Guidelines for improving African parents' involvement in psycho-emotional support for learners with emotional barriers to learning

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DECLARATION

I Tsoellang Mphuthi, do hereby declare that this script “Guidelines for improving African parents' involvement in psycho-emotional support for learners with emotional barriers to learning” contained in this dissertation is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

T Mphuthi

Signature



Date

21/10/25

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ABSTRACT

African parents often lack knowledge of the psycho-emotional support needed for learners with psycho-emotional barriers to learning. This calls for the need to equip African parents with strategies so that they are empowered with knowledge and skills to help develop their learners. Psycho-emotional barriers brought about by challenges such as divorce, abuse, and poverty are major concerns that require urgent attention, due to the number of learners affected by such barriers and the negative impact they have on teaching and learning in South African schools. In order to collaboratively improve the effects of the psycho-emotional barriers of learners, a participatory action learning and action research (PALAR) was used as the research methodology, employing a transformative research paradigm. This was viewed as suitable for this research study to answer the following research question: What guidelines can assist African parents to improve parental involvement in psycho-emotional support for learners with psycho-emotional barriers to learning? In order to answer this, convenience sampling was employed, within Botshabelo, Free State. I worked collaboratively with six parents; three school-based support team members (SBST); and one district-based support team members (DBST) as co-researchers/participants to formulate guidelines for African parents to improve their involvement in psycho-emotional support for learners with psycho-emotional barriers to learning. Therefore, the co-researchers and I investigated and answered the research questions within three cycles. Data was generated by means of group discussions and collages. Data was analysed through thematic content analysis. The analysis revealed three interconnected themes relating to challenges faced by African parents in supporting learners with psycho-emotional barriers; strategies for African parents to support their learners; and assisting African parents in providing psycho-emotional support. The findings suggest the following recommended guidelines: awareness should be promoted through culturally relevant education; strengthening parent-child communication and emotional literacy; fostering collaborative engagement with schools; community and cultural assets should be utilised; and addressing socio-economic constraints through multi-stakeholder support.

Key terms: **African psychology, collaborative school support, emotional barriers to learning, parental involvement, psycho-emotional support**

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ALS	Action Learning Set
CIHR	Canadian Institutes of Health Research
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DBST	District Based Support Team
DoE	Department of Education
EWP6	Education White Paper 6
IDEA	Disability Act
NASEN	National Association for Special Educational Needs
NCESS	National Committee on Education Support Services
NCSNET	National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training
NRCIM	National Research Council and Institute of Medicine
NWU	North-West University
PALAR	Participatory Action Learning and Action Research
PAR	Participatory Action Research
SAPS	South African Police Service
SASA	South African Schools Act
SBST	School Based Support Team
SE	Special Education
SGB	School Governing Body
SIAS	Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support
SMT	School Management Team
SNA	Support Needs Assessment
SSRC	Special School as Resource Centre
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

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CHAPTER 1: OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

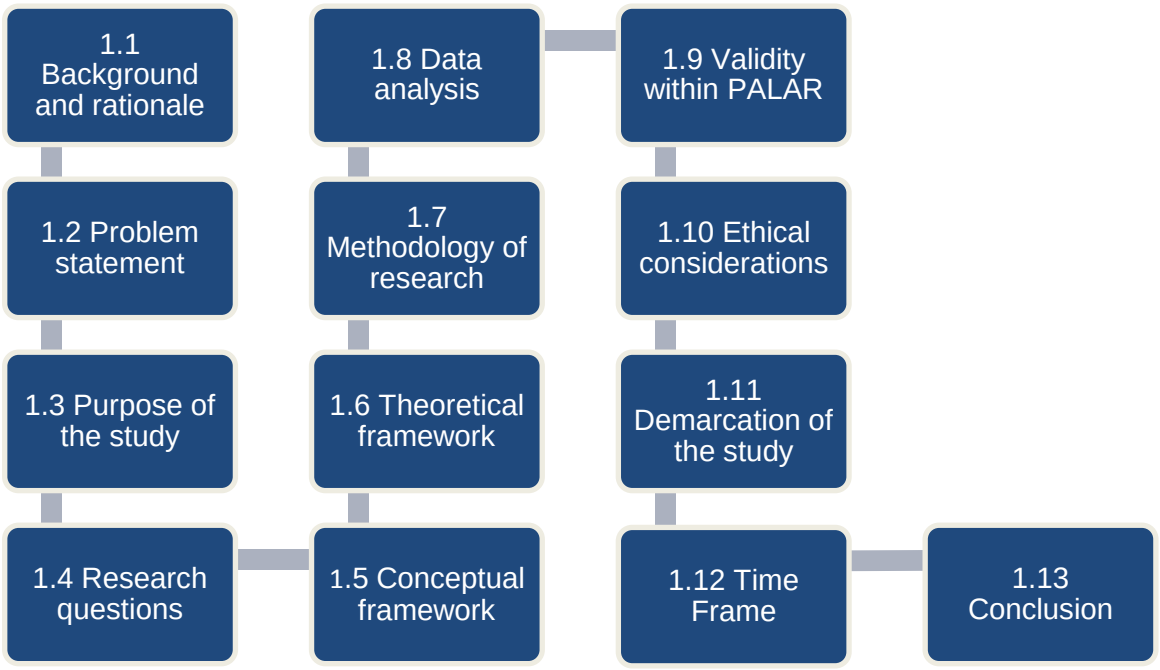


Figure 1.1 Overview of Chapter 1

Source: Author's own construct

1.1 Rationale

Many factors influence parental beliefs about learners' development and upbringing, and form the basis of parenting, which determines how and why learners act in a certain way (September, Rich & Roman, 2016; Sigel & McGillicuddy-De Lisi, 2019). Taraban and Shaw (2018) agree that parents' ideas and beliefs influence learners' development and adjustment. They further contend that, just like any other cognitive conception or construct, parental beliefs are influenced by the social and cultural environment in which they are generated. According to the United Nations (2020), we live in an era influenced by globalisation and migration; families are forced to adapt to constantly changing social and cultural conditions that serve as priorities driving this adaptation. This evolving context underscores the need to understand how African parental beliefs shape psycho-emotional support for learners with psycho-emotional barriers to learning. In this regard African parental beliefs about psycho-emotional support needed for learners with psycho-emotional barriers may play a key role in learners' lives. Parenting practices is the way in which these beliefs and ideas materialise and refer to how parents behave to fulfil their socialising function (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2016). The NRCIM (2016) further contends that African parents who have traditional preconceptions about psychological

development are classified as having a pre-existing belief about the learner's development, and their own stereotypical ideas on gender and authoritative parental practices.

According to Bornstein (2017), all parental views are based on an interrelated set of conceptual ideas about development. Even though parents have diverse ideas on how learners should learn and develop in transitioning processes, there seems to be a link that gives consistency and unity to these underlying ideological belief systems (Bornstein, 2017; September et al., 2016). The lack of awareness among parents regarding the need for tailored psycho-emotional support for learners with psycho-emotional barriers can result in overlooked developmental challenges. The less parents are aware of the need for tailored curriculums for learners with psycho-emotional barriers to learning, the more they fail to acknowledge other problems that might arise in these learners.

Darling and Cassidy (2014) state that parents often do not understand the significance of their support and participation in their learner's learning, and this may be applicable to some illiterate parents who do not read too much, or are uninformed about barriers to learning. Many special needs education specialists believe that parental involvement is an important element for learners with learning difficulties, because parents' perceptions about their learner's well-being and development are important, as they are a source of support (Ryan & Quinlan, 2017). Parental involvement is necessary in implementing personalised education programmes for learners with learning disabilities. If learners lack support from home at any stage of their learning, they are already at a disadvantage.

Parents' involvement in their learner's education and supporting them emotionally should be nourished within the home. Parents should provide a healthy and secure environment where support can flourish. This will nourish a positive attitude for learners towards school and adequate learning experiences (Durisić & Bunijevac, 2017). However, parents' backgrounds can hinder the psychological support given and involvement with the learner. Parents who did not finish school or are less informed, for example, may struggle to help the learner with schoolwork, a contributing factor to psychological distress for both the parent and learner. Furthermore, Hornby (2011) states that parents who may not have a university degree may feel inferior to educators, as they are more or better qualified. This may contribute to reluctance to working closely with educators to provide support for the learner.

Other contributing factors to parents not being able to support the learner might be employment far away from home, or not having enough time and resources to emotionally support their learners. This is even truer when both parents must work, and work commitments take preference

over family time. Furthermore, within certain occupations, parents might not be able to regularly take leave for home-based participation, or having to work long hours puts a strain on parents (Haley-Lock & Posey-Maddox, 2014). According to Qualls (2016), parents who are in poor health, or who do not have a strong social support system from extended family members, may struggle to engage in the learner's learning.

In South Africa, parents rarely have medical aid to be able to get support from psychologists or other services needed for psycho-emotional support for the learner (Qualls, 2016). This requires a change in how we think about supporting learners academically and emotionally. Parental involvement in a learner's education is a powerful predictor of academic accomplishments and psychological development (Park, Susan & Holloway, 2017). Park et al*.* (2017*)* believe that a parent should take responsibility in supporting the learner's education and in turn lessening distress in the learner. If parents work with educators and other stakeholders, then their learners might thrive emotionally as well. From what I have experienced as part of the SBST, there is insufficient participation from some African parents in schools due to certain reasons such as employment commitments or poor educational backgrounds (Mothusi et al., 2024). Inclusive education in South Africa is underpinned by a strong legislative and policy framework aimed at addressing historical inequalities and promoting equitable access to quality education for all learners. Two key policy instruments that guide inclusive practice in South African schools are *Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education – Building an Inclusive Education and Training System* (Department of Education, 2001) and the *Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) Policy* (Department of Basic Education, 2014). Together, these frameworks provide both the philosophical foundation and the procedural mechanisms for implementing inclusive education within the schooling system. Understanding what SIAS and White Paper 6 entail is therefore critical for evaluating how inclusivity is conceptualised and enacted within schools. These policies redefine inclusion not merely as physical placement in mainstream classrooms, but as meaningful participation, curriculum access, and appropriate support for diverse learning needs. However, successful implementation depends on educator capacity, systemic support, and contextual realities.

Thus, the aim of this study is to formulate guidelines, through a collaborative approach, for African parents to improve their psycho-emotional support for learners with psycho-emotional barriers to learning in Botshabelo.

1.2 Problem statement

Darling and Cassidy (2014) assert that some African parents from communities view the psycho-emotional support needed for their learners as infringing on their learner's right to privacy. It is

furthermore seen as disrespecting their family values, causing some parents to be in denial that their learners need help and support. Often, when African communities see an underachieving child, this child will be overlooked. Some African parents might not feel comfortable to recognise that their learners need psychological support, and might lack the necessary knowledge about psychological support for learners with psycho-emotional barriers to learning. It is necessary for guidance from the school system to support learners with psycho-emotional barriers (Baker et al., 2016). Learners who may not have supportive parents face difficulties on their own, and this affects not just their academic achievement but also their self-esteem. Despite growing recognition of the importance of psycho-emotional support in inclusive education, limited research has explored how African parents perceive and engage with this form of support, particularly in contexts where cultural norms, socioeconomic pressures, and systemic barriers intersect. From my experience, since I work with African parents on a daily basis, majority of them are disengaged and uninterested in their learner's academics, which generally promotes academic failure in their learner's learning. This disengagement is not merely a matter of choice but often reflects deeper structural and cultural constraints that have yet to be adequately addressed in the literature.

Socio-economic barriers continue to pose significant challenges to learner's academic achievement. One major socio-economic barrier is poverty, which limits learners' access to essential learning resources and supportive educational environments. Learners from low-income families are more likely to experience food insecurity, inadequate housing, limited access to books and digital technologies, and reduced participation in enrichment activities. A second critical barrier is low parental educational attainment, which influences the level of academic support and educational guidance available to learners (Gurung et al., 2021). Parents with limited formal education may face challenges in assisting with homework, understanding curriculum expectations, or navigating institutional structures within schools. These conditions negatively affect cognitive development, concentration, and academic performance of learners (Shao et al., 2022).

Parental involvement and support at home not only promotes academic performance but also impacts learners' cognitive abilities. However, current interventions often overlook the psycho-emotional dimension of parental support, especially in African contexts, where emotional well-being is shaped by unique cultural and familial dynamics. The focus of this research is to construct guidelines for African parents to promote parental engagement in psycho-emotional support for learners who face emotional difficulties. This study is therefore both timely and necessary, as it seeks to fill a critical gap in existing research by offering context-sensitive, culturally grounded strategies for enhancing African parental involvement in psycho-emotional support. By doing so,

it extends prior research on inclusive education and parental engagement, while contributing practical tools for educators, policymakers, and families.

1.3 Purpose of the study

The goal of this study is to collaborate with parents and education support staff (SBST and DBST members) to develop guidelines for African parents to promote parental engagement in psycho-emotional assistance for learners experiencing emotional difficulties to learning.

1.4 Research questions

This study will be guided by the following research questions:

Primary question

What guidelines can assist African parents to improve parental involvement in psycho-emotional support for learners with emotional barriers to learning?

Secondary questions

- What challenges do African parents experience when supporting learners with psycho-emotional barriers?
- How can African parents support their learners when they experience emotional barriers to learning?
- How can African parents be assisted to psycho-emotionally support their learners with emotional barriers to learning?

1.5 Concept clarification

1.5.1 African Psychology

African psychology is based on the African's perception of reality of traditional Western Psychology (Nwoye, 2015). This point of view of reality implies that nothing in life is absolute. This viewpoint is consistent with an awareness in African psychology of the phenomenon of interdependence between the individual and the community. This is expressed in the core concept of *Ubuntu*, or the notion that a human is a human via other people (Hay & Joubert, 2021). The concept of African Psychology does not want to divide people; rather, it seeks to enhance effective human understanding in a multiracial African community (Nwoye, 2020). This framework was chosen because it aligns with the study's aim to incorporate culturally-grounded understandings

of psycho-emotional support and parental beliefs, especially in African communities where traditional interpretations of emotional distress may differ from Western norms. The interest within African Psychology is to focus on conducting research within fields that have the potential to generate relevant data for addressing the psychosocial needs of Africans, particularly those that aim to bring to the forefront African Indigenous Knowledge systems deemed essential for addressing the unique challenges of living in the contemporary African world (Nyowe, 2015). Given this, it is reasonable to conclude that African Psychology arose to transcend the constraints and paradigms of psychological study and practice established by Western psychology.

According to Nwoye (2015), one may infer that African Psychology is the psychology of pan-African people, cultures, and civilizations, with the goal of creating relevant and emic-based knowledge about the human psychological condition in continental Africa.

1.5.2 Collaborative school support

Collaborative school support is a society made up of members of the community, government, administrators, families, learners, educators, administrative personnel, government officers, donors, and education personnel (Nel et al., 2013). In a school support environment, collaboration refers to all relevant stakeholders participating in the learner's learning and engaging with each other to assist the learner (Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2005). Enabling or encouraging cooperation enables key players in a learner's life to work together to guarantee optimal learning. This concept is central to the study's objective of developing guidelines through a participatory approach, involving co-researchers and stakeholders in supporting learners with psycho-emotional barriers.

1.5.3 Psycho-Emotional barriers

Psycho-emotional barriers are mental difficulties that prevent learners from freely conveying their ideas and feelings to others. Psycho-emotional barriers restrict people from being themselves and living their lives to the fullest. People who have emotional walls can be restrained in their thinking (Javed, 2018). The Disabilities Act (IDEA) of the United States (2017) defines emotional and behavioural barriers as situations in which a learner demonstrates several of the following characteristics, which may affect academic attainment: a failure to know and understand cognitive, tactile, or lifestyle factors; an inability to develop acceptable personal and social relationships with peers; unsatisfactory forms of behaviour or emotions under ordinary situations; and a proclivity to develop physical ailments and anxieties in response to personal or school issues. This concept is foundational to the study's focus, as it defines the nature of the barriers that African parents must understand and address through psycho-emotional support.

1.5.4 Parental involvement

Scholars believe that the environment in which learners grow up has a substantial impact on their development, and that understanding nearly any aspect of parenting requires taking cultural values, beliefs, and practices into consideration (National Association for Special Educational Needs, 2016). According to Edwards and Kutaka (as cited by Garcia & Guzman, 2015), parental engagement typically refers to the interaction with their learners and the school to improve academic success. It also refers to the level of parental participation in their child's life and schooling. Literature on parental involvement in schools focuses on family background, the family's involvement in school activities, and determining whether these aspects genuinely affect the academic performance of the child (Tus, 2021).

In my experience, working in the SBST with African parents can be challenging at times, because some are uninformed about different barriers to learning whilst others are of mature age or cannot read or write. The elderly might have different beliefs, which makes it more difficult to explain to them, because often they will tell me that the child has some spiritual or ancestral callings when you tell them that their child has a problem academically (Sigida, 2022). For this reason, I find it necessary to incorporate the co-researchers' belief system as part of my focus within this study. We as a research group will have to incorporate African belief systems within the guidelines in support of learners with psycho-emotional barriers to learning if co-researchers deem it necessary. For this reason, it is necessary to incorporate co-researchers' belief systems as part of the study's conceptual focus. The guidelines developed will reflect African belief systems where appropriate, ensuring cultural relevance and acceptance.

1.5.5 Psycho-emotional support

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2020) refers psycho-emotional support as planned interventions and actions designed to cater to people's psychological and emotional needs in order to foster resilience, positive behaviour, and mental health (UNESCO, 2020). It helps people overcome stress, trauma, and mental disorders by emotional pain by providing support, understand and compassion and guidance. Psycho-emotional support has become crucial in enhancing learners' social adjustment, emotional control and motivation in any educational environment. It allows educators to establish a secure and encouraging environment for learning where learners feel recognised and acknowledged, which promotes overall well-being and academic achievement (Maree, 2021).

Psycho-emotional support has become essential for learners with emotional learning barriers to conquer barriers that restrict their academic development. Learner behaviour, concentration and

motivation is negatively influenced by psycho-emotional barriers like loss, exposure to violence, anxiety and low self-esteem (Donald et al, 2010). Learners can build coping skills and emotional resilience that help them overcome obstacles in their personal and academic lives with the right psycho-emotional support. In order to ensure that learners, receive continuous emotional support at home and at school, parents, teachers, and counsellors work together to provide this assistance (DBE, 2014).

Family relationships, community norms, and sociocultural beliefs all have an impact on psycho-emotional support in the African context. When it comes to giving learners psychological stability and mental stability, parents play a crucial role. However, poverty, a lack of awareness about mental health, and cultural stigmas associated with expressing emotions might be obstacles for many African parents (Amoako & Asiedu, 2022). Their ability to effectively offer psycho-emotional support to learners who face emotional learning barriers may be affected by these challenges. In order to improve learners' emotional well-being and academic achievement within culturally relevant frameworks that respect and incorporate African family values, it is imperative to set guidelines for increasing African parents' involvement in psycho-emotional assistance (Nyowe, 2020).

1.6 Theoretical framework

The growth of learners is an essential part of this study. This study employs three theoretical frameworks: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, Positive Psychology, and Family Systems Theory. These frameworks were selected because they collectively address the environmental, emotional, and relational dimensions of parental involvement in psycho-emotional support.

Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory

The Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory is consistent with South Africa's inclusive education strategy (Department of Education [DoE], 2001), which emphasizes the provision of emotional support to learners. As a result, it contributes to their learner’s willingness and motivation to learn.

According to Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, learners develop within a complex network of relationships at various levels of their environment. This model concentrates on the reciprocal interaction and impact of the many systems on one another. The theory was chosen for this study because it assesses a child's growth in the framework of the network of connections that make up his or her surroundings.

The Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory of Urie Bronfenbrenner identifies five environmental components that regulate lifetime development: The microsystem, according to Guy-Evans (2020), is the most significant level of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory since most immediate environmental conditions, such as home and school, contain the child's growth. This theory supports the study's aim to explore how home-based parental involvement interacts with school-based support systems to influence learners' well-being.

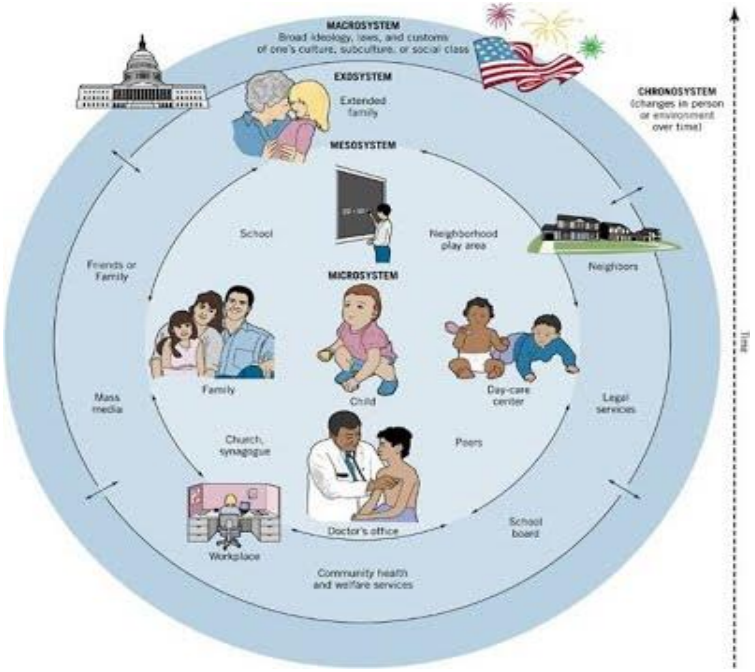


Figure 1.2: Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory

Source: Author's construct from Bronfenbrenner (1979)

Positive Psychology

Seligman's theory of Positive Psychology is described as follows (Seligman, 2018). Positive Psychology is about involvement, positive feelings, connections, significance, and achievement – summed up, it is about the concept of well-being. Positive psychology focuses on people's strengths and virtues, and urges the adaptation of a more open and appreciative perspective about the potential capabilities and motives of people, which is in line with this study (Seligman, 2018).

In this study, Positive Psychology theory will guide how African parents can be collaboratively supported in their involvement in psycho-emotional support for learners with emotional barriers and to identify interventions that might help them to cope with challenges (Van Sittert, 2016).

This framework was chosen because it emphasizes resilience, emotional well-being, and strengths-based approaches – key elements in supporting both parents and learners.

Family Systems Theory

According to Darling and Cassidy (2014), Family Systems Theory considers families to be living life forms. This theory emphasises limitations, norms, wants, and practices that help the family preserve peace and normalcy. If one member of the family changes, the other members must adjust as well, as family is the most basic unit of a community. According to Hammond et al. (2015), the best way to comprehend a family is to examine it as a comprehensive system. This system is complicated, a collection of pieces and divisions in families, each with an aim and objective. This means that if one family member changes, it will have an influence on and modify other family systems. The idea of family systems pushes us to understand the relationship between parental participation and academic success. This technique examines individuals encountering a crisis or issue through assessments that incorporate different aspects of the system rather than simply one family member, as shown in Figure 1.3 below:

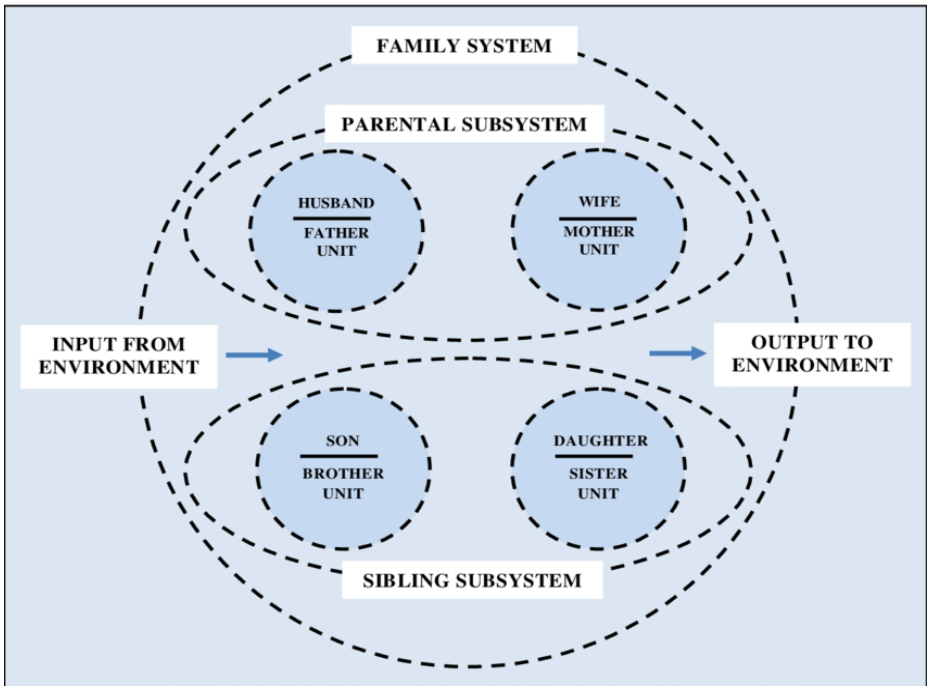


Figure 1.3: Model of family system theory

Source: Author's construct from Bowen (1978)

This theory was selected because it highlights the interconnectedness of family dynamics and the ripple effect of parental involvement on learner outcomes.

The three theories discussed above may be used as a theoretical framework to create guidelines to enhance African parents' knowledge of how they can help their learners with psycho-emotional barriers to improve their learning and academic performance. African parents often lack knowledge when it comes to barriers to learning; they often think the child is going through adolescence or some phase, not knowing that the child needs professional help. African parents must recognise that there are several types of educational barriers to learning, and what support should be provided to learners when problems arise. I will use these theoretical frameworks to obtain a richer comprehension of the research title. A detailed discussion of the theoretical framework will be provided in chapter 2.

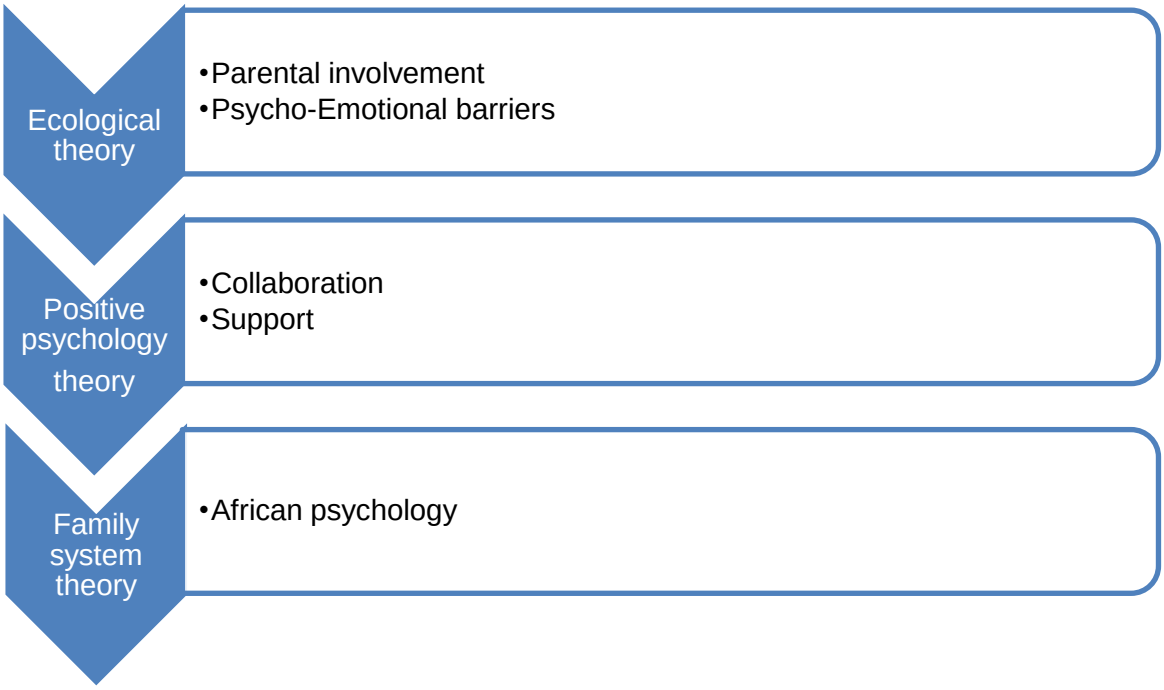


Figure 1.4: Overview of the theories

Source: Author's own construct

Together, these frameworks provide a multidimensional lens for understanding and improving African parents' involvement in psycho-emotional support. They will guide the development of culturally responsive, evidence-based guidelines that address psycho-emotional barriers to learning. A detailed discussion of the theoretical framework will be provided in Chapter 2.

