

**ASSESSMENT OF SOCIAL WORK SERVICES TOWARDS ADDRESSING BARRIERS
TO LEARNING IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN SIBASA CIRCUIT, VHEMBE DISTRICT**

By

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DECLARATION

I, **Tsireledzo Sikhitha**, declare that “*Assessment of social work services towards addressing barriers to learning in public schools in Sibasa Circuit, Vhembe District*” is my own work that has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Signature:  Date: 08/03/2023

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my family members who have never failed to give me emotional, financial, and moral support throughout the study. I also dedicate my study to my late aunt Mrs. Phophi Tshidino Magoro may her soul rest in peace.

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To the Almighty God for giving me the strength and wisdom to complete this research report.

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed social work services in addressing barriers to learning in public schools in Sibasa Circuit in Vhembe District. The study was conducted in two public secondary schools, with a focus on Grade 11 and 12 learners of the said circuit. The study was qualitative in nature and used an exploratory research design. The purposive sampling method was used to draw a sample from learners, educators, and social workers. Semi-structured individual interviews and focus groups were used to collect data, which was analysed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that learners encountered the following barriers to learning: teenage pregnancy, substance abuse, bullying, peer pressure and poverty. It was found that those barriers to learning disturb learners as they cannot focus on school activities. The findings also revealed that social workers should offer social work services such as casework and group work to provide psychosocial counselling, and educational support in addressing barriers to learning. The researcher recommends that the Department of Basic Education appoint school social workers permanently to prevent and address barriers to learning experienced by learners.

Keywords: Barriers to Learning, Inclusive Education, Learners, School Social Work, Social Work Services

LIST OF ACRONYMS

AASW	-	Australia Association of Social Workers
BBST	-	District-Based Support Team
CSTL	-	Care and Support for Teaching and Learning
DBE	-	Department of Basic Education
DOE	-	Department of Education
DSD	-	Department of Social Development
ED	-	Educator
FGD	-	Focus Group Discussion
LSA	-	Learner Support Agent
NASW	-	National Association of Social Workers
NCES	-	National Center for Education Statistics
RSA	-	Republic of South Africa
SBST	-	School-Based Support Team
SCW	-	Social Worker
SIAS	-	Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support

Table of Contents

DECLARATION	i
DEDICATION	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
ABSTRACT	iv
LIST OF ACRONYMS	v
LIST OF FIGURES	xiii
LIST OF TABLES	xiv
CHAPTER ONE	1
1.1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.2 BACKGROUND	2
1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT	3
1.4 AIM OF THE STUDY	4
1.5 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY	4
1.6 RESEARCH QUESTIONS	5
1.7 RATIONALE	5
1.8 DELIMITATION AND BACKGROUND OF SIBASA CIRCUIT	6
1.9 DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS	6
1.9.1 Barriers to learning	6
1.9.2 Inclusive Education	7
1.9.3 Learner	7
1.9.4 Learner support	7
1.9.5. School Social Work	8
1.10 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	8
1.11 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY	9

1.12 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	10
1.12.1 Research Approach.....	10
1.12.2 Research Design.....	10
1.12.3 Research Setting or Context.....	10
1.12.4 Population and Sampling.....	11
1.12.5 Data Collection Method.....	11
1.12.6 Data Analysis.....	11
1.13. Quality Criteria.....	11
1.13.1 Credibility.....	12
1.13.2 Transferability.....	12
1.13.3 Dependability.....	12
1.13.4 Confirmability.....	12
1.14. Ethical Considerations.....	13
1.15 CHAPTER LAYOUT.....	14
1.14 SUMMARY.....	14
CHAPTER TWO.....	16
ASSESSMENT OF SOCIAL WORK SERVICES AND BARRIERS TO LEARNING IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS.....	16
2.1 INTRODUCTION.....	16
2.2 SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK.....	16
2.3 THE HISTORY OF SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK.....	17
2.3.1 THE HISTORY OF SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK INTERNATIONALLY.....	17
2.3.2 THE HISTORY OF SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK IN AFRICA.....	19
2.3.3 THE HISTORY OF SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK IN SOUTH AFRICA.....	19
2.4 DESCRIPTION OF BARRIERS TO LEARNING.....	22
2.5 CATEGORIES AND TYPES OF BARRIERS TO LEARNING.....	23

