THE INFLUENCE OF LEARNERS' SOCIOECONOMIC HABITAT ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE: A CASE OF SELECTED PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN VHEMBE EAST DISTRICT, LIMPOPO PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA

by

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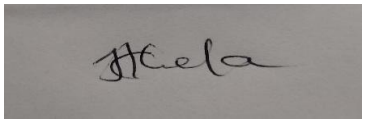
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DECLARATION

I, **TSHISIKHAWE TSHIFARO PLANTINA,** declare that this thesis entitled "**THE INFLUENCE OF LEARNERS' SOCIOECONOMIC HABITAT ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE: A CASE OF SELECTED PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN VHEMBE EAST DISTRICT, LIMPOPO PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA"** is my own work and all sources that I have used have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.



Signature: **Date:** 21/04/2026

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Mauluma Zion City Apostolic Church for praying for its members to prosper in life and in whatever endeavours they commit themselves to do for the betterment of the church, community and country at large.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the following people:

- My handsome husband, Dr Mbulaheni Paul Tshisikhawe (Nefhere), for his physical, emotional and prayerful support throughout my studies. His love and support have proven that behind every successful woman, there is a positive, sacrificing and loving husband.
- My lovely God-given children, Tshedza and Rotondwa, for their support and encouragement on this journey.
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ACRONYMS

SES:	Socioeconomic status
APA:	American Psychological Association
ANC:	African National Congress
EST:	Ecological System Theory
FRPL:	Free and Reduced Price Lunch
NLSCY:	National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth
LGBTIQ:	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex or Queer
EUNIS:	European Nature Information System
DH:	Departmental Head
PA:	Principal for school A
PB:	Principal for school B
DHA:	Departmental Head school A
DHB:	Departmental Head school B
RTA:	Register teacher school A
RTA:	Register teacher school B
STA:	Subject teacher school A
STB:	Subject teacher school B
LA1 to LA14:	Learners from school A number LA1 learner to learner number LA14
LB1 to LB14:	Learners from school B number LB1 learner to learner number LB14
PA1 to PA 5:	Parents from school A number PA1 parent to parent number PA5
PB1 to PB5:	Parents from school B number PB1 parent to parent number PB5

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ABSTRACT

The socioeconomic habitat of learners play a pivotal role in shaping their academic performance, especially in the early educational stages. The study's aim was to explore the influence of learners' socioeconomic habitat on academic performance The research focused on key socioeconomic factors, such as household income, parental education levels, employment status, access to educational resources, and living conditions. The ecological systems theory underpinned the study, employing the interpretivist paradigm with an ethnographic research design. Purposive sampling was used to select participants from two primary schools, and the sample comprised 58 participants (2 principals, 2 departmental heads (DHs), 2 register teachers, 2 subject teachers, 40 learners, and 10 parents). Data was collected through face to face and focus group interviews and observations, and the collected data was analysed thematically, through coding. The main findings revealed that learners from low SES backgrounds faced multiple, interrelated challenges that negatively affect their academic engagement and performance. Learners from low SES lacked adequate parental academic and learning material support due to low educational and financial constraints, limiting access to essential learning resources. The study further revealed that educated parents provided academic support and recognised that education is a shared responsibility involving parents, learners, and teachers, and that collaboration among these three stakeholders is essential for effective learning. The findings also revealed a lack of essential facilities, such as adequate classrooms, libraries, halls, laboratories, and playgrounds, limiting both academic and extra-curricular development at the study sites. However, findings revealed that Saturday classes, after-school care or drop-centres could help learners from low SES to improve academically. The study recommends that events like parents' day, fun days, casual days, sports days and career days should be introduced for learners to enjoy being at school. During these events, learners from low SES can socialise and play together with others to build their self-esteem and learn more effectively. Based on the main findings, the study further recommends that the government and school authorities should develop policies that foster parental involvement in their children's education, and provide adequate infrastructure, such as classrooms, libraries, playgrounds, and technological

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equipment for schools, so that learners from low-income backgrounds can also aca demically benefit from the rich school environment.

Keywords: Habitat, Low income, Parental involvement, Policymakers, Socioeconomic,

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION ..... *i*
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT ..... *ii*
DEDICATION ..... *iii*
ACRONYMS ..... *iv*
ABSTRACT ..... *v*
APPENDICES ..... *xiii*
LIST OF TABLES ..... *xiv*
LIST OF FIGURES ..... *xv*
CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY 1
1.1 INTRODUCTION 1
1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM 4
1.3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY 5
1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS 5
1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY 6
1.6 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK 6
1.7 PRELIMINARY LITERATURE REVIEW 8
1.8 DEFINITIONS OF THE KEYWORDS 10
1.8.1 Academic achievement 10
1.8.2 Educational outcomes 11
1.8.3 Family Environment 11
1.8.4 Habitat 11
1.8.5 Socioeconomic Status 12
1.9 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY 12
1.9.1 Research Paradigm 12
1.9.2 Research design 13
1.9.3 Research Approach 14
1.9.4 Research methodology 14
1.9.5 POPULATION AND SAMPLING PROCEDURES 15
1.9.5.1 Population *15*

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1.9.5.2 Sampling procedure *15*
1.9.5.3 Sample Size *16*
1.10 DATA COLLECTION STRATEGIES 16
1.11 DATA ANALYSIS 17
1.12 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH 18
1.12.1 Credibility 18
1.12.2 Dependability 19
1.12.3 Confirmability 19
1.12.4 Transferability 19
1.13 DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY 20
1.14 1ETHIAL CONSIDERATIONS 20
1.15 OUTLINE OF THE STUDY 21
1.16 CHAPTER SUMMARY 21
CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW 23
2.1 INTRODUCTION 23
2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK 23
2.2.1 The microsystem 25
2.2.2 The mesosystem 26
2.2.3 The exosystem 26
2.2.4 The macrosystem 27
2.2.5 The chronosystem 28
2.3 CHALLENGES FACED BY PRIMARY SCHOOL LEARNERS FROM LOW SOCIOECONOMIC BACKGROUNDS 29
2.3.1 Type of school attended 29
2.3.2 Access of learners from low SES to reading materials 30
2.3.3 Learners from low SES and school absenteeism 30
2.3.4 Families' structure and parents' participation from low SES 31
2.3.5 Inexperienced teachers 32
2.3.6 Social and emotional challenges 32
2.3.7 Limited prior literacy experiences 34
2.3.8 Family conflict and divorce 35

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2.3.9 Infrastructure challenges in primary schools 36
2.4 LEARNERS' FAMILY SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS'S INFLUENCE ON THEIR ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE 36
2.4.1 Influence of family socioeconomic status and academic achievement 36
2.4.2 Parental Involvement in Learners' Education 37
2.4.3 Socioeconomic status and academic performance of learners 40
2.4.4 Family background environment and academic achievement 40
2.4.5 Parental income on academic achievement 42
2.4.6 Parental education and academic performance of learners 43
2.5 INFLUENCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS ON LEARNERS' ACADEMIC SUCCESS 44
2.5.1 School infrastructure and learner performance 45
2.5.2 School and family relationships on learners' performance 46
2.5.3 Community involvement 47
2.5.4 School environment and support 47
2.5.5 Learning environment 49
2.5.6 Physical learning environment 50
2.6 INTERVENTIONS TO MITIGATE CHALLENGES LEARNERS FROM LOW SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS FACE IN PRIMARY SCHOOL 51
2.6.1 Enhanced learning environments 51
2.6.2 The significance of parental engagement 52
2.6.3 Targeted academic interventions 53
2.6.4 Attitude change by the teachers 53
2.6.5 Provision of adequate infrastructure 53
2.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY 54
CHAPTER THREE RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY 55
3.1 INTRODUCTION 55
3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM 55
3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN 57
3.4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY 58
3.4.1 Population 60

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3.4.2 Sampling method and procedure 61
3.4.3 Study sample 61
3.4.4 Data collection strategies 62
3.4.5 Data analysis 63
3.5 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH 66
3.5.1 Credibility 66
3.5.2 Dependability 67
3.5.3 Confirmability 67
3.5.4 Transferability 68
3.6 DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY 68
3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS 68
3.7.1 Permission to conduct the research 69
3.7.2 Informed consent 69
3.7.3 Confidentiality 70
3.7.4 Voluntary participation 70
3.7.5 Respect for participants 70
3.7.6 Transparency 71
3.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY 71

CHAPTER FOUR DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS 72

4.1 INTRODUCTION 72
4.2 DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURE 72
4.3 QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF CONTEXTUAL QUESTIONS 74
4.4 EMERGING THEMES 74
4.4.1 Theme 1: Challenges that affect the academic performance of learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds 76
4.4.1.1 Academic challenges encountered by learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds 76
4.4.1.2 Scioeconomic factors that influence learners' academic expectations ... 80
4.4.1.3 Performance of learners from low SES learners compared to other learners 85

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4.4.1.4 Status of learners from low SES and the school culture 86
4.4.2 The influence of learners' socioeconomic status on their academic performance 89
4.4.2.1 Parents' education contribution towards learners' performance 89
4.4.2.2 Comparative parental support to schooling for learners from low SES and high SES 91
4.4.2.3 Comfortability of learners from low SES in the school environment 93
4.4.2.4 Role of the principal in creating a conducive school environment for learners from low SES 94
4.4.3 Environmental and community support and infrastructure that influence learners' academic success 96
4.4.3.1 Availability of infrastructure 96
4.4.3.2 Community support to learners from low SES 99
4.4.3.3 Attracting learners from low SES to come to school 102
4.4.4 Intervention strategies to mitigate the challenges of low SES students in primary school 103
4.4.4.1 Supportive resources needed to address the academic challenges of learners from low SES 104
4.4.4.2 Programmes and initiatives to address challenges faced by learners from low SES 107
4.4.4.3 Strategies for learners from low SES to feel welcomed at school and study freely 109
4.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY 112

CHAPTER FIVE SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS 114

5.1 INTRODUCTION 114
5.2 THEME 1: CHALLENGES THAT AFFECT THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF LEARNERS FROM LOW SOCIOECONOMIC BACKGROUNDS 114
5.2.1 Academic challenges encountered by learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds 114
5.2.2 Socioeconomic factors that influence learners' academic expectations 115

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5.2.3 Performance of learners from low SES compared to other learners 116
5.3 THEME 2: THE INFLUENCE OF LEARNERS' SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS ON THEIR ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE 116
5.3.1 Parents' education contribution towards learners' performance 117
5.4 THEME 3: ENVIRONMENTAL AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND INFRASTRUCTURE THAT INFLUENCE LEARNERS' ACADEMIC SUCCESS 119
5.4.1 Availability of Infrastructure 119
5.4.2 Community support to learners from low SES 119
5.4.3 Attracting learners from low SES to come to school 120
5.5 THEME 4: INTERVENTION STRATEGIES TO MITIGATE THE CHALLENGES OF LOW SES STUDENTS IN PRIMARY SCHOOL 120
5.5.1 Supportive resources needed to address the academic challenges of learners from low SES 120
5.5.2 Programmes and initiatives to address challenges faced by learners from low SES 121
5.5.3 Strategies for learners from low SES to feel welcome at school and study freely 121
5.6 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE STUDY 122
5.7 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES 122
5.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY 122
5.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY AND CONCLUDING REMARKS 123
REFERENCES 125
APPENDICES 149

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: UNIVERSITY OF VENDA ETHICAL CERTIFICATE..... 149
Appendix B: LIMPOPO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION ETHICAL CERTIFICATE . 151
APPENDIX C: LIMPOPO PROVINCIAL RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE 153
Appendix D: REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT SCHOOLS..... 155
APPENDIX E: RESPONSE FROM SCHOOL A..... 157
APPENDIX F: RESPONSE FROM SCHOOL B 158
APPENDIX G: INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR PRINCIPALS, TEACHERS AND PARENTS..... 159
APPENDIX H: CONSENT FORM FOR LEARNERS..... 162
APPENDIX I: INTERVIEWS SCHEDULES 165
Appendix J: LEARNER'S OBSERVATION SHEET..... 171
APPENDIX K: TURN IT REPORT..... 173
APPENDIX L: EDITOR'S REPORT..... 174

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LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1 Demographic data of working study participants 73
Table 4.2 Themes and sub-themes of the study 75
Table 4.3 Infrastructure availability at the two schools 99

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LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1 Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System (Guy-Evans, 2025) 24

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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Primary school education is the cornerstone of a child's academic journey, as it lays the foundation for future learning and development. While schools play an important role in shaping learners' educational experiences, the family environment also profoundly influences those critical formative years (Olumuji, 2025). Families' unique ideas, values, and resources significantly influence children's attitudes towards learning, academic achievement, and overall educational outcomes (Marah, Fute & Kangwa, 2025). The differences in academic experiences and outcomes between learners from wealthy and less economically advantaged backgrounds have been pronounced and growing over recent decades. Learners whose parents have completed advanced levels of education and have greater financial resources demonstrate better performance in school and enjoy the various lifetime benefits of educational success than learners whose parents have less education and fewer financial resources (Ma, Jennifer; Pender, Matea, Welch & Meredith, 2016).

Socioeconomic status (SES) has long been recognised as a key factor in educational opportunities and outcomes. The American Psychological Association (APA) defined socioeconomic status as "the social standing or class of an individual or group" (APA, 2018). SES has been commonly used as a latent construct for measuring family background (Bofah & Hannula, 2017). Differences in SES are clear across various domains, including resource access, parental involvement in children's education, and academic achievement. By examining families from different socioeconomic backgrounds, this study aimed to explore the influence of learners' socioeconomic habitat on academic performance.

In Britain, the influence of family SES on education is already evident in primary school; it persists and increases throughout the school years, with children from impoverished families obtaining lower grades and fewer educational qualifications than children from

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more privileged backgrounds (Stumm, Sophie & Cave; Sophie & Wakeling, 2022). Reducing the negative effects of family background on children's education is a priority for educators, policymakers, and researchers, but the success of their efforts is poorly evidenced (Zhang, Sulong & Hassan, 2025). It has been argued that education policies must prioritise equity in learning outcomes over equality in learning opportunities to disrupt the perpetuation of social and economic inequality across generations. It is speculated that the influence of family SES on children's education will only noticeably weaken if primary education settings were to be better equipped to meet and remediate children's differential home environments (Von Stumm, Cave & Wakeling, 2022).

According to Li and Qiu (2018), family background in Chinese families influences the academic performance of the children. They added that parents compete for high-quality educational opportunities that lead to better academic performance. The way parents behaved affected children's behaviour and, in turn, academic performance. The academic performance of most students from urban areas is heavily affected by their socioeconomic status. Education in China is regarded as the basic mechanism for enhancing the population quality of a nation, and education during childhood is the foundation for the formation of the human labour force quality. Children who maintain conflict with their parents have less confidence in themselves, and they struggle to trust others, which leads to social and emotional problems. There is compulsory education and the expansion of schools across China. The average level of education among Chinese citizens has improved significantly. The goal of compulsory education is to ensure the quality at the starting point of one's education, and equal opportunity should, in theory, guarantee that the family background of the children's school does not affect the outcome. This, however, may not happen, as what happens in the family has been found to affect learning outcomes in most societies (Duncan, 2025).

In Nigeria, parents are mostly responsible for funding their children's formal education, just like in many other countries. Typically, there is a clear relationship between the family's financial status and the quality of education provided to children. For instance, even though the same teacher teaches the same course content to the same class of learners year after year, there is constantly a difference in learners' academic

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performance (Vadival, Alam, Nikpoo & Ajanil, 2023). Silva, Vautero and Usssence (2021) posit that family plays an important role in academic success. Mozambique is one of the world's poorest countries. Their educational access is very low. Their primary education is free, but many drop out of primary school before they go to secondary school. Family influence through parents' occupation can have an influence on the academic performance of a learner. Family warmth and support help learners at home with their homework. Family background, such as socioeconomic status, can affect academic performance through parental involvement, expectations and support. Parents are less involved in their learners' academic performance. They have less expectation towards their children's educational performances. The quality of education in Mozambique is poor, leading to low cognitive development levels in learners. It is not easy for parents to help with material resources, as they cannot afford them.

One of the most unequal societies in the world is South Africa (Mkuzo & Govender, 2025). In 1994, democratic elections were held for the first time in the country's history, and a black majority administration led by the African National Congress (ANC) took office with a mandate to address the inherited injustices and disparities. Ball (2016) proposed a conceptual framework for education policy analysis that recognises the three dimensions (political, ideological, and economic) as interrelated but with the relative autonomy of each dimension, drawing on Althusser's analysis of a social system (Amoo, Adeyinka & Aderibigbe, 2018). It is well known that family SES causes differences in children's academic performance; therefore, children from low SES families typically perform worse academically than their more affluent peers (Vaknin-Nusbaum, 2025). Parental participation behaviour, an important component of family practices, is linked to this SES status, as well as the children's academic performance (Zhang, Jiang, Ming, Ren, Wang & Huang, 2020). Given this background from research on how SES influences learners' academic outcomes, this study was conducted to explore the influence of learners' socioeconomic habitat on academic performance.

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1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Learners from low SES families in underprivileged areas, particularly in South Africa, face significant obstacles in accessing quality education. These learners often attend poorly resourced government schools while their wealthier counterparts attend better-equipped institutions (Nekhubvi, Sinthumule, Zitha, Mukhodobwane & Mulaudzi, 2025). This disparity has long-term consequences, as highlighted by Lareau (2011), who argues that family background plays a critical role in shaping children's educational experiences. Low SES parents often lack the necessary resources and knowledge to effectively support their children's schooling. This creates a cycle where lower parental engagement and fewer learning opportunities result in poorer academic outcomes for children from disadvantaged families. Wills (1989) calls this ‘learning to labour,’ as low-class children go to school, fail and join their parents in low-income jobs.

According to Tshisikhawe, Runhare and Litshani (2024), the South African government has tried to address the disparities of the past by introducing the child grant, the National School Nutrition Programme, categorising schools under quintiles, and providing adequate learner-teacher support materials. However, the socioeconomic habitat of the learners plays a vital role in their poor academic performance.

Research by Spaull and Jansen (2019) revealed the persistent inequalities in South Africa’s education system, where rural and township schools are under-resourced and lack qualified teachers and essential infrastructure. Learners’ low socioeconomic factors exacerbate these disparities in educational access, as parents in low SES communities are less able to supplement their children's learning. Poon (2020) expands on this, noting that low-SES parents frequently feel less competent in supporting their children’s education, which leads to reduced expectations of academic success. Inadequate school resources and low parental involvement hinder learners from low SES backgrounds from achieving excellence, perpetuating a cycle of poverty. It is against this backdrop that this researcher explored the influence of learners’ socioeconomic habitat on academic performance in selected schools in Vhembe East District, Limpopo Province, South Africa.

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1.3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The study's aim was to explore the influence of learners' socioeconomic habitat on academic performance. The following objectives supported the aim:

- To identify and explain the challenges faced in their academic performance by primary school learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds.
- To examine the influence of learners' family socioeconomic status on their academic performance in primary schools, focusing on parental education, school environment and learning environment.
- To assess the influence of environmental factors, including community support and infrastructure, on learners' academic success.
- To propose targeted interventions to mitigate the challenges that learners from low SES backgrounds face in primary school.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main research question was: How does the learners' socioeconomic habitat influence academic performance? The following subsidiary research questions supported the main research question:

- What challenges do primary school learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds face in their academic performance?
- What is the influence of learners' family socioeconomic status on their academic performance in primary schools, focusing on parental education, school environment and learning environment?
- How do environmental factors - community support and infrastructure - influence learners' academic success?
- What intervention strategies can mitigate the challenges of low-SES students in primary school?

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1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The essence of this study was to explore the influence of learners' socioeconomic status conditions on academic outcomes in selected primary schools within Vhembe District, Limpopo Province, South Africa. It was hoped that the study would provide principals of schools (managers of teaching and learning processes) with insights into accommodating learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds. The educators stand to benefit from the treatise, as they will obtain an understanding of their responsibilities in the teaching and learning environment. They will understand learners from diverse backgrounds and know how to support and teach them so that they succeed in their academic endeavours. Learners, as the primary beneficiaries in teaching and learning, will benefit because the education provided will accommodate their backgrounds. Parents will also benefit because they will be advised on how to help their children academically, even those of low socioeconomic backgrounds. The study will benefit other researchers, as its outcomes create avenues for further research and stimulate interest and awareness in the area, which may be used as a basis for workshops, seminars, and conferences, as well as for learner orientation.

1.6 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was underpinned by the ecological system theory. The Ecological Systems Theory (EST), also known as “human ecology,” was a framework developed in 1979 by Urie Bronfenbrenner (Harkonen, 2007). Harkonen notes that this theory was influenced by Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory and Lewin’s behaviourism theory. Bronfenbrenner’s theory focused on the influence of social interaction on child development; hence, everything in the surrounding environment and social interactions influences a person's development. The Ecological System Theory advances that children are shaped by their interactions with others and their context. The theory has four complex layers, systems, which are commonly used in studying a phenomenon. At first, the ecological theory was most used in psychological research. However, several studies have used it in fields such as law, business, management, teaching and

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learning, and education, as it explains the underlying socioeconomic and sociocultural factors that influence human performance (Harkonen, 2007).

There are many possible ways to use the model from the perspective of teachers and parents. Teachers can use the model to create personalised student learning experiences for teaching purposes. The theory supports teachers and administrators in developing school environments suitable for students' needs, characteristics, culture, and family backgrounds (Taylor & Gebre, 2016). The model focuses on the context (Schunk, 2016); hence, teachers and school administration can use the model to increase students' academic achievement and educational attainment by involving parents and observing other contextual factors (for example, students' peers, extra-curricular activities, and neighbours) that can help or inhibit their learning.

The Ecological System Theory can support parents in educating and guiding their children. It can prompt parents to assist their children in choosing their friends and finding good neighbourhoods and schools. Additionally, parents can build close connections with teachers, so they know their children's skills and abilities. By involving themselves in schools, parents can positively influence their children's educational contexts (Bunijevac, 2017). According to Watson (2017), there are five layers instead of four, with the chronosystem being the fifth one. The levels range from smaller proximal settings, wherein individuals interact directly, to larger distance settings, which indirectly influence development. Masakona (2022) proposes that those 'systems' influence learners and are regarded as "fluid" by diverse professions and community members. The Ecological System Theory is divided into five levels: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronsystem, as discussed in full and aligned with the study in Chapter Three.

The interaction among factors in the maturing biology of children, their community environment or immediate family, and the societal landscape, fuels and steers development (Paquette & Ryan, 2001). The changes in one layer affect other layers, exerting a specific effect. It is, therefore, a matter of influence that is effective in both ways

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a person influences the environment, just as the environment influences a person (Härkönen, 2007). The focus of the study was on the influence of learners' socioeconomic habit on academic performance. The habitat of learners can be related to the different ecological systems layers in Bronfenbrenner's theory, as represented by society at large, and the immediate social system, namely the family, the school and peers of the learners.

The Ecological Systems Theory underpins the study by offering a comprehensive framework for understanding how various environmental systems influence a learner's educational experience. Scholars, such as Rosa and Tudge (2013), explicate how this theory highlights the interaction between children and their immediate surroundings (microsystem), as well as broader societal influences (macrosystem), including economic and cultural contexts. The chronosystem specifically addresses how changes over time, such as shifts in family dynamics or financial instability, affect a child's development (Watson, 2017). Those temporal changes can lead to significant academic challenges, especially for learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds, who are more likely to experience instability in both their home and broader social environments. Diemer, Mistry and Wadsworth (2022) reinforce the relevance of the chronosystem in examining how socioeconomic changes over time directly influence educational access and outcomes, thus guiding the study in exploring how those multiple layers of influence contribute to educational disparities among learners from different socioeconomic backgrounds.

1.7 PRELIMINARY LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Dukhi, Singh and Maharaj (2020), a literature review involves the systematic identification, critical analysis, and synthesis of existing research in order to establish current knowledge and identify research gaps. This preliminary review focuses on how SES influences the academic performance of primary school learners, the challenges faced by learners from low-SES backgrounds, and interventions that may mitigate these challenges.

Research consistently indicates that family socioeconomic status plays a significant role in learners' academic achievement, particularly during the foundation phase of schooling (Farooq & Asim, 2020). Socioeconomic status, defined as a composite measure of a

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household's position within a social hierarchy, affects access to educational resources, parental involvement, and learning opportunities (Munir et al., 2023). Learners from low-SES households often face limited access to learning materials, inadequate parental support, and under-resourced schools, all of which negatively influence academic performance. Despite these challenges, some learners succeed academically when supported by engaged parents and a conducive educational environment, highlighting the importance of systemic educational improvements, government funding, teacher development, and inclusive teaching practices.

Parental education and involvement have been identified as critical determinants of learners' academic success. Active parental engagement, which begins at home through the provision of a safe, supportive, and stimulating environment, positively influences children's socioemotional and cognitive development (Bunijevac, 2017; Farooq & Asim, 2020). Bronfenbrenner's (1987) ecological perspective emphasises the reciprocal relationship between families and schools in shaping children's development. Studies further demonstrate that parental involvement enhances academic achievement, attendance, self-esteem, and long-term school engagement (Chaudhary & Garg, 2023). Educated parents are better equipped to provide educational resources and social capital that support learning (Morris et al., 2016; Tamayo et al., 2022). In contrast, children from low-SES homes often experience limited academic and social support, leading to poorer educational outcomes (Kim et al., 2023).

The school and learning environment also significantly influence academic performance in low-SES contexts. Schools in disadvantaged communities frequently experience inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms, and limited access to teaching and learning resources (Wium, 2010; Cobbold, 2017). Such conditions reduce opportunities for individualised instruction and effective classroom management, thereby hindering learning (Summersett-Ringgold et al., 2015; Dagada, 2022). Additionally, ineffective teaching strategies, insufficient teacher training, and challenges related to language transition from home to school environments further exacerbate learning difficulties for low-SES learners (Munns et al., 2013; Vadivel et al., 2023; Wium & Louw, 2011).

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Learners from low-SES backgrounds also face significant social, emotional, and literacy-related challenges. Economic hardship is often associated with stress, anxiety, health problems, and unstable family conditions, all of which negatively affect concentration, attendance, and academic performance (Mistry & Elenbaas, 2021; Maebana et al., 2022; Ndlela, 2021). Limited exposure to early literacy experiences places these learners at a substantial disadvantage compared to their higher-SES peers (Blanchard, 2023; Romeo et al., 2022).

To address these challenges, the literature highlights the importance of targeted interventions. Enhanced learning environments, access to educational resources, teacher training, and professional development are essential for improving instructional quality and learner outcomes (Tan et al., 2014; Liu et al., 2022). Parental engagement initiatives and community-based programmes further support learners by strengthening home-school partnerships (Bonci, 2008; Martin et al., 2014; Şengönül, 2022). In addition, targeted academic interventions, such as small-group instruction and collaborative learning strategies, have been shown to significantly improve literacy and numeracy outcomes among at-risk learners (Dietrichson et al., 2020; Ghavifekr, 2020). The literature review was detailed in Chapter Two.