1.7 Research methodology

1.7.1 Research paradigm

According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016), one can define a paradigm as a set of basic and hypothesised assumptions that could be the basis for any framework; the way speculations

are made, as well as the way a group works together. The transformative paradigm will be employed in this study. Transformative research aims to lead marginalised groups to social or political transformation (Creswell, 2014; Omodan, 2020; 2022).

In this study, this paradigm will help us enhance our understanding of supporting learners with psycho-emotional barriers at schools, and educating and training African parents on psycho-emotional barriers to learning. A PALAR design enables the researcher and co-researchers to gather, analyse, interpret, and disseminate data collaboratively (Zuber-Skerritt, 2015) to generate knowledge for change. The following are the philosophical foundations of the study:

Epistemology

Epistemology is based on justification and human knowledge, and how it was developed to enable the participants to acquire more understanding of this research study (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Epistemology is a theory of human knowledge that deals with the dynamics of the research study (Rina et al., 2023). In this study, epistemology guided the collaborative generation of knowledge among participants – particularly African parents, educators, and support staff – as they explored the nature and impact of psycho-emotional support for learners with emotional barriers to learning. The participatory approach enabled co-researchers to reflect on their lived experiences, cultural beliefs, and practices, thereby deepening their understanding of how parental involvement can be strengthened through context-sensitive guidelines.

Ontology

Ontology focuses on the nature of reality to assist the participants to have a clear understanding of the data generated, the importance of the research problem, and how they contributed to achieving the desired solutions (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). An ontology is a theory that explains the importance of a concept or research problem to be solved (Rina et al., 2023). In this study, ontology was concerned with understanding the lived realities of African parents and learners, particularly how psycho-emotional barriers manifest in everyday life and affect learning. It helped frame the research problem by acknowledging the complex interplay between cultural beliefs, emotional well-being, and parental engagement. This ontological stance supported the development of guidelines that are grounded in the authentic experiences of those directly affected.

Axiology

Axiology refers to the ethical issues the researcher considered during the planning of a research proposal. The focus was on the perceptions of right and wrong conduct concerning this research (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Axiology is the concept of right and wrong, fair and unfair, and good and bad that can be applied to everyday life (Rina et al., 2023). It addresses a question: what is the nature of ethics or ethical behaviour? In this study, axiology informed the ethical principles guiding respectful engagement with African parents and co-researchers. It ensured that cultural values, emotional sensitivities, and personal beliefs were honoured throughout the research process. I took into consideration respect for the human morals of every participant who was part of this research, especially when discussing emotionally sensitive topics such as psychological distress, parental capacity, and learner vulnerability. This ethical orientation was essential in building trust, fostering collaboration, and ensuring that the guidelines developed are both morally sound and socially just.

1.7.2 Research design

To address the research questions, Participatory Action Learning and Action Research (PALAR) was employed as the research design. PALAR is built on the premise that the researcher and their study co-researchers are co-researchers who should collaborate to solve, analyse, and improve local issues or difficulties (Zuber-Skerritt, 2015). PALAR is a mixture of AL (lifelong action learning) and PAR (participatory action research) (Wood, 2019). According to Zuber-Skerritt (2015), action learning is the process by which changes occur in an organization or on a personal level after reflecting on experiences. PALAR integrates action learning in small groups known as action learning sets (ALS) (Wood, 2020) to create change in co-researchers' actions and thoughts. Members of the action learning group share and reflect on their personal experiences with the research topic in order to generate new knowledge and participant-led solutions to the group's complex social problems. PALAR is imagined as a methodology, learning theory, facilitation process and philosophy (Zuber-Skerritt, 2015). As a researcher, PALAR enables me to interact with co-researchers to generate data to find significant improvement that will benefit them. Many people learn most effectively when they are involved in the solution, as their participation makes the learning more sustainable (Rodriguez-Espinosa & Verney, 2021). PALAR, like all action research, is carried out in cycles. This study applied PALAR to collaboratively explore and address the challenges African parents face in providing psycho-emotional support to learners with emotional barriers, with the aim of co-developing practical guidelines for improvement.

The PALAR design includes the researcher and co-researchers in a cyclical process in which we address and solve challenges jointly by: (1) proposing a transformation, (2) implementing that transformation, (3) monitoring and analysing the processes and consequences of that transformation, and (4) repeating the process (Tracy, 2019). In each cycle, I adhered to the components of action, which are plan, implement, monitor, and reflect. The scope of the investigation was determined by the co-researchers' lived experiences and the shared goal of enhancing parental involvement in psycho-emotional support. The number of sessions scheduled depended on when the group decides that the problem is solved and when data saturation is reached.

Table 1.1: PALAR cycles that were followed in this study

There were three workshops held for three days, consisting of 3 sessions and 3 cycles: ***Cycle 1- day 1:*** *Cycle 1- day 1 consisted of one session, which was held in the afternoon. In this cycle, the action group learned more about one another and expressed their views within the team. The first session was for brainstorming (start-up workshop). Participants were organised, ethical agreement was established and analysis conducted. During this session, participants had group discussions where they discussed the challenges they experience in supporting learners with psycho-emotional barriers.* *After building relations, the initial research question was answered:* What challenges do African parents experience when supporting learners with psycho-emotional barriers?
Cycle 2- day 2: *Cycle 2 of day 2consisted of one session. In this cycle, participants reflected in group discussions on proceedings that happened in cycle 1 of day 1, and collaboratively they brainstormed and shared ideas. The co-researchers (action group learning) had a group discussion in order to answer the following research questions:* • What guidelines can assist African parents to improve parental involvement in psycho-emotional support for learners with emotional barriers to learning?

• How can African parents support their learners when they experience psycho-emotional barriers to learning? *After discussing the above research questions, participants reflected on cycles 1 and 2 to determine the next cycle.*
Cycle 3- day 3: *Cycle 3 of day 3 consisted of one session. We reflected on what we had learned, and the findings from cycle 1 and 2. Participants collaboratively discussed the final research question:* • • How can African parents be assisted to psycho-emotionally support their learners with emotional barriers to learning? *After discussing the above research question, three participants worked together as a group and made a collage at the end of cycle three.*

Source: Author's own construct

1.7.3 Research methods

1.7.3.1 Site selection

This research study was conducted in collaboration with parents and education support staff (i.e. SBST educators and a DBST psychologist) in Botshabelo schools in Free State. Since I am working in Botshabelo in the Motheo District, it was easier to select the study sample in this district due to the close proximity of potential co-researchers. Convenience sampling was used in this study, because the sample was selected from a group of people who are easily accessible. Convenience sampling is a method of non-probability sampling based on participant availability (Dudovskiy, 2018). This also allowed meetings to be as regular as possible with co-researchers, and educators from different schools could participate. The sample consisted of African parents of identified learners with psycho-emotional barriers, as well as SBST and DBST members who regularly support and nurture learners with diverse learning needs.

1.7.3.2 Participant recruitment

I chose three schools in Botshabelo that specialise mainly in special needs. Each school has an SBST which plays a vital role in supporting learners with barriers. I requested permission from

principals of the three different schools to talk with the parents of learners with psycho-emotional barriers to learning, and SBST members who would like to volunteer to take part in the PALAR study. After obtaining permission from parents, I asked the SBST for the profiles of learners with psycho-emotional barriers so I could obtain their information. From the information given, I recruited six parents and three members from the SBST.

The DBST is responsible for empowering educators how to address barriers to learning. In recruiting the DBST I asked permission from the Department of Education in Motheo District to assist with parental involvement in supporting learners. I recruited one DBST member. The SBST and DBST met regularly with the parents within the action learning set, contributing to the co-construction of knowledge and the development of context-sensitive guidelines.

1.7.4 Data generation methods

Due to the selection of a qualitative research approach, particular data generated methods were used. Using PALAR as a research design allows one to interpret the perspectives and opinions of the study co-researchers (Tracy, 2019). This helped me understand how African parents of learners with psycho-emotional barriers feel. In this study, the selected parents, the SBST and a psychologist from the DSBT members and I worked collaboratively as co-researchers, to formulate guidelines for African parents to support learners with psycho-emotional barriers. Group discussions and collages were used to generate data. These methods enabled rich, experiential insights into the emotional, cultural, and practical dimensions of parental involvement.

Visual data generated methods are closely related to the use of images, which may include paintings, collages, and drawings in the creation of knowledge, supplementing other sources of data (Nieuwenhuis, 2019). In this study, collages were made by African parents who took part in the study. Collages portrayed the feelings of parents and visualised ideas and solutions. They served as a creative, culturally resonant way for African parents to express their experiences and reflections. The collages were completed toward the end of the workshop in cycle 3, as a reflection on what they had learned throughout the process. Throughout this process, I acknowledged that action research is often fluid and responsive, with overlapping stages and evolving insights.

1.7.5 Researcher's role

In this study, I actively participated in collaborating with the research co-researchers (African parents, SBST and DBST members) in Motheo District to formulate guidelines for African parents to support their learners with psycho-emotional barriers to learning. I did not make assumptions but rather strived to comprehend the real experiences of other people (Zuber-Skerritt, 2015). I

endeavoured to be supportive of the co-researchers to satisfy their needs and priorities, as well as to establish an atmosphere in which they may improve their skills and talents, and to ensure that I was well prepared for meetings. It was my responsibility to generate and record data after meetings and to provide information to co-researchers before meetings.

I was both researcher and participant in this collaborative venture, and believed that we can collaboratively develop guidelines that may capacitate African parents in their quest to support their learners better.

1.8 Data analysis

According to Molapo (2016), an action research data analysis is similar to qualitative data analysis in that it involves sorting, accounting for, and interpreting data to make sense of co-researchers' explanation of themes and categories. I used inductive content analysis, as I was comparing themes. According to Molapo (2016), inductive content analysis is a research technique used to investigate a procedure used to empower researchers, identify patterns, and gain insight into the study by reducing volumes of verbal and written data to manageable pieces through coding. The process relies on inductive reasoning, in which themes emerge from the raw data through repeated examination and comparison (Hall, 2019). During the content analysis process, the researcher and co-researchers discovered patterns in the data which were collapsed under broad themes to understand a phenomenon, and interpret the meanings thereof. Together, we analysed the data to ensure that co-researchers' voices were authentically represented in the findings. A detailed description of clustered categories will be presented, followed by the identification of themes. In cycle 3, I led a reflective session with the co-researchers to discover topics jointly to establish guidelines. The themes' objective will be to address the core question: "Which guidelines can assist African parents to improve parental involvement in psycho-emotional support for learners with emotional barriers to learning?"

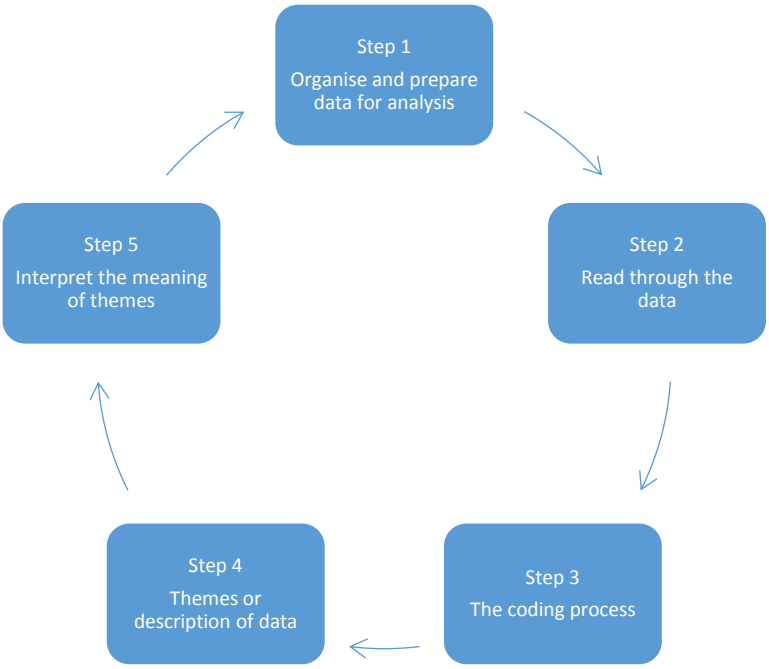


Figure 1.5: Phases of inductive content analysis process

Source: Author's construct from Joubert (2013)

1.9 Validity within PALAR

This study will employ Herr and Anderson's (2014) five validity criteria as quality measures, since they are relevant to the aims of PAR/PALAR. These aims, as shown in Table 1, serve as the framework for determining the quality of PAR/PALAR investigations (Herr & Anderson, 2014).

Table 1.2: Quality measure criteria used for this study

Type of validity	How to establish validity
Outcome validity	I made sure that everyone participating in the study strictly adhered to the plan, as there were reflections at all stages of the study to show what the co-researchers have learned.
Dialogic validity	There were regular action learning group meetings between co-researcher that were partaking in the study, whereby co-researchers were reflecting on research questions, sharing findings and processes

Democratic validity	All co-researchers in the study engaged in discussions, their views and opinions are also important, and they were treated equally
Catalytic validity	Reflections are important because they are part of learning, and they show what a person has learnt. The sharing of findings was determined in collaboration with the members of the ALS group. This included displaying data generation methods, holding information sessions with other stakeholders and teachers from other schools, or advocating for other schools to use the same PALAR process to determine their own guidelines.
Process validity	Relationships were built in this study to encourage harmonious teamwork amongst co-researchers and researchers for ongoing learning. Co-researchers and I reflected on our own behaviour and the relationships among ourselves.

Source: Author's own construct from Herr and Anderson (2014)

These criteria ensure that the study is credible, dialogic, outcome-based, and grounded in the lived realities of co-researchers, thereby enhancing the trustworthiness and relevance of the guidelines produced.

1.10 Ethical considerations

Permission was obtained from the North-West University Ethics Committee (approval number NWU-00331-24-A2), the Free State Department of Education, principals of participating schools (through goodwill letters), and all co-researchers to conduct the research (through informed consent letters). See ANNEXURES A to E for these letters.

Informed consent

According to Molapo (2016), informed consent entails that the potential co-researchers in research are given relevant information regarding the project/research in which they are to participate. Informed consent was obtained from all the members who were voluntarily participating in the study. Thus, an informed consent form was drawn up, and read and signed by each co-researcher who was willing to participate. The goal of this research was explained to the co-researchers. To better clarify the nature of the research, group focus discussions were held with those individuals who volunteered to engage in the research.

No harm

Throughout the study, I ensured that co-researchers were not emotionally harmed in any manner. I enforced respect and collaboration among co-researchers to guarantee that no one was harmed (CIHR, 2022).

Co-researchers' rights to privacy

Co-researchers were informed that all information and experiences they share would be handled as confidential. According to Creswell (2014), co-researchers in research have the right to remain anonymous, which will be honoured in this study. Without their approval, no personal information will be disclosed. The co-researchers' identities was safeguarded by the use of symbols such as A, B and C.

Anonymity and confidentiality

Co-researchers' anonymity and confidentiality was protected, and they were assured that their personal information would be kept private (locked away in a safe). Co-researchers were notified that they had the option of refusing to answer some questions and choose what information they wished to disclose (Xu et al., 2020).

1.11 Layout of the study

This dissertation is organised into five chapters, each contributing to the systematic development of the research inquiry:

Chapter 1 provides an orientation to the study, including the problem statement and contextual background. It introduces the three theoretical frameworks – Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory's, Positive Psychology, and Family Systems Theory – and outlines the research design and methodology. The chapter concludes with a discussion of quality assurance measures within the PALAR framework, and ethical considerations.

Chapter 2 presents the theoretical underpinnings of the study, focusing on learning theories relevant to psycho-emotional barriers and parental involvement. A comprehensive review of the literature is provided to contextualise the research problem and support the conceptual framework. The three theoretical frameworks are also discussed in depth and how they apply to the topic of the dissertation.

Chapter 3 details the Participatory Action Learning and Action Research (PALAR) methodology employed in the study. It elaborates on the research design, data generation methods, and the participatory processes that guided the inquiry.

Chapter 4 presents and analyses the findings generated through reflective engagement and iterative PALAR cycles. The data are interpreted in relation to the conceptual and theoretical frameworks, and the primary research question is addressed. Practical guidelines for supporting learners with psycho-emotional barriers and enhancing parental involvement are also articulated.

Chapter 5 synthesises the research outcomes and offers evidence-based recommendations. The chapter concludes with reflective commentary and final remarks on the study's contributions to inclusive education and participatory research.

1.12 Chapter summary

This chapter provided an overview and discussion of the research study by presenting the background and context, problem statement, and rationale. The significance of the study was established by highlighting the need for guidelines to improve African parents' involvement in psycho-emotional support for learners with emotional barriers to learning.

Research questions were identified, as they guided the formulation of the study's purpose and objectives. Concept clarification was offered to define key constructs such as African psychology, psycho-emotional barriers, parental involvement, and collaborative school support.

I discussed the theoretical framework, which included Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, Positive Psychology, and Family Systems Theory, explaining how each framework supports the study's focus and methodology.

The research methodology was outlined, with emphasis on the Participatory Action Learning and Action Research (PALAR) design. Data generation methods, including focus group discussions and collages, were described, along with the researcher's role in facilitating collaborative inquiry.

The chapter also detailed the research setting, participant recruitment, and sampling strategy, ensuring transparency in how co-researchers were selected and engaged. Data analysis procedures were briefly explained, highlighting the use of inductive content analysis to identify themes and patterns.

Validity within PALAR was addressed using Herr and Anderson's criteria, and ethical considerations were discussed to ensure respectful and responsible engagement with all participants.

This chapter laid the foundation for the study's implementation and findings. The next chapter will present a detailed review of relevant literature, further contextualising the study within existing research and theoretical perspectives.

CHAPTER 2: Perspectives on parental involvement in and support for learners experiencing psycho-emotional barriers to learning

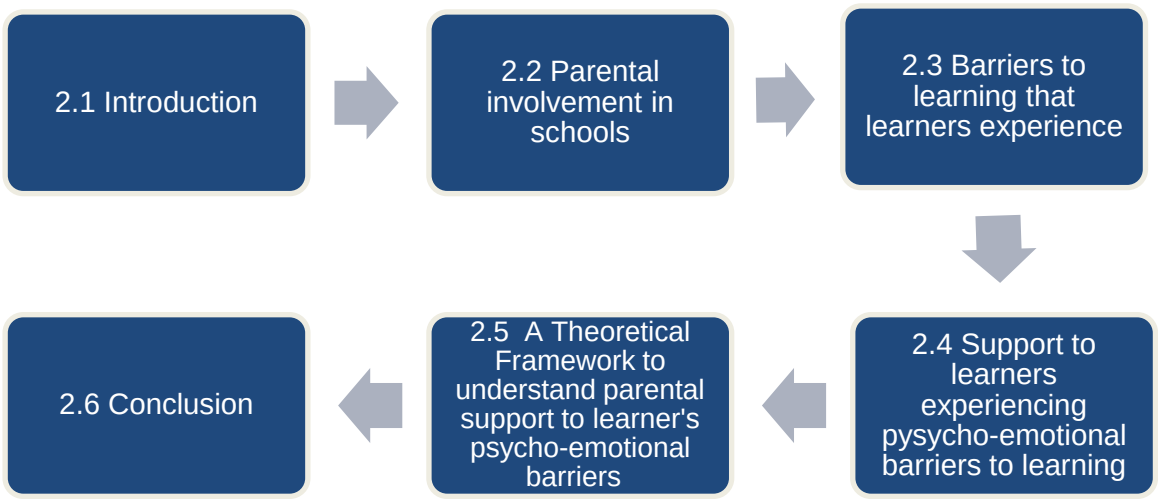


Figure 2.1 Overview of Chapter 2

Source: Author's own construct

2.1 Introduction

Parental involvement in a child's life is crucial and can positively impact their learning. Building on the previous chapter, which outlined the study's background, rationale, and methodological approach, this chapter introduces the theoretical and conceptual foundations that underpin the research. This chapter explores how parents can be involved and assisted in supporting learners with psycho-emotional barriers to learning. It establishes the significance of understanding psycho-emotional support within African contexts, where cultural beliefs and systemic challenges influence parental engagement. In this chapter, I will be discussing how Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, Positive Psychology, and Family Systems Theory relate to the psycho-emotional needs and support of learners and African parents. These frameworks were selected to provide a multidimensional lens through which parental involvement can be understood, contextualised, and strengthened. This chapter is intended to explore how African parents of learners with psycho-emotional barriers can be supported and involved in their education. It will also clarify key concepts such as African Psychology, psycho-emotional barriers,

collaborative school support, psycho-emotional support, and parental involvement, so laying the conceptual groundwork for the development of culturally responsive guidelines. By mapping out these theoretical and conceptual elements, the chapter sets the stage for the literature review that follows, where existing research will be critically examined to further contextualise the study.

2.2 Conceptual framework: Parental involvement in schools

2.2.1 Overview

Parents are expected to be actively involved in the educational development of their learners, but there are persistent barriers to this developmental process (DoE, 1997). There are factors affecting parental involvement such as parental levels of education, their lack of knowledge of certain information, and past experiences with the school and educators. The NCESS (1997) and South African Schools Act (1996) contend that learning as well as development in the child's life should be implemented successfully, therefore parental involvement is crucial in teaching and learning, as learners depend on parental support. This underscores the importance of involving parents in decision-making processes to ensure the success of intervention programmes. This indicates that when decisions are taken, parents should be involved so that intervention programmes can be implemented successfully. In order for learners to reach or achieve their educational goals, parents' ought to be active both at school and home (Myende & Nhlumayo, 2020). According to Fischer (2013) and Gurung et al. (2021), parental education levels have an impact on the child's life and academics. Recent studies also highlight that family size, parental education, and socio-economic status are key determinants of academic growth and learner well-being (Shao et al., 2022). This section sets the foundation for understanding how parental involvement operates across different contexts and how it relates to psycho-emotional support for learners with psycho-emotional barriers.

2.2.2 Parental involvement in the learning of their learners

To foster collaborative relationships between school governing bodies, parents, and educators, active parental involvement in learners' academic development is essential (South African Schools Act, 1997). Parental involvement can be defined as parents being actively involved in their learner's learning, participating in educational enrichment activities, and helping them with their homework (Schaedel et al., 2018). Furthermore, Waters et al. (2014) define parental involvement as any assistance carried out by parents, caregivers, or guardians for learners.

There are many ways in which parents can show their involvement, by assisting with homework, reading, attending parent meetings and functions, having parent-teacher relationships, and being

actively involved in their learning. Forms of involvement include attending school meetings, maintaining parent-teacher relationships, and supporting learning at home. Brody et al. (2018) categorise parental involvement into three domains:

- Home involvement (e.g. homework support, monitoring progress)
- School involvement (e.g. attending meetings, communicating with teachers)
- Socialisation (e.g. encouraging engagement, discussing performance with educators).

Studies by Ntekane (2018), Ugwuegbulem (2018), Boonk et al. (2018), and Tran et al. (2020), show a positive relation between parental involvement and learner's academic development, as past research has shown a link that can lead to a positive attitude towards learning. The more parents are involved, the more learners succeed. The studies focused more on parental involvement in education and established an encouraging effect on learners' learning outcomes. These studies confirm that increased parental engagement leads to improved learner attitudes, behaviour, and academic success.

Learners' behaviour, school attendance and social skills are enhanced by parental involvement as it assists learners to adapt better in school. Boonk et al. (2018) found a significant positive relation between parental involvement and academic achievement when supporting learners. Parental involvement has a significant impact on the South African school-aged adolescent's educational level (Nkoane & Lawrence, 2020). Comparably, Tran et al. (2020) discovered that once parents, guardians, caregivers and parents offer learners the required support, it promotes intellectual development and family background. According to Hoover-Dempsey (1997), the reason some parents are always active in the education of their learners is because they are convinced that they should take part, educators and learners encourage them to be, and their involvement will enhance the education of the child. Parental educational support is critical in a learner's learning, particularly from kindergarten. Pushor and Amendt (2018) argue that parental involvement is the most powerful tool for improving learner's learning outcomes, especially when initiated early in a child's educational journey. Based on these definitions and findings, it is evident that parents play a critical role in shaping both the academic and social development of their learners. This concept is central to the current study's aim of enhancing African parents' involvement in psycho-emotional support.

2.2.3 African parents and their school involvement

According to Guyon et al. (2015), learners can look back to their parents to see who they are, hence we say parents' viewpoints are influenced by their surrounding and background. For

instance, if both parents show a positive attitude towards learning, then automatically the child will be positive about school as well. The same goes for parents who are negative. Therefore, this indicates that the attitude of parents regarding being actively involved in their learner's learning could influence how learners view their education. The more parents are invited to school meetings and are always informed in decision-making, the more their perceptions of being involved are impacted, as it promotes partnerships. If parents demonstrate a positive attitude toward learning, learners are more likely to adopt similar attitudes. Conversely, negative parental perceptions can hinder learner motivation and engagement. This highlights the importance of inclusive school practices that invite parents into decision-making and foster meaningful partnerships. Ugwuegbulem (2018) conducted a study in Imo State, Nigeria, which revealed that parents from low socio-economic backgrounds often experience low self-esteem, limiting their involvement in their learner's education. This finding is echoed in South African contexts, where socio-economic status remains a significant barrier to parental engagement. Freund et al. (2018) found that Arab parents typically engage with schools only when problems arise, such as behavioural issues or academic failure. This reactive form of involvement suggests that proactive strategies are needed to build sustained parental engagement.

Rispoli et al. (2018) note that parents with higher education levels are more likely to support their learner's academics at home, and benefit from educator guidance. Learners with learning disabilities whose parents are well-educated tend to receive more effective support strategies. This underscores the need for accessible information and training for all parents, regardless of educational background. To ensure equitable parental involvement, Rispoli et al. (2018) advocate for free enrichment activities and open access to information, particularly for families facing socio-economic challenges. This aligns with the study's goal of developing culturally responsive guidelines that empower African parents to support learners with psycho-emotional barriers.

2.3 Barriers to learning that learner's experience

2.3.1 Overview of barriers to learning

The Screening Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) policy document (DBE, 2014) define learning barriers as hurdles that obstruct learning development in learners, they restrict learners from reaching their full potential. Barriers to learning can include lack of learning and teaching resources, learners not understanding the taught content, classroom management and organisation, curriculum coverage and the quality of learning, assessment, and lastly, language of instruction. Scholastic barriers emerge within the school system and include challenges such as the use of unfamiliar instructional languages, inaccessible infrastructure for learners with physical disabilities, and a curriculum that fails to accommodate diverse learning needs (DBE,

2014). Scholastic barriers include the medium of instruction (most learners struggle with this as they are only fluent in their vernacular), the infrastructure of the school is not child friendly (the needs of learners with special needs are not met, e.g. wheelchair access), lack of access to teaching and learning support materials, as well as a curriculum that does not accommodate everyone (learners who are visually impaired may struggle in a school that does not have advanced technology).

According to the DBE (2014), learners face challenges arising from experiences in the classroom, home, and community. These experiences can themselves become barriers to learning.

- Classroom experiences: difficulties with reading, writing, and language comprehension
- Home experiences: unsupportive family environments, lack of parental involvement
- Community experiences: absence of enrichment programmes and weak school-community partnerships.

