. These were individuals who were located at schools, who were members of school-governing bodies and district officials and thus accessible. School-based, district-based support teams and members of school-governing bodies were not only suitable individuals in terms of providing the required data but were also easily accessible in one place in sufficient numbers.

Considering these assertions and based on the statement by Creswell and Creswell (2022), that a sample size for qualitative studies could range between 10 and 50 participants, I decided on a sample size of 35 participants. A larger sample would have been difficult to manage and a smaller number would not have yielded sufficient and analysable data. The number of participants sampled was practical considering that the study was a small-scale conducted over a short period. Teachers who were members of support teams, principals and members of school-governing bodies were sampled because they were responsible for or involved in school-based support. These individuals provided sufficient data on various aspects of the research problem because they had intimate knowledge and understanding of school-based support due to their positions in

the school, district and home or community, which placed them at the centre. They provided perspectives based on their different positions in school-based support.

The determining factor of the sample size was the assumption that it was adequate to yield sufficient data for analysis and drawing of conclusions. A sample was selected from a population of teachers who were members of school-based support teams and were assumed to be compatible with the research purpose. One province, one district and five rural secondary schools were selected based on the above criteria. I was able to gather relevant and sufficient information for analysis from information rich sample. They possessed intimate knowledge of all the intricacies around school-based support, access to learning and success of rural learners. The number of participants was not too small to compromise the credibility factor or too large to cause manageability challenges.

To gather sufficient and reliable data, the 35 participants sampled comprising of 15 teachers, five principals, five district officials and 10 members of school-governing bodies. Since that number could not be obtained from one school, participants were sampled from five schools and one district. The list of participants was obtained from school principals of selected schools. To mitigate challenges associated with bias, demographical information of the sample, such as the age and gender of the participants and the general location where the study was conducted, was provided. The number of participants in each group ensured that the group was manageable, that each participant's voice was heard and that participants were sufficient to represent the population of the study.

4.5 Data Collection Methods

Data collection method is the process of gathering information necessary to answer research questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). Data can be collected through interview recordings, notes and interview transcripts. In qualitative research, the key is matching the data collection method with the research question. In other words, data collection and instruments used are influenced by the research question. Using inappropriate data collection methods might not produce sufficient or reliable data, which might compromise

the results of the study. There are different methods used to collect data for qualitative studies such as observation, interviews, questionnaires and focus groups. I chose focus groups, individual interviews, a questionnaire and field notes as the data collection methods.

4.5.1 Focus group interviews

Focus group is a data collection tool that relies on discussions and interactions between participants to yield information or data. It takes place through group interviews characterised by discussion and responses to questions posed by researchers (Gundumogula, 2020). The method of collecting data is used in qualitative research and assists researchers in comprehensive exploration of research problems. I used focus groups as a primary data collection tool to elicit data that might not be produced through other modes of enquiry. Focus group interviews were only conducted in schools to minimise disruptions of teaching and learning. One session was conducted in each school, which meant that all individuals from each school were interviewed simultaneously.

There were 30 focus group participants. Five focus groups (one per school) were conducted. Each group had six participants consisting of three teachers who were school-based support team members, one principal and two members of school-governing bodies. (The additional five participants were for individual interviews and are discussed in below (**see section 4.5.2, “Individual interviews”: 141**)). The number of participants in each focus group was consistent with Gundumogula’s assertion (2020), that the minimum number of participants in each focus group interview should be three and the maximum twelve. Six participants in each group ensured that everyone’s contributions were heard and it made it easier to manage the discussions.

The same questions were posed to all focus groups. To ensure the success of focus group interviews, I planned my opening remarks in advance to introduce the topic and purpose of the study as well as the guidelines on how participants should conduct themselves. Participants were requested to give each other time to voice their views, not to argue and

to be respectful towards each other. All information conveyed to establish rapport was done in a respectful and considerate manner to avoid the infringement of the rights and dignity of all participants.

I started the proceedings by introducing myself briefly and explaining the purpose of the research as well as the procedures that the group interview should follow (Choi, Park, Hong, Rhee & Park, 2022). I also clarified the use of an audio recorder and requested participants to sign consent forms. Participants were also informed that they would not be compensated for their participation. I assured participants of the protection of their identity and anonymity by avoiding the use of names or any identifiable marks or locations. Participants were also assured that their names, private or personal information or that of their schools would not be explicitly disclosed in the study. All participants and names of their schools are referred to only by pseudonyms such as Participating School A, B C, D or E (PSA, B, C, D, E). District-based support teams are referred to as District-Based Support Team (DSBT 1). Information gathered will not be shared with people outside of the study.

I sought consent from participants. They were requested to complete the return slip or consent form to comply with university of South Africa (UNISA)'s ethical prescripts. They were provided with additional information such as the participant information sheet and were afforded opportunities to comment or ask questions at the beginning of each session. I established a rapport with participants and encouraged them to express their views freely. Participants were informed that they were at liberty to discontinue with the study at any time should they wish to do so without any fear of victimisation or intimidation. I provided background information regarding the topic and began the interview by asking introductory questions before diving into the gist of the study.

Researchers are obligated to ensure that any information shared by participants does not violate their right to dignity (Bos, 2020). To fulfil the obligation, participants were informed that they had a right not to disclose certain information that they considered confidential. I ensured that no participants' private or personal information or information that they did

not wish to share with others was collected and if it was collected, it will not be shared with people outside of the study. I always maintained and respected participants' right to privacy.

The discussions were recorded with an audio recorder and consent was sought from participants before any recording resumed. Participants from three schools declined to be recorded and I respected their request. Instead, I transcribed their discussions during the sessions. I am a professional typist with a typing speed of more than 60 words per minute, which simplified transcription. Before each session, I prepared spaces for typing responses even though I intended to record the interview sessions. After each session I went through the questions and responses with participants before they disperse to ensure that their responses were captured correctly. The advantage was that it eliminated possible technical challenges such as inaudibility of recorded audio that might have occurred. Transcribing during focus group sessions also allowed me to ask for clarity in cases of ambiguity of responses.

As a facilitator of the group discussions, I guided the discussions with minimum to moderate participation to prevent the group from deviating from the topic. The duration of focus groups was 45 to 50 minutes, depending on participants' discussions, in line with Gundumogula (2020), who states that the duration of focus group interviews could be anything between 30 minutes to 3 hours per session. Although group discussions could be unsettling, more so to people who are not confident enough to express their views in front of others, it was liberating and empowering because it allowed people to express their opinions more freely without any fear.

Focus group questions were open-ended, in a simple language easy for participants to understand and posed in a manner that they avoided ambiguous responses. Participants were able to respond in accordance with questions asked. Biased or leading questions were avoided. Questions were not steered towards a particular answer but were a true reflection of the study. All focus group sessions were conducted through an interactive mode of inquiry, which gave me an opportunity to also ask probing questions and observe

participants' interactions and body language. At the conclusion of each session, I thanked all participants for their time and allowed them to ask any questions.

4.5.2 Individual interviews

Interviews provide data from participants through questions and researchers can gain "participants' subjective perception" of a particular research problem (McGrath, Palmgren & Liljedahl, 2019). Interviews explore participants' experiences, attitudes, perceptions and views about a particular phenomenon in detail. Five individual interviews were conducted with district-based support teams at the district office.

There are different types of qualitative interviews that could be adopted as a data collection tool, for example structured, semi-structured or unstructured interviews. Structured interviews are mostly used in quantitative studies, they control the kind of data elicited from participants and can be adapted as the interview progresses (Bibri, 2020). Semi-structured interviews are used when the goal of the study is to gain participants' unique perspective of a particular phenomenon (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). Unstructured interviews are used mostly to gather information on participants' lived experiences and they allow researchers and participants to have informal communication (Wegmeyer, Tenbrink, Delacruz, Salim & Speer, 2022).

Individual interviews were conducted with five district-based support team members at the district office. Individual interviews were conducted with district-based support teams only because it would have been difficult to convene them simultaneously due to the nature of their work, which keeps them outside their offices. Conducting individual interviews also provided me with opportunities to engage with these participants on a one-on-one basis to gain an in-depth understanding of their views regarding the research topic. It was important for me to gain individual perspectives without engaging in group discussions. I used unstructured interviews for the current study to elicit information from key individuals who had lived experiences supporting education in rural contexts (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). The interview technique is not rigid and restrictive in terms of participants'

responses and it gave me the freedom to adapt the questions as the interview progressed. I obtained the names of participants and their contact details from the senior official in the district office. I made appointments with district-based support teams at times that were convenient to them.

There are different modalities of conducting individual interviews, such as face-to-face, telephonically or online. I chose a face-to-face mode of interview because it allowed me to have physical interaction with participants, which is vital for in-depth exploration of phenomena being studied. I was able to probe further and observe participants' body language. I started each interview with introductions, outlining the purpose of the study and assuring each participant that their confidentiality and anonymity would always be maintained. I established rapport with participants. Participants were also requested for consent to use an audio recorder to capture the discussions. Questions were open-ended and designed to elicit more information from participants in line with the aim and secondary questions of the study. The same questions were asked to all five district-based support team members. The duration of the individual interviews was between 45 and 50 minutes.

4.5.3 Open-ended questionnaires

For depth, triangulation and rigour, open-ended questionnaires were also used as a data collection tool. Triangulation is described as the use of multiple sources of data, which enhances the quality of the study (Usman & Audu, 2021). These authors further states that there are different types of triangulations in research such as “data, investigator, methodical, environmental and theoretical triangulation” (Usman & Audu, 2021: 55).

Data triangulation implies the use of multiple data collection tools to collect data for the study. Investigator triangulation involves using several investigators in the analysis process in the study. Theoretical triangulation is the adoption of multiple theories to explore a similar a research problem. Methodical triangulation is the use of more than one research

method in a study and is also referred to as mixed method research (Bans-Akutey & Tiimub, 2021). Environmental triangulation refers to the “use of various settings to validate research findings” (Bans-Akutey & Tiimub, 2021: 2).

Of all these types of triangulations, I chose data triangulation, which employs different data collection tools to enhance the rigor of the study. The justification of the choice of triangulation I used is that I needed to improve or strengthen the credibility of and believability of the findings, which essential in confirming research findings. Employed data collection tools complemented each other, validated information gathered from each tool thus aiding in addressing deficiencies in data collection tools. Data from all collection tools employed pointed to the same direction in terms of findings, which assisted in the confirmation of findings (Bans-Akutey & Tiimub, 2021).

By adding a questionnaire as another data collection tool, I was able to enhance the rigour and depth of the study. Questionnaires were open-ended in nature, which was not restrictive in terms of participants’ responses. Open-ended questions afforded participants the freedom to express their views, thoughts and experiences freely without any restrictions giving participants opportunities to provide responses that they might not have been able to provide during individual and focus group interviews. It gave them the freedom to express themselves uninhibitedly. The questionnaire was in hardcopy format, and each participant completed their own questionnaire in the ample spaces provided.

The questionnaire was used to all categories of the sample as a secondary data collection tool to support data collected through focus groups and individual interviews. It was designed prior to the data collection process and consisted of ten questions that differed from the focus group and individual interview questions. Section A of the questionnaire consisted of questions relating to participants’ demographic details, Section B contained actual research questions and Section C elicited any other information that might not have been covered in Section B. Questionnaires were distributed after focus group and individual interviews to all participants to self-administer in their own time.

The questions for the focus groups, individual interviews and questionnaire were not too specific. Questions that required 'yes' or 'no' responses, or that were too general or too broad were avoided. The language used in the questions was easy for participants to understand (McGrath, Palmgren & Liljedahl, 2019). Questions started with words such as 'how' or 'describe' and questions that produced limited answers, such as those starting with 'why' and 'where' were avoided.

4.5.4 Field notes

Field notes were not considered an essential part of field research; they were merely researchers' private thoughts, perceptions and ideas written down during the process of conducting research (Khan, 2020). However, field notes have grown to become an essential part of field research and analysis process because they provide additional data for research. In addition, field notes enhance the data collected and provide rigour and were therefore also used as a data collection tool for the current study. Field notes exposed me to data that might not have been obtained through other modes of enquiry, and they assisted in maintaining a systematic chronological record of events, making observations and refining ideas.

There are different kinds of notes in research and they are descriptive and reflective notes. Descriptive notes answer questions that might not be answered by other means. Reflective notes capture the researcher's thoughts, ideas and observations during field research (Genkova, 2020). I took descriptive field notes when entering school premises to describe the schools' surrounding environment. Field notes corroborated some of the findings in the study and assisted in addressing any biases that I might have had during the data analysis and interpretation stages, maintaining a systematic chronological record of events and observations, refining ideas regarding certain aspects of the interview that I might have forgotten (Khan, 2020). In addition, I also took notes of appointment dates, times and calls made to schools and the district office and these functioned as reflective notes that entailed events and ideas as they occurred that might have produced additional data that benefitted the study.

4.6 Data Collection Tools

A qualitative study gathers data involving participants' perceptions, feelings and understandings about a particular issue, which tends to produce large volumes of data (Taherdoost, 2021). As previously discussed, focus group and individual interviews were employed in the current study as primary data collection methods, which produced a large quantity of data that would have been difficult to manage without using a tool to capture participants' responses. Audio recording was used for during focus group and individual interviews. It would have been difficult to capture each contribution accurately while facilitating interviews. Using an audio recorder provided backup to ensure accurate reporting.

Information from individual or focus group interviews is either written down, audio taped or video taped, depending on the researcher's preference (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). The presence of a recording device in an interview or focus group interview might influence participants' behaviour and the way they engage in the discussion and respond to questions (Rutakumwa, Mugisha, Bernays, Kabunga, Tumwekwase, Mbonye, & Seeley, 2020). The presence of a recorder might also unsettle some participants, particularly in studies that are personal in nature where, for example, responses might provoke fears of victimisation, exploitation and exposure. On the other hand, failure to record interviews could add to the limitations of the study because proving adequacy and accuracy of data collection might be difficult due to difficulties associated with writing down participants' responses.

The current study did not pose risks associated with fear of victimisation or intimidation and therefore the use of a recorder was beneficial. Audio recording was used to capture participants' responses and statements. I sought consent to record participants before proceeding and a recorder was used only where consent was given. Some participants were uncomfortable to be recorded and did not give their consent. In such instances, I typed all the responses below each question and captured participants' responses

verbatim. Where participants consented to being recorded, I also used a mobile phone as backup in case the audio recorder device malfunctioned.

4.7 Data Analysis and Interpretation

The process of analysing and interpreting data involves reducing large quantity of data into small and manageable size, organising data into categories and identifying patterns, relationships and themes. It involves bringing order to raw data (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). The content data analysis method was used in the current study because it matched the kind of data collected, which assisted in producing credible results. The current study produced a sizeable volume of data, which needed to be reduced into a manageable volume. Content analysis is when data is reduced or summarised into a smaller amount of content, which makes it easier to manage it and identify themes and interpret meanings (Roller, 2019).

I used content method of data analysis, which involves data organisation, sorting and repeated reading, coding, “validation of accuracy of results” and narrative reporting (Ningi, 2022: 197-198). Content analysis was useful in this qualitative study because it facilitated the determination of themes, concepts and words appearing in the data, which was essential in interpreting the results (Shava, Hleza, Tlou, Shonhiwa & Mathonsi, 2021). Recordings of focus group and individual interviews were transcribed into a Word document, which made it easier to read through. I scrutinised data to establish the frequency with which participants used certain phrases or statements. Data was divided into parts and organised into categories to establish similarities and contrasts between responses. Meanings and relationships in phrases and themes were identified and emerging themes were grouped together. After this stage, there was additional intensive reading of transcripts, which gave me a general understanding of participants’ responses and allowed the building of patterns, categorisation of information and development of themes.

I ensured that no vital information was lost during the transcribing process, which usually happens when using software that is not familiar with certain terms used in certain languages. I read the transcribed data without taking anything out of participants' responses. Reading simplified the interpretations of participants' responses and the subsequent production of a trustworthy report. Through the content data analysis process, I was able to transform the large amount of data I had gathered into an organised and concise summary of key results and findings. I counted the frequency words, phrases or statements used in participants' responses to identify themes and sub-themes.

After another intensive reading, I divided the data into parts and organised it into categories to establish similarities and contrasts between responses. Meanings and relationships in phrases and themes were identified and emerging themes were drawn and grouped together. I reviewed the data, ensuring that nothing was missed and determined whether the themes that had been identified corresponded with participants' responses and research questions. Identified themes were linked with quotations, scholarly views and notes.

Themes that were grouped together during the initial analysis stage were compared to establish similarities, contrasts and relationships. Notes made during initial readings were reviewed to establish different kinds of information and to develop coding schemes. Similar patterns were grouped together and allocated codes. Codes were also allocated to events that occurred for the duration of the study or situations observed (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). Thereafter, I scanned through the categories of themes for interpretation, with research questions that the research intended to answer in mind. I remained cognisant of the research questions when interpretation data.

Unique codes were developed, reviewed, revised and combined to develop more cohesive themes. Data from all sources was coded and different categories that shared similarities were identified. Relationships between emerging themes and patterns were identified. Interpretations and implications were drawn and conclusions made. Participating schools and individuals were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identities and any identifying

features. For instance, the focus group for a particular school is referred to as FGSA, district-based participants are referred to as DP. Discussions around pseudonyms to maintain anonymity will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Data for the study has been saved in an easily retrievable manner. Typed field notes, transcribed audio recordings and scanned questionnaires are filed on an external hard drive, which is kept safe in a cabinet at home.

4.8 Trustworthiness of Results of the Study

Trustworthiness is the likelihood that repeating the same processes will yield comparable results, thus attaining consistency. The approach and design of the research contribute to the rigour of the study and determine credibility and trustworthiness of results (Pieridou & Kambouri-Danos, 2020). In addition, Pieridou and Kambouri-Danos (2020), are of the opinion that the researcher's ability to manage tensions, reflections and questions arising from the study also makes a major contribution to the credibility and trustworthiness of a study. There are four criteria of trustworthiness that researchers of qualitative studies should establish to enhance the believability of their findings and they are credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability (Stahl & King, 2020). These criteria will be discussed in the sections below.

4.8.1 Credibility

The credibility of a study is promoted by using different triangulation processes and adopting research methods that are well established (Stahl & King, 2020). Data collection methods and tools used in the study were aligned with the research problem, which enhances the credibility of its findings. The line of questioning in both data collection methods, that is, open-ended questions, also enhanced the credibility of the study. Questioning in the current study involved persistent observation of non-verbal cues and participants' demeanour (Devakirubai, 2020). It allowed me to intently engage with participants in their discussions and identify behavioural characteristics relevant to the study. For an example, when participants indicated the effects of time constraints in their

ability to engage in school-based support activities, their demeanour and body language demonstrated frustrations and concerns.

The data analysis process involved organising, categorising and codifying data, which, according to Gagani (2019), also enhances the credibility of the study. Multiple data collection methods were also utilised as a form of triangulation. Usman and Audu (2021), describe triangulation as the use of multiple sources of data, such as interviews, focus groups and questionnaires, to enhance the quality of the study. Using various data collection methods ensured that data from one source was corroborated with data from others. A convergence of data was obtained through different methods, which also assisted in determining identifiable patterns during data analysis stages (Stahl & King, 2020).

The extent of triangulation, the authenticity of data and my objectivity during data collection and the analysis processes enhanced the credibility of the study. Member checking was also conducted with participants to afford them the opportunity to validate, confirm and amend their statements accordingly. Data validation ensured data accuracy and the truthful presentation of information obtained. Member checking was also done on field notes that I took during each session. Participants were given opportunities to read my observations of their school environment and other related information to deny or confirm my remarks.

In addition to employing an appropriate research methodology, data analysis procedure used and triangulation upheld the credibility of findings. Credibility was also enhanced by avoiding plagiarism. I have cited all sources of information and used quotation marks when quoting directly from sources to acknowledge work done by other scholars. I have not claimed other people's work as my own (Bairmani, Ali Shreeb & Dehham, 2020). I also submitted my work to Turnitin for plagiarism detection.

The study did not present any tensions that needed to be managed or addressed. Questions raised by participants were mainly regarding confidentiality and anonymity,

which were addressed by replacing the names of participants and their schools with pseudonyms to maintain their anonymity. Their contributions will only be used for the study and are available only to individuals involved in the study. Data collected in the study will only be used for purposes of the study and will not be shared with individuals outside the study. Researchers are ethically bound to adhere to these pronouncements.

4.8.2 Dependability

Dependability is achieved by what Stahl and King (2020: 27), refer to as “peer debriefing” described as a process in which a researcher consults or communicates with peers who have no vested interest in the study to obtain feedback on the study. I communicated on several occasions, particularly when there were uncertainties, with an established scholar who has been championing me to undertake the journey. Feedback obtained from my peer assisted me in the promotion of credibility of my findings and the study. There were times when I was unsure of my work or not confident in submitting to my supervisors and she gave guidance that steered me in the right direction.

Additionally, I knew that my study would go through rigorous scrutiny from my supervisors who were tasked with the responsibility of guiding me through the process. The knowledge that my work will pass through their vigorous inspection and their guidance, ensured that I followed due processes and employed the correct research methodologies, techniques and tools. Consequently, appropriate data collection methods were used that were appropriate for the research question.

Research approach, design and tools employed ensured the correctness accuracy and transparency of the research process followed, which are important in qualitative research. There were no changes that occurred during the research process that could have compromised the dependability of the study. The data collection methods and research sample that were intended to be used from the planning stages were in fact used. The dependability of the study was maintained through using appropriate data collection methods, applying sampling techniques relevant to the research problem and collecting

sufficient and analysable data. All these are aspects that Stahl and King (2020) highlight as crucial in enhancing the findings of a study. Dependability of was also achieved by checking data thoroughly throughout the collection and analysis processes.

4.8.3 Confirmability

Confirmability is one of the criteria of trustworthiness that researchers of qualitative studies are required to establish and is described as the accuracy of methodology employed in the research process, data analysis procedures and objectivity of the research in data collection and analysis processes (Stahl & King, 2020). It is described as the extent to which the researcher has reported the results of their research objectively (Riazi, Rezvani & Ghanbar, 2023). Researchers adopt a neutral stance in collecting and analysing data and reporting their findings. Nyirenda, Kumar, Theobald, Sarker, Simwinga, Kumwenda, Johnson, Hatzold, Corbett, Sibanda and Taegtmeyer (2020), describe confirmability in terms of researchers' acknowledgement of the extent to which their beliefs, views or any other biases could have influenced their data collection, analysis, interpretation and reporting processes.

I maintained objectivity and was neutral throughout the research and data analysis processes. No personal bias interfered with data collection and analysis. I was always aware of how my views, emotions, feelings and experiences could interfere with the interpretation of results. I am a product of rural schooling and have always been sympathetic towards the conditions in rural contexts. However, my goal for undertaking the study was to gain knowledge of support services in rural schools in the 21st century and contribute to the existing knowledge. I kept all my views, experiences and knowledge in check to ensure that I interpreted and reported on findings accurately, objectively and neutrally.

In addition to acknowledging my personal biases and the influence that they could have exerted on the study, I established confirmability of the results using an appropriate data analysis process, which allowed the use of coding and identification of patterns and

themes. Data was rigorously analysed to establish the emergence of recurring patterns in participants' responses. The process assisted in the identification of themes and sub-themes. All these actions reinforced the confirmability of the results of the study.

4.8.4 Transferability

It is the applicability of results to other environments and is achieved through detailed descriptions of events, surroundings and participants (Nyirenda, Kumar, Theobald, Sarker, Simwinga, Kumwenda, Johnson, Hatzold, Corbett, Sibanda & Taegtmeyer 2020). As previously indicated, the main concern of the current study was not representation and generalisation of findings. Rather, the intention was to gain deeper meaning and expand knowledge of the effect of school-based support in education and how its improvement could influence access to education and success of rural learners.

The current study explored how participants experienced, understood, viewed, or made sense of the phenomenon under study through a qualitative mode of inquiry, which does not support generalisation of findings. However, transferability can be attained in qualitative studies through adequate details and descriptions of contexts where the study was conducted. Through such detailed descriptions, readers will be able to make their own judgements of the authenticity of findings and their applicability to other contexts with similar characteristics.

In the current study, I provided thick descriptions of contextual school environments and the duration of focus groups and individual interviews, which others could draw from to expand knowledge of the phenomenon, thus enhancing the transferability aspect (Stahl & Kind, 2020). Detailed descriptions of the rural context where the research was conducted provide sufficient information for readers and other researchers to make their own determination of transferability of findings to other rural contexts with similar characteristics (Nyirenda, Kumar, Theobald, Sarker, Simwinga, Kumwenda, Johnson, Hatzold, Corbett, Sibanda & Taegtmeyer 2020). Research and data analysis methods used in the study and

time frames for conducting focus groups and individual interviews provided assisted in the transferability aspect.