1.8 DEFINITIONS OF THE KEYWORDS

Underneath are definitions of key terms used in this study, showing how they were used and what they meant for the study.

1.8.1 Academic achievement

Academic achievement refers to the extent to which students, teachers, or institutions have attained their educational goals, often measured through examinations or other forms of assessments (Naskath et al., 2023). There is, however, no consensus on the best evaluation methods or the most crucial aspects influencing achievement, as factors such as learners' environment, test anxiety, motivation, and emotions play significant roles (Mosche, 2019; Ward, Stoker & Murray-Ward, 2019). This study evaluated academic performance based on these definitions, exploring how various factors,

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including socioeconomic status and family environment, influence learners' educational outcomes.

1.8.2 Educational outcomes

Educational outcomes encompass the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that individuals acquire through educational experiences, contributing to individual and societal prosperity (Howard et al., 2019). According to Naskath et al. (2023), these outcomes represent the observable results of the educational process. Glewwe et al. (2021) maintain that educational outcomes are dynamic and require continuous evaluation and modification to remain relevant. This study explored how different variables, particularly socioeconomic status and family environment, influence educational outcomes among learners in primary school.

1.8.3 Family Environment

The family environment includes the social and physical surroundings in which a child grows, encompassing factors such as family composition, interaction styles, and parents' behaviour (Lee, 2023). It serves as a unique interpersonal setting where moral values, habits, and coping mechanisms are developed, significantly shaping a child's personality and character (Naskath et al., 2023). In this study, this environment is crucial for understanding how familial factors affect learners' academic performance and educational outcomes.

1.8.4 Habitat

Habitat refers to the location where an organism lives and the resources it utilises, traditionally defined as the physical features and species present in an area (Klappenbach, 2014). In this study, "habitat" specifically refers to the home environment of children, which plays a vital role in their development and educational experiences. Understanding the relationship between children's habitats and their academic performance helps identify potential disparities based on socioeconomic status.

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1.8.5 Socioeconomic Status

Socioeconomic status (SES) is defined as the position of an individual or group on the social scale, influenced by factors such as income, education level, occupation, and access to resources (APA Dictionary of Psychology, 2007). Wani (2019) explains that SES significantly influences various life aspects, including nutrition, lifestyle, and education. Avvisati (2020) elaborates that SES reflects an individual's or family's social standing in relation to their access to or control over wealth, power, and status. In this study, SES serves as a critical variable in examining how social and economic factors affect learners' academic performance and educational outcomes, particularly among those from low-income families.

1.9 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This section describes the research approach and design used in this investigation, and its various aspects, including research paradigm, design, methodology, sampling, population, sample, data collecting methods, data analysis and ethical issues covered below.

1.9.1 Research Paradigm

The concept of a paradigm, derived from the Greek word meaning “pattern,” refers to a framework of beliefs that shapes how researchers view the world and conduct research (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Paradigms influence how research problems are understood, investigated, and interpreted (Hughes, 2010; Fraser & Robinson, 2004). They represent underlying beliefs and values about knowledge, truth, and reality, guiding researchers’ actions and decisions throughout the research process, including data collection and analysis (Guba, 1990; Brooke, 2013; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Researchers’ understandings of knowledge and truth are shaped by their experiences and worldviews, which in turn influence how they perceive themselves, others, and the world (Schwandt, 2001; Chilisa & Kawulich, 2012; Mukherji & Albon, 2015).

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This study adopted an interpretivist paradigm, grounded in the assumption that truth and knowledge are subjective and shaped by cultural and life experiences (Ryan, 2018). From an interpretive perspective, meaning is constructed through social interaction, language, and shared understanding (Berryman, 2019). Interpretive research focuses on understanding the how and why of phenomena and is closely aligned with idealism, drawing on approaches such as social constructivism, phenomenology, and hermeneutics, which reject objectivist views of meaning as independent of human experience (Collins, 2010).

Within this paradigm, researchers are seen as social participants who seek to understand differences in people's experiences and contexts (Saunders et al., 2012). Interpretive researchers acknowledge their subjectivity, believing that meaning can be understood and shared through human language and qualitative inquiry (Carey, 2012). Although often used interchangeably with qualitative research, interpretive research is a distinct paradigm based on the belief that social reality is constructed through human experience and sociocultural contexts, making it particularly suitable for studying human behaviour (Rehman & Alaharti, 2016). Rather than testing hypotheses, interpretive researchers aim to understand social truth by integrating participants' subjective experiences, beliefs, and cultural backgrounds (Rehman & Alaharti, 2016).

The data collected was interpreted based on what was said, and then the findings werepresented. Personal visits to the selected primary schools for data collection helped the researcher interpret the experiences, thoughts, opinions and actions of the participants in their own social settings and cultural contexts.

1.9.2 Research design

In this study, an ethnographic research design was used. Ethnography is a design of inquiry from anthropology and sociology in which the researcher studies the shared patterns of behaviours, language, and actions of an intact cultural group in a natural setting over a prolonged period. Data collection often involves observations and interviews (Creswell, 2014). Ethnographic research involves a rigorous description of the setting or individuals, followed by data analysis for themes or issues (Asenahabi, 2019).

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1.9.3 Research Approach

In this study, a qualitative research approach was particularly relevant, as it allowed for an in-depth exploration of the complex experiences and perceptions of stakeholders involved in the education of learners from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. By employing interviews, the research captured the lived experiences of these stakeholders, shedding light on how factors such as family environment, habitat, and socioeconomic status influence learners' educational journey. This approach enables the identification of nuanced themes and patterns that quantitative methods may miss, providing a richer understanding of the barriers and facilitators that influence academic performance and educational outcomes. Ultimately, the qualitative perspective illuminated the intricate dynamics at play, offering valuable insights intoinforming educational policies and practices aimed at reducing disparities and enhancing the learning experiences of all learners.

1.9.4 Research methodology

This study employed a combination of qualitative research methods to collect data, semi-structured interviews and observations. Creswell and Poth (2018) elucidate that research methods refer to the specific strategies or techniques used to gather and analyse data in a study, methods that allow researchers to investigate a particular phenomenon systematically. Semi-structured interviews facilitated in-depth conversations with stakeholders, enabling them to share their experiences and perspectives regarding educational barriers and supports related to learners' socioeconomic status.

These methods were justified as they aligned with the study's qualitative nature to explore the complex social dynamics affecting learners from low-SES academic performance. Research by Smith et al. (2021) claimed the appropriateness of qualitative methods in educational research, noting that they would allow for a comprehensive understanding of the participants' contexts and experiences. By using those methods, the study captured rich data that detailed the challenges and opportunities faced by learners from various socioeconomic backgrounds, ultimately contributing to a deeper understanding of the factors influencing educational outcomes.

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1.9.5 POPULATION AND SAMPLING PROCEDURES

The population and sampling procedures are discussed hereunder

1.9.5.1 Population

According to Wilson (2018), the population in research refers to the total set of people or aspects that the researcher is interested in. A population is a complete set of people with specified characteristics (Thacker, 2020). A population is defined as a group of individuals who have certain skills, knowledge, and experiences required for research (Liu & Liu, 2022). A research study's population should be well-defined and reflect the group to which the findings generally apply (Wilson, 2018). The population for the study was all primary school principals, DHs, educators, learners, and parents from the same locality with similar socioeconomic statuses.

1.9.5.2 Sampling procedure

In this study, purposive sampling was the most suitable sampling technique. Purposive sampling, also known as “non-probability sampling”, involves selecting participants based on specific characteristics or criteria relevant to the research objectives (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016). In this case, the study targeted learners and parents from low socioeconomic backgrounds, as well as their educators and principals, including departmental heads, to gain insights into their unique experiences and challenges related to education.

The justification for using purposive sampling lies in its ability to focus on participants who are most likely to provide rich, relevant information regarding the study's objectives. This technique allowed for a deeper exploration of the nuances associated with socioeconomic factors and educational outcomes, ensuring that the sample represented the population of interest. By selecting individuals with first-hand experience with the challenges faced by low-SES learners, the study gathered in-depth data that was relevant and vital for understanding the complexities of these individuals' educational experiences. In addition, purposive sampling enables researchers to achieve a more targeted understanding of

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specific subgroups, which is essential for developing effective interventions and policy recommendations.

1.9.5.3 Sample Size

In this study, a sample of 58 participants was drawn from two schools: 8 educators (that include 2 principals (1 X 2 principals = 2), 2 DHs (1 X 2 heads of department) 2 register teachers (1 X 2 register teachers), 2 subject teachers (1 X 2 subject teachers), 40 learners (20 learners per school, 2 schools X 20 learners each = 40), and 10 parents (5 per school, 2 X 5 parents each = 10 who comprised single parents, grandparents and coupled parents). Principals, DHs, and teachers were selected since they managed and taught learners from low SES, while learners and parents were selected for their habitat and socioeconomic status. This distribution allowed for a balanced representation of perspectives from each group, ensuring that the complexities of the educational experiences of socioeconomic status (SES) learners were thoroughly explored.

Learners were selected to provide first-hand insights into their educational challenges and experiences. At the same time, parents were included to share their views on the factors that influence their children's education and their perceptions of the essence of schooling. Educators, on the other hand, offered valuable professional insights into how socioeconomic factors affect learners' classroom performance and engagement. By incorporating those three distinct yet interconnected perspectives, the study aimed to create a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by low-SES learners. This approach enhanced the richness of the collected qualitative data and ensured that the findings reflected the diverse experiences and challenges associated with socioeconomic educational disparities.

1.10 DATA COLLECTION STRATEGIES

A data collection strategy is the systematic process of gathering information on variables of interest in an established systematic way that allows one to answer stated research questions, test hypotheses, and evaluate outcomes (Schensul, Schensul & LeCompte, 2019).

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The data was collected directly from the participants in a natural setting, such as the school. For principals, heads of department, register teachers, subject teachers, I used face-to-face interviews, while focus groups were used on learners and parents and observations on learners and subject teachers as they were teaching.

According to Maree (2012), observation is a systematic process of recording the behavioural patterns of participants, objects and occurrences without necessarily questioning or communicating with them. It is an everyday activity whereby people use their senses (seeing, hearing, touching, smelling and tasting) and their intuition to gather data. Creswell and Creswell (2018) define observation as a fundamental data collection method in research, especially in social sciences, psychology, and natural sciences. It involves systematically watching, listening, and recording behaviours, events, or phenomena in natural settings or experimental conditions. The researcher observed learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds using an observation sheet.

1.11 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis is the process of interpreting and drawing conclusions from research data (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016). To find patterns, themes, and connections that might lead to an answer to the research question, the collected data must be structured, summarised, and examined. Thematic analysis was used to categorise the collected data for that study. This qualitative data analysis technique - thematic analysis - identifies, assesses, and reports on overarching themes and meanings within the data. The open-endedness of thematic analysis allows researchers to examine a wide range of data types, such as those from interviews, focus-group discussions, and observations.

Cooksey and McDonald (2019) suggest that studies seeking themes and data patterns that may provide light on the study issue are ideal for thematic analysis. With this method of analysis, a researcher can acquire a more comprehensive grasp of the data and uncover insightful patterns and themes via thematic analysis. One aspect that the study explored was how learners describe the significance of intrinsic drive to their academic performance. Thematic analysis helps identify patterns and recurrent themes in qualitative data collected through interviews.

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Using a thematic analysis, a researcher may learn more about the data and uncover unexpected results. The researcher may also constantly adjust the themes and subthemes in a thematic analysis to account for new material as it emerges. Researchers benefit from this adaptability since they can be flexible and learn more about the issue by incorporating the participants' unique experiences and insights.

1.12 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

The trustworthiness of qualitative research is determined by the extent to which the study's findings are credible and reliable. In this study, trustworthiness was ensured through the criteria of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

1.12.1 Credibility

The reliability of research depends on how well its findings mirror the information that the study's participants provided (Middleton, 2023). The researcher's proper implementation of the procedures ensures the study's veracity, including participant double-checking, peer debriefing, and ongoing involvement. The results are more likely to be accurate and represent the participants' experiences and viewpoints if shared with them. During a peer debriefing, a researcher shares the findings with peers to gain new perspectives and validate their views; therefore, spending enough time with the participants to understand their viewpoints and experiences is essential for sustained involvement.

To make data collection more credible, the researcher tape-recorded participants' responses. After each interview, I allowed everyone to listen to the recorded text to clarify, comment and add to what they said. The transcriptions from vocal to written scripts were done word-for-word. This was "member checking", which Shenton (2019) considers to be the single most crucial provision that can bolster a study's credibility. Checks relating to data accuracy occurred on the spot for participants to verify what they had said. The aim of this process was to ascertain whether the participants considered their words to match what they had intended.

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1.12.2 Dependability

Dependability is the continuity and stability of findings across time (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). The researcher used techniques, such as audit trails and triangulation, to ensure that the study was reliable. Audit trails entail keeping meticulous records of the research process, such as data collection and analysis, to allow for the replication of the study by other researchers. Triangulation includes comparing the results from different techniques or data sources to ensure they were similar, accurate and reliable. The researcher achieved dependability by identifying the themes and discussing them with the participants to check if they were accurate and dependable.

1.12.3 Confirmability

According to Lambert and Lambert (2021), confirmability relates to the results' neutrality and objectivity, which ensures that the researcher's prejudices did not affect them. The researcher used techniques like reflexivity and peer review to ensure conformability in this research. Reflexivity entails considering the researcher's prejudices, attitudes and views to avoid influencing the results. A peer review involves several researchers examining the study's findings to ensure that the interpretations are sound and unaffected by the researcher's biases. The researcher ensured that no participant was forced to participate in the interview to collect the data. Views from different participants were recorded verbatim through a tape recorder after informed consent had been signed, so participants freely voiced their opinions.

1.12.4 Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings can be applied to other contexts or settings (Lubbe, 2020). Thick description and purposeful sampling were two strategies the researcher employed to ensure this study was transferable. To ensure that readers understood the study's background, thick descriptions included thorough and contextualised descriptions of the study's context, participants and any conclusions reached. To guarantee that the sample was representative of the population of interest, purposeful sampling was employed, which entailed choosing participants based on

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defined criteria, hence boosting the study's external validity. In this study, the researcher clearly described the selected schools and participants in their contexts when conveying the research findings. Additionally, to assess the extent to which findings were accurate for people in other settings, similar projects employing the same methods but conducted in different environments were suggested.

1.13 DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study was conducted in Vhembe District of Limpopo Province in South Africa. The study only focused on the two primary schools, and the participants were only school principals, departmental heads, teachers, learners and both parents of each learner. The study area is closer to the researcher's workstation. This lessened the research expenses and reduced the emotional stress of travelling the entire circuit.

1.14 ETHIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethics refers to the principles, values, and standards that guide individual and collective behaviours and decisions and help to distinguish right from wrong (Beauchamp & Childress, 2019). Ethics is a set of moral principles that govern individual and societal behaviour and help individuals and groups make decisions that are morally and socially responsible (Fisher, 2019). Ethics is the study of moral philosophy and the principles of right and wrong conduct, encompassing issues related to morality, values, and decision-making in different contexts (Kumar & Kumar, 2020).

Since the study involved human participants, it followed the procedures that are in line with ethical considerations for their freewill in participation. Consent forms were prepared and completed by participants after an explanation of all procedures to be followed before, during, and after the study. It was explained to the participants that participation in the study was voluntary and that they were free to withdraw their participation at any time without any explanation. Confidentiality of information was also assured. These ethical considerations were discussed in detail in Chapter Three.

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1.15 OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

The outline of the study is detailed below:

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

This chapter discussed the background and significance of the problem, the purpose of the study, a brief explanation of the research methodology, sampling techniques, and data collection strategy, as well as the ethical principles.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter focused on the review of literature relevant to the study. The chapter covered what other researchers have done on the topic under study.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The research methodology was described in this chapter. The discussions focused on describing the design, sampling techniques, and data collection and analysis strategies.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS

The chapter dealt with a presentation of the collected data, its analysis, and interpretation.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This final chapter synthesised the study, commencing with the objectives and empirical findings and ending with the conclusion and recommendations for the future.

1.16 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter introduced the study about the influence of learners' socioeconomic habitat on academic performance: a case of selected primary schools. Amongst other things, the chapter presented the background to the study, statement of the problem, aim of the study, objectives of the study, research questions, significance of the study, definitions of key words, delimitation of the study, trustworthiness of the qualitative research, ethical consideration and its layout. The study was put into perspective by outlining the theoretical framework that was underpinned by the Ecological Systems Theory. The

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methodological procedures of the study were briefly discussed. The next chapter dealt with the literature review relevant to the study.

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CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The study's main aim is to explore the impact of a learner's socioeconomic habitat on academic performance. This chapter reviewed the literature that answers the objectives and the research questions of the study. Reviewing literature serves to sharpen and broaden the theoretical framework of the research, reveal new developments in the field, expose gaps in existing knowledge and shortfalls in previous studies. This chapter discusses the challenges that primary school learners from low socioeconomic status face in their academic performance, the influence of family socioeconomic status on learners' academic performance, the influence of environmental factors on learners' academic success and the interventions to mitigate challenges that learners from low socioeconomic status face in primary schools.

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Ecological System Theory underpins the study. The Ecological Systems Theory (EST), also known as "human ecology," is a framework developed in 1979 by Urie Bronfenbrenner (Harkonen, 2007). Harkonen notes that this theory was influenced by Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and Lewin's behaviourism theory. Bronfenbrenner's theory focuses on the influence of social interaction on child development; hence, everything in the surrounding environment and social interactions influences a person's development. The Ecological Systems Theory theorises that children are shaped by their interaction with others and the context. The theory has four complex layers, systems, which are commonly used in studying a phenomenon. At first, the ecological theory was most used in psychological research. However, several studies have used it in fields such as law, business, management, teaching and learning, and education (Harkonen, 2007).

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There are many possible ways to use the model from the perspective of teachers and parents. Teachers can use the model to create personalised student learning experiences for teaching purposes. The theory supports teachers and administrators in developing school environments suitable for learners' needs, characteristics, culture, and family backgrounds (Taylor & Gebre, 2016). The model focuses on the context (Schunk, 2016); hence, teachers and school administration can use the model to increase learners' academic achievement and educational attainment by involving parents and observing other contextual factors (for example, learners' peers, extra-curricular activities, and neighbours) that may help or inhibit their learning.

Furthermore, the Ecological System Theory model can support parents in educating and guiding their children. It can prompt parents to assist their children in choosing their friends and finding good neighbourhoods and schools. Additionally, parents can build close connections with teachers, so they know their children's skills and abilities. By involving themselves in schools, parents can positively influence their children's educational context (Bunijevac, 2017). According to Watson (2017), there are five layers instead of four, with the chronosystem being the fifth one. The levels range from smaller proximal settings, wherein individuals interact directly, to larger distance settings, which indirectly influence development. Masakona (2022) claims that these 'systems' influence on learners is regarded as "fluid" by diverse professions and community members.

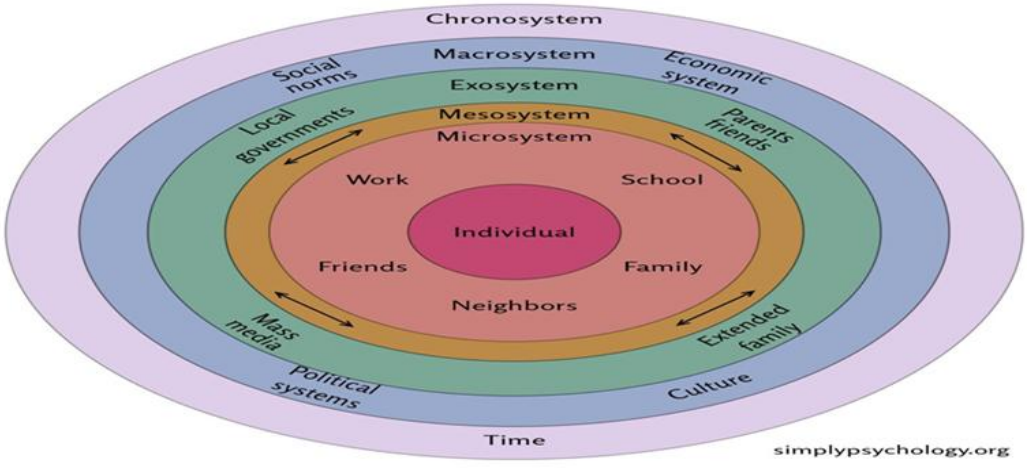


Figure 2.1 Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System, (Guy-Evans, 2025)

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The interaction among factors in the maturing biology of children, their community environment or immediate family, and the societal landscape, fuels and steers development (Paquette & Ryan, 2001). The changes in one layer affect other layers, exerting a specific effect. It is, therefore, a matter of influence that is effective in both ways: a person influences the environment, just as the environment influences a person (Härkönen, 2007). The focus of the study is on the influence of learners' socioeconomic habits on academic performance. The researcher ensured that there was a mutual understanding between the teachers, parents and learners. Parents and learners were made aware that socioeconomic habitat may not necessarily dictate the destiny of the learners. Learners were made aware that their future is within their own hands, irrespective of their socioeconomic habitat. Learners were advised that through dedication and commitment, they may conquer the world through education. The following layers of environmental influence on the Ecological System affect a child's development, and are discussed hereunder:

2.2.1 The microsystem

At the lowest level, such as family and school, the micro-system fulfils various functions, such as care, education and socialisation of individuals in the immediate environment and culture. At this level, Bronfenbrenner's theory refers to parental involvement, success in school and personal characteristics that can be combined with and influence an individual's development. The micro-system is linked to parents' participation in their children's education at home and expands to include parental involvement at home, family structure and size, and other immediate environmental agents (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). A microsystem describes the immediate environment of the child, which may include close family, neighbourhood, and school contexts of the child (Berk, 2000). The developing child directly contacts stakeholders such as family members, school, neighbours, and childcare environments (Paquette & Ryan, 2001), and these influence the child's choices (Härkönen, 2007). The quality of relationships and interactions in these settings directly affects the learner's academic performance. For instance, supportive parents and teachers can enhance a child's academic motivation and success. Watson (2017) indicates that the microsystem influences children's behaviour and academic

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achievements within the school community. Parents were encouraged to be part of what happens at school and to help their children, irrespective of their level of education. They were encouraged to build proper relationships with their children so that they could be free to ask questions and explore.

2.2.2 The mesosystem

The mesosystem is the second layer of the ecological system theory developed by Bronfenbrenner, which outlines that other surrounding environments also influence the child's learning (Härkönen, 2007). This layer comprises connections and processes involving two or more settings in the developing child. This layer largely depends on the connection or relation between home and school (Härkönen, 2007). This system postulates that the developing child is a link, and to maintain such a relationship, the child attends school regularly and observes all the school's rules and policies. This includes, amongst other things, being punctual and doing all school activities as prescribed. Watson (2017) posits that encouragement in the community to achieve academically is substantial, therefore encouraging families' interactions with the school. Ettekal and Mahoney (2017) add that parents are more poised to encourage and support their children when the norms and goals of the work activity align with those of the home setting. The interconnections between the mesosystems, such as the relationship between learners' families and their schools, have an influence; therefore, positive interactions between parental involvement in school activities can lead to better academic outcomes. Parents and learners were shown the relationship between home and school and how the two should engage or work. It is the duty of parents to teach their children to listen and obey what the mother or father figure says, as they have to listen to their teachers at school. Children should learn to follow rules and obey them at home so that they can do the same at school.

2.2.3 The exosystem

The exosystem encompasses the settings in which there are links between contexts where an individual plays no active role and those where they are indirectly involved.

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Härkönen (2007) describes this layer as containing elements of the microsystem that affect the individual indirectly. For example, the experiences and stressors of parents in their workplaces can have a ripple effect on their children's well-being and academic performance. Ettekal and Mahoney (2017) add that parents often expose their children to activities with which the former are familiar, suggesting that children are likely to engage in activities similar to those their parents participated in during their own childhood. This connection is particularly pronounced in families where parents value education; educated parents tend to prioritise academic success and invest significantly in their children's schooling. Conversely, research by Bowers and Moyer (2017) indicates that parents from low socioeconomic backgrounds may be less likely to emphasise the importance of education, often attributing their children's lack of schooling to poverty-related challenges. These dynamics highlight how broader social systems, such as parents' workplaces and community resources, can indirectly influence learners by shaping their parents' educational perspectives and capabilities. Factors like parental job stress or the availability of community support services can significantly influence a learner's academic performance and engagement in school. Parents were advised not to let their backgrounds affect their children's future. If they are uneducated, they need to look for advice on educational matters from the educated. Besides, uneducated parents should be encouraged to look for advice from their children's teachers.

2.2.4 The macrosystem

The macrosystem refers to a set of overarching norms, beliefs, and values reflected in a society's religious, cultural, and socioeconomic organisation (Ettekal & Mahoney, 2017). This system encompasses the actual culture of an individual and influences various aspects of their development. According to Watson (2017), the macrosystem is closely tied to the cultural influences that directly affect children, shaping their experiences and interactions. This cultural influence stems from elements and organisations associated with the child, including ethnicity, religious groups, and social class. Recent research by Wang and Chen (2020) further elaborates on this concept, emphasising how the macrosystem reflects the cultural environment in which the child resides. Additionally, Smith et al. (2021) state that the macrosystem includes overarching cultural, economic,

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and societal influences that shape the other systems. For instance, factors such as socioeconomic status, cultural attitudes towards education, and public policies can significantly influence the educational opportunities available to children and their subsequent outcomes, demonstrating how deeply embedded societal structures influence individual development. Children should learn the norms, values, cultures, and beliefs of the society so that they can feel they are part of it.

2.2.5 The chronosystem

As a framework, the chronosystem demonstrates the influence of time on a child's environment, highlighting how significant life events and changes can influence development, according to Watson (2017). He notes that major disruptions, such as economic downturns or changes in family structure, can adversely affect a child's academic success. These sudden or gradual shifts play a critical role in shaping a learner's educational path, sometimes leading to long-lasting effects on their academic performance and personal development. Supporting this, Acar, Hong and Wu (2021) indicate that both internal and external life events influence children's outcomes, with transitions, like family instability or financial strain, directly influencing educational engagement. They argue that abrupt changes, such as the death of a primary caregiver or the loss of financial support, create heightened risks for disruptions in school participation. Further reinforcing this perspective, Diemer, Mistry and Wadsworth (2022) contend that time-related events, including economic instability and changes in family structures, can significantly affect a child's developmental context, since such events make it harder for parents to support children's schooling. Financial challenges may ultimately force families to withdraw their children from school, demonstrating how shifts over time can profoundly influence educational trajectories. Children should be taught about internal and external life events like death, family instability, and financial constraints, so that when they encounter such situations, they know that it is not the end of the world and should soldier on.

The Ecological Systems Theory, originally developed by Bronfenbrenner, underpins this study by offering a comprehensive framework for understanding how various

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environmental systems influence a learner's educational experience. Scholars such as Rosa and Tudge (2013) explicate how this theory highlights the interaction between children and their immediate surroundings (microsystem), as well as broader societal influences (macrosystem), including economic and cultural contexts. The chronosystem specifically addresses how changes over time, such as shifts in family dynamics or financial instability, affect a child's development (Watson, 2017). These temporal changes can lead to significant academic challenges, especially for learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds, who are more likely to experience instability in both their homeS and broader social environments. Diemer, Mistry and Wadsworth (2022) reinforce the relevance of the chronosystem in examining how socioeconomic changes over time directly influence educational access and outcomes, thus guiding the study in exploring how these multiple layers of influence contribute to educational disparities among learners from different socioeconomic backgrounds.