According to Lee (2018), disability or physical health can negatively influence the learning process of learners in schools (e.g. poor eyesight, chronic illnesses, and speech impairment). Psychosocial factors such as domestic violence, substance and emotional abuse, poverty, gangsterism and disruptive behaviours are prevalent in some learners' backgrounds, and which will impact on their learning (Daniels, 2013). Barriers to learning do affect learner behaviour negatively (Oldfield et al., 2017). For instance, if a naughty learner struggles to read out loud in front of their peers, they will show avoidance behaviour preventing them from feeling embarrassed.

Donald et al. (2002) emphasise that parental involvement is a key protective factor in mitigating learning barriers, especially within inclusive education settings.

2.3.2 Psycho-emotional barriers to learning

According to Vlok (2016), in this study one can define emotional and behavioural barriers as a negative low self-esteem learners experience when learning; they can be afraid of failing, are shy or have insecurities. Learners with low self-esteem suffer from intrinsic barriers as this leads to learners being disobedient towards educators and parents, while others lose interest in their academics, which will lead to poor academic performance. Learners' emotional and behavioural problems can be caused by parental divorce, insufficient communication between two parents, and single parenthood (Theunissen et al., 2017). Past traumatic experiences can result in emotional and behavioural problems. Adubasim and Ugwu (2019) define trauma as a shock that

makes an individual feel hopeless, horrified, or terrified. When a learner experiences a traumatic event such as losing a loved one, abuse by parents or bullies, or accidents, this can lead to traumatic effects that can result in medical intervention, as these events can have a negative effect on learners' health and academic performance (Frieze, 2015); also learners can present behaviours such as lack of concentration, absenteeism, and non-participation in social skills (Hassan, 2015). These behaviours directly impact academic performance and classroom engagement.

Educators and psychologists agree that there is a relationship between emotional, behavioural and social skills, and learners' learning (Dobbs et al., 2006). Furthermore, learners' academic achievement and well-being is affected by their behavioural and emotional problems at school (Borgen et al., 2019). Learners who experience psycho-emotional barriers tend to be disruptive and violent towards other learners and educators. Emotional and behavioural problems include making noise as this interrupts other learners, being unwilling to participate in the classroom, and not paying attention in class (Bell et al., 2019). According to Wang, Hu, and Wang (2018), environmental and personal factors can negatively or positively influence a learner's behaviour. Bal et al. (2012) assert that cultural contexts are meditated by learners' learning outside and inside of school, and learners' behaviour. In this study, personal factors refer to learners' emotional states and how these influence their behaviour. For instance, a learner grieving a parent may suppress emotions and struggle to concentrate in class. According to Hasan and Husain (2016), it is evident that learners with negative emotions show behaviour problems. Evidence shows that negative emotions are linked to behavioural problems during adolescence (Bradshaw et al., 2010; Mesurado et al., 2018). If parents are constantly fighting at home, it could influence the learner's behaviour at school. Carrell and Hoekstra (2010) conducted a study and found out that learners who are exposed to physical abuse at home are more likely to be disruptive and show poor academic achievement. Schools need to collaborate with social workers and psychologists to provide learner support, and it is important for the Department of Education to host workshops for parents and educate them about different barriers to learning.

These findings underscore the need for schools to collaborate with social workers and psychologists to provide holistic learner support. The Department of Education should host workshops to educate parents about psycho-emotional barriers and their impact on learning. Given the study's focus on improving African parents' involvement in psycho-emotional support, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory is used to understand how environmental and personal factors interact to shape learner emotions and behaviour (Navarro & Tudge, 2022).

2.4 Support to learners experiencing psycho-emotional barriers to learning

Learner support can be defined as any form of assistance or support designated to learners with barriers to learning to enable them to overcome their barriers (The EWP6, DoE, 2001). Department of Education (2005) also defines learner support as activities used to enhance effective learning for all learners, and cater for diversity. Learner support decreases learning barriers that might create behavioural problems (Booth & Ainscow, 2011; DoE, 2014). According to Conway (2017), factors such as the community, school, and the child's home should be considered when identifying behavioural problems in learners, hence Makhalemele and Nel (2016) highlight the importance for learner support. Optimal learning requires collaborative support involving educators, families, learners, and other stakeholders (Mitchell, 2021). To resolve behavioural problems, educators should be supported by the school staff. The EWP6 (2006) states that it is obligatory to give support where necessary to learners who have behavioural problems (Prinsloo & Gasa, 2016) so that they are not excluded from education. Inclusivity is a cornerstone of the South African education policy, as reflected in SIAS and Education White Paper 6: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System. These policies mandate support for all learners, regardless of their barriers, culture, or values, and which will be discussed later in this chapter. Learner support includes differentiated lesson planning, homework assistance, and emotional guidance tailored to individual needs. In this section, the focus is on how educators and parents can collaborate to support learners with psycho-emotional barriers in mainstream schools.

2.4.1 School and district-based interventions

Educators are not solely responsible for managing learner discipline and behavioural challenges (Sullivan, 2017); they must be supported by a multidisciplinary team within the school to collaboratively address learner needs. Schools play a pivotal role in fostering parental involvement, particularly when educators and parents build trusting relationships around learners' academic and emotional development (Oswald et al., 2018). One key mechanism for learner support is the Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) policy (DBE, 2014), which provides a structured process for identifying and addressing barriers to learning, including behavioural and emotional challenges. SIAS promotes collaborative intervention involving educators, parents, the District-Based Support Team (DBST), the School-Based Support Team (SBST), and other stakeholders. The policy unfolds in four stages:

Stage 1: The learner profile

This stage involves obtaining personal information about the learner when they enter school; the main reason is to obtain an understanding about the learner's health and family life. It is completed collaboratively by educators, health professionals, and parents, ensuring a shared understanding

of the learner's needs. Educators screen all learners and use this profile to identify potential learning and behavioural barriers (Hess, 2022).

Stage 2: Identification of barriers

Educators and a member of SBST complete this section with parents and guardians (DBE, 2014). It reviews curriculum-related challenges, learner strengths and weaknesses, and contextual factors such as home violence or educator preparedness. This section reviews the challenges the learner experiences in the curriculum (areas of concern, strengths, and weakness). According to Writes (2019), learner behavioural problems lead to curriculum challenges which can disturb their learning and academic success. In this section there should be evidence collected by an educator from the learner's workbook, assessment tasks, class behaviour and social strengths during class (DBE, 2014). This section also outlines contextual factors affecting learner's potential to learn. The factors may include educator's knowledge about the curriculum, and barriers to learning and violence at home. This allows educators, parents, and the SBST to discuss contextual learning barriers learners experience when they are deciding on the individual support needed by the learner, as they will then plan, implement, and monitor it. This stage enables stakeholders to collaboratively plan, implement, and monitor individualised support strategies.

Stage 3: Assessment

The DBST, SBST, parents and guardians complete this section to determine the type of support the learner needs (DBE, 2014). Parents may receive training, counselling, and mentoring to support learners at home, while schools are equipped with appropriate resources. In this study, assessment is used to evaluate learner development and performance. It also provides insight into how much support educators must offer, and gives parents hope by affirming their child's potential. Therefore, different role players need to collaborate to support the learner where needed (DBE, 2014).

Stage 4: An action plan

The DBST completes this section with the help of the school, as it reviews an action plan for the educator and SBST. This stage outlines where support will be provided and accessed by different role players, and how it will be implemented and monitored (DBE, 2014). Support may include specialised educators, classroom materials, and services from social workers, occupational therapists, or psychologists. In this study, learners with psycho-emotional barriers will be supported through targeted interventions and inclusive practices. The SIAS policy offers a comprehensive framework for identifying barriers, understanding their root causes, and

coordinating interventions, making it essential for improving psycho-emotional support through parental involvement.

2.4.2 Support system connected to SIAS policy

2.4.2.1 The School-Based Support Team (SBST)

The School-Based Support Team (SBST) is obligated to regulate the support needed by learners and the school. It consists of different educators within the school who need to work together to identify and support learners with barriers (DoE, 2005; Landsberg, 2019). The referring educator, who works closely with the learner, initiates the Support Needs Assessment (SNA) and consults with parents and SBST members. Parents must be clearly informed about their child's barriers and consent to the proposed support. If classroom-based interventions are ineffective, the SBST escalates the case to the DBST for additional resources and expertise. Educators and the SBST usually use classroom-based resources to help support the learner, but if there is no change, the SBST will get assistance from the DBST, as they will provide more support and resources needed. Educators play a crucial part in identifying, developing and implementing support structures; however appropriate support is needed (Zwane & Malale, 2018).

2.4.2.2 The School Management Team

The school management team consist of educators (departmental heads), the principal and the deputy principal (Maja, 2016). They oversee the implementation of inclusive education and ensure that support structures are effectively managed. They control, manage and organise support to the school at large. According to Walton and Lloyd (2011), the SMT is responsible for promoting and supporting inclusive education. In this study the school management team supports the educators, parents, and learners, and they also communicate with the SBST regarding the needs of learners. They support any decision taken by the SBST and DBST about the learner.

2.4.2.3 The District-Based Support Team (DBST)

The DBST is not only made up of curriculum advisors, it also consists of social workers, educational psychologists and occupational therapists, as they are not directly involved but deal with factors affecting the learner's education (Nel et al., 2016). Each member contributes specialised knowledge to support learners, educators, and parents (DoE, 2005). The DBST provide support where it is necessary and also provides recommendations, support programmes and services to the SBST, learners, and parents. According to Donohue and Bornman (2014), the functionality of the DBST is to support educators who need help in supporting learners, as it

assists educators to identify and eradicate hurdles that hinder learners' success (Engelbrecht et al., 2016). They also develop educators with necessary support and classroom resources (Mfuthwana, 2016).

2.4.2.4 Special Schools as Resource Centres (SSRC)

According to Landsberg (2019), SSRCs are resource centres for full-service and mainstream schools, and function as an integrated part of the DBST. They support schools and learners with barriers, and provide support in regard to the curriculum. According to Mitchell (2021), SSRCs provide educators with training on behaviour and barriers, and provide support. They can also provide support to the community and non-governmental organisations (Landsberg, 2019). In this study, SSRCs will collaborate with the South African Police Service and community members to deliver behavioural talks, and reduce school-based and societal behavioural issues. Mainstream schools will obtain training on barriers to learning, or be given an educator who specialises in barriers. As discussed above, in identifying and supporting learners with barriers, different role players are needed to communicate and collaborate in overcoming obstacles.

2.4.3 Parental support to alleviate psycho-emotional barriers to learning

According to Landsberg (2019) and Baker, Wise, Kelley, and Skiba (2016), parents play a vital role in identifying and supporting learners with psycho-emotional barriers, as they possess intimate knowledge of their learner's well-being, behaviour, and developmental history. Prinsloo (2019) adds that when identifying and supporting learners with emotional issues, educators and parents need to collaborate (Baker et al., 2016). To foster active parental involvement, schools can offer non-academic engagement opportunities such as coaching or assisting with extramural activities such as soccer or netball. These activities help parents remain connected to the school environment and build rapport with educators. As both a researcher and SBST member, I believe that many parents are not disengaged by choice, but due to a lack of information and support. Workshops and meetings facilitated by the DBST and other stakeholders can educate parents about psycho-emotional barriers and equip them with strategies to support their learners at home (Nel, 2013).

Support may include:

- Helping with schoolwork
- Creating a nurturing home environment where learners feel safe to express emotions
- Avoiding harmful language and affirming the child's worth

- Encouraging strengths and celebrating progress (Carrell & Hoekstra, 2010)

This approach aligns with the study's aim to develop guidelines that empower African parents to provide psycho-emotional support tailored to their learner's needs.

2.4.4 African parents' involvement in supporting psycho-emotional barriers

Parents need to become involved in their learner's academics at home, so the child's learning can be effective (Driessen et al., 2005; Harris & Goodall, 2008; Michael, Wolhuter & van Wyk, 2018). Strong partnerships between schools, communities, and families are essential for inclusive support (Tlale & Romm, 2018). To ensure good working relations between the school and parents, there should be meetings discussing issues about the child, and an open communication of important information (Michael et al., 2018). Such involvement allows parents to understand the challenges their learners face, contribute valuable insights, and collaborate on solutions. Additionally parents can volunteer and schedule a meeting with the child's educator, just to come and see the progress of the child. This will create educational development in learners, as parents will be learning what their learners are facing, how to address it, and provide the school with information that might assist their learner's learning (Michael et al., 2018).

Parents can intervene by incorporating approaches such as building relations, planning, teamwork, and training, with the educational setting of the child. Early childhood programmes that focus on social-emotional development and cognitive skill-building are particularly effective. These programmes also train parents and educators in behavioural management techniques (Schindler, 2015).

African parents should be:

- Informed about different types of learning barriers
- Trained to support learners with emotional challenges
- Encouraged to seek therapeutic support when needed
- Consistently engaged in communication with educators

According to Tran et al. (2020), when parents provide consistent emotional and academic support at home, it stimulates cognitive development and enhances learner resilience.

2.5 A Theoretical Framework to understand parental support to learner's psycho-emotional barriers

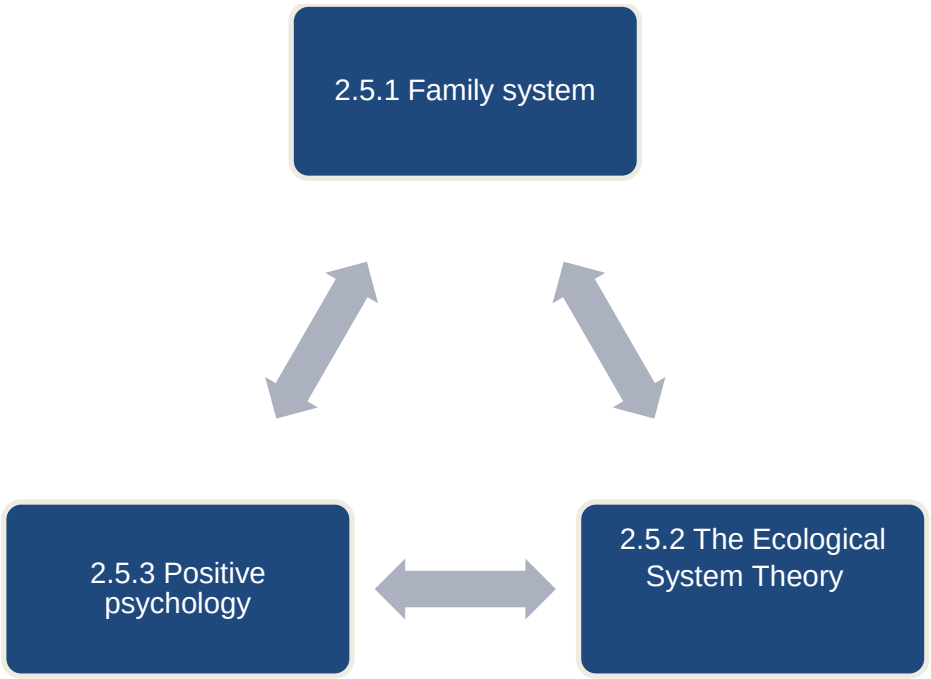


Figure 2.2: Overview of theories

Source: Author's own construct

2.5.1 Family system

Family system theory is about human behaviour, created by Bowen (1976). According to Broderick (1993), in the family system theory, individuals are strongly related to each other and dependent; he also claims that when there is an alteration within, all variants are affected. Family system theory focuses on primary behaviour between family members (Johnson, 2016). Family members influence each other. Therefore, in order to understand human behaviour and problems, one should consider the context of the family in which the individual exists (Sugitanata, 2024). This theory is particularly relevant to the current study, which investigates African parents' involvement in psycho-emotional support for learners with psycho-emotional barriers to learning. It provides a lens to understand how family dynamics, roles, and emotional processes shape parental engagement and learner well-being.

An individual's behaviour sequences family interaction. When parents get divorced or lose a job, somehow it affects everyone negatively, mostly the learners, hence they suffer from psycho-

emotional barriers. This theory believes that a family should build relationships and interact with each other more often, as they are a system (Moore, 2019). Families should develop a foundation whereby the youth teach the younger ones how to build and maintain relationships within the family, as this is important (Smith, Reinke, Herman & Huang, 2019). During the schooling years, learners develop interpersonal skills, academic problem-solving abilities, and social navigation strategies. The theory supports the notion that school and home environments are interlinked, and that parental disengagement can lead to emotional distress and academic decline. The family composition can affect the child's learning (Schneider & Coleman, 2018). This means that if there are many adults and learners in the family, this can cause a distraction; often parents will not have time for every child in the family. According to Kerig (2019), family system theory gives understanding on how parenting takes place. Family system theory is all about how a family interacts, and how family patterns influence the functioning of the family (Sugitanata, 2024). Historically, Bowen's theory emerged in the mid-20th century as a response to reductionist psychological models that treated individuals in isolation. It has since evolved to inform contemporary practices in education, counselling, and family therapy.

There are several concepts Bowen explains about how the family system works (Sugitanata, 2024). Bowen's family theory consists of eight mechanisms which are interconnected in relation to the child's welfare. These concepts focus on how families should adapt to challenges and anxieties that develop in families.

2.5.1.1 Differentiation

According to Chesson (2023) differentiation refers to the human ability to maintain oneself while connected to others. According to Bowen (1976), differentiation can be defined as differentiated individuals that are able to have supportive relationships and have a healthy development. Well-differentiated individuals can control their actions and feelings in a way that separates them from other individuals. They are responsible for how they feel and think, and are not easily manipulated by others. If a parent is poorly differentiated, they may struggle in making the right decisions about their child, but if they are highly differentiated they become calm and are able to support their learners without being emotional (Chesson, 2023). It is important for parents of learners with psycho-emotional barriers to be strong for their learners. Learners with psycho-emotional barriers have low levels of differentiation who easily yield to social pressure. They are affected by peoples' thoughts, and opinions about themselves, their feelings and behaviours. They often give up their own opinion in order to favour other people. This mechanism will help learners with psycho-emotional barriers to be well differentiated by acting according to their life principles, and have intimate and meaningful relationships with others.

2.5.1.2 Triangles

Triangles refers to a third member who will assist in reducing conflict between two people (Kerr, 2000). Brown and Errington (2024) define triangles as the smallest relationship unit containing emotional forces in a relationship of two people. This means when two people have issues, a third person can be involved to address the issue at hand. When parents are having a conflict they may involve a child to choose between them, which creates a triangulation dynamic. Parents should work collaboratively to promote the family's wellbeing. Often when parents fight or divorce, this can negatively affect or damage the child, thus leading to learners having barriers or a change of behaviour. When parents' divorce, the one living with the child is expected to take care of the child and be involved with the child, while the other one is not. This mechanism encourages that parents should solve their issues and engage in their child's learning so that parental involvement can be sustained. This concept is relevant to the study's aim of promoting collaborative parental involvement. It highlights the need for conflict resolution and unified support for the learner's emotional and academic development.

2.5.1.3 Nuclear Family Emotional Process

The concept of Nuclear Family Emotional Process refers to emotional and behavioural actions of the family (Chesson, 2023). This means that conflicts and tensions within the family create functionality problems for learners. When a learner cannot express how they feel, this can create communication and emotions problems. Parental tension between parents can spill over to the learners in the family. The more parents focus on their learners with psycho-emotional barriers, the more the child can function at school and with others. Parents should become cooperative, stay calm with each other, and join hands to find solutions for the child's problems.

2.5.1.4 Emotional cut-off

According to Bowen (1978), emotional cut-off refers to emotional distancing between others in the family. A person's differentiation level is determined by cut-off. Brown and Errington (2024) assert that emotional cut-off can be described as physical distance or emotional withdrawal. When an individual has stress or undergoes traumatic events, emotional cut-off can be a coping mechanism for them. According to Brown (1999), the emotional and physical health of individuals may appear as emotional cut-off. If a family member abuses another physically or sexually, a person may cut contact with them, as they have experienced trauma from a family member. When one parent emotionally cuts off the other parent, they become less involved or interested in their learner's learning.

Learners with psycho-emotional barriers tend to cut off everyone by isolating themselves from others, which generates more problems for them, as it deprives them of resources from people who might render help. Often learners with psycho-emotional barriers like cutting off people, because problems in the family trigger their anxiety (Brown & Errington, 2024). This concept underscores the importance of emotional availability and consistent parental involvement in the learner's development.

2.5.1.5 Multigenerational Transmission Process

According to Nichols and Schwartz (2006) in Multigenerational Transmission Process, patterns such as behaviour and emotions can be generational. This theory of Bowen suggests that certain behaviour within the family might be difficult to change, as it has been happening from one generation to the next (Chesson, 2023). If parents are used to avoid conflicts, it is likely that other generations to come will be used to avoiding conflicts, so it will become a family tradition. This will result in learners having difficulty in healthily solving conflicts with friends at school. This concept is vital for understanding how cultural and familial beliefs influence African parents' perceptions of emotional support, and their engagement with schools.

2.5.1.6 Sibling Position

Sibling position refers to the birth order of siblings in the family and how each sibling can impact each other's emotional and social development (Bowen, 1978). He also suggested that sibling position influences learner's relations with others, emotional functionality, and personality. Bowen believed that one sibling's birth order can be linked with the attitudes and behaviours of others (Miller, Anderson & Keala, 2004). Siblings develop their own personalities, behave and operate in their own beneficial ways, therefore the child's welfare system needs to be considered (Thompson et al., 2019). Last-borns or younger siblings tend to be more rebellious than first-borns who are more responsible, hence siblings will differ.

The eldest siblings are always responsible and the youngest are carefree, while the last-born are neglected. While working with learners with psycho-emotional barriers I noticed that most of them are middle learners in their families and are neglected, hence there is no parental involvement in their education because they are assumed to be dependent. Learners experience parents differently; they might show up for the one child, while the others also need parental guidance (Brown & Errington, 2024). This concept helps explain disparities in parental involvement, and highlights the need for inclusive support strategies that consider family structure.

2.5.1.7 Societal Emotional Process

This process refers to how social issues such as culture and politics can impact family dynamics (Chesson, 2023). She adds that societal issues affect the functioning of an individual's emotions and behaviour in the family. Our societies are suffering from anxiety and that can lead to the society experiencing either regression or progression (Bowen, 1978). Societal and health challenges that happen in a child's life can result in various communications within the family, which can cause stress. According to Thompson et al. (2019), health professionals, such as social workers and psychologists, should examine how society at large influences the health of the child.

Family dynamics, such as unemployment and poverty, can cause pressure in the family, leading to the child underperforming at school, and not having parental support because of the situation at home.

2.5.1.8 Family Projection Process

The last process is Family Projection, which refers to parents projecting their anxiety and emotions onto the child (Chesson, 2023). When parents are stressed about their child's learning, they often pass their stress to the learners, which can put them under pressure and make them depressed. Health professionals that work with families should implement tasks that will promote differentiation within family members (Thompson et al., 2019); this will help family members to manage their emotions and actions as they will develop self-awareness within their family (Kerr & Bowen, 1988).

Bowen's Family System Theory (1978) helps us in understanding behaviours and relationships patterns within interconnected systems, hence a family therapist will be more understanding of these patterns and be able to develop interventions.

2.5.2 Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory

When identifying the influences and impacts of behavioural problems in learners, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979) is applicable. This theory claims that the interactions of the child influences their development as they grow (1979, 1994, and 2005). The model illustrates interactions between the child and the environment. This framework is particularly relevant to the current study, which investigates African parents' involvement in psycho-emotional support for learners with psycho-emotional barriers to learning. It provides a holistic lens to understand how multiple environmental layers shape parental engagement and learner well-being. This theory can logically help us comprehend how human growth is shaped by the dynamic processes through which an individual develops and creates socio-ecological

surroundings in reciprocal environments. The Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory is a nested system, where the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem influence each other in the child's development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Donald et al., 2014). Parental involvement can be analysed through these layers, offering insight into how psycho-emotional barriers are shaped by family, school, community, and broader societal factors (Seginer, 2006).

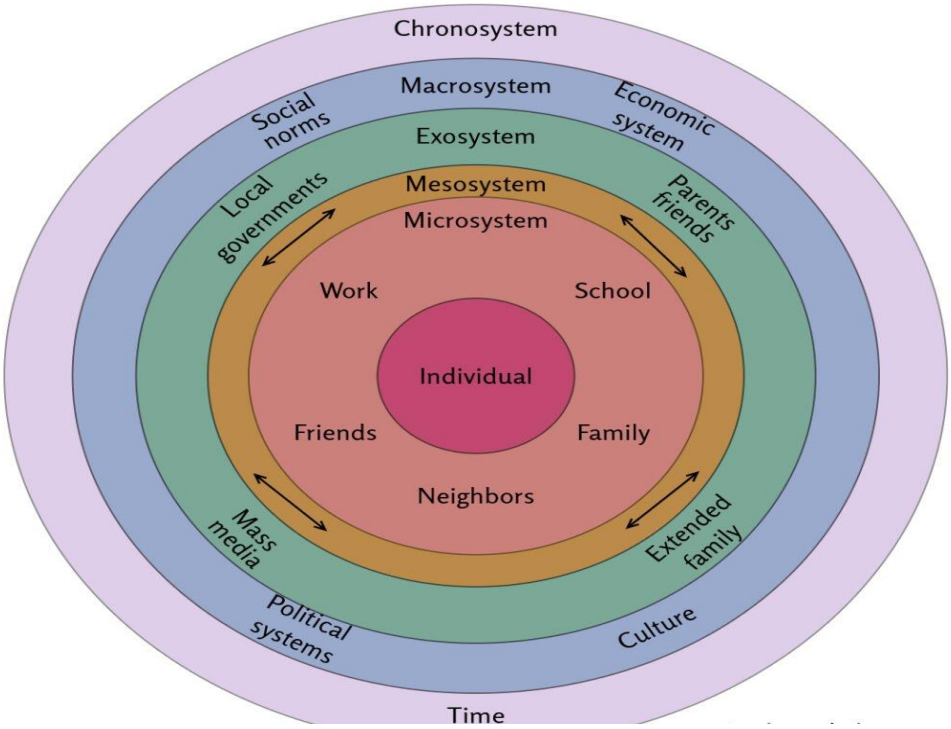


Figure 2.3: Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory

Source: Author's construct from Bronfenbrenner (1979).

Microsystem: The home environment of the child is the microsystem of parental involvement. In this study, the microsystem is where African parents and learners with psycho-emotional barriers interact daily, making it the primary focus for psycho-emotional support. In the microsystem, the child is the core focus; this includes their health and personal factors affecting them. Personal factors may include age and gender which influence how the child behaves. The microsystem includes the child's immediate environment such as friends, school, and the family, as they are the direct link to the child (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Donald et al., 2020; Nel, 2013; Swart & Pettipher, 2019). This study focuses on the learner where they interact with their surroundings, as this can have an impact on their behaviour. According to Lind et al. (2019), when a certain behaviour is modelled to the child, it can influence their behaviour as they imitate what is done or

shown; therefore it is important that a child grows up in a positive and healthy environment. In this study the parents and learners with psycho-emotional barriers are primarily in the microsystem, thus the study is interested in the influence parents can have on their learning. Parental attitudes, responsiveness, and emotional availability within the microsystem directly affect the learner's emotional resilience and academic engagement.

The **mesosystem,** which is secondary, includes educator-parent interaction and interactions which focus on factors affecting the child at school and in the home system (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The interactions include the school, peers, and neighbourhood, church, family, and health services, as they are the foundation of this system (Swart & Pettipher, 2019). In this study, the mesosystem highlights how disruptions in one setting (e.g. parental conflict or divorce) can affect the learner's behaviour and emotional stability in another (e.g. school). They further explain that what the child experiences in the microsystem can affect activities in other systems. When parents' divorce, learners may find it hard to understand and accept the situation, hence they will suddenly show bad behaviour and behavioural problems arise (Brown & Errington, 2024). The mesosystem is crucial for understanding how coordinated support between schools and families can mitigate psycho-emotional barriers. In this study, the mesosystem consists of the microsystem and its influence; for example, how the township, neighbourhood, and parents influence learners with psycho-emotional barriers.