4.9 Ethical Considerations

According to Kuzior (2021:13), the term “ethics” originates from the Greek word *ethos* and it refers to “traditions, customs, norms and values adopted by people”. Ethics are applicable in various aspects of life, both professionally and personally. These aspects of life present us with ethical dilemmas, which are also applicable to the research process. Research studies are influenced by researchers’ view of life, which presents ethical dilemmas that researchers are obligated to manage. Ethics in research implies the obligation to adhere to codes of conduct as set by their institutions and other organisations involved in the study to protect the exploitation and harming of the subjects of studies. Researchers are therefore ethically bound to report their truthful observations and findings, protect the environment and subjects of the study and always uphold the integrity of the study.

Before I undertook the field research, I sought and obtained ethical clearance from the Ethics Committee of the University of South Africa (UNISA) as ethically and legally compelled to do so. I also sought permission in writing from the Gauteng Department of Education, the relevant district office and principals of the selected schools. I adhered to all ethical prescripts and codes of conduct as prescribed by the institution and the Department of Basic Education during the entire data collection process. For example, some of the requirements for conducting research in schools are that teaching and learning should not be disrupted, data should be collected after school hours and participants have a right to decline or consent to participate in the study. I adhered to these conditions by requesting appointments with schools in the afternoon. Participants were informed that they were at liberty to decline to participate. They were not coerced to participate. Each participant consented and participated of their own free will.

Interviews were conducted in safe and secure environments (schools and a district office) that maintained the safety and security of participants and confidentiality of all recordings. Participants were treated with respect and dignity, considering that they were cultural and human beings. Cultural belief systems were recognised, observed and always respected to uphold participants' integrity. People of different statuses who required to be addressed in a particular way were treated as such.

Pieridou and Kambouri-Danos (2020), highlight that interactions between researchers and participants might influence the kind of data collected. Researchers have power that can influence the data collection process and the choice of what is included or dismissed. It was crucial that I always adhered to ethical guidelines and principles and ensured that my personal biases did not influence the kind of data I collected. To minimise the influence of certain aspects on the data collected, I conducted myself in a respectable manner and maintained open communication with participants. There were instances when school principals did not honour our appointments, which was costly in terms of time and resources for me. Even in such instances I communicated with them respectfully, understood their reasons and agreed to reschedule our appointments. I addressed all participants' concerns, maintained a healthy power balance, respected and valued their views and listened to their contributions intently (Pieridou & Kambouri-Danos, 2020).

Researchers' underlying values and beliefs may interfere with the interpretation of participants' perspectives because researchers use their own understanding or experiences when analysing data and interpreting the results. It was crucial that I acknowledge my underlying values and belief system. I kept these in check to maintain a neutral stance and ensured that I reported the extent to which they influenced interpretations. I did not display any personal biases that could influence the interpretation and presentation of the results of the study.

4.10 Conclusion

Chapter 4 discussed the research process followed to explore the improvement of school-based support for access to learning and success of rural learners. The research approach, design and paradigms applied to explore the phenomenon were outlined. The trustworthiness and credibility of the study were also explained. Ethical issues that were anticipated to arise during the research process were identified and addressed. The most appropriate ways to answer the research questions were pinpointed and discussed in the chapter to enhance trustworthiness of the study. Research processes such as approach, design and data collection tools were identified and extensively discussed. Data analysis processes applied such as organising, categorising and coding data were also outlined. In the next chapter, findings of the study in relation to research questions will be presented. Chapter 5 comprises sections that address the limitations of the study in terms of what the study was unable to uncover and implications of findings for the theoretical framework used to underpin the study.

CHAPTER 5

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter the research methodology followed to conduct the study was outlined. Processes, procedures and methods employed in exploring the improvement of school-based support for access to education and success of rural learners were discussed. The kind of data required to answer the research question and how that data would be obtained and from whom were highlighted. The appropriateness of the methodology, processes and procedures applied to reach a particular conclusion was outlined.

In the current chapter, findings are discussed in relation to the research question, aim and objectives of the study. Data collected through focus groups, individual interviews, open-ended questionnaires and field notes will be presented, analysed, described and interpreted in a systematic manner. Themes and sub-themes were identified for interpretation and presentation of findings in accordance with the aim and objectives of the study. Findings were presented through participants' direct quotations. The results of the study were summarised, directly interpreted, patterns established (Creswell & Poth, 2024), and the results presented in accordance with the objectives of the of the study.

5.2 Physical Description of Schools

The five schools sampled for the study were no-fee quintile 1 schools from the same district. They were also in the same area but different sections. All sampled schools had average infrastructure, mostly supplemented by mobile containers as classrooms, offices and storerooms. They had running water and feeding schemes and some had scholar transport. They use English as their language of instruction. They were in a community where different South African languages are spoken. Gates at all schools were secured

and access-controlled by security personnel. Visitors sign in when entering the school premises for security purposes.

- **School A**

The school is located in the middle of the residential area. There were few brick buildings used as classrooms, supplemented by mobile containers. Teachers were accommodated at a container-marked storeroom, which also served as a sick room for learners who fell ill while at school. One teacher had a desk in between shelves of books and there were constant movements of people coming in and out. The principal's office was also a mobile container. Wheelchair ramps were built in bathroom entrances. A tuckshop on the school premises sold snacks. The school also had an emergency assembly point, a small netball court and a soccer field. The appearance of the school was clean but congested with learners and building structures.

- **School B**

The school was also situated in the middle of the community. The road was in extremely bad condition, and it took longer to reach the school due to potholes. It was a double storey building, which appeared to have sufficient classrooms. There was a dedicated administrative block where there were offices, staff rooms, administrative staff and photocopiers. There were no mobile containers that I could see.

- **School C**

The school was further away than schools A and B. No container classrooms were visible. There were more brick buildings than at school A. The road to this school was also in bad condition, especially on rainy days. School C also had a dedicated office block where there were staff rooms, the principal's office and a reception area with copiers managed by administrative personnel. During one of my visits, a service provider was delivering bottled water in 5 litre containers due to a cholera outbreak.

- **School D**

The gate was closed immediately after the first bell or alarm rang. During one of my visits, a large group of learners were gathered outside the school gate. When I asked, learners stated that they arrived late and were temporarily locked out. The school did not have scholar transport and learners walked long distances. They were unable to leave their homes early for safety reasons. Inside the school, the deputy principal was scolding them to go to their classrooms and she complained about discipline challenges in the school. The buildings were also supplemented by mobile containers, with some used as classrooms. A reception area was managed by administrative staff.

- **School E**

There were no houses near the school. It was situated opposite a main road and residential area. The environment was clean and quiet and I could hear teaching and learning taking place in classrooms. The buildings appeared newer, although insufficient and supplemented by mobile containers. The mobile containers were also used as classrooms. Three buses were parked inside the school premises for scholar transport. There was a dedicated administrative block with principal's and deputy principal's offices, a reception area with administrative staff, a teachers' staff room and a hall the size of a classroom, which appeared to be used as a conference or meeting room. The road to school was in better condition than those to the other schools.

5.3 Participants' Demographics

A total of 23 females and 12 males made up the participants. Most participants had degrees and postgraduate qualifications and had been teaching at the same school or working at the same district for more than 3 years. The study was conducted in rural secondary schools where the medium of instruction or language of teaching and learning was English. As indicated earlier, different official languages are spoken in the community

where these schools are located. The district office was in town inside a small shopping mall. Some district officials were in open-plan areas and others were in offices.

5.4 Summary of the Study

The currently study explored the effect of school-based support in education and how its improvement could influence access to education and success of rural learners. The literature reviewed in the study focused on the role of district-based support in school-based support, factors influencing accessibility of learning in rural schools, factors influencing success in rural schools and the challenges impeding school-based support. Results of the study will be discussed in accordance with these aspects and the objectives of the study, which were as follows:

- To explore the teachers' understanding of the role school-based support play in teaching and learning.
- To establish factors that determine the provision of school-based support.
- To determine the approaches that rural schools employ to provide school-based support.
- To establish the contribution of improving school-based support towards access and success of rural learners.
- To establish potential strategies that can be developed to enhance school-based support in rural settings and how these strategies can be effectively implemented to promote access to education and success for rural learners.

The study followed a comprehensive exploration of the research problem through an instrumental case study design, which allows a deeper understanding of experiences, knowledge, practices and views of participants in relation to the research question. The design was viewed as the best option to explore the research problem because it allows exploration of a problem through participants' eyes and affords researchers opportunities to gain deeper insight into a phenomenon" (O'Brien, Zapata, Chang & Pierloussi, 2022).

Data was collected through different tools, that is, focus groups, individual interviews, an open-ended questionnaire and field notes. Collection of data through various tools provided the study with depth and rigour, enhanced corroboration and added to the quality of the study. Participants were school-based and district-based support teams and members of school-governing bodies and principals, selected due to their positions in schools that placed them at the centre of the research problem and better positioned to be knowledgeable about school-based support. They were also selected for convenience in terms of their accessibility. In addition, sampled individuals were more likely to provide the required data to answer the research question (Subedi, 2021).

There was a population of 2 606 secondary schools and fifteen districts in Gauteng at the time of the study. Five schools and one district were selected from that population. The total number of participants was 35 and the composition was as follows:

- Focus groups were conducted with school-based support team members and principals from each school. Each sampled school was used as a research site for focus groups.
- Five focus groups were conducted in each school. Each group was composed of six participants, namely three teachers, one principal and two members of the school-governing body.
- Individual interviews were conducted with five district-based support team members. The district office was used as the research site for these individual interviews.
- Self-administered open-ended questionnaires were distributed to all 35 participants for completion.

The sample was representative in terms of gender and age group. It also included school-governing bodies which represented educational stakeholders such as parents and community members. The participation of school-governing bodies gave voice to parents, who are critical stakeholders in education. Data was from different perspectives, for example classroom and support, monitoring and support and school-governing bodies from community or parental perspectives.

Different themes emerged during the data analysis process and findings will be discussed in relation to these themes and sub-themes. Participants' statements will be presented verbatim to demonstrate their views, experiences, knowledge and practices regarding the research problem without taking anything away from their statements.

5.5 Summary of Data

Data transcribed from focus groups and individual interview audio recordings, the questionnaire and field notes were analysed through the qualitative data analysis method of content analysis. The analysis method is best to analyse data retrieved from various sources including documents (Kleinheksel, Rockich-Wiston & Wyatt, 2020). Content analysis is versatile because it can be used in both quantitative and qualitative studies.

In qualitative studies, content analysis considers participants and their contexts and it is beneficial in categorising and identifying patterns, similarities and differences. Results are presented, analysed, described and interpreted systematically. Themes are identified and interpreted and findings are presented in accordance with the objectives of the study. Conclusions and recommendations for the sector and further research will be drawn and presented. The frequency with which phrases or statements were used by participants was counted and five themes and ten sub-themes emerged. The findings will be discussed according to these themes

5.6 Presentation of Findings of the Study

As indicated earlier, participants of the study were school-based support teams, which are composed of teachers and members of school-governing bodies, and district-based support teams with different educational backgrounds. Findings from all processes I undertook during data collection phase such as individual interviews, focus group interviews, questionnaires and field notes are discussed in terms of the different themes that emerged during the content data analysis process. Findings of the study will be

presented narratively. The section that follows will outline the themes and sub-themes that emerged during the data analysis process in a table format.

Table 5.1: Categories, Themes and Sub-themes

Category	Themes	Sub-themes
Teachers' understanding of the role of school-based support in teaching and learning	Functionality of school-based support teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time constraints
Determinants of providing school-based support	Barriers to learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Socio-economic conditions • Family structure
Approaches employed in the provision of school-based support	Needs analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early identification of needs • Effective implementation of intervention programmes
Contribution of improving school-based support for access and success	Improved teaching strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusion
Potential strategies to enhance school-based support	Addressing barriers to learning effectively	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational resources • Collaboration • Policy alignment • Teacher training and professional development

Pseudonym	Description
FGA 1	Focus Group Participant 1-6 from School A
FGB 1	Focus Group Participant 1-6 from School B
FGC 1	Focus Group Participant 1-6 from School C
FGD 1	Focus Group Participant 1-6 from School D
FGE 1	Focus Group Participant 1-6 from School E
DP 1-5	District Participant 1-5
AT 1	Teacher 1 from School A
BT 1	Teacher 1 from School B
CT 1	Teacher 1 from School C
DT 1	Teacher 1 from School D
ET 1	Teacher 1 from School E
FN A-E	Field Notes for School A-E
QSA-E	Questionnaire for School A-E
QDP 1-5	Questionnaire for District Participant 1-5

Total: 35

Table 5.2: Key Pseudonyms

5.6.1 Theme 1: Functionality of school-based support teams

The policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) mandates each school to establish and maintain functional school-based support teams (Department of Basic Education, 2014b). The policy further states that it is the responsibility of school principals to establish support teams and ensure their full functionality. Theme 1 emerged from the exploration of teachers' understanding of the role of school-based support in teaching and learning.

Understanding the role played by school-based support is the foundation for its improvement. Support teams should have a clear understanding of the nature, intricacies and benefits of support in education before attempting to undertake the journey. Buabeng and Akuamoah-Boateng (2019), emphasise that it is important for teachers to understand the effects of effective teaching and learning. Understanding enhances support and ensures that the needs of those supported are at the centre of everything. Teachers who understand the dynamics of their roles tend to have positive attitudes towards their tasks or responsibilities. All participants of the current study demonstrated a clear understanding of the role played by school-based support in enabling learners to access education and be successful, which is demonstrated by some of their responses below:

“To support the learners with socio-economic challenges that is a barrier to academic performance” (questionnaire, school CT1).

“School-based support can help all learners to achieve desired academic results through identification of barriers and trying by all means to solve or minimise them”
(questionnaire, school BT1).

Studies have shown that teachers' understanding of the role of support influences their perceptions, willingness and the way they provide such support (Brown & Buthelezi, 2020). In some instances, teachers' reluctance or unwillingness to be involved in support services stems from a lack of understanding, which can cause neglect, thereby perpetuating

challenges affecting teaching and learning. The challenge was not the case in the current study. Participants' responses confirmed that the teachers understood school-based support, its role and necessity in the attainment of educational goals.

“School-based support is meant for supporting learners with their psychological, not only limited to needs, which the school would have identified from the learner. It is mainly for attending to issues or challenges that disturb or make it difficult for the learner to learn effectively at schools. It is also about amending, where necessary, the curriculum to suit the special individual needs of the learners you are working with. It works to ensure that there are no learners who are disadvantaged because of their different socio-economic challenges that not only affect the learner, but the community at large” (questionnaire, school DT1).

It was crucial for the current study to determine whether participants could articulate the role of school-based support in education because it influences planning processes and contributes to the effective implementation of support activities or programmes (Buabeng & Akuamoah-Boateng, 2019). Effective execution of any plan requires a deeper understanding. Results of the current study show the teachers' understanding of the importance of school-based support in teaching and learning. The statement from school DT1 suggests the teachers' understanding of the importance of supporting learners, but also the teachers.

Although determining teachers' understanding of school-based support and its effect on the improvement of educational outcomes was crucial, it was equally important to explore whether such knowledge extended to practice, that is, whether participants were actively involved in the provision of support. The extension of knowledge is demonstrated through establishing support structures and sustaining their functionality. Evidence suggests that teachers' understanding of the role of school-based support did extend to the establishment and sustaining of functional support teams to a certain extent. School-based support teams in two schools were not fully functional. They supported teaching and learning in an unstructured manner.

“Our school recently changed SBST structure because the old one was not inclusive; it did not include all the necessary stakeholders. The new team is not yet 100% functional. However, the structure in place is composed of teachers, parents and members of school-governing bodies. We have a plan in place to ensure that that the new school-based support team is fully functional and inclusive” (FGA 1).

“The school-based support in our school is partially functional due to time constraints. We do not have enough time to teach and still perform school-based support team functions” (FGB 3).

“We do have a plan in place to ensure that it functions soon. Teachers do not have time to attend to certain matters, all they could do with the time they have is to teach to ensure that they finish the syllabus” (FGB 1).

These responses demonstrate that not all the schools had fully functional school-based support teams. Lack of functionality implies that education is not effectively supported and the support programmes, initiatives or activities are fragmented or unstructured, which could lead to a lack of direction or guidance in the attainment of educational goals. Establishing school-based support teams benefits not only learners, but also professional development (Hamamoto, 2023). The finding implies that schools are missing out on reaping the benefits of being in a community (community of practice), one that meets regularly to share ideas, experiences and even resources to support each other and their learners.

Evidence suggests that some schools had functional school-based support teams in place where they ensured the provision of support for team members and learners continuously.

“Our school-based support team is functioning in this school. The team meet regularly during scheduled meetings on a quarterly basis and urgent whenever necessary or forced by events. We try all in our powers to support these learners” (FBC 3).

“We have a school-based support team that functions very well in supporting teaching and learning. It plays a major role in teaching and learning, it is where we identify socio-economic factors, barriers to learning in its entirety. Learners might not learn because of certain factors. It assists in identifying what might have been missed in earlier grades”

(FBE 6).

The results suggest that there is a clear understanding of the role of school-based support in education. However, functionality of support structures is not attained across the board. Various reasons were cited for the non-functionality or non-existence of school-based support teams in participating schools. What emerged consistently from the data analysis was that teachers did not have sufficient time to teach and provide support.

Sub-theme 1: Time constraints

Time is a fundamental factor in all aspects of life. Everyone has the same amount of time each day to do all they are mandated or wish to do. For some, it appears there can never be sufficient time to accomplish all that they set out to do in a day, week, month or year. Their tasks, duties or responsibilities seem to be very much more than the amount of time available. Studies associate time constraints with a decline in performance or success (Kostma, 2022).

Findings of the current study reveal that even though teachers exhibited a clear understanding of school-based support, its establishment, functionality and sustainability were still a challenge. The main factor that emerged from the current study as a contributor to these challenges was time constraints. Nine out of fifteen teachers indicated that they did not have sufficient time to implement the curriculum and engage in school-based support activities.

“The problem is that it takes time in overcrowded classes like theirs. Some teachers are even lazy to do all the steps and as a result, they will ignore the problem or challenge that the learner is facing. The main cause of this laziness comes from the number of

steps that SIAS policy requires teachers to follow from identifying problems to addressing them. Some teachers find it time consuming to follow all these steps which means that some learners will still come to school with their challenges which will not be attended to” (FGA 1).

“Sometimes teachers are not willing to go through the referral processes because it is long and time consuming..... A teacher who identifies learning barrier or problem is the one who is supposed to see to it that all the steps are followed through. Some teachers are not prepared or willing to do that because it takes their time they could be finishing their syllabus. This means that learning barriers experienced by these learners will not be addressed or no referrals will be made at all. These learners will be stuck at the school where they will not be getting the necessary support they need” (FGA 5).

This is in stark contrast to the principles of community of practice theory, which advocate that the group of people who share similar interests and are driven by common goals meet regularly to discuss their shared concerns, as well as resolutions to their challenges. The results show that some of the participating schools did not have any form of a community of practice where members collaborate and engage regularly. Lack of community that engages in regularly suggests that teachers are bypassed by opportunities to experience a sense of belonging as they commit to their roles and responsibilities (Irving, McPadden & Caballero, 2020). Evidence from participating schools indicates that each person conducted their own support whenever time permitted. There was a lack of structure and consistency in terms of meeting, supporting and sharing ideas and resources.

School-based support teams are supposed to have routine engagements such as meetings, workshops and other related events at regular intervals. Regular interaction is one of the characteristics of a community of practice. A space should be created where members freely strategise, develop programmes to ensure optimal support services, identify resources and capacitate and guide each other on optimum utilisation of resources demonstrated by the response from a district participant who reiterated that team members should have regular meetings:

“...the school-based support team must be well balanced and meet regularly and provide feedback and support regarding each case. Encourage timeous support and referral to the district-based support team if necessary” (questionnaire, DP 5).

Lack of time implies that support teams do not meet regularly and merely conduct their own individual support initiatives whenever time permits, which could have a negative effect on the quality of support provided and hinder collaborative endeavours. Time constraints robs teachers of opportunities to reflect on their experiences and challenges with each other, which, in Smith, Kempster and Wenger-Trayner’s view (2019), promotes innovative ideas.

5.6.2 Theme 2: Barriers to learning

One of the objectives of the study was to establish factors that determine the provision of school-based support, that is, what necessitates support teams to implement support programmes or activities in their schools. The findings of the study reveal that the main factor that determines the initiation of school-based support is barriers to learning. The policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) (Department of Basic Education, 2014b), describes barriers to learning as environmental, innate or systemic factors that impede access to learning academic success. Studies found environmental conditions, lack of understanding and other developmental challenges as some of the factors that contribute to barriers to learning (Salie, Moletsane & Mukuna, 2020).

“Socio-economic conditions, poverty, child-headed families, absent parents are some of the factors that force us to provide support to our learners. When we see that some learners are struggling to read for instance or with other subjects, we intervene. When there is a need for psychologists, social workers, police or health department, we facilitate those supports” (FGE 3).

“To assist learners with socio-economic challenges where possible, so that they can be able to continue with their studies (needy learners)” (questionnaire, school CT 1).

“Factors like the background, setting and family structure of a learner play a big role. These will help with determining the nature of help you will be supporting the child with”
(questionnaire, school AT 5).

Participants indicated that barriers to learning determine the provision of school-based support. The study reveals that barriers to learning in these schools were caused by socio-economic conditions and physical, emotional and intellectual impairments. These challenges have always been prevalent in rural schools but were intensified by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted normal teaching and learning. Incorporating technology in teaching and learning has become the norm, which is problematic for these schools due to challenging internet connections and lack of devices.

“Technology is also lacking. We have teachers who do not have technology gadgets to support learners in classrooms. We need to keep up with times but we are still lacking compared to other schools in cities” (FGE 2).

Worsened socio-economic challenges intensify barriers to learning, which impedes access to education and success of rural learners, particularly those with physical or intellectual disabilities. Nedzinskaite-Maciuniene, Stasiunaitiene and Simiene (2022), emphasise that learners with impairments suffer immense learning losses due to worsened socio-economic conditions in rural areas. Support teams also look at family background and structure to determine the need for support. District-based support teams adopt a holistic approach in determining support needs. They do not only look at learners’ needs, but consider teachers’ needs and conditions of schools.

“Every term there is a rule that schools should be monitored for school-based support team functionality. We check their challenges such as curriculum differentiation. We look at the needs of the school and decide whether that particular school needs support or those teachers need refresher courses. Schools identify their needs but if they do not we identify gaps during our monitoring visits” (DP 3).

In this section, participants spoke about barriers to learning as the main factor in determining support needs. They also indicated that barriers to learning were caused and exacerbated by socio-economic conditions and learners' family background structure. Two sub-themes emerged from the data analysis, which are socio-economic conditions and family structure, and these will be discussed below.

5.6.2.1 Sub-theme 1: Socio-economic conditions

Socio-economic conditions are social factors, such as poverty, that contribute to lower educational achievements, access, poor school attendance and risk of drop-out at university level (Ntema, 2022). These conditions also contribute to availability and accessibility of certain resources, amenities and necessities of human life (Kokot, 2020), affect access to pre-primary education (Choudhury, Joshi & Kumar 2023), and impede the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals, such as equitable education (Nakidien, Singh & Sayed, 2021), indicating that socio-economic conditions have a devastating effect on all facets of life. Participants expressed the opinion that barriers to learning are intensified by socio-economic conditions, which has adverse effects on access to education and success of rural learners.

“These learners come from poor background. Some of them cannot even afford to buy pads. We as teachers must help them. So, we ask for help from stakeholders such shops in our community sometimes. When we receive stock, we keep it in the office and every girl who needs sanitary pads can come and ask. If we do not do that, these learners stay at home for the entire period of their menstrual cycle and they miss out on learning because we cannot wait for them. By the time they come back they missed a lot of lessons” (FGA 4).

The participants' statement supports the field notes I took during my visit to school A to conduct the focus group. I noted several girls coming into the office/storeroom where I was seated requesting sanitary pads from teachers:

“Girls come in the storeroom/office at an interval to request sanitary pads. The teacher who is the coordinator for the school-based support team hand out sanitary pads from a box which is almost empty to the girls. When I asked where the pads came from she responded that they were donated. She further stated that they are running out and should start writing to nearby business for donations” (FNA).

“Sometimes learners are not able to do research online, no network coverage, no smart phones, data etc” (questionnaire, school CT 3).