2.3 CHALLENGES FACED BY PRIMARY SCHOOL LEARNERS FROM LOW SOCIOECONOMIC BACKGROUNDS

Learners from low SES are normally faced with a lot of challenges because of their background, which might make them unable to concentrate at school and can lead to failure. These learners are likely to drop out of school. These difficulties fall within different categories, and some of them are discussed next:

2.3.1 Type of school attended

According to Rauscher and Shen (2022), children attending government schools, which attract relatively little funding, are often from low SES. These children are also likely to have very little support for education at home. Their exposure to print is limited or absent, except in marketplaces. It is assumed that children from the informal areas grow up under more deprived circumstances. These challenges may lead children living in informal areas to lower attendance in school because they have to earn their livelihood or earn to supplement their family income. This may also impact on their time and ability to engage

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with homework. These children have very limited or no knowledge of the language of teaching and learning, which is English.

2.3.2 Access of learners from low SES to reading materials

Learners from low SES were more likely to borrow books from libraries if they were available than to buy them. Apart from financial constraints, one explanation is that fewer books are available for purchase, and fewer bookstores can be found in high-poverty neighbourhoods. This accounts for a gap in reading for low SES children, especially during holidays when they do not have access to school libraries, if they are even available (Claark & Akerman, 2020). Children from poor or low-SES families seem to be poor readers in later education levels due to the lack of reading resources at home and lower family literacy. Children from less favourable socioeconomic backgrounds tend to focus more on helping their parents do household chores or even earn money rather than spending time on reading. Children from lower socioeconomic status frequently have limited access to school materials such as textbooks and stationery due to financial restrictions (Tshisikhawe & Ramatswi, 2025). Reading is less enjoyable for children of lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Liu, Peng & Luo, 2019).

Primary school learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds often face significant challenges that impact their academic performance and overall development. Underneath follow some of these challenges.

2.3.3 Learners from low SES and school absenteeism

Prolonged absence from school has significant consequences for individuals' life courses. Children and adolescents who frequently miss school are at a higher risk of dropping out of school, achieving lower qualifications, showing risky sexual and drug-related behaviours, or being involved in criminal activities (Wolf & Kupchik, 2017). In the longer term, school absenteeism lowers employment probability and leads to greater economic difficulties in early adulthood (Ansari et al., 2020).

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An important risk antecedent of school absenteeism identified in several studies is family SES (Klein et al., 2020). Learners from lower-SES backgrounds are over-represented among those absent from school (Gubbels et al., 2019). For instance, Garcia and Weiss (2018) found that 23.2% of learners eligible for free and reduced-price lunch (FRPL) missed three or more days of school per month compared to only 15.4% of those not eligible for FRPL. Learners on FRPL were also more than twice as likely to be absent than their peers without FRPL (2.3% vs 1.1%) when looking at school absences of more than 10 days a month.

Socioeconomic inequalities in school absenteeism are relevant because they parallel SES gaps in children's academic achievement (Chmielewski, 2019) and may partly account for these socioeconomic disparities. Additionally, school absences may be more harmful to children from lower SES families because parents from lower-SES backgrounds have fewer financial, social and educational resources necessary to support their children in catching up with missed school lessons. Socioeconomic inequalities in school absenteeism may lead to an accumulation of multiple disadvantages in the educational course of children from lower SES families (Cooper & Stewart, 2020).

2.3.4 Families' structure and parents' participation from low SES

Societal variables, such as shifting family dynamics, including increasing the number of divorces that lead to more single-parent families and the number of households, where both parents work full-time, may lead to less involvement of parents. These elements are now more prevalent than ever. In the United States, one in three kids has a parent who does not live with them; these kinds of parents are less involved (Stewart, 2020). Families with single mothers are impacted by economic problems, thereby impacting their involvement in their child‘s education. Parental participation is restricted by age, learning disabilities, capabilities, skills, and behavioural issues (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). If a child has a learning disability and difficulty, and parents and school have a different perspective about that difficulty or disability, it may also cause a lack of parental engagement (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). It was found that parents are typically less concerned with the teachers as misbehaviour worsens (Hornby & Lafaele, 201). When teachers and parents have

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conflicting beliefs about one another, restrictions may be put in place on parental involvement. Limits around parental engagement grow as a result of parents' and teachers' expectations that one is only interested in a surface-level relationship and the other does not care about the education of their learners (Hornby & Lafaele, 2021).

2.3.5 Inexperienced teachers

Essential resources, such as trained and/or experienced teachers, instructional materials, and suitable facilities, are usually lacking in schools serving low-SES neighbourhoods; effective teaching and learning processes are hampered by this shortage (Condy, Janet, Blease & Bernita, 2014). Dagada (2022) suggests that many teachers in these environments may be undertrained in efficient reading techniques. This information gap may lead to inefficient instructional methods that fail to address the unique requirements of primary school learners, hence creating literacy difficulties.

Large class numbers can make it challenging for teachers to give each student the individualised attention he/she requires, causing many learners to fall behind academically as a result of this. Teachers may find it challenging to maintain a productive learning environment if they are not given enough training in classroom management strategies. These teachers' inadequacies may influence all learners, but those who require more structured support, like those from low-SES contexts, may be most affected.

Quinton (2022) contends that teachers' expectations and interactions with low-SES learners may also be influenced by the former's impressions of them. According to research, teachers may have an idea that causes them to undervalue these pupils' potential, lowering their academic expectations and discouraging them. When learners internalise these low expectations, it can become a self-fulfilling prophecy that affects their motivation and output. Teachers who lack training in creating healthy relationships may struggle to connect with low-SES learners, further turn them away, and reduce their participation (Lavy & Ayuob, 2019).

2.3.6 Social and emotional challenges

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Economic concerns can also cause emotional issues for learners, including anxiety and sadness, which further influence their academic performance (Mistry & Elenbaas, 2021). Teachers are essential in identifying these challenges and providing support through counselling and inclusive classroom methods. Furthermore, learners from low socioeconomic status backgrounds may undergo severe stress owing to unstable family circumstances, such as child-headed households or exposure to violence and abuse (Maebana, Molotja & Themane, 2022). Such tension might negatively influence concentration and learning ability in school.

Ndlela (2021) suggest that the emotional and social challenges these learners face might develop into behavioural problems in the classroom, making it difficult for teachers to maintain a conducive learning environment. Learners from low-income families are more likely to face health difficulties such as malnutrition and a lack of access to healthcare, which might impair their academic performance. Health issues can cause increased absenteeism, compromising learning continuity and academic progress.

Marvin (2023) posits that social and emotional learning significantly impacts academic success. Learners need to be better prepared to manage their own emotions when they develop social-emotional ability. Social emotional learning encourages cognitive and learning abilities and skills to increase. It is important in supporting cognitive development. Social emotional learning helps learners to develop positive behaviours. It can also help in creating a conducive environment, and academic excellence can be improved. Educators need to come up with many strategies to help them receive a holistic education that addresses social emotional learning needs.

Khalid and Raqeeb (2023) state that social emotional learning is an integral component of education and part of human development. It helps learners manage and recognise their emotions and to emphasise others'. It helps in maintaining positive relationships to make choices, handle stress, and control their impulses, academic demands, and peer interaction. It helps with fostering positive teacher-student relationships. Learners gain a deeper understanding of their emotions through social emotional learning, such as aggressive behaviours among other learners. Learners with social emotional learning

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remain at school, complete their studies and graduate. The programmes of social learning theory make progress in helping learners better cope with emotional stress, resolve problems, and engage themselves in different activities.

Social and emotional learning programmes can assist organisations in developing caring, research-based, and pro-social ethical environments in the social, ethical environments in the school and community. The impact on student well-being is positive, as measured by the number of children who end up getting into trouble. This social emotional learning has lasting effects that benefit learners in developing them to be healthy, confident, and well-behaved human beings. This can also make learners trust their classroom environment (Afyare, 2024).

2.3.7 Limited prior literacy experiences

Primary school learners with low socio-economic status (SES) have significantly lower academic achievement and future educational possibilities, due to a lack of prior literacy experiences. Research by Blanchard (2023) concluded that children from low socio-economic circumstances enter school with much lower literacy skills than their higher SES peers. For example, studies have shown that learners from low-income homes might be up to 12 years behind their higher-income counterparts in literacy when they enter high school.

Teachers in low-SES schools may not be trained in evidence-based literacy education approaches; this might lead to their reliance on out-of-date or inefficient instructional techniques that fail to address the unique requirements of struggling readers (Lavy & Ayuob, 2019). In addition, children from households with lower socioeconomic status frequently have fewer books at home and less access to reading resources than their peers of higher socioeconomic status. This lack of exposure to various texts inhibits their vocabulary growth and comprehension of print concepts, which are critical for literacy acquisition (Romeo, Uchida & Christodoulou, 2022).

The combined effect of these problems results in considerable academic performance discrepancies between primary school learners from disadvantaged socioeconomic

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backgrounds and those from affluent environments. Disadvantaged learners are more likely to struggle with core abilities in reading and mathematics, experience higher rates of school absenteeism, and face extreme difficulties in attaining educational milestones than their higher SES counterparts.

2.3.8 Family conflict and divorce

Nkirote and Marima (2018) indicated that family conflict and divorce can negatively impact a child's academic performance. They argue that marital status plays an important role in determining the academic performance of children at school. When they are at school, they do not want to play with others, but in some instances, those children end up being bullies, practising what they see happening at home. Most problems that cause conflict in families are infidelity, insecurity, abuse and hostility. Academic performances are active only when the home is overwhelming with love, happiness, and respect. Regarding divorce, most learners do not want to cooperate at school. They become aggressive, looking for attention to the problems at home, as they cannot defend themselves as kids. Divorce can emotionally affect the children indirectly and make them not focus on school and at home, which lowers academic performance. They will also not want to participate in any activities at school or in the classroom. Some learners stop going to school because their role models divorced, affecting them indirectly. Besides, others feel like they want to have a relationship with girls if they are girls and boys to boys, hating the fact that the other gender is abusive. Some children, when they grow up, hate marriage, as they saw what happened with their own parents having conflicts every day.

According to Ndayambaje, Yvete and Ayriza (2020), children who experience family conflict struggle academically, and it is also difficult for them to have a relationship with friends or family members. These children may be psychologically affected, and they cannot see any future for themselves. They can imitate their parents when conflicts occur, thinking that this is a normal life or situation, if the conflict continues. Mostly, children behave the way parents do at home; if they are always having fun, conflict, and love, the child does the same with other children. Teachers can see the family in a child through

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the child's misbehaviour at school because of the parents' sour relationship. Researchers have shown that there is an increase in disorders in children caused by family conflicts.

2.3.9 Infrastructure challenges in primary schools

Technology integration in schools is difficult owing to a shortage of equipment, internet, electricity, and teacher training (Kaufmann & Vallade, 2020). Thus, schools must assess current situations and supply technology-related equipment for better instruction. Due to inadequate school infrastructure renovations, classrooms are overcrowded. More learners need materials, informational resources, physical resources, and textbooks because school infrastructure helps learners learn. Adarkwah (2022) reported that Sub-Saharan African primary schools perform poorly, and governments cannot reach primary education targets. The economy is affecting school infrastructure, which is essential to teaching and learning. The quality of the learning environment is a crucial factor in learners' performance. Resource management in education improves learners' performance. Thus, a school administration committed to learners' success should collaborate with central and local governments to create, remodel, and repair school infrastructure (Herath, Duffield & Zhang, 2022).

2.4 LEARNERS' FAMILY SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS'S INFLUENCE ON THEIR ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

Education is a fundamental tool for personal and societal development, yet learners' academic performance is often influenced by various factors, amongst which are as follows:

2.4.1 Influence of family socioeconomic status and academic achievement

A learner's family's SES significantly influences their academic achievement, especially in the early school years. The intricate and multifaceted ways that socioeconomic status affects academic achievement have been highlighted in several studies (Farooq & Asim, 2020). According to Munir, Faiza, Jamal, Daud and Igbal (2023), socioeconomic status is a composite measure that reflects an individual's or a household's relative position

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within a social hierarchy. The SES of learners does have an influence on academic performance. Learners from low SES battle to have access to educational resources. They need their parents to be more involved in their education so that they can perform better. There are learners from low SES who defy the odds and do better academically. These learners need support from their parents to achieve better academically. The education system must be improved so that it can provide a better education for all learners. This includes funding from the government. A supportive and educational environment can lead to better academic performance. They also need to have access to extracurricular activities. Training is needed for inclusive teaching practices. Teachers also need to be developed. It could be training sessions or attending curriculum workshops to improve academic performance. The government must provide better educational resources, modern facilities and infrastructure, thus narrowing the achievement gap.

2.4.2 Parental Involvement in Learners' Education

The United Nations Report highlighted education as a basic right and need, which is significant in the accomplishment of the second goal of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (UNESCO, 2020). This is because a good education and, for that matter, high academic performance guarantee skilled and dynamic citizens. A person's education is closely linked to their life chances, income, and well-being. Therefore, it is important to have a clear understanding of what benefits or hinders one's academic achievement. Family is the initial contact where the child learns the concept of authority, good manners and respect for elders. It also lays down or determines the intellectual development of the child through activities that develop language and number competence in the child (Munir, Faiza, Jamal, Daud & Iqbal, 2023).

Through parental involvement, children get attention from their parents in terms of their education. Parental involvement means the involvement of parents with teachers in terms of communication, school visiting on the part of the parents, supervision of parents of their children's education, supporting learners at home in completing their home tasks set by the school, and the participation of parents in school meetings (Tahir, Ishfaq, Begum &

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Sharjeel, 2021). According to Asia (2019), the lack of parents' involvement in the welfare of their children immensely contributes to learners' low performance. Parental involvement in schooling also predicts achievement. Variance in psychosocial and emotional fortification in the family background could be an indicator of high or low academic performance of learners, bearing in mind the intervening effect of high and low socioeconomic status and emotional stability of learners, which is a prerequisite for academic achievement. This is because psychological problems are potential sources of trouble with learning. The involvement of parents in the education of the child is very crucial. The socioeconomic status of single-parent households and the ever-changing dynamics of household dynamics are influences on student learning, and if there is a relationship between single-parent households and parental involvement with student learning.

The engagement of parents in their children's educational journey not only enhances academic performance but also fosters social and emotional development, creating a holistic environment for learning (Wafa & Muthi, 2024). However, many schools face significant challenges in effectively engaging parents in meaningful partnerships that support their children's learning. These challenges can stem from various factors, including communication barriers, differing expectations, cultural differences, and a lack of understanding of the roles that parents can play in the educational process (Muhammad et al., 2024)

Sengonul (2022) postulates that parental involvement and academic achievement urge parents to be more involved in their school's academic performance. Most parents in primary schools do not care about their children's schoolwork. When you call them, they do not come to school. You only see them when they are collecting their children's reports. Others do not even know their child's class teacher. Parents need to value education so that they can be involved in their children's educational activities. They need to visit the school to monitor their children's progress, as they are struggling to help them at home. They need to take their children to the library to learn more about what they are looking for and to find new information. Parents must engage themselves in activities like reading and playing games with their children at home. They also need to talk to their children

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about what was happening at school and what they did, so parents can know how to help them.

A parent's socioeconomic status has a significant role in parental involvement and the success of their own children. Parents are regarded as the most important role in the microsystem. Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory maintains that status has a remarkable role in the association between parental involvement in education and the school success of their children. Parents should let their children participate in classroom activities to motivate them. Parents should participate in school organisations, such as the Parents' and Teachers' Association and the School Governing Body, to motivate their own children. The low-SES parents do not care about their children's homework; instead of helping them, they refer them back to their teachers, saying they are the ones getting paid at the end of the month (Sengonul, 2022).

According to Poudel, Subedi and Dahal (2024), parental involvement in primary school helps parents to support children to learn through early home reading activities, such as reading to children, telling stories, and other types of home-based parental involvement, and academic socialisation processes, including supervising and helping with homework. Parents must try to socialise their children educationally by sharing the value and importance of education and their educational hopes with them.

Parental involvement provides many benefits for the running of the school, including an improvement in academic performance. When parents are involved, they influence their children academically and in their behaviour at school. Parents must be involved in any decision-making process of the school. The school must have continuous meetings with parents so that they can work together to maintain better academic performance. Parents can volunteer to render services at school to make it a better place. They must have better communication skills between the teacher and the learner, and between the teacher and parents, to discuss matters related to school (Clark & Akerman, 2020). Teachers must establish a home-school relationship with parents; when teachers give learners work, parents must know how to support them at home, whether it is homework or a project. If they do not understand, they must contact the teacher for assistance. Parents should also

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use their skills at school to motivate their own children to learn that there are many opportunities to learn, and the school must incentivise them for the job they have done so that they can be more willing to do so without payment (Ndwandwe, 2023).

2.4.3 Socioeconomic status and academic performance of learners

Socioeconomic status was defined as a construct that considers both the resources and prestige associated with an occupation (Krieger, Williams & Moss, as cited in the Australian Commission on Health, 2017). Educational credentials, wealth, assets, income and social and material status are all included. Education creates differences in getting knowledge, access to information, and benefits expected from new learning (Ayub, Gul, Malik, Sharjeel & Rauf, 2021). In the same way, income provides opportunities to access knowledge, material and other goods. Inside a community, socioeconomic status may be considered an honour (Weber, 2020). Social networking, lifestyles, family backgrounds, etc., are different socioeconomic status parameters. The family background, social networks, and lifestyles are all parts of 'socioeconomic status' and have been considered in the current research. The effects of the background of the family, along with lifestyle, can cause children to accelerate or retard their academic careers. McMillan and Westor (2022) assert that education, occupation, and income are aspects of socioeconomic status and thus suggest that they be studied separately. As they understand it, the three parameters are not closely connected, which is why they were studied in isolation. It is advisable for the researchers to study them separately in relation to educational performance.

2.4.4 Family background environment and academic achievement

Family environment plays a vital role in the lives of learners inside and outside the school premises. The family environment comprises factors like socioeconomic status, family being run by single or two parents, divorce, parenting styles, material objects, number of family members and the neighbouring people living around (Tahir, Ishfaq, Begum & Sharjeel, 2021). The family environment influences children's basic socialisation and affects their future choices. Occupation, education and income are the determining

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factors of SES, as elaborated by Cruickshank (2024). Camelo et al. (2023) point out that SES affects learners' learning. Parents are disrupted because of economic problems and increased conflicts within the family setup. SES defines the home life of children, as it is closely linked to the home environment they are provided with. A single-parent household child, compared to a child in a parent's household, does not perform as well (Mohd Hanafian, Rosly & Ahmed, 2024).

Hanushek, Peterson, Talpey and Woessmann (2019) posit that family background affects learners' achievements and performance in primary school education. They regard it as the most important determinant of achievement. Many factors connect SES and achievement: children exposed to lower SES environments are at greater risk of traumatic stress and other medical problems that can affect brain development. They argue that in the United States, poor Americans are living, learning, and raising children in an increasingly separate and unequal world. Policymakers have examined the tools that can help schools break the linkage between learners' learning and their SES background. Policymakers need to consider alternatives if the tools applied thus far have been unable to lessen the relationship between SES and achievement. Learners from poor backgrounds find it difficult to learn as they sometimes go to school on an empty stomach, usually in primary schools.

According to Li and Qiu (2018), family background in families does influence the academic performance of learners. Parents do compete for high-quality educational opportunities that lead to better academic performance. Parenting behaviour can cause the children's behaviour to affect academic performance. Parenting behaviour and educational support for their children can cultivate children’s learning habits and affect academic performance. We also find that urban learners’ academic performance is more heavily affected by their families’ socioeconomic status than that of those in rural areas. According to Liu, Peng and Luo (2019, in China, education is regarded as a basic mechanism for enhancing the population quality of a nation, and education during childhood is the foundation for the formation of human labour force quality. The family’s socioeconomic status is increasingly important in determining personal educational achievement, and the expansion of schools has not dampened it. If we do not have a

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highly qualified primary and middle school education, we barely have a chance to proceed to higher education. School quality affects learners' academic performance. It is not only school quality that affects academic achievement, but also the way and abilities of their children's parents participate in their academic performance. Childhood education not only affects achievements and happiness at the individual level but also shapes the labour force's quality and capacity for innovation to determine the potential of a nation's development. Bhat (2022) states that family background influences a child's academic achievement.

Per Linguam (2023) states that a supportive family environment can help children's academic achievement. This includes providing emotional support, a safe space for learning, and a conducive learning environment at home. Socioeconomic factors, such as a family's financial status, parents' educational level, race, and gender, have an impact on the quality and availability of schooling.

2.4.5 Parental income on academic achievement

The income of a family is the most influential factor in the education of their children. Several researchers have explained that parents' economic status positively influences their children's academic achievement. Parents of low economic levels cannot invest sufficiently in their children's education (Ahamad, 2016). Lareau (2023) stated that poor and working-class parents primarily focused their responsibility on providing for the physical needs of their children, such as clothing, food, and housing. Bjorman (2025) indicated that when families are constrained by inadequate resources, children's educational attainment is consequently affected. Furthermore, Ahmad (2016) claimed that parents of low socioeconomic status cannot pay attention to their children's academicperformance. They fail to create an educational environment in their home, as their priority is searching for a source of income. Kainuwa and Yusuf (2023) insisted that learners of low socioeconomic status drop out of school because their parents are not interested in sending their children to school, as they cannot afford the cost of books, uniforms, transportation fees from home to school, and other daily monetary demands of their children. Parents of low socio-economic status engage in multiple jobs due to the

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low remuneration for longer working hours. They can not provide time, attention, and energy to their children's education, according to Jensen, as cited in Elia (2015). Lareau (2023) argued that the socioeconomic status of a family is a form of social and cultural capital in which children of poor and working-class parents mostly spend their time watching TV. In contrast, the high economic class is engaged in computers, coaching classes, and tuition (Thomson, 2018).

2.4.6 Parental education and academic performance of learners

Researchers claim that parents' education plays a positive role in their children's academic performance (Ahamad, 2016). Parents are the closest people to learners, as they obtain their early education from them. The study of Pong et al. (2005) shows that parental educational participation, such as discussing school stuff with children, checking their homework, and participating in school activities, can improve children's academic performance. Ahamad (2016) adds that children of the high socio-economic class get an opportunity for psychological support from their parents. Pant (2020) emphasises parental education and involvement in educational activities as the social capital of children. Parents of the high socioeconomic class participate in the academic activity of their children, and they support their children in successful learning. They pay more attention to their children's academic progress, regularly interact with their teachers, and manage their children's school absenteeism and other difficulties. Bakar et al. (2017) support the argument that children of educated parents get these advantages over those of uneducated parents. Sewell and Hauser (1993) add that the performance of young learners is significantly affected by parents' education. Educational aspirations of parents were found to be the most consistent factor, while Kaninuwa and Yusuf (2013) emphasised that mothers' education serves as human capital in the family. Moreover, the mother's attitude and behaviour have been observed to be reflected in their children at school. Educated mothers can pay closer attention to their children's educational activities.

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2.5 INFLUENCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS ON LEARNERS' ACADEMIC SUCCESS

The following are a number of environmental factors that influence learners' academic success and performance.

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2.5.1 School infrastructure and learner performance

According to Zottor, Egyir, and Anaman (2022), infrastructure is regarded as buildings, playgrounds, ICT devices and educational materials that assist learners and teachers in achieving their goals. Herath, Duffield and Zhang (2022) add that infrastructure implies classrooms, labs, workshops, teacher offices, janitors' closets, reading rooms, dispensaries, libraries, cafeterias, and gymnasiums. Schools' infrastructure is its buildings. The community can utilise all school buildings. Zottor, Egyir, and Anaman (2022) note that learners need a conducive environment for education to be effective. In the past, learners used to learn under the trees when it rained, or it was cold or windy. The learning environment must be in good condition. It is the responsibility of the community to utilise all the school buildings for better academic performance. The community should be more involved in the school renovation process and look for donations from small businessmen or Entrepreneurs who attended that school, as they need to chip in for the school to be in good condition. Poor classrooms and libraries affect the academic performance of learners. The good quality of school buildings also improves the effectiveness of education and learning. Poor performance in primary school will also lead to poor performance in high school, and they will blame parents and friends for low achievement. Good infrastructure can improve academic performance. If the buildings are in good condition, that means every learner must have a desk and chair.

Yangambi (2023) states that the impact of school infrastructure on student learning and performance is a major factor. In the United States of America, studies found that student achievement is related to building conditions. Learners perform better in the newest or renovated buildings. When the classroom is overcrowded, too hot, too cold, dust-filled, or poorly ventilated, learners and teachers experience physical and intellectual discomfort. Such an environment can cause learners to sleep. An environment with little natural light produces less than the required result. Classrooms with enough space for learners to sit well and the teacher to move freely can produce better performance. It will be easy to create a private study area in such a classroom. There are many challenges in school facilities, and the district needs to provide an environment conducive to learning. Such

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educational buildings can help learners write their examinations well and perform better. The classroom should be flexible enough for teaching and learning.

The quality of the school buildings and the capacity to give an effective education despite historical changes present unique possibilities for understanding how and why good educational accomplishment and improving school infrastructures should be prioritised. Poor classrooms, libraries, and labs affect student performance the most. School location, parent participation, and socioeconomic level may also affect these aspects (LaRocque, Kleinman & Darling, 2021).

According to Nyati (2023), a well-built classroom infrastructure promotes a positive learning environment and improves the school quality, and results will be much better. Poor school building, ground conditions, and infrastructure have an impact on teaching and learning. South African schools have become a death trap rather than centres for teaching and learning. Lack of safety in school leads to lower academic performance. School facilities need to be improved so that the performance and safety of the school are also impressive. Dzaga (2017) argues that each province must make provision for infrastructure funds to repair and replace windows, doors, and other facilities, as these are very expensive. Schools must not remain on premises where pipes are broken or faulty, as this is risky for teachers and learners.

2.5.2 School and family relationships on learners' performance

When families and schools work together, learners are more motivated to learn and develop more comprehensively. Effective communication between family and school can also help identify and address behavioural issues. Motale (2014) on the impact of socioeconomic status on learner achievement at public schools in Nkangala District, Mpumalanga Province, explored five successful but diverse schools, all structured differently, yet they all had five factors in common. They all had prominent features of schools that have better learners' academic achievement, and these are:

- Clear and high standards.
- Multiple changes.

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- Strong leadership.
- Collaborative teams.
- Committed teachers.

Schools in poverty-stricken areas are not likely to provide relevant learning resources to their learners. Many resources are unavailable in most schools. Teachers sometimes face the dilemma of some learners displaying unruly behaviour, which teachers are untrained to manage. For example, residents of the township areas do not escape the negative impact of social ills associated with historical segregation (Nelson Mandela Organisation, n.d.).