The third system, which is the **exo-system,** refers to contexts of parental involvement, such as their workplace, neighbourhood and social networking, legislation, and policy making (Joubert, 2023). Parental stress from their work, lack of time, or limited access to support services, can reduce their capacity to engage in their child's education. The workplace is important in learning and developing the parent's knowledge about school. Interactions that hinder the child's development, such as social relations, can be examples in the neighbourhood. Parental social networking is based on school and home involvement, where there is communication about the child and support is given (Smith et al., 2020). Parental involvement can be affected by legislation and policy-making, as it has a positive effect on the child's academics. The tension at the child's home and their socioeconomic status can cause behavioural problems, as it negatively impacts on their relations with friends, parents, and educators. This system influences the learner's behaviour, performance, and the mesosystem.

The fourth system is the **macro-system,** which explains how sociocultural practices such as lifestyles and belief systems affect parental involvement. According to Donald et al. (2014), Nel (2013) and Swart and Pettipher (2019), the macro system focuses on economic attitudes, ideologies, beliefs, and the social structures of parents as they have an impact on other

systems. In this study, the macrosystem is relevant in understanding how African cultural beliefs – such as attributing emotional distress to spiritual causes – can affect parental recognition and response to psycho-emotional barriers. In this study context, if parents do not believe that their child is suffering from psycho-emotional barriers, which could impact negatively on the child. Moreover if the school lacks infrastructure and resources this can lead to the learners being uninterested in learning, as they are not receiving quality education.

The **chronosystem** encompasses the four systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979, 1986). This system is especially relevant in the post-COVID-19 context, where disruptions in education and limited parental involvement in the Motheo District exacerbated the psycho-emotional barriers in learners. The system refers to how interactions relate and timeframes develop between all systems, and how they influence learner development (Donald et al., 2014; Nel, 2013; Swart & Pettipher, 2019). When the education curriculum, system and policies continuously change, it negatively impacts the learner, as they are not coping with the curriculum changes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019). The chronosystem helps explain how long-term exposure to stressors, such as poverty, trauma, or inconsistent support, can compound emotional difficulties.

According to Makhalemele and Nel (2016), ineffective support structures and systems are the central aspects of the context of this study. Hence the Department of Education should provide educators and parents with necessary support to accommodate learners with emotional and behavioural problems so they are not left alone (Sullivan, 2020). It is clear that contextual, personal, and environmental factors should be considered when identifying emotional and behavioural problems in learners (Mapepa & Magano, 2018; Nel, 2013; Swart & Pettipher, 2019).

Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory was discussed, and shows how different systems impacted on the learner. In this system it is important to investigate psycho-emotional barriers to learning, and its impact on teaching and learning.

2.5.3 Positive psychology

The two founders of positive psychology wrote "psychologists have scant knowledge of what makes life worth living" (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000:6). Since World War II, they recognised that psychology has become a science largely about healing. Despite the challenges we face daily as human beings, they wanted us to find a way to live better (Kellerman & Seligman, 2023). Positive Psychology emerged as a paradigm shift, moving away from pathology and deficit-based models toward a strengths-based approach that promotes well-being, resilience, and flourishing. This evolution is particularly relevant in educational contexts where psycho-emotional barriers to learning are prevalent.

According to Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000), positive psychology deals with positive human behaviour, how humans feel or show emotions and their strengths, and it is aimed at making people happy. Gable and Haidt (2005) add that positive psychology can also be defined as the study of what human beings are good at as individuals within their communities and organisations. Seligman (2013) describes positive psychology as being about flourishing and well-being. Positive psychology aims at flourishing. Flourishing can be defined as engagement and pursuit of a life that provides full happiness and fulfilment despite life challenges (Ackerman, 2021). This framework is central to the current study, which seeks to develop guidelines for African parents to support learners with psycho-emotional barriers. It provides a lens to understand how emotional strengths, relationships, and engagement can be cultivated to overcome psychological challenges in learning. It focuses on human health and what drives them in this life (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Psychology focuses on the mental health of individuals and positive relations (Seligman, 1999), while Positive Psychology focuses on impacts that make people happy (Kossakowska, 2014). In this study, Positive Psychology helps us understand how parental attitudes, emotional availability, and strengths-based support can influence learners' emotional resilience and academic success.

Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) outline three levels of Positive Psychology:

- Subjective level: experiences such as happiness, peace, and comfort
- Individual level: traits like intelligence, patience, and emotional regulation
- Group level: collective values such as hard work, nurturing, and influence

These levels align with the study's focus on individual learner needs, parental traits, and community-based support systems. Positive emotions and strength contribute to the learning of learners as it helps them to conquer barriers and perceive their strengths. The goal of positive psychology is to supply the community and individuals with instruments that will enable them to thrive. According to Snyder (2021), positive psychology is used to help us promote well-being and comprehend our strengths, and seek ways to flourish in human nature (Seligman, 2011).

PERMA Model of Well-being

Seligman (2011) introduced the PERMA model, which identifies five core elements of well-being: Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment. This model is used in the study to guide the development of psycho-emotional support strategies for learners and to inform parental involvement practices. The figure below provides a visual representation of well-being PERMA.

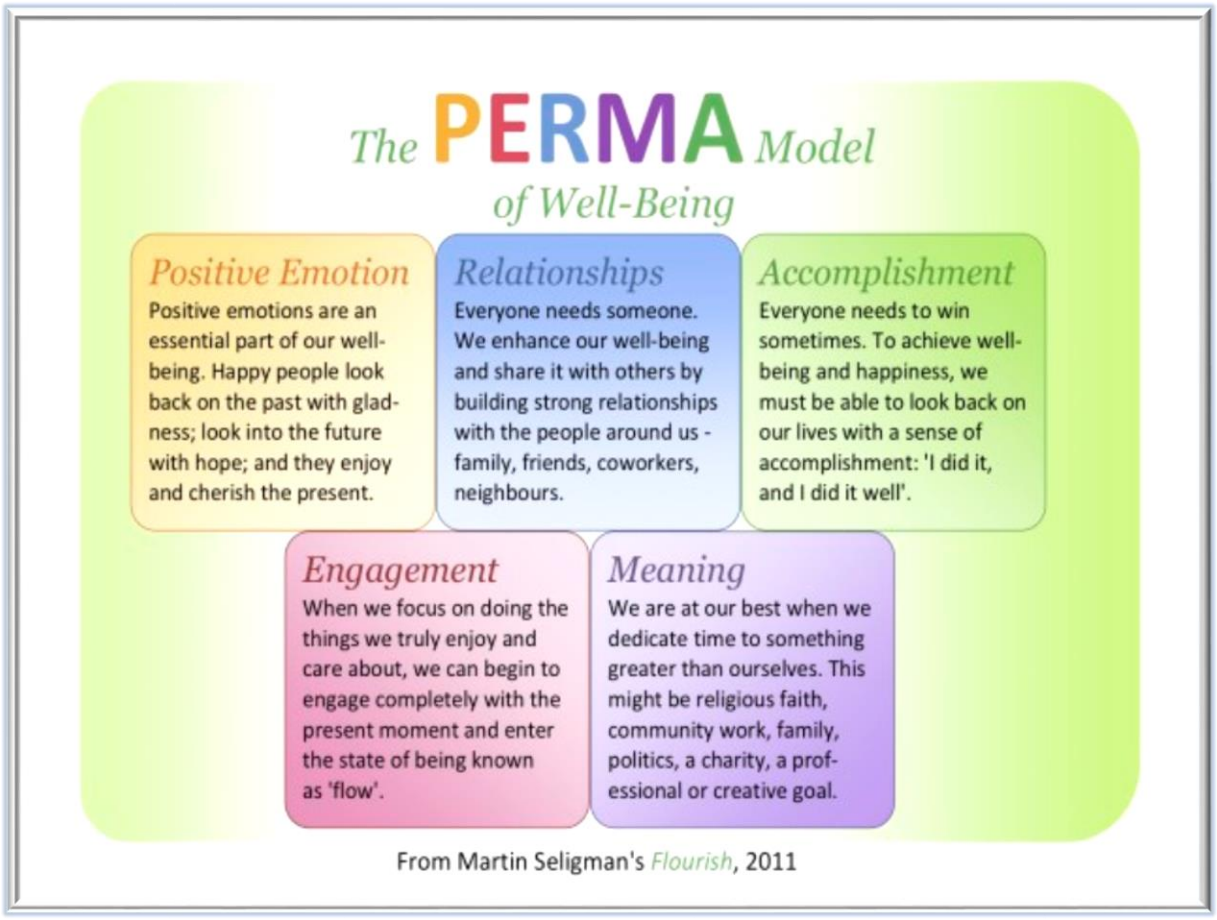


Figure 2.4: Model of wellbeing PERMA

Source: Author's construct from Seligman (2011)

2.5.3.1 Positive emotions

Positive emotions such as joy, hope, gratitude, and compassion are foundational to learning (Pekrun & Linnenbrink-Garcia, 2014). Fredrickson (2001) argues that these emotions promote flourishing and improve well-being. In this study, positive emotions are essential for learners with psycho-emotional barriers, as they help counteract disengagement and academic decline. Negative emotions can lead to withdrawal and failure in learning. Educators and parents must intervene to foster emotional regulation and promote a positive mood (Hardman, 2020). Happy circumstances are paired with happy or positive emotions. Positive emotions are vital in the learning of the child as they are the foundation for the learning process (Pekrun & Linnenbrink-Garcia, 2014). This element is much more than happiness but a pleasant life. Positive emotions

include love, joy, hope, gratitude, pride, amusement, compassion and interest (Madeson, 2017). According to Fredrickson (2001), positive emotions indicate flourishing and improve well-being.

Negative emotions cause unhappiness in human beings, hence learners become disengaged in extra-curricular activities leading to failure in academics. Psycho-emotional barriers may cause failure in learning development. According to Dalimunthe et al. (2024), learner's mental, intellectual and physical state is crucial for their learning development, hence researchers believe that emotions play a huge role. When supporting learners, it is the educators' role to intervene and change how learners feel in order to destress in a positive mood (Hardman, 2020).

2.5.3.2 Engagement and flow

Csikszentmihalyi (1989) developed the concept of flow, which means focusing and living in the moment. Engagement refers to focusing on the activity. According to Csikszentmihalyi (1990), enjoyment is usually experienced when one engages in something they love.

According to Noble and McGrath (2015), engagement is important in education. Parental involvement in learning is vital as it shows engagement. According to Fredrickson (2013), cognition, emotions and behaviour are seen as engagement for learners. Learners who suffer from psycho-emotional barriers are less likely to engage in academics. When learners behave, they listen attentively and become actively involved in class and in their academics (Noble & McGrath, 2015). Learners in primary and secondary schools should be encouraged to engage, to promote learning (Hammill et al., 2020). Learners with psycho-emotional barriers often struggle to engage. This study uses the concept of flow to encourage parents to create emotionally-safe environments that promote learner focus and participation.

2.5.3.3 Positive relationships

Relationships consist of friends, family members, community members, and colleagues. In this model, relationships refers to the social interactions of humans (Seligman, 2012). As human age, interactions become important (Madeson, 2017).

According to McGrath and Noble (2011), when learners experience positive interactions at school they show respect, learn more, co-operate, and become actively involved. Positive relations are important to one's health, as individuals support each in traumatic events. There are three levels that influence the learner's performance which are the peers, home, and the school, and educators should establish a positive learning environment (Hammill et al., 2020). This study highlights the importance of nurturing relationships between African parents and their learners,

as well as between families and schools, to support emotional development and academic success.

2.3.3.4 Meaning

Steger et al. (2009) define meaning as how people understand life, and how they see themselves and the purpose they have. According to Rothmann and Redelinghuys (2020), people's sense of importance to their organisations can be referred to as meaning. It is important that individuals have a purpose in life so they can focus on what matters to them. One can have meaning by trying new and creative activities, and spending time with the people they love. For learners with psycho-emotional barriers, meaning can be cultivated through purposeful activities, supportive relationships, and affirming environments. According to Smith (2021), for learners to thrive academically, they should be equipped with resources that will help them to become better individuals, and develop intellectually and academically.

2.3.3.5 Accomplishment

In PERMA, accomplishment is also referred as achievement. Reaching a target as a result of working hard is seen as having a sense of accomplishment. Every learner has a goal or a target they want to reach in life, but for them to reach their full potential, they should have the motivation to finish what they have started. When they reach accomplishment, they flourish academically and intellectually. According to Noble and McGrath (2016), Positive Psychology helps everyone in the education system to flourish and be proficient. This study uses the concept of accomplishment to emphasise the role of parental encouragement and emotional support in helping learners overcome barriers and achieve success.

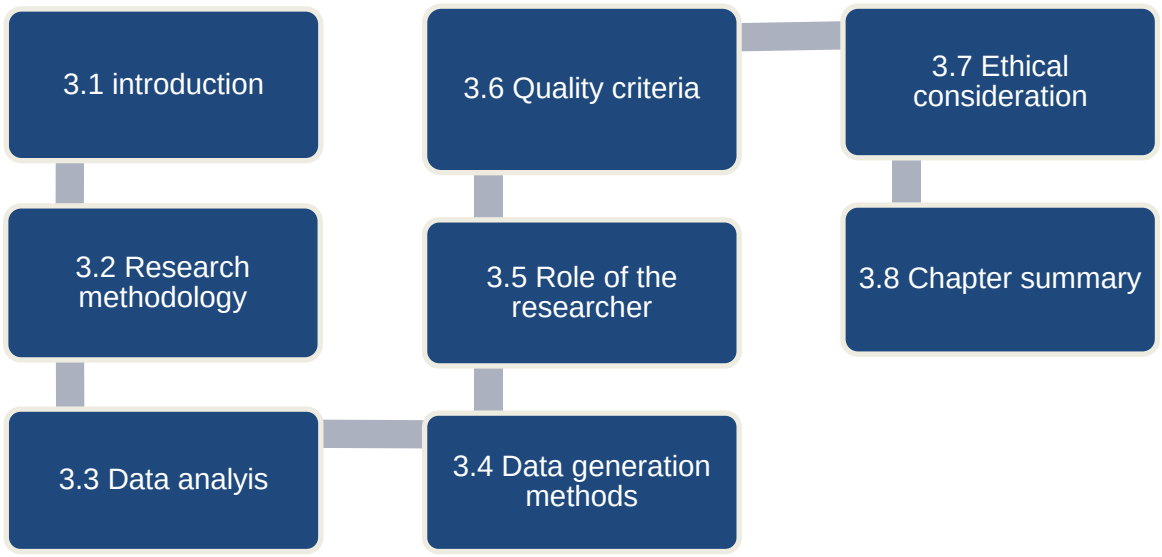
2.6 Chapter summary

The Department of Education should implement support structures in mainstream schools so that every learner is included in the education system and not left behind. The SBST, as well as the DBST as support structures, should provide necessary support to learners with psycho-emotional barriers and African parents. This chapter presented a literature review that conceptualised psycho-emotional barriers to learning and parental involvement, and outlined the theoretical framework that focused on factors influencing psycho-emotional barriers in learners. This chapter was based on a literature review that conceptualised psycho-emotional barriers to learning and parental involvement as well as a theoretical framework that focused on factors that influence psycho-emotional barriers in learners based on Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, Positive Psychology, and Family Systems theory. These theories

relate to the child as the main factor, and the role the family plays in their lives. To better understand these interactions, the chapter examined family routines, their impact on child development, and the systemic nature of psycho-emotional barriers. Psycho-emotional barriers and parental involvement were discussed, as it also focused on how African parents and learners with psycho-emotional barriers can be supported collaboratively. The chapter concluded by highlighting the importance of integrated support systems and collaborative engagement between families and schools. This sets the stage for Chapter 3, which introduces PALAR as the guiding methodology and elaborates on the methods used to generate data for this research study.

Chapter 3: Research methodology

Figure 3.1: Overview of Chapter 3



Source: Author's own construct

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research design and methodology employed in the study. It outlines how sampling was conducted, how participants were recruited, the Participatory Action Learning and Action Research (PALAR) process, the role of the researcher, measures to ensure trustworthiness, and the procedures used for data generation.

Additionally, the chapter describes the data analysis process, quality criteria, and ethical considerations that guided the study. Building on the conceptual and theoretical foundations established in Chapter One, this chapter operationalises the study's methodological framework. The aim of this study was to formulate guidelines for African parents to improve their involvement in psycho-emotional support for learners with emotional barriers to learning in primary schools, as described in Chapter One. This methodological chapter is critical to the broader research, as it provides the empirical foundation for understanding how collaborative inquiry was used to explore and address the research problem.

The following research questions guided this study:

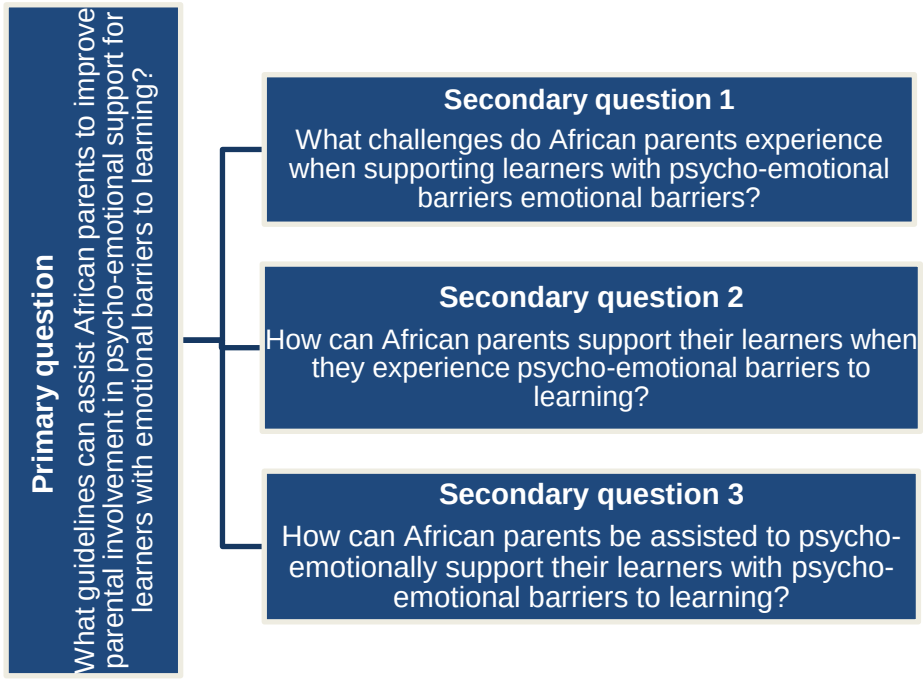


Figure 3.2: Summary of Research questions

Source: Author's own construct

3.2 Research methodology

3.2.1 Research paradigm

In conducting research, it is essential to establish a guiding paradigm that frames the study's philosophical and methodological orientation. This study adopts a transformative paradigm, as it is an effective and participatory phenomenon, and it is based on the idea that people who are involved in this research can improve their own circumstances (Tandon et al., 2016). Transformative paradigm can be described as a framework for researchers engrossed in human rights and social justice (Mertens, 2010; 2012; Omodan, 2020, 2022). Mertens (2012) further explains that the transformative paradigm is a research platform that amplifies the voices of marginalised and oppressed groups, fostering collaboration across diverse communities to co-create solutions. This paradigm enables researchers to explore ways in which they can support participants and other populations to participate in thinking and implementing possible solutions (Romm, 2014). Central to this paradigm is the recognition that collective engagement enhances problem-solving and promotes sustainable change. This paradigm shows that people work better together as a group. According to Wood (2020), a participatory, inclusive, and transformative paradigm is essential. It values diverse perspectives as catalysts for change, and promotes democratic participation in knowledge generation. The applicability of this paradigm is

demonstrated through its alignment with the Participatory Action Learning and Action Research (PALAR) approach, which operationalises transformative principles by fostering collaborative inquiry and reflective practice. Action learning, as described by Zuber-Skerritt and Wood (2019), Gold and Pedler (2022), and Pedler (2020), facilitates change through group-based processes that encourage listening, learning, and dialogue around shared goals. Zuber-Skerritt and Wood (2024) further argue that sustainable action and meaningful transformation require a deep understanding of lived realities and the co-construction of knowledge. Thus, the transformative paradigm not only underpins the philosophical stance of this study but also informs its methodological choices, ensuring that the research remains ethically grounded, contextually relevant, and oriented toward empowerment and systemic change (Zuber-Skerritt & Wood, 2024). The following philosophical foundations underpinned the study:

Epistemology

Epistemology concerns the nature, origin, and justification of human knowledge, particularly how individuals come to understand and interpret phenomena within a given context (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). It provides a theoretical lens through which the dynamics of knowledge construction are examined (Rina et al., 2023).

In this study, epistemological assumptions were operationalised through collaborative knowledge generation among African parents, educators, and support staff. The participatory nature of the research enabled co-researchers to engage in reflective dialogue, drawing on their lived experiences, cultural norms, and community practices. This process fostered a deeper understanding of psycho-emotional support, and highlighted how parental involvement could be enhanced through contextually relevant and co-constructed guidelines.

Ontology

Ontology addresses the nature of reality and the assumptions researchers make about what constitutes meaningful existence and experience (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). It provides a framework for understanding the significance of the research problem and the realities it seeks to explore (Rina et al., 2023).

In this study, ontological assumptions were reflected in the emphasis on participants' lived realities, particularly those of African parents and learners experiencing psycho-emotional barriers to learning. The researcher acknowledged the complexity of these realities, shaped by cultural beliefs, emotional challenges, and socio-educational contexts. This ontological stance

informed the framing of the research problem and ensured that the resulting guidelines were grounded in the authentic, everyday experiences of those most affected.

Axiology

Axiology pertains to the values and ethical principles that guide research conduct, including considerations of fairness, respect, and moral responsibility (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017; Rina et al., 2023). It addresses questions about what constitutes ethical behaviour in the research process. In this study, axiological principles were embedded throughout the research design and implementation, ensuring culturally respectful and emotionally sensitive engagement with all participants.

Special attention was given to honouring participants' values, beliefs, and emotional vulnerabilities, particularly when discussing sensitive topics such as psychological distress, parental capacity, and learner well-being. This ethical orientation was instrumental in building trust, fostering genuine collaboration, and ensuring that the guidelines developed were both morally sound and socially just.

3.2.2 Research design

A research design serves as a structured plan that guides the processes of data generation, data analysis, and participant selection (Nieuwenhuis, 2019). According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), selecting an appropriate research design requires researchers to determine the most suitable strategy of inquiry that aligns with the study's purpose and philosophical assumptions.

A well-defined research design enables researchers to make informed decisions about how best to address the research problem and achieve the study's objectives (Fouché & Light, 2010). This study adopted a Participatory Action Learning and Action Research (PALAR) design, which is grounded in principles of democratic engagement, empowerment, and social transformation (Zuber-Skerritt, 2012). PALAR promotes active participation, agency, and collaborative problem-solving, enabling individuals to take control of their circumstances, improve well-being, and strengthen interpersonal relationships (Zuber-Skerritt, 2018; Lawrence et al., 2022). This design was particularly appropriate for the study's aim of enhancing African parents' involvement in psycho-emotional support for learners with psycho-emotional barriers to learning, as it foregrounds inclusive dialogue and shared learning. PALAR facilitates collective inquiry, allowing participants to critically examine existing practices and collaboratively develop context-sensitive solutions (Zuber-Skerritt et al., 2020). The inclusion of participants as co-researchers was essential, as PALAR functions simultaneously as a paradigm, a learning theory, and a

methodology that promotes reciprocal researcher-participant engagement (Schiller et al., 2021). In this study, the PALAR design was integrated with Positive Psychology Theory, which emphasises strengths-based approaches to well-being and resilience. This theoretical merger provided a robust framework for exploring how collaborative action learning could empower African parents to support their learner's emotional development. The combined design facilitated rich data generation through participatory methods, and supported iterative reflection and analysis aligned with the transformative goals of the study. While PALAR offers significant advantages, such as fostering empowerment, contextual relevance, and ethical inclusivity, it also presents challenges, including time-intensive processes and the need for sustained participant engagement. These limitations were carefully managed through flexible scheduling and continuous dialogue with co-researchers. In the following sections, I will discuss in detail how participants were recruited and how data were generated.

3.2.3 Site and recruitment of co-researchers

A sample design plan is developed before generating data from the selected sample, hence the researcher is responsible for the sample (Bezuidenhout, 2022). To study the population, researchers can use two sampling methods, which are probability and non-probability sampling (Maree & Pietersen, 2016). Selection of participants and site are also defined as sampling (Mphahlele, 2017).

Convenience sampling was used in this study. Convenience sampling is a method of non-probability sampling based on participant availability (Dudovskiy, 2020). Wienclaw (2019) asserts that convenience sampling allows the researcher to generate data from willing participants who are most conveniently accessible and approachable for the researcher. The researcher conveniently sampled three schools around Motheo District, six parents of learners with psycho-emotional barriers per school, three SBST educators per school with four or more years of teaching experience, and a DBST member. DBST members participated in the study since they oversee the work of the SBST.

The site for this study was Botshabelo in Free State, as it has many schools in close proximity. Also I am an educator in Botshabelo, so this will enable regular meetings with participants. The schools will be referred to as school A, school B, and school C for purposes of discussion. Participant inclusion criteria were as follows:

1. Participants have a teaching degree
2. They are part of the SBST in their schools
3. They reside in the Motheo district

Co-researchers that were working in schools, were part of the SBST. They needed to have a teaching degree as have learners with psycho-emotional barriers. Parents were not required to have a teaching degree and volunteered based on psycho-emotional challenges experienced by the learners. All participants participated voluntarily and were given consent forms that gave the researcher permission to generate data for the study.

Table 3.1 Summary of participants

Sampled population	***Number***	***Position at school***	***Gender***
SBST members	*3*	*Teacher and SBST coordinator*	*Females*
DBST member	*1*	*Psychologist*	*Female*
Parents	*6*	*Parents*	*Females and males*

Author's own construct

3.3 Data generation methods

In this study, I as the facilitator formed action learning sets, working together with eleven participants. According to Woods (2019), ALS in PALAR process emphasises that participants become educated how to resolve the problems they encounter and encourage individual development. In this research, study group talks, and visual data such as collages were used to generate data.



Figure 3.3 Data generation schedule

Source: Author's own construct

3.3.1 Group discussions

Group discussions are defined as a qualitative research method where a group finds a way of gaining in-depth understanding of social issues (Nyumba et al., 2018). They further add that they are a "cost-effective and promising alternative in participatory research." According to Adekola and Olumati (2023, 11), group discussion can affect results negatively, as participants may not express themselves fully because other people are listening to their experiences, so they think they will be judged.

In this research, the group consisted of experienced individuals working with special needs learners in their particular schools. The DBST and SBST members along with the parents discussed the research question in depth; "What guidelines can assist African parents to improve parental involvement in psycho-emotional support for learners with psycho-emotional barriers to learning?" This discussion allowed the DBST and the SBST to explore and share their knowledge with the parents. The parents and SBST discussed their challenges and experiences in being involved in their learners' learning, and the DBST formulated solutions to resolve these challenges.

The above information was done in cycles 1, 2 and 3 of the research, where participants were building relations. Group discussions were conducted in the beginning of each cycle as we transcribed, analysed, and interpreted data. Group discussions were held in Sesotho as most participants were Sesotho speaking, we had a translator who translated every detail to them. The translator was a Sesotho educator. The questions since they were written in English were translated to Sesotho.

3.3.2 Collages

According to Clark et al. (2013, 25), visual data generation method is defined as "reinforc[ing] a belief that people communicate in different ways and can connect differently with ideas if they are presented in a visual format." Strategies such as drawings, collages, photos, and graffiti are forms of visual data generation method. Collages may limit participants as some cannot draw or be creative; however co-researchers focused on the meaning of what was made (Ademolu, 2022).