These statements describe the effects of poverty on different spectrums that impede access to education. For example, learners who do not have sanitary pads will miss school because parents cannot afford to buy them. On the other hand, learners who do not have technological gadgets and connectivity are unable to complete their homework, which affects their performance. Technology, for instance, has been found to have a positive effect on learners’ performance in subjects such as Mathematics (Saal, Ryneveld & Graham, 2019). The inability of learners to access the internet or necessities denies them opportunities to learn, which affects their performance.

The results demonstrate the extent to which poverty affects conditions of teaching and learning and to which schools provide relief to their learners. The inability of parents to provide their children with sanitary pads affects learner attendance, and connectivity affects effective learning, which in turn impedes access to learning. Socio-economic conditions are a barrier that instigates the provision of support.

“The community around here is very poor and parents are not that educated. Because they have lower levels of education, they are not really interested in education. They only show interest when their children fail a class. It is poverty that makes them loose interest in education. Most of parents do not have jobs, they rely on social grant and this causes lack of motivation and interest” (FGA 6).

“Sometimes you will see a learner with torn trouser or shirt and you must buy those things for them because parents cannot afford to buy” (FGC 6).

“Poverty is a problem around here. For an example, we have learners who are 10 in their families surviving on grandparents’ social grants only. The money is not enough to support these children. Some share a room with parents at home due to poverty. They don’t have enough space and live shacks some of them. These kids do not always do well in school because of poverty. Some children use this information to bully others and bullied children do not perform well in school either” (FGC 1).

“Sometimes we as teachers adopt some of learners because their parents are poor to afford even school uniform. We buy winter clothing for our learners because they do not have money at home. For an example, last week, my colleague saw one learner who was shivering because it was too cold and the learner did not have jersey. My colleague went and bought this child a school jersey. Sometimes you will see a learner with torn trouser or shirt and you must buy those things for them because parents cannot afford to buy. We also buy our learners sanitary pads from our own pockets” (FGC 2).

Most participants expressed the opinion that poverty creates and widens achievement gaps between urban and rural schools (Norley, 2023). A learner who does not have winter clothes or a uniform, for example, might abscond from school, resulting in learning losses that contributes to lower levels of education and creates a generation of uneducated or unemployed people. There is a gap created by poverty that necessitates intervention. Evidence in this section addressed the objective of the study, which was to identify factors that determine the provision of school-based support.

5.6.2.2 Sub-theme 2: Family structure

As indicated earlier, children’s surrounding environment plays a major role in education. A nurturing family or home environment enhances educational learning, as well as social and emotional development (Motamedi, 2020). Various factors have been found to

contribute to children's well-being, including family structures, that is, parents and interaction with other family members including extended members (Wesserman, 2020). Furthermore, the way parents and family members interact with their children affects their general well-being, educational outcomes and social growth.

There are different family structures, such as traditional or non-traditional, functional or dysfunctional. A traditional or functional family is composed of a mother, father, siblings, grandparents, uncles and cousins, and it provides children with role models, stability and support structures. Examples of non-traditional or dysfunctional families are those with one parent, that is, a mother or father, those with grandparents or other extended family members only (Motamedi, 2020).

Family structure emerged as a sub-theme under factors that determine the provision of school-based support. The results indicate that some learners came from non-traditional families such as child-headed households. Some children had lost both parents due to death, others' parents worked far from home and only came home on weekends or at month-end. Such dysfunctionality created non-traditional family structures, leading to children raising themselves and being unsupervised, which affected their social well-being, sense of security (Motamedi, 2020), and ultimately access to and success in education.

“There are learners with challenges that need the intervention of district-based support. For an examples, some learners in this school come from child headed families. This is challenging because such learners cannot give it their all at school. They have family problems that they are faced with daily” (FGA 2).

“There are child-headed families in this community. These children need all the support because they do not have adults at home. Some of the parents died because of illnesses. Some learners live with their grandparents who cannot support them in their education to do well in school. Some learners are orphans, who struggle to pay attention to their education because they are occupied with some problems at home” (FGB 3).

Participants from different schools cited similar factors that determine the provision of school-based support in their schools, demonstrating similarity of experiences in rural schools. Dysfunctional or untraditional family structures disrupt children's developmental process, which in turn affects access and educational progress (Vinogradov, Shatunova & Sheymardanov, 2020). The response from school B (FGB 3) that children with absent parents fail to pay attention to their education because they are always preoccupied with family problems supports assertions of Vinogradov, Shatunova and Sheymardanov (2020).

The home environment of child-headed households forces children to grow up at a very young age, which interferes with their development, which in turn affects their school attendance and leads to the failure to attain educational outcomes. Non-traditional family structures have a negative effect on teachers as well because they assume parental roles by providing educational, psychosocial, social and financial support (Vinogradov, Shatunova & Sheymardanov, 2020).

"We have child-headed homes here, children take care of each other because they do not have parents. We also buy our learners sanitary pads from our own pockets. This interferes with our families because we take money for our families and spend on our learners" (FGC 4).

"We profile our learners and do home visits based on the profile we gathered. We know each learner's conditions and support them based on our assessment and findings. Most of the learners grow up in very poor and difficult conditions. We intervene to support these learners so that they can also have a chance to succeed in education" (FGE 1).

The results of the study suggest that support is necessitated by family structures that are not conducive to children's development and learning. Upon conducting home visits, school E initiates support activities after determining unfavourable home environments. Their intervention changes the course of events in that there are improvements in learner

performance. Family structure or home environment determines the provision of school-based support.

5.6.3 Theme 3: Needs analysis

The current study also explored the approaches that rural schools employ in the provision of school-based support and their effective implementation to promote access to education and academic success. Needs analysis emerged consistently as an approach that schools use to develop and implement support services. It is well known that support in any organisation is prompted by a need.

Studies have shown that needs analysis is the basic step in the development of support or intervention strategies because it affords opportunities for organisations to design programmes that address identified needs (Sakkir, Dollah, Arsyad & Ahmad, 2021). The development of appropriate training programmes, for example, relies on effective needs analysis. If support needs are poorly identified, it will lead to a waste of time and resources and the development of inappropriate intervention programmes or activities. The effectiveness of a needs analysis lies in early identification of barriers to learning or needs and effective implementation of intervention or support programmes. These two sub-themes will be discussed in detail below.

5.6.3.1 Sub-theme 1: Early identification of needs

There are various learning needs that could have a negative effect on educational success or achievement and they could be curriculum, psychosocially, psychologically or physiologically related. These needs cannot be separated from learners; they come as a package and it is the responsibility of the schooling system to have systems in place for appropriate identification for effective intervention.

One of the purposes of the policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) is to develop effective mechanisms for early identification of needs (Department of

Basic Education, 2014b). Identification of learning needs or barriers to learning from the onset is critical for the provision of effective school-based support. Evidence emanating from the current study supports and emphasises the importance of early identification of needs as a precursor to effective support.

“The main element of support is earlier identification of learning challenges or psychosocial problems that affect learners’ ability to learn. All these are in put in place to ensure that appropriate support is given to teachers and learners” (DP 1).

Participant’s statement is a response in an individual interview with a district-based support team member indicating that support teams do not concentrate solely on curriculum learning needs, but also on other aspects of teachers’ and learners’ lives such as psychosocial factors because people are also social beings who are affected by their interactions with others and surrounding environments. The response addresses a question on the influence of district-based and school-based support on teaching and learning. There is also emphasis on the need for early identification of learning needs.

“Early identification in January and on admission, using a screening tool such as the SIAS policy and forms. Teachers are to complete relevant forms for grade R, 1 and 7. It is a standard tool from the province have indicated that it should be used. Other schools come up with mechanisms themselves for other grades, especially with regards to learners from other schools” (DP 1).

The policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) mandates that schools put systems in place for early identification (Department of Basic Education, 2014b). The current study found that schools adhere to the mandate of the policy by ensuring that needs or gaps are identified early in the year and from lower grades. Although there is specific form that schools are mandated to use in the determination of needs process, some schools have developed their own as a supplementary tool. Despite adherence to existing prescripts, schools also develop and apply their own approaches in line with their environment or context (Jaspers-van der Maten, Rommes & Scholte, 2023).

They take initiatives to identify learning needs early and appropriately, to promote the development of relevant strategies to address diverse needs faced by their schools.

“...Parents should always be aware of what is going on with education of their children and SBST are involved in raising such an awareness. Early identification is also crucial in this case” (DP 3).

Early identification affords time for support teams to position or organise themselves in advance to involve parents to strengthen support. Parental involvement also assists parents in seeking second opinions or other interventions outside the schooling system should they wish to do so (Department of Basic Education, 2014b). Early identification promotes early intervention, which might change the course of events and improve learning outcomes (Brouwer-Borghuis, Heyne, Vogelaar & Sauter, 2019). It allows teams time for trial-and-error where intervention programmes are tried for effectiveness or discarded when found to be inappropriate.

“We do early identification of needs and challenges and this assists in assessing learning needs or learning barriers and this will determine whether to refer learners to different schools that will assist them better” (DP 1).

Learners are referred to other schools that are more suited to their needs. When barriers are identified earlier, schools, parents and districts work together to ensure that referrals and/or placements are done timeously. Early identification of needs is more useful in cases where current schools do not have the necessary resources or tools to accommodate identified learning needs. Schools are able to explore other possible and helpful avenues and alleviating learning losses, and learners with additional needs are supported better (Nonis & Gibson, 2021).

“District-Based Support teams play an important role in schools. It assists teachers to identify challenges early on and refer them to other schools who can support them better. You must understand that some teachers were trained long time ago and District-

Based Support teams provide these teachers will new skills on the assessment of learning needs and referrals” (DP 2).

Resources are critical in addressing barriers to learning effectively. As indicated earlier, some schools do not have the necessary resources to support additional learning needs. When challenges or needs are discovered earlier, support teams can identify relevant schools with appropriate resources for better support. The study findings also indicate that early identification leads to capacity building. Teacher training or development provided is aligned with identified learning needs, aligning teachers’ skills with needs for effective intervention that could avoid escalation of barriers to learning (Thage, Makgosi & Mthembu, 2021).

As schools engage with parents immediately after identifying educational barriers, their participation is enhanced, which is an essential aspect in addressing barriers to learning effectively (Alqahtani & Arabia, 2023). Parental involvement in the identification process encourages parents to be part of the solution, contributing to coming up with additional avenues to support their children instead of blaming schools or being in denial.

“We try to identify the needs of our learners early on to make sure that we are all on board when we start teaching. We also invite parents to meetings and try to include them in school matters. Sometimes parents do not get involved even when we inform them of what we are suspecting is going on with their kids. Sometimes they are in denial. But we still involve them because they have to be part of the solution” (FGD 1).

The findings in this section highlight the importance of early identification of barriers to learning as an approach employed by schools to improve school-based support. Early identification enhances the development of appropriate intervention programmes and parental participation. It is also beneficial in referrals, placements and identification of relevant resources for support.

5.6.3.2 Sub-theme 2: Effective implementation of intervention strategies

Schools rely heavily on needs analysis in addressing educational challenges. Needs analysis simplifies the identification of root causes, development and implementation of intervention strategies. Addressing barriers to learning effectively requires robust systems and processes in place. What follows should be monitoring and evaluation of implemented interventions (Thage, Makgosi & Mthembu 2021). Results of the current study show that effective implementation of interventions is important in the improvement of school-based support.

“If a barrier is identified and support given, performance will improve. This means that when we notice that there are problems with teachers or learners we intervene and assist in the best way possible. This way we can overcome many problems” (DT 4).

Effective implementation of support strategies is not always attainable due to the unwillingness or lack of involvement of implementers. The study shows that some teachers were not willing to conduct a needs analysis, identify challenges or institute support mechanisms because they viewed the process as tedious and time-consuming. According to Mäkelä, Tuhkala, Mäki-Kuutti and Rautopuro (2023), lack of commitment constrains effective implementation. Findings in the current study support that of Mäkelä, Tuhkala, Mäki-Kuutti and Rautopuro (2023), that suggest that some teachers are resistant to conduct a thorough needs analysis, identifying needs and providing support. The response below supports findings of the these scholars:

“A teacher who identifies learning barrier or problem is the one who is supposed to see to it that all the steps are followed through. Some teachers are not prepared or willing to do that because it takes their time they could be finishing their syllabus. This means that learning barriers experienced by these learners will not be addressed or no referrals will be made at all. These learners will be stuck at the school where they will not be getting the necessary support they need” (FGA 5).

Another crucial aspect in the effective implementation of support strategies that emerged from the data is record keeping. Documenting processes and information relating to identified barriers to learning ensures continuity of support. Referrals or placements that are accompanied by relevant information allow receiving schools to prepare for continuity of support. The study results suggest that there is always insufficient background information regarding learners to make satisfactory determinations of needs. In most cases, receiving schools start from the beginning, which is time-consuming.

“Record keeping over the years is key for supporting children. From their records we can be able to either diagnose or be able to identify previous cases that the learner might have experienced in the past” (AT 4).

“...There are no records of the school-based Support Teams’ activities such as when they identify learning challenges, when they refer the learner or suggest the kind of support the learner needs. school-based support team should keep records so that they have something to refer to...” (FGC 6).

The evidence confirms that effective implementation also relies on reliable records that provide background information about learners. The policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) mandates that learner profiles or records should be provided to receiving schools to ensure smooth transition of support processes (Department of Basic Education, 2014b).

Parental involvement is one of the cornerstones of effective implementation of support strategies. Lambert, Hurley, January and D’Angelo (2022), associate parental involvement with academic success. In addition, parental involvement improves morale, which motivates effectiveness of support strategies (Mboweni & Taole, 2022). Evidence from the current study suggests that participating schools encourage parental involvement from the initial stages of needs identification, which promotes engagement and communication.

“Our responsibility is not to teach only, we must involve parents, be interested in learning these challenges. When we detect a challenge we inform parents so that they know what their children are going through. If we find out that a learner is short sighted or have hearing problems or any other illness, we involve parents and the district” (FGA 1).

“...We call parents and have sessions together with their learners” (FGE 5).

Parental or stakeholder involvement provides opportunities for engagement, communication and collaboration, which are all in line with Wenger’s community of practice theory (Beni, Fletcher & Ní Chróinín, 2022). Engaging in support activities with parents encourages sharing of ideas, which sustains the functionality of school-based support teams in the process. Although there were schools that demonstrated strong presence of parental involvement, there is also evidence to suggest that parents are not always eager to participate when learning gaps or challenges are identified. They shy away from their responsibilities, which results in unsuccessful intervention.

“Parents are in denial that their children are experiencing problems. They always blame schools that they are not doing enough. They always blame the education system. If parents can come on board and accept the challenges, they can be involved in coming up with solutions or intervention strategies. As a result, some learners even drop out of schools. Parents are not always willing to take advise of solutions we bring to them” (DP 3).

“Some parents are not supportive or involved. Our wish is that all parents can be involved in supporting these learners...” (FGE 3).

In this section, findings related to approaches that participating schools used to improve school-based support were discussed. It was found that schools use a needs analysis approach to identify needs, which assists in early identification. Intervention strategies are developed to address identified needs. The findings suggest that the effectiveness of

approaches used to improve school-based support relies on parental involvement, availability of resources and learners' background information or profiles.

5.6.4 Theme 4: Improved teaching strategies

Theme 4 relates to one of the objectives of the study, which was establish the contribution of improving school-based support towards access and success of rural learners. Teaching strategies are the approaches that teachers use in their classrooms to deliver learning content. There are different strategies that teachers apply when teaching, largely influenced by the subject. For example, in teaching reading comprehension, teachers can apply strategies such as reading aloud, brainstorming and asking questions (Dwiningtiyas, Sofyan & Puspita, 2020). Teaching strategies can also be enhanced through capacity building, that is, equipping teachers with relevant content knowledge (Pocaan, 2022). School-based and district-based support is an important factor in the improvement of these aspects.

The study reveals that school-based support influences teaching strategies, which advances access to learning. Teachers demonstrated their support strategies when by seating them at the front of the classroom so that they could see the chalkboard visually impaired learners. Teachers practiced inclusion, which promotes access to learning despite physical barriers to learning. Teachers adapted their teaching approaches through individual attention, for example, to influence access and performance.

"...I develop teachers so that they know how to present a lesson ..." (DP 3).

"If the district-based support team was not there it would have been difficult for teachers to manage cases and apply teaching strategies. Teachers are assisted to use differentiation strategies..." (DP 4).

Support teams are aware that their support capacitates teachers to improve their classroom management styles, content delivery and the support they render to learners

with additional needs. Cardino and Ortega-Dela Cruz (2020), concurs that support allows teachers to understand different learning styles and the subsequent design of strategies to suit those styles of learning.

“District-based support teams influence teaching and learning by capacitating educators as a whole...” (DP 3).

Teaching strategies are strengthened through support and to promotes access to learning. Support nurtures their efforts and willingness to implement programmes that promote inclusivity (Mpu & Adu, 2021). Findings in this section show that improved teaching strategies can accelerate access to education and success of rural learners.

Sub-theme 1: Inclusion

In this context, inclusion refers to educating, accommodating and valuing all learners despite their limitations, circumstances and background. It implies that no learner is discriminated against due to physical, emotional, intellectual, social, or psychological circumstances. There are various factors that impede effective implementation of inclusive education such as lack of direction in terms of precise processes to be followed and legislative frameworks to guide implementation processes (Francisco, Hartman & Wang, 2020). Nonetheless, its effective implementation promotes access and requires stakeholder involvement. Under sub-theme 1, the contribution of inclusion in promoting access to and success in education will be discussed.

It is important that teachers and district officials demonstrate an understanding of inclusion, its intricacies and benefits to education so that they can implement inclusive education programmes successfully. People’s attitudes and perceived unwillingness to conduct certain activities can be attributed to a lack of knowledge or understanding. Woodcock and Hardy (2022), argue that understanding of inclusion and its processes is crucial to successful implementation symbolising the importance of understanding inclusion and its

contribution to promoting access to education and enhancing performance. Furthermore, inclusion addresses stigmatisation and victimisation of others based on their limitations.

“I have a clear understanding of what inclusion means, it means including learners who have some form of disability, are less intelligent or gifted learners. As a school and teachers, we assist these learners with their schoolwork and other educational activities. This school is inclusive, it accommodates learners with disabilities. We built ramps to the bathroom to accommodate learners who are wheelchair bound or could not climb the stairs or any form of entry” (FGA 2).

“Inclusion is about enrolling learners with physical barriers to learning to mainstream school. Sometimes physical barriers such as visual impairment are identified late and this causes problem of addressing this challenge earlier. For inclusion to work in our school, we as teachers must identify learning barriers early and have activities in place to help them” (FGC 1).

In addition to their understanding, participants demonstrated their contribution in its promotion in their schools. Resource shortages forced teachers to improvise their strategies.

“We also have short-sighted learners or those with hearing impairment. We support these learners by sitting them at the front of the class to ensure that they can read lips or see clearly what is written on the chalkboard” (FGA 4).

*“...We also print documents in larger fonts for learners who have vision problems...”
(FGC 5).*

These responses suggest that learners with additional needs in mainstream schools are not left unattended; they are included in the classroom and have access to learning opportunities like everyone else, which limits social isolation normally experienced by learners with barriers to learning and promotes healthy mental well-being (Taff & Clifton,

2022). Some participating schools also ensured accessibility of their buildings or facilities by all learners, irrespective of physical barriers, which encouraged learner attendance. My field notes taken during a visit to one of the participating schools' efforts to promote access to education and opportunities to learn.

“There are ramps built in bathroom entrances because the container and ground are not on the same level. The ramps are wheelchair friendly, which is a form of inclusion, that is inclusivity to all learners irrespective of physical disabilities” (FNA).

Although there is evidence of awareness of inclusion and positive practices thereof, the data also reveals that some of the rural schools that participated in the study still struggled with inclusion due to various challenges, including inadequate resources. The finding resonates with Makoelle and Burmistrova (2020), who found that lack of or inadequate resource provision impedes effective implementation of inclusive education programmes.

“It is hard because the school-based support team is partially functional in our school. We do not have specific tasks in place that we use for inclusion. Barriers to learning sometimes go unattended because we do not have time or resources. The little we can we do like completing forms to district, printing learning resources in larger font to accommodate visually impaired learners” (FGB 4).

“We understand that inclusion is about including learners who are disabled in mainstream schools. These learners are accommodated in our school even though we do not have the resources to help them” (FGB 6).

Even though participating schools experienced resource challenges, the results show that they did not ignore barriers to learning. Instead, they adapted and improvised their classroom strategies to promote inclusivity and accessibility.

“We include all learners in our school. We have learners who have sight problems in classes and what we do is to place them in front of the classroom to make sure that they

can see the board. Those who have hearing problems are also seated in front of the class so that they can read lips. The challenge is that during covid, it was difficult for such a learner to read teachers' because we were wearing masks. They did not benefit much from classes and this was a huge problem" (FGA 6).

"There are new special schools in our townships with pre-vocational schools. Learners are referred and accommodated successfully with what is available. For all learners to be referred to special schools a psychological evaluation must be conducted. We have few psychologists and they have more schools to cover but they do it" (DP 5).

Inclusion is also derailed by infrastructural challenges such as the insufficient number of special schools in rural communities such as this one. Available schools cannot accommodate the number of learners requiring specialised support. Such learners end up in mainstream schools. Although accommodating learners in mainstream school is permissible by law, mainstream schools in rural communities are not adequately resourced (in terms of facilities and human resources with relevant expertise and skills) to implement inclusivity resulting in exclusion, anxiety and isolation, which is detrimental to access and success. Inclusion promotes support services that enhance access to learning (Taff & Clifton, 2022).

Despite resources and other challenges experienced by participating schools, the findings suggest that lack of resources or schools does not deter school-based and district-based support teams from inclusion. Their practices promote access to education even with few resources available.

5.6.5 Theme 5: Addressing barriers to learning effectively

It was also the intention of the current study to identify potential strategies that can be developed to enhance school-based support in rural settings and how such strategies can be implemented effectively to promote access to education and academic success for rural learners. Studies identified various factors that contribute to barriers to learning such as

poverty, different learning paces and stages, levels of intellectual development, language proficiency and school and environments (Salie, Moletsane & Mukuna, 2020). To address or alleviate these barriers successfully, support teams should be clear about their roles and responsibilities, conduct needs analysis, identify learning barriers early and develop and implement intervention strategies that promote access and academic success (Mashraky, 2021). Accordingly, the Education White Paper 6, which states that vulnerability of learners with barriers to learning is aggravated by the extent to which support is provided (Department of Education, 2001). The study did not uncover new or unfamiliar strategies that could be employed to improve school-based support. Instead, results show that strengthening existing approaches that some schools employ could enhance school-based support.

5.6.5.1 Sub-theme 1: Educational resources

Resources are crucial in every sector and determine the success or failure of projects. Allocation of resources in South African schools, particularly those in rural or disadvantaged communities, has been an ongoing debate, which led to the establishment of various organisations to support, collaborate or challenge the Department of Basic Education. For example, a section 27 organisation was established to advocate for social justice, including the right to basic education. In its stance against resource challenges in schools, the organisation took legal action against the Department of Basic Education for failure to provide all schools with textbooks.

Another organisation such as Siyavula took a different route and collaborated with other stakeholders and the Department to address resource shortages (Lambert, 2019). Even though these organisations appear to be on different sides of the spectrum, they are both driven by addressing educational challenges affecting schools in rural and disadvantaged communities. These examples demonstrate the extent to which debates around educational resources in South African schools have unfolded.

Issues surrounding educational resources are universal, such that several studies were conducted to explore the various components. Some found that the availability of resources and facilities influences learner enrolment (Usama, 2023), and others determined the influence that resources and facilities have on academic achievement (Ndemo & Kwaba, 2023). These are just a few of the scholars who have contributed to the wider resource debate all over the world.

In the current study, educational resources emerged as a tool that can drive, address or aggravate barriers to learning. Educational resources such as teachers, teaching and learning materials and school infrastructure were consistently raised by participants as tools that could uplift school-based support. Ngobeni, Maimane and Rankhumise (2020), found that lack of educational resources contributes to poor learner performance suggesting that the provision of adequate resources and infrastructure in schools promotes effective support and enhances accessibility of quality education and academic success.

“...Get more government support systems in terms of resources, bridging classes where learners can get extra support before going to the mainstream schools. Our classes are too big and there is no way for support, they are overcrowded...” (FGE 4).

“We can improve support by allocation of educational resources and increasing provision of support...We could provide additional transport, ensure that we have intense support and more resources...” (DP 4).

“...Lack of resources in schools. Schools should be provided with materials a year before to ensure that learners start learning in the first day of the new year’s term” (AT 1).

Educational resources play a critical role in the improvement of school-based support. Resources allow support teams to strengthen their existing approaches and explore various support avenues that can enhance access to education and contribute to improved learner performance.