2.5.3 Community involvement

According to Husein, Muturi and Samantar (2018), the community must be more involved in school activities to improve the academic performance of the school. It is the duty of the community to decide if their school needs to pay school fees to help where they are battling, such as adding buildings to the school premises, as norms and standards do not want their money spent on that. The community needs to be more involved in motivating teachers to improve academic performance. The community also needs to respect teachers and involve themselves in training and technical support for the school. It should also be involved in the maintenance of school infrastructure and academic performance. The community needs to volunteer at school, not for payment, to help the school be in good condition for better results. They also need to volunteer to repair broken stuff, such as windows, desks, chairs, doors, and the school surroundings, and to build extra classrooms for their children. When a community is not involved in the schools, they let burglars vandalise the school even in daylight, but when they are involved, they make sure the school is always guarded (Clark & Akerman, 2020).

2.5.4 School environment and support

Families can establish connections with other families, teachers, and school personnel in a supportive school environment. Parents may encounter obstacles because of an unfavourable school environment. It can be challenging to encourage parental

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involvement in a school when families have different cultural backgrounds (LaRocque, Kleiman & Darling, 2021). Parents who feel welcomed at school get more involved in school activities. Regarding communication, big schools are found to be less respectful and unsafe than small schools (Goldkind & Farmer, 2023). Suppose discussing the most effective indicator of family engagement, a low student-teacher ratio was discovered as the best signal. Family engagement in a child's schooling has also been found to be influenced by parents and perceptions of the academic environment (Rodriguez & Elbaum, 2024).

The school environment and support mechanisms in primary schools that serve low-income (SES) areas significantly influence educational achievement. These institutions frequently encounter unique challenges that can jeopardise the children's academic achievement. Understanding the dynamics of these environments is critical for devising effective assistance plans.

Schools in low-income communities usually face inadequate funding, resulting in insufficient educational resources such as textbooks, technology, and learning materials (Wium, 2010). This scarcity directly influences the ability of learners to interact with the content successfully. Cobbold (2017) add that a significant portion of children in low-SES schools identified a lack of educational resources as a barrier to learning. For instance, compared to just 1% of kids in high SES schools, over 21% of children in these schools struggle because of a lack of resources. The disparity demonstrates the importance of textbooks, teaching resources, and technology. Schools with lower socioeconomic status may also have poor physical infrastructure, such as dilapidated structures and insufficient classroom space. Poor infrastructure in these settings causes learning obstacles for about 50% of learners (Cobbold, 2017).

Summersett-Ringgold, Li, Haynie and Iannotti (2015) argue that a learning environment that is uncomfortable and distracting may result from inadequate amenities. Due to resource constraints, class sizes are frequently increased, creating crammed classrooms with little opportunity for individualised attention. This circumstance may reduce instruction's efficacy and restrict pupils' opportunity to receive individualised support. In

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addition, Dagada (2022) posits that since most classrooms can hold 40 to 50 learners in each primary school class, overcrowding can influence how reading and comprehension are taught in schools. Overcrowded classrooms often result in disruptive learners and ineffective disciplinary actions. It will result in inadequate performance due to insufficient interaction between teachers and learners.

2.5.5 Learning environment

Numerous factors have been identified as affecting children's educational experiences and outcomes, including the learning environment in low-SES schools during primary school, Grades R-7. These elements, which fall into two categories, in-school and out-of-school, all significantly influence how young learners learn.

In-school influences can refer to the frequent lack of knowledge of teachers about the unique requirements of pupils from low-income families. Many teachers may lack the professional development necessary to assist these learners' literacy and language development due to inefficient teaching methods (Wium, 2010). Many educators in low-SES schools could still be using outdated teaching strategies like rote learning, which do not promote language and literacy development (Munns, Hatton & Gilbert, 2013). Additionally, Vadivel, Alam, Nikpoo and Ajanil (2023) posit that ineffective teaching tools may hinder learners from transitioning from their informal home language to the more abstract and structured language used in academic settings.

On the issue of the learning environment of out-of-school influences, Wium and Louw (2011) argue that transitioning from the casual language spoken at home to the formal language necessary in school settings can be difficult for kids from low-socioeconomic homes. This challenge may result in inadequate communication and understanding, both of which are essential for academic achievement. Learners' family environment greatly influences their early language development. A child's preparedness for school, as indicated earlier, is greatly influenced by several factors, including parental participation, socioeconomic position, and access to educational resources. Low-SES children are frequently less exposed to printed materials, as they are less likely to have reading

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experiences, essential for developing literacy abilities, with their caregivers (Hugo & Masalesa, 2021).

2.5.6 Physical learning environment

The physical aspects of learning spaces, including lighting, noise levels, and temperature, significantly affect learners' academic performance. A study by López-Chao et al. (2020) found that appropriate lighting and reduced noise levels positively influence concentration and learning efficiency among university learners. Similarly, maintaining optimal classroom temperatures was shown to enhance student engagement and performance.

Classrooms, libraries, labs, and staff housing increase the physical learning environment regarding preliminary technical abilities and the development of quality and suitable school elements (Aguilera-Hermida, 2020). Cleanliness inspires and improves academic performance. Garbage disposal, drainage, appropriate water for personal hygiene, clean restrooms, and other school facilities might impact cleanliness (Adarkwah, 2022). According to Hidayatullah, Surianto and Desembrianita (2024), the school's physical elements reflect its academic and extracurricular offerings. School infrastructure determines classroom size and shape. The classroom's size, layout, and educational tools determine how learners are taught. Parents' and other educational stakeholders' opinions on school quality influence school infrastructure and behaviour. The quantity and mix of components that make school infrastructure management efficient determine how well school administrators may achieve organisational goals (Kaufmann & Vallade, 2020).

Schools are closed spaces that human beings occupy and in which they breathe for hours every day. Normally, they do not have constant and automatic ventilation, which generates a lack of oxygen in the environment, and only schools with a mechanical supply and exhaust type of ventilation meet the recommended ventilation rate per student (Oluyemi, 2021). The environment in which learners and teachers learn and teach is human-made. It is not the natural environment of a living being, but rather the relationship with nature. The classroom configuration has a close relationship with the teaching approach. The disposition of the space that will affect the interaction in the classroom and

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the choice of student seats also generates an impact on academic performance (Haverinen-Shaughnessy, 2021).

Benedict and Hoag (2020) add that the other element of the classroom that may influence learning space attachment is the student seating location, due to issues, such as proximity to the teacher, accessibility to the halls or distance to the screen. Additionally, the learning space attachment is associated with learners' perceptions of whose artworks are permanently exhibited. This bond between learners and their classroom is also related to their feelings of security and privacy, which contribute to their comfort.

2.6 INTERVENTIONS TO MITIGATE CHALLENGES LEARNERS FROM LOW SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS FACE IN PRIMARY SCHOOL

To address the obstacles encountered by learners from low SES during primary school, comprehensive strategies are required. The following strategies are regarded as beneficial:

2.6.1 Enhanced learning environments

According to Nayak (2025), schools should ensure that classrooms are equipped with learning resources that promote cognitive growth. This includes literature, technology, and instructional games that appeal to various learning styles. Mafokwane (2017) suggests that learners can access books, educational games, and technology; these may involve stakeholders in creating initiatives, such as book drives, collaborations with local libraries, or requesting donations of school supplies from willing individuals or groups.

The presence of well-trained and experienced teachers is essential for improving learning settings. Tan, Yang and Yang (2014) argue that learners in low-income schools are generally taught by inexperienced teachers, which can harm their academic achievement. Effective teacher training and professional development can result in better instructional quality, which benefits learners' learning experiences (Liu, Peng, Zhao & Luo, 2022). Creating improved learning settings is critical for overcoming the academic obstacles experienced by primary school learners from poor socioeconomic backgrounds.

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Educational institutions may dramatically improve these pupils' academic performance by providing access to resources, creating supportive school climates, boosting teacher quality, and involving families. This comprehensive strategy is critical to breaking the cycle of poverty and creating fair educational opportunities for all learners.

2.6.2 The significance of parental engagement

Parental attitudes and engagement towards home-learning activities can positively influence children's accomplishments and minimise other variables that impair reading abilities (Bonci, 2008). Schools should actively engage parents through frequent contact, workshops, and activities that increase parental involvement in their children's education; these various forms of engagement can help boost expectations and goals for academic achievement (Martin et al., 2014). Tan, Yang and Yang (2014) posit that engaging parents and kids can also be improved by establishing community-based programmes. Parents can get more involved in their children's education by participating in programmes that give resources for at-home learning and courses on successful parenting techniques. Parental participation is a significant support mechanism that can help compensate for the disadvantages of low socioeconomic status. For example, research shows that children from low-SES households benefit more from parental involvement in academic pursuits than their higher-SES counterparts (Duan, Guan & Bu, 2018).

To improve parental involvement among low-SES households, schools should implement customised initiatives. This may involve creating a friendly school climate that promotes parent involvement, offering available tools to all parents, and allowing flexible meeting times (Bester, Suzanne & Michè. 2021). Studies have repeatedly demonstrated that more parental participation corresponds with better academic results for children, especially in low-income homes (Şengönül, 2022). Engaged parents frequently support academic socialisation, which involves discussing schooling, assisting with homework, and cultivating a good attitude towards education with the school and the teachers. This assistance is crucial for improving children's learning experiences and outcomes. This implies that some of the difficulties these kids face during their academic careers may be lessened with the active involvement of parents.

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2.6.3 Targeted academic interventions

Targeted academic interventions can be quite helpful in addressing the academic obstacles that learners from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds confront; hence, structured academic support can help close learning gaps.

According to research, small-group education can significantly enhance reading and mathematical outcomes for at-risk pupils, with effect sizes averaging approximately 0.38 (Dietrichson, Filges, Klokker, Viinholt, Bøg & Jensen, 2020). Targeted academic interventions enable personalised attention and instruction, allowing teachers to address specific learners' requirements better. Collaborative learning programmes that include learners working together, such as paired reading or cooperative learning, have been shown to positively affect literacy skills and overall academic achievement (Ghavifekr, 2020). These strategies, therefore, boost academic performance and help peers develop social skills, creating a more supportive learning environment.

2.6.4 Attitude change by the teachers

Ali, Masroor and Tariq (2020) suggested ways for teachers to have a caring and sharing attitude. Among them, one is to figure out the learners' aptitude level so the teacher can prepare the lesson accordingly, confirming the availability of relevant material and observing the lived experiences of the learners. A safe and caring environment encourages learners' creativity and the ability to express themselves without fear and anxiety. They add that teachers need to identify and remediate the classroom issues to obtain desirable soundness in the learners' attitudes and enable their creativity to arise.

2.6.5 Provision of adequate infrastructure

According to Hidayatullah, Surianto and Desembrianita (2024), infrastructure has a significant effect on learning achievement. Academic infrastructure can influence learners' learning achievement, which is a learning outcome with indicators of changes in learners' behaviour, attitudes and development of abilities. This means that the better the academic infrastructure, the better the learners' learning achievement will be. Academic

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infrastructure includes face-to-face classroom facilities such as benches, tables, boards and projectors. With a large amount of infrastructure available, learners' needs, both physical and psychological, are met so that they can increase their focus on studying without any distractions or lack of facilities. Apart from that, the many increasingly sophisticated information technology facilities certainly make it easier for learners to gain maximum knowledge.

2.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Parents need to be more involved in their children's education for them to do well academically. Learners from the SES families borrow books from the library, as they cannot afford to buy them. Those learners from the low SES sometimes undergo severe stress due to the many problems they encounter at home. Occasionally, this can affect these learners psychologically. The school benefits a lot when parents are more involved in their children's academic work. Parents need to be motivated to help their learners while at home. They also need to volunteer at school to render services so that their children can learn freely and be proud of themselves, and to improve their academic performance. Schools need a large infrastructure for learners to learn freely and improve their academic results. Learners from low SES normally received inadequate funds, leading to insufficient resources.

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CHAPTER THREE
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter reviewed literature related to this study. This chapter discusses the research design and methodology, including the research paradigm and the study's methodological approaches. The research objectives and research questions guided the selection of data collection and analysis techniques. The post-positivist/interpretivist paradigm and ethnographic design guided the study. Furthermore, the chapter discusses the relevance of the qualitative research approach for this study. The chapter also addresses the issue of the selection of participants, data gathering processes and procedures used for data collection, which included individual face-to-face interviews, focus group interviews and observations, as well as the methods used to analyse gathered data.

3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

The term “paradigm” is derived from the Greek word " pattern " (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017) and has been broadly defined by many academics. Shrestha and Shama (2024) define a research paradigm as the underlying philosophical and theoretical frameworks that guide research studies. It influences researchers to think about reality, knowledge and how to conduct research. It also guides how the findings are interpreted, the choice of research methods and methodology and how data is collected and analysed. Khatri (2020) adds that the research paradigm refers to the theoretical or philosophical ground for the research work. It is viewed as a research philosophy. It directs the researcher in the overall process of investigation, including the selection of research problem, setting research questions, determining the nature and types of reality, knowledge, methodology and value of research work. Kumatongo and Muzata (2021) affirm that a research paradigm is a set of common beliefs and agreements shared by scientists on how problems can be understood and addressed. It can also be referred to as the way scientists respond to three basic questions of ontology, epistemology and methodological

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questions, which deal with how knowledge is generated, handled, understood and applied to the topic under study. In this study, the interpretive paradigm assisted me to consider and understand the different ways in which the study participants perceived how family background or socioeconomic habitat could influence learning and academic outcomes of learners from poor families.

This study adopted an interpretivist paradigm based on Ryan's (2018) assumptions that "truth and knowledge are subjective" because of differences in our culture and life experiences that shape how different individuals understand and interpret the same situations and events. The interpretive paradigm approach by Berryman (2019) states that "social construction, language, shared consciousness, and other social interactions" are essential for interpreting facts. Reality, therefore, is not objective as the positivist paradigm claims. Interpretivism, on the other hand, argues that reality is subjective, as it depends on one's own life experiences and perceptions of events and situations (Collins, 2010). Besides, Collins (2010) asserts that, for interpretive researchers to find answers to qualitative questions, they need to structure their research questions to focus on understanding the "how and why" of a phenomenon.

According to the interpretive approach, researchers, as social participants, need to understand the differences between people and their experiences (Saunders et al., 2012). Interpretations, also known as interpretive, involve researchers explaining the elements of research. Hence, these researchers incorporate their subjective notions and beliefs into research because they believe that through the exploration of human language, the meanings can be understood and shared in qualitative research (Carey, 2012). It is, therefore, essential to understand who is interpreting, why, and how they are interpreting. The terms "interpretative research" and "qualitative research" are frequently interchanged, despite being fundamentally different concepts; they are related in that interpretivism informs qualitative research. As a research paradigm, interpretive is based on the premise that social reality is shaped by human experience and social backdrop, thereby making it well suited to research human behaviours related to the context of its sociocultural issues (Rehman & Alaharti, 2016). Interpretive researchers see social truth as embedded in their social surroundings. They explain truth through a method of

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understanding in place of a hypothesis, trying out the method with the aid of using and integrating the participants' subjective experiences, notions and beliefs of their respective social and cultural contexts (Rehman & Alaharti, 2016).

In this study, the collected data was interpreted based on participants' thoughts and language, and then the findings were brought up after interpreting the participants' verbatim narratives and the participants' observations. Personal visits to the selected primary schools for data collection helped me to interpret the experiences, thoughts, opinions and actions of the participants in their own social settings and cultural contexts.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

According to Rezigalla (2020), research design is set up to decide on, among other issues, how to collect further data, analyse, and interpret them, and finally, to provide the answers to the questions. The primary objective of the research design is to guarantee that the collected evidence allows the answering of the initial questions as clearly as possible. Muraina and Adeleke (2021) argue that research design is a strategic framework that connects research topics to strategy implementation. Khanday, Sumble, Khanam and Deeba (2023) define research design as a researcher's procedure to answer legitimate, objective, and correct inquiries.

The ethnographic research design was used, which is a design of inquiry from anthropology and sociology in which the researcher studies the shared patterns of behaviours, language, and actions of an intact cultural group in a natural setting over a period (Almusaed, Almssad & Yitmen, 2025). Data collection often involves observations and interviews (Creswell, 2014). Ethnographic research involves a rigorous description of the setting or individuals, followed by data analysis for themes or issues that emerged from the collected data (Asenahabi, 2019). Therefore, the research design in this study was the whole process of planning the research, designing the research purpose, objectives, questions, methods of selecting participants, research instruments, and data collection procedure, as well as analysing the data into research findings that responded to the research objectives.

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3.4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

According to Sreekumar (2023), research methodology is a structured and scientific approach used to collect, analyse, and interpret quantitative or qualitative data to answer research questions or test a hypothesis. A research methodology is like a plan for carrying out research and helps keep researchers on track by limiting the scope of research. Before writing a methodology, research limitations and ethical concerns must be considered. Kumari, Lavanya, Vidhya and Premila (2023) argue that research methodology systematically solves a research problem. Kapur (2018) affirms that research methodology is the systematic and structured method for collecting, analysing, and interpreting data in a research investigation. It entails the practical decisions on what data to gather, from whom, how to acquire it, and how to evaluate it, ensuring that the study goals and objectives are effectively realised. In this study, which explored the influence of learners' socioeconomic habitat on academic performance, I developed the following research objectives and research questions, as covered in Chapter One:

The study's main aim was to explore the influence of a learner's socioeconomic habitat on academic performance. The following objectives supported the aim:

- To identify the challenges faced in their academic performance by primary school learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds.
- To examine the influence of learners' family socioeconomic status on their academic performance in primary schools, focusing on parental education, school environment and learning environment.
- To assess the influence of environmental factors, including community support and infrastructure, on learners' academic success
- To propose targeted interventions to mitigate the challenges that learners from low SES backgrounds face in primary school.

The objectives were followed by the following research questions:

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The main research question was: How does the learners' socioeconomic habitat influence academic performance? The following subsidiary research questions supported the main research question:

- What challenges do primary school learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds face in their academic performance?
- What is the influence of learners' family socioeconomic status on their academic performance in primary schools, focusing on parental education, school environment and learning environment?
- How do environmental factors - community support and infrastructure - influence learners' academic success?
- What intervention strategies can mitigate the challenges of low-SES students in primary school?

The qualitative research approach was particularly relevant for this study, as it allowed for an in-depth exploration of the complex experiences and perceptions of stakeholders involved in the education of learners from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. By employing interviews, I captured the lived experiences of these stakeholders, namely the principals, heads of department, register teacher, subject teacher, learners, and parents, shedding light on how factors such as family environment, habitat, and socioeconomic status influence learners' educational journey. This approach enabled the identification of nuanced themes and patterns that quantitative methods may miss, providing a richer understanding of the barriers and facilitators that influence academic performance and educational outcomes. Ultimately, the qualitative perspective helped illuminate the intricate dynamics at play, offering valuable insights into informing educational policies and practices aimed at reducing disparities and enhancing the learning experiences of all learners.

The qualitative research method was chosen for this study because, according to Creswell and Poth (2021), it has the following advantages:

- Qualitative research is comprehensive; it takes the big picture into account and seeks to understand the entire picture.

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- The relationships that exist within a system are investigated by qualitative research.
- In qualitative research, knowing a particular social context is prioritised over generating predictions about it.
- The researcher becomes the research tool in qualitative research. Additionally, there is room for the researcher to outline their personal biases and ideological preferences.
- The design of qualitative research takes ethical factors into account and incorporates decisions made with informed consent.

For principals, heads of department, register teachers, subject teachers, I used face-to-face interviews, while focus groups were used on learners and parents and observations on learners and subject teachers as they were teaching. Face-to-face data collection took place when the interviewer spoke directly with the respondent following the prepared questionnaires. This method ensured data quality while raising the response rate. These interviews focused on people's perspectives, experiences, opinions, or motivations on the impact of socio-economic habitat on academic performance of learners (Creswell, 2022).

3.4.1 Population

A population is defined as a group of individuals who have certain skills, knowledge, and experiences required for research (Liu & Liu, 2022). A population is a complete set of people with specified characteristics (Thacker, 2020). According to Thomas (2023), population refers to the entire group of individuals, objects, or events that share a common characteristic and are the focus of the study. It represents the complete set of elements that the researcher aims to study and draw conclusions about. The population can include people, animals, or even inanimate objects, depending on the research context. Essentially, it is the larger group to which the researcher intends to generalise their findings. The population for this study was all the principals, departmental heads, teachers, learners and parents of learners from low socioeconomic status in Dzindi Circuit, Vhembe East District.

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3.4.2 Sampling method and procedure

The purposive sampling was the most suitable sampling technique for this study. Purposive sampling, also known as “non-probability sampling”, involves selecting participants based on specific characteristics or criteria relevant to the research objectives (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016). In this case, the study targeted learners and parents from low socioeconomic backgrounds, as well as their teachers, departmental heads and principals, to gain insights into their unique educational experiences and challenges.

The justification for purposive sampling lies in its ability to focus on participants most likely to provide rich, relevant information on the study's objectives. This technique allows for a deeper exploration of the nuances associated with socioeconomic factors and educational outcomes, ensuring that the sample is representative of the population of interest. By selecting individuals with first-hand experience with the challenges faced by low-SES learners, the study gathered in-depth data that was relevant and vital for understanding the complexities of these individuals' educational experiences. In addition, purposive sampling enables researchers to achieve a more targeted understanding of specific subgroups, which is essential for developing effective interventions and policy recommendations.

3.4.3 Study sample

Casteel and Bridier (2021) define a study sample as a broader population to serve as a representative sample and the focus of collecting data. Furthermore, Tchendjieu, Zhu, Hillard, Clarke, Napolioni, Lee Fang, Chen, Lu and Tsao (2022) define a study sample as a group of people from a broader population. According to Simkus and Simkus (2022), a study sample is the participants selected from a target population (the group you are interested in) to make observations about. As an entire population tends to be too large to work with, a smaller group of participants must act as a representative sample.

For this study, a sample size of 58 participants was selected from two schools: 2 principals, 2 heads of department, 2 register teachers, 2 subject teachers, 40 learners and 10 parents, who comprised single parents, grandparents and coupled parents.

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Principals, DHs, and teachers were selected, since they managed and taught learners from low SES, while learners and parents were selected based on their habitat and socioeconomic status. This distribution allowed for a balanced representation of perspectives from each group, ensuring that the complexities of the educational experiences of socioeconomic status (SES) learners are thoroughly explored.

Learners were selected to provide first-hand insights into their educational challenges and experiences. At the same time, parents were included to share their views on the factors that influence their children's education and their perceptions of the essence of schooling. Conversely, teachers offered valuable professional insights into how socioeconomic factors affect learners' classroom performance and engagement. By incorporating these three distinct yet interconnected perspectives, the study aimed to explore a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by low-SES learners. This approach enhanced the richness of the collected qualitative data and ensured that the findings reflected the diverse experiences and challenges associated with socioeconomic educational disparities.

3.4.4 Data collection strategies

According to Taherdoost (2021), the data collection strategy is the set of techniques that are applied to obtain accurate and trustworthy data from various sources. This helps the researcher to find answers to research questions. Liu (2021) posits that the data collection strategy serves as a road map for determining what information is required, how to gather it, and how to evaluate it. Ojo Agbodu, Idowu and Adedayo (2022) define data collection as the process of acquiring information for use in corporate decisions, strategic planning, research, and other applications. The data serves as a guide for all meaningful decision makers. It helps in making big decisions and solving problems that arise.

A data collection strategy is the systematic process of gathering information on variables of interest in an established systematic way that allows one to answer stated research questions, test hypotheses, and evaluate outcomes (Karunarathna et, al, 2024)

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The data was collected directly from the participants in a natural setting, such as the school. The researcher used face-to-face (individual) interviews with the principals, DHs, subject teachers, register teachers, parents and learners. Observations of learners were also used to get direct information from the natural setting of the school. According to Maree (2012), observation is a systematic process of recording the behavioural patterns of participants, objects and occurrences without necessarily questioning or communicating with them. It is an everyday activity, whereby people use their senses (seeing, hearing, touching, smelling and tasting) and their intuition to gather data. Creswell and Creswell (2018) define observation as a fundamental data collection method in research, especially in social sciences, psychology, and natural sciences. It involves systematically watching, listening, and recording behaviours, events, or phenomena in natural settings or experimental conditions. The researcher observed learners' behaviours from low socioeconomic backgrounds using an observation sheet, focusing more on class participation, interacting with peers, emotional expression, self management, signs of socio-economic impact and support needed.

3.4.5 Data analysis

According to Popenoe, Langius-Eklof, Stenwall and Jervaeus (2021), data analysis is defined as the systematic application of statistical and logical techniques to describe and illustrate, condense and recap, and evaluate data. Creswell (2020) defines data analysis as the process of systematically organising, interpreting and synthesising data to uncover patterns, relationships and insights that inform decision-making and research conclusions. Hagman (2023) adds that data analysis is the process of organising, analysing and interpreting qualitative research data- non-numeric, conceptual information. Data analysis is the process of interpreting and drawing conclusions from research data (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016). To find patterns, themes, and connections that might lead to an answer to the research question, the collected data must be structured, summarised, and examined. Thematic analysis was used to categorise the collected data for this study. This qualitative data analysis technique, thematic analysis, identifies, assesses, and reports on overarching themes and meanings within the data. The open-endedness of thematic analysis allows researchers to examine

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a wide range of data types, such as those from face-to-face interviews, focus-group discussions and observations (Khan, Khalique & Saini, 2025).

Cooksey and McDonald (2019) suggest that studies seeking themes and data patterns that may provide light on the study issue are ideal for thematic analysis. With this analysis method, a researcher can acquire a more comprehensive and in-depth grasp of the data and uncover insightful patterns and themes via thematic analysis. Thematic analysis helps identify patterns and recurrent themes in qualitative data collected through interviews and focus-group discussions.

Using a thematic analysis, a researcher may learn more about the data and can potentially provide unexpected results. The researcher may also constantly adjust the themes and subthemes in a thematic analysis to account for new material as it emerges. Researchers benefit from this adaptability, since they can be flexible and learn more about the issue by incorporating the participants' unique experiences and insights. Nowell et al. (2017) indicated that the process of thematic analysis involved several structured steps to ensure meaningful and reliable insights, which are drawn from the data underneath, followed by the steps:

- **Familiarising with the Data**

The first step involves thoroughly immersing oneself in the data to develop a deep understanding of its content. This process includes transcribing interviews, carefully reading through the data, and noting initial ideas (Nowell et al., 2017). In this study, data were gathered through observations, focus group discussions and semi-structured face-to-face interviews with primary school principals, focus group interviews with teachers, learners and parents, focusing on their experiences and challenges related to the impact of socioeconomic habitat on academic performance.

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- **Generating Initial Codes**

The second step requires systematically identifying and coding meaningful segments of the data that are relevant to the research questions. These initial codes represent the fundamental units of information extracted from the raw data (Braun & Clarke, 2020).

- **Searching for Themes**

After coding, the researcher organises related codes into broader themes, gathering all relevant data under each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2023a). Themes provide a higher-level understanding of patterns within the data. To develop the themes, I grouped similar or related codes into categories that reflected the broader patterns emerging from the collected data. Then, those categories were refined into themes.