Co-researchers (parents) made collages as a way of telling a story and expressing their feelings. They collaboratively worked together with the SBST and DBST, as they are working with learners with barriers and are more knowledgeable.

The collages were made at the end of cycle three when answering the following question: what challenges do African parents experience when supporting learners with psycho-emotional barriers? They made a collage displaying the challenges they come across. When participants spend time drawing they become engaged and devoted to the research (Hurdley, 2019). Collages that were made by participants made sense of their experiences, challenges, and situations as they showed different kinds of emotions.

3.4 The role of the researcher

As the facilitator and primary researcher in this study, I worked with participants closely as my co-researchers, and emphasised collaboration and participation (Wessels, 2016; Zuber-Skerritt, 2015). According to Miles et al. (2020), it is the researcher's primary responsibility in action research to ensure that data is created, organised, and incorporated in the whole PAR process. I as the researcher engaged in the study with other participants, and explained to participants their rights and assured them of confidentiality and safety. Before conducting the research, I asked for permission from principals, the DBST, the DoE, participants, and the SGB.

In the Action Learning Sets (ALS), it was my main responsibility to create an environment that is honest and open, where participants such as parents and educators are able to ask questions, obtain clarity on things they do not understand, and get the support they need in order to minimise psycho-emotional barriers to learning. While working with participants I was very supportive and provided an environment that enabled their abilities and skills (Zuber-Skerritt et al., 2020). It was my responsibility to have a good connection with participants, observe carefully, and be a good listener as participants shared their experiences. I sent out clear and accurate meeting invitations that showed the time and date to the participants, so they were not inconvenienced; after meetings it was my responsibility to generate and record data.

I was responsible for ensuring that the venue was available and that co-researchers had pens, pencils, and books/blank pages for drawing purposes. Nieuwenhuis (2019) states that the researcher must communicate with co-researchers beforehand to clarify the logistics for transportation to the venue. Communication between the researcher and co-researchers is of utmost importance, as the researcher can evaluate if the co-researchers still want to remain part of the study (Xu et al., 2020). Fortunately for this study, the co-researchers work at the same school as the researcher. It was, therefore, convenient in terms of transportation costs. Upon the

co-researchers agreeing to be part of the study, I requested them to sign the consent forms. Signing the consent forms took place after the information in the consent forms was read and understood. I scheduled the meetings so that they did not infringe on work time and thus considered the responsibilities and duties of the possible co-researchers. Since the study followed a participatory approach, I explained the process of PALAR to the possible co-researchers, who were then called “co-researchers” after signing the consent forms. I explained to the co-researchers that, should there be a need for more clarity, I will consult experienced supervisors. I maintained a harmonious relationship with the co-researchers to promote a conducive atmosphere, professionalism, and honest participation. I was responsible for transcription of the recordings, and a report will be submitted to my supervisors.

3.5 Data analysis

According to Carlzon (2022), data analysis is the process of analysing, gathering, and modelling data that extricate understanding and support researchers’ decision-making. In participatory research, data analysis is a collaborative process in which the researcher engages with participants to co-construct meaning through reflection, dialogue, and interpretation of findings (Vanner, 2015). In action research, the volume of data generated can be substantial and complex, requiring systematic approaches to manage and interpret it effectively (Clark et al., 2020).

According to Molapo (2016), inductive content analysis is a research technique used to investigate a procedure used to empower researchers, identify patterns and gain insight into the study by reducing volumes of verbal and written data to manageable pieces through coding. This method was selected for its suitability in participatory contexts, where emergent themes are grounded in the lived experiences and perspectives of co-researchers. When answering research questions, themes will be identified. During inductive content analysis, the researcher tries to discover patterns in the data, which are then collapsed under broad themes to understand a phenomenon and generate theory. To ensure transparency and rigour, the following five-phase process was followed, adapted from Molapo (2016):

Table 3.2: Phases of inductive content analysis

Step 1 Organise and prepare data	I familiarised myself with the data and I had diaries and collages prepared for our meetings
Step 2	I read through all the data to develop a comprehensive understanding, identified keywords during data generation

Read through the data	method which created codes. The data was coded by grouping similar ideas and concepts from participants.
Step 3 Coding process	The data was sorted into smaller numbers to identify themes that emerged from the participants.
Step 4 Themes or description of data	Themes developed when codes were grouped to identify common responses and patterns. I examined the codes in sub-categories so I can interpret the themes.
Step 5 Interpretation of themes	Interpretation of data is a critical step in the analysis process. Categorising and understanding concepts were part of interpreting themes, as it enhances the credibility of the findings.

Source: Author's construct from Molapo (2016)

Throughout the analysis, measures were taken to maintain the integrity and quality of the data, including member checking, peer debriefing, and iterative reflection with co-researchers. No specialised software was used, so manual coding was conducted systematically using colour-coded matrices and thematic charts to organise and visualise the data. The analysis process was aligned with the study's research objectives and questions, ensuring that the emergent themes directly addressed the core aim of enhancing African parents' involvement in psycho-emotional support. To mitigate potential biases, the researcher maintained reflexive journals, engaged in collaborative interpretation with participants, and triangulated data sources to validate findings.

3.6 Quality Criteria: Trustworthiness, Reliability, and Validity

In this study, validity and reliability were considered essential to ensure the rigour and credibility of the qualitative research process, particularly within the context of action research (Newton & Burgess, 2008). Action research requires robust quality criteria to confirm that the procedures used are methodologically sound and ethically defensible. To ensure trustworthiness in this study, validity was enhanced through the framework proposed by Anderson and Herr. I adopted five criteria – outcome validity, process validity, democratic validity, catalytic validity, and dialogic validity – as outlined by Anderson and Herr (1999), because these dimensions align closely with the participatory and transformative nature of teacher research (Leuverink & Aarts, 2019:758).

3.6.1 Outcome Validity

According to Anderson and Herr (1999), outcome validity refers to the degree to which the research successfully addresses the identified problem and generates actionable knowledge. This criterion assesses whether the research question has been answered and whether the findings contribute to practical solutions (Leuverink & Aarts, 2019). In this study, outcome validity was demonstrated through the development of context-sensitive guidelines aimed at enhancing African parents' involvement in psycho-emotional support. Group discussions and collages were implemented to collaboratively explore and answer the research question: *"What guidelines can assist African parents to improve parental involvement in psycho-emotional support for learners with psycho-emotional barriers to learning?"*

3.6.2 Democratic Validity

Democratic validity refers to the extent to which all stakeholders are actively involved in the research process and contribute to decision-making (Leuverink & Aarts, 2019). It emphasises the perspectives of participants and promotes equitable collaboration (Anderson & Herr, 2015). In this study, democratic validity was upheld by involving SBST and DBST members, as well as African parents, in co-constructing solutions to support learners with psycho-emotional barriers.

3.6.3 Process Validity

Process validity addresses the integrity of the research procedures, including the quality of relationships with participants and the credibility of the evidence used to support findings (Anderson & Herr, 2014). It also recognises that challenges encountered during the research process can lead to deeper learning and refinement of practice.

In this study, process validity was supported through the use of PALAR's reflective cycles, which enabled iterative learning and adaptation. Multiple data generation methods were used to enhance triangulation and ensure a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

3.6.4 Dialogic Validity

Dialogic validity refers to the role of peer review and critical dialogue in enhancing the credibility of the research (Leuverink & Aarts, 2019). In this study, dialogic validity was achieved through reflective discussions between the researcher, DBST members, and participants. Parents engaged in structured activities which facilitated critical engagement and co-analysis of emerging themes.

3.6.5 Catalytic Validity

Catalytic validity concerns the transformative potential of the research – how it enables participants to re-examine their roles and deepen their understanding of social realities (Anderson & Herr, 2014). In this study, catalytic validity was demonstrated through shifts in participants' perceptions of learners with psycho-emotional barriers. The DBST facilitated educational sessions for parents, focusing on psycho-emotional barriers and strategies for support.

To mitigate potential biases and enhance trustworthiness, the study employed triangulation, and member checking. These strategies ensured that interpretations remained grounded in participants' lived experiences and that the findings were both credible and ethically sound.

Table 3.3 Anderson and Herr's Goals of Action Research and Validity Criteria

Goals of Action Research	***Quality/ Validity Criteria***
1. The generation of new knowledge	*Dialogic and process validity*
2. The achievement of action-oriented outcomes	*Outcome validity*
3. The education of both researcher and participants	*Catalytic validity*
4. Results that are relevant to the local setting	*Democratic validity*
5. A sound and appropriate research methodology	*Process validity*

Source: Author's construct from Herr and Anderson (2015)

3.7 Ethical considerations

Before conducting the research, ethical clearance (NWU-00331-24-A2) was obtained from the North-West University (NWU) Ethics Committee within the Faculty of Education (see ANNEXURE A). In research involving human participants, ethical considerations are paramount, as the

researcher must ensure the safety, dignity, and autonomy of all participants (Wiles & Boddy, 2013). The ethical principles guiding this study were informed by the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act No. 108 of 1996) and the South African Council for Educators' ethical guidelines, which collectively provided a framework for responsible and respectful research conduct.

Informed Consent

Participants were fully informed about the nature, purpose, and procedures of the study prior to their involvement. Participation was strictly voluntary, and individuals were advised of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without penalty. I was actively involved as we discussed the results with my co-researchers and came to an agreement on the exact themes from the findings. According to Manandhar and Joshi (2020), participants must be provided with sufficient information to make autonomous and informed decisions. No financial incentives or rewards were offered. Consent was also obtained from the Department of Education at the Motheo District level, as well as from the School Governing Bodies (SGBs) of the selected schools, given that participants included educators, parents, and district officials.

No Harm

The researcher ensured that all research activities were conducted in safe and supportive environments to prevent physical or emotional harm (CIHR, 2022)**.** In response to environmental challenges such as heavy rainfall, session dates were rescheduled and participants were notified promptly. Sessions were designed to accommodate participants' schedules, and breaks were provided when participants expressed fatigue. These measures were documented in the ethical declaration included as Addendum A.

Right to Privacy and Confidentiality

The researcher upheld the participants' right to privacy throughout the study. Personal identifiers were excluded from all data records to maintain anonymity, and confidentiality was ensured in accordance with the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA), Act 4 of 2023. Collages and other personal materials were securely stored and made accessible only to the participants and the researcher. Data privacy and security were maintained through password-protected digital storage and locked physical files, with access restricted to authorised personnel only.

3.8 Chapter summary

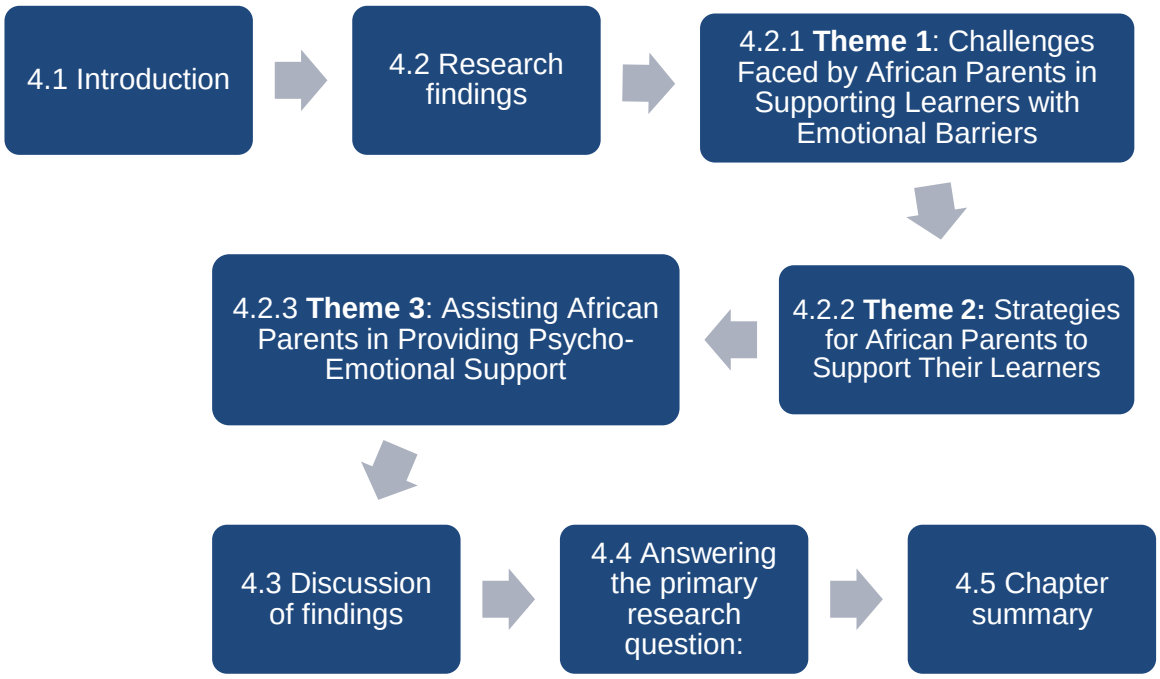
In this chapter, I provided a detailed discussion of the research strategies and methodologies employed in conducting this study. The study was guided by the Participatory Action Learning and Action Research (PALAR) design, which emphasises collaborative inquiry, empowerment, and democratic engagement. I gave a detailed description of the research methodologies, highlighted the data generation methods, and explained the data analysis procedures. Group discussions and collages were used to generate data in this study. My role as a researcher was also discussed, emphasising my responsibility in facilitating ethical and inclusive participation.

Ethical consideration is crucial when conducting research that involves human beings, and in this study, I ensured that co-researchers were protected from harm, had the right to privacy, and signed informed consent forms. No participant was coerced or manipulated into participation, and all ethical protocols were strictly adhered to.

Quality criteria were also highlighted, and the study's validity was enhanced through the application of Anderson and Herr's five criteria: outcome validity, process validity, democratic validity, catalytic validity, and dialogic validity. These criteria provided a robust framework for ensuring the trustworthiness and credibility of the research process. This chapter laid the foundation for understanding how the research was designed and ethically conducted. In the next chapter, I will present how data was generated, interpreted, and analysed in collaboration with co-researchers, leading to the identification of key themes and insights.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH DATA AND FINDINGS

Figure 4.1: Overview of chapter 4



Source: Author's own construct

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the research findings of the study were presented and discussed with participants during the course of the study. Data was gathered through three cycles, and three main themes were identified and discussed. I discussed the data generation methods throughout the PALAR cycles, which guided me through the entire process. I also analysed and interpreted data through group discussions and collages. Every meeting was audio recorded and transcribed, and discussions are presented in this chapter. Every cycle took three days and each cycle had one session because we mostly met after work, as most co-researchers were available only at that time. There was no time for two sessions daily, but we had breaks during the session. During the first cycle, I explained the PALAR process to my co-researchers, emphasised that it is a collaborative process, and built relations. When we established relations, co-researchers had opinions and voiced out their expectations to be met by the end of this study. Everyone was given a chance to state the challenges they face as African parents when supporting learners with

psycho-emotional barriers at home, and this was conducted in group discussions. This was very overwhelming to witness. At the end of cycle one, some co-researchers had a reflection session, as they also wrote in their diaries and had a group discussion. During cycle two, which took place after a week, we discussed our secondary research questions which were as follows: What guidelines can assist African parents to improve parental involvement in psycho-emotional support for learners with psycho-emotional barriers; and How can African parents support their learners when they experience psycho-emotional barriers to learning? During cycle 3, which also took place after a week, co-researchers came up with strategies how African parents can be assisted. At the end of the cycle, co-researchers worked in groups and created collages which summarised the challenges African parents face. The other four co-researchers, who were three SBST members and one DBST, only participated in group discussions. I also reflected on my experiences as an educator to determine challenges and needs. When reference is made to the following co-researchers in the findings, the roles that they fulfil must be kept in mind:

Table 4.1 Co-researchers roles

Co-researcher	**Role that they fulfil**
CR1	Parent
CR2	Parent
CR3	Parent
CR4	Parent
CR5	Parent
CR6	Parent
CR7	SBST Member
CR8	SBST Member
CR9	SBST Member
CR10	DBST Member

Source: Author's own construct

In this chapter I present data which was obtained from my co-researchers, and how themes were revealed using the transformative paradigm in the cycles.

4.2 Research findings

Before we generate data, I met with principals from the three schools. The purpose of the study was clarified and how the school and the SBST educators will benefit when taking part in the study. All co-researchers discussed their expectations, roles, and responsibilities, and consent forms were signed voluntarily. In the three schools I invited, participants and I knew each other from the SBST and inclusive workshops, so it was easy for us to be honest and open when we built relationships, and equality amongst co-researchers was emphasised.

In explaining themes, the number of co-researchers who agreed are as indicated below:

- “few” refers to one to three co-researchers
- “many” refers to four to six co-researchers
- “most” refers to seven to ten co-researchers

We discovered these themes:

Theme1: Challenges African parents face;

Theme 2: Strategies for African parents to support their learners and

Theme 3: Assisting African parents in providing Psycho-emotional support.

The themes were discussed in detail along with their sub-themes and explanations. My co-researchers used the terms ‘learners’ and ‘learners’ interchangeably in the quotations.

To ensure anonymity, each co-researcher received a numerical code. All participants were noted as co-researchers, and each co-researcher was noted as CR + a number when responding, e.g. CR1. I used direct quotations from group discussions, and every group discussion was noted as GD +.

4.2.1 Theme 1: Challenges faced by African parents in supporting learners with psycho-emotional barriers

The purpose of this theme is to investigate the challenges African parents face in supporting learners with psycho-emotional barriers on a daily basis. In this theme we answered the research question “What challenges do African parents experience when supporting learners with psycho-emotional barriers?” This question was answered in cycle one of day one, as we had only one

session with the co-researchers. We had one session, mainly because they were engaging fully in questions that were asked and the discussions we had. African parents are expected to help their learners with school work, or provide support at home, but these learners have psycho-emotional barriers and parents are not even aware of these. Learners are misbehaving, and failing, which makes it difficult for African parents to interfere, because they lack knowledge about barriers to learning and there is no parental involvement. The theme focuses on the significance of empowering African parents to reduce psycho-emotional barriers in their learner's lives. The co-researchers were SBST members within the schools, one member of the DBST in the Motheo district, and parents. Theme 1 is divided into the following sub-themes:

4. 2.1.1 Sub-theme 1.1: Socio-cultural and economic barriers

Co-researchers joined group discussions to reflect on the challenges they encounter at home with learners experiencing psycho-emotional barriers. These reflections highlight that the home environment plays a significant role in shaping learner well-being, often influenced by socio-cultural beliefs and economic hardship.

*"We grew up just fine without any psycho-emotional barriers … but this new generation of learners has a lot of complications, always suffering from something. We do not even know what mental health means as Africans, let alone in our cultures" (*CR3-GD1).

This statement reveals a generational and cultural disconnect in understanding mental health. The co-researcher questions the legitimacy or relevance of psycho-emotional barriers by comparing the past to the present, pointing to limited awareness and stigma rooted in cultural perceptions.

"We come from poor backgrounds, we do not have money to provide our kids with the best support, and if I had the means I would have helped my poor child; shame he is really struggling and so am I" (CR1-GD1).

Here, poverty emerges as a critical constraint, not only on learner's access to care but also on parents' ability to support their emotional needs. The co-researcher's expression of helplessness underscores how systemic deprivation permeates the home environment, hindering parental agency.

"When a child comes from a poor background, learners often look at that, they discriminate our learners*, do not play with them, and hence get affected by this. They are always pushed aside by learners and educators because of their status* (CR4-GD1).

This quote captures the compounding effect of poverty through social exclusion. The learner's socio-economic status becomes a marker for stigma, resulting in isolation both from peers and educators. Discrimination further exacerbates psycho-emotional barriers by denying learners a sense of belonging.

"Poverty is a very big hindrance for our learners, especially kids from poorer homes, not only Black people. Learners are having a hard time at home, not even having electricity at home, and receiving everything they need… then you can't expect the child to still be able to live or do well at school… And I also think… uh… the basic needs of hunger, I think hunger plays a very big role. That's what I see in some South African schools, even though schools provide feeding schemes" (CR5-GD1).

This contribution emphasizes the intersection of material deprivation and educational performance. The inability to meet basic physiological needs, such as food and electricity, undermines learner's capacity to engage with learning. Even where support systems such as feeding schemes exist, they often fall short of addressing the holistic challenges faced by impoverished learners.

Collectively, these narratives illuminate the compounded impact of cultural misunderstandings, poverty, and social exclusion on learner's emotional well-being. The co-researcher's voices suggest that interventions must not only address material needs, but also challenge socio-cultural narratives around mental health to foster inclusive and supportive learning environments.

Sub-theme 1.2: Lack of awareness and knowledge about psycho-emotional barriers from parents

A recurring concern among co-researchers was the limited parental understanding of emotional and mental health issues in learners. This lack of awareness often delays support and intervention, inadvertently intensifying the learners' distress.

"As parents it's natural to want the best for your child, however sometimes we might not recognise the signs of emotional distress and mental health issues, and we might attribute change in behaviour to being moody or acting out" (CR2-GD1).

This statement highlights the unintentional misinterpretation of emotional symptoms as mere behavioural shifts. It underscores how deeply ingrained assumptions and limited mental health literacy can obscure timely recognition of distress.

"As Black parents it's tough to admit when we are struggling to support our child's well-being. We worry that people will think we're failing and have a fear of being judged or labelled as bad

parents in our societies"(CR3-GD1).
This reflects the sociocultural stigma attached to acknowledging mental health issues, especially within Black communities. The fear of judgment and societal shame can create barriers to openly discussing or seeking help for a child's emotional needs.

"We want the best for our learners but sometimes we might not know what to look out for when it comes to mental health issues, we might not be aware of the signs or underestimate how serious the issue is" (CR4-GD1).
This quote illustrates the disconnection between parental intentions and practical knowledge. While concern exists, there is a gap in recognizing clinical or behavioural indicators, resulting in delayed responses to emerging psycho-emotional barriers.

"Parents may not be aware of the various treatment options available for learners's mental health, such as therapy, medication or group support. We are not even aware of what are barriers to learning. We are old school" (CR5-GD1).
Here, limited access to information about intervention options compounds the problem. The phrase "we are old school" reveals a generational gap that can contribute to resistance or misunderstanding regarding mental health and inclusive education strategies.

"We are not aware of our child's emotional struggles, we might unintentionally downplay their feelings. I saw that my child has a problem but I thought it is a stage she's going through like any other child. We should be taught about such so we can protect our learners" (GR6-GD1). This points to a widespread parental tendency to normalize distress as part of development. The call for education signals readiness among parents to engage if appropriate tools and guidance are provided.

Most co-researchers agreed that the school should educate them about psycho-emotional barriers during parents' meetings. This reflects the acknowledgment of schools as critical conduits for awareness-building and collaboration between educators and families.

"A lack of parental awareness can lead to learner's emotional distress being ignored or minimized, potentially exacerbating their problems and hindering their ability to develop coping mechanisms"(GR7-GD1).
The implications here are significant. Without early recognition and support, learners' resilience and psychosocial development may be compromised, affecting their academic and interpersonal outcomes.

Most co-researchers further expressed the need for early detection mechanisms for psycho-emotional barriers in learners. All SBST and DBST members affirmed that parents should proactively communicate with educators when they notice unusual behaviour. This collaboration facilitates timely intervention, fostering a shared responsibility in supporting learner well-being.

Together, these insights reveal a deep-seated need for capacity-building among parents. Emotional literacy and inclusive dialogue must be prioritized within school communities to bridge the knowledge gap. Empowering parents with understanding and resources is essential to creating a supportive environment where learner's emotional needs are acknowledged and addressed with dignity.

Sub-theme 1.3: Communication and parent-child relationship

The nature and quality of communication between parents and learners were central to this sub-theme. **Many** co-researchers expressed concern about the breakdown in relational ties and highlighted the role of generational shifts, emotional invisibility, and missed opportunities for meaningful connection.

"These teenagers are always glued up to their cell phones, they do not even talk to us, and we cannot even make a conversation with them. When you talk to them, they lash out to everyone in the house" (CR1-GD1).
This quote illustrates how technology and emotional volatility contribute to communication barriers in the home. The co-researcher highlights a sense of helplessness and alienation from their learners, suggesting that digital immersion is replacing interpersonal connection.

"My daughter and I, we normally talk about everything but I was never aware that they might be suffering emotionally about certain things that happen" (CR3-GD1).
Despite a seemingly open relationship, this reflection reveals a gap in emotional depth and attentiveness. Superficial communication may mask deeper struggles, showing that regular interaction does not always translate into meaningful emotional support.

"My daughter is always indoors, does not like playing with other kids, and whenever I ask she always says she is fine, so I assumed everything is fine until now" (CR4-GD1).
The co-researcher's assumption underscores a reliance on surface-level observations. Learners may withhold emotions or camouflage distress, especially if they perceive parental reactions as dismissive or disconnected.

"We as parents are too avoidant and it may lead our learners to have a difficult time trusting us, because we disappointed them in the past. We are always busy making ends meet while

neglecting our learners" (CR5-GD1).
This quote poignantly captures the emotional cost of socio-economic pressures. Avoidant parenting styles, often driven by survival needs, contribute to relational breakdown and diminished trust between parent and child.

"We should have a strong parent-child relationship because it's the foundation of a child's sense of security and confidence. When we make our learners feel safe and supported they know they can count on us to be there for them, no matter what" (CR8-GD1).
This statement shifts the tone toward aspiration, emphasizing the protective and stabilizing role of nurturing relationships. Emotional availability is framed as essential for developing resilience and trust.

"It is very crucial to have a relationship with your child; know what they like, how their day was at school and who are their friends etc. This will help the child in developing a sense of identity, learn about the world and develop a sense of belonging" (CR9-GD1).
Here, the co-researcher connects everyday engagement with deeper developmental outcomes. Knowing a child's world facilitates identity formation and fosters connection, suggesting that curiosity and attentiveness are key relational tools.

"It is important to have an open relationship between parent and child, because it plays an important role in shaping our future relationship and romantic relationships" (CR10-GD1). This statement affirms the long-term influence of early relationships. The quality of parent-child interactions not only affects current emotional well-being but also informs future relational patterns.

Most co-researchers acknowledged that maintaining relationships with their learners is challenging, particularly when faced with changing attitudes and emotional unpredictability. In response, one SBST member actively supported families by offering practical strategies to foster open communication at home, indicating that schools can serve as catalysts for relational healing.

Collectively, these insights reflect a dual need: to rebuild trust, and bridge the generational and emotional gaps between parents and learners. Strengthening communication requires not only time and intentionality but also support structures that empower caregivers to listen, empathize, and respond constructively. Parent-child relationships, when nurtured, become a vital anchor for emotional security and psychosocial development.

4.2.2 Theme 2: Strategies for African parents to support their learners

The purpose for this theme is to investigate strategies for African parents in order to support their learners. In this theme we answered the following research questions, which were "What guidelines can assist African parents to improve parental involvement in psycho-emotional support for learners with psycho-emotional barriers; and How can African parents support their learners when they experience psycho-emotional barriers to learning?" These questions were answered in cycle two of day two, when we had one session. In this session we brainstormed strategies for African parents when supporting their learners with psycho-emotional barriers.

Sub-theme 2.1: Building emotional resilience in learners

Most co-researchers consistently emphasized that the emotional foundation laid at home plays a decisive role in shaping a child's capacity to cope with challenges. A supportive and healthy domestic environment was identified as essential for nurturing resilience and emotional stability.

"The environment which they reside in, has a powerful impact on them in their daily lives" (CR7-GD2).
This underscores the foundational influence of the home setting on learner's emotional well-being. The co-researcher's observation reflects how day-to-day exposure to either stability or stress within the household can affect learners' overall functioning and ability to adapt.

"Parents – even if you fight with your spouse, do not let your child get exposed to that. Let your home be a healthy environment for your learners" (CR8-GD2).
This quote reveals parental awareness of the impact of interpersonal conflict. Shielding learners from such exposure is seen as an act of protection, preserving their emotional space and reducing the risk of internalizing familial discord.