One of the most crucial components of resources is human resources. Teachers in this instance are human resources that implement policies at school level. It is of the utmost importance that they be adequately trained, qualified or skilled to carry out support services for learners with additional needs. It is necessary for them to have tools or skills that promote access to education. The results of the study reveal that teachers lack proficiency in South African Sign Language, which suggests that learners with hearing impairments will not be adequately supported.

“Language of teaching and learning is another challenge that should be improved on. If we could improve on that it will assist in improving support in schools” (FGE 4).

“Some schools have disabled learners and we have to provide specialised support to them to ensure that teaching and learning is not disrupted. Resources such as money, nurses and teachers play a major role...We do not have teachers who are trained or qualified teachers to teach disabled learners” (DP 4).

These statements support Ngobeni, Maimane and Rankhumise (2020), who found that teachers lack training in South African Sign Language, which impedes language development. These authors further state that lack of training in sign language contributes to poor performance. Additionally, poor language proficiency impedes access to education. The current study found that participating schools resort to placing learners at the front of the classroom so that they can read lips because teachers are not proficient in sign language.

The results further reveal transportation as another resource challenge. Participants viewed transport as an important resource that promotes access in their schools. Access to support services and learning is derailed by the lack of reliable transportation to and from schools. For example, some support services can only be provided after school hours, and the lack of transportation derails the important strategy.

“...This is not safe at all for learners especially girls to leave school premises late. It has become challenging to keep learners in school after school to provide individual attention and additional support because it is not safe for learners to go home after hours...” (FGB 3).

The Department of Basic Education and the Department of Transport introduced scholar transport to address the challenge of accessibility of schools and safety of learners (Republic of South Africa, 2015). Participants of the current study revealed that the existing transport provision did not cater for all learners sufficiently. Transport times were not aligned with after-school classes. Strengthening existing transport provision in terms of alignment with after-school classes will afford support teams the opportunity to implement strategies that might address barriers to learning.

“Lack of learner transport scholar transport provided by the national department does not always cover all learners. Transport times is also a challenge because it differs with school hours. Some learners do not come to school every day because of this. There is a problem of roads that are in bad conditions. Some learners stay home because of this” (DP 3).

“We are unable to provide individual attention to our learners due to large classes, overcrowding and the amount of work we have as teachers. The only option is to support learners to address barriers to learning by conducting reading exercises for instance, after school...There is no safe transport that will take those learners home after hours...For an example, a learner from nearby school was sexually assaulted and murdered a week or so ago because learners left the school late because teachers were assisting them with challenges they are experiencing, providing extra support after school” (FGB 6).

These responses demonstrate the role of educational resources in addressing educational challenges successfully. They are corroborated by my field notes where I captured my observations during one of my visits to participating school D.

“...A large group of more than 50 learners were gathered outside the gate as if there is a gathering of some sort outside the school gate such that I had to stop few meters away from the gate because learners blocked the entrance. I asked a group of students why they were outside the school gate and one of them replied that they were late and the gate is closed. The rule of the school is that gates are closed immediate after the bell rings. The student further stated that they will open the gate soon to let them all in. When I asked why she was late she said because we stay very far away from school and had to walk all the way. I asked her about scholar transport and she answered there was none, they do not have scholar transport and cannot afford their own transport, so, they walk to school daily. One of the learners added that it is difficult to wake up early to come to school in this cold weather and that is why he arrived late” (FND).

The statement demonstrates the role of resources in access to education. Accessibility to learning opportunities is enhanced by resources. The lack of transport, for example, impedes learners’ ability to arrive at school on time, which contributes to learning losses. This has a negative effect on success because children who cannot endure walking long distances to school could eventually drop out. Educational resources improve school attendance and thus promote access and improve learning outcomes.

5.6.5.2 Sub-theme 2: Teacher training and professional development

As indicated in the preceding section, teachers are educational resources that drive the curriculum and strategies designed to address educational challenges. They are better placed to assess, identify or determine learning needs, social challenges as well as other factors impeding access to and success in education. Teachers provide support that surpasses curriculum implementation. They play a parental role at school. To carry out their teaching and supportive roles effectively, teachers should not only be adept in the subject matter, but also be knowledgeable about social, socio-economic and other barriers to learning to enable them to provide meaningful support.

Teachers' knowledge influences the support they provide to their learners (Jehangir & Nasreen, 2020). It is important that their training "appeals to their social, academic and financial beings and be aimed at producing real learning outcomes" (Ahmed, Pasha & Malik, 2021). Training programmes should be aligned with current educational trends, teaching and learning needs and address educational barriers (Ahmed, Pasha & Malik, 2021).

The current study found that reskilling teachers through training is essential in their retention and it enhances policy implementation (Bawani & Mphahlele, 2021). The current study already determined teachers' understanding of the role of school-based support and should be supplemented by relevant skills, qualifications or training to ensure that learning needs are addressed successfully. The study results reveal that training and professional development are important in improving school-based support, they expand current skills and competencies and improve the execution of support interventions.

"Sometimes learners from rural areas cannot get quality education because people who conduct tutorial lessons are less qualified people who are not trained to teach relevant content, people who passed matric" (questionnaire, school AT 3).

"We as teachers need to be trained in certain issues that relate to access to education, we cannot support our learners if we ourselves do not know how to provide support. We need knowledge on how to determine if learners have learning barriers and how to help them cope" (FGE 5).

"Teacher training and capacity building is important in supporting learners and teachers. Teachers need new information because education is not the same as years ago. So, they need to change with times. This will help them to support their learners better" (DP 2).

"...Rural teachers require basic training sometimes so that they can go to the next level" (DP 3).

These responses relate to potential strategies that could improve support in schools. Data collected through different tools demonstrates the role of teacher training and professional development in improving school-based support. As indicated earlier, teachers lack certain competencies such as sign language proficiency, which negatively affects support for hearing-impaired learners. Training can close the gap, arm teachers with appropriate language skills and ensure that they are abreast of new teaching and support trends. Besides training, teachers can be encouraged to enrol in courses in line with their specialisations (Mabasa-Manganyi, 2023).

“We check their challenges such as curriculum differentiation. We look at the needs of the school and decide that a particular school needs support or those teachers need refresher course” (DP 3).

“District-based support team is important because teachers were trained long time ago, and district support provides training to assist learners will barriers to learning...Teachers lack skills to refer learners” (DP 2).

These responses reiterate the need equip teachers with capabilities to improve certain aspects that relate to the provision of school-based support. Learners with identified barriers to learning are referred to schools that have the necessary resources to address their challenges. Through training, teachers acquire skills to determine when referrals are necessary. Keeping learners in schools that are not resourced to address their challenges implies that they will not be adequately supported or have access to education and are at a higher risk of failure.

Professional development is also crucial in the improvement of classroom practices and is evident in Maboya, Jita and Chimbi (2022), who alluded to the fact that professional development can close teachers' content gaps and improve learner performance. Capacitation through professional development is in line with the constructs of community of practice theory due to its nature of promoting knowledge acquisition (Philander & Botha,

2021). Participants in the current study appeared to support the above findings when they stated that:

“Peer community learnings (PCL) are very important for teachers. Teachers from the same area meet to discuss challenges and how to address them and improve their teaching and learning” (DP 2).

“By ways of workshopping new teachers in terms of classroom management, dealing with different types of learners by School Management Teams (SMTs), kind of orientation workshop to provide new teachers with necessary skill in dealing with learners” (questionnaire, school ET 1).

Training and professional development are necessary in the improvement of classroom practices (Maboya, Jita & Chimbi 2022), and improve teacher retention. Through professional development or learning communities, teachers interact with others and share ideas, experiences and challenges.

The study also reveals a different concept that some of the participating schools used in their efforts to improve school-based support, and that is termed *“twinning”*. Huertas-Abril and Muszynska (2022: 63), indicate that *twinning* is a collaborative learning initiative, which in their case was e-twinning, which played a role in “social and online curriculum integration”. The current study reveals that some schools collaborated with better performing schools, particularly those in different contexts, to improve teaching, learning and educational achievements.

“There is this concept that we are also trying, it is called twinning. Schools from different environment share ideas and educational resources. This could improve learner performance. They can exchange ideas, share resources, learner from each other. Resources are crucial. This will improve support, teaching and learning” (DP 4).

“We identify schools that are performing well and do what we call twinning with them. We are one of the best performing schools in our district. Our principal liaises with principals of those schools to understand what makes them tick. Information she gathers there is used in our school...” (FGE 1).

These schools engaged in *twinning* practices, which are in line with the theory of community of practice. Their engagement with better performing schools allowed them to access those schools’ best practices, which they then applied in their own schools. Regular engagement is a form of professional development as it equips teachers with additional knowledge and skills to support their learners and each other better.

Policy plays an important role in communicating goals and values of a particular sector to maintain certain standards and achieve goals (Jolly & Robins, 2021). Teachers are policy implementers at school level and, according to Guerrero-Nieto and Quintero (2021), have their own perspectives about such policies, which might influence the implementation process. Teachers might not agree with certain policies that they are mandated to implement, which might compromise the effectiveness of the implementation process.

The results of the current study show that provision of training in such instances will enhance teachers’ knowledge of policies for effective implementation.

“Teacher development is required for training and individual development to encourage teachers to study to understand issues involved” (DP 1).

The study findings highlight training and professional development as a potential strategy that can be used to improve school-based support. Equipping teachers with skills and knowledge to carry out policy mandates will significantly improve support, access and success. Training is also beneficial in ensuring that teachers do not pick and choose what to implement. In other words, they do not concentrate on what they are knowledgeable on or comfortable with.

5.6.5.3 Sub-theme 3: Collaboration

Collaboration is regarded as a cornerstone for education because it connects different people with similar interests, values and goals (Hirsch, Stevenson, Ellis & Nese, 2022). It brings different stakeholders together and promotes inclusion. Some countries such as the United States of America have been considering cross-university collaboration to strengthen initial teacher education (Hirsch, Stevenson, Ellis & Nese, 2022). Partnerships strengthen engagements, sharing of ideas and resources and equip members with new skills (Douglas, 2020).

The key to reducing educational barriers and promoting effective teaching and learning lies in strengthened support service, which could be enhanced through collaborative efforts. Parents are the most critical educational stakeholders who play a major role in learning, particularly at home, which aids in children's development. They contribute through creating an environment that strengthens the bond with their children, provides a sense of belonging and improves children's confidence in themselves and their learning.

Similarly, findings in the current study reveal that collaboration with stakeholders such as parents, the community and other departments is critical in the improvement of school-based support, access to education, opportunities to learn and academic success. The study found varying degrees of parental involvement in schools, some positive and some negative. In all these schools, there was some level of parental participation, although it required strengthening. For example, school E indicated that they had strong parental involvement, but it could still be strengthened since some parents were not as supportive:

“...we have parents who help us, sleep in school with learners to prepare for exams...parents also adopt struggling learners for a period of time during examinations...we call parents and have sessions together and there is a group of pastors who preach and pray for them, we involve parents and parents hold their children's hands and place their hands on their heads as pastors pray” (FGE 2).

“Some parents are not supportive or involved. Our wish is that all parents can be involved in supporting these learners” (FGE 4).

“We also invite parents to meetings and try to include them in school matters. Sometimes parents do not get involved even when we inform them of what we are suspecting is going on with their kids. Sometimes they are in denial. But we still involve them because they have to be part of the solution” (questionnaire, school DT 1).

The findings suggest varying degrees of parental involvement and that teachers yearn for satisfactory parental involvement in all aspects of education. The results suggest that despite some resistance, lack of interest, denial and non-involvement, schools still include and invite parents, which indicates teachers’ willingness to implement collaboration and their strong belief in its positive effects on achieving educational success.

“Parents and members of school governing bodies are also included or involved in the team, which strengthen the support that is provided” (DP 1).

“Some parents are involved with their learners’ education and are always there to support their schools. Parents assist with watching learners during breaks to assist teachers. Mediation or involving parents is crucial and it ensures that education is accessible. By involving parents, we are ensuring that education is accessible to all” (FGB 3).

The study also reveals the need for collaboration with other stakeholders such as police, health and social workers. These stakeholders render additional support services required to address educational challenges. For example, social workers get involved in cases of child-headed families. Lack of stakeholder involvement compromises effective implementation of intervention programmes (Makhurane, 2020).

“Involving social workers, nurses, psychologists and other stakeholders to work with drug abuse at schools and learner pregnancy. We have learners who have doing drugs

and girls who are pregnant while still at school. We collaborate with various stakeholders to assist schools with these challenges. We address and empower primary school learners with psychosocial issues such as abuse, harassment etc at school, home and community” (FGD 4).

These statement demonstrates participants’ recognition of the importance of stakeholder engagement and gaps created when there is no interaction. The statement is also an indication that improving school-based support relies on collaboration between schools and other stakeholders that assists in identifying, allocating and sharing resources, which is consistent with Wenger’s community of practice theory, which maintains that community enhances sharing of resources for effective support systems.

Access to quality education is highly dependent on collaboration between the education sector and other stakeholders such as communities, parents and local government (Ama, Moorad & Mukhopadyay, 2020). Each of these stakeholders contributes uniquely to the improvement of educational conditions. One of the criteria for maintaining a successful community of practice is regular engagements, which involve collaboration and communication. Participants of the current study demonstrated that collaboration enhances support systems and practices, which are all critical in promoting access to equitable education and attainment of educational goals.

5.6.5.4 Sub-theme 4: Policy alignment

As indicated in section 2.2.6 (policy context), policy communicates goals and values of an organisation, and sets and maintains certain standards to achieve its goals (Jolly & Robins, 2021). The South African education sector has adequate policy and/or legislative frameworks that direct education towards academic success. Marais and Wessels (2020: 1), argue that there are policies that “lack explicit guidance on implementation”. Perceived insufficient guidance is usually a result of misalignment between policies and contexts. Policy prescripts rarely address rural contexts, which leads to individual interpretation that compromises successful implementation. Although the South African education sector is

supported by various policies, other studies have found some of the policies inadequate in addressing access to learning opportunities and attaining educational outcomes (Tsakeni, Munje & Jita 2021).

The current study reveals that policy alignment is a contributory factor in the improvement of school-based support. There is a misalignment of policies and contexts of implementation, especially rural contexts. Most educational policies are designed with certain contextual conditions in mind, and it is one of the impediments of successful implementation. Misalignment of policies and contexts affect their effectiveness.

“Teachers need to be well informed knowledgeable on policies. Policy documents should not only be filed, but they should also be their bible. Teacher development is required for training and individual development to encourage teachers to study to understand issues involved. There should not be a cut and dry strategy (one-size-fits all)” (DP 1).

The importance of understanding the role of school-based support in teaching and learning was touched on earlier. A clear understanding of guiding principles is also critical, particularly in the implementation phase. The statement also taps into the issue of teacher training, which was discussed in **section 5.6.5.2. (see, “sub-theme 2: Teacher training and professional development”: 194)**. This suggests that policies are not always context specific, and they do not always consider certain conditions that affect implementation processes. Participants also suggested that policy development is exclusionary in that implementers are not involved in the conceptualisation stages, which create ambivalence towards policies, which compromises their successful implementation.

“We are not involved when policies are developed but we implement them. Schools are expected to deliver without resources at all. We work with the same policy as other schools in urban areas. Those schools have resources, they have sponsors and parents who are working and contributing to the school. Our schools are different. Parents are poor and they are not really interested in school matters. We should have policies that speak to us, that tell us where to get resources to implement” (FGC 5).

“Policies are not favourable to rural conditions. They are not always relevant to our environment. It is difficult to implement such policies because they are not conditioned to our rural schools. Some of us choose what to implement and what to ignore because our school don’t have resources to implement of these policies” (FGB 1).

The study reveals that alignment of policies with context is crucial to improve school-based support. Misalignment of policies and contexts frustrates implementers and derail successful implementation (Kabeya, Chigona & Osman 2022). Consequently, some implementers will choose certain aspects of a policy to implement and ignore others. Participants suggested that policy should be relatable to their unique contexts and be aligned with resources at their disposal. For example, a policy on the integration of technology in classrooms will not be implemented if schools do not have the necessary gadgets and connectivity, implying that such schools will not be on par with current educational trends, which infringes access and success.

5.7 Discussion of Findings

The current study set out to examine the effect that school-based support structures have on education and how their improvement could influence access to education and success of rural learners. Curriculum on its own does not always cater for diverse learning needs. There are usually gaps that require some form of intervention to enhance accessibility of opportunities to learn and educational success. Such gaps are mostly a result of socio-economic conditions, unconventional family dynamics and unhealthy social conditions. To close such gaps, robust intervention programmes implemented through school-based support are necessary.

The results of the study suggest that the participating rural schools do not operate on the same level in terms of establishment, maintenance and sustainability of school-based support teams. Even though it is mandated by the policy on Screening, Identification,

Assessment and Support (SIAS) (Department of Basic Education, 2014b), schools establish their support teams and conduct their functions differently.

The participating schools experienced some challenges that arose from contextual conditions in their efforts to provide and improve school-based support, which complicates access and success. Furthermore, some schools did not have a functional relationship with their communities, parents and stakeholders. Dysfunctional parent-teacher relationship compromises the improvement of school-based support, which also relies on the contribution of various stakeholders. The findings of the study will be discussed in relation to the questions or objectives that the study intended to answer or achieve.

5.7.1 Objective 1

To explore the teachers' understanding of the role school-based support play in teaching and learning.

As one of its objectives, the study explored teachers' understanding of the role school-based support play in teaching and learning. Understanding is the initial step to improving and providing effective support. People cannot address what they do not understand or acknowledge. There should be a demonstration of whether they have any useful knowledge of issues at hand. Although understanding cannot be accurately measured, it can be demonstrated through actions. Through understanding the role of support in teaching and learning, support teams will understand their learners in terms of their strengths and weaknesses and know the support required. In turn, it builds a trusting relationship between support teams and learners.

According to the findings, participants understand school-based support and its role in improving learning outcomes. Teachers demonstrated that they had a clear understanding of the policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) (Department of Basic Education, 2014b), and its mandate. They were aware of the establishment,

composition, functionality and sustainability of school-based support teams and how these influence teaching and learning.

Despite this knowledge and understanding as described earlier, the study found inconsistencies in terms of support provided. For example, the participating schools did not have structured support systems, services or activities in place. School-based support teams conducted their roles haphazardly, with no set standard operating procedures or processes. The way in which support services were conducted suggests that some participating schools did not formulate their own guidelines as guided by national or provincial policies. School-based support teams were functional in some of the participating schools suggesting lack of consistency in terms of establishment and continuance of support teams across the district.

The study also found that there was reluctance to identify learning needs. Teachers found the whole process from identification to completion of relevant forms and the intervention process tedious and time-consuming. The findings suggest that some barriers to learning were left unattended because teachers were restricted and this has dire consequences for access and learner performance. For example, participating school B indicated that there were Grade 10 learners who could not read comprehensively that attributed to learning barriers that were not addressed in the lower grades.

The results of the study suggest that schools do not always adhere to policy prescripts and are selective implementers, which negatively affects access and educational outcomes. Misalignment of policies with contexts makes implementation processes unsuccessful.

5.7.2 Objective 2

To establish factors that determine the provision of school-based support.

The provision of any kind of support is prompted by a need. The study undertook to identify the factors that call for support in schools. The results reveal that barriers to learning within learners and the surrounding environment are the leading factors that determine the provision of school-based support. The main cause of these barriers is socio-economic conditions, particularly at home. The above assertion is substantiated by Salie, Moletsane and Mukuna (2020), who found socio-economic conditions to be the main causes of barriers to learning.

I visited all schools that participated in the study more than once for initial introductions, data collection and collection of questionnaires. On these occasions, it took me longer to reach schools due to the condition of the roads. The housing in the community is not in the best condition either, which demonstrates poverty. My observations about the state of the surrounding environment substantiate the findings of the study and my view that poverty contributes to barriers to learning, thus necessitating the provision of support.

School A had a drive to provide sanitary pads to young girls because their families could not afford to buy them. Sanitary drive is a support mechanism necessitated by poverty. Some participating schools had a feeding scheme provided by the National School Nutrition Programme of the Department of Basic Education, which is also a support strategy that the Department uses to encourage learner attendance.

The study found that family structure is a factor in the determination of provision of support. Family structure contributes to children's well-being, which plays an important role in educational success (Wesserman, 2020). Participants indicated that some of their learners came from child-headed families, homes with single parents or grandparents only, which necessitated the provision of support. Participants from schools C and E, for example, indicated that they conducted home visits to observe learners' home

environments. All these factors determine the ability of children to access education and their academic success.

Upon establishing that learners were from child-headed families or any other form of dysfunctional family structure, they instituted support mechanisms. For example, in instances where parents had died, school C indicated that they involved social workers to assist learners with grants and other necessities. These support activities were initiated by all the participating schools, including those with dysfunctional support teams demonstrating schools' willingness to address barriers to learning through the provision of support. The study established that socio-economic conditions such as poverty and family structure are the main determinants for the provision of support.

5.7.3 Objective 3

To determine the approaches that rural schools employ to provide school-based support.

The findings suggest that the main approach that the participating schools used in the provision of school-based support is needs analysis. The development and implementation of effective support mechanisms lie in proper needs analysis. Participants revealed that they assessed the needs of schools, learners and teachers and devised appropriate intervention strategies. Needs analysis is important in the provision of support. It affords opportunities to assess gaps and develop appropriate strategies to address challenges. Inappropriate needs analysis and diagnostic assessments lead to the development of improper intervention strategies, which also hamper the implementation process. Proper needs analysis promotes the development of "tailored" strategies to address challenges (Zoghiami, 2020). It is for this reason that some participants conducted home visits to investigate learners' needs further.

Participants emphasised that needs analysis was conducted early at the beginning of each academic year. Schools identified needs or gaps and developed and implemented

strategies early. District-based support teams worked closely with schools to identify teaching and learning needs to ensure that no child or teacher was left behind. The district had a functional support structure, which enabled them to assist schools in conducting a needs analysis. They supported schools with support services located at district level to address identified gaps. Despite partial or non-functionality of school-based support teams in some of the participating schools, the findings suggest that they did assess teaching and learners' needs and made referrals necessary to other schools or their district for support.

Studies have shown that effective support does not start and end with identification; it should be followed by the development of remedial strategies, their application and monitoring (Thage, Makgosi & Mthembu, 2021). There were no structured support strategies employed by the participating schools. Support mechanisms developed were obstructed by challenges such as insufficient resources. For example, participants from school B identified after classes as an additional support strategy. However, transport provision was insufficient to keep learners after school.

Although there are approaches that rural schools employ to provide school-based support, effective implementation is not realised due to certain interferences hindering access to education and academic success of rural learners. Teachers end up providing uncoordinated support on their own, such as buying clothes for their learners whenever there is a need and providing internet access to needy learners.

5.7.4 Objective 4

To establish the contribution of improving school-based support towards access and success of rural learners

The study results show that the main contribution to the improvement of school-based support is improved educational achievements. Teachers and learners perform better when they are adequately supported and their needs addressed. The findings suggest that

when district-based support teams make provision for psychologists or social workers to address certain barriers to learning, improving conditions of teaching, learning and performance. For example, supporting child-headed families encourages school attendance. Support alleviates certain pressures so that children concentrate on their education. It improves children's home environment, which has been associated with improved learning achievements (Fadiji & Ready, 2020).

An important aspect of improving school-based support is the allocation of educational resources such as suitably skilled, knowledgeable and qualified teachers (Essau & Maarman, 2021). The study established that capacitating teachers improves support and allows learners access to adequately skilled, knowledgeable and trained teachers who are capable of effective curriculum delivery. Even though the results show that some teachers still struggle in their roles, there is evidence to suggest that they can be the best versions of themselves if adequately trained or supported.

Inclusion is one of the important aspects in the improvement of educational achievements. Schools are mandated to educate, accommodate and value each learner despite their limitations, circumstances, challenges or background. The findings suggest that participating schools did not follow standard procedures when it comes to inclusion. There appears to be a lack of standard guidelines or frameworks that guide inclusion in the participating schools. Each participating school had its own aspects of inclusion.

However, there is also evidence to suggest that schools implemented inclusive education programmes and supported their learners in the process. An example is that of teachers who placed visual- and hearing-impaired learners at the front of the classroom so that they could see the chalkboard and read teachers' lips. These are support strategies that schools apply to ensure inclusivity, affording each learner access to opportunities to learn.

5.7.5 Objective 5

To establish potential strategies that can be developed to enhance school-based support in rural settings and how these strategies can be effectively implemented to promote access to education and success for rural learners.

The current study also intended to formulate strategies that can be developed to improve school-based support and their effective implementation to promote access to education and success of rural learners. The results reveal that addressing barriers to learning effectively is the most important approach that can lead to access to education and success in education. Ignoring barriers to learning or addressing them superficially intensifies their effects. A good example is that given by school B about a Grade 10 learner who experienced reading challenges. Had the learner's reading challenges been addressed in the lower grades, the learner might have been able to read better. The learner could be suffering from a learning disability, which was unfortunately neither identified nor addressed.