- **Reviewing Themes**

This phase involves evaluating the themes to ensure they align with the coded data and the entire dataset. The researcher refined the themes and created a thematic map to guide the analysis (Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017). The following main themes were developed: General understanding of challenges faced by learners from low SES, Impact of family socioeconomic status on academic performance, Impact of environmental factors on academic success of learners from low SES, and intervention strategies to mitigate challenges faced by learners from low SES.

- **Defining and Naming Themes**

At this stage, the researcher defined and clarified the key elements of each theme, ensuring they accurately represented the data. The themes were named to reflect their content and the aspects of the data they captured (Creswell & Creswell, 2020).

- **Producing the Report**

The final step involved conducting a comprehensive analysis and writing the report. This included selecting vivid and compelling data extracts, analysing them in relation to the

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research questions and existing literature, and producing a scholarly report (Braun & Clarke, 2020).

3.5 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Trustworthiness is the degree to which one may trust the results of a study, which depends on how credible that study is. The reliability of the study was ensured by using the criteria of credibility, dependability, conformability and transferability.

3.5.1 Credibility

The reliability of research depends on how well its findings mirror the information that the study's participants provided (Middleton, 2023). The researcher's proper implementation of the procedures was ensured by the study's veracity, including participant double-checking, peer debriefing and ongoing involvement. The results are more likely to be accurate and represent the participants' experiences and viewpoints if shared with them. During a peer debriefing, the researcher shared the findings with peers to gain new perspectives and validate their views; therefore, spending enough time with the participants to understand their viewpoints and experiences is essential for sustained involvement.

To make data collection more credible, I ensured credibility by using d a tape recorder to record participants' responses. After each interview, the researcher allowed everyone to listen to the recorded text to clarify, comment and add to what he/she said. The transcriptions from vocal to written scripts were done word-for-word. This is "member checking", which Shenton (2019) considers to be the single most crucial provision that can be made to bolster a study's credibility. Checks relating to data accuracy occurred on the spot for participants to verify what they had said. The aim of this process was to ascertain whether the participants considered their words to match what they had intended.

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3.5.2 Dependability

According to Lim (2024), dependability in qualitative research refers to the consistency and stability of the research findings over time and under similar conditions, and thus, it parallels the concept of reliability in qualitative research, addressing the need for research findings to be repeatable and consistent if conducted again under similar circumstances. Dependability acknowledges that while qualitative research often explores dynamic, evolving phenomena, the methods and processes used should exhibit a level of consistency that allows the findings to be dependable. Abdulhamid, Kabir, Ghafir and Lei (2022) define dependability as the ability of a system to reliably deliver the service it was designed to provide. Accordingly, a dependable system should always be able to avoid failures that are more frequent and more severe than acceptable so that it can provide services that can justifiably be trusted. The researcher achieved dependability by identifying the themes and discussing them with the participants to check if they were accurate and dependable.

3.5.3 Confirmability

Lim (2024) indicated that confirmability in qualitative research refers to the degree of alignment maintained in the study, and it is akin to the concept of objectivity in quantitative research. This criterion assesses whether the findings, interpretations, and conclusions are rooted in data, paradigm, and /or theory, and not unduly influenced by the researcher's personal biases, interests, or motivations. Awan, Yahya and Arif (2023) define confirmability as the degree to which the results of an inquiry should be confirmed by other researchers. According to Lambert and Lambert (2021), confirmability relates to the results' neutrality and objectivity, ensuring that the researcher's prejudices did not affect them.

In this study, I ensured that no participant was forced to undergo an interview to collect the data. Views from different participants were recorded verbatim through a tape recorder after informed consent had been signed, so participants could freely voice their opinions.

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3.5.4 Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings can be applied to other contexts or settings (Lubbe, 2020). Thick description and purposeful sampling are two strategies the researcher employed to ensure this study is transferable. To ensure that readers understand the study's background, thick descriptions should include thorough and contextualised descriptions of the study's context, participants and any conclusions reached. Purposeful sampling was employed to guarantee that the sample was representative of the population of interest, which entailed choosing participants based on defined criteria, hence boosting the study's external validity. In this study, I clearly described the selected schools and participants in their contexts when conveying the research findings. Additionally, to assess the extent to which findings were accurate for people in other settings, similar projects employing the same methods but conducted in different environments were suggested.

3.6 DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study was conducted in Vhembe District of Limpopo Province, South Africa. The study only focused on primary schools. The participants were only the school principals, teachers, learners and parents of learners who are staying together, divorced parents and those who work far away and leave the children with guardians. The researcher chose the study area because it is closer to her work area, which did not cost much to travel around collecting data.

3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethics refers to the principles, values, and standards that guide individual and collective behaviours and decisions and help to distinguish right from wrong (Beauchamp & Childress, 2019). Ethics, hence, can be understood as a set of moral principles that govern individual and societal behaviour and help individuals and groups make decisions that are morally and socially responsible (Fisher, 2019). Ethics is the study of moral philosophy and the principles of right and wrong conduct, encompassing issues related to morality, values, and decision making in different contexts (Kumar & Kumar, 2020).

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The following are some of the key ethical considerations that were considered:

3.7.1 Permission to conduct the research

The researcher secured approval from the University of Venda Research Ethics Committee, and the Limpopo Department of Education and ethical certificates were granted (Appendices A and B). These approvals were essential to ensure that the study adhered to institutional and departmental guidelines and respected the rights of educational stakeholders. The researcher also clearly explained the study's objectives, methods, and ethical considerations to obtain informed consent from participants, following the ethical standards (World Medical Association, 2018). This process highlights the importance of maintaining transparency and fostering collaboration, which builds trust and encourages cooperation among all parties involved (Smith, 2018).

3.7.2 Informed consent

Informed consent refers to the ethical principle that participants in the study should be given enough information about the research so that they can decide whether they want to participate in the study or not (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). According to Hassan (2024), informed consent is the process through which individuals voluntarily agree to participate in an activity, such as a research study or educational programme, after being fully informed about the purpose, risks, benefits and alternatives involved. The study was conducted with the informed consent of all participants, who are the stakeholders in the education of primary school learners. This means that participants were fully informed about the purpose and nature of the study, their rights as participants, and any potential risks or benefits associated with their participation. A written consent form was signed by the participants and guardians of minor participants to accept to be part of the study, and they could withdraw from participating if they felt they no longer wanted to, without explanation (Appendix F).

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3.7.3 Confidentiality

According to Creswell and Creswell (2022), confidentiality refers to the protection of sensitive information or data from unauthorised access, disclosure, or use. Lee (2021) indicates that confidentiality is a set of rules that limit access to or restrict the use of certain types of information. Confidentiality includes non-public information disclosed or made available to the receiving party, directly or indirectly, through any means of communication or observation. The confidentiality of all participants was maintained throughout the study. This means all personal and sensitive information was kept confidential and only shared with authorised persons. The names and schools of participants were not used; instead, symbols that represent the participants were utilised.

3.7.4 Voluntary participation

Bhandary (2021) posits that voluntary participation means that all research subjects are free to choose to participate without any pressure or coercion. All participants can withdraw from or leave the study at any point without feeling an obligation to continue. According to Creswell and Creswell (2022), participation should always be voluntary, meaning that no one must be forced or coerced to participate in the study. Participation in the study was voluntary, and participants were free to withdraw at any time without any negative consequences.

3.7.5 Respect for participants

Tariq (2025) indicates that respect for research participants is a fundamental ethical principle that requires researchers to treat individuals as autonomous agents while protecting their dignity, privacy, and rights. Respect for persons refers to treating others with dignity and respecting their decisions (Liu & Zhou, 2025). Respect for persons entails recognising and honouring individuals' autonomy by allowing them to make their own decisions about participating in research (Telgenbuescher, 2025). Participants were treated with respect and dignity throughout the study. This included considering their cultural and social backgrounds and ensuring that the study did not cause harm or distress to participants.

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3.7.6 Transparency

Transparency in research is the ethical practice of publicly disclosing, recording, and publishing all parts of a study, including methodology, data, and findings, to enable verification, replication, and trust (Aguinis, Cope, Martin & Yokoya, 2025). Research transparency refers to the sharing and dissemination of research and research findings (Bagita-Vangana, Unger & Thriemer, 2025). The sharing and distribution of research and its results is referred to as research transparency (Uribe & Mariño, 2025). The study was conducted with transparency, and all research procedures and findings were reported truthfully and accurately.

3.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The research design and methodology outlined in Chapter 3 established a robust framework for investigating the impact of socio-economic habitat on academic performance. Through a thoughtful integration of qualitative methods and ethical considerations, the study aimed to contribute meaningful insights into the field of education and policymaking, facilitating informed decisions and potential interventions to enhance educational environments and outcomes. The sampling method, study sample size, and population were outlined, with a clear explanation of the purposive sampling technique and the determination of sample size based on data saturation. The data collection instruments, including face-to-face and focus group interviews and observations, were discussed in detail. Thematic analysis was identified as the chosen approach for analysing the qualitative data collected, providing a systematic way to identify patterns and themes within the textual information from the collected data. The section on trustworthiness highlighted various factors, like credibility of research instruments, transferability of study results, dependability of data collection instruments, and confirmability of data sources, ensuring the overall reliability and credibility of the study.

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CHAPTER FOUR
DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This study aimed to explore the influence of learners' socioeconomic habitat on academic performance. The study took place at selected primary schools in Vhembe East District in Limpopo Province, South Africa. In the previous chapter, the research design and methodology were presented and discussed, as well as the study's data gathering procedures. This chapter presents and analyses data gathered through interviews conducted with five different categories of participants, comprising 2 primary schools principals, 2 departmental heads, 2 register teacher and 2 subject teachers, 10 parents and 40 learners from low-SES families.

Data collected from interviews were interpreted using content analysis, as Cooksey and McDonald (2019) state that studies seeking themes and data patterns that may provide light on the study issue are ideal for thematic analysis. The analysis was based on the themes and patterns that emerged from the data. I corroborated the gathered data from individual and focus group interviews with observations that were recorded in my reflective research, which was made available from two schools. The content analysis made it possible to compare and contrast the views of participants according to the study

4.2 DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURE

This section presents the analysis of data. The first part focuses on the biographical data, and the second part on the analysis of the contextual questions.

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Table 4.1 Demographic data of working study participants

Participants	Number of participants	Academic qualifications	Experience	School category
Principal School A (PA)	1	BED Hons in School Management	3 years	Semi-rural
Principal School B (PB)	1	Med in Inclusive Education	4 years	Semi-rural
Departmental Head School A (DHA)	1	BED Hons in Education	18 years	Semi-rural
Departmental Head School B (DHB)	1	Bachelor of Education in Foundation Phase	12 years	Semi-rural
Register Teacher School A (RTA)	1	BED Hons in Curriculum Studies	3 years	Semi-rural
Register Teacher School B (RTB)	1	Bachelor of Education in Foundation Phase	6 years	Semi-rural
Subject Teacher School A (STA)	1	BED Hons in Educational Psychology	6 years	Semi-rural
Subject Teacher School B (STB)	1	BED Hons in Foundation Phase	6 years	Semi-rural

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Table 4.1 reveals that participants in the study had adequate and relevant experience in teaching; all principals were teachers before, meaning they have experience with learners from low SES. Another factor is that three years of experience of the principals is enough to understand most of the challenges that learners experience at school. Register teachers and subject teachers have six years of experience and have seen it all. Thus, the participants are experienced to participate in the study. All of the participants have teaching qualifications, which means they have learnt about their profession and know how to handle learners from different backgrounds. They understood educational matters well. The majority had above five years' experience as teachers, thus had a wide source of knowledge to reflect on socioeconomic issues that influence learning outcomes.

4.3 QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF CONTEXTUAL QUESTIONS

The presentation, analysis and discussion or interpretation employed qualitative approaches, as outlined in the previous chapter. The data emerged from interviews conducted with the principals, teachers, parents and learners. The analysis process was guided by a theoretical framework, research questions, research objectives and literature review. The participants were coded as follows: Principal for School A as PA and principal for school B as PB, Departmental Head school A as DHA, Departmental Head school B as DHB, Register teacher for school A as RTA and Register teacher for school B as RTB, and Subject teacher school A as STA, while Subject teacher school B was STB. Moreover, Learners school A were coded as LA1 to LA14, with Learners school B as LB1 to LB14. Parents for school A were named PA1 to PA5, and parents for school B as PB1 to PB5.

4.4 EMERGING THEMES

Four major themes emerged from the gathered data. The major themes were sub-divided into sub-themes in order to present and analyse participants' views.

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Table 4.2 Themes and sub-themes of the study

Themes	Sub-themes
4.4.1 Challenges that affect the academic performance of learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds	4.4.1.1 Academic challenges encountered by learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds 4.4.1.2 Socioeconomic factors that influence learners' academic expectations 4.4.1.3 Performance of learners from low SES compared to other learners 4.4.1.4 Status of learners from low SES and the school culture.
4.4.2 The influence of learners' socioeconomic status on their academic performance	4.4.2.1 Parents' education contribution towards learners' performance 4.4.2.2 Comparative parental support to schooling for learners from low SES and high SES 4.4.2.3 Comfortability of learners from low SES in school environment 4.4.2.4 Role of the principal in creating a conducive school environment for learners from low SES
4.4.3 Environmental and community support and infrastructure that influence learners' academic success	4.4.3.1 Availability of rich learning infrastructure 4.4.3.2 Community support to learners from low SES 4.4.3.3 Attracting learners from low SES to come to school
4.4.4 Intervention strategies to mitigate the challenges of low-SES students in primary school	4.4.4.1 Supportive resources needed to address the academic challenges of learners from low SES

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Themes	Sub-themes
	4.4.4.2 Programs and initiatives to address challenges faced by learners from low SES 4.4.4.3 Strategies for learners from low SES to feel welcomed at school and study freely

Discussion of data according to themes

This section presents and discusses the findings of the study, organised according to the key themes that emerged from the data analysis. The themes were driven through a systematic process of coding and categorisation, informed by the research question and the theoretical framework underpinning the study. Each theme is discussed in relation to relevant literature in order to interpret the findings and highlight areas of practice. Appropriate verbatim excerpts from participants are included to substantiate the interpretations and provide deeper insight into the perspective of participants.

4.4.1 Theme 1: Challenges that affect the academic performance of learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds

The theme sought to bring about the challenges that are faced by learners from low SES, as observed by different stakeholders at school. It checks the status of low-SES students in terms of school cleanliness and the provision of other basics like breakfast, lunch, and supper.

4.4.1.1 Academic challenges encountered by learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds

For learners to learn freely, they must not be faced with challenges that can disturb them. The emotional and social challenges faced by learners from low SES might develop into behavioural problems in the classroom, making it difficult for teachers to maintain a conducive learning environment. Learners from low-income families are more likely to

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face health difficulties such as malnutrition and a lack of access to healthcare, which might impair their academic performance. Health issues can cause increased absenteeism, compromising learning continuity and academic progress (Ndlela, 2021). Backgrounds for learners are different, and they can affect the learning of learners, especially if one has a low-SES background. Principals, DH and teachers were asked to identify the most common challenges that they observe amongst learners from low SES in their schools. Explaining the observation on learners from low socio-economic related challenges, one school principal from school A indicated that:

> *because they're still young, it's easier to recognise them through their behaviour. You give them work, the work is not done, you ask why the work is not done, and one might say, "My mom was not home" or "my dad did this and that." So when you do follow up, you find that these people or this particular group of learners who are normally not doing their work, their socioeconomic status is very bad or worse (PA).*

In agreement with the Principal at school B, it was further added that the lack of basic needs impacted on the learners.

> *when we need study materials as a school, they are kids, of course, but there are some things that we can still buy to enhance their learning. But when you ask parents to buy, you find that most of them say, 'We don't have money; we cannot afford it.' So we tend to learn abstractly out of space because we cannot have the concrete things to use (PB).*

The literature seems to indicate that low-class learners are generally not exposed to rich or relevant cultural capital in class societies (Wei, 2025). One of the Departmental Heads indicated this by narrating that:

> *When we give them homework, they don’t write because their parents are not learnt enough (DHA).*

Relating to the academically impoverished home environment, the Deputy Principal of School B also concurred that:

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academically, they didn't achieve well because their parents didn't help them with their homework and studying, and they didn't supervise them when they were at home. That's the most important problem we have (DHB).

One of the register teachers indicated that:

Most of them do not perform well in class. Some of them are even left behind because they don't concentrate in class (RTA)

The second register teacher added on to say that:

These learners from this low background don't have support from their parents.

It prevents them from performing well academically. These learners from low backgrounds feel safe at school rather than at home. So, when they come, they come to school, and they are tired because some play the role of being parents. So, when they come to school, they are tired and exhausted (RTB).

To show the seriousness of the unrich home environment of the learners from low SES, she indicated that:

Learners from low socio-economic backgrounds don't have resources. They don't have uniforms. Sometimes they come to school with torn or old clothes. They don't have school bags. During casual day, they don't even have clothes to wear. Some do not come to school on such days. They don't have breakfast, lunch, or pocket money (STA).

Most of learners are not able to read and understand English (STB).

Parents also contributed to the challenges that are faced by learners from low-SES backgrounds. One parent said:

Sometimes children show that they are tired, and they do not understand what is needed. I sometimes don't have time, and the child may refuse to write the homework if it is not understandable (PA1).

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Another parent supported the first one to show that, because they are not educated, they find it very difficult to help their children. The parent put it this way:

> *Many times, I don't understand questions from their homework, so I can't help with any school work (PA 5).*

The parents from school B added on to what was said by the parents from school A. The parents of learners from low SES have problems supporting their children. They voiced their mind like:

> *When I fail to understand homework questions, it's a challenge because I cannot help my child. I didn't go far with school, so I don't understand the things that the child is learning at school (PB1).*
>
> *The problem is when you are teaching the child things that you don't understand as a parent. We did not learn the things that these children are learning now (PB3).*
>
> *When we don't have data to Google things that are needed, it is a problem (PB4).*

The other challenges faced by learners from low socio-economic backgrounds, as laid down by other parents from school A, were the issue of poverty, drug abuse, bad roads during rainy seasons, bullying and some community members who break into schools and steal learners' food. The parents from both schools A and B alluded that:

> *Poverty is the main issue that affects education, a shortage of food and health problems, and the clinic is very far (PA1).*
>
> *The challenge is that our children buy things that have substances. When they arrive at school, they do not want to go to classes. They are always under the influence of these drugs, and it prevents them from learning (PA4).*
>
> *When it is raining, it becomes difficult for our children to go to school because of the roads. There are also people who wait for our children by the road as they go through the bushes, and they rob them of their belongings (PB1).*

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Things that are affecting education in our community are children who bully others and those who use substances like alcohol and drugs that disturb our community (PB2).

There are some people who break into schools and steal children's food, and children cannot learn on an empty stomach, as here at home, we don't have enough food. Some break the windows, and when it is cold, our children feel cold, and they cannot learn well (PB3).

The findings indicate that learners from low SES backgrounds face multiple, interrelated challenges that negatively affect their academic engagement and performance. Consistent with Sengonul (2022), many learners lack adequate parental and material support due to financial constraints, limiting access to essential learning resources. Within Bronfenbrenner's microsystem, the home environment, characterised by poverty, parental fatigue, and limited resources, fails to provide the support necessary for effective learning (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). The study further reveals that some learners assume adult responsibilities at home, resulting in physical and emotional exhaustion that compromises concentration at school. Disruptions within the family microsystem, as explained by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, hinder learners' cognitive and emotional development. Inadequate school uniforms and clothing also contribute to absenteeism, particularly during casual days, as learners experience embarrassment and social exclusion. This reflects a strained mesosystem, where economic hardship weakens the interaction between home and school expectations. Parents reported limited involvement in their children's academic work due to long working hours, fatigue from piece jobs, unfamiliarity with the curriculum, and lack of internet access. These factors further weaken home-school relationships, which Bronfenbrenner identifies as critical for learner development. The absence of digital resources exacerbates educational inequalities, particularly in learning contexts that increasingly rely on online materials.

4.4.1.2 Scioeconomic factors that influence learners' academic expectations

There are so many factors that can influence a learner's ability to meet academic expectations. These factors can be positive or negative. Socioeconomic factors, such as

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a family's financial status, parents' educational level, race, and gender, have an impact on the quality and availability of schooling (Per Linguam, 2023). The views of participants were solicited in regard to the socioeconomic factors that influence learners' ability to learn and meet the academic expectations, which are to be successful in life and to live a better life because of education. Educational level of parents is one factor that can influence learners to meet academic expectations. If parents are educated, they know what is expected at school; thus, they can give support in everything that concerns school. However, if parents are not educated, they care less about their children's education (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). They do not take it seriously, and they cannot support their children.

In concurrence with the literature cited above, most of the educators felt that educated family members act as role models and a motivating factor to learners. One such view was expressed by one of the principals who thought that:

> *The well-educated or the more educated parents are understanding. When we talk about the academic achievements and the academic support that is needed by the school and the learners, they understand it better (PA).*

The other principal also thought education in the family is an important factor in supporting the offspring and siblings to learn harder and develop resilience in schooling. Expressing this view, the principal explained that:

> *When the learner's parents are educated, they are able to help their children with schoolwork. They are able to motivate and encourage their children because they know what is expected and what needs to be done at school. They are able to stand and support their children. But for learners from families where parents are not educated, it is hard because they don't even know what is happening at school; they are not interested at all. So, parents' education contributes immensely towards the performance of their children because they are their role models. If all our children were coming from parents who are educated, we wouldn't be having a situation where our learners wouldn't perform as expected because parents would help and close the gap (PB).*

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The departmental head of school A shared the same sentiments with the principals of schools A and B. When expressing this view, the departmental head directed that:

> *…parents' education contributes more to their learners' performance. We can see this when learners from well-to-do families are not forced to do something. If you give them something to do, they will do it well because their parents are able to encourage them (DHA).*

In addition to what was said by the participants above, the departmental head of school B added that:

> *The parents must be the one who invest those learners so that they can to read, do their homework and they must be the one who come to school to see the performance of their children and talk to the educators about their children's education because nowadays education is like three foot in other words it has three legs is the learner, the parent and the educator. If the parents don't take their part, their children are not going to achieve (DHB)*

Register teacher from school A added that parents who are educated tend to be their children's role models, and their children are motivated. In order to make it clearer, the register teacher from school A explained that:

> *I think parents' education can help these learners because if parents are educated, they tend to support their children because they know the importance of education. Again, when they're educated, these parents tend to be role models for their children. They motivate their learners to do schoolwork. And then, those who are not educated don't value education; they can't support these children in their educational path (RTA).*

As the participants conclude, the register teacher from school B and the subject teacher from school A supported the other participants in concurring that parents' education is important. To bring out their thinking, they indicated that:

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Usually, educated parents know the importance of education, so they convince their children to go to school and to learn more (RTB).

Educated parents are more likely to create a home environment that supports learning (STA).

The excerpts above revealed that there is a big difference between parents who are educated and those who are not educated when it comes to supporting and motivating their children. Those educated parents seem to take their children's education very seriously. They support them in everything that concerns education and school (Li & Qui, 2018). They are also their children's role models. In contrast, those parents who are not educated seem to care less about their children's education. They do not give them any support whatsoever. Educated parents create a conducive environment for their children to do their schoolwork without any disturbances. Educated parents have the knowledge that education is not for teachers and learners only. Rather, it is a three-legged pot, where one leg is the parent, another one is the learner, and the third one is the teacher. All these legs have to support each other to make things easier for everyone.

The researcher claims that the learning environment is one of the factors that can contribute towards the teaching and learning of the learners. If the environment is conducive, it encourages the learners to work harder, but if it is unwelcoming, it becomes very hard for learners to learn. They will not feel motivated. During the interviews, participants were asked about how they make the learning environment conducive for learners from low SES. Motivation of learners from low SES may help make them feel welcome and work harder, as they know they are part of the larger school community. A participant stated:

As the principal, I encourage my staff to make sure that they make the learners from low SES feel welcome. Those who are from the low-SES community are the ones that we pull closer to make them feel accepted (PA).

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The principal from school B added that they made learners from low SES welcome by doing some school work with them and helping them in other ways. The participants claimed:

> *As a school, we accept them, we assist them, we engage their parents, and we also do extra work with them because many are left behind because of the challenges that they are facing at home. We normally try our best to support them; we check on them, and when some don't have uniforms, we try to help even though we don't have enough. Sometimes we get some help from donors. The help we get from outside people helps make our learners look the same (PB).*

The departmental head also suggests that they are doing so as a school to create a better environment for learners from low SES. The departmental head said:

> *As a DH, I encourage those learners from low and poor-families to participate more in all that we do. I always ask them to feel free at school and forget about where they come from and their situations at home (DHA).*

The departmental head from school B emphasises the issue of love they give and show to learners from low SES, so that they can be in an environment conducive to teaching and learning. The departmental head posits that:

> *We love them. We cherish them for whatever they do; we just congratulate them so they can feel proud, be recognised, and know they are also loved, irrespective of their status. Even if we want to send someone to get something, we send those learners from low SES so that they can feel comfortable and know that they are also accommodated at the school (DHB).*

The quotation above shows that the participants are trying their level best to create a better space for the learners from low SES. They bring them closer and encourage them to work harder, not focus on their background or status as a stumbling block. The learners feel free, as some participants ask them to do certain things for them. There are some stakeholders or donors who are brought in to help with uniforms and other resources that are needed for the learners to feel proud and not differentiate themselves from other

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learners who are coming from well-to-do families. The learners from low SES are brought closer to their teachers so that they can feel free to learn.

4.4.1.3 Performance of learners from low SES learners compared to other learners

Socioeconomic status is a composite measure that reflects an individual's or a household's relative position within a social hierarchy. The SES of learners influences academic performance. Learners from low SES battle to have access to educational resources (Munir, Faiza, Jamal, Daud & Igbal, 2023). The learners from low SES perform poorly, as they do not have any role model, but the ones from high SES perform well. The principals were asked to confirm how the learners from low SES performed academically as compared to other learners. Home status sometimes is not a factor that can make the learners perform well or not; however, participants responded:

> *Some learners from low-SES backgrounds perform well; some don't. Some reach Grade 4, unable to read and write, and when you try to involve the parents, they will never avail themselves. Those from the better side of life perform better because they have support from their parents and siblings. When they don't understand, parents are always there to help. For those who are from low SES, their parents are never there to support them because they don't understand education and educational matters (PA).*

The other principal concurred with the fellow principal from school A regarding the learners from low SES performance. These learners are competitive, and they are doing well. This was how the principal of school B alluded:

> *Yes, it ranges differently depending on the efforts and understanding of the teachers and the way the school is run. I wouldn't say they are performing very poorly. They are competing because when they are helped and assisted well, they perform equally well with those from high SES. We have three phases in our school: the foundation phase, the intermediate phase, and the GET phase. From lower grades, they perform well; even those from low SES do well. But when they go to intermediate, where they are now physically competing and evaluating*

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themselves against those from high SES, that is where the issue of comparing themselves with others attacks them. And basically, when they pass the intermediate phase and go to Grade 7 (GET), through life orientation, their teachers guide them, tell them that they are important and of value, and they start to show good performance (PB).