"We all have stress as human beings but don't let that have an effect on your learners" (CR9-GD2).
Here, stress is acknowledged as inevitable, yet the emphasis is placed on emotional containment and intentional parenting. The co-researcher calls for emotional boundaries to prevent adult distress from spilling into the child's experience.

Few co-researchers collectively agreed that parents can actively foster emotional resilience through deliberate acts of emotional modelling, such as teaching emotion regulation, reinforcing positive self-talk, and cultivating affirming environments. These practices are seen not only as preventative but as formative in shaping learners' psychological endurance.

"Parents should develop positive coping strategies for their learners so they can thrive and navigate life; show them love even when you are tired and overwhelmed by life" (CR10-GD2).

This quote affirms the importance of consistent emotional availability. Love, even in moments of fatigue or hardship, is viewed as a cornerstone of a child's ability to build coping mechanisms and cultivate self-worth.

The broader significance of emotional resilience was also highlighted. Parents recognized that it equips learners with tools to manage difficult emotions, confront adversity, and recover from setbacks. However, many co-researchers expressed concern that their learners struggle with identifying and managing emotions such as sadness, frustration, and anger, indicating a gap in emotional literacy that requires proactive support.

"We should teach our learners at home and school that not everything will go according to their way or plan. Teach them to also understand emotions of other people and always share theirs when something is bothering them" (CR8-GD2).
This insight extends resilience-building beyond self-regulation to include empathy, perspective-taking, and open communication. The development of emotional intelligence is framed as a communal responsibility shared by both parents and educators.

In summary, the data suggests that emotional resilience is not solely an innate trait but a learned capacity, deeply influenced by parental behaviour and environmental consistency. Co-researchers called for intentional efforts to model healthy emotional strategies, provide emotional education, and promote open expression, both at home and in school. These findings point to the urgent need for collaborative interventions that empower caregivers with tools to support learners in becoming emotionally agile and socially attuned individuals.

Sub-theme 2.2: Parental involvement in school-based support systems

Co-researchers underscored that parental engagement is pivotal in enhancing the effectiveness of school-based support mechanisms. The insights reveal that collaborative efforts between families and educational teams are essential in identifying and addressing emotional and learning barriers among learners.

"We as parents, we should collaborate with educators because they spend seven hours with our learners at school, hence it is very important because we get to be informed about our child's needs" (CR1-GD2).
This quote illustrates the significance of sustained parental-educator collaboration. The co-researcher acknowledges educators' extensive contact with learners, positioning them as critical observers of learner's daily academic and emotional experiences – a valuable resource that parents can access through meaningful engagement.

"We encourage parental involvement in our school; parents are encouraged to always come to school to check the progress of learners before end of term. In this way parents will know the challenges their child experience at school. All parents that enrolled their learners in any school have the right to be involved" (CR7-GD2).
Here, a proactive school stance is emphasized. The open invitation to parents reinforces the principle of inclusive education, affirming both their rights and responsibilities in supporting learner development through regular check-ins and shared accountability.

"We as the SBST, we are here to help learners experiencing learning difficulties in school. It is our duty to help them, hence we meet on a regular basis with those learners and their parents to discuss interventions" (CR8-GD2).
This reflects the structured approach schools take to address barriers to learning. The role of the SBST becomes more than remedial; it becomes relational, anchored in sustained engagement with both the learner and their caregiver.

When parents actively participate, they offer invaluable contextual insights that enable school support teams to better understand the nuances of the learner's emotional and behavioural presentation. This reciprocal exchange enriches intervention planning and fosters trust.

"Parents should arrange a meeting with the educator to have a discussion about the learner, and the weaknesses will be explained, and what measures will be taken into consideration when helping the learner; also what we can do to help the child" (CR7-GD2).
This statement reinforces the two-way communication model. By inviting parents to initiate dialogue, educators create space for tailored interventions informed by the child's lived realities, both at home and in school.

"When parents are more involved in their learner's learning, it becomes easy for us as SBST to help that learner, because we give them activities they have to do at home with their parents" (CR7-GD2).
This reveals the interdependency of home-school collaboration. Extending learning support into the home setting strengthens intervention continuity and ensures that strategies are reinforced in learners' everyday environments.

The collective sentiments suggest that informed, consistent parental involvement is indispensable. Engagement should not be limited to crisis moments but embedded as a norm within the school-home ecosystem. SBSTs are seen not only as facilitators but as partners who initiate and sustain relational channels with families.

"After the referral process has been done by the SBST, if there are no changes in the learner, they will be referred to the DBST, where the learner's workload will be reduced to accommodate the pace in which they work with" (CR10-GD2).
This quote illustrates how structured referral pathways are designed with flexibility and learner-centeredness in mind. The goal is not only to escalate support but to adapt learning conditions to meet individual needs, underscoring the importance of accurate parental input in these decisions.

In conclusion, co-researchers highlighted that parental involvement is not auxiliary but foundational to effective support systems. Through structured dialogue, shared interventions, and sustained collaboration, both educators and parents can co-create responsive environments where learners are understood, supported, and empowered.

Sub-theme 2.3: Leveraging community and cultural resources

Co-researchers recognized that community and cultural infrastructures hold untapped potential to support learners facing psycho-emotional barriers. These resources, if sensitively engaged and meaningfully organized, could enhance collective awareness, reduce stigma, and foster inclusive support networks.

"Leveraging cultural resources can promote understanding and inclusivity among diverse groups in our communities" (CR7-GD2).
This perspective underscores the transformative potential of culturally embedded practices. By affirming local traditions and values, community spaces can act as bridges between diverse belief systems, fostering a shared understanding of emotional well-being.

Few co-researchers consistently noted that communities must be educated about learning barriers and emotional challenges. They emphasized the importance of organizing peer support groups, where parents can exchange lived experiences and coping strategies. This shared sentiment points to a deep need for grassroots initiatives that normalize conversations about psycho-emotional barriers. Peer-based models are particularly vital in promoting solidarity, reducing isolation, and dismantling the stigma surrounding mental health.

"Our communities have churches, clinics, and hospitals where they have psychologists; parents should engage in such support if the school does not provide them with one" (CR8-GD2). This quote highlights the accessibility of external support systems beyond school boundaries. Religious and health institutions are presented as culturally-trusted spaces that, when mobilized, can offer psychological and emotional assistance to families in need.

However, **mos**t co-researchers expressed concerns about being judged for their beliefs within their own communities.
This tension reveals underlying challenges to inclusivity. While cultural networks can be supportive, they may also be sites of exclusion, particularly for those whose parenting approaches or belief systems diverge from dominant norms. Emotional safety within communities thus requires intentional work to affirm diversity and safeguard against judgment.

"The school should collaborate and partner with the local clinics in order to create a comprehensive health support system for everyone in the community and educate parents about such" (CR2-GD2).
This recommendation points to a systemic solution that fuses educational and health sectors. By forming strategic partnerships, schools can act as conduits for broader community care, integrating medical, psychological, and educational interventions in a unified framework.

"Schools will raise awareness for the community to be educated and reduce stigma about psycho-emotional barriers" (CR10-GD2).
Here, the school emerges as a central platform for cultural transformation. Through awareness campaigns and inclusive programming, it can facilitate dialogue that challenges misconceptions and normalizes emotional support for learners.

In summary, leveraging community and cultural resources requires a nuanced balance of collaboration, sensitivity, and strategic engagement. When schools actively partner with health institutions and cultural hubs, they not only enrich the support network for learners but also create ripple effects that transform parental attitudes and community norms. This collective mobilisation fosters resilience breaks down stigma, and positions emotional well-being as a shared social responsibility.

4.2.3 Theme 3: Assisting African parents in providing psycho-emotional support

The purpose of this theme is to assist African parents in providing support to their learners at home. We answered the last question in day three of our cycle which was "How can African parents be assisted to psycho-emotionally support their learners with psycho-emotional barriers to learning?" In this cycle we had only one session. In addition to providing support for learners, the DBST and the SBST participating in this study suggested that African parents need appropriate skills, gain knowledge, and understand what the psycho-emotional barriers to learning are. Data findings are from group discussion and collages.

Sub-theme 3.1: Training and capacity building for parents

Many co-researchers highlighted a persistent imbalance in the allocation of support; while School-Based Support Teams (SBSTs) benefit from regular guidance and capacity building through District-Based Support Teams (DBSTs), parents often remain excluded from these processes. This omission hinders meaningful parental involvement and limits the effectiveness of interventions designed to assist learners with emotional and learning barriers.

"The department always implements support for educators at schools but what about us parents?" (CR2-GD3).
This question reveals a perceived marginalization of parents within systemic support structures. Parents feel overlooked and excluded from training initiatives that could empower them to better understand and respond to their learner's challenges.

"Even if they do provide us with support, they use big English that we do not understand as parents, so we are just agreeing sometimes" (CR5-GD3).
This statement points to a critical issue of accessibility. Language barriers, especially the use of technical or unfamiliar terminology, can alienate parents and prevent meaningful engagement with support strategies. Agreement without comprehension undermines the collaborative intent of these programmes.

"We are always told what to do at home with learners but they do not provide us with proper training, and this is frustrating to us as parents who are not knowledgeable" (CR4-GD). The absence of foundational guidance leaves parents feeling disempowered. Instructions without contextual education may breed frustration and helplessness, particularly among caregivers who lack background knowledge in educational or psychological support.

"Provide workshops for parents to help them understand the support needed for their learners" (CR7-GD3).
This quote reflects a strong call for proactive engagement. Workshops are viewed as a practical and empowering solution that can bridge the knowledge gap and foster confident, informed parenting.

Most co-researchers agreed that regular parent meetings and workshops are essential for implementing effective support strategies. These platforms offer opportunities not only for training but also for reciprocal dialogue and relationship building.
The emphasis on sustained contact suggests that capacity building must be continuous rather

than episodic. Establishing strong school–home relationships, especially with African parents, is perceived as vital to motivating participation and fostering trust in school-led interventions.

"We should always acknowledge parents for the support they put in their learner's learning, make them seen and appreciated for all the efforts they put in" (CR8-GD3).
This highlights the emotional dimension of parental involvement. Recognition and appreciation serve as powerful motivators and affirm the vital role parents play in learner development.

"Early signs of distress are always there in learners, hence parents should attend workshops so they can be knowledgeable about psycho-emotional barriers to learning. Early signs of psycho-emotional barriers are anger, low self-esteem, and fear—when your child presents with those symptoms, know that they are suffering from psycho-emotional barriers" (CR10-GD3).
This statement underscores the importance of equipping parents with emotional literacy. Early detection requires awareness, and training provides the tools to interpret behaviours that may otherwise go unnoticed or misunderstood.

Educators are routinely trained to identify and support learners with psycho-emotional barriers, making it imperative for parents to receive parallel guidance. Without shared understanding, interventions risk being fragmented and less effective.
Establishing strong, respectful relationships with African parents, rooted in cultural awareness and mutual appreciation, can transform them from peripheral observers into active partners. This relational dynamic is key to ensuring that strategies are not only implemented at school but also reinforced meaningfully at home.

Sub-theme 3.2: Policy and institutional support

Many co-researchers emphasized the need for systemic and policy-driven approaches to support African parents, particularly those navigating the complex emotional and learning barriers faced by their learners. While school-based structures like SBSTs and DBSTs are in place, co-researchers felt these mechanisms often operate in silos, benefiting educators but leaving parents behind.

The overarching sentiment was that sustainable solutions must be rooted in the integration of diverse professional expertise and equitable access to institutional resources.

"Psychologists and educational specialists should be more involved in helping African parents and provide learning support" (CR10-GD3).
This quote reflects the call for multidisciplinary involvement in addressing learners' emotional

challenges. The inclusion of psychological professionals and education specialists is seen not merely as supplemental, but foundational to parental empowerment and learner well-being.

"Provide African parents with educational psychologist as a form of therapy in every school" (CR7-GD3).
Here, support is envisioned as preventative and restorative. The proposal underscores the therapeutic value of engaging educational psychologists within community settings, positioning emotional support as a routine part of school-parent collaboration.

"The SBST in our schools are always there to assist parents and learners; they should utilise them" (CR10-GD3).
This suggests that while the structural support exists, there may be gaps in awareness or accessibility for parents. Encouraging parents to engage with SBSTs reveals a belief that institutional relationships can be strengthened through visibility and open channels of communication.

Beyond access, **many** co-researchers recognized the importance of joint capacity building. They advocated for inclusive training environments where parents are not passive recipients but active collaborators.

For example, it was noted that when DBST workshops are delivered to SBST members, parents should also be invited to participate.
This recommendation reinforces the value of shared learning experiences. Co-attendance at workshops promotes transparency, strengthens relational ties, and aligns home and school strategies, ultimately creating a more unified support system.

Collectively, these reflections illustrate that policy and institutional support must move beyond consultation and into co-creation. For African parents to be genuinely supported, institutional efforts must include culturally-responsive practices, regular parent inclusion in strategic planning, and the development of comprehensive support networks anchored in empathy and collaboration.

Sub-theme 3.3: Strengthening family and community networks

Co-researchers underscored the vital role families and communities play in promoting emotional well-being in learners. Emotional resilience and support do not occur in isolation; they are shaped and sustained through interpersonal connections within households and local networks.

"We should make it a norm in our families to attend therapy as a form of emotional support to us as parents and our learners" (CR7-GD3).

This statement challenges the stigma often associated with mental health support, and reframes therapy as a proactive and normalized form of care. By positioning therapy as a shared family activity, the co-researcher advocates for de-stigmatisation and intergenerational healing.

"When providing support to parents, let it be provided to everyone in the family so that everyone in the family is aware what psycho-emotional barriers are and what kind of support they can provide"(CR9-GD3).

This sentiment highlights the importance of whole-family engagement. Emotional support is not solely the responsibility of parents; it should be embedded across the familial unit, enabling siblings and extended relatives to actively contribute to a nurturing home environment.

"Encourage play in our families as this will strengthen the relationship they have with one another, as this will strengthen quality time with parents and siblings" (CR9-GD3).

Here, play is identified as a relational tool that builds emotional connection and counters digital detachment. Structured recreational activities offer meaningful opportunities for bonding, reinforcing relational trust and reducing emotional distance.

Every African family *"should build a supportive environment for their learners, enhance communication and foster a sense of belonging in the family and community"* (CR10-GD3). This broad but powerful appeal speaks to the dual need for emotional safety and cultural inclusion. A sense of belonging is nurtured through consistent communication, shared values, and communal affirmation of each child's worth.

At the end of cycle three, CR2, 3 and 5 participated together as a group in collage-making, to illustrate the challenges African parents face when supporting learners with psycho-emotional barriers. In Figure 4.1, co-researchers explained that they do not have time to bond or help their learners with academics as they are always working hard for them.

"*I always knock off late from work, I cannot even see what my child is struggling with because her siblings are always assisting her"* (CR5-GD1).

Figure 4.1 is an example of a collage created by the co-researchers 2, 3 and 5 illustrating how distant they feel from their learner. The other two collages created showed similar characteristics and are thus not included in the presentation of findings.



Figure 4.2 Collage from CR2, 3 & 5.

The reflections documented in theme 3 through group discussions and collages reveal how parents internalised the session's learnings and considered ways to apply them in their daily lives. The use of creative reflection provided emotional release and facilitated deeper insight. Co-researchers reported feeling more empowered and connected, suggesting that collective engagement enhanced not only their understanding but also their motivation to take action. Together, these voices suggested that emotional development must be a shared responsibility, embedded within everyday family practices and cultural norms. Strengthening family and community networks cultivates safe spaces where psycho-emotional barriers are addressed, not with judgment but with empathy and connection. This approach promotes relational healing, amplifies emotional awareness, and affirms the collective resilience of African families.

4.3 Discussion of findings

Below, I interpret the findings that emerged in response to sub-questions 1, 2 and 3 against existing literature, to answer my primary question: What guidelines can assist African parents in improving their involvement in psycho-emotional support for learners with psycho-emotional barriers to learning? I discuss three major themes, supported by literature, flowing from the findings reported for sub-questions 1–3: namely, challenges faced by African parents in supporting learners with psycho-emotional barriers; strategies for African parents to support their learners; and assisting African parents in providing psycho-emotional support.

Theme 1: Challenges faced by African parents in supporting learners with psycho-emotional barriers

Research Question: *What challenges do African parents experience when supporting learners with psycho-emotional barriers?*

This theme reveals a complex interplay of socio-cultural, economic, and relational factors that hinder African parents' ability to provide psycho-emotional support to learners. The findings are discussed across three interrelated sub-themes.

Sub-theme 1.1: Socio-Cultural and economic barriers

Co-researchers consistently highlighted how poverty, cultural beliefs, and systemic exclusion shape the emotional landscape of learners. The perception that emotional distress is a "modern" phenomenon (CR3-GD1) reflects generational disconnect and cultural stigma surrounding mental health, which is well-documented in African contexts (Moonsamy & Gurayah, 2024). Such beliefs often delegitimize emotional struggles and so delay intervention. The perception of emotional distress as a "modern" issue (CR3-GD1) reflects cultural narratives that delegitimize mental health concerns. This aligns with findings from the Department of Basic Education's psychosocial support guide (DBE, 2020), which emphasizes the need to dismantle stigma through community-based education. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979) further contextualizes how systemic exclusion and peer discrimination (CR4-GD1) disrupt the microsystem, impeding learner development.

Co-researchers' accounts of poverty and cultural stigma are strongly supported by Sithole-Tetani (2025), who found that economic hardship and limited access to psychological services significantly impair parental capacity to support learners with learning difficulties. The statement "we depend on social grant money" (CR-GD1) echoes this, confirming that financial precocity restricts access to psycho-emotional resources.

Economic hardship emerged as a critical constraint on parental agency. Statements like “we do not have money to provide our kids with the best support” (CR1-GD1) illustrate how material deprivation limits access to care, echoing findings by Stud (2022) that link poverty to reduced psychosocial support and increased vulnerability among learners.

Moreover, social exclusion, as described in CR4-GD1, intensifies psycho-emotional barriers. Learners from low-income families face discrimination from peers and educators, which undermines their sense of belonging. This aligns with Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory (1979), which emphasizes how microsystemic interactions (e.g. peer and teacher relationships) directly affect learner development. While existing literature affirms economic and cultural barriers, few studies explore how generational beliefs specifically shape parental responses to emotional distress. This suggests a need for more culturally-nuanced interventions that address intergenerational mental health literacy.

Sub-theme 1.2: Lack of awareness and knowledge

A recurring theme was limited parental understanding of emotional and mental health issues, often resulting in misinterpretation of symptoms (CR2-GD1). This reflects broader concerns about mental health literacy in African communities (Madlala et al., 2022), where emotional distress is frequently misunderstood or normalized.

The fear of societal judgment (CR3-GD1) underscores the sociocultural stigma associated with mental health, particularly within Black communities. This stigma can inhibit help-seeking behaviours and perpetuate silence, as supported by studies on cultural barriers to mental health care (Ahad et al., 2023). The misinterpretation of emotional symptoms (CR2-GD1) is consistent with low mental health literacy in African communities, as documented by Sithole-Tetani (2025), who advocates for psychoeducation as a tool to reduce parental anxiety and improve support strategies. The fear of societal judgment (CR3-GD1) is well-supported by studies on stigma in Black communities, where mental health is often viewed through moral or spiritual lenses (Ahad, 2023). Participatory models of inclusive education, such as those promoted in South Africa’s CSTL framework, emphasize the role of schools in bridging this gap through parents’ workshops and collaborative learning (Edström et al., 2022).

Importantly, co-researchers expressed a willingness to learn, with calls for schools to educate parents during meetings (CR6-GD1, CR7-GD1), which challenges deficit-based narratives and highlights a readiness for transformation. This suggests that awareness campaigns should not only inform but also empower parents as co-educators (Morowane & Marishane, 2024). This aligns with participatory models of inclusive education (DBE, 2001), which advocate for

collaborative partnerships between schools and families to foster awareness and early intervention.

Sub-theme 1.3: Communication and parent–child relationships

The findings reveal a breakdown in relational ties, often exacerbated by generational shifts and socio-economic pressures. Technology was cited as a barrier to meaningful interaction (CR1-GD1), reflecting global concerns about digital disconnection in family dynamics (Kyalo, 2024). Technology as a barrier (CR1-GD1) reflects global concerns about digital disconnection, particularly in low-income households, where screen time may replace emotional engagement (Nirmani, 2024). This is supported by emerging literature on digital parenting and relational erosion.

Despite some parents reporting open communication (CR3-GD1), deeper emotional struggles often remained hidden. This suggests that surface-level engagement may not suffice in identifying distress, reinforcing the need for emotional literacy and attuned parenting. While some parents report open communication (CR3-GD1), the persistence of hidden emotional struggles suggests that relational quality – not just frequency – is key. This calls for interventions that build emotional literacy and attuned parenting, rather than simply increasing dialogue.

Avoidant parenting styles linked to economic stress (CR5-GD1) resonate with Bowlby's attachment theory (1988), which underscores the importance of secure relationships for emotional resilience. The literature on protective factors confirms that parental warmth and involvement can buffer against adversity, even in resource-constrained settings.

Encouragingly, several co-researchers emphasized the importance of nurturing relationships (CR8-GD1, CR9-GD1), pointing to a latent capacity for emotional support if parents are equipped with the right tools. This aligns with literature on protective factors in child development, where parental warmth and involvement buffer against adversity (Walter et al., 2025).

The findings both confirm and extend existing literature, revealing that African parents face multi-layered challenges, but also possess latent capacities for transformation. The integration of empirical data with theoretical frameworks and policy documents suggests that guidelines should:

- Address economic and cultural barriers through community-based psychoeducation.
- Promote inclusive school-parent partnerships grounded in participatory principles.
- Equip parents with emotional literacy tools to foster secure, attuned relationships.

Theme 2: Strategies for African parents to support their learners

The purpose for this theme is to investigate strategies for African parents in order to support their learners.

Research Questions Addressed:

- *What guidelines can assist African parents to improve parental involvement in psycho-emotional support for learners with psycho-emotional barriers?*
- *How can African parents support their learners when they experience psycho-emotional barriers to learning?*

This theme reveals a constellation of strategies that African parents can adopt to support learners facing psycho-emotional barriers. The findings are organized across three sub-themes and interpreted through the lenses of the dissertation's theoretical framework of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, Positive Psychology, and Family Systems Theory, offering a multidimensional understanding of psycho-emotional support. The themes are further supported by recent literature where empirical data are either confirmed, supported, or disproved.

Sub-theme 2.1: Building emotional resilience in learners

Co-researchers emphasized the home environment as a foundational space for emotional development and resilience. Statements such as "Let your home be a healthy environment" (CR8-GD2) and "Don't let stress affect your learners" (CR9-GD2) reflect a growing awareness of the emotional climate within families. Co-researchers' emphasis on the home as a "healthy environment" (CR8-GD2) aligns with Bronfenbrenner's microsystem, where proximal processes – daily interactions – shape emotional development. This is confirmed by Sithole-Tetani (2025), who found that emotionally nurturing home environments significantly buffer learners against stress and anxiety.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) situates the family within the microsystem, where daily interactions directly shape a child's development. The co-researchers' reflections affirm that emotional resilience is cultivated through consistent, nurturing relationships, and that disruptions, such as exposure to conflict, can undermine a learner's adaptive capacity.

Family Systems Theory (Bowen, 1978) further illuminates this dynamic by emphasizing the interdependence of family members. Emotional distress in one part of the system (e.g. parental stress) can ripple through the entire family unit, affecting the child's emotional regulation and

sense of safety. The call for emotional boundaries and intentional parenting (CR10-GD2) reflects an effort to stabilize the family system and protect the child's emotional space. Bowen's Family Systems Theory (1978) supports the idea that parental stress can destabilize the family unit, affecting learner's emotional regulation. The ripple effect described by co-researchers (CR10-GD2) is echoed in studies showing that unresolved parental distress can impair learner's coping mechanisms.

Positive Psychology contributes a strengths-based lens, highlighting the role of emotional availability, love, and empathy in fostering resilience (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Quotes such as "show them love even when you are tired" (CR10-GD2) and "teach them to understand emotions of other people" (CR8-GD2) align with the development of emotional intelligence and self-efficacy, which are key constructs in Positive Psychology that support thriving despite adversity. Statements such as "show them love even when you are tired" (CR10-GD2) reflect the principles of emotional availability and empathy central to Positive Psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). These findings are in line with literature on emotional intelligence and self-efficacy, which are protective factors in adverse contexts (Shubayr & Dailah, 2025).

While literature affirms the importance of emotional resilience, co-researchers' emphasis on intentional parenting and emotional boundaries adds depth to existing models (Housman, 2017). This suggests that guidelines should include practical tools for emotional regulation and stress management within families.

Sub-theme 2.2: Parental involvement in school-based support systems

Co-researchers highlighted the importance of collaborative engagement between parents and educators, noting that schools are well-positioned to observe and respond to learners' emotional needs. Statements such as "educators spend seven hours with our learners" (CR1-GD2) and "SBSTs meet regularly with parents" (CR8-GD2) reflect a recognition of schools as critical partners. The recognition that "educators spend seven hours with our learners" (CR1-GD2) confirms the centrality of schools in learners' emotional lives. The Department of Basic Education's Guide for Learner Support Agents (2020) emphasizes the importance of SBSTs and school-family collaboration in psychosocial support.

Bronfenbrenner's mesosystem – the interaction between two microsystems (home and school) – is activated here. When parents and educators collaborate, they create a cohesive support network that enhances the learner's emotional and academic development. This interconnectedness is vital for identifying barriers early and implementing responsive

interventions (DBE, 2001). Bronfenbrenner's mesosystem is activated through parent–school partnerships. Co-researchers' accounts of SBST meetings (CR8-GD2) reflect best practices in inclusive education, where shared responsibility enhances early identification and intervention.

Family Systems Theory supports this by emphasizing the need for open communication and shared responsibility across systems. The reciprocal exchange between parents and SBSTs (CR7-GD2) fosters trust and ensures that interventions are informed by the learner's lived realities both at home and in school (Duristic & Bunijevac, 2017). The reciprocal exchange between parents and educators (CR7-GD2) supports Bowen's emphasis on open communication across systems. Sithole-Tetani (2025) also found that collaborative engagement reduces parental anxiety and improves learner outcomes.

From a Positive Psychology perspective, this collaboration promotes hope, engagement, and empowerment. When parents are involved, not only during crises but as part of routine school processes, they contribute to a culture of care and optimism that supports learner flourishing. The structured referral pathways (CR10-GD2) also reflect a learner-centred approach that adapts to individual needs – an essential principle in inclusive education and strengths-based practice. Routine involvement, not just during crises, promotes hope and engagement (Peak & McGarty, 2024). This aligns with strengths-based approaches that foster resilience through consistent, affirming relationships. The structured referral pathways (CR10-GD2) reflect learner-centred care, a cornerstone of inclusive and empowering education.

Sub-theme 2.3: Leveraging community and cultural resources

Co-researchers identified community infrastructures, such as churches, clinics, and cultural groups, as valuable yet underutilized assets in supporting learners. Quotes such as "parents should engage in such support if the school does not provide them with one" (CR8-GD2) and "schools should collaborate with local clinics" (CR2-GD2) reflect a systems-thinking approach to care. It further affirms the role of the exosystem in Bronfenbrenner's model (Navarro & Tudge, 2022). The DBE's CSTL framework advocates for multi-sectoral partnerships to address psycho-emotional barriers holistically (DBE, 2014).

Bronfenbrenner's exosystem, which includes community institutions and services, plays a pivotal role here. When schools partner with clinics and cultural organizations, they extend the support network beyond the classroom, creating multi-layered interventions that address psycho-emotional barriers holistically (Manian & Sorensen, 2024). Community infrastructures, such as churches, clinics, and cultural groups, are recognized in literature as protective environments. However, co-researchers' concerns about judgment and stigma challenge overly idealized views

of community support. This tension is echoed in Sithole-Tetani's (2025) findings, which caution that community norms can both enable and inhibit emotional safety.