2.5.1 Extrinsic learning barrier	24
2.5.1.1 Socio-economic (poverty) barriers	24
2.5.1.2 Bullying phenomena	24
2.5.1.3 Teenage pregnancy	25
2.5.1.4 Peer pressure	26
2.5.1.5 Substance abuse.....	27
2.5.1.6 Lack of parental involvement in their children’s education	28
2.5.2 Systemic barriers.....	29
2.5.2.1 Inadequate policies and legislation.....	29
2.5.2.2 Discriminatory attitudes towards learners.....	29
2.5.3 Intrinsic barriers to learning	30
2.6 CONTEMPORARY MEASURES TO ADDRESS BARRIERS TO LEARNING	31
2.6.1 Department of Education strategies for addressing learning barriers	31
2.6.2 Department of Social Development: Social work intervention strategies to address barriers to learning	32
2.7 SOCIAL WORK SERVICES PROVIDED TO LEARNERS IN SOUTH AFRICAN PUBLIC SCHOOLS TO ADDRESS BARRIERS TO LEARNING	33
2.7.1 Barrier identification.....	33
2.7.2 Assessment.....	34
2.7.3 Counselling	35
2.7.4 Crisis Intervention	36
2.7.5 Prevention programmes	36
2.8 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK IN EDUCATION AND SOCIAL WORK	37
2.9 SUMMARY.....	40
CHAPTER THREE.....	41
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	41
3.1 INTRODUCTION.....	41

3.2 RESEARCH APPROACH.....	41
3.4 RESEARCH SETTING OR CONTEXT	42
3.5 POPULATION AND SAMPLING	44
3.5.1 Population	44
3.5.2 Sampling method and procedures.....	44
3.6 PILOT STUDY.....	46
3.7 DATA COLLECTION METHOD AND TOOL.....	46
3.7.1 Interviews	47
3.7.2 Focus Group Discussions	48
3.8 DATA ANALYSIS	49
3.9 QUALITY CRITERIA.....	51
3.9.1 Credibility	51
3.9.2 Transferability	51
3.9.3 Dependability	52
3.9.4 Confirmability.....	52
3.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	52
3.10.1 Permission to conduct the Study	52
3.10.2 Entry to research site	53
3.10.3 Informed Consent	53
3.10.4 Voluntary Participation.....	53
3.10.5 No harm to Participants	54
3.10.6 Debriefing of Participants	54
3.10.6 Confidentiality and Anonymity	54
3.10 SUMMARY.....	55
CHAPTER FOUR.....	56

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION	56
4.1 INTRODUCTION.....	56
4.2 BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION OF PARTICIPANTS	56
4.3 DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS STRATEGIES	58
4.4 FINDINGS DISCUSSION.....	59
Theme1: Participants’ understanding of barriers to learning.....	61
Sub-theme 1.1: Understanding of barriers to learning	61
Sub-theme 1.2: Identification of learners with barriers to learning	73
Sub-theme 1.3: The effects of barriers to learning on learners	75
Theme 2: Contemporary measures to address barriers to learning	76
Sub-theme 2.1: Social workers’ roles and services in addressing barriers to learning.	77
Category 2.1.1 Support to learners using social work methods.....	77
Sub-category 2.1.1.1 Support to learners on individual level and through group work.....	77
Sub-category 2.1.1.2 Provide psychosocial services to learners	78
Sub-category 2.1.1.3 conduct educational talks.....	79
Sub-category 2.1.1.4 Linkage to other relevant service providers	80
Theme 3: Measures required to improve current social work services offered to learners experiencing barriers to learning	80
Sub-theme 3.1: Collaboration with other stakeholders	81
Category 3.1.1. Parental involvement.....	82
Theme 4: Participants’ views on the influence of social work services to address barriers to learning	83
Sub-theme: 4.1: Changes in learners’ behaviour	83
Sub-theme 4.2: Improved school performance	85
Sub-theme 4.3: The ability to cope with life challenges	86