The study established that improvement of school-based support also relies on availability of resources at schools. Lack of resources has been found to contribute to the intensity of barriers to learning (Ngobeni, Maimane & Rankhumise, 2020). Increasing resource allocation in schools will enhance the effectiveness of support. Addressing infrastructural and other resource challenges such as overcrowding and transportation will allow teachers to render classroom support, which promotes access. Even though the policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) shifted from individual attention to a holistic approach (Department of Basic Education, 2014b), the study results suggest that participating schools still practised the former approach as a remedial action and believed in its effectiveness.

Teacher training emerged as a strategy that can be improved to promote access to education of rural learners. Participants revealed that success is determined by access. Learners who have access to opportunities to learn through adequately trained and

suitably qualified and skilled teachers stand a better chance of success. Training equips teachers with new knowledge, skills and approaches that improve education. Lack of training has a negative effect on teachers' ability to render support services (Jehangir & Nasreen, 2020). Training in South African Sign Language, for example, will promote access to education, irrespective of where learners are seated in classrooms. Training and professional development as a strategy can promote access and success. The results show a need for teacher training in sign language proficiency.

Collaboration is another potential strategy that can be used to improve school-based support. Collaboration fosters sharing of ideas and teamwork and promotes inclusion (Hirsch, Stevenson, Ellis & Nese, 2022), which is consistent with Wenger's community of practice theory. Collaboration through parental involvement is crucial. The results highlight inadequate collaboration with parents, the community and other educational stakeholders, which hinders continuity of learning.

The involvement of stakeholders such as the police, nurses and psychologists was also emphasised. Stakeholders can alleviate resource challenges through donations or sponsorships, counselling services or guidance. Effective implementation of any intervention is also determined by the level of cooperation between schools and stakeholders.

The results also reveal a misalignment between policies and context. Policies are not aligned with rural conditions; instead, they are developed around urban contexts in terms of resources, capacity and infrastructure. The disjuncture has a negative effect on successful implementation and intended results.

5.8 Conclusion

In this section findings of the study were presented in a narrative format. Research findings were outlined in terms of themes and sub-themes that emerged during data analysis stage. Findings were discussed in relation to the research questions and objectives to determine

the extent to which those questions were answered. The results of the study suggest the existence of unstructured and disorganised support services in sampled schools. The effects of educational resources, teachers' skills and capabilities and time constraints that negatively affect effective implementation of support strategies were also highlighted. Misalignment of policies with rural contexts also gained prominence in the study. These findings suggest that there is a need to improve school-based support. The improvement of school-based support relies on strengthening collaborative efforts with critical educational stakeholders. In the next chapter, the summary, conclusions and recommendations of the study will be discussed.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, data collected to explore the effect of school-based support in education and how its improvement could influence access to education and success of rural learners was analysed through a content analysis procedure and interpreted, and the results were presented. The findings of the study were discussed in relation to the research questions and the theory that underpinned the study to demonstrate the extent to which the aim of the study was realised.

In this chapter, the main findings of the study will be summarised, concentrating on the main themes that emerged during the data analysis process. The findings will be discussed in relation to the main and secondary research questions. Recommendations for the education sector and suggestions for further research will be made. Chapter 6 will also address limitations of the study as well as the potential strategies that can be adopted to improve school-based support for access to education and success of rural learners.

6.2 Summary of the Study

The aim of the study was to explore the effect of school-based support in education and how its improvement could influence the access to education and success of rural learners. To realise the aim of the study, an in-depth exploration of the research problem was required. The exploration was carried out through an instrumental case study design, which allows for the use of different data collection tools.

Chapter 1 introduced the study in terms of the background, the research problem, objectives and questions. It set the tone for the study and the direction followed to attain its aim and objectives.

In **chapter 2**, existing literature related to the topic of the study was presented to determine what has already been written about the topic and existing gaps that required exploration. It also assisted in avoiding repetition in terms of what has already been researched and adding to the existing body of knowledge.

The theoretical framework that underpinned or provided a lens for the study was discussed in **chapter 3** in various contexts. Wenger's community of practice theory was adopted to underpin the study due to its emphasis on collaboration, participation and social engagement. The community of practice theory was chosen because it relates to principles of school-based support as set out in the policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) (Department of Basic Education, 2014b: 15), which states that the "efficiency of support is based on intersectoral collaboration". Wenger's community of practice theory advocates for collaborative practices that foster sharing of ideas, challenges, solutions and best practices.

Chapter 4 addressed the research methodology, that is, the means and ways of conducting research to answer the research question. An instrumental case study design was chosen due to its nature of providing an in-depth exploration of the research problem. Additionally, a case study was suitable because it allowed the use of more data collection tools, which enhances the results of the study. The sample, its size and site selection were also explained.

Chapter 5 outlined data analysis processes and the interpretation of results. The findings of the study were presented in relation to the research questions to demonstrate the extent to which the questions were answered. Participants' responses were presented verbatim to ensure that they were accurately represented without compromising the essence of their views, perceptions, experiences and practices. The findings of the study were discussed in accordance with the themes and sub-themes that emerged during the data analysis process.

As indicated earlier, the current chapter, **chapter 6**, is the final and concluding chapter of the study. The summary, conclusions and recommendations for the sector and further research will be presented in this chapter. A strategy to improve school-based support will also be presented.

6.3 Summary of Findings

The five themes and ten sub-themes that emerged from the data analysis will be summarised.

6.3.1 Theme 1: Functionality of school-based support teams

The findings under theme 1 theme suggest that three out of five schools did not have functional school-based support teams. Schools that did not have functional support teams cited time constraints as the main challenge of establishing and maintaining support teams. Two out of five schools had functional support teams in place, which aided their inclusion efforts. The time constraints sub-theme did not only affect the establishment and sustainability of support teams, but also impeded the implementation of some intervention strategies to support learners with additional learning needs.

6.3.2 Theme 2: Barriers to learning

Theme 2 emerged as a determining factor in the provision of school-based support. The participating schools indicated that the main factor that influenced their decision to provide support in their schools was barriers to learning at school and home environments. Socio-economic conditions and family structure were recurring sub-themes and they compounded barriers to learning, which prompted the implementation of support strategies.

6.3.3 Theme 3: Needs analysis

The results of the study show that participating schools and district-based support teams conducted needs analysis as an approach to provide support in their schools. The results of the needs analysis acted as a conduit through which support teams conducted early identification of needs and developed and instituted support programmes contributes towards effective implementation of intervention programmes, which promote access to education and enhance the attainment of educational goals.

6.3.4 Theme 4: Improved teaching strategies

Under theme 4 theme, the results show that support provided by schools-based and district-based support teams influences teaching strategies, which promotes inclusion. Teachers determined the support that certain learners required in their classrooms and improvised their teaching approaches to accommodate all learners. Determination of needs demonstration that improving school-based support improves teaching strategies or approaches, which aids in educational accessibility and subsequent success.

6.3.5 Theme 5: Addressing barriers to learning effectively

The results reveal potential strategies that could be used to enhance school-based support in rural schools. The ability of support teams to address barriers to learning effectively is a culmination of establishing and sustaining functional support teams, identifying needs early and adapting teaching approaches. The study reveals that effective implementation of support systems relies on the availability of resources, collaboration between schools and other educational stakeholders, alignment of policies with rural contexts and the capacitation of teachers with the necessary skills and capabilities. All these aspects are sub-themes in addressing barriers to learning effectively.

6.4 Review of Research Questions

The research questions will be discussed in relation to themes and sub-themes that emerged during the data analysis process under the current section. The main research question of the study is: How does the improvement of school-based support in education affect the access and success of rural learners? The discussions in this section will centre on the secondary and primary research questions. The following secondary questions were explored to answer the main research question:

- How do teachers understand the role that school-based support plays in teaching and learning?
 - What factors determine the provision of school-based support?
 - What approaches do rural schools employ in the provision of school-based support?
 - How does the improvement of school-based support contribute towards access and success of rural learners?
 - What potential strategies can be developed to enhance school-based support in rural settings and how can these strategies be effectively implemented to promote access to education and success for rural learners?
- **Question 1: How do teachers understand the role that school-based support plays in teaching and learning?**

Knowledge and understanding of any directive are critical aspects in any successful undertaking. Teachers cannot master or practise the activities of school-based support if they do not have an understand of what they entail. The results of the current study show that the teachers surveyed had a clear understanding of the role of school-based support in teaching and learning. Their understanding was acquired through training on the implementation of the policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) Department of Basic Education, 2014b), and interaction or collaboration with others. They were knowledgeable about the mandates and prescripts of this policy. Their understanding

influenced their willingness and attitudes in the implementation of support programmes or activities (Brown & Buthelezi, 2020).

However, their understanding did not extend to practice. Participants in some of the schools reported that they did not have school-based support teams in place. Some stated that they had support teams in their schools but the teams were not fully functional. Consequently, these teachers engaged in school-based support activities in silos, inconsistently and haphazardly. They did not have structured programmes or activities in place and the main deterrent cited was time constraints.

Despite teachers' understanding of the role of school-based support in teaching and learning, evidence from three participating schools indicates that their support structures were characterised by partial functionality or non-functionality, inconsistency and unplanned or disorganised support services, which is not in line with the key principle of community of practice theory, which advocates for regular social interaction characterised by exchanging ideas on common concerns. Understanding is gained through continuous social interaction, which allows members to interpret each other's actions and behaviours to construct their own meanings and apply newly acquired understanding or knowledge to their own contexts (Fish, Flavell & Cunningham, 2022). Support teams from three schools were deprived of new experiences that can only be acquired through association with others. Prolonged or continuous exposure to support activities increases team members' understanding of issues at hand (Jaye, Levy, Majakwara & Hanson, 2020).

Since most of the participants in the current study worked in silos, they did not benefit from the activities of a community, such as sharing resources. Each individual handled their own challenges or successes on their own, which does not benefit teaching, learning, access and success. Non-existence of or non-functional school-based support teams demonstrates a disjuncture between understanding and practice. If teachers were conducting support services frequently, it would improve their efficiency (Teig, Scherer & Nilsen, 2019). The more they engage in school-based support activities, the more they will

perfect their practice and efficiency. Constant and continuous engagement will also promote proactive measures rather reactive ones.

Time constraints emerged as one of the major deterrents in the establishment and sustainability of functional support teams in some participating schools. Their involvement in support services would leave them with insufficient time to commit to their curriculum-related activities. Therefore, curriculum implementation was an easy choice because they viewed it as their core function and an enabler to educational success. Schools that have functional support teams and those that didn't, have the same amount of time to teach and conduct school-based support activities. The finding suggests that teachers are not cultivating the benefits of social interaction and creating meaningful relationships that build on their existing knowledge and understanding. The establishment of functional school-based support teams could expand teachers' knowledge and understanding base. They can adopt different strategies from others that could influence support services in their respective schools.

- **Question 2: What factors determine the provision of school-based support?**

One of the intentions of the current study was to identify factors that determine the provision of school-based support. There are various personal and environmental factors that are found to necessitate support. These are emotional, psychological, social, physiological, psychosocial or contextual, and they do not necessarily work in isolation, but could be a combination of some or all (Silva-Martínez, Iglesias-Martínez & Lozano-Cabezas, 2023). These factors are compounded by an unfavourable home environment, which affects or influences individuals' ability to attain certain educational goals (Mampe, 2020).

Barriers to learning are the main determinants of school-based support. Participants understood what they assessed when making determinations for support. Most of them indicated that they were triggered by learners' struggles inside and outside of the classroom, which compelled them to undertake a deeper analysis of the root causes. A

learner who, for example, was not performing well or whose performance had declined was a call for concern for teachers. Upon this discovery, teachers were compelled to conduct further investigations to identify specific challenges impeding learners' performance.

The study also revealed that teachers were triggered by learners' outward appearance, behaviour and mannerism to determine intervention needs, for example a learner who was wearing torn or inappropriate clothes for a particular season. Usually, the outward appearance seemed to be a result of poverty or abusive home environments. Socio-economic conditions thus became the main determinants in the decision-making processes of providing support services. Basing the determination on socio-economic conditions is in line with Cekiso, Cekiso, Rabeleman, Jadezweni, Mandende and Dieperink, (2022), who found that performance of rural learners is affected by their parents' low levels of education, socio-economic status and unfavourable home environments.

Family structure was also found to be one of the determinants of the provision of support. Some learners were raised by their grandparents or extended family members due to parents' deaths or working far from home. Participants also reported that there were learners from child-headed families who struggled with attendance and performance, which affected access to education. Learners from child-headed families experience extreme trauma that compromises their ability to learn successfully and they require a specialised form of support to unlock their full potential. Factors around non-traditional or dysfunctional family structures determine the provision of support and the nature of support required.

Socio-economic conditions exacerbate home environments, thus intensifying barriers to learning. In some instances, teachers were compelled by these conditions to provide individual support to promote educational access and continuity of learning. Lack of structured support in some of the participating schools compelled teachers to institute individual relief measures to alleviate socio-economic pressures that compound barriers

to learning. Teachers had to provide clothes to some of their needy learners to encourage school attendance.

- **Question 3: What approaches do rural schools employ in the provision of school-based support?**

The effectiveness of school-based support relies on the approaches adopted and how they are implemented. The study found that participating schools employed needs analysis as a primary approach in the provision of school-based support. Teachers assessed teaching and learning needs and gaps and determined relevant support services that could be used to address identified needs. The assessment of teaching and learning needs assists support teams in the development of relevant and appropriate intervention programmes.

Needs analysis affords opportunities for early identification of needs and subsequent support mechanisms. Determination of needs is one of the most important stages in the provision of support because it highlights contextual variables that might influence the provision of support. The support mechanism considers teachers', learners' and families' perspectives before the development of intervention programmes (Wulandari & Hustarna, 2020), thus adopting a holistic approach.

The results of the current study show that conducting a needs analysis is critical in the early identification of needs and effective implementation of intervention programmes. It ensures that support teams put their support systems in place timeously, which limits interruptions of teaching and learning and alleviates the intensity of educational barriers (Department of Basic Education, 2014b). These practices are in line with the prescripts of the SIAS Policy, which mandates earlier identification of gaps. Kosimov (2021), states that early determination of educational needs affords opportunities of identifying relevant resources and processes to close those gaps.

Effective implementation of any strategy in any organisation is dependent on resources, the attitudes of implementers and time. Although the participating schools conducted a

needs analysis to identify teaching and learning needs and provide support, the practice was not consistent across the board. Some schools did not have functional support teams in place; instead, they conducted uncoordinated activities in silos, which led to ineffective implementation. Schools that had functional support teams in place encountered countless resource shortages, lack of parental involvement and time constraints. These challenges impeded their intervention efforts.

Parental involvement was reported as an impediment to the improvement of school-based support suggesting that schools miss out on opportunities to build meaningful relationships with parents. Children grow up with a perception that they are in an uncaring environment, which neglects their needs and affects their educational achievements (Bachman, Anderman, Zyromski & Boone, 2021). Perceptions of participants of the current study regarding lack of parental involvement were that parents were less interested in education and not motivated to be involved. Consequently, schools did not make elaborate attempts to mobilise parental support. Instead, they continued to use normal channels of communication, which have proven ineffective, such as instructing learners to bring their parents to school when learners have committed a transgression. Although schools' are making efforts, it still does not have the desired effect, as some parents do not attend to these issues and schools are forced to proceed without parents' inputs or involvement.

Infrastructural challenges were also found to impede the effectiveness of activities of school-based support teams. After-school classes were identified as a mechanism that could be used to support learners with additional needs. However, the implementation of the initiative was derailed by inadequacies in scholar transport. Funded scholar transport does not make provision for after-school classes. Even though teachers demonstrated positive attitudes towards conducting afternoon classes to support learners that could not be assisted during normal classroom activities, their efforts were impeded by infrastructural and resource challenges. Shortcomings of the system obstruct constructive teaching, learning and effective implementation of support services (Chantyclaire, 2021).

The success of approaches that schools employ in the provision of support hinges on parental involvement, a favourable home environment conducive to continuous learning, availability of resources and support from other stakeholders. These affect not only learner performance, but also teacher performance, which affects educational access and success (Thaba-Nkadimene, 2020).

- **Question 4: How does the improvement of school-based support contribute towards access and success of rural learners?**

The current study found that the participating schools created teaching and learning environments with support systems that fostered motivation, positive attitudes and willingness to conduct support activities efficiently, which contributed towards academic achievement (Morris, 2020). This is in line with the policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) which states that changes in attitudes, behaviour, teaching methods, curricula and learning environment contribute towards the resolution of educational challenges (Department of Basic Education, 2014b). Schools with functional school-based support teams support teaching and learning activities, which promotes accessibility of learning opportunities and academic achievement.

Participants in the current study reported that strengthening support systems in their schools influenced their teaching strategies, which is crucial in creating an inclusive education environment. Teachers adapted their teaching strategies in their classrooms based on identified learning needs. For example, they rearranged the seating positions of the learners to ensure that visually or hearing-impaired learners could access the learning content. This shows how support affects classroom strategies, which aids vulnerable learners to access learning.

Teachers are critical human resources in curriculum implementation, identification of needs or gaps and provision of support. The study results reveal that teachers from the participating schools lacked proficiency in sign language, which impeded successful implementation of inclusive education. Learners with hearing impairments, for example,

had to resort to reading teachers' lips. Teachers' lack of sign language proficiency constrains inclusion efforts in schools (Chauke & Tabane, 2021). Even though the participant teachers adapted their classroom methods by rearranging the seating, there were extenuating circumstances that rendered this approach ineffective, such as when everyone was wearing masks during COVID. This deprives learners of opportunities to learn, thus influencing access and inclusion (Taff & Clifton, 2022). Supporting teachers through training programmes that elevate access and improve educational outcomes is crucial.

Even though three out of five of the participating schools continued to devise means of modifying their classroom management approaches to promote inclusion, their efforts did not always yield positive results. This indicates the importance of establishing and maintaining functional support teams that engage regularly to evaluate and strengthen existing strategies that seem ineffective. Access to and success in education can only be attained through solid support systems that strive to tend to children needs, irrespective of their limitations (Kauffman & Hornby, 2020). Schools and teachers in the current study demonstrated their ability to promote inclusion, access and success, provided they had uninterrupted support that reinforced their efforts (Long, Ferranti & Westerman, 2022).

- **Question 5: What potential strategies can be developed to enhance school-based support in rural settings and how can these strategies be effectively implemented to promote access to education and success for rural learners?**

Barriers to learning are more intense in public than private schools and are the main impediments to access to equitable education and success of learners in rural schools (Alshwiah, 2021). The current study also found that the participating schools were confronted by barriers to learning that were compounded by environmental factors, which undermined their support efforts. Factors such as engagement, parental involvement, policy mismatch, inadequate resources and poorly skilled teachers compromise the development and effective implementation of support services. Schools require support in

harnessing these facets to achieve educational access and success. Failure to exploit positives in these factors increases barriers to learning.

Educational resources have been found to influence the implementation of inclusive education (Chauke & Tabane, 2021). Resource challenges were also a recurring sub-theme in the results of the current study. The participating schools did not have resources to support visually and hearing-impaired learners, for example. They applied temporary measures to ensure that each learner was afforded a fair opportunity to learn. These schools demonstrate an understanding of the importance of their role towards promotion of inclusivity. They created enabling conditions for an improved teaching and learning environment.

Strengthening inclusive practices through acquiring sign language proficiency could enable accessibility of learning opportunities. This will allow hearing-impaired learners to access education. Instead of increasing fonts on printed materials, braille can be used to support visually impaired learners. These initiatives will capacitate teachers and stimulate their willingness to address learning gaps (Makhalemele & Payne-Van Staden, 2020; Kheswa, 2020). The current study shows that capacitating human resources is a key driver in promoting accessibility of equitable education by all learners. These skills can be acquired through training. Engagement with others could assist in identifying basic information or knowledge that teachers could use in combination with acquired skills and this will build capacity of schools and teachers (Fish, Flavell & Cunningham 2022).

Alignment of policy with rural context is crucial in the improvement of support in schools. Policy mandates were found to contrast with conditions in participating schools. The policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) mentions that schools should maintain and regulate minimum requirements for functionality of support teams (Department of Basic Education, 2014b), which contrasts with current conditions of support teams in some of the participating schools. The participating schools were constrained in terms of resources, skills and time to maintain minimum functionality of their support teams. Time constraints, for example, did not permit certain schools to establish

and maintain a functional support structure. In some schools, teachers did not have sufficient time to focus on all learners with additional support needs because of class sizes. They were confronted by overcrowded classes, which are time and labour intensive to manage and support.

As previously indicated, effective implementation of any support mechanisms is dependent on reliable resources, sufficient time, collaboration and adequately skilled or trained implementers. Addressing these obstacles will enhance access to education, learning opportunities and achievement of educational outcomes. The education sector should create enabling conditions that aid any support strategy applied to cater for all educational needs. Professional learning through engagement and participation could enhance the effectiveness of support strategies. Through regular interaction with their peers, teachers could gain different perspectives on how to identify and address teaching and learning needs effectively. Policymakers should consider contextual challenges that are rural specific and make the necessary provisions in policies to ensure smooth implementation.

- **Main research question: How does the improvement of school-based support in education affect access to education and success of rural learners?**

The study found that two out of five participating schools had functional support teams in place and three did not. Participants from schools with functional support services reported improved access to education and academic success. Schools without functional teams in place are faced with myriad support challenges that impede even their individual support efforts. All these schools operate in similar circumstances, and they face similar socio-economic, resource and facility challenges, which raises the question: what are some schools doing differently from others? The answer to this question could unlock potential strategies that schools could employ to improve support teams to promote access to education and attainment of educational success.

The findings indicate that support promotes access to learning. Teachers in the study showed that they accommodated disabled learners or those with additional support needs by ensuring their participation in classroom activities. Learners were given fair opportunities to learn and succeed. These achievements are attained with limited skills, resources, support and time, signifying that intensifying support services could lead to much better outcomes. Training these teachers in basic sign language proficiency, for example, will allow them to engage impaired learners effectively, which increases support and access.

Engaging in the activities of school-based support provides teachers with opportunities to learn from each other. The support team becomes a community that creates a professional learning platform. Schools that were able to maintain the functionality of their support teams enjoyed some level of educational success. They reported that they had learners who were able to break free from the constraining environment to attain academic success. They used these learners to motivate others who were still in school. These schools identified gaps, developed approaches to close those gaps to address barriers to learning and ultimately promoted inclusion and access despite limiting conditions they encountered.

The study also found that teachers conducted home visits to assess the conditions of learners' home environments. Information gathered from home visits was used to determine the kind of support learners required to unlock their potential. Socio-economic conditions, which are the usual inhibitors to access to education and success, were addressed through engaging other departments such as the Department of Social Development, which provides financial support. Some teachers bought school uniforms for needy learners. Some schools were on the National School Nutrition Programme, which provides learners with nutritious meals each day. Some schools also supplied learners with necessities such as sanitary pads. These kinds of initiatives allow learners to focus on their studies, promote school attendance and access to education and improve learner performance.

Engaging other stakeholders in addressing barriers to learning also improves collaboration and involvement that ensures that additional needs that are outside of schools' ambit are attended to. The involvement of educational stakeholders in addressing barriers to learning implies that impediments to accessibility of learning opportunities are alleviated. Involvement of sister departments and other educational partners also implies that relevant resources are identified and provided. Teachers are unburdened from responsibilities of sourcing resources by involving partners, thus allowing them to dedicate more of their time to curriculum-related matters. Stakeholder involvement also strengthens communication, relationships and interaction, all of which are vital aspects of a community of practice.

6.5 Implications for Theory, Research and Practice

The primary aim of the study was to explore the effect of school-based support in education and how its improvement could influence the access and success of rural learners. The findings of the study have implications for theory, research and practice, which will be discussed in the section below.

6.5.1 Implications for theory

I used Wenger's community of practice theory as a lens to explore the effects of improving school-based support on access to education and success of rural learners. Community of practice theory promotes regular interaction of people who share common goals, interests and concerns (Brinton, Chilmonik, Koi & Monh, 2021), observe each other's behaviours and actions, and interpret and apply these to their own situations (Fish, Flavell & Cunningham, 2022). Community of practice theory also emphasises collaborative practices, which act as learning tools that improve skills and practices. Members of a community of practice draw knowledge from each other's experiences and apply same to their contexts.