Family Systems Theory cautions, however, that community norms can both support and constrain families. Co-researchers expressed concerns about judgment within communities, revealing that emotional safety requires intentional efforts to affirm diversity and reduce stigma. This tension highlights the need for inclusive, culturally sensitive programming that respects varied parenting approaches. The ambivalence expressed by co-researchers suggests that guidelines must address cultural sensitivity and stigma reduction (Hana et al., 2024). Emotional safety requires intentional efforts to affirm diverse parenting styles and normalize help-seeking.

Positive Psychology offers a pathway forward by emphasizing community strengths, collective efficacy, and cultural pride. Awareness campaigns and inclusive programming (CR10-GD2) can foster dialogue, reduce isolation, and normalize emotional support, thereby transforming communities into resilient ecosystems that uplift both learners and caregivers. Awareness campaigns and inclusive programming (CR10-GD2) align with the concept of collective efficacy (Losberg & Zwozdiak-Myers, 2021). When communities embrace emotional support as a shared value, they become ecosystems of resilience, uplifting both learners and caregivers (Furu et al., 2023).

The empirical data largely confirm and enrich existing literature, while also revealing gaps and tensions that demand context-sensitive responses. Guidelines for African parents should:

- Promote emotional literacy and resilience through home-based strategies grounded in empathy and intentional parenting.

- Strengthen school-parent partnerships via SBST engagement, routine communication, and learner-centred referral systems.

- Leverage community resources while addressing stigma through culturally sensitive programming and inclusive dialogue.

Theme 3: Assisting African Parents in providing psycho-emotional support

Research Question Addressed:

How can African parents be assisted to psycho-emotionally support their learners with psycho-emotional barriers to learning?

This theme explores the systemic, relational, and community-based mechanisms needed to empower African parents in supporting learners with psycho-emotional barriers. The findings, drawn from group discussions and collage reflections, are organized across three sub-themes and interpreted through relevant theoretical lenses.

Sub-theme 3.1: Training and capacity building for parents

Co-researchers consistently emphasized the lack of accessible training and emotional literacy for parents, contrasted with the structured support educators receive from SBSTs and DBSTs. Quotes such as “What about us parents?” (CR2-GD3) and “They use big English that we do not understand” (CR5-GD3) highlight both exclusion and linguistic barriers, which undermine parental agency. These findings are echoed in Sithole-Tetani’s (2025) study, which found that parents of learners with learning difficulties often feel disempowered due to inaccessible language and lack of psychoeducation. This confirms that emotional literacy is not just a skill gap but a structural barrier.

This aligns with Bronfenbrenner’s microsystem, where the family is a primary context for development. Without equipping parents with the tools to interpret and respond to emotional distress, the microsystem becomes fragmented (Glynn & Baram, 2019). Family Systems Theory (Bowen, 1978) reinforces this by showing how uninformed or unsupported caregivers can inadvertently perpetuate emotional instability within the family unit. Bronfenbrenner’s microsystem emphasizes the family as the primary site of development. When parents lack emotional literacy, the microsystem becomes fragmented, weakening the child’s support structure. According to Brown and Errington (2024), Bowen’s Family Systems Theory reinforces this, showing how uninformed caregivers can unintentionally perpetuate emotional instability.

The call for workshops (CR7-GD3) and regular meetings reflects a desire for relational learning environments, where parents are not passive recipients but active participants. This echoes participatory education models (Freire, 1970), which advocate for dialogic, inclusive spaces that build confidence and competence. This statement challenges traditional top-down models and supports capacity-building through mutual respect and shared knowledge. From a Positive Psychology perspective, recognition and appreciation (CR8-GD3) are vital motivators. When parents feel valued, they are more likely to engage meaningfully. Moreover, emotional literacy, such as identifying early signs of distress (CR10-GD3), is a cornerstone of resilience-building (Rao et al., 2024), enabling timely intervention and support. Recognition and appreciation (CR8-GD3) are vital motivators (Yelipele et al., 2024). When parents feel valued, their engagement deepens. Emotional literacy, such as identifying early signs of distress (CR10-GD3), supports

resilience-building, a key tenet of Positive Psychology and a protective factor against psycho-emotional barriers (Seligman, 2018).

Sub-theme 3.2: Policy and institutional support

Co-researchers called for systemic reform and inclusive policy frameworks that integrate parents into the broader support ecosystem. Statements such as “Provide African parents with educational psychologists” (CR7-GD3) and “Parents should be part of DBST workshops” reflect a push toward multidisciplinary collaboration and shared capacity building. This is confirmed by South Africa’s SIAS policy (DBE, 2014), which promotes collaborative planning but suffers from implementation gaps. This aligns with Bronfenbrenner’s exosystem, which includes institutional structures that indirectly affect the child. When parents are excluded from these systems, the support becomes fragmented (Guy-Evans, 2024). Bronfenbrenner’s exosystem includes institutional structures that indirectly affect the child. When parents are excluded from SBST and DBST processes, the support becomes fragmented. Family Systems Theory suggests that external scaffolding, such as institutional partnerships, can stabilize internal family dynamics (Chan, 2024). Family Systems Theory also emphasizes the need for external scaffolding to stabilize internal dynamics, suggesting that institutional partnerships can buffer familial stress (Brown & Errington, 2019). The literature supports this integration. The Department of Basic Education, 2022) advocates for inclusive education systems that recognize parents as co-educators. Moreover, the South African SIAS policy (DBE, 2014) encourages collaborative planning and intervention, though implementation gaps remain.

The recommendation for co-attendance at workshops (CR10-GD3) promotes transparency and alignment between home and school strategies. This echoes inclusive education models that treat parents as co-educators, not peripheral stakeholders (Maguvhe & Mpya, 2025). The Department of Basic Education’s psychosocial support framework (2020) also encourages multidisciplinary collaboration to support vulnerable learners. This shared learning fosters trust and ensures that interventions are culturally responsive and contextually grounded. While policy frameworks exist, co-researchers’ experiences suggest that these are not consistently implemented. This discrepancy highlights the need for localized, context-sensitive policy enactment that reflects the lived realities of African families.

Sub-theme 3.3: Strengthening family and community networks

Co-researchers emphasized the relational and communal nature of emotional support, advocating for whole-family engagement and community-based healing. Quotes such as “Make therapy a norm in our families” (CR7-GD3) and “Support should be provided to everyone in the

family" (CR9-GD3) reflect a shift toward collective care. Sithole-Tetani (2025) confirms that community support, emotional, practical, and experiential, enhances parental resilience and reduces stress. Family Systems Theory is central here, highlighting how emotional health is co-constructed across family members. When siblings and extended relatives are involved, the support becomes more sustainable and less dependent on individual caregivers (Johnson, 2016). Family Systems Theory emphasizes that emotional health is co-constructed (Bowen, 1978). Involving siblings and extended relatives creates sustainable support networks. Bronfenbrenner's macrosystem is activated in the call to destigmatize therapy and normalize emotional dialogue, aligning with community-based psychosocial support models. Bronfenbrenner's macrosystem, which includes cultural values and societal norms, is activated in the call to destigmatize therapy and normalize emotional dialogue. This is echoed in literature on community-based psychosocial support, which emphasizes culturally-embedded interventions. The emphasis on play (CR9-GD3) and quality time reflects Positive Psychology's focus on relational joy, bonding, and resilience (Sclanavo, 2023). Activities that foster connection counteract emotional detachment and build trust, especially in families under strain from economic pressures (CR5-GD1). The emphasis on play and quality time (CR9-GD3) reflects Positive Psychology's focus on relational joy and bonding (Seligman, 2020). These activities counteract emotional detachment and foster trust, especially in economically-strained families (CR5-GD1).

The appeal to "build a supportive environment" (CR10-GD3) encapsulates the need for emotional safety, belonging, and cultural affirmation, all of which are foundational to learner well-being and family cohesion. Co-researchers' advocacy for community-based healing challenges individualistic models of therapy. Their insights support a culturally embedded approach that integrates traditional practices, collective dialogue, and inclusive programming (Paloma & Cathy, 2025).

The findings confirm and extend existing literature, while also revealing critical gaps in implementation and cultural responsiveness (Kushnier et al., 2023). To assist African parents effectively, guidelines should:

- Develop accessible training in emotional literacy using culturally relevant language and participatory methods.

- Embed parents in institutional support systems through inclusive policies, co-attendance at workshops, and multidisciplinary collaboration.

- Strengthen family and community networks by normalizing therapy, promoting relational activities, and leveraging local infrastructures.

4.4 Answering the primary research question:

The following primary research question guided this research study: What guidelines can assist African parents to improve parental involvement in psycho-emotional support for learners with psycho-emotional barriers to learning? Through participatory inquiry, the study explored and responded to three secondary research questions, revealing both persistent challenges and promising strengths. Theme 1 illuminated the socio-cultural and economic constraints that hinder parental involvement, including stigma, poverty, and limited mental health literacy. Yet, it also brought to the surface the parents' openness to learning and their desire for stronger relational ties with their learners, indicating a latent capacity for transformation. Theme 2 highlighted strategies that parents already employ or aspire to adopt, such as fostering emotional resilience at home, engaging collaboratively with educators, and leveraging community resources. These findings confirmed that many parents possess intuitive strengths, such as empathy, commitment, and cultural wisdom, which can be harnessed through structured support. Theme 3 emphasized the need for systemic assistance, including accessible training, inclusive policy frameworks, and strengthened family and community networks. Co-researchers advocated for workshops, shared learning spaces, and culturally embedded interventions, demonstrating a proactive stance toward change. Importantly, the study found that when parents are recognized, equipped, and included, they become powerful contributors to learner well-being. The establishment of parent forums, informal knowledge-sharing in churches and clinics, and collaborative engagement with SBST and DBST teams, reflect a growing ecosystem of care. Ultimately, the study affirmed that African parents are not passive recipients of support but resilient, resourceful partners whose involvement, when nurtured through inclusive, context-sensitive practices, can transform psycho-emotional barriers into pathways for growth and belonging.

The following five practical guidelines were derived to strengthen parental engagement and enhance support for affected learners.

1. Promote awareness through culturally relevant education

Derived from: Sub-theme 1.2 (Lack of awareness and knowledge) and Sub-theme 3.1 (Training and capacity building)

- Develop and disseminate accessible, multilingual resources that explain psycho-emotional barriers and their impact on learning.
- Facilitate parent workshops using participatory methods (e.g. storytelling, role-play) to demystify psycho-emotional challenges.

- Partner with local NGOs or schools to offer ongoing psycho-educational sessions tailored to community contexts.

2. Strengthen parent-child communication and emotional literacy

Derived from: Sub-theme 1.3 (Communication and parent-child relationships) and Sub-theme 2.1 (Building emotional resilience)

- Encourage daily check-ins where learners can express emotions without judgment.
- Introduce simple emotional vocabulary and coping strategies that parents and learners can practice together.
- Use culturally familiar metaphors and narratives to help learners articulate feelings and build resilience.

3. Foster collaborative engagement with schools

Derived from: Sub-theme 2.2 (Parental involvement in school-based support systems) and Sub-theme 3.2 (Policy and institutional support)

- Advocate for inclusive school policies that recognize and support parental involvement in psycho-emotional development.
- Create parent liaison roles or committees to bridge communication between families and educators.
- Encourage schools to host regular feedback forums where parents can share concerns and co-develop support strategies.

4. Leverage community and cultural assets

Derived from: Sub-theme 2.3 (Leveraging community and cultural resources) and Sub-theme 3.3 (Strengthening family and community network)

- Engage traditional leaders, faith-based groups, and community elders in promoting emotional well-being practices.
- Organize community healing circles or support groups where parents can share experiences and strategies.

- Integrate indigenous knowledge systems and cultural rituals that foster emotional strength and belonging.

5. Address socio-economic constraints through multi-stakeholder support

Derived from: Sub-theme 1.1 (Socio-cultural and economic barriers) and Sub-theme 3.2 (Policy and institutional support)

- Collaborate with social workers, health professionals, and local government to provide wraparound services (e.g. food security, mental health access).
- Advocate for policy reforms that allocate resources to psycho-emotional support in underserved communities.
- Encourage schools to adopt flexible engagement models (e.g. mobile outreach, weekend sessions) to accommodate working parents.

4.5 Chapter Summary

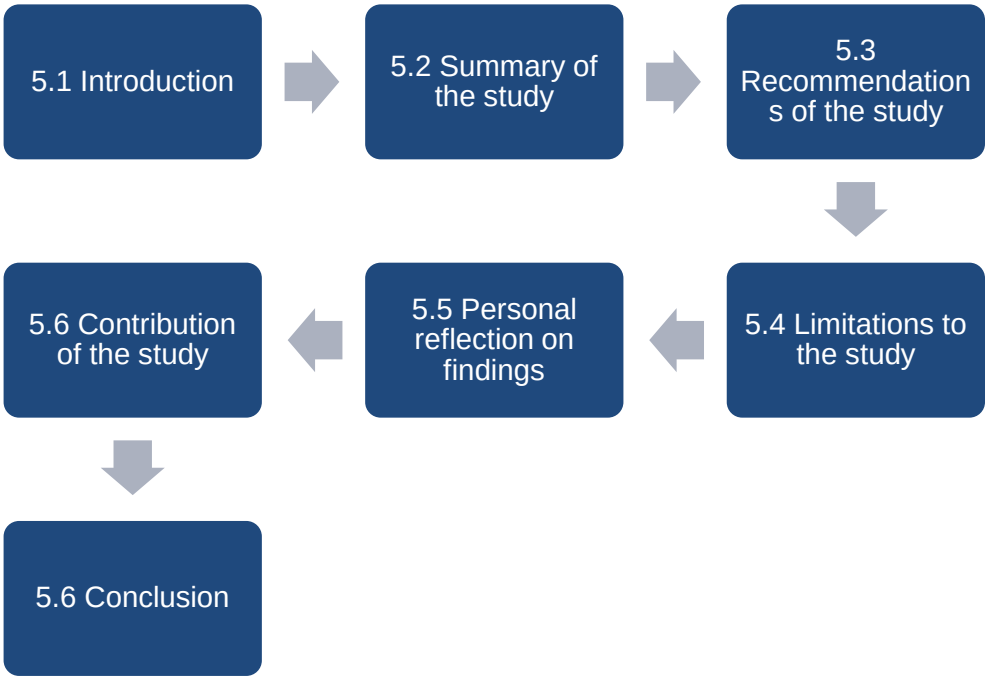
This chapter presented the findings of this study. The research question that guided cycle one was: What challenges do African parents experience when supporting learners with psycho-emotional barriers? The co-researchers identified the challenges through group discussions. The theme and subsequent sub-themes were as follows: Theme 1: Challenges faced by African parents in supporting learners with psycho-emotional barriers, sub-theme 1.1: Socio-cultural and economic barriers, sub-theme 1.2: Lack of awareness and knowledge and sub-theme 1.3: Communication and parent-child relationships. Cycle two was guided by the following research question: What guidelines can assist African parents to improve parental involvement in psycho-emotional support for learners with psycho-emotional barriers; and how can African parents support their learners when they experience psycho-emotional barriers to learning. The theme and subsequent sub-themes were as follows: Theme 2**:** Strategies for African parents to support their learners, sub-theme 2.1: Building emotional resilience in learners, sub-theme 2.2: Parental involvement in school based support systems and sub-theme 2.3: Leveraging community and cultural resources. Cycle three was guided by the following research question: How can African parents be assisted to psycho-emotionally support their learners with psycho-emotional barriers to learning? In this cycle, the co-researchers created three collages consisting of different pictures summarising the challenges African parents face. Co-researchers utilised collages and group discussions whereby the collages represented their stories and challenges. The theme and subsequent sub-themes were as follows: Theme 3: Assisting African parents in providing psycho-emotional support, sub-theme 3.1: Training and capacity building for parents, sub-theme 3.2:

Policy and institutional support and sub-theme 3.3: Strengthening family and community networks.

The findings were discussed and compared against existing literature, and finally the primary research question was answered. The subsequent chapter will present the concluding analysis of the research and recommendations. It will offer a synthesis of the key findings in relation to the primary research question, along with a reflective account of the research journey, highlighting methodological insights, limitations, and the broader implications of the study's outcomes.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Figure 5.1 Chapter 5 Overview



Source: Author's own construct

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore how African parents in our communities can be supported when assisting learners with psycho-emotional barriers. This chapter presents a summary of the study, recommendations of the study, limitations of the study, personal reflections of findings and contribution of the study towards future research and a conclusion:

5.2 Summary of the study

Overview of Chapters

Chapter One introduced the foundational elements of the study. It provided a comprehensive background to the research, articulated the problem statement, and clarified the study's aim. The research questions and objectives were formulated in alignment with the overarching purpose of the inquiry. The chapter also outlined the research design and methodology, including data generation and analysis procedures, and concluded with a discussion of quality criteria, specifically those within the PALAR framework, and ethical considerations.

Chapter Two presented a critical review of the literature, focusing on African parents' involvement in schools, the support structures available to learners and their families, and the theoretical frameworks underpinning the study. These frameworks – Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, Positive Psychology, and Family Systems Theory – provided a conceptual lens through which psycho-emotional barriers and parental engagement were examined.

Chapter Three detailed the methodological approach adopted in the study. Grounded in a transformative paradigm and guided by the principles of Participatory Action Learning and Action Research (PALAR), the chapter described the transformative orientation of the research. Data were generated through group discussions and visual collages. The chapter also addressed the procedures for data analysis, the role of the researcher as a co-participant, and the application of the quality criteria and ethical protocols.

Chapter Four presented the findings of the study, derived from collaborative analysis with co-researchers across two iterative PALAR cycles. The data were interpreted in relation to the conceptual and theoretical frameworks, and themes and sub-themes were co-constructed and critically discussed. This chapter provided an integrated view of the study's outcomes and their relevance to the research questions.

Chapter Five offered a synthesis of the entire study. It summarised the key findings, articulated practical recommendations, and acknowledged the limitations encountered during the research process. The chapter concluded with reflective insights and implications for future practice and research in inclusive education and participatory methodologies.

5.3 Recommendations of the study

This segment provides general recommendations that I personally reflected on that are relevant to determine possible solutions to challenges of enabling African parents' involvement in schools to reduce psycho-emotional barriers to learning. The suggestions below emerged from my personal reflection on the findings, and the practical guidelines from chapter 4:

- SBST members should be given enough resources that will aid in accommodating and assisting learners with barriers to learning. The committee should be always functional so they can support the needs of learners in schools. They should ensure that every learner enrolled in the school has a learner profile, and that those with learning barriers have SNA forms.

- There should be always communication between parents and the school. Parents ought to be given clear concise information about their learners' difficulties, achievements, and behaviour.
- The support and training of parents of learners with barriers to learning. Parents should be equipped with knowledge and support about barriers to learning. The SBST will give parents the support they need and work together in providing additional information. It is recommended that schools should hold workshops for parents, SBST, and DBST members, where they can discuss the difficulties and support.
- The support for African communities. African communities ought to be knowledgeable about barriers to learning. The schools should collaborate with health workers such as doctors, clinics, and librarians in raising awareness about barriers.
- Early identification of learners. Educators in classrooms ought to identify learners with barriers at an early age or grade level. Subsequently SBST members will provide support, and communicate with parents and the DBST on referral processes.
- Training for educators. All educators ought to be equipped with the necessary guidance and skills to support learners with barriers, so it does not become only the SBST's responsibility.
- The SMT should ensure that parents are welcome at school. The school should create a safe environment for parents where they can come to the school at any time to discuss the challenges they have at home with learners, and find the solutions with educators.
- The DBST should continuously support the SBST by frequently coming to the school to train, guide, and monitor educators in completing SNA forms, and ensuring the functionality of the SBST in the school. They ought to consistently support learners with learning barriers.

5.4 Limitations to the study

Language used with the co-researchers posed a challenge. Co-researchers were Sesotho-speaking and preferred to engage in their home language. Consequently, the researcher was required to translate the data into English to facilitate analysis and reporting.

Some co-researchers were employed and often concluded their workday late, resulting in fatigue. To accommodate their availability and ensure meaningful participation, the sessions were consolidated into a single two-hour meeting.

The study encompassed three distinct schools, with participants residing in geographically dispersed communities. Co-researchers were required to travel from their respective communities to convene at a central research venue.

The SBST co-researchers involved in the study were drawn from the Motheo District in Botshabelo. Their insights and contributions were shaped by their individual experiences and the specific contextual realities of their educational environments.

5.5 Personal reflection on findings

5.5.1 Findings I did expect

I envisioned that parents would point out the challenges they come across at home when living with learners with psycho-emotional barriers. Parents are not often given adequate support, unlike educators, hence they seem uninterested and lack involvement as parents. They are often called to school for parents' meetings but where is their training like the educators? They are not well equipped and trained for assisting learners with psycho-emotional barriers. How can parents support learners if they are not knowledgeable and trained? It becomes hard for them to see their learners suffering and they cannot help, and they are unaware. I strongly believe that parents are the main role-players in inclusive education as they cooperate with the school and educators, and this improves the learner's academic performance.

I also envisioned that parents lack knowledge of psycho-emotional barriers or any other learning barriers. We live in different communities, with different educational backgrounds and socio-economic status. Parents lack knowledge of what the barriers are; they have no knowledge, hence once a leaner is misbehaving at home or school, or not performing well in their academics, they will blame this on being a stage of adolescence, or on the child's friends. Learners are often given names or labelled as rebellious and crazy, hence I chose to research about psycho-emotional barriers to learning to educate African parents in townships.

5.5.2 Findings I did not expect

I did not expect that parents would be interested in finding ways to support learners with psycho-emotional barriers, share their experiences and would go miles in order to achieve this. All the parents shared the same sentiments on finding strategies to support learners at home and in their communities. In my school, African parents do not always cooperate by helping learners with home-work, or do not attend meetings. I was impressed to witness their interest and cooperation. The fact that they were willing to participate in the study and discuss their personal experiences

gave me hope, and I realised that parents just need clear and proper communication, and to be well-informed and given support by education role players.

5.5.3 Findings that disappointed me

The finding that disappointed me were the principals. When I asked permission to conduct research, they were reluctant to allow their schools to participate in the study, I had to beg them. I kept making appointments to see them and they would reschedule. I believed that this study would be beneficial to their schools. It is their responsibility to want what is best for their learners.

The finding that also disappointed me were the DBST members. The SBST committee is functional in schools but the DBST lack commitment in supporting schools with learners with barriers. This discourages educators and causes lack of parental involvement because of the referral processes.

5.6 Contribution of the study

The result of this study merits the following contribution to future research:

- Informing practice in inclusive education: The outcome of this research is expected to serve as a valuable source for future research and information for educators, school leaders, and policymakers seeking to enhance African parents' involvement in psycho-emotional support for learners facing psycho-emotional barriers to learning.

- Empowering collaborative support structures: The study highlights how co-researchers, including parents, teachers, and support staff, navigate the challenges of engaging families in emotionally responsive educational practices. It also reveals strategies for strengthening collaborative relationships that foster a more inclusive and supportive learning environment, which can be further explored in future.

- Evaluating and enhancing existing approaches: By critically examining current strategies used to involve parents in psycho-emotional support, the study identifies gaps and limitations in practice. These insights will guide future research and inform the development of context-sensitive, culturally grounded guidelines that promote meaningful parental engagement.

5.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, the study was brought to a reflective and analytical close by revisiting its core purpose, summarizing key findings, and offering practical recommendations to enhance African

parents' involvement in psycho-emotional support for learners with psycho-emotional barriers. My personal reflection, the limitations of the study and proposed recommendations for future practice and policy were also discussed. Findings from this research underscore the critical role of parental involvement in learners' academic progress and overall well-being. The range of psychological and emotional challenges experienced by African parents in this study highlights the need for targeted support mechanisms.

Although SBST members were found to receive some institutional support, the study revealed a significant gap in support for parents, resulting in limited parental engagement in school activities. It is evident that schools must foster stronger relationships with parents and the broader community to enhance collaborative support for learners. To achieve this, parents must be equipped with relevant knowledge and skills through structured training and support programmes focused on psycho-emotional barriers to learning. The Department of Education should formally recognise African parents as essential stakeholders in the education process and prioritise their inclusion in school-based support initiatives. The findings affirm the value of collaborative inquiry in addressing systemic challenges and promoting equity in educational practice.

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LIST OF ANNEXURES

ANNEXURE A: ETHICS CLEARANCE LETTER

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ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER OF STUDY

Based on approval by the **Education Sciences Research Ethics Committee (EduREC)** on 24 October 2024, the Education Sciences Research Ethics Committee hereby **approves** your application as indicated below. This implies that the North-West University Senate Committee for Research Ethics (NWU-SCRE) grants its permission that, provided the special conditions specified below are met and pending any other authorisation that may be necessary, the study may be initiated, using the ethics number below.

Study title: Guidelines for improving black African parents' involvement in psycho-emotional support for learners with emotional barriers to learning

Study Leader/Supervisor (Principal Investigator)/Researcher: Dr C Joubert

Student / Team: Ms T Mphuthi (MEd student – 27560120), Prof J Hay

Ethics number:

N	W	U	-	0	0	3	3	1	-	2	4	-	A	2
Institution				Study Number						Year			Status	

Statuses: S = Submission; R = Re-Submission; P = Provisional Authorisation; A = Authorisation

Application Type: Single study

Commencement date: 24/10/2024 **Risk:** Low Risk

Expiry date: 24/10/2025

Approval of the study is initially provided for a year, after which continuation of the study is dependent on receipt and review of the annual (or as otherwise stipulated) monitoring report and the concomitant issuing of a letter of continuation.

Special in process conditions of the research for approval (if applicable):

General conditions:

While this ethics approval is subject to all declarations, undertakings and agreements incorporated and signed in the application form, the following general terms and conditions will apply:

- *The study leader/supervisor (principle investigator)/researcher must report in the prescribed format to the ES-REC:*
  - *annually (or as otherwise requested) on the monitoring of the study, whereby a letter of continuation will be provided, and upon completion of the study; and*
  - *without any delay in case of any adverse event or incident (or any matter that interrupts sound ethical principles) during the course of the study.*
- *The approval applies strictly to the proposal as stipulated in the application form. Should any amendments to the proposal be deemed necessary during the course of the study, the study leader/researcher must apply for approval of these amendments at the ES-REC, prior to implementation. Should there be any deviations from the study proposal without the necessary approval of such amendments, the ethics approval is immediately and automatically forfeited.*
- *Annually a number of studies may be randomly selected for an external audit.*
- *The date of approval indicates the first date that the study may be started.*
- *In the interest of ethical responsibility, the NWU-SCRC and ES-REC reserves the right to:*
  - *request access to any information or data at any time during the course or after completion of the study;*

- *to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modification or monitor the conduct of your research or the informed consent process;*
- *withdraw or postpone approval if:*
  - *any unethical principles or practices of the study are revealed or suspected;*
  - *it becomes apparent that any relevant information was withheld from the ES-REC or that information has been false or misrepresented;*
  - *submission of the annual (or otherwise stipulated) monitoring report, the required amendments, or reporting of adverse events or incidents was not done in a timely manner and accurately; and / or*
  - *new institutional rules, national legislation or international conventions deem it necessary.*

The ES-REC would like to remain at your service as scientist and researcher, and wishes you well with your study. Please do not hesitate to contact the ES-REC or the NWU-SCRE for any further enquiries or requests for assistance.