The findings indicate that learners from low SES backgrounds are not inherently poor performers; rather, their academic outcomes are strongly influenced by the level of support they receive. This aligns with literature suggesting that when learners from disadvantaged backgrounds are provided with appropriate emotional, instructional, and material support, they can perform at levels comparable to their peers from higher SES backgrounds (Per Linguam, 2023). These findings challenge deficit-based perspectives that associate low SES with low academic ability and instead emphasise the role of supportive environments in fostering learner success. The mesosystem, which encompasses interactions between home and school, is highlighted in the findings. Participants indicated that learners' performance could improve further if parents provided support at home. Literature consistently shows that parental involvement, regardless of parents' educational level, positively influences learners' academic achievement through encouragement, monitoring, and emotional support. Bronfenbrenner's theory emphasises that strong home-school linkages enhance learner development, suggesting that even minimal parental engagement can reinforce the positive efforts made by teachers at school.

4.4.1.4 Status of learners from low SES and the school culture

This section was intended to verify the status of learners from low SES as they come to school at the two selected schools. Individual interviews and observations revealed that learners from low SES seem vulnerable, coming to school hungry and tired, and unprepared because they did not do their homework. Very few were wearing torn and unwashed uniforms. There is a saying that 'cleanliness is next to godliness'. When learners are clean on the outside, wearing clothes that have been washed and ironed, they are likely to learn with pride and vigour. If learners are not well dressed, their self-

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esteem seems to go down; they tend to undermine themselves, which can affect their confidence and motivation (Cruickshank, 2024). The most important meal of the day is breakfast; if learners do not receive it, it affects them the whole day. Participants were asked about the status of the low SES when they come to school in terms of hunger, uniform and clothes. Participants answered:

> *Most of learners from low SES come to school hungry. Early in the morning, you find them standing by the kitchen door waiting for the soft porridge to be ready. And then when you look at them, their clothes are torn. When it's cold, they don't even have jerseys. Their shoes are torn, and some are walking barefoot. Some came wearing oversized clothes to show that they are not theirs (PA).*

Learners are encouraged to come to school wearing a uniform and to maintain that culture. A parent from school B indicated that some community members donate school uniforms and that, for learners to learn without hunger, the government helps with NSP and nutrition. To explain what was happening, the parent alluded:

> *Not many of them because, basically, the surrounding communities are helping a lot with uniforms. The department is helping out a lot with SNP and nutrition. Many came to school hungry, but the good thing is that the government is helping with food. The challenge we face, even though some community members are helping, is the lack of school uniforms. When I check, many learners who queue for school breakfast are from low SES (PB).*

To support the need for the NSP and nutrition, the departmental heads of schools A and B concurred that the learners from both schools came to school hungry. In their own verbatim, the departmental heads from the school and B said:

> *Of course, many learners from low SES come to school hungry. We see this: when they come very early in the morning, they queue for soft porridge, but those from well-to-do families don't go there (DHA).*
>
> *Yes, learners from low SES come to school hungry. Normally, when I check, I find that. In the morning, those learners are the ones who queue first for soft porridge,*

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and even during break, they run very fast to be the first to get their food so they can eat quickly and join the queue again if there is some surplus. Their clothing is way better these days because of some donors who help with uniforms; the challenge is keeping those uniforms clean. But still, many come with dirty clothes (DHB).

The register teacher from school A, the class teacher from school B, and a parent from school A also shared the same sentiments with their departmental heads regarding learners from low SES arriving at school in an empty stomach in the morning. In their own words, they said:

Yes, they do come to school hungry without uniform and torn clothes (RTA).

Yes, they do come to school hungry, mostly without a uniform and their clothes are torn (CTB).

These learners come to school hungry. We see them fighting for the queue when teachers are dishing out food. They thought maybe the food would finish. Again, these learners don't have warm clothes during winter. They wear a tattered uniform. They come to school in a uniform that is different from that of the other learners (PA4).

The above views from the participants' and the researcher's observations indicated that parents of low SES cannot invest sufficiently in their children's education (Ahamad, 2016) The majority of learners from low SES come to school hungry, which shows that they never had the most important meal to start the day, breakfast. That was proven by how they queue for the soft porridge and how they fight in the queue, thinking the food might run out. The clothes they wear are torn, as observed. Even though some donors tried to donate uniforms, the majority came dirty. They do not wash their uniform. During winter, it is worse because they do not wear warm clothes, which they do not have. According to Munir, Faiza, Jamal, Daud and Igbal (2023), socioeconomic status is a composite measure that reflects an individual's or a household's relative position within a social hierarchy; as such, the way these learners from low SES look can demoralise them from learning.

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4.4.2 The influence of learners' socioeconomic status on their academic performance

In this section, participants were asked to present their responses on the family socioeconomic status and its relationship to learners' academic performance. Included in the following discussion are the parents' education contributions towards learners' performance, support given by parents to teachers and comfort level of learners from low SES when coming to school.

4.4.2.1 Parents' education contribution towards learners' performance

This sub-theme outlines the contribution of parents towards learners' performance. The responses from participants from interviews revealed that parents who are educated are more supportive of their children because they understand the importance of education. Parents' education plays a positive role in their children's academic performance (Ahamad, 2016). In comparison, parents who are uneducated do not take their children's education seriously. They think it is the teachers' duty to make their children successful, which ends up affecting their children's performance. Participants stated:

> *The better educated or the more educated parents are, the better understanding they have of educational matters of their children. They are very supportive. When we talk about the academic achievements and the academic support that is needed by the school and the learners, they understand it better (PA).*

Principal of school B agreed with what the principal of school A said, in line with parents who are educated about their children's education. To support what was said, the principal indicated that:

> *When the parents are educated, they are able to help their children and the teachers. They are able to motivate their children. They are able to encourage and help their children with schoolwork because they can read and understand their children's homework. When teachers need support, they are available. They even attend meetings and share their ideas. Those parents who are not educated care*

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less about their children's education. It is hard for uneducated parents because they don't understand the importance of education (PB).

Departmental heads from schools A and B also shared the same sentiments about educated parents and their children's education. They both agreed that parents who are educated played a significant role in their children's educational achievement. They claimed that:

Parents' education contributes more to their learners' performance. We can see this when learners from well-to-do families are not forced to do their schoolwork or anything. If they give them something to do, they will do it well because their parents are able to encourage them (DHA).

When the parents are educated, they normally invest in their children's education. They help with homework and help their learners read and write. They ask about the performance of their children. Those who are not educated care less about education; they care more about the results at the end of the year. They are very noisy if their children have not done well, forgetting that they never bother to support their children or even check their children's books. If the parent didn't go to school, they didn't take their part; their children do not achieve as they are supposed to (DHB).

Subject teachers from both schools also concurred with the idea that educated parents help their learners, as they are aware of the importance of education. To answer the question, they posited that:

Usually, educated parents know the importance of education, so they convince their children to go to school and to learn more (STB).

If parents are educated, they tend to support their children because they know the importance of education. They tend to be the role models of their children. They motivate their children to do their schoolwork. Those who are not educated don't value education. They don't support their children in their educational matters, and their children end up failing (STA).

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The excerpts above reveal that parents' educational status plays a significant role in shaping their children's educational experiences and outcomes (Bhat, 2022). Parents who are educated are often better positioned to support their children's learning, as they are able to assist with schoolwork at home, guide study habits, and provide academic encouragement. Literature indicates that such parents tend to serve as positive role models, demonstrating the value of education through their own experiences and attitudes (Per Linguam, 2023). In addition, educated parents are more likely to engage actively with schools by attending meetings, supporting school activities, maintaining communication with teachers, and regularly monitoring their children's academic progress. This level of involvement strengthens home-school relationships and contributes positively to learners' motivation and performance. Equally, the findings suggest that parents with lower levels of education provide less academic support to their children. This is often not due to a lack of interest, but rather limited educational knowledge, confidence, and understanding of school expectations. As a result, their involvement may be largely confined to focusing on end-of-year results rather than ongoing learning processes. Bhat (2022) notes that parents with limited educational backgrounds may feel ill-equipped to assist with schoolwork or engage meaningfully with teachers, which can reduce their participation in their children's education. This limited involvement may negatively affect learners' academic development, as consistent guidance and encouragement at home are crucial for sustained learning.

4.4.2.2 Comparative parental support to schooling for learners from low SES and high SES

Teachers are the ones who spend most of their time at school with learners who come from different SES. Teachers and learners cannot make education fashionable if they have no support from parents. Parents may support the school in many ways, like attending school meetings, volunteering to teach learners some extra-curricular activities, including traditional dances, and contributing to fundraising campaigns (Asia, 2019; Tahir, Ishfaq, Begum & Sharjeel, 2021). Participants revealed that parental support came more from upper-income families than from low-income families because school culture is

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similar to high-income families: This was illustrated by one of the educators, who explained that:

> *Those from high SES are better at supporting the school. They help their children with their homework and also teach them how to read and write. Some of the learners from high SES can show a lot of progress, as they sometimes know the things that have not been taught yet. But those parents from low SES do not support us at all. You give learners homework; the learner will come without writing it, and when you ask why, the learner will say, 'My parent said, 'I am not a teacher' (PA).'*

On the same sentiments, another principal concurred with the fellow principal about parents who support the school. The principal answered that:

> *Some parents, mostly educated ones, donate their children's uniforms who have passed from our school, and it is so helpful. Some parents volunteer to clean our classes once per quarter, and it is one support that we appreciate (PB).*

In addition to the comparison between low- and high-SES, the Departmental head also supported what the principals said. The departmental head of School A answered that:

> *When we have problems, we normally call our parents. Some come, and we share with them the problems we are experiencing with the learners' performance. Then the parents help by supporting the learner at home. The problem is the ones who don't come (DHA).*

One subject teacher added on what the principals have said about parents from higher SES in support of schooling. Parents from high SES do not just sit and fold their arms; they take the initiative to visit the school to check on and support the teachers. This was indicated by one subject teacher, who said:

> *Sometimes they come to school to see the progress of their children, and they do help as much as they can with the learners (STA).*

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One subject teacher, register teacher and class teacher spoke in one voice as they concur on what the parents from high SES did for the schools. They all talk about volunteering as a way of support for the school and their children. They indicated that:

> *They usually attend parents' meetings and also volunteer to cook at school.*
>
> *Some of them don't come and collect their books (STB).*
> *Some of these parents volunteer at school, cooking meals for these learners (RTA).*
>
> *Other parents come to clean the classroom or the school surroundings (CTA).*

The above verbatim statements show that participants are not satisfied with the way their parents are supporting them; however, a few who are supporting are doing a great job. The lack of parents' involvement in the welfare of their children immensely contributes to learners' low performance (Asia, 2019). There are those who attend school for parents' meetings, some volunteer to clean the classrooms and the surroundings (Tahir, Ishfaq, Begum & Sharjeel, 2021). Those from high SES support the teachers by helping their children when they are given homework.

4.4.2.3 Comfortability of learners from low SES in the school environment

Learners should feel free to go to school, regardless of their backgrounds. School can be the only place where learners can learn and become better people. Therefore, learners should be comfortable attending any school they want, as the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1990) allows all learners access to education. Observations and individual interviews revealed that learners were interacting with each other, and they were playing with each other, which shows that learners from low SES were comfortable coming to school. One participant agreed with the constitution of the country, as the learners from low SES are coming to school in large numbers, and the principal said:

> *Learners from low SES are wanted, and they come to our school in large numbers. Even parents who we see only when they bring their children on the first day confirm that they are bringing their children to our school because we seem to*

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care. They say we give them clothes, and it makes their children no longer look poor. The challenge is that after giving those clothes or a uniform, their parents no longer looked after them well. If the learner doesn't have a uniform, we normally don't chase them away; we try to find something for them. We encourage togetherness amongst our learners. They are not segregated (PA).

One departmental head supported the comfortability of learners from low SES when they come to school. They feel equal to their counterparts. The departmental head alluded that:

Yes, they are comfortable coming to our school because there is not much competition between high- and low-SES learners. So here they don't have much competition. They feel like they are equal. So there is not even one single challenge which will emanate unless maybe one or two or three, four children who are coming from high SES situations, which doesn't make much difference and impact. So they are fine, and they feel comfortable coming to our school (DHB).

The findings revealed that learners from low SES are very comfortable coming to the schools because of how they are treated. Even parents love to bring their children because of the way the school is doing things to eliminate the differentiation between high- and low-status issues. Some of the things that made these learners from low-SES backgrounds feel comfortable coming to these schools were that they were shown love and that they didn't discriminate or segregate.

4.4.2.4 Role of the principal in creating a conducive school environment for learners from low SES

This sub-theme outlines the role of the principals in creating a conducive environment for learners from low SES in the two schools. Responses from the participants revealed that principals are the most influential of their teachers to take care of all learners equally, irrespective of the family backgrounds they are coming from. The principals, because of their authority, may influence what the school environment is like. They are the ones who ensure good conditions for teaching and learning. Participants stated:

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> *As the principal, I always encourage my staff to treat all learners equally, whether from high or low SES. I encourage my teachers to take good care of all learners and include all learners in whatever they do. In most instances, those learners from low SES are the ones that we pull closer to make them feel welcomed and accepted. When schools close, I instruct my nutrition teacher to give the remaining food to learners from low SES so that they can at least have something to eat during holidays, even if it cannot take them through the whole holiday (PA).*

The other principal agreed with the counterpart about the role that they play to create a conducive environment for learners from low SES. Like the other principal, they are doing all they can to make these learners feel free and be part of all the activities that occur at school. The participant alluded that:

> *Learning environment was made possible in our school by the number of donors who support us. These donors are helping make our school and learners conducive to learning. Our learners look the same and are treated the same; they are taught to respect themselves and each other the moment they enter through the gate. I always warn them about bullying and tell them to report it to their teachers. They know different kinds of bullying and abuse. Our learners are taught to feel free, and they are free. I encourage the teachers to accept, assist, and support them. We try to engage with their parents, and we also do some extra work with them (PB).*

The above verbatim statements show that participants were playing their roles of creating a learning environment conducive to low SES learners. All learners are treated equally, which was a great thing because all learners are equal and should be treated equally (SA Constitution, 1994). Learners from low SES feel welcomed, treated, supported and helped the same. Learners are made aware of bullying, abuse, and other mischiefs that might happen to them, and are advised that if such things occur, they must report them to their teachers. Learners' needs, both physical and psychological, should be met so they can focus on studying without distractions or inadequate facilities (Hidayatullah, Surianto & Desembrianita, 2024). Teachers' attitude should change towards learners

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from low SES so that they can feel welcomed and be part of the school. Teachers should have a caring, sharing attitude and figure out learners' aptitude level so that they can prepare the lesson accordingly, confirming the availability of relevant material and observing the lived experiences of the learners (Ali, Masroor & Tariq, 2020). It was revealed that it is the role of the principal to make sure that the learners from different backgrounds are taken care of physically and psychologically by bringing different stakeholders to school to check and talk to learners.

4.4.3 Environmental and community support and infrastructure that influence learners' academic success

In this section, participants were required to give their responses on the impact of environmental factors on academic success in the two schools. The theme describes the availability of infrastructure at the schools and also the community support that the school received.

4.4.3.1 Availability of infrastructure

Infrastructure is one factor that can make learning easier for learners and teachers alike. A well-infrastructured school usually produce better learners as they are taught in a conducive environment. Leaners need a conducive environment for education to be effective (Egyir, Anaman & Zottor, 2024). If the school has enough classrooms, a playground, proper and adequate ablution blocks, a library, a laboratory, a staff room, and an office, teaching and learning become very easy. Participants were asked if they have enough infrastructure to make the education of their learners a success. Participants said:

> *We don't have enough infrastructure. Learners learn better by touching and experiencing. So we don't have things like the laboratory. We don't have workshops where we can take our learners to learn subjects like technology or to experiment with things like those in Natural Sciences. We cannot say there is enough infrastructure, but classrooms are there for formal learning. If we want to take our learners out for casual or informal learning, there's no space for that (PA).*

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On the issue of infrastructure, the other principal concurs with the counterpart that there was a lack of infrastructure, which affects the smooth running of the school, and that learners from low SES need this infrastructure, as it can help them improve their academic performance. The participant put it like that:

> *We may not say we have infrastructure like a sports ground, which is very important because some learners from low SES who are not doing well academically may perform better in sports. We don't have a library; we don't have a computer centre. Our yard is very small, and we can't even afford a playing field for our learners, which is a disadvantage, because they say all work and no play makes Jim a dull boy and Mary a dull girl. If we can have such infrastructure, it would help a lot because learners would play soccer, they would come to play tennis, volleyball, and netball, and then they would find that they would also do well academically (PB).*

Another participant also supported what was said by other participants in terms of the infrastructure: Participant said:

> *I don't think we have enough infrastructure because our learners are overcrowded in the class. I think if we can have some more classes, even in the hall where we'll be gathered together with the learners, if there's something we want to tell them (DHA).*

The same sentiments were shared by one departmental head in line with the rich learning infrastructure availability at the school. Participants alluded that:

> *No, there isn't enough infrastructure; we don't have a library where learners can learn to read and also borrow books to read at home. Talking about the laboratory is just a waste of energy. Our classrooms are overcrowded, and the learner – teacher ratio is 1:63, which is too much for a teacher. We have been writing letters to the authorities requesting for some mobile classrooms, but it's like it is falling on deaf ears; however, we are pushing irrespective of all odds (DH2).*

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Some parents were also concerned about the availability of rich learning infrastructure at the schools their children attend. They concur with what the principals and the departmental heads have said. In their own words, the parents said:

> *No, we don't have school playgrounds. Classes are not in a good state (PA2, PA1)*
>
> *There is a shortage of buildings; we don't have a library or a hall, and there is a shortage of classes, with learners overcrowded (PA3, PB4).*
>
> *Principal's office and admin office are small (PA4, PB3).*

The quotes above reveal that from all the schools that were visited, all the participants unanimously indicated that they are working in the worst environment without proper infrastructure like libraries, halls, laboratories and play grounds that learners may use to do some extra curriculum activities because out of the extra curriculum activities, some learners who are not good academically may be good in sports but they cannot be spotted because there are no play grounds (Herath, Duffield & Zhang, 2022). The classrooms are not enough, as they are overcrowded, as confirmed by the parents. The office of the principal and the admin offices are too small for the workers to work properly. All that infrastructure may help in proper teaching and learning if it is provided.

Learners are the receivers of teaching and learning, and the impact of school infrastructure on learners and performance is a major factor (Yangambi, 2023). They are the ones most affected if the infrastructure is not provided, is not enough, or is not there at all. As the main beneficiaries, learners were asked to mention the infrastructure that they see lacking at their schools. Learners responded:

The table below presents what learners said about the infrastructure affecting their teaching and learning. They have laid out some common infrastructure unavailability at the two schools. In both schools, there are no soccer or netball fields, Laptops or tablets, textbooks, or a library. The infrastructure mentioned is very important for teaching and learning of these learners from the two schools. However, in school A, there are clean toilets, and their classrooms have ceilings, while in school B toilets and ceilings are still a challenge.

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Table 4.3 Infrastructure availability at the two schools

Infrastructure not available	School A	School B
Soccer and Netball grounds	LA3	LB9, and LB12
Laptops and Tablets for learners	LA2, LA3, LA11	LB4, and LB8
Text books	LA4	LB3, LB7, LB10 and LB 12
Air conditions	LA5, and LA8	
Library	LA7, LA9 and LA 14	LB6, AND LB15
WIFI	LA8	
Clean toilets		LB5, and LB11
Ceiling		LB 8, LB10 and LB 11

The table above indicates that the information from the learners as participants and beneficiaries of teaching and learning has indicated that there are a number of things that learners need, which may help them to learn better. Because these infrastructure or resources are not available, it becomes difficult for them to learn. Well-built classroom infrastructure promotes a positive learning environment and improves the school quality and results (Nyati, 2023). As we are in the fourth industrial revolution, many feel that there should be resources to help them explore the world and search for more information through technological devices, but these are not available at their schools.

4.4.3.2 Community support to learners from low SES

The school is a community property, and the community should take care of it. The community must be more involved in school activities to improve academic performance (Husein, Muturi & Samantar, 2018). The school management should encourage the community to be part of the activities that happen at school. If the community is made part of the school, the school becomes a safe place from vandalism and other bad things that happen in schools. Participants were asked to explain how the community support the principal, the school and learners from the low SES. Participants responded:

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> *Some community members helped our school by coming to clean the yard, and others helped by teaching our learners cultural dances, especially during competitions, and our learners performed very well because of their help. Some parents who are part of the community donated some clothes, and some brought vegetables and fruits to be given to needy learners (PA).*

Another participant agreed with the previous speaker about the support that the school receive from the community. The participant indicated that the community was doing a great job to make sure that the school becomes a better place for learners from low SES. One of the participants put it in this way:

> *The community is supporting us very much. There are a number of donations that we receive from the community around our school. We received shoes, and some uniforms. Our local chief is very supportive. When we have functions, he always gives us money to make them a success, and he also makes sure he is part of the function. There is a pastor's forum, a team of local pastors who always arrive at school to offer some support. When there are problems, we call them, and they come and help with whatever. The civic organisation is really supporting us. They look after our school. We are receiving prayers and support from church people (PB).*

One participant, a department head, also concurred with the previous participants regarding the support that the school receives from the community. The participant even indicated that some community members have adopted some of the learners from low SES so that they can do what is needed at school for them. Participant said:

> *Members of the community are really helping at our school. They gave us all the support that we needed as a school. As you know, we have many learners from low-SES backgrounds, learners from very poor backgrounds, whose parents cannot afford them better uniforms. Some community members, out of the blue, just arrived with a bag full of school shoes, which were distributed to needy learners. Some community members have adopted some learners, and they are*

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doing everything for them. Some community members are seriously God-sent, and they are a blessing to our school (DH1).

Another participant also added to the support that the community was giving to the school. The community was supporting the school even with their physical powers, doing the job on their own to make sure that things went well at school. One participant indicated that:

The community around our school are really helping. They keep an eye on our school because they own the school. Whenever we have functions at school, they come and support us by cleaning the yard. They donate lots of things (DH2).

Other participants also shared their experiences in connection with the support that they get from the community as a school. The participants gave their own side of the story on the things that the communities around the two schools are doing to support the learners from low SES and the schools in general. Underneath are what the participants indicated:

The community donated clothes and shoes to our learners, and sometimes they bring old clothes to us so that we can give them to our learners from the low-SES backgrounds (RTA).

They support in different ways, such as helping kids with homework and ensuring that the school is running smoothly through SGB's components (STA, STB).

Some of the NGOs support us by donating school uniforms, school shoes, school bags, books, and sanitary towels for the girls (RTB).

The statements above reveal that the communities around the two schools are really supporting the schools in different ways. The communities are owning the schools, and they are helping and supporting the learners from low SES by donating school shoes and uniforms. There are also some groups of people from the community, like the pastors' forum, who are helping too. The local chief, as a member of the community, is helping a lot. The community is doing a great job to support the schools. When the community is not involved in schools, they will let the burglars vandalise the school even in daylight, but

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if they are involved, they will make sure they guard the school always (Clark & Akerman, 2020).

4.4.3.3 Attracting learners from low SES to come to school

This sub-theme outlines the things that the schools are doing to attract or ensure that learners from low SES are coming to school on a daily basis. Coming to school daily benefitted these learners because they learn every day. They gain academically. Principals and teachers should do all in their power to make sure that learners from all backgrounds go to school to benefit from teaching and learning (LaRocque, Kleiman & Darling, 2021). Participants were asked to explain how they attract learners from low SES to always be at school. To attract and pull learners from low SES to come to school, the government introduced the National School Nutrition Programme so that learners are given food at school because some were coming to school on an empty stomach, and to make learners improve in their academic performances (Tshisikhawe, Runhare & Litshani, 2024). On that view, and in support of the participants, the response was as follows:

> *Now that there is a feeding scheme provided by the government, all learners are always at school. Before, they were only given food during break; now they get even breakfast, too. The breakfast is really helping these learners because they are always early, so breakfast cannot pass them by. The feeding scheme has really helped attract these learners to school early, especially those from low SES. They seem to sleep on an empty stomach, hence their early arrivals. The hot meals are really helping attract many learners to school, especially those from low SES (PA).*

Another participant concurred with the previous participant about the steps the school was taking to encourage learners to attend school so they could be educated. Participant said:

> *The government is doing that for us by feeding them, while, as a school, we teach them seriously, provide them with better opportunities, and treat them equally. We*

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always encourage them to love themselves. When a child is not coming to school, we call the parents to let them know the child is not at school, and then they explain if there is a reason (PB).

Those who do not have clothes, we give them clothes. Those who do not have shoes, we give them shoes (DHA).

One participant added details about the steps the school was taking to attract learners. They encourage learners to work harder by giving them some sort of awards as a token of appreciation for the performance that the learners from low SES are showing:

If our learners are performing better, we give them prizes so that they feel more encouraged to come to school. We also encourage our learners to perform cultural activities, and some learners come to our school mainly because of that, because they realised that we are not only focusing on teaching and learning but also on extracurricular activities (STA).

The excerpts above revealed that the schools are doing what they can to attract learners from low SES to attend school. They are given a free meal from breakfast through lunch. Those learners who are performing well are given some token of appreciation, which is an advertisement enough to attract younger ones to school. The introduction of extra-curricular activities in the form of traditional dances seems to be selling the schools well, as learners come because they are interested in those activities. Schools should ensure that classrooms are equipped with learning resources that promote cognitive growth. This includes literature, technology, and instructional games that appeal to various learning styles (Nayk, 2025).

4.4.4 Intervention strategies to mitigate the challenges of low SES students in primary school

This section presents participants' responses to the intervention strategies to mitigate challenges faced by learners from low SES at the two selected schools. The focus was on the support and resources needed by the schools to address the academic challenges of learners from low SES, programmes or initiatives that schools can implement to

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address challenges faced by learners from low SES, and strategies to make learners from low SES feel welcome at school and study freely.