The same applies to the current study. School-based support team members who interact, collaborate and engage on a regular basis acquire new understanding and capacitate each

other. Their continuous interactive engagement births collaborative efforts, allowing them to assist each other in identifying and sharing ideas, solutions and resources. They model each other's behaviour and practices to apply to their individual scenarios or contexts, thus influencing their own practices. Learning through modelling and observing others could enhance self-efficacy and skills (Yildirim, Isik, Gulcek & Ayla, 2020). School E, is a good example of how social interaction enhances the effectiveness of support activities and collaboration and how these in turn influence their school's performance. The principal interacted with principals from other schools, learned their practices that contribute towards educational achievement and applied those in their own school context. They shared their acquired knowledge and understanding with the school-based support team members. Modelling behaviour enhanced their interaction with parents and learners.

Three elements that characterise Wenger's community of practice theory, which are domain, community and practices or skills (Hyder, Adcock & Brown, 2020), are applicable to the current study. School-based support team members teach various subjects, some similar and some different; they all have teaching skills and are in a teaching community. Although members of school-governing bodies are not teachers, they share similar goals with schools. They all strive to support teaching and learning and particularly learners with additional learning needs to promote inclusion. Each support team member has a unique role to play in the attainment of educational goals.

Improvement of school-based support relies on support teams' willingness to meet regularly, strategically position themselves to assess their specific needs and develop relevant mechanisms to address those needs. The attainment of their goals is largely influenced by aligning themselves with others who share similar views, challenges and experiences. Belonging to a community provides members with a platform to encourage, support and accept each other (Brinton, Chilmonik, Koi & Mohn, 2021). It is more beneficial to new teachers who, through their interaction with experienced teachers within a community, learn different classroom management styles, teaching approaches and support mechanisms. Being part of a school-based support community exposes

inexperienced teachers to new skills and strategies necessary to address diverse learning needs.

Wenger's community of practice theory provided a lens through which I was able to explore the effects of improving school-based support for access to education and success of rural learners. Being part of a school-based support team means being in a community that comes up with innovative ideas to improve teaching, learning and inclusion. The theory demonstrates that collaboration, interaction, engagement and sharing of concerns, ideas and best practices could enhance school-based support teams' practices. Teamwork has a higher probability of influencing teaching and learning, which contributes towards the accomplishment of educational goals. Furthermore, a community of practice provides members with professional development opportunities, thus contributing towards capacity building (Yi, 2022), which is a crucial aspect of the improvement of school-based support.

6.5.2 Implications for policy and practice

The findings of the study can create an awareness of the importance of aligning policies with the environment in which they will be implemented. The study found that policies are not always aligned with rural contexts and do not make provision or give direction for resources for implementation. Policy developers could assess challenges that are rural context specific which could impede the implementation process and infuse those into policy prescripts to ensure that policies relate to the context in which they will be implemented. The involvement of policy implementers in the conceptualisation and finalisation of policies also emerged from the study. If teachers as policy implementers are consulted and involved in the developmental phases, they could contribute critical information that relates to challenges they encounter in implementation so that it is infused into policies.

Although schools are required to adapt policies to their environment, the requirement is not always adhered to and there are policies such as the Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) policy that are supposed to be implemented as is

(Department of Basic Education, 2014b). Although teachers are equipped to implement these policies, training does not ensure successful implementation because neither the training nor the policy take rural contextual challenges into consideration. Training programmes conform to policy prescripts, with assumptions that there are enabling conditions in schools. The finding could assist policy developers to gain background knowledge and a broader understanding of various contextual factors that could support or deter policy implementation processes.

The findings regarding the existence and functionality of school-based support teams could create awareness among district officials regarding the need to capacitate schools in the establishment and maintenance of support teams in schools. There was no evidence to suggest that district support teams were aware of non-existent or non-functional school-based support teams in some of the participating schools. The finding could enable the district office to reassess and intensify support for improving school-based support. Provincial education departments are custodians of schools and as such, the provincial education department concerned could also assess and amend its resource allocation strategy or approach and capacitate schools better. Findings of the study could also assist schools in creating welcoming school environments that attract and strengthen parental and stakeholder involvement. Schools could be more intentional in their efforts to understand parental impediments to involvement.

6.6 Recommendations

Some recommendations are made that could enhance the improvement of school-based support, access to education and success of rural learners. School-based support can be improved by strengthening systems that are already in place.

6.6.1 Recommendation 1: Policy development and alignment

Policy implementation challenges arise when policies do not embed socio-economic, infrastructural, socio-cultural and contextual disparities that exist in different contexts.

There appears to be an assumption that all schools have the capacity and resources to carry out any policy mandate, hence the lack of explicit resource provision or direction in policies. If these issues are not taken into consideration during policy development processes, schools will always experience challenges during implementation phases.

It is also recommended that schools as policy implementers be involved in the early stages of policy development because their involvement could address unexpected and unforeseen challenges that are usually encountered at the implementation phase. Currently, teachers' role in policies is inadequate and restricted to implementation (Watkins, 2022). Teachers are usually involved during the call for comments stage, which is an advanced phase of policy development. The study could create awareness of the important role that teachers could play in policy making if they are actively involved from the inception.

Schools should be assisted in the development of their own school-based support policies based on the main policies such as the policy Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) to ensure alignment with contexts (Department of Basic Education, 2014b). Participating schools were all from the same area with different sections, but some had functional and others non-functional school-based support teams. Schools with functional support teams took different approaches in implementing the policy, which other schools could adopt and apply to their environments. There should be interactions between schools with functional support teams and those without so that the latter can learn best practices that could be applied to other schools.

6.6.2 Recommendation 2: Adequate resource allocation

One of the recurrent themes of the study was educational resources. The Departments of Transport and Basic Education should assess allocations for scholar transport in rural areas. Distances between schools and home should be re-evaluated to ensure that the policy covers all learners who still walk long distances to schools. Accessibility of schools

by all learners will be attained. Aligning transport times with after-school hours will also ensure that schools provide support to learners with additional support needs.

Participants were from mainstream schools that also accommodated disabled learners due to shortages of special schools in the area. Resourcing these schools adequately will enhance the implementation of inclusive education programmes. Teachers in mainstream schools that implement inclusive education should also be capacitated with relevant training.

The study found that learners' home environments are not conducive to continuous learning. Learners do not have reading materials, technological gadgets and internet connectivity at home to aid learning at home. Stakeholders could be involved in the provision of resources to create home environments that allow uninterrupted learning.

6.6.3 Recommendation 3: Strengthening collaboration and participation

The importance of schools' collaboration with local businesses was also highlighted in the study. School A, for example, received donations of sanitary pads from a local business, which is a motivation factor. The effort ensured school attendance of girl learners during their menstrual cycles. Stakeholder involvement in education fosters access to learning. Advocacy campaigns can assist in leveraging stakeholder involvement in promoting teaching and learning activities.

Lack of parental involvement was a recurring theme in the study. Advocacy programmes should be developed to leverage parental and community involvement and support. Often, there is insufficient knowledge and understanding regarding parental involvement in education (Sibanda, 2021). Most participants in the current study perceived a lack of or inadequate parental involvement as a sign of demotivation and no interest in education. Although there is some level of awareness of the role of environmental conditions in impeding parental involvement, this understanding is insufficient to form a strong understanding and compassion. Perceived uninterest or indifference towards education

could be addressed through understanding the role of socio-economic conditions in parental involvement. Schools could embark on educating themselves on barriers to parental involvement to demonstrate compassion for parents' predicaments and possibly strengthen communication, bonds and participation.

6.6.4 Recommendation 4: Capacity building

There are inadequacies in teachers' capacity, particularly in facilitating inclusivity. Their lack of proficiency in sign language demonstrates a gap that requires attention. Effective implementation of inclusive education programmes relies on teachers' capabilities, in this case, inclusive curriculum delivery. Schools' capacity and teachers' skills and competencies need to be adapted and strengthened to meet the demands of implementing inclusion. Training on basic sign language skills to teach hearing-impaired learners and provide braille materials to aid visually impaired learners could be provided.

Time constraints were cited as one of the impediments in providing support in schools. To address this challenge, schools should be capacitated with additional human resources. For example, the Department is currently running the Basic Education Employment Initiative, which is a recruitment drive to curb the unemployment rate. Teaching assistants are recruited to provide classroom support to teachers before lessons and during lessons. They also help teachers to address the identifiable learning gaps (Department of Basic Education, 2020a). Their basic training includes curriculum, reading, psychosocial support and digital literacy, which could be expanded to other areas related to school-based support such as basic sign language proficiency. Teachers with larger classrooms with varied learning needs could be allocated an assistant who is adequately trained to provide support. Time constraints experienced by some participants of the study could be alleviated. Funding that is currently allocated for maintenance of political office bearers' livelihoods (ministers, deputy ministers, Public Protector etc.) could be redirected to fund the initiative to employ teachers' assistants on a permanent basis.

6.7 Proposed Strategy for the Improvement of School-based Support for Access to Education and Success of Rural Learners

6.7.1 Introduction

Improvement of school-based support is compromised by various factors, such as socio-economic conditions, resources, time constraints, parental involvement, collaboration and policy alignment. Improving these factors will create enabling conditions for establishing and sustaining functional support teams and developing and implementing support strategies effectively. Unfavourable teaching and learning environments combined with social barriers influence access to learning and academic success (Alshwiah, 2021). Creating an environment characterised by participation, engagement and communication could contribute to children's academic success (Bachman, Anderman, Zyromski & Boone, 2021). It is therefore important that a strategy that encompasses all spheres of support be developed to achieve optimal support.

What follows below is the proposed strategy that could be employed to accelerate school-based support in rural schools. The proposed strategy hinges on the principles of Wenger's community of practice theory that interaction of people who are linked by specific domains of knowledge, common goals and interests could improve their practices in their respective teaching and learning environments (Brinton, Chilmonik, Echelberger, Koi & Monh, 2021).

The proposed strategy seeks to mobilise and strengthen the existing support structures to ensure that they promote inclusion, access to education and success of rural learners. In so doing it seeks to provide all learners with multiple and equivalent learning opportunities to enhance their potential and interest and contribute meaningfully to their families, communities and society. The background, objectives and implementation of the proposed strategy are outlined below.

6.7.2 Background

The findings reveal challenges that impede the effectiveness of existing school-based support initiatives. The study also reveals disparities in schools' operations regarding the establishment and maintenance of functional support teams across schools. Some schools do not have functional support teams in place and others do, leading to inconsistencies in the creation of meaningful learning opportunities, which impedes the promotion of access to learning. Despite the disparity, all schools encounter similar challenges in employing support services. Additionally, the existing support structures in schools do not adequately address socio-economic barriers due to capacity-related challenges. These challenges are compounded by dysfunctional home environments that are not conducive to continuation of learning, policy mandates that are not designed to address contextual impediments such as socio-economic conditions and time constraints that inhibit support teams from executing their duties optimally. Policies are not always accompanied by adequate resource allocation or identification and it becomes the responsibility of teachers, who are not adequately capacitated and supported, to assemble the required resources.

The South African government has put support structures in place to assist school management, teaching and learning and to improve educational access and success. For example, school-governing bodies, school-based and district-based support teams were established to assist in transforming schools (Davids, 2022) and management and in supporting teaching and learning. These and other structures were intended to bridge inequality and performance gaps between schools in urban areas and those in marginalised or disadvantaged communities. However, these support systems are insufficient in sustaining effective teaching and learning activities, more so in the current era where there is an emergence of various extenuating circumstances that hamper efforts to promote equitable education.

The study found that some schools respond satisfactorily to the intervention strategies recommended by the Department of Basic Education, such as the use of appropriate forms

in identifying learning needs and the mandatory establishment of functional school-based support teams. However, there are still areas of concern that schools are struggling with, such as capacity, parental involvement, time constraints, policy mandates and resources. As time changes, new areas of concern emerge, caused by various external circumstances such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which came with its own risks. All these require mitigation strategies that could stimulate effective execution of support.

There are also several good practices that some schools apply through various mechanisms such as requesting donations from local businesses and adopting learners who are in need to improve their performance, among others. These good practices could be shared with and applied in other schools. Mobilisation of support is critical in education. It requires the sector to strategically position itself to exploit services and support at their disposal. Harnessing available support requires a strategy that clearly outlines coordinated activities that could be developed to enlist involvement and participation of all stakeholders.

6.7.3 Objectives of school-based support strategy

The school-based support strategy will focus on the establishment of support activities outside the normal classroom situation, characterised by social interaction, engagement and collaboration. These will also strengthen existing support structures and capacitate teachers. The objectives of the school-based support strategy are as follows:

- To capacitate schools in the establishment and maintenance of functional school-based support teams.
- To heighten parents' awareness of their role in creating enabling home conditions.
- To mobilise support from other educational stakeholders such as community and sister departments that offer essential services.
- To strengthen existing infrastructure or resources such as scholar transport for the continuation of extra classes.

- To upscale teacher training to also focus on programmes that promote inclusion, such as basic sign language.
- To enhance existing support services to address teachers' time constraints.
- To foster learning through social interaction, engagement or mentoring programmes.
- To raise awareness of the importance of aligning policies with rural contexts.

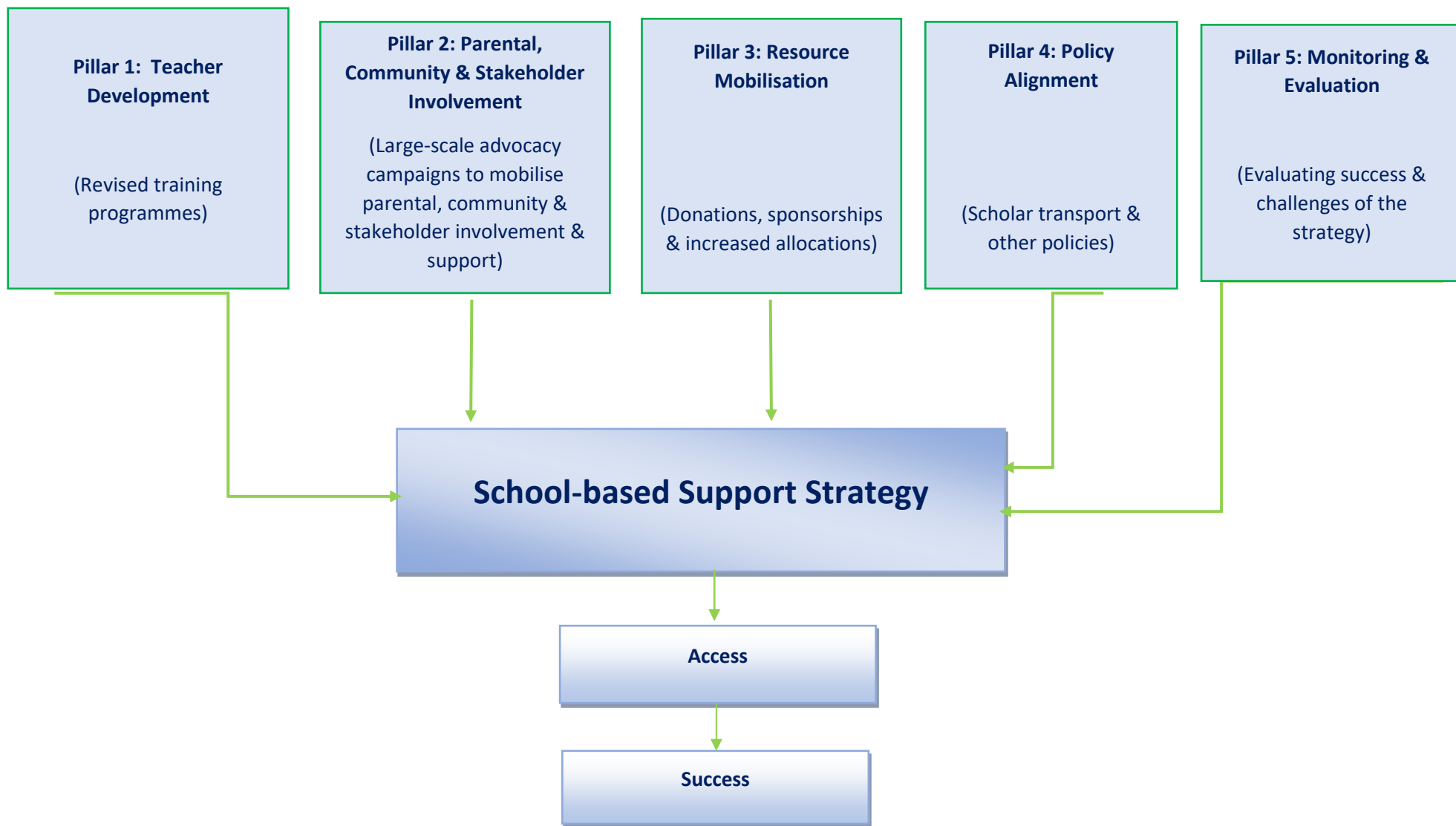


Figure 6.1: Proposed School-based support strategy

Proposed implementation process

The proposed strategy is composed of five pillars that could contribute to improving school-based support: teacher development; parental, community and stakeholder involvement; resource mobilisation; policy alignment; monitoring and evaluation. Each pillar identifies deficiencies that hinder the effectiveness of intervention strategies. Strengthening these pillars could override prevailing impediments to accessing quality education and educational success. The implementation of any programme in any organisation requires relevant skills, knowledge, expertise and understanding of what is supposed to be implemented. If implementers lack understanding of programmes and their roles, it could derail the entire process (Mamabolo, Malatjie & Mphahele, 2022).

6.7.4.1 Pillar 1: Teacher development

The current study determined that the existence of knowledge and understanding could contribute towards successful implementation. Pillar 1 is teacher development (capacity development) through courses, workshopping or in-service training. Teacher training contributes to knowledge and understanding, which aids implementation of programmes. It builds on existing skills and capacitates teachers in advancing their understanding. Teachers who understand their roles in the provision of support are better positioned to identify additional learning needs and apply available services to support their learners. It is also through their understanding of best initiatives that they will be able to support and capacitate each other better and thrive.

Continuous teacher support through training is crucial in the successful implementation of support strategies in schools (Mamabolo Malatjie & Mphahele, 2022). Teachers perform better when they are adequately prepared and skilled to handle educational and support-related responsibilities. It is important to upscale teacher training to also focus on programmes that promote inclusion. Existing training programmes, courses or in-service training could be adapted to suit and address teaching and learning needs. Currently, the Department of Basic Education provides training on the implementation of the policy on

Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) Policy as a mechanism for early identification and intervention (Department of Basic Education, 2014b). However, the effectiveness of that training is refuted by the findings of the study. Not all schools that participated in the study were implementing the policy effectively. Three out of five schools found the steps, procedures or processes too lengthy and time-consuming to complete and cope with. Adapting training content to suit specific contexts could entice participation by all schools.

As part of pillar 1, the proposed school-based support strategy could include basic sign language proficiency in teacher training programmes to equip teachers with language skills to promote inclusion in classes with diverse learning needs. Existing training programmes should be upscaled to suit a particular context and address identified teaching and learning needs. Learners with additional needs such as hearing impairments will then not only rely on reading lips. Exclusionary classroom antics (reading teachers' lips) will be eliminated and school attendance encouraged.

Pillar 1 (teacher development) could also be instrumental in capacitating teachers in the establishment and sustainability of functional support teams. To achieve pillar 1, there should be continuous engagement with fellow teachers from within or from nearby schools. Introducing mentoring programmes and twinning, which school E appears to benefit from could be initiated. Twinning involves pairing up poor-performing schools, teachers or principals with best performers. These individuals will engage with each other to share ideas, resources, solutions and best practices. The term is popularly used in online communities, referred to as e-twinning, which, according to Çelebi and Yilmaz (2021), provides teachers with learning platforms through online collaborative engagements. Twinning fosters learning through social interaction and aids professional development. The concept could build capacity, assist with resources and equip teachers with knowledge of different practices that promote inclusion and success.

6.7.4.2 Pillar 2: Parental, community and stakeholder involvement

Pillar 2 is also a fundamental pillar in the improvement of school-based support. Teachers do not always understand that socio-cultural and economic factors constrain parental involvement in schools (Sibanda, 2021). Lack of understanding and knowledge could be emanating from a lack of interaction, engagement or communication. If schools, the community and parents have regular engagement, they could strengthen their communication, which will aid in gaining an understanding, thus improving participation. They could discuss and resolve issues that impede parental interest and involvement. Outreach programmes could be initiated in these schools to attract and sustain parental, community and stakeholder involvement.

For example, offering basic skills training to parents in the creation of small vegetable gardens in their homes could be conducted through mobilising support from local businesses and other sister departments such as the Department of Agriculture, which could sponsor communities with basic gardening tools and other resources. Other stakeholders could offer information sessions or other basic skills training programmes. Schools could be used as centres for such activities, which will create a welcoming environment, where parents feel that they are part of and welcomed by the school community. Equipping parents with basic skills will alleviate some of the socio-economic challenges that they are facing. Successful implementation of pillar 1 requires schools to reach out to communities, parents and other stakeholders through outreach initiatives such as offering basic parental training programmes.

6.7.4.3 Pillar 3: Resource mobilisation

Allocation of resources in schools has been a contentious topic in the South African education sector. The effect of resources or lack thereof in schools has been widely explored, but to date, resource allocation is still problematic. Resource challenges emanate from inadequate allocation or mismanagement of provided resources. It is evident that the government is unable to resource schools adequately and a different route

should be explored. Various stakeholders could sponsor schools with different resources. Stakeholders that sponsor or donate could be allowed to place their advertising boards on school fences. Such collaborative initiatives could benefit both parties involved. The donation drive has been proven effective by one of the participating schools (school A), which received donations of sanitary pads from a local business. The initiative requires engaging with business or other stakeholders for commitment to the initiative.

The Department of Basic Education could also consider increasing its resource allocation in schools to promote access and inclusion. Lack of adequate funding of schools restricts schools in fulfilling their mandates. Etor, Ekanem and Sule (2020), are in support of the assertion. they revealed that poor funding of schools and education contribute to limited access to education in Nigeria. Comparably, the South African education sector is characterised by inadequate funding, which compromises accessibility of resources in schools and ultimately equitable education. Since socio-economic conditions in rural areas constrain parents' ability to contribute financially to the education of their children, the South African government could collaborate with internal and external non-governmental organisations to provide resources in rural schools. For example, the European Union has been partnering with the South African government to fund various educational projects. Collaboration with national and international stakeholders is another avenue that the sector could strengthen to mobilise resources in rural schools.

6.7.4.4 Pillar 4: Policy alignment

Policy alignment is another important factor in the improvement of school-based support. Pillar 4 will require schools to be assisted in the adaptation of national policies to rural contexts to aid in effective policy implementation. The National Learner Transport Policy provides that beneficiaries of scholar transport should be learners from Grade R to 12 who travel long distances from their homes to schools (Republic of South Africa, 2015). Eligibility criteria of the policy could be revised to explicitly spell out the number of kilometres from homes to schools that qualify for scholar transport. Alternatively, the revision could state that all learners from rural and disadvantaged communities, where

there are fewer schools that are further apart, who travel long distances should be eligible for scholar transport. Current scholar transport times could also be amended to cover weekends or after-school classes. Schools could mobilise support from local businesses or communities to sponsor learner transport for purposes of strengthening their support services.

6.7.4.5 Pillar 5: Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluating should be conducted to evaluate or assess the level of success of the school-based support strategy (Karimi, Mulwa & Kyalo, 2021). The stage will highlight progress of the strategy, obstacles, gains and areas for improvement. The effectiveness of the proposed strategy will be evident in the areas of establishment and sustainability of school-based support teams across all schools, increased parental and stakeholder engagement and participation, availability of resources, capacitated teachers who are not strained and policies that are implementable in all contexts. A large-scale study could be conducted to assess the level of improvement in school-based support.

6.8 Limitations of the Study

The current study was a qualitative instrumental case study design, which undertook an in-depth exploration of improving school-based support for access to education and success of rural learners. Focus groups, individual interviews, a questionnaire and field notes were used as data collection tools. Data collection was limited to one district and five rural secondary schools. Even though the sample size was neither too big nor too small, but just enough to yield sufficient and analysable data, the results of the study cannot be generalised to the entire population. Instead, they are limited to other cases within the study, district and schools where data was collected.

Although the study did not intend to explore parental involvement, insights into inhibitors of involvement would have cleared some misconceptions. Parental involvement turned out

to be key in the improvement of school-based support and parents' views on the issue would have answered some lingering questions.

6.9 Suggestions for Further Research

Support is a widely researched area, but school-based support still requires more exploration. Existing studies focus more on support for physical and intellectually disabled learners. Additional studies that explore the phenomenon of improvement of school-based support using different approaches and designs are required. These studies could use a larger sample to be able to generalise their results to the entire population.