Yours sincerely



Prof JJJ de Beer
Chairman NWU Education Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Original details: (22351930) C:\Users\22351930\Desktop\ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER OF STUDY.docm
8 November 2018

Current details: (22351930) M:\DSS1\8533\Monitoring and Reporting Cluster\Ethics\Certificates\Templates\Research Ethics Approval Letters\9.1.5.4.1 ES-REC Ethical Approval Letter.docm
5 December 2018

File reference: 9.1.5.4.2

ANNEXURE B: LETTER FROM DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Enquiries: M.Z. Thango
Ref: Research Permission: T. Mphuthi
Tel. 051 404 8808
Email: MZ.Thango@fseducation.gov.za

education
Department of Education
FREE STATE PROVINCE

3858 Sunrise Section
Nahamadi
Frankfort
9830

Dear Miss T. Mphuthi

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE FREE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION: MANGAUNG METROPOLITAN DISTRICT

This letter serves to inform you that you have been granted permission to conduct research in the Free State Department of Education within the Mangaung Metropolitan district. The details in relation to your research project with the North-West University are as follows:

Topic: Guidelines for improving African parents involvement in psycho-emotional support for learners with emotional barriers to learning.

1. **List of schools involved:** Katamelo Primary School, Batjha Primary School and Qelo Primary School.
2. **Target Population:** Six parents, three educators who are members of SBST and one member of DBST at the selected schools and district.
3. **Period of research**: From the signature of this letter until 30 September 2025. Please note that the department does not allow any research to be conducted during the fourth term (quarter) of the academic year. Should you fall behind your schedule by three months to complete your research project in the approved period, you will need to apply for an extension. The researcher is expected to request permission from the school principals to conduct research at schools.
4. The approval is subject to the following conditions:
   - 4.1 The collection of data should not interfere with the normal tuition time or teaching process.
   - 4.2 A bound copy of the research document should be submitted to the Free State Department of Education, Room 101, 1st Floor, Thuto House, St. Andrew Street, Bloemfontein or can be emailed to the above-mentioned email address.
   - 4.3 You will be expected, on completion of your research study to make a presentation to the relevant stakeholders in the Department.
   - 4.4 The ethics documents must be adhered to in the discourse of your study in our department.
5. Please note that costs relating to all the conditions mentioned above are your own responsibility.

Yours Sincerely,

Mr. MZAMO W. JACOBS
DIRECTOR: QUALITY ASSURANCE, M&E AND STRATEGIC PLANNING

DATE: 22/04/2025

ANNEXURE C: PERMISSION LETTER: DISTRICT BASED SUPPORT TEAM

NWU®
NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY
NOORDWES-UNIVERSITEIT
YUNIBESITI YA BOKONE-BOPHIRIMA

Private Bag X6001, Potchefstroom
South Africa 2520
Tel: 018 299-1111/2222
Web: http://www.nwu.ac.za

Faculty of Education

Miss T Mphuthi

Tel: 0694303205
Email: tsoellang30@gmail.com

COMBER
Lesley.wood@nwu.ac.za
Carmen.Joubert@nwu.ac.za
Johnnie.Hay@nwu.ac.za

Date: 16 August 2024

GOODWILL PERMISSION: DIRECTOR - DISTRICT BASED SUPPORT TEAM

I herewith wish to request your permission for the DBST to participate in this research, which involves reflective dairies, focus group talks and visual data collection in collaboratively formulating guidelines for African parents in supporting learners with psycho-emotional barriers. Prior to granting permission, please acquaint yourself with the information below.

The details of the research are as follows:

TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT:

Guidelines for improving African parents' involvement in psycho-emotional support for learners with emotional barriers to learning

ETHICS APPLICATION NUMBER

NWU-00331-24-A2

PROJECT SUPERVISOR: Dr C Joubert
CO-SUPERVISOR: Prof J Hay
ADDRESS: 1174 Hendrick Van Eck Boulevard, Vanderbijlpark, 1900
CONTACT NUMBER: 016 910 3096

MEMBER OF PROJECT TEAM MEd-Student: Tsoellang Mphuthi
ADDRESS: 1000 H2 section, Botshabelo, 9781
CONTACT NUMBER: 069 430 3205

FACULTY OF EDUCATION RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
Contact person: Ms Erna Greyling, E-mail: Erna.Greyling@nwu.ac.za, Tel. (018) 299 4656

This study has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education of the North-West University and will be conducted according to the ethical guidelines of this committee. Permission was also obtained from the provincial Department of Basic Education.

What is this research about?
The aims of this research are:

The aim of this study is to collaborate with parents and education support staff (SBST and DBST members) to develop guidelines for African parents to promote parental engagement in psycho-emotional assistance for learners experiencing emotional difficulties to learning.

Participants

- 3 SBST members
- 6 parents, 2 from each school. As there will be 3 schools included
- 1 DBST member

What is expected of the participants?

To collaboratively work and share ideas with all participants as we will bring positive change in improving guidelines for African parents in supporting learners with psycho-emotional barriers. Participants are also expected to participate in group discussion and collages.

There will be three workshops held for three days each for 4-5 hours as there will be breaks in between. After the end of the workshop one collage will be made.

Benefits to the participants

African parents will be equipped with guidelines needed to support learners with emotional barriers. The collaborative cycles of the project will help change participants' mind-sets by improving guidelines for African parents.

Risks involved for participants

Minimal risk. The environment will be friendly and harmless. The researcher will plan the research in a way that it will ensure that participant's schedules are considered.

The researcher will ensure that the co-researchers are not harmed by stating their own opinion or in any way. Respect will be encouraged amongst members.

Confidentiality and protection of identity

Participants will be given consent forms so they can understand the purpose of this study. Confidentiality and anonymity of data collection will apply within the Protection Of Personal Information Act (POPIA), 4 of 2023 and findings kept in the google-drive by the Project leader (main supervisor) with a secure password.

Participation is voluntary and participants may withdraw at any time, without giving any reason and it will be not held against them

Dissemination of findings

All findings will be made available to all co-researchers at school and will be used as part of the master's dissertation and might be used to publish articles. Sessions will be audio recorded for transcription purposes.

If you have any further questions or enquiries regarding your participation in this research, please contact the researchers for more information.

DECLARATION BY DBST CHAIRPERSON/RELEVANT RESPONSIBLE PERSON:

By signing below, I ...Tshepiso Masobolola... agree to give permission for the research to take place with the identified participants in the study entitled:

[Enter title here]

I declare that:

- I have read this information and consent form and understand what is expected of the participants in the research.
- I have had a chance to ask questions to the researcher and all my questions have been adequately answered.
- I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary and participants will not be pressurised to take part.

- I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary and participants will not be pressurised to take part.
- Participants may choose to leave the study at any time and will not be penalised or prejudiced in any way.
- Participants may be asked to leave the research process before it is completed, if the researcher feels it is in their best interests, or if they do not follow the research procedures, as agreed to.

Signed at (place) Bloemfontein on (date) 23 / 05 /2025

Signature of DBST Chairperson/Relevant responsible person

ANNEXURE D: PERMISSION LETTER: SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

NWU®
NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY
NOORDWES-UNIVERSITEIT
YUNIBESITI YA BOKONE-BOPHIRIMA

Private Bag X6001, Potchefstroom
South Africa 2520

Tel: 018 299-1111/2222
Web: http://www.nwu.ac.za

Faculty of Education

Miss T Mphuthi

Tel: 0694303205
Email: tsoellang30@gmail.com

COMBER
Lesley.wood@nwu.ac.za
Carmen.Joubert@nwu.ac.za
Johnnie.Hay@nwu.ac.za

Date: 16 August 2024

PERMISSION LETTER: SCHOOL GOVERNING BODY/PRINCIPAL/OTHER RELEVANT PERSON

I herewith wish to request your consent to participate in this research, which involves group discussions and collages, which will formulate guidelines for African parents to support learners with psycho-emotional barriers. Before you give consent, please acquaint yourself with the information below.

The details of the research are as follows:

TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT:

Guidelines for improving African parents' involvement in psycho-emotional support for learners with emotional barriers to learning.

ETHICS APPLICATION NUMBER

NWU- 00331-23-A2

PROJECT SUPERVISOR: Dr C Joubert
CO-SUPERVISOR: Prof J Hay
ADDRESS: 1174 Hendrick Van Eck Boulevard, Vanderbijlpark, 1900
CONTACT NUMBER: 016 910 3096

MEMBER OF PROJECT TEAM MEd-Student: Tsoellang Mphuthi
ADDRESS: 1000 H2 section, Botshabelo, 9781
CONTACT NUMBER: 069 430 3205

FACULTY OF EDUCATION RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
Contact person: Ms Erna Greyling, E-mail: Erna.Greyling@nwu.ac.za, Tel. (018) 299 4656

This study has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education of the North-West University and will be conducted according to the ethical guidelines of this committee. Permission was also obtained from the provincial Department of Basic Education.

What is this research about?
The aims of this research are:

The aim of this study is to collaborate with parents and education support staff (SBST and DBST members) to develop guidelines for African parents to promote parental engagement in psycho-emotional assistance for learners experiencing emotional difficulties to learning.

Participants

- 3 SBST members
- 6 parents, 2 from each school. As there will be 3 schools included
- 1 DBST member

What is expected of the participants?

To collaboratively work and share ideas with all participants as we will bring positive change in improving guidelines for African parents in supporting learners with psycho-emotional barriers. Participants are also expected to participate in focus group interviews, visual data collection and reflective dairies.

There will be three workshops held for three days each for 4-5 hours as there will be breaks in between. After each workshop, two dairy entries will be needed and at the end of the workshop one collage will be needed from each participant.

Benefits to the participants

African parents will be equipped with guidelines needed to support learners with emotional barriers. The collaborative cycles of the project will help change participants' mind-sets by improving guidelines for African parents.

Risks involved for participants

Minimal risk. The environment will be friendly and harmless. The researcher will plan the research in a way that it will ensure that participant's schedules are considered.

The researcher will ensure that the co-researchers are not harmed by stating their own opinion or in any way. Respect will be encouraged amongst members.

Confidentiality and protection of identity

Participants will be given consent forms so they can understand the purpose of this study. Confidentiality and anonymity of data collection will apply within the Protection Of Personal Information Act (POPIA), 4 of 2023 and findings kept in the google-drive by the Project leader (main supervisor) with a secure password.

Participation is voluntary and participants may withdraw at any time, without giving any reason and it will be not held against them

Dissemination of findings

All findings will be made available to all co-researchers at school and will be used as part of the master's dissertation and might be used to publish articles. Sessions will be audio recorded for transcription purposes.

If you have any further questions or enquiries regarding your participation in this research, please contact the researchers for more information.

DECLARATION BY PRINCIPAL/OTHER RELEVANT PERSON:

By signing below, I ..... agree to give permission for the research to take place with the identified participants in the study entitled:

Guidelines for improving African parents' involvement in psycho-emotional support for learners with emotional barriers to learning

I declare that:

- I have read this information and consent form and understand what is expected of the participants in the research.

- I have had a chance to ask questions to the researcher and all my questions have been adequately answered.
- I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary and participants will not be pressurised to take part.
- Participants may choose to leave the study at any time and will not be penalised or prejudiced in any way.
- Participants may be asked to leave the research process before it is completed, if the researcher feels it is in their best interests, or if they do not follow the research procedures, as agreed to.

Signed at (place) BOTSHABELO on (date) 15 / 05 /2025

Signature of School Principal/Relevant person

QELO SCHOOL OF SKILLS
15 - 05 - 2025
Principal
270 D Section Botshabelo

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YUNIBESITI YA BOKONE-BOPHIRIMA

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South Africa 2520
Tel: 018 299-1111/2222
Web: http://www.nwu.ac.za

Faculty of Education

Miss T Mphuthi

Tel: 0694303205
Email: tsoellang30@gmail.com

COMBER
Lesley.wood@nwu.ac.za
Carmen.Joubert@nwu.ac.za
Johnnie.Hay@nwu.ac.za

Date: 16 August 2024

PERMISSION LETTER: SCHOOL GOVERNING BODY/PRINCIPAL/OTHER RELEVANT PERSON

I herewith wish to request your consent to participate in this research, which involves group discussions and collages, which will formulate guidelines for African parents to support learners with psycho-emotional barriers. Before you give consent, please acquaint yourself with the information below.

The details of the research are as follows:

TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT:

Guidelines for improving African parents' involvement in psycho-emotional support for learners with emotional barriers to learning.

ETHICS APPLICATION NUMBER

NWU- 00331-23-A2

PROJECT SUPERVISOR: Dr C Joubert
CO-SUPERVISOR: Prof J Hay
ADDRESS: 1174 Hendrick Van Eck Boulevard, Vanderbijlpark, 1900
CONTACT NUMBER: 016 910 3096

MEMBER OF PROJECT TEAM MEd-Student: Tsoellang Mphuthi
ADDRESS: 1000 H2 section, Botshabelo, 9781
CONTACT NUMBER: 069 430 3205

FACULTY OF EDUCATION RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
Contact person: Ms Erna Greyling, E-mail: Erna.Greyling@nwu.ac.za, Tel. (018) 299 4656

This study has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education of the North-West University and will be conducted according to the ethical guidelines of this committee. Permission was also obtained from the provincial Department of Basic Education.

What is this research about?
The aims of this research are:

The aim of this study is to collaborate with parents and education support staff (SBST and DBST members) to develop guidelines for African parents to promote parental engagement in psycho-emotional assistance for learners experiencing emotional difficulties to learning.

Participants

- 3 SBST members
- 6 parents, 2 from each school. As there will be 3 schools included
- 1 DBST member

What is expected of the participants?

To collaboratively work and share ideas with all participants as we will bring positive change in improving guidelines for African parents in supporting learners with psycho-emotional barriers. Participants are also expected to participate in focus group interviews, visual data collection and reflective dairies.

There will be three workshops held for three days each for 4-5 hours as there will be breaks in between. After each workshop, two dairy entries will be needed and at the end of the workshop one collage will be needed from each participant.

Benefits to the participants

African parents will be equipped with guidelines needed to support learners with emotional barriers. The collaborative cycles of the project will help change participants' mind-sets by improving guidelines for African parents.

Risks involved for participants

Minimal risk. The environment will be friendly and harmless. The researcher will plan the research in a way that it will ensure that participant's schedules are considered.

The researcher will ensure that the co-researchers are not harmed by stating their own opinion or in any way. Respect will be encouraged amongst members.

Confidentiality and protection of identity

Participants will be given consent forms so they can understand the purpose of this study. Confidentiality and anonymity of data collection will apply within the Protection Of Personal Information Act (POPIA), 4 of 2023 and findings kept in the google-drive by the Project leader (main supervisor) with a secure password.

Participation is voluntary and participants may withdraw at any time, without giving any reason and it will be not held against them

Dissemination of findings

All findings will be made available to all co-researchers at school and will be used as part of the master's dissertation and might be used to publish articles. Sessions will be audio recorded for transcription purposes.

If you have any further questions or enquiries regarding your participation in this research, please contact the researchers for more information.

DECLARATION BY PRINCIPAL/OTHER RELEVANT PERSON:

By signing below, I ..... agree to give permission for the research to take place with the identified participants in the study entitled:

Guidelines for improving African parents' involvement in psycho-emotional support for learners with emotional barriers to learning

I declare that:

- I have read this information and consent form and understand what is expected of the participants in the research.

- I have had a chance to ask questions to the researcher and all my questions have been adequately answered.
- I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary and participants will not be pressurised to take part.
- Participants may choose to leave the study at any time and will not be penalised or prejudiced in any way.
- Participants may be asked to leave the research process before it is completed, if the researcher feels it is in their best interests, or if they do not follow the research procedures, as agreed to.

Signed at (place) Botshabelo (Katamelo on (date) 16 / 05 /2025

Signature of School Principal/Relevant person

KATAMELO PRIMARY SCHOOL
3284 SECTION U BOTSHABELO
H. Pini Date: 16/05/2025
Principal
Signature:

NWU®
NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY
NOORDWES-UNIVERSITEIT
YUNIBESITI YA BOKONE-BOPHIRIMA

Private Bag X6001, Potchefstroom
South Africa 2520
Tel: 018 299-1111/2222
Web: http://www.nwu.ac.za

Faculty of Education

Miss T Mphuthi

Tel: 0694303205
Email: tsoellang30@gmail.com

COMBER
Lesley.wood@nwu.ac.za
Carmen.Joubert@nwu.ac.za
Johnnie.Hay@nwu.ac.za

Date: 16 August 2024

PERMISSION LETTER: SCHOOL GOVERNING BODY/PRINCIPAL/OTHER RELEVANT PERSON

I herewith wish to request your consent to participate in this research, which involves group discussions and collages, which will formulate guidelines for African parents to support learners with psycho-emotional barriers. Before you give consent, please acquaint yourself with the information below.

The details of the research are as follows:

TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT:

Guidelines for improving African parents' involvement in psycho-emotional support for learners with emotional barriers to learning.

ETHICS APPLICATION NUMBER

NWU- 00331-23-A2

PROJECT SUPERVISOR: Dr C Joubert
CO-SUPERVISOR: Prof J Hay
ADDRESS: 1174 Hendrick Van Eck Boulevard, Vanderbijlpark, 1900
CONTACT NUMBER: 016 910 3096

MEMBER OF PROJECT TEAM MEd-Student: Tsoellang Mphuthi
ADDRESS: 1000 H2 section, Botshabelo, 9781
CONTACT NUMBER: 069 430 3205

FACULTY OF EDUCATION RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
Contact person: Ms Erna Greyling, E-mail: Erna.Greyling@nwu.ac.za, Tel. (018) 299 4656

This study has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education of the North-West University and will be conducted according to the ethical guidelines of this committee. Permission was also obtained from the provincial Department of Basic Education.

What is this research about?
The aims of this research are:

The aim of this study is to collaborate with parents and education support staff (SBST and DBST members) to develop guidelines for African parents to promote parental engagement in psycho-emotional assistance for learners experiencing emotional difficulties to learning.

Participants

- 3 SBST members
- 6 parents, 2 from each school. As there will be 3 schools included
- 1 DBST member

What is expected of the participants?

To collaboratively work and share ideas with all participants as we will bring positive change in improving guidelines for African parents in supporting learners with psycho-emotional barriers. Participants are also expected to participate in focus group interviews, visual data collection and reflective dairies.

There will be three workshops held for three days each for 4-5 hours as there will be breaks in between. After each workshop, two dairy entries will be needed and at the end of the workshop one collage will be needed from each participant.

Benefits to the participants

African parents will be equipped with guidelines needed to support learners with emotional barriers. The collaborative cycles of the project will help change participants' mind-sets by improving guidelines for African parents.

Risks involved for participants

Minimal risk. The environment will be friendly and harmless. The researcher will plan the research in a way that it will ensure that participant's schedules are considered.

The researcher will ensure that the co-researchers are not harmed by stating their own opinion or in any way. Respect will be encouraged amongst members.

Confidentiality and protection of identity

Participants will be given consent forms so they can understand the purpose of this study. Confidentiality and anonymity of data collection will apply within the Protection Of Personal Information Act (POPIA), 4 of 2023 and findings kept in the google-drive by the Project leader (main supervisor) with a secure password.

Participation is voluntary and participants may withdraw at any time, without giving any reason and it will be not held against them

Dissemination of findings

All findings will be made available to all co-researchers at school and will be used as part of the master's dissertation and might be used to publish articles. Sessions will be audio recorded for transcription purposes.

If you have any further questions or enquiries regarding your participation in this research, please contact the researchers for more information.

DECLARATION BY PRINCIPAL/OTHER RELEVANT PERSON:

By signing below, I Joseph Ramthimo agree to give permission for the research to take place with the identified participants in the study entitled:

Guidelines for improving African parents' involvement in psycho-emotional support for learners with emotional barriers to learning

I declare that:

- I have read this information and consent form and understand what is expected of the participants in the research.

- I have had a chance to ask questions to the researcher and all my questions have been adequately answered.
- I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary and participants will not be pressurised to take part.
- Participants may choose to leave the study at any time and will not be penalised or prejudiced in any way.
- Participants may be asked to leave the research process before it is completed, if the researcher feels it is in their best interests, or if they do not follow the research procedures, as agreed to.

Signed at (place) BATJHA PRIMARY on (date) 12/05/2025

Signature of School Principal/Relevant person

P.O. BOX 5869
BOTSHABELO
TEL: 051 535 3299
PRINCIPAL: J.R. RANTHIMO

BATJHA

DATE: 12/05/2025

SIGNATURE:

ANNEXURE E: INFORMED CONSENT FORM



Private Bag X6001, Potchefstroom
South Africa 2520

Tel: 018 299-1111/2222
Web: http://www.nwu.ac.za

COMBER
Lesley.wood@nwu.ac.za
Carmen.Joubert@nwu.ac.za
Johnnie.Hay@nwu.ac.za

Faculty of Education

Miss T Mphuthi

Tel: 0694303205
Email: tsoellang30@gmail.com

Date: 16 August 2024

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

I herewith wish to request your consent to participate in this research, which involves group discussions and collages, which will formulate guidelines for African parents to support learners with psycho-emotional barriers. Before you give consent, please acquaint yourself with the information below.

The details of the research are as follows:

TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT:

Guidelines for improving African parents' involvement in psycho-emotional support for learners with emotional barriers to learning

ETHICS APPLICATION NUMBER

NWU- 00331-23-A2

PROJECT SUPERVISOR: Dr C Joubert
CO-SUPERVISOR: Prof J Hay
ADDRESS: 1174 Hendrick Van Eck Boulevard, Vanderbijlpark, 1900
CONTACT NUMBER: 016 910 3096

MEMBER OF PROJECT TEAM MEd-Student: Tsoellang Mphuthi
ADDRESS: 1000 H2 section, Botshabelo, 9781
CONTACT NUMBER: 069 430 3205

FACULTY OF EDUCATION RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
Contact person: Ms Erna Greyling, E-mail: Erna.Greyling@nwu.ac.za, Tel. (018) 299 4656

This study has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education of the North-West University and will be conducted according to the ethical guidelines of this committee. Permission was also asked from the provincial Department of Basic Education as well as the school principal.

What is this research about?

The aim of this research is:

The aim of this study is to collaborate with parents and education support staff (SBST and DBST members) to develop guidelines for African parents to promote parental engagement in psycho-emotional assistance for learners experiencing emotional difficulties to learning.

Participants

- 3 SBST members
- 6 parents, 2 from each school. As there will be 3 schools included
- 1 DBST member

What is expected of the participants?

To collaboratively work and share ideas with all participants as we will bring positive change in improving guidelines for African parents in supporting learners with psycho-emotional barriers. Participants are also expected to participate in group discussion and collages.

There will be three workshops held for three days, each for 4-5 hours, as there will be breaks in between. After the end of the workshop one collage will be made.

Benefits to the participants

African parents will be equipped with psycho-emotional support for learners with psycho-emotional barriers to learning. The collaborative cycles of the project will help change participants' mind-sets by improving guidelines for African parents.

Risks involved for participants

Minimal risk. The environment will be friendly and harmless. The researcher will plan the research in a way that it will ensure that participant's schedules are considered.

The researcher will ensure that the co-researchers are not harmed by stating their own opinion, or in any way. Respect will be encouraged amongst members.

Confidentiality and protection of identity

Participants will be given consent forms so they can understand the purpose of this study. Confidentiality and anonymity of data generated will apply within the Protection Of Personal Information Act (POPIA), 4 of 2023 and findings kept in the Google-drive by the Project leader (main supervisor) with a secure password.

Participation is voluntary and participants may withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, and it will be not held against them.

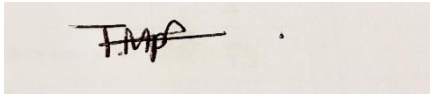
Dissemination of findings

All findings will be made available to all co-researchers at school and will be used as part of the master's dissertation and might be used to publish articles. Sessions will be audio recorded for transcription purposes.

If you have any further questions or enquiries regarding your participation in this research, please contact the researchers for more information.

Yours sincerely

(T Mphuthi)



DECLARATION BY PARTICIPANT:

By signing below, I ……..……. agree to take part in a research study entitled:

[Guidelines for improving African parents' involvement in psycho-emotional support for learners with psycho-emotional barriers to learning**]**

I declare that:

- I have read this information and consent form and understand what is expected of me in the research.
- I have had a chance to ask questions to the researcher and all my questions have been adequately answered.
- I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary and I have not been pressurised to take part.
- I may choose to leave the study at any time and will not be penalised or prejudiced in any way.
- I may be asked to leave the research process before it has finished, if the researcher feels it is in my best interests, or if I do not follow the research procedures, as agreed to.

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_____ _____

Signature of participant **Researcher**

ANNEXURE F: DECLARATION OF LANGUAGE EDITOR

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20/10/2025

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled

GUIDELINES FOR IMPROVING AFRICAN PARENTS' INVOLVEMENT IN PSYCHO-EMOTIONAL SUPPORT FOR LEARNERS WITH EMOTIONAL BARRIERS TO LEARNING

Submitted by

T MPHUTHI

orcid.org/0000-0001-7943-3367

For the degree of **MASTER OF EDUCATION (SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION)**

At **NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY**

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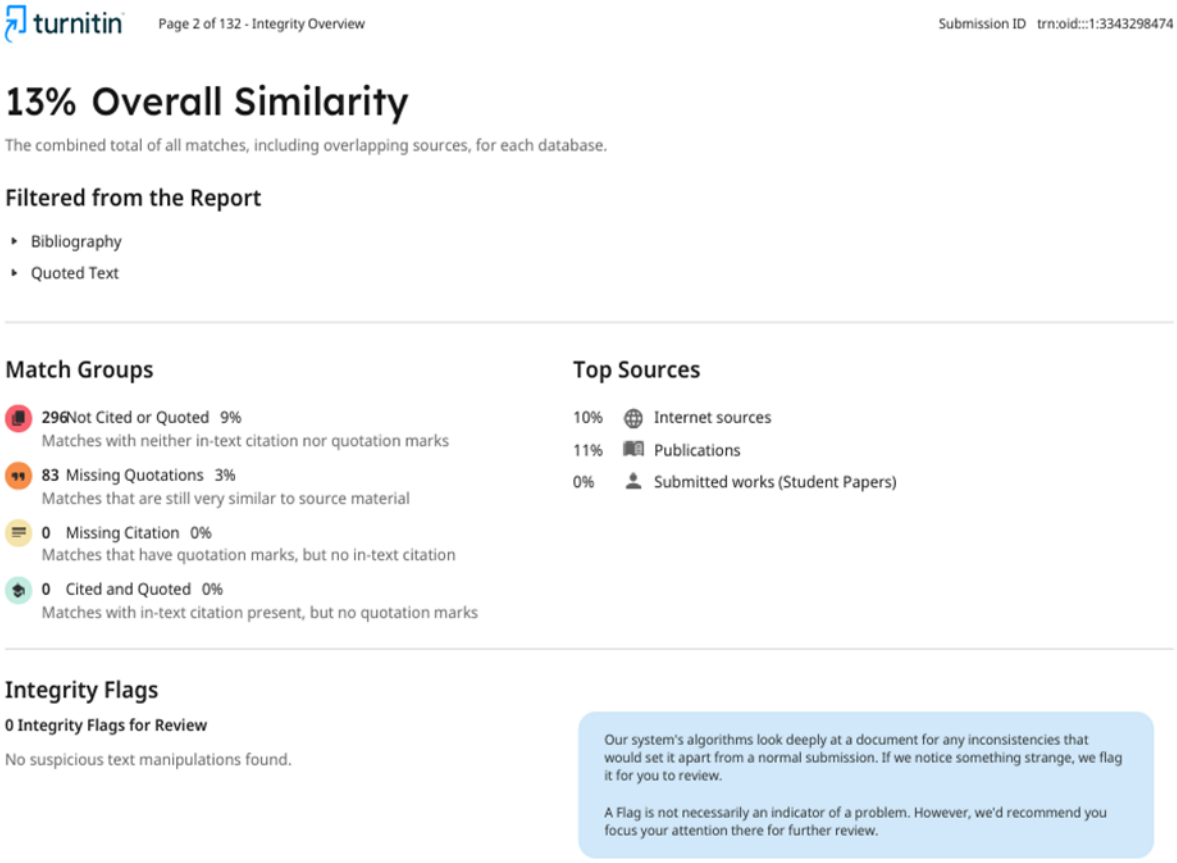
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ANNEXURE G: TURN IT IN REPORT



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