4.4.4.1 Supportive resources needed to address the academic challenges of learners from low SES

Participants were requested to give their responses on the support or resources needed by the schools to address the academic challenges of learners from low SES. Learners' education is a priority, irrespective of their family background. Classrooms, libraries, labs, and staff housing increase the physical learning environment regarding preliminary technical abilities and the development of quality and suitable school elements (Aguilera-Hermida, 2020). Resources are of great importance to make teaching and learning a success. Without resources like laptops, Wi-Fi, laboratories, libraries, and playgrounds, learning can be very difficult. In response to the question asked, participants responded:

> *Realising that we are living in the fourth industrial revolution, we cannot run away from technology, but the problem is that learners from low SES do not have cell phones, and if they do, they are little toys that cannot access the network. If, as a school, we can get tablets for our learners, they could help them a lot. If not tablets. Desktop computers or even laptops can be so helpful to our learners from low SES because they may be able to network into the world (PA).*

One of the participants indicated that human resources are needed to support their children throughout their academic journey. Today's education includes three important parties: the teachers, learners and parents. Learners are at the centre who must be helped by the two adults in order to achieve academic success. Participant indicated:

> *In terms of support, if the parents of our low SES learners can change their attitude of not caring about their children's education and start to care, it can make us as a school very happy. We need their support at school, as well as support from those who support their children academically at home (PA).*

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Another participant added that parents' support as a human resource is important, noting that parents can support the school and their children in their education, even though their learners are from low-SES backgrounds. Parents' support was highly needed, and one participant alluded:

> *The involvement of the parents or parental involvement could be the best support we could ask for as a school. Parents should take their children's education seriously, even though they are from poor backgrounds, because education can open doors for their children and take them out of poverty (PB).*

One participant indicated that the government should also take part in providing the resources that are needed by the learners from low SES so that their education can be made easier and more profitable. Participant said:

> *If the government can provide or build us better classes and erect for us some playgrounds (DHA).*

Another participant went on to add the resources needed to address the challenges low-SES learners face. The participant went on to add that the home environment was also a challenge to these learners, and the government should help these learners even in their homes. This was what the participant indicated:

> *The houses some of these learners from low SES live in are terrible, and the educational home environment counts. If the government can help by building better houses for our learners, where they can have access to electricity, so that they can study better, it can improve our educational performance (DHB).*

Another participant suggested the support the school may provide to help these learners from low-SES backgrounds with the challenges they face. One participant suggested that:

> *If we can get extra classes after school or Saturday classes in order for us to have more time with the learners from the low SES, we can have better results because they would be at school most of the day instead of being at home (STA).*

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One participant was concerned with the learner teacher support materials to make teaching and learning for learners from low SES better and more successful. Participant indicated that:

> *The Department should address the shortage of stationery and also follow up with learners regularly (STB).*

One participant agreed that the government should provide support to address the challenges that learners from SES may learn freely without any obstacles. The participant suggested the issue of adding the meals that learners are getting from two to three per day. Participant suggested that:

> *As a teacher, I could be happy if the government could increase the meals that are given to learners on a day. Suppose they can also have food after school, so that they go home on a full stomach. Three meals a day can make a difference for learners from low SES. Learners from low SES should be provided with abacuses so that they can learn to calculate in mathematics with easy, if we can be provided with puzzles to improve their critical thinking (RTA).*

Another participant also suggested that support from different nongovernmental organisations help learners from low SES so that their educational matters may improve. Participant suggested that:

> *As a parent, I know some organisations that support our schools, such as pastors' forums, which can come and help our children learn to live better; Munna ndi nnyi forum, which mostly helps the boy child when they have problems and also teaches them how to be a better man (PA1, PB3).*

These statements above suggest that the schools are not well equipped with resources and are not well supported. There are many resources that the schools need in order to function well and to do their task of teaching and learning well. Basic resources like libraries, proper classrooms, Laboratories, and even playgrounds are a necessity and must be provided. Schools are part of the technological world, and as such, they need resources such as computers, laptops, and, more recently, tablets for learners so they

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can compete with the world (Hidayatullah, Surianto & Desembrianita, 2024). One participant indicated that two meals are not enough because some of the low SES learners go home hungry because they eat during break. If the government can increase the meals to three per day, it can help these low-SES learners. Different teaching aids like puzzles, calculators, abacuses and enough learner teacher support materials can make the life of teachers and learners simple (Hidayatullah, Surianto & Desembrianita, 2024).

4.4.4.2 Programmes and initiatives to address challenges faced by learners from low SES

Learners from low SES, like any other learners, need to be taken care of so that they can be educated and succeed in life. As they seem to experience problems at schools and homes, the schools should be able to help. Schools should actively engage parents through frequent contact, workshops, and activities that increase parental involvement in their children's education; these various forms of engagement can help boost expectations and goals for academic achievement (Martin et al., 2014). There must be programs that schools can implement to address the challenges faced by these learners from low SES, so they can learn freely without any disturbances. Participants were asked to bring up the programmes or the initiatives that schools can implement to address challenges faced by learners from low SES. Participants stated:

> *The school should form partnerships with different stakeholders or organisations like churches, social workers, police, health facilities, and any other stakeholder that can offer help or have an interest in helping learners in need, more so those learners from low SES. I feel like we need to include the police so that they can deal with parents who care less and neglect their children. We need to start initiating different sports that cater for both boys and girls, but the challenge we have is playgrounds, but sports can take kids from the streets (PA).*

One participant supported what was said by the previous participant about bringing different stakeholders to schools to talk and support learners from low SES about the challenges that they faced: Participant added that:

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Bringing in social workers, pastoral forum and health workers may help these learners a lot because some of these learners have serious problems that need them to consult, but they do not do so because some of their parents care less. If these people come to school, they can offer their services in the presence of teachers, and that can help these learners (RTB).

Another participant came up with the idea of involving community members in different structures to come to school to talk to learners from the low SES about the challenges that they face that affect their academic performance. Participant suggested that:

As a school, if we want to help these learners from low-SES backgrounds, we need to involve civic leaders and local churches so they can talk to the parents of these learners to encourage them to be responsible and take their children's education seriously. So that they can advise the parents on how to support their children in educational matters. I also think that as a school we need to talk to parents so that we can start extra classes in the morning, afternoon, and weekend in order to help learners from low SES to catch up on things they do not understand, to help them in reading and writing and also in mathematics (PB).

One participant added that the school may help learners from low SES address the challenges they face so they can attend school without them. Participant added that:

In order to address the challenges that low SES learners face, we invite the pastoral forum to come and motivate these learners at school. We also invite health professionals to come and support our learners. We also ask the social workers to come and address some social issues with the learner. We also invite the policing forum to come and address issues such as abuse and bullying (CTA).

Two participants thought of programmes that might help learners from low SES address the challenge of not having people to help them with the schoolwork their teachers assigned as homework. Participants suggested that:

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I think we can introduce after-school care, where learners from low SES can go after school and have people help them with their homework and support them with reading and writing, and then be given a meal before they go home (DHA).

The school can start Saturday classes so that we can help the learners from the low SES to do better and perform well in their school work (RTA).

These statements suggest that the schools may offer the best programmes, or that they are providing the best programmes that can help learners from low-SES backgrounds. If schools can bring all these different stakeholders into their schools, learners from low-SES backgrounds may be helped a lot. Their performance might improve, and they can compete with their counterparts. After classes, Saturday classes, and after-school care or drop centres may help these learners improve academically (Ghaviferkr, 2020). These schools have better programmes, and what is needed is for them to be fully initiated, and they start to be fully functional for the benefit of the learners from low SES backgrounds.

4.4.4.3 Strategies for learners from low SES to feel welcomed at school and study freely

Participants were requested to give their responses on the strategies that they can use to make learners from low SES feel welcome at school and to study freely. They reported that teachers should have a caring and sharing attitude (Ali, Masroor & Tariq, 2020). Learners from low SES are usually not free; they feel intimidated by those from high SES. It is the duty of the school to take care of these learners from low SES so that they feel part of the school, and study freely. They need to be shown love and acceptance by the teachers and the other learners so that their self-esteem can be boosted. Participant answered:

The only thing we can do to help them feel okay is to show them love. We love them. Help them with their school work. If they don't have anybody to support them, we support them in class. Those who can be here maybe 10, 15 minutes after school, we can work with them as teachers to show them that even though they don't have anybody at home, we are here to help them (PA).

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Another participant suggested that for the school to be friendly to learners from low SES, it must treat all learners with respect so they feel valued and happy. Participant indicated that:

> *We have a motto: every learner who comes through the gate of our school should be treated with respect and dignity, so they feel equal. Organise welcome events, hold meetings, and greet to generate excitement. Celebrate diversity and incorporate different cultures in lessons (PB).*

Another participant added to what was suggested by the participant above. The participant emphasised the issue of self-esteem. Learners must be free to bring their voices out; they must speak their minds. The participant reported that:

> *By encouraging them to have positive self-esteem, to believe in themselves and always strive for success. Made them feel free to talk about anything, and mostly the problems they encounter at home. We shall organise sports days, cultural days, casual days, fun days, career days and sports days (DHA)*

Two participants brought up the issue of love as something that may conquer all. When learners from low-SES backgrounds are shown love by their teachers, it can have a greater impact on their lives; they might be free to come to school. Participants suggested that:

> *The most important thing is love. We have to love them and have a good relationship with them. If we love them, show them love and respect, and congratulate them when they have done better, it will make them feel free, and they will want to come to school. When the schools closed for holidays, we distributed the leftovers of food to learners from low SES and that made them feel free to come to our school (DHB).*
>
> *By loving them, supporting them, and giving them leftovers to eat at home (RTA).*

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For the school to be friendly to learners from low-SES backgrounds, one participant suggested that learners should be listened to and not judged. If they are listened to, they tend to change and do things in a better way. Participant said:

> *As teachers, we listen to them and talk to them well in a dignified manner. They are actually not judged. We accept them as they are and encourage them to work hard in order to change their situation (RTB).*

One participant brought up the issue of teachers being pseudo-parents to these learners from low SES as a strategy to mitigate the challenges they face, so that the school becomes more friendly to them. When these learners have done well, they must be encouraged to work better. Participant alluded:

> *For the learners from low SES to learn freely, teachers have to play a parental role to them by showing them love, caring and support. They must be given extra time to learn. They must be given individual support. They must be congratulated always when they have done better to encourage them to keep on working hard. Protect them from being bullied and abused so that they can feel free to come to school and learn (CTA).*

The statements above show that the participants have better ideas and strategies that can make learners from low-SES backgrounds feel welcome and learn freely. Learners from low-SES backgrounds will be shown love, and nothing can make a learner feel free than when loved. Learners will be highly supported in their educational matters. They will be praised whenever they have achieved better. The teachers will play a parental role to them (Ali, Masroor & Tariq, 2020). They will be encouraged to work harder and be supported. Different events like parents' day, fun days, casual days, sports days, and career days, so learners can enjoy being at school. During these events, learners will socialise and play together, which will build their self-esteem, encourage them to attend school, and allow them to learn freely.

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4.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The chapter presented the empirical data that was gathered through face-to-face interviews and observations. The major aim of the chapter was to explore the influence of learners' SES conditions on academic outcomes in selected Primary schools in Vhembe East District, Limpopo Province, South Africa. School principals, Departmental heads, register teachers, class teachers, learners and parents of the two schools were requested to address issues relating to challenges faced by learners from low SES. Data were presented and analysed in accordance with the four delineated but interrelated themes: the general understanding of the challenges faced by learners from low SES; learners' family socioeconomic status and academic performance; the impact of environmental factors on academic success; and interventions/strategies to mitigate challenges faced by learners from low SES.

Different themes were generated, and their findings were as follows:

Theme 1: General understanding of challenges faced by learners from low SES.

The main findings of the study were that participants understood the different challenges that learners from low SES face, which prevent them from achieving academically. The findings indicate that learners from low SES backgrounds face multiple, interrelated challenges that negatively affect their academic engagement and performance. Many learners lack adequate parental and material support due to financial constraints, limiting access to essential learning resources.

Theme 2: Impact of family socioeconomic status on academic performance.

The findings revealed a clear difference between educated and less educated parents in terms of the support and motivation they provide for their children's education. The findings indicate that educated parents take their children's education seriously and actively support all school-related activities, including homework, school programs, and continuous monitoring of academic progress. The parents also serve as role models, demonstrating the value of education through their attitudes and involvement. In addition, educated parents are more likely to create a conducive home environment that supports

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learning, allowing their children to complete schoolwork with minimal distractions. In contrast, the findings suggest that parents with lower levels of education provide limited academic support to their children. This lack of continuous support may negatively affect learners' academic engagement and performance. Overall, the findings highlight that parental education influences parents' understanding of their role in the educational process. Educated parents appear to recognise that education is a shared responsibility involving parents, learners, and teachers, and that collaboration among these three stakeholders is essential for effective learning.

Theme 3: Impact of environmental factors on the academic success of learners from low SES.

The study revealed a lack of infrastructure at the two schools, which hinders effective teaching and learning and impedes the progress of learners. The study shows that there are not enough classrooms, libraries, laboratories, technological equipment for learners, such as laptops or tablets, Wi-Fi, and that prevents learners from being part of the technological world. There are no playgrounds for learners to play different types of sports, which could have helped some of these learners from low-SES backgrounds showcase their talents, as the majority do not perform well in class.

Theme 4: Intervention strategies to investigate challenges faced by learners from low SES.

The participants revealed that certain initiatives they think may help learners from low-SES backgrounds attend school and study freely. The study discovered that the introduction of casual days, fun days, parents' days, sports days and many other initiatives may motivate low SES learners to come to school without any fear and be free to learn.

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CHAPTER FIVE
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter analysed and interpreted data based on the research questions, theoretical framework and the literature review. This chapter discusses the findings that emerged during the research process. Literature review, responses of participants, observations and theoretical framework were infused in an endeavour to develop a fuller understanding of the influence of learners' SES conditions on academic outcomes in selected Primary schools within Vhembe East District, Limpopo Province, South Africa.

The data emerged from interviews with school principals, departmental heads, registered teachers, subject teachers, learners, and parents, as well as observations. The findings of the study unfolded following research questions, from which the following themes were developed:

5.2 Theme 1: Challenges that affect the academic performance of learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds

In line with the first study objective and the related research question of this study, this section presents and discusses the findings of the study under the following sub-themes: academic challenges encountered by learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds, socio-economic factors that influence learners' academic expectations, and the performance of learners from low SES backgrounds compared to other learners.

5.2.1 Academic challenges encountered by learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds

The study sought to understand the challenges that learners from low SES are facing that might affect their academic achievement. The findings revealed that learners from low SES lack parental support because many of their parents are not educated and, as such, do not take education seriously. The lack of parents' involvement in the welfare of their

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children immensely contributes to learners' low performance. Parental involvement in schooling also predicts achievement. Some of the learners are staying with grandparents who have never been to school, and it becomes very hard for them to help these learners with their homework. These learners usually come to school looking tired, hungry and with torn clothes. Some learners tend to mock and bully them. The findings also revealed that there is a challenge: these learners do not have technological equipment that can help them connect to the wider world. If the gadgets are there, the network is the problem. The above findings concur with the reviewed literature from earlier findings, which indicate that some people within the communities are selling drugs to these learners, and when they arrive at school, they can no longer concentrate because they are high (Wolf & Kupchik, 2017; Asia, 2019).

5.2.2 Socioeconomic factors that influence learners' academic expectations

As in other studies reviewed in the literature, this study also found that financial status and parents' educational level affect the quality of education for learners from low SES backgrounds. This is in line with earlier research, which points to the observation that parents who are educated are supportive of their children in terms of their ability to assist learners with school academic work as opposed to parents who have low levels of education (Ahamad, 2016). They can afford and manage to help their children with their schoolwork, and they are role models to their children, which challenges the children to excel and aim to achieve better. Other research indicates that parents from low SES can afford to provide their children with the appropriate support, including resources such as books and other helpful materials (Bakar et al., 2017). However, for parents from low SES, it was found that they have no capacity to support their children because they may not have the resources their children need to pursue their schooling effectively. The views from the educators and observations made during teaching and learning indicated that learners from low SES were limited in terms of primary needs like dress, food and had no adequate confidence in class due to language limitations, especially in English, which is the language of learning and teaching. A majority of learners from low-income families relied on the school feeding scheme for meals during the day. This national nutrition programme, according to Tshisikhawe, Runhare and Litshani (2024), is one of the pull

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factors for learners from rural and low-income families to school, and this study also confirmed this proposition from the earlier research.

5.2.3 Performance of learners from low SES compared to other learners

The findings of the current study revealed that learners from low SES are well supported with learning resources and academic support. The participants pointed out that parents from low-income families worked to put food on the table and did not have time to support their children with schoolwork. In fact, the majority of the interviewed teachers felt that the parents were not sufficiently educated to help their children with schoolwork. While research indicates that low-income parents also value education, they have no resources and the knowledge and skills to support their children with learning (Adele, 2017). Marxist sociologists, therefore, claim that schooling gives an advantage to high-income families, while it segregates against low-income families, who, in the end, leave school without passing (Munir, Faiza, Jamal, Daud & Igbal, 2023). If these learners are supported, the findings indicate they can compete with others. Only those who are not well looked after from low SES do not perform well. All in all, learners from low SES can compete with others and perform even better than those from high SES. Therefore, one can conclude that poverty is the determining factor that influences the poor performance of learners from low SES, not that they are genetically not intelligent (Cruickshank, 2024)

One of the findings under this section was that if learners are not well dressed, their self-esteem is very low, and they start to undermine themselves. Some learners tend to mock them, and they start feeling like they do not belong at school, which affects their performance. It was revealed that many of these learners from low SES come to school on an empty stomach. Their clothes are torn, and some are not even washed.

5.3 Theme 2: The influence of learners' socioeconomic status on their academic performance

This section presents and discusses the findings of the study under the following sub-theme: parents' education contribution towards learners' performance, support to teachers by parents from low SES and high SES, comfortability of learners from low SES

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coming to school and the role of the principal in creating a conducive environment for low SES.

5.3.1 Parents' education contribution towards learners' performance

The study findings revealed that parents' educational status is vital in contributing to the learner's performance. Parents who are educated understand educational matters very well. They are very supportive of their children as they know the Importance of education. As per the study findings, research from the reviewed literature also concurred that educated parents do not hesitate to support the school and the teachers in whatever is needed (Pant, 2020). Educated parents help their children with schoolwork and are concerned about their children's progress. They give themselves time to visit schools to check if their children are coping and to hear if there are any problems. The teachers who interviewed claimed that the problem is with parents who are not educated and do not take their children's education seriously. However, this is contrary to research because while the parents value education, their main hurdle is that they have no resources and knowledge enough to academically help their children (Pant, 2020). Teachers said that if they are called to parent-teacher meetings, they do not come; they do not help with anything. What they do is to shout the loudest when their children have not progressed. They cannot help their children with schoolwork at home; they say it is the teacher's work because they get paid for it. In the end, not supporting the children affects their academic performance.

All these observations point to the fact that the school culture is that of high-income groups, and the poor are not accommodated because their culture is not part of the school culture, especially in terms of the language of learning and teaching. The inadequate support to teachers by parents from low SES compared to parents from high SES was claimed by teachers who participated in this study. They claimed that when teachers ask them to come individually to discuss concerns about their individual children, they did not come, while those from high SES cooperated with teachers (Tahir, Ishfag, Begum & Shrjeel, 2021). In rural areas. The teachers are mostly parents from high SES and therefore work hand in hand with schools where their children learn.

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On the one hand, an important finding of this study, which influenced the school adjustment and performance of learners from low SES, was that learners from low SES felt comfortable coming to school because they were positively treated there. Teachers and the whole school community made it possible for the learners from low SES to feel welcome at the school. They supported them in their initiatives, which made them feel comfortable and at ease.

The findings revealed that the principals, as the heads of the two schools selected for the study, did a great job of creating a conducive learning environment for learners from low SES to feel welcome and free to learn. The principals made it a point that all learners were treated, supported, and helped equally, as provided for in the country's constitution, which gives every child the right to education (SA Constitution, 1994). Through the support of the school management committee (SMT), all learners are made aware of bullying, abuse and all the different types of mischiefs, which helped to protect the rights of children from low SES. Principals revealed during the interviews that if any learner is being bullied, they report it to their teachers, and proper action shall be taken by the SMT. The principals and teachers said they encouraged all learners to treat each other well and not mock others, because they come from different backgrounds, and that is not by choice.

It was established from the study that although there were incidents of mocking outside the teaching and learning environment, the principals were doing their best to create a conducive environment for low SES, which helped them perform equally to those from high SES. Teachers, however, differed on this, claiming that learners from low SES struggled with their studies. Due to time constraints, this study, however, did not analyse the actual academic performance of learners from low-SES backgrounds using school records, as it focused only on the views and experiences of study participants. The study of school records can be another study at a higher level, whereby the records of learners from different SES are compared, contrasted and discussed through statistical analysis. The principal encourages establishing a home-school relationship with parents; when teachers give learners work, parents must know how to help them at home, whether it is homework or a project. If they do not understand, they must contact the teacher for

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assistance. Parents should also use their skills at school to motivate their own children to learn that there are many opportunities to learn, and the school must reimburse them for the work they have done so that they are willing to do more without payment (Ndwandwe, 2023).

5.4 Theme 3: Environmental and community support and infrastructure that influence learners' academic success

This section presents and discusses the findings of the study under the following sub-theme: availability of infrastructure, community support and attracting learners from low SES to come to school.

5.4.1 Availability of Infrastructure

In line with findings from the reviewed literature, the findings of the current study showed that learners need a conducive environment for education to be effective (Egyir, Anaman & Zottor, 2024). However, the reality at the two schools was that there was no proper infrastructure for learning to take place easily and effectively for families of low-SES children, as well as at the schools where the study was conducted. The teachers, school principals, and heads of department indicated that the non-availability of infrastructure, such as libraries, computer laboratories, and classrooms, was not sufficient, and the office space for the principal is too small (Zhang, 2022). There are no playgrounds where learners can engage in their extracurricular activities. It was also revealed that there is no equipment, such as laptops or tablets, that can help teachers and learners explore the technological world.

5.4.2 Community support to learners from low SES

The findings revealed that the communities within the two schools were supporting the schools in different ways. The communities are more involved in school activities to better the academic performance of the school (Husein, Muturi & Samantar, 2018). There are different stakeholders that are found within the communities that are also helping. Communities donate items like shoes, uniforms, and sanitary towels, which are really

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helping learners from low-SES, as some parents may not be able to afford them. The community support the schools by sacrificing their time to clean the school. They also guard the school as they feel they own it and it is their property.

5.4.3 Attracting learners from low SES to come to school

The findings revealed that learners from low SES are attracted to come to school by providing them with the meals that the government has offered to schools. When learners perform well in their academic or extracurricular activities, they are recognised with a token of appreciation. The classrooms are equipped with learning resources that make them appealing to learners to feel that they are in a proper space for teaching and learning Lopez-Chao et al., 2020). Learners are made to feel free at all times. They can talk to whoever within the school premises if they encounter any problem. Classrooms, libraries, labs, and staff rooms increase the physical learning environment regarding preliminary technical abilities and the development of quality and suitable school elements, which can attract learners to come to school (Aguilera-Hermida, 2020).

5.5 Theme 4: Intervention strategies to mitigate the challenges of low SES students in primary school

This section presents and discusses the findings of the study under the following sub-theme: support/resources needed by the school to address academic challenges of learners from low SES, programmes or initiatives that schools can implement to address challenges faced by learners from low SES and strategies to make learners from low SES feel welcomed at school and study freely.

5.5.1 Supportive resources needed to address the academic challenges of learners from low SES

The findings of the study revealed that there are a number of resources that are needed by the two schools that were selected for the study. They showed that basic resources like enough teacher learners support materials, laboratories, proper classrooms and playgrounds should be provided. Learners from low SES cannot afford to buy books;

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therefore, it is the duty of the departments to provide such resources. Different teaching aids like puzzles, calculators, abacuses and enough learner teacher support materials can make the life of teachers and learners simple (Hidayatullah, Surianto & Desembrianita, 2024). As low-SES learners come to school hungry, the findings revealed that it would be appropriate to provide three meals per day to support these learners.

5.5.2 Programmes and initiatives to address challenges faced by learners from low SES

The study's findings revealed that if the parents of low-SES learners were included in the school, it could be the best approach, as they might be taught how to help their children academically. The two schools selected wish to initiate after-school and Saturday classes to help learners from low-SES backgrounds, as their parents do not have time to support their academic improvement. After-school classes or drop centres will help the learner with their homework, and they will learn to read and write. The school intends to introduce reading competitions to motivate learners to improve their reading skills. They want to open doors for sister departments like health, police, and pastors' forums to frequent schools to talk to learners about drugs, abuse and different health issues.

5.5.3 Strategies for learners from low SES to feel welcome at school and study freely

The findings of the study revealed that the academic staff should learn to have a caring and sharing attitude (Ali, Masroor & Tariq, 2020). In other words, teachers should change their attitudes towards learners from low-SES backgrounds and consider that these learners have the right to learn, feel welcome, and study freely. Learners from low SES should be shown love by their teachers and their fellow learners. Learners from low-SES backgrounds should be supported in all efforts; they must be recognised when they do well. They must be praised to boost their ego and self-esteem. The findings also revealed that teachers should play a parental role to these learners from low SES (Ali, Masroor & Tariq, 2020). The findings also revealed that different events like parents' day, fun days,

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casual days, sports day and career days should be introduced so that learners can socialise with each other as they are enjoying the happenings of the day.

5.6 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE STUDY

The findings of the study highlighted several key areas that require attention to improve the influence of learners' socioeconomic habitat on academic performance. Drawing from the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Parents from low SES should be forced to support their children academically. The schools should have a policy on parents' support, which will guide the parents to help and support their children and the school for academic improvement.
- The schools should identify and profile learners from low SES so that they can keep watching and supporting them for their improvement in learning.
- The government should make it a point to provide enough resources that are needed by schools for the betterment of teaching and learning.
- The Government should build schools with the necessities for learning, like libraries, laboratories and proper classrooms.
- The schools and the Department of Education should encourage the communities around the schools to support the schools in any way necessary.
- Schools should sell themselves better to attract learners from low SES

5.7 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

The study provides opportunities for other research to be conducted based on the comparison of learners from high-SES and low-SES habitat on academic performance. Studies utilising quantitative and mixed research approaches can be carried out to yield significant outcomes in the same field. A similar study could be conducted focusing on a wider research boundary or including document analysis on the comparison and contrasting of academic records of learners from different backgrounds.

5.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

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A master's degree is completed in a maximum of two years, which can create pressure on student researchers, and result in some study limitations. In this study, the research was conducted using a case of two selected secondary schools employing a qualitative research approach only. This makes it difficult to generalise the study's results to other school contexts that may differ from the two schools where it was conducted. Therefore, the study was conducted only in two schools because of financial and time constraints. Instead of the mixed methods approach, which employs both the quantitative and qualitative approaches, the study was only conducted using the qualitative methods through interviews of educators and observations at the two schools. Furthermore, due to time constraints, this study did not analyse learners' actual academic performance from school records, as it focused solely on the views and experiences of study participants, gathered through interviews. The study of school records can be another study at the doctoral level, which allows more time for research, whereby the records of learners from different SES are compared, contrasted and discussed through statistical analysis. However, apart from the limited time, financial resources and selection of two study sites, measures were taken to ensure that the research approach, which was selected, followed quality and ethical measures that are outlined and discussed in the instruction and methodology chapters of the study to ensure that the results are valid and reliable.

5.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

The study was set to explore the influence of learners' socioeconomic habitat on academic performance in Vhembe East District schools. The chapter summarised the different findings from the themes and sub-themes, which included challenges encountered by learners from low socio-economic backgrounds; socio-economic factors that influence learners' academic expectations; and the performance of learners from low SES backgrounds compared to other learners. In general, all study participants indicated a variety of challenges faced by learners from low SES and suggested how the challenges can be minimised. Despite the challenges identified, it was noted from the study that the SMTs tried their best to make all learners enjoy the right to education, including those from low SES.