The study did not explore whether the participating schools have programmes or initiatives in place that attract and encourage parental involvement and, if there are, whether they require strengthening to contribute to the improvement of school-based support. Similar studies should be carried out to explore or investigate other school-based support frameworks or intervention programmes that the Department of Basic Education is implementing in schools as mechanisms to support teaching and learning. Such studies should be conducted in both rural and urban contexts to compare practices in varied conditions. Further research in this area is also necessary to establish whether schools in other contexts have best and tested practices that could be adopted by schools in different contexts to promote inclusivity, access to education and improvement of learning outcomes. There is a need for more comprehensive, in-depth research with a larger sample, over an extended period and covering broader aspects of school-based support.

6.10 Conclusion

The aim of the study was to explore the effect of school-based support in education and how its improvement could influence the access and success of rural learners. In chapter 6, findings of the study were discussed in relation to the research questions, a summary of the study was given, recommendations were made and limitations were presented.

6.11 Concluding Remarks

One of the challenges encountered by rural learners is lack or inadequate access to quality education Wood (2023: 2), stated rural learners have limited opportunities to access quality education due to lack of “necessary infrastructure such as schools and libraries” . Addressing these challenges will contribute towards the improvement of school-based support, which in turn, will promote access and assist in the attainment of educational goals. Promotion of access is not solely reliant on infrastructure or resources, it also relies on collaboration and involvement different stakeholders, suitability of teachers in terms of skills, training and knowledge. All these aspects play an important role in improving learning outcomes.

The study established that teachers’ understanding of the role of school-based support in teaching and learning and their knowledge of policy mandates regarding the establishment and sustainability of functional school-based support teams. However, not all schools have functional support teams in place, which demonstrates inconsistencies in adherence to policy mandates. Schools that do not have functional support teams in place provide support in an uncoordinated and isolated manner compromising the role of support in teaching and learning. There should be coordinated support services in schools to yield the appropriate outcome.

Even though all participating schools initiate some form of support, their efforts are derailed by a lack of sign language proficiency, inadequate resource allocation, time constraints, lack of parental involvement and policies that are not context specific. Some of these schools managed to rise above their limiting circumstances to attain educational success. Addressing these areas of concern will require strong collaborative efforts and robust strategies that could exploit available channels to improve school-based support, promote access and aid academic success.

Strengthening support services in schools will empower teachers in the development and implementation of support mechanisms in accordance with learners' additional needs. The education sector should redefine core pillars of support to solidify each child's prospects of accessing equitable education irrespective of surrounding circumstances. This study contributes to existing discussions around school-based support in education and the role of support in general in educational achievement. It is, therefore, necessary that studies of this nature continue to be conducted to accentuate educational plights in different contexts and gather knowledge and best practices that could be shared among schools.

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APPENDICES

Appendix number	Name of appendix	Attached (YES or NO)
A	Proof of Registration	YES
B	Ethical clearance from UNISA	
C	Turnitin report	YES
D	Editor report	
E	Request for permission to conduct research to Gauteng Department of Education	YES
F	Response from Gauteng Department of Education	YES
G	Letter to Tshwane North District Requesting Permission to Conduct Research	YES
H	Response from Tshwane North District Granting Permission to Conduct Research	YES
I	Informed Consent	YES
J	Consent to participate in a study (reply slip)	YES
K	Participant Information Sheet	YES
L	Focus Group Questions	YES
M	Individual Interview Questions	YES
N	Completed Questionnaire	YES

APPENDIX A: PROOF OF REGISTRATION

0 MHR

NETSHIPALE A M MS
2267 VILLA LANTANA
161 SALIE STR
AMANDASIG EXT 36
0182

STUDENT NUMBER : 3602-783-9

ENQUIRIES NAME : MAPONYA PP
ENQUIRIES TEL : 0124415702

DATE : 2023-08-01

Dear Student

I wish to inform you that the following amendment(s) have been approved in respect of your projected research output:

DEGREE : PHD (PSYCHOLOGY) (90058)
TITLE : Improving school-based support towards access and success of rural learners
SUPERVISOR : Prof LDN TLALE (tlaleldn@unisa.ac.za)
CO-SUPERVISOR : Dr TAL PHALA (phalatal@unisa.ac.za)
ACADEMIC YEAR : 2023

Yours faithfully,

Prof MM Sepota
Acting Registrar



APPENDIX B: ETHICAL CLEARANCE

UNISA COLLEGE OF EDUCATION ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

Date: 2023/05/10

Ref: **2023/05/10/36027839/09/AM**

Name: Ms AM NETSHIPALE

Student No.:36027839

Dear Ms AM NETSHIPALE

Decision: Ethics Approval from
2023/05/10 to 2028/05/10

Researcher(s): Name: Ms AM NETSHIPALE
E-mail address: 36027839@mylife.unisa.ac.za
Telephone: 082 855 0819

Supervisor(s): Name: PROF LDN TLALE
E-mail address: tlaleldn@unisa.ac.za
Telephone: 012 4292064

Title of research:

IMPROVING SCHOOL-BASED SUPPORT TOWARDS ACCESS AND SUCCESS OF RURAL LEARNERS

Qualification: PhD Psychology of Education

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 2023/05/10 to 2028/05/10.

*The **medium risk** application was reviewed by the Ethics Review Committee on 2023/05/10 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.



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 **2028/05/10**. Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.

Note:

*The reference number **2023/05/10/36027839/09/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 Mpine Makoe
ACTING EXECUTIVE DEAN
qakisme@unisa.ac.za

APPENDIX C: TURNITIN REPORT

Turnitin Originality Report

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[Tadesse Hailu Afework. "Challenges and opportunities of using a distributive approach in instructional leadership : a case study in secondary schools in the Haramaya district of Ethiopia", 2020](#)

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[Ngubane, Teboho Solomon. "Community learning centres' leadership support towards effective curriculum delivery management in Gauteng province", 2023](#)

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[Mashabela, Kgotsofatso Prunish. "The contributions of local economic development projects towards income poverty reduction : a case study of Ba-Phalaborwa Local Municipality", 2022](#)

<1% match ()

[Hannah, Julia Elizabeth. "Secondary school teachers' experiences of learning support", Stellenbosch : Stellenbosch University, 2015](#)

<1% match ()

[Van Rooyen, Donavin Adam. "An exploration of the investigative value of cell phone record analysis in the investigation of serious and violent crimes in the Winelands District, Western Cape Province", 2022](#)

<1% match ()

[Cweba, Vuyokazi. "Challenges faced by Teachers in applying reading strategies when teaching English reading in the foundation phase in the Mthatha District", 'Necatibey Faculty of Education Electronics Journal of Science and Mathematics Education', 2015](#)

<1% match ()

["Lived experience of teachers educating young learners with foetal alcohol spectrum disorder", 'University of Pretoria - Department of Philosophy', 2021](#)

<1% match ()

[Manyi, Stella. "Mixed-methods study into the development and progression of young entrepreneurs in Soweto, South Africa", 2023](#)

<1% match ()

[Phiri, Luckson. "A framework for the sustainable competitive advantage of foundries in South Africa", 2022](#)

<1% match ()

[Ndlovu, Maanda Luxious. "Thabo Mbeki: an intellectual biography", 2023](#)

<1% match ()

[Gwebu, Mkhubo Isaac. "Physical Sciences teachers' adoption of 21st century computer-based instructional strategies in teaching chemical reactions in Grade 11", 2019](#)

<1% match ()

[Sekererayi, Chinyanga Grace. "Communication support for learners with autism : a case of special schools in Umlazi district, Kwazulu-Natal province", 2022](#)

<1% match ()

[Makgatho, Selina Magugudi. "Accounting for sustainable development in water services : a case of Lephalale Local Municipality in the Limpopo province, South Africa", 2022](#)

<1% match ()

[Mampane, Jane Thandi. "Facilitating educational access for children with learning disabilities: The implementation of inclusive education in South Africa", Department of Political Studies, 2023](#)

<1% match ()

[Brhanu, Hailesslassie Yohannes. "Strategies to strengthen health management information systems in public health centres in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia", 2022](#)

<1% match ()

["Strengthening comprehensive sexuality education within the curriculum in the early grades", 'University of Pretoria - Department of Philosophy', 2018](#)

<1% match ()

[Ezomo, Olawunmi Doyinsola. "Educators' in-service training programme to manage student drug abuse at a college in Limpopo", 2023](#)

<1% match ()

[Kleinboo, Deon. "Mentoring and resilience development of school principals in the Tinara Circuit of the Nelson Mandela Bay Metro", 2023](#)

<1% match ()

["Realising access to inclusive education for the hearing-impaired learner in Nigerian primary schools", 'University of Pretoria - Department of Philosophy', 2017](#)

<1% match ()

[Mavuso, Zanele Nkosikhona. "Grade 10 science learners' behavioural intentions related to good practices of solid waste management in Vosloorus, Gauteng", 2022](#)

<1% match ()

[Mokoka, Pauline Kelaetswe. "The effects of dysfunctional participative decision-making practices in two Alexandra township schools", 2022](#)

<1% match ()

[Shadaya, Girlie. "The implementation of inclusion policy for learners with special education needs: a case study of four primary schools in the Grahamstown District", 'Necatibey Faculty of Education Electronics Journal of Science and Mathematics Education', 2012](#)

<1% match (Internet from 22-Nov-2022)

https://uir.unisa.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10500/26727/thesis_zulu_pd.pdf?isAllowed=y&sequence=1

<1% match (Internet from 22-Nov-2022)

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<http://uir.unisa.ac.za>

<1% match (Internet from 03-Sep-2022)

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<1% match (Internet from 17-Aug-2023)

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APPENDIX D: EDITOR'S REPORT

To whom it may concern

23 October 2023

Proof of language editing

I hereby declare that I have edited the thesis entitled "Improving school-based support towards access and success of rural learners" written by Adziliwi Martha Netshipale for the Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology of Education at the University of South Africa.

Changes were suggested using track changes in MSWord. The onus is, however, on the author to make the changes suggested and to attend to the queries. I take no responsibility for any changes made to the document after I completed the editing.

Glenda Buncombe



BA (Trans), Rhodes University

Cell number: 083 381 2806

Email address: glendabuncombe@gmail.com

APPENDIX E: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH TO GAUTENG DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



GAUTENG PROVINCE
 EDUCATION
 REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

For admin. Use only:

Ref. no.:

Enquiries: 011 3550775/1379

2023 GDE RESEARCH REQUEST FORM

REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN INSTITUTIONS AND/OR OFFICES OF THE GAUTENG DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

1. PARTICULARS OF THE RESEARCHER

1.1	Details of the Researcher	
	a) Surname and Initials:	Netshipale AM
	b) First Name/s:	Adziliwi Martha
	c) Title (Prof/Dr/Mr/Mrs/Ms):	Ms
	d) Student Number:	36027839
	e) SA ID Number:	7108010279085
	f) Work permit no. (If not SA citizen)	N/A

1.2	Private Contact Details	
	a. Home Address	c. Postal Address (if different)
	No. 2267, Viall Lantana Estate	
	161 Salie Street, Amandasig Ext. 36	
	Pretoria	
	b. Postal Code: 0182	d. Postal Code: 0182
	e. Tel: 012 357	f. Cell: 082 855 0819
	g. Fax:	h. E-mail: 366027839@mylife.unisa.ac.za

2. PURPOSE & DETAILS OF THE PROPOSED RESEARCH

2.1	<i>Purpose of the Research (Place a cross where appropriate)</i>	
	Undergraduate Study – Self	
	Postgraduate Study – Self	X
	Private Company/Agency – Commissioned by Provincial Government or Department	
	Private Research by Independent Researcher	
	Non-Governmental Organisation	
	National Department of Education	
	Commissions and Committees	
	Independent Research Agencies	
	Statutory Research Agencies	
	Higher Education Institutions only	
2.2	<i>Full title of Thesis / Dissertation / Research Project</i>	
	Improving School-Based Support Towards Access and Success of Rural Learners	
2.3	Value of the Research to Education (Attach Research Proposal)	
	Attached	
2.4		Date
	a. <u>Estimated</u> date of completion of research in GDE Institutions	May 2023
	b. <u>Estimated</u> date of submission of Research Report /Thesis/Dissertation and Research Summary to GDE:	June 2024
2.5	Student and Postgraduate Enrolment Particulars	
	a. Name of institution where enrolled:	University of South Africa (UNISA)
	b. Degree / Qualification:	Doctor of Philosophy in Education
	c. Faculty and Discipline / Area of Study:	Psychology of Education

d. Name of Supervisor / Promoter:	Professor LDN Tlale
-----------------------------------	---------------------

2.6	Employer (or state Unemployed / or a Full Time Student) :	
a. Name of Organisation:	Department of Basic Education	
b. Position in Organisation:	Deputy Director	
c. Head of Organisation:	Minister of Basic Education, Mrs A Motshekga	
d. Street Address:	222 Struben Street, Pretoria.	
e. Postal Code:	0001	
f. Telephone Number (Code + Ext):	012 357 4180	
g. Fax Number:		
h. E-mail address:	netshipale.m@dbe.gov.za	

2.7	PERSAL Number (GDE employees only)
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3. PROPOSED RESEARCH METHOD/S

(Please indicate by placing a cross in the appropriate block whether the following modes would be adopted)

3.1 Questionnaire/s (If Yes, supply copies of each to be used)

YES	X	NO	
-----	---	----	--

3.2 Interview/s (If Yes, provide copies of each schedule)

YES	X	NO	
-----	---	----	--

3.3 Use of official documents

YES		NO	X
<i>If Yes, please specify the document/s:</i>			

3.4 Workshop/s / Group Discussions (If Yes, Supply details)

YES	X	NO	
<p>Focus group interviews will be conducted with fifteen (15) teachers who are school-based support teams members, ten (10) school governing body (SGB) members and five (5) principals. Individual interviews will be conducted with five (5) district-based support team members. Open-ended questionnaire will be completed by all thirty-five (35) participants.</p>			

3.5 Standardised Tests (e.g. Psychometric Tests)

YES		NO	X
<i>If Yes, please specify the test/s to be used and provide a copy/ies</i>			

4. INSTITUTIONS TO BE INVOLVED IN THE RESEARCH

4.1 TYPE and NUMBER of Institutions (Please indicate by placing a cross alongside all types of institutions to be researched)

INSTITUTIONS	Write NUMBER here
<i>Primary Schools</i>	
<i>Secondary Schools</i>	5
<i>ABET Centres</i>	-
<i>ECD Sites</i>	-
<i>LSEN Schools</i>	-
<i>Further Education & Training Institutions</i>	-
<i>Districts and / or Head Office</i>	1

4.2 Name/s of institutions to be approached for research (Please complete on a separate sheet if space is found to be insufficient).

Name/s of Institution/s	
1.	ADAM MASEBE SECONDARY SCHOOL
2.	BOITSHEPO SECONDARY SCHOOL
3.	BOKAMOSO SECONDARY SCHOOL
4.	HANS KEKANA SECONDARY SCHOOL
5.	HAMANSKRAAL SECONDARY SCHOOL
6.	HOSEA KEKANA SECONDARY SCHOOL
7.	KONDELELANI SECONDARY SCHOOL

4.3 District/s where the study is to be conducted. (Please indicate by placing a cross alongside the relevant district/s)

District/s			
Ekurhuleni North		Ekurhuleni South	
Gauteng East		Gauteng North	
Gauteng West		Johannesburg Central	
Johannesburg East		Johannesburg North	
Johannesburg South		Johannesburg West	
Sedibeng East		Sedibeng West	
Tshwane North	X	Tshwane South	
Tshwane West			

If Head Office/s (Please indicate Directorate/s)

4.4 Approximate number of learners to be involved per school (Please indicate the number by gender: M- Male and F- Female)

Grade	1	2	3	4	5	6

Gender	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Number												

Grade	7		8		9		10		11		12	
Gender	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Number												

4.5 Approximate number of educators/officials involved in the study (Please indicate the number in the relevant column)

Type of staff	Educators	HODs	Deputy Principals	Principal	Lecturers	Office Based Officials
Number	15 (school-based support teams)			5		5

10 SGB members

4.6 Letters of Consent (Attach copies of Consent letters to be used for Principal, SGB and all participants. For learners also include parental consent letter)

4.7 Are the participants to be involved in groups or individually?

<i>Groups</i>	X	<i>Individually</i>	X
---------------	---	----------------------------	----------

4.8 Average period of time each participant will be involved in the test or other research activities (Please indicate time in minutes for ALL participants)

Participant/s	Activity	Time
School-Based support teams (Fifteen (15) Teachers, five (5) principals & ten 10) SGBs)	Focus Group Interviews	50 Minutes – 1 hour
District-Based Support Teams	Individual Interviews	45 – 50 Minutes
All thirty-five (35) participants	Self-administered open-ended Questionnaire	Participants' own time

4.9 Time of day that you propose to conduct your research.

<u>Before</u> school hours		During school hours (for <u>limited</u> observation only)		<u>After</u> School Hours	<u>X</u>
----------------------------	--	---	--	---------------------------------	----------

SEE Condition 5.4 on Page 7

4.10 School term/s during which the research would be undertaken.

First Term		Second Term	X	Third Term	
------------	--	-------------	---	------------	--


5. CONDITIONS FOR CONDUCTING RESEARCH IN GDE


Permission may be granted to proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below

being met and permission may be withdrawn should any of these conditions be flouted:

- 1) *The District/Head Office Senior Manager/s concerned, the Principal/s and the chairperson/s of the School Governing Body (SGB.) must be presented with a copy of this letter.*
- 2) *The Researcher will make every effort to obtain the goodwill and co-operation of the GDE District officials, principals, SGBs, teachers, parents and learners involved. Participation is voluntary and additional remuneration will not be paid;*
- 3) *Research may only commence from the second week of February and must be concluded by the end of the THIRD quarter of the academic year. If incomplete, an amended Research Approval letter may be requested to conduct research in the following year.*
- 4) *Because of COVID 19 pandemic researchers can ONLY collect data online, telephonically or may make arrangements for Zoom with the school Principal. Requests for such arrangements should be submitted to the GDE Education Research and Knowledge Management directorate. The approval letter will then indicate the type of arrangements that have been made with the school.*
- 5) *The Researchers are advised to make arrangements with the schools via Fax, email or telephonically with the Principal.*
- 6) *Research may only be conducted BEFORE or AFTER school hours so that the normal school program is not interrupted. The Principal and/or Director must be consulted about an appropriate time when the researcher/s may carry out their research at the sites that they manage.*
- 7) *Items 3 and 6 will not apply to any research effort being undertaken on behalf of the GDE. Such research will have been commissioned and paid for by the Gauteng Department of Education.*
- 8) *It is the researcher's responsibility to obtain written consent from the SGB/s; principal/s, educator/s, parents and learners, as applicable, before commencing with research.*
- 9) *The researcher is responsible for supplying and utilizing his/her own research resources, such as stationery, photocopies, transport, faxes and telephones and should not depend on the goodwill of the institution/s, staff and/or the office/s visited for supplying such resources.*
- 10) *All research conducted in GDE Institutions is anonymous. The names and personal details of the GDE officials, schools, principals, parents, teachers and learners that participate in the study may neither be asked nor appear in the research title, report / thesis/ dissertation or GDE Research Summary.*
- 11) *On successful completion of the study the researcher must supply the Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management, with electronic copies of the Research Report, Thesis, Dissertation as well as a Research Summary (on the GDE Summary template). Failure to submit these documents may result in future permission being withheld, or a fine imposed for BOTH the Researcher and the Supervisor.*
- 12) *Should the researcher have been involved with research at a school and/or a district/head office level, the Director/s and school/s concerned must also be supplied with a GDE Summary.*
- 13) *The researcher may be expected to provide short presentations on the purpose, findings and recommendations of his/her research to both GDE officials and the schools concerned;*

6. DECLARATION BY THE RESEARCHER
6.1 I declare that all statements made by myself in this application are true and

accurate.	
6.2 I have read, understand and accept ALL the conditions associated with the granting of approval to conduct research in GDE Institutions and I undertake to abide by them. I understand that failure to comply may result in permission being withdrawn, further permission being withheld, a fine imposed and legal action may be taken against me. This agreement is binding.	
6.3 I promise once I have successfully completed my studies, (before graduation) or on successful project completion, to submit electronic copies of my Research Report / Thesis / Dissertation as well a GDE Summary on the GDE template sent to me with my approval letter or found on www.education.gpg.gov.za	
Signature:	
Date:	11 November 2022
7. DECLARATION BY SUPERVISOR / LECTURER / PROMOTER	
7.1 I declare that: (Name of <u>Researcher</u>) Ms M Netshipale.....	
7.2 is enrolled at the institution / employed by the organisation to which the undersigned is attached.	
7.3 The questionnaires / structured interviews / tests meet the criteria of:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational Accountability; • Proper Research Design; • Sensitivity towards Participants; • Correct Content and Terminology; • Acceptable Grammar; • Absence of Non-essential / Superfluous items; • Ethical clearance 	

7.4 The student / researcher has agreed to ALL the conditions of conducting research in GDE Institutions and will abide by them.	
7.5 I will ensure that after success completion of the research degree / project / study an electronic copy of the Research Report / Thesis / Dissertation and a Research Summary (on the GDE template) will be sent to the GDE. Failure to submit the Research Report, Thesis, Dissertation and Research Summary may result in: permission being withheld from BOTH the student and the Supervisor in future and a fine may be imposed.	
7.6 Surname of the Supervisor :	TLALE
7.7 First Name/s of the Supervisor:	Lloyd Daniel Nkoli
7.8 Title:	PROFESSOR
7.9 Institution / Organisation:	UNISA
7.10 Faculty / Department:	PSYCHOLOGY OF EDUCATION
7.11 Telephone:	012 429 2064
7.12 E-mail address:	tlaleldn@unisa.ac.za
7.13 Signature:	
7.14 Date:	11 November 2022

ANNEXURE A: GROUP RESEARCH

This information must be completed by every researcher/ student / field worker who will be visiting GDE Institutions for research purposes, besides the main researcher who applied and the Supervisor/ lecturer / Promoter of the research.

By signing this declaration, the researcher / students / fieldworker accepts the conditions associated with the granting of approval to conduct research in GDE Institutions and undertakes to abide by them.

Supervisor/ Promoter / Lecturer’s Surname and Name.....

DECLARATION BY RESEARCHERS / STUDENTS:

Surname & Initials	Name	Tel	Cell	Email address	Signature

N.B. This form (and all other relevant documentation where available) may be completed and forwarded electronically to Gumani.Mukatuni@gauteng.gov.za, please copy (cc) ResearchInfo@gauteng.gov.za. The last 2 pages of this document must however have the original signatures of both the researcher and his/her supervisor or promoter. It should be scanned and emailed, posted or hand delivered (in a sealed envelope) to Mr Gumani Mukatuni, 7th Floor Marshal Street, Johannesburg. All enquiries pertaining to the status of research requests can be directed to Mr Gumani Mukatuni and/or Ms Busi Mchunu on tel. no. 011 355 0775/1379.

Other Information:

- i) On receipt of all emails, confirmation of receipt will be sent to the researcher. The researcher will be contacted via email if any documents are missing or if any additional information is needed.
- ii) If the GDE Research request submitted is approved, a GDE Research Approval letter will be sent by email to the researcher as well as the Supervisor / Lecturer / Promoter. Please ensure that your email address is correct.
- iii) After successful completion of your research, please send your Research Reports / Thesis / Dissertations and GDE Research Summaries (on the template provided to both the Researcher and the Supervisor with the GDE Research Approval letter) to the same addresses as the GDE Research Request documents were sent to, namely: Gumani.Mukatuni@gauteng.gov.za, Busi.Mchunu@gauteng.gov.za and copy Faiith.Tshabalala@gauteng.gov.za and ResearchInfo@gauteng.gov.za.

APPENDIX F: RESPONSE FROM GAUTENG DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



GAUTENG PROVINCE

Department: Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

8/4/21/2

GDE RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER

Date:	09 June 2023
Validity of Research Approval:	08 February 2023– 30 September 2023 2023/201
Name of Researcher:	Netshipale AM
Address of Researcher:	No. 2267, Viall Lantana Estate 161 Salee Street, Amandasig Ext. 36 Pretoria
Telephone Number:	082 855 0819
Email address:	366027839@mylife.unisa.ac.za
Research Topic:	Improving School-Based Support Towards Access and Success of Rural Learners
Name of University:	UNISA
Type of qualification	PhD
Number and type of schools:	5 Secondary Schools
District/s/HO	Tshwane North

Re: Approval in Respect of Request to Conduct Research

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

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

1
Making education a societal priority

Office of the Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management

7th Floor, 17 Slimmonds Street, Johannesburg, 2001

Tel: (011) 355 0488

Email: Falth.Tshabalala@gauteng.gov.za

Website: www.education.gpg.gov.za

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

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

Kind regards



Dr. G. M. Mukatuni
Acting OES: Education Research and Knowledge Management

DATE: 09/06/2023

2

Making education a societal priority

Office of the Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management

7th Floor, 17 Simmonds Street, Johannesburg, 2001

Tel: (011) 355 0488

Email: Faith.Tshabalala@gauteng.gov.za

Website: www.education.gpg.gov.za

APPENDIX G: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO TSHWANE NORTH DISTRICT



Ms T Coetser
District Director
Tshwane North District
Private Bag X945
PRETORIA
001

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN SEVEN (7) GAUTENG NORTH RURAL SCHOOLS IN 2023

Dear Ms Coetser

thea.coetser@gauteng.gov.za

The above matter bears reference.

I am currently registered with the University of South Africa (UNISA) to study for a **Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology of Education**. As part of my studies, I am required to conduct field research in line with my topic entitled: **“Improvement of School-Based Support towards Access and Success of Rural Learners”**. This letter serves as a formal request to conduct my study in some of the rural secondary schools in Tshwane North District and district-based support teams in your district. The list of identified schools is attached for ease of reference. I have received approval from Gauteng Department of Education to conduct a study in identified schools (Letter of approval attached). I will apply for ethical clearance from the ethics committee of the Department of Psychology of Education at the University of South Africa early 2023, which I will furnish to your office should it be required.

Data will be collected through focus groups sessions with School-Based Support Teams and individual interviews with District-Based Support Teams. All focus group sessions will be conducted through face-to-face mode of interaction in schools after school hours to minimize disrupting teaching and learning. Where it is permissible, focus group interviews will be conducted during school-based support teams meetings to minimize inconveniencing participants. Individual interviews with District-Based Support Teams will also be conducted through face-to-face modality at your district office.

The information provided during the sessions will be used for purposes of research only. No foreseeable risks are associated with this study. However, to mitigate the risks Covid-19 transmissions, hygienic regimen of using sanitiser, wearing of mask and sitting further apart from each other will be observed. There will be no physical contact among participants and the researcher. All session will be conducted outside or inside where distant sitting arrangements can be observed. All sessions will be approximately 1 hour.

Participants will not be forced to take part in the study and will be at liberty to withdraw from participating at any time, should they wish to do so. Participants will not be required to provide their names or those of their schools. Should participants provide information that might make them identifiable, relevant steps such as the use of Pseudonyms or codes, will be taken to protect their

anonymity and confidentiality. The information provided will only be used for purposes of the study and will not be shared with other parties outside of the study.

There will be no reimbursement or any incentives for participation in the study. It is envisaged that findings of the study might unearth the impact that the improvement of school-based support could have on teaching and learning, access and success of all learners, particularly those in rural schools. Findings could inform policy development, strategies and programmes that could enhance the provision of school-based support and address barriers to learning. Upon completion of the study, a copy of a thesis will be provided to your office should it be required. Do not hesitate to contact me should you require additional information.

Any queries regarding this study may be directed to me on my mobile phone: 082 855 0819 and email address: netshipale.m@dbe.gov.za or the supervisor, Professor LDN Tlale on mobile number: 084 388 5988; phone number: 012 429 2064 or email: tlaleldn@unisa.ac.za.

Yours Sincerely



AM Netshipale

PHD Student (UNISA)

DATE: 22/05/2022

APPENDIX H: RESPONSE FROM TSHWANE NORTH DISTRICT



Enquiries: Pranay Devchand / Sandra de Bruyn
Sub-Directorate: Information Systems & Strategic Planning (ISSP)
Office no. 126
Email: Pranay.Devchand@gauteng.gov.za
Sandra.DeBruyn@gauteng.gov.za
Tel: 012 543 4315/060 752 4048
Ref: 31/08/18

TO : NETSHIPALE AM
FROM : MS THEA COETSER
DISTRICT DIRECTOR: TSHWANE NORTH
DATE : 4 APRIL 2023
SUBJECT : PERMISSION GRANTED TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Dear Netshipale

It is our pleasure to inform you that the District Office grants you permission to conduct research at Tshwane North District **selected** Schools as requested and approved by Head Office on the topic: **"Improving school-based support towards access and success of rural learners."**

You may only conduct the research **after contact time** to protect teaching and learning activities. The principal must be consulted regarding an appropriate time to conduct the research.

You are personally responsible for providing and utilising your own research resources. Participants names must not appear in the research report and all appropriate ethical measures must be implemented to protect them.

The list of Secondary schools are Hosea Kekana, Boitshepo, Kondelelani, Bokamoso, Adam Masebe, Hammanskral and Hans Kekana.

Tshwane North District expects you to submit, upon completion, a summary of your research findings as stipulated in **Clause No. 14 of the GDE letter of approval you received.**

The District appreciates your contribution towards the enhancement of education in the province.

We anticipate your success with this research project.

Regards

MS THEA COETSER
DISTRICT DIRECTOR: TSHWANE NORTH

DATE: 14/04/2023



DISTRICT:TSHWANE NORTH
Tel:(012) 543 4302, Cell: 066 487 2743 Email: Thea.Coetser@gauteng.gov.za
Wonderboom Junction Mall, 1st Floor, Corner Lavender &
West Road, Wonderboom, 0066, Private Bag X945, Pretoria, 0001
<https://education.gauteng.gov.za/Pages/Index.aspx> | Call Centre: 0800 005 175

APPENDIX J: INFORMED CONSENT



INFORMED CONSENT

Dear Participant

My name is Martha Netshipale and I am currently registered with the University of South Africa (UNISA) to study for a [Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology of Education](#). I will be conducting research entitled: **“Improving School-Based Support towards Access and Success of Rural Learners”** at your school. You have been selected by a purposeful sampling strategy from the population of all rural secondary schools in Tshwane North, Gauteng to participate in this research. I invite you to take part in this study.

The purpose of the study is to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the effect that the improvement of school-based support has on teaching and learning, access to and success in education. The study aims to highlight the importance of improving school-based support and such improvement can enhance accessibility of learning opportunities and attainment of educational outcomes.

The objectives of the study are to explore the teachers' understanding of the role school-based support play in teaching and learning, establish factors that determine the provision of school-based support, determine the approaches that rural schools employ to provide school-based support and establish the contribution of improving school-based support towards access and success of rural learners.

This study has a potential to inspire the enhancement of support teams' activities, encourage schools to establish and maintain their own support approaches or mechanisms that cater for diverse intellect, abilities and talents and reinforce connections between support teams and other educational stakeholders. Furthermore, the study could unearth factors that hinder effectiveness of support initiatives. Findings could also inform educational policy and the development of programmes that could enhance the provision of school-based support and address barriers to learning. A copy of a thesis will be provided to your office should it be required.

You are kindly requested to participate in focus group and/or individual interviews that will be scheduled at your schools to take place after school hours. You are also requested to complete a questionnaire at your own time. The questionnaire will be collected at a time and date that will be agreed upon with the researcher. The information provided during these session(s) will be used for purposes of research only. No foreseeable risks are associated with this study. However, to mitigate the risks Covid-19 transmissions, hygienic regimen of using sanitiser, wearing of mask and sitting further apart from each other will be observed. There will be no physical contact with each other and sessions will be conducted outside or where distant sitting arrangements can be observed. The duration of all sessions will be between 50 minutes and 1 hour.

No foreseeable physical or emotional risks are associated with this study. However, to mitigate the risks Covid-19 transmissions, hygienic regimen of using sanitiser, wearing of mask and sitting further apart from each other will be observed. There will be no physical contact among participants and the researcher. All session will be conducted outside or inside where distant sitting arrangements can be observed. The duration of all sessions will be between 50 minutes and 1 hour. The study also poses a potential risk of inconvenience. Since focus group will be conducted after school hours, it might inconvenience other people who have other plans after school. To minimise this risk, the agreed duration of each session will be adhered to.

You are not required to indicate your name or that of your school and your anonymity will be ensured. However, indication of your age, gender, occupation position etcetera, will contribute to a more comprehensive analysis. All information obtained from these sessions will be used for research purposes only and will remain confidential. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you have the right to decline to answer any questions if so desired, or to withdraw from the session at any stage without penalty. The interviews will be recorded using an audio recorder. After the completion of the study, an electronic summary of the findings of the research will be made available to you on request.

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was granted by the Ethics Committee of the College of Education, University of South Africa (UNISA). If you have any research-related enquiries, they can be addressed directly to me or my supervisor. My contact details are: +27 82 855 0819, e-mail: 36027839@mylife.unisa.ac.za and my supervisor can be reached at cell number: +27 84 388 5988 or phone number: +2712 429 2064, Department of College of Education, UNISA, e-mail: tlaleldn@unisa.ac.za

By attending the focus group and/or interview sessions, you imply that you have agreed to participate in this research and the recording of your responses during each session.



AM Netshipale
PHD Student (UNISA)
Date: 01/06/2023

APPENDIX K: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET



Research study on: “Improving School-Based Support towards Access and Success of Rural Learners”.

DEAR PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANT

My name is **Adziliwi Martha Netshipale** and I am doing research under the supervision of Prof L.D.N. Tlale, a professor in the Department of Psychology of Education towards a [Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology of Education](#) at the University of South Africa (UNISA). We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled: “**Improving School-Based Support towards Access and Success of Rural Learners**”.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

The purpose of the study is to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the effect that the improvement of school-based support has on teaching and learning, access to and success in education. The study aims to highlight the importance of improving school-based support and such improvement can enhance accessibility of learning opportunities and attainment of educational outcomes.

The study will explore teachers’ understanding of the role of school-based support in teaching and learning, establish factors that determine the provision of school-based support, determine the approaches that rural schools employ in the provision of school-based support, establish the contribution of improving school-based support towards access and success of rural learners and establish the strategies that can be developed to improve school-based support.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF THE STUDY?

This study has a potential to inspire the enhancement of support teams’ activities, encourage schools to establish and maintain their own support approaches or mechanisms that cater for diverse intellect, abilities and talents and reinforce connections between support teams and other educational stakeholders. Furthermore, the study could unearth factors that hinder effectiveness of support initiatives. Findings could also inform educational policy and the development of programmes that could enhance the provision of school-based support and address barriers to learning.

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

I obtained your contact details through the principal of your school. You are invited because you are a member of school-based support team who is conversant with various intricacies of the provision of school-based or district-based support, conversant with classes or grades within the secondary schooling system. Also, you are familiar with school environment and dynamics of teaching and learning in general.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

You will be asked to respond to questions about your perceptions, views, knowledge and experiences of related to the study in a focus group, individual setting and questionnaire. Your participation is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participate in the study.

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

You are free to withdraw from the study at any time. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent form. By participating in this study, you will share your personal experiences, perceptions, views and knowledge about the topic of the study.

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

No foreseeable risks are associated with this study. However, to mitigate the risks Covid-19 transmissions, hygienic regimen of using sanitiser, wearing of mask and sitting further apart from each other will be observed. There will be no physical contact with each other and sessions will be conducted outside or where distant sitting arrangements can be observed. The duration of individual interviews will be between 45 minutes and 50 minutes. you will also be requested to complete a questionnaire at your own time.

No foreseeable physical or emotional risks are associated with this study. However, to mitigate the risks Covid-19 transmissions, hygienic regimen of using sanitiser, wearing of mask and sitting further apart from each other will be observed. There will be no physical contact among participants and the researcher. All session will be conducted outside or inside where distant sitting arrangements can be observed. The duration of all sessions will be between 50 minutes and 1 hour. The study also poses a potential risk of inconvenience. Since focus group will be conducted after school hours, it might inconvenience other people who have other plans after school. To minimise this risk, the agreed duration of each session will be adhered to.

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

Your name or that of your school will not be recorded anywhere and no one, apart from the researcher will know about your involvement in this research. No one will be able to connect you to the answers you give since your answers will be given a code number and your identifiable information a pseudonym. You will be referred to in this way in the data, any publications, or other research reporting methods.

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

The research data will be transcribed and stored in both soft and hard copies. Soft copies will be stored electronically and will be password protected. Both versions will be kept for a period of 5 years in a locked cupboard at the researcher's home office.

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

You will not receive any payment or financial rewards for participating in this study.

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICS APPROVAL?

This study has received written approval from the Research Ethics Review Committee of the School of Education, UNISA. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher should you required one.

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

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact Martha Netshipale on 082 855 0819 or 36027839@mylife.unisa.ac.za. Should you require any further information or have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact Prof L.D.N. Tlale on +27124292064| or tlaleldn@unisa.ac.za.

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

Thank you.



AM Netshipale
PHD Student (UNISA)

Date: 01/06/2023

APPENDIX L: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. How would you describe the nature of school-based support in your school?
2. What factors necessitate district-based support in schools?
3. What are your thoughts, feelings or experiences on addressing barriers to learning?
4. If you could improve your approach on the provision of learner support, what will that be and how would you change that?
5. What are support related challenges that you encounter in your school?
6. What is your understanding of inclusion?
7. How do the support team handle inclusion related challenges?
8. How would you describe accessibility of education or opportunities to learn by rural learners?
9. How in your view, does the activities of school-based support teams affect access?

APPENDIX M: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS QUESTIONS

1. How does district-based/school-based support influence teaching and learning?
2. What district-based/school-based activities do you employ as a support mechanism?
3. What is your understanding of success in education?
4. How would you describe educational success of learners/teachers in your school/district?
5. What, in your view, are the factors that contribute to the success you described above to?
6. What approaches do your school employ in the provision of school-based support?
7. What effect do the approaches you mentioned above have on achieving educational goals?
8. What are your views on the influence that school-based/district-based support have on improving accessibility of learning opportunities?
9. What are the challenges that impede school-based/district-based support initiatives in your school?

10. What strategies can be developed to improve school-based/district-based support in your school?

APPENDIX N: COMPLETED QUESTIONNAIRE

APPENDIX : QUESTIONNAIRE



BACKGROUND

My name is Martha Netshipale and I am a Doctor of Education in Psychology of Education candidate at the University of South Africa (UNISA). The purpose of this questionnaire is to gather information on the effect that the improvement of school-based support has on access to education and success of rural learners. Your responses to this questionnaire will only be used for purposes of this study and any information provided shall remain confidential. You are therefore requested to answer questions as freely and honestly as you can. The questionnaire will take approximately 45 minutes of your time.

INSTRUCTIONS

The questionnaire consists of three sections as follows:

SECTION A	BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION
SECTION B	QUESTIONS PROMPTING YOUR KNOWLEDGE, EXPERIENCE, PERCEPTIONS AND VIEWS OF THE EFFECT OF IMPROVING SCHOOL-BASED SUPPORT ON ACCESS AND SUCCESS OF RURAL LEARNERS
SECTION C	ANY OTHER RELEVANT INFORMATION THAT MIGHT NOT HAVE BEEN COVERED ON THE QUESTIONNAIRE

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THE STUDY, IT IS HIGHLY APPRECIATED!

SECTION A: BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Please go through the questions and mark your answer with an (X)

1. Please indicate your gender: Male () Female ()
2. Please indicate your position in the school: HoD () Teacher () Principal () SBT () DBST () SGB () Other () please specify _____
3. How long have you been serving in your position? _____
4. Please indicate your highest education level by crossing the relevant box: Post graduate degree () Diploma () Post matric certificate () Grade 12 (Matric) Degree () other () (please specify) _____

SECTION B: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the role of school-based support in teaching and learning?

The SBST is responsible for following Key Functions:
Co-ordinating all learner, teacher, Curriculum and school development support in the school. This includes linking the SBST to other school-based Management structures and processes, or even integrating them in order to facilitate the Co-ordination of activities and avoid duplication; collectively identifying school needs and, in particular, barriers to learning at learner, teacher, curriculum and school levels;
collectively developing strategies to address these needs and barriers to learning. This should include a major focus on teacher development and parent consultation and support. Drawing in the resources needed, from within and outside the school, to address these challenges; and
Monitoring and evaluating the work of the team within an 'action-reflection' framework.

Furthermore it relates to the following:

Study the report provided by the teacher on barriers identified and support provided/implemented up to that point, and the impact of the support;

Access support needed and develop a programme for teacher and parents;

provide training/support to be implemented in the classroom if necessary;

Evaluate/monitor after the proposed programme has been implemented for a period agreed upon by SBST, teacher and parents. The kind of support to be provided will determine the length of a formal report which should be compiled by SBST;

Identify further School-Based support assets and mobilise;
Encourage collegial support/peer support;

2. What is the role of district-based support in schools?

The role function of District-Based Support teams is the support of SBST's with regards to the management of the Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support Process of learners identified with barriers in need of a high level of support.

District-Based Support team (DBST), including Curriculum and Support Managers, human resource planning and development co-ordinators, Social workers, therapist, Psychologists and other health professionals, working within the school system collaborate to provide a higher level of support for learners that are referred to the DBST and who cannot be accommodated at school level.

The DBST is responsible for decision-making around any form of support provisioning to learners, school and teachers.

The DBST must provide a programme of action to a school in terms of a referral made to the DBST via the SNAB form within a reasonable timeframe.

Once a DBE123B is signed, the DBST must provide feedback to the parents and school of the outcome within 3 days.

The DBST must establish a sub-committee named District Based Accommodations Committee (DBAC).

This subcommittee must follow all the guidelines and procedures for the application and approval of Accommodations, Concessions, Exemptions or endorsed NGE as outlined by the Provincial Based Accommodations committee.

NB: ONLY DBST SHOULD ANSWER THIS QUESTION

3. How would you compare school-based support in rural and urban contexts?

Although the SBST's of urban areas might have more resources available to them regarding the support of learners, e.g. in-house psychologists and sometimes social workers, in my opinion, it boils down to the level of functionality of the SBST.

Functionality is directly related to the management structure of school with regards to coordination and support. If the school is steered by a good management structure, SBST's are functional and referral to the DBST happens to provide the support which might be available already at urban based SBST's. Functionality is furthermore dependent on the correct constitution of the SBST and the level of expertise available.

oversight and support of the SBST school management is key.

4. How would you improve school-based support in your school?

Improve functionality of the SBST by the following:
Ensure the correct constitution of the SBST, drawing in expertise where available.

Draft of SBST Policy which clearly outline the duties and responsibilities of each member.

Officially appoint members by an appointment letter outlining the responsibilities of each member.

Have a fully developed management plan for each term regarding activities and responsibilities.

Ensure oversight and support of the SBST by the School Principal and school management as an important and necessary team to drive the support mechanism for learners identified as in need of support.

The SBST must be well balanced and meet regularly and provide feedback and support regarding each case.

Encourage timely support and referral to the SBST if necessary.

5. How does school-based support influence accessibility of education?

The SBST is the only body that can refer learner for assessment and/or placement in special schools offering a relevant curriculum (and therefore access) to suit the needs of the learner. The SBST is therefore directly responsible to facilitate optimal access of educational provisioning for learners who may not be able to cope in the mainstream setting.

6. What are the challenges of accessibility of education and educational resources in rural settings?

Although more special schools exist in urban areas, the Department has gone a long way to address the establishment of special schools in rural areas, as transport is always a determining factor for access. A number of special schools are recently established, like Boepathutse and Dilope to add to the already existing ones like Dominican School for the deaf, and phelang. And this is only TN District.

A bigger problem might be the overall availability of space in all of the established special schools, rural or urban, especially for our ASD learners. Transport is usually available to urban special schools, as they have a transport policy to get learners from rural areas to schools.

There is a bigger need for different categories of learners in need of a specific programme, which makes access to a particular programme difficult (like ASD learners)

7. What factors determine your decision as SBT/DBST to provide support?

The DBST always provide support when learners are referred to the DBST is the key factor. Support must be provided even when space for placement is not immediately available. whilst waiting for placement a learner should be supported in situ with the development of an individual support plan, which can include differentiated support such as straddling, etc. The DBST must provide guidance to the SBT and class educators to support all referred learners. Support can include teacher development and training or a request for support from the Resource Centres.

8. What strategies or approaches do you use in the provision of support?

The DBST is responsible for the training and development of SBSTs and educators in the screening, identification, assessment and support of learners.

A hierarchy of support should be provided, first at classroom level, then at SBST level and ultimately at DBST level.

School visits are scheduled to monitor and support the SBSTs in their endeavours to support learners.

Sometimes additional training per school takes place to render support when a need is identified.

Liaison with other departments and institutions like hospital and private professional services is also helpful to address support needs of learners, e.g. specialized audiological assessment for learners where the hearing levels are indicated as possible barrier.

Our resource centres are also offering training programmes for educators, coordinated by the DBST to offer support on a number of relevant subjects to support teachers in addressing various barriers in the classroom and beyond.

9. How do the strategies or approaches you described above address barriers to learning?

All of these mechanisms used either serve to support the learner in situ or facilitate placement at a special school suitable to his/her individual needs. It serves to alleviate the barriers at school level or to provide the relevant curriculum offering suitable to the level of the learner's cognitive functioning.

10. What is the role of school-based support in improving learning outcomes?

Timeous intervention by the SBST can improve the identified backlogs of learners with the ISP's in place. Should intervention not be successful, referral to the DBST for placement in special schools, relevant to the needs of the learners can assist in the learner's ability to reach his/her full potential.

learners with their psychological, not only limited to, needs which the school would have identified from the learner.

It is mainly for attending to issues or challenges that disturb or make it difficult for the learner to learn effectively at schools.

It is also about amending, where necessary, the curriculum to suit the special, individual needs of the learners you are working with.

It works to ensure that there are no learners whom are disadvantages because of their different socio-economic challenges that not only affect the learner but the community at large.

2. What is the role of district-based support in schools?

District based support in schools is there to ensure that the school-based support does

not operate in isolation. The school based support would identify the different challenges that learners have, categorise them work with what they can. Whatever problem that seems to be beyond the reach of the school based support, the district based support would then aid the situation.

Although I was not aware that there exists a district based support, I understand that they should come to the party where the school cannot reach or the school has no funds for it.

NB: ONLY DBST SHOULD ANSWER THIS QUESTION

3. How would you compare school-based support in rural and urban contexts?

Lined writing area for student response.

4. How would you improve school-based support in your school?

I would improve the relationship between the school SBT & with parents, as well as

the police. It is often a case of either mistrust or misinformation that ends up as an insolvent situation or case. As a school in a rural setup, the schools should also have a budget for SBSI cases because they often need money to get solved.

Communication is also a barrier for most within the SBSI. The SMT members should strengthen the flow of information from bottom level to top and vice versa.

Record keeping is also a challenge that needs to be looked into, as well as for teachers whom are components of the SBSI must not have the same work load as other teachers because you sometimes have to leave class as a member.

The number of meetings per term must also be looked into as the SBSI committee hardly meets up to discuss either policy amendments and the likes.

5. How does school-based support influence accessibility of education?

School Based Support is mainly there to ensure that even learners with the biggest challenges to access school are dealt

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with so that learners can make it easy.

It is also to deal with abuse cases that children face at home to make it easy for both parents and children.

6. What are the challenges of accessibility of education and educational resources in rural settings?

Socio economic issues are the umbrella of the challenges in accessibility to education.

6

and educational resources. Unemployment and crime are some of the socio-economic factors that hinder access to education and educational resources.

I understand that the district would try and provide all the necessary resources to schools for the smooth running of education but with situations whereby the police or proper health care is required, it becomes a challenge.

7. What factors determine your decision as SBT/DBST to provide support?

Factors like the background, setting and family structure of a learner play a big role.

7

and educational resources. Unemployment and crime are some of the socio economic factors that hinder access to education and educational resources.

I understand that the district would try and provide all the necessary resources to schools for the smooth running of education but with situations whereby the police or proper health care is required, it becomes a challenge.

7. What factors determine your decision as SBT/DBST to provide support?

Factors like the background, setting and family structure of a learner play a big role.

7

be able to identify previous cases that the learner might have experienced in the past.

From this therefore, it is important that family since it is the primary support structure for the learner, is made aware of such challenges. Now depending on the nature of the problem, police or the District Based Support team should be involved.

9. How does the strategies or approaches you described above address barriers to learning?

In the case a learner is experiencing some form of disturbance at home, these strategies

would then address the problem for the learner so that they can be able to attend school with ease.

Overall, strategies to dealing with learners with challenges must always ~~be~~ be sensitised and dealt with with confidentiality and sympathy. This will then ensure that the challenge is dealt with properly.

10. What is the role of school-based support in improving learning outcomes?

When learners face socio-economic challenges at home/school/the community at large, it creates a challenge for the learner

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to either study/learn freely which in turn increases the failure rate learners that are facing challenges often show signs of poor performance so if a functional SBST would then deal with such challenges, together with the community and police, to help learners realise and achieve their full potential which will result in good or excellent performance.

SECTION C: ANY OTHER RELEVANT INFORMATION THAT MIGHT NOT HAVE BEEN COVERED BY QUESTIONS ASKED

1. Do you have any other additional information that might not have been covered in the questions above? If yes, please provide details below:

No.