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In conclusion, based on the study findings, recommendations were suggested, the study's limitations were outlined, and suggestions for further studies were made. The major recommendations are that; parents from low SES should be forced to support their children academically, schools should have policy on parental support which will guide the parents to help and support their children and the school for academic improvement; schools should identify and profile learners from low SES so that they can keep watching and supporting them for their improvement in learning, the government should make it a point that it provides enough resources that are needed by schools for the betterment of teaching and learning and that schools and the department of education should encourage the communities around the schools to support the schools in any way necessary to protect the educational rights of all children, including those from low SES.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: UNIVERSITY OF VENDA ETHICAL CERTIFICATE

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ETHICS APPROVAL CERTIFICATE

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

NAME OF RESEARCHER/INVESTIGATOR:
Mrs TP Tshisikhawe

STUDENT NO:
9213982

PROJECT TITLE: **The influence of learners' socio-economic habitat on academic performance: a case of selected primary schools in Vhembe East District, Limpopo Province, South Africa.**

ETHICAL CLEARANCE NO: FHSSE/25/CSEM/08/2207

SUPERVISORS/ CO-RESEARCHERS/ CO-INVESTIGATORS

NAME	INSTITUTION & DEPARTMENT	ROLE
Prof T Runhare	UNIVEN, Educational Studies	Supervisor
Dr TE Tshiovhe	UNIVEN, Educational Studies	Co-Supervisor
Mrs TP Tshisikhawe	UNIVEN, Educational Studies	Investigator -Student

Type: **Master's Research**
Risk: ***Minimal risk to humans, animals, or environment (Category 2)***
Approval Period: **July 2025 – July 2026**

The Research Ethics Social Science Committee (RESSC) hereby approves your project as indicated above.

General Conditions
While this ethics approval is subject to all declarations, undertakings and agreements incorporated and signed in the application form, please note the following.

- **The project leader (principal investigator) must report in the prescribed format to the REC:**
  - **Annually (or as otherwise requested) on the progress of the project, and upon completion of the project.**
  - **Within 48hrs in case of any adverse event (or any matter that interrupts sound ethical principles) during the course of the project.**
  - **Annually a number of projects may be randomly selected for an external audit.**
- **The approval applies strictly to the protocol as stipulated in the application form. Would any changes to the protocol be deemed necessary during the course of the project, the project leader must apply for approval of these changes at the REC. Would there be deviated from the project protocol without the necessary approval of such changes, the ethics approval is immediately and automatically forfeited.**
- **The date of approval indicates the first date that the project may be started. Would the project have to continue after the expiry date; a new application must be made to the REC and new approval received before or on the expiry date.**
- **In the interest of ethical responsibility, the REC retains the right to:**
  - **Request access to any information or data at any time during the course or after completion of the project,**
  - **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 project are revealed or suspected.**
  - **It becomes apparent that any relevant information was withheld from the REC or that information has been false or misrepresented.**
  - **The required annual report and reporting of adverse events was not done timely and accurately,**
  - **New institutional rules, national legislation or international conventions deem it necessary.**

ISSUED BY:
UNIVERSITY OF VENDA, RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
Date Considered: July 2025

Name of the RESSC Chairperson of the Committee..Prof M. Mwale-Manjoro.....

Signature.....Mwale.....

University of Venda
PRIVATE BAG X5050, THOHOYANDOU, 0950, LIMPOPO PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA
TELEPHONE (015) 962 8506/8313 FAX (015) 962 9000
"A quality driven financially sustainable, rural-based Comprehensive University"

UNIVERSITY OF VENDA
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR
RESEARCH AND INNOVATION
2025 -07- 2 2
Private Bag X5050
Thohoyandou 0950

© University of Venda

Appendix B: LIMPOPO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION ETHICAL CERTIFICATE

CONFIDENTIAL

LIMPOPO
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA
OFFICE OF THE PREMIER

TO: DR MC MAKOLA

FROM: DR MM MAEBANE

ACTING CHAIRPERSON: LIMPOPO PROVINCIAL RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (LPREC)

REVIEW DATE: 26 NOVEMBER 2025

SUBJECT: THE INFLUENCE OF LEARNERS' SOCIO-ECONOMIC HABITAT ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE: A CASE OF SELECTED PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN VHEMBE EAST DISTRICT, LIMPOPO PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA

RESEARCHER: TP TSHISIKHAWE

Dear Colleague

The above researcher's research proposal served at the Limpopo Provincial Research Ethics Committee (LPREC). The committee is satisfied with the methodological and ethical soundness of the proposed study.

Decision: The proposal is granted full approval.

Regards

Acting Chairperson: Dr MM Maebane

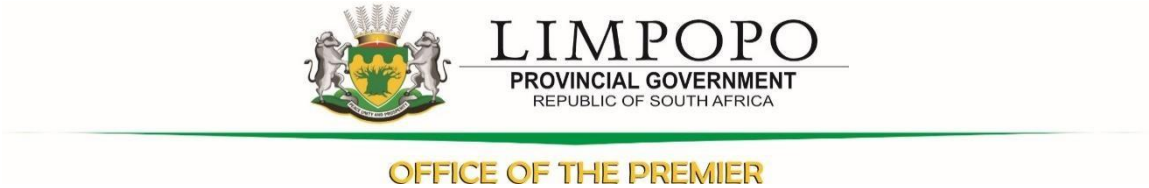
© University of Venda

Secretariat: Dr. MJ Mokgokong

Date: 12/12/2025

© University of Venda

APPENDIX C LIMPOPO PROVINCIAL RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE



Office of the Premier

Research and Development Directorate

Private Bag X9483, Polokwane, 0700, South Africa

Tel: (015) 230 9910, Email: mokobij@premier.limpopo.gov.za

LIMPOPO PROVINCIAL RESEARCH ETHICS

COMMITTEE CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

REVIEW DATE: 26 NOVEMBER 2025

PROJECT NUMBER: LPREC/282/2025: PG

SUBJECT: THE INFLUENCE OF LEARNERS' SOCIO-ECONOMIC HABITAT ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE: A CASE OF SELECTED PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN VHEMBE EAST DISTRICT, LIMPOPO PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA

RESEARCHER: TP TSHISIKHAWE

Acting Chairperson: Dr MM Maebane



Acting Chairperson: Limpopo Provincial Research Ethics Committee

© University of Venda

The Limpopo Provincial Research Ethics Committee (LPREC) is registered with National Health Research Council (NHREC) Registration Number **REC-111513-038.**

Note:

i. **This study is categorized as a Low Risk Level in accordance with risk level descriptors as enshrined in LPREC Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)**

ii. **Should there be any amendment to the approved research proposal; the researcher(s) must re-submit the proposal to the ethics committee for review prior data collection.**

iii. **The researcher(s) must provide annual reporting to the committee as well as the relevant department and also provide the department with the final report/thesis.**

iv. **The researchers will be required to make presentations of the study findings and recommendations at the Provincial Research Conference/Departmental Research Day.**

v. **The ethical clearance certificate is valid for 12 months. Should the need to extend the period for data collection arise then the researcher should renew the certificate through LPREC secretariat. PLEASE QUOTE THE PROJECT NUMBER IN ALL ENQUIRIES**

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Appendix D: REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT SCHOOLS

ENQ: Tshisikhawe TP

P.O BOX 4542

Thohoyandou

0950

The Principal

…….Primary school

Dear Sir/Madam

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

1. The above matter has references
2. I am a registered student at the University of Venda for a Master of Sociology of Education. The degree requires me to conduct research, my topic is “The Influence of Learners' SocioEconomic Habitat on Academic Performance: A Case of Selected Primary Schools in Vhembe East District, Limpopo, South Africa”.
3. The research will be in the form of individual (face-to-face) interviews with the principal, Departmental Head, Register teacher, Subject teachers, learners and parents. Interviews will be done after school so that we do not disturb teaching and learning.
4. Participation from the participants will be voluntary, and they can withdraw their participation without any reprisal. The interviews will be kept confidential, and participants’ names will never be divulged.

Hoping for a positive response.

Yours truly in education

© University of Venda

……

Tshisikhawe TP

© University of Venda

APPENDIX E: RESPONSE FROM SCHOOL A

LURENZHENI JUNIOR PRIMARY SCHOOL

EMIS NO. 930320026
Stand No. 113
Shayandima Industrial Area
Dzindi Circuit
Vhembe District
Limpopo Province

P.O.BOX 05
Shayandima
0945
Tel/Fax 072 979 3391

lurenzhenijpschool@gmail.com

Enq: Masakona TMJ

12 January 2026

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT OUR SCHOOL

1. The above matter bears reference.

2. The school wishes to inform you that your research for Master of Sociology of Education has been approved. Topic of the research: "THE INFLUENCE OF LEARNERS SOCIO-ECONOMIC HABITAT ON PERFORMANCE: A case of selected primary schools in Vhembe East District, Limpopo, South Africa."

3. Hoping that you find this in order.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
LURENZHENI JUNIOR PRIMARY SCHOOL
THE PRINCIPAL
2026 -01- 12
P.O. BOX 05, SHAYANDIMA, 0945
TEL: 072 979 3391
LIMPOPO PROVINCE

Yours in Education

Masakona TMJ

M 9 T.M.J

Date: 12/01/2026

© University of Venda

APPENDIX F: RESPONSE FROM SCHOOL B

MAKUMBANE PRIMARY SCHOOL

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

EMIS NO: 930320148
ENQUIRIES: Mutshinyalo CELL
071 1917475
EMAIL:
makumbaneprimary@gmail.com

P.O. BOX 8703
SHAYANDIMA
0945
13 January 2026

To : TSHISIKHAWE T P

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT MAKUMBANE PRIMARY SCHOOL

1. The above matter serves as reference
2. Kindly be informed that your request to conduct research at Makumbane Primary School has been accepted. Research Topic: " The influence of Learners Socia-Economic Habitat on Academic Performance: A case of Selected Primary Schools in Vhembe East District, Limpopo , South Africa. Degree : Master of Sociology of Education.
3. Hoping that our school will provide you an environment that is conducive and relevant enough for your study.

Yours in Education Development

MAKUMBANE PRIMARY SCHOOL
PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE
SIGNATURE :
DATE : 13-01-2026

© University of Venda

APPENDIX G: INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR PRINCIPALS, TEACHERS AND PARENTS

Title of Study: The Influence of Learners' Socio-Economic Habitat on Academic Performance: A Case of Selected Primary Schools in Vhembe East District, Limpopo Province, South Africa

Principal Investigator: Tshisikhawe Tshifaro Plantina
Institution: University of Venda
Contact Information: 076 390 9212

Purpose of the Study:

You are being asked to participate in a research study that aims to explore the Impact of Learners' Socio-Economic Habitat on Academic Performance: A Case of Selected Primary Schools in Vhembe East District, Limpopo Province, South Africa.

Procedures:

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to take part in an interview that will last approximately (45 minutes to 1 hour). During this interview, you will be asked questions related to the Progression of learners in schools. The interview will be conducted in person. If the participant is busy, a team meeting will be arranged at a time that suits them. The participant will be audio-recorded the whole time for the purposes of transcription and analysis.

Risks and Discomforts:

There are no risks associated with this study. However, you may feel uncomfortable answering some of the questions. If at any point you feel uncomfortable, you have the right to skip questions or stop the interview without any consequences.

Benefits:

While there may be no direct benefit to you for participating in this study, your responses will contribute to improving teaching and learning in schools.

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Confidentiality:

Your participation in this study will be kept confidential. No personal information will be collected as data, but participants will be kept anonymous.

Voluntary Participation:

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, for any reason; there will be no penalty or loss.

Contact Information:

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please contact Prof T Runhare at 015 962 8502 and/or Dr TE Tshiovhe on 015 962 9083

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant, you may contact the Ethics Committee of the University of Venda.

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understood the information provided above. I have been informed of the purpose, procedures, and risks of the study, and I have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without penalty. By signing this form, I give my consent to participate in the research study.

Participant's Name:

_____

Participant's Signature:

_____

Date: _____

© University of Venda

Researcher's Name: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____

Date: _____

© University of Venda

APPENDIX H: CONSENT FORM FOR LEARNERS

Consent Form for Participation in Research Study (Learners)

Title of the Study: The Influence of Learners' Socio-Economic Habitat on Academic Performance: A Case of Selected Primary Schools in Vhembe East District, Limpopo Province, South Africa

Researcher: Tshisikhawe TP

Institution: University of Venda

Dear Parents/Guardians,

Your child is invited to participate in a research study conducted by **Tshisikhawe Tshifaro Plantina** from the University of Venda. The purpose of this study is to explore the Influence of Learners' Socioeconomic Habitat on Academic Performance: A Case of Selected Primary Schools in Vhembe East District, Limpopo Province, South Africa. Your child's participation in this study is entirely voluntary.

Purpose of the Study:

The aim of this research is to understand the Influence of Learners' Socio-Economic Habitat on Academic Performance. The findings of this study may help to develop better strategies to enhance learners' learning experiences and academic outcomes.

Procedures:

If you consent to your child's participation, the following activities will take place:

- Your child will participate in interviews to share their experiences and perspectives on how their habitat contributes towards their academic performance.
- Academic performance data (such as grades and test scores) may be collected and analysed in relation to their responses.

Duration:

The study will be conducted over the course of one academic term. Participation will require approximately 40 to 1 hour of your child's time, spread over several sessions.

Risks and Benefits:

© University of Venda

Risks: There are no risks associated with this study.

Benefits: While there may be no direct benefit to your child, their participation will contribute to valuable research that could improve educational practices and policies in the future.

Confidentiality:

All information collected during this study will be kept strictly confidential. Data will be anonymised and securely stored. Your child's identity will not be revealed in any reports or publications resulting from this study.

Voluntary Participation:

Participation in this study is voluntary. You and your child have the right to withdraw at any point without any penalty or loss of benefits to which your child is otherwise entitled.

Contact Information:

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please feel free to contact Prof T Runhare on 015 962 8502 or Dr TE Tshiovhe on 015 962 9083.

Consent:

Please indicate your consent for your child's participation by signing below.

Parent/Guardian Consent Form

I have read and understood the information provided above. I voluntarily agree to allow my child to participate in this study.

Child's Name: _____

Parent/Guardian Name: _____

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____

Date: _____

© University of Venda

Learner Assent Form

I have read the information provided (or had it read to me). I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Learner's Name: _____

Learner's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Tshisikhawe TP (Mrs) 076 390 9212 University of Venda

© University of Venda

APPENDIX I: INTERVIEWS SCHEDULES

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW SCHEDULE WITH SCHOOL PRINCIPALS AND DHs

INTRODUCTION

I wish to thank you for agreeing to take part in this research project. You are assured that everything you say during the interview will only be used for this project. You should never mention your name, the names of colleagues or schools. You are also free to use any language that will help you to express your views without compromise.

PART ONE: BIOGRAPHICAL QUESTIONS

1. How long have you been a principal?
2. What are your academic qualifications?
3. Do you consider your school a rural or township school, and why?

PART TWO: General Understanding of Challenges

1. What are the most common academic challenges you observe among students from low socio-economic backgrounds in your school?
2. How do socio-economic factors influence students' ability to meet academic expectations?
3. Do learners from low SES behave differently from other learners?
4. Do the learners from low SES come to school hungry, without a uniform and in torn clothes?

PART THREE: LEARNER'S FAMILY SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE (FOCUSING ON PARENT EDUCATION, SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENT)

1. How can parents' education contribute towards learners' performance?
2. Who seems to support you most in making learners' education success between parents from Low SES and those from High SES, and why?
3. How is the performance of low SES academically?
4. Are learners from low SES comfortable coming to your school, and why?
5. What do you do as the principal to make the learning environment conducive for low SES?

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PART FOUR: INFLUENCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS (COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND INFRASTRUCTURE) ON ACADEMIC SUCCESS

1. From your experience, do you have enough infrastructure to make the education of your learners a success? If not, which infrastructure do you wish to have?
2. How does the community support you and the school together with the learners from low SES?
3. What do you do as a school to make learners from low SES think of coming to school daily?

PART FIVE: INTERVENTIONS TO MITIGATE CHALLENGES FACED BY LEARNERS FROM LOW SES

1. What additional support or resources do you think the school needs to better address the academic challenges of students from low socio-economic backgrounds?
2. What programs or initiatives can the school implement to address these challenges?
3. What can you do to make learners from low SES feel welcomed and for them to learn freely?

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR TEACHERS

INTRODUCTION

I wish to thank you for agreeing to take part in this research project. You are assured that everything you say during the interview will only be used for this project. You should never mention your name, the names of colleagues or schools. You are also free to use any language that will help you to express your views without compromise.

PART ONE: BIOGRAPHICAL QUESTIONS

1. How long have you been a teacher?
2. What are your academic qualifications?
3. Do you consider the school a rural or township school, and why?

PART TWO: General Understanding of Challenges

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1. What are the most common academic challenges you observe among students from low socio-economic backgrounds in your class?
2. How is the attendance of learners from low SES and its impact?
3. Do learners from low SES behave differently from other learners?
4. Do the learners from low SES come to school hungry, without a uniform and in torn clothes?
5. How do you handle the issue of a lack of learning resources, if there are?

PART THREE: LEARNERS' FAMILY SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE (FOCUSING ON PARENT EDUCATION, SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENT)

1. How can parents' education contribute towards learners' performance?
2. What kind of support do you get from parents from Low SES?
3. Do you think parents' education status has an impact on the success of the learners? If so, how?
4. How do peer relationships affect their academic performance?
5. What teaching strategies have you found effective in helping students from low socio-economic backgrounds succeed?

PART FOUR: INFLUENCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS (COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND INFRASTRUCTURE) ON ACADEMIC SUCCESS

1. Do you notice differences in learning attitudes or motivation between students from low socio-economic backgrounds and others?
2. How do health, nutrition, or other physical factors play a role in their academic performance?
3. How does the community support you and the school together with the learners from low SES?

4. What do you do as a school to make learners from low SES think of coming to school daily?

PART FIVE: INTERVENTIONS TO MITIGATE CHALLENGES FACED BY LEARNERS FROM LOW SES

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1. What additional support or resources do you think the school needs to better address the academic challenges of students from low socio-economic backgrounds?
2. What programs or initiatives can the school implement to address these challenges?
3. What can you do to make learners from low SES feel welcomed and for them to learn freely?
4. How can school leadership and policymakers better support teachers in addressing the needs of students from low socio-economic backgrounds?
5. What else can be done to support learners from low SES for better academic achievement?

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR LEARNERS

INTRODUCTION

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PART ONE: General Understanding of Challenges

1. With whom do you stay at home?
2. When you have homework, who helps you?
3. Do you eat breakfast before coming to school?

PART TWO: LEARNERS' FAMILY SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE (FOCUSING ON PARENT EDUCATION, SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENT)

1. When you have homework, do your parents/guardians help you? If not, what is their reason?
2. What kind of support do you get from parents/guardians at home?
3. Do you think parents' education status has an impact on the success of the learners? If so, how?
4. Why do you like your school?
5. What do you hate about your school?

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PART FOUR: INFLUENCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS (COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND INFRASTRUCTURE) ON ACADEMIC SUCCESS

1. Do you feel welcomed at school?
2. Do you get support from other people to make you succeed in your academic career?
3. What do you think is still lacking in your school in terms of infrastructure?
5. What can be done to make your school better?

PART FIVE: INTERVENTIONS TO MITIGATE CHALLENGES FACED BY LEARNERS FROM LOW SES

1. What do you think needs to be done by your teachers to make you feel comfortable at school?
2. What can be done at home to make you love coming to school every day?

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR PARENTS

INTRODUCTION

I wish to thank you for agreeing to take part in this research project. You are assured that everything you say during the interview will only be used for this project. You SHOULD NEVER MENTION YOUR NAME, THE NAMES OF COLLEAGUES OR SCHOOLS. YOU ARE ALSO free to use any language that will help you to express your views without compromise.

PART ONE: GENERAL UNDERSTANDING OF CHALLENGES

1. What problems do you encounter when helping your children with schoolwork at home?
2. Do you feel confident helping your children with academic work?
3. What makes your children not come to school daily?
4. What resources or support would you like to help you assist your children better?

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PART TWO: LEARNERS' FAMILY SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE (FOCUSING ON PARENT EDUCATION, SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENT)

1. Do you think the school provides adequate support for students from low socio-economic backgrounds?
2. How do you feel about your involvement in school-related activities, and what challenges do you face in participating?
3. Are you satisfied with the school's communication about your child's progress and needs?
4. Do you have access to resources like books, the internet, or a quiet place for your child to study?
5. How often do you discuss school activities or homework with your child?

PART THREE: INFLUENCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS (COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND INFRASTRUCTURE) ON ACADEMIC SUCCESS

1. Do you think the school's facilities (e.g., classrooms, playgrounds, technology) are sufficient for effective learning?
2. Are there any challenges related to transportation or access to the school?
3. What improvements would you like to see in the school or community infrastructure to support academic success?
4. What challenges in the community do you think negatively impact your child's education?

PART FOUR: INTERVENTIONS TO MITIGATE CHALLENGES FACED BY LEARNERS FROM LOW SES

1. What kind of programs or resources (e.g., free tutoring, school supplies, transportation) would help your child succeed?
2. How could the school better communicate or work with you to support your child's learning?
3. Are there barriers (e.g., time, language, awareness) that make it hard for you to participate in your child's education? How can the school address these?

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Appendix J: LEARNER'S OBSERVATION SHEET

Focus: The Influence of Learners' Socio-Economic Habitat on Academic Performance: A Case of Selected Primary Schools in Vhembe East District, Limpopo Province, South Africa

Observer Name: _____

Date: _____

Time: _____

Grade/Class: _____

School : A or B

1. Learner Demographics

- **Gender**: □ Male □ Female □ Other. **Estimated Age**: ___**Learner Code:** _

2. Observation Criteria

Behaviour	**Indicator**	**Observation**	**Notes**
Class participation	Do learners attend to a teacher, actively listen, ask questions, complete class tasks/homework, raise their hands/respond to questions?		
Interacting with peers	Interacts positively with peers, Isolated or withdrawn behaviour		
Emotional expression	Do learners display signs of frustration, anxiety, or confidence?		

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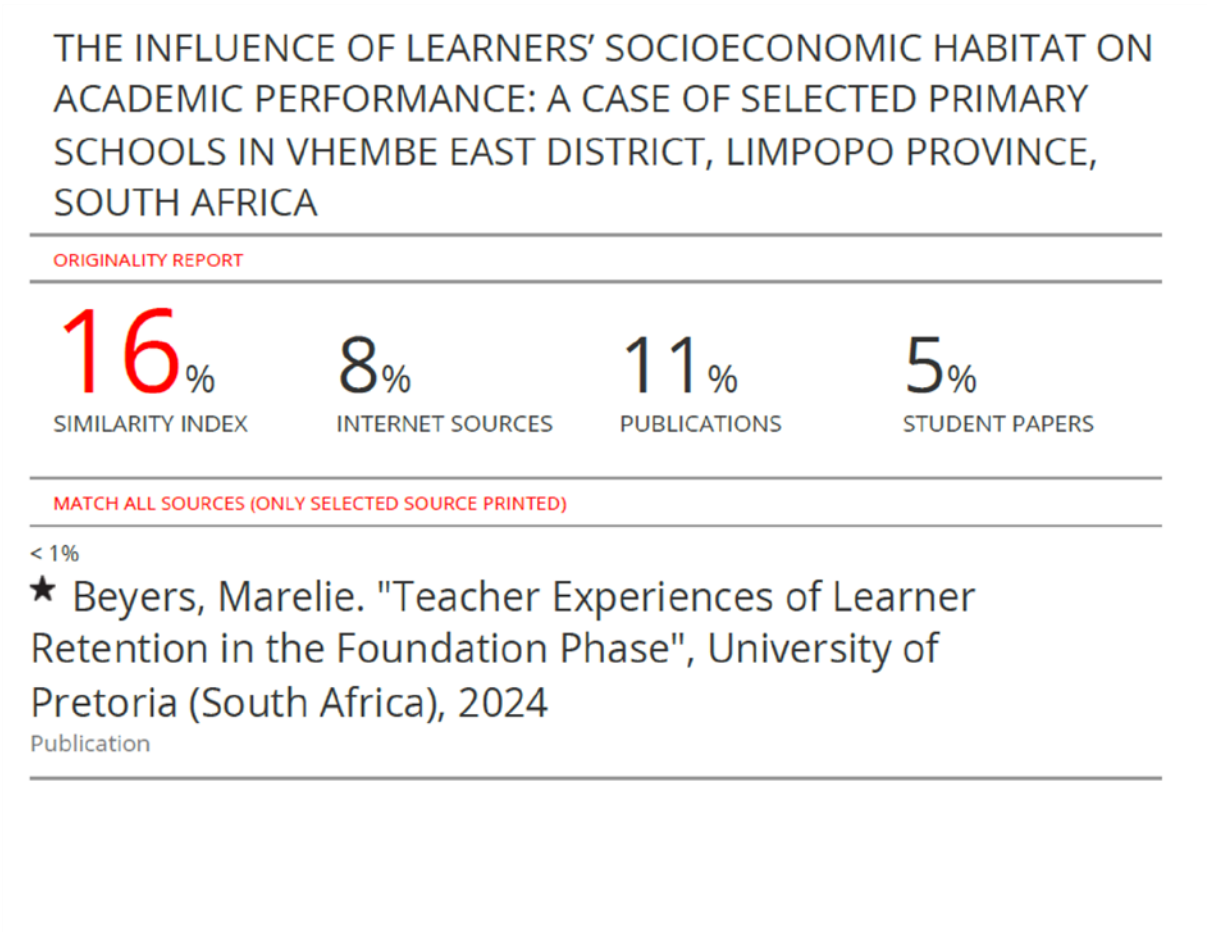
Self management	Brings necessary materials (books, pens, etc.)		
Signs of Socio-Economic Impact	Do learners come to class? hungry/tired/unprepared? Wears a worn-out or inappropriate school uniform?		
Support needed	Do learners appear to need emotional/academic support?		

Observer Signature: _____

Date: _____

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APPENDIX K: TURN IT REPORT



THE INFLUENCE OF LEARNERS' SOCIOECONOMIC HABITAT ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE: A CASE OF SELECTED PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN VHEMBE EAST DISTRICT, LIMPOPO PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA

ORIGINALITY REPORT

16%	8%	11%	5%
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

MATCH ALL SOURCES (ONLY SELECTED SOURCE PRINTED)

< 1%

★ Beyers, Marelie. "Teacher Experiences of Learner Retention in the Foundation Phase", University of Pretoria (South Africa), 2024

Publication

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APPENDIX L: EDITOR'S REPORT

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SATI
SOUTH AFRICAN TRANSLATORS' INSTITUTE

CERTIFICATE OF EDITING

This confirms that I edited substantively the document below, including a Reference list. The document was returned to the author with various tracked changes to correct errors and clarify meaning.

TITLE: **The influence of learners' socioeconomic habitat on academic performance: A case of selected primary schools in Vembe EastDistrict, Limpopo Province, South Africa**

AUTHOR : **Tshisikhawe TP**

STUDENT NUMBER **9213982**

Note: The edited work described here may not be identical to that submitted. The authors, at their sole discretion, have the prerogative to accept, delete, or change amendments made by the editor before submission.

DATE: **18 February 2026**

EDITOR'S COMMENT

The author was advised to effect suggested corrections regarding subject-verb agreement, punctuation and overall academic writing style, to name a few.

Signature

Dr Kufakunesu Zano, PhD in English. A member of the South African Translators' Institute, Ref 1000686, South Africa 2025

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