4.5 SMMARY	87
CHAPTER FIVE.....	88
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	88
5.1 INTRODUCTION.....	88
5.2 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS.....	88
5.2.1 Participants’ understanding of barriers to learning	89
5.2.1.1 Understanding of barriers to learning.....	89
5.2.1.2 Types of barriers to learning.....	89
5.2.1.3 Indicators of barriers to learning	91
5.2.1.4 The effect of barriers to learning	91
5.2.2 Contemporary measures to address barriers to learning.....	92
5.2.2.1 Social workers’ roles and different types of services provided to learners with barriers to learning	92
5.2.3 Measures required to improve the current social work services offered to learners experiencing barriers to learning	93
5.2.4 Participants’ views on the influence of social work services in addressing barriers to learning.....	93
5.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY	94
5.4 CONCLUSION	94
5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS.....	95
5.5.1 Government structures	95
5.5.2 Involvement of stakeholders	95
5.2.3 Future research.....	95
6 REFERENCES.....	97
APPENDICES.....	110
Appendix A: Ethical Clearance from the University.....	110
Appendix B: Ethical Clearance from the Department of Education.....	111

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form.....	113
Appendix D: Parents/legal guardian consent form	114
Appendix E: Child Assent form	115
Appendix F: Declaration of consent.....	116
Appendix G: Interview Schedule.....	117
Appendix H: Editorial letter	120

LIST OF FIGURES

Fig 2.1 Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory on contextualized child development (Tuswa, 2016)	38
Fig 3.1 Vhembe District Municipality (Profile: Vhembe District Municipality 2020)	42

LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.2.1: Biographical information of educators.....	55
Table 4.2.2 Biographical information of social workers (LSA)	56
Table 4.2.3: Biographical information of learners.....	56
Table 4.2.4: Key for interpreting findings from one-on-one semi-structured interviews and focus groups.....	57
Table 4.2.5: The findings revealed four major themes which are tabled and discussed.....	58

CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL ORIENTATION TO STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Learners face many problems that prevent them from accessing education. These issues could arise from the learner as an individual, society, or educational institution (Department of Basic Education, (DBE) 2010). However, learners need support to overcome the problems. “South Africa has recognised that there are numerous circumstances that can hinder learners from receiving education or that can cause learning to breakdown, and these elements have been considered to be considered to be barriers to learning, which can emanate from learners in association with other learners, families, the school environment, their communities, the educational system, and the larger social system” (Ndinisa,2016:01). The DBE (2010) acknowledges that failure to effectively handle barriers to learning can result in exclusion or breakdown.

Dealing with barriers to learning is not just the duty of teachers. There must be involvement from experts including police, psychologists, social workers, and others in the medical field. Social workers can remove some barriers and stop others from arising (Berger, 2013). To deal with these barriers, the DBE (2010) introduced a programme called Care and Support for Teaching and Learning (CSTL). “The programme has priority areas that needed the assistance of the Department of Social Development” (DSD) (DBE, 2010:32). In 2017 the Department of Basic Education Limpopo employed social workers on a temporary contract, and they call them Learner Support Agents. To guarantee that learners have access to high-quality instruction education, the DBE determined that there are both direct and indirect demands for social work services. As a result, social workers collaborate with DBE to overcome learning barriers by providing help, particularly psychosocial support (DBE, 2010). Van Sittert (2016) indicated that in instances where there are barriers to learning on the learning site, the profession of social work aims to offer social services to learners, parents, and schools.

Van Sittert (2016) further indicates that social workers also help learners make use of social opportunities to reach their full potential. Based on the information provided, the

study intends to explore social work services in addressing barriers to learning in public schools. These services are meant to assist those who are in need, vulnerable and at risk. Therefore, learners are at risk and in need of social work interventions, hence the study is important.

1.2 BACKGROUND

The importance of social workers in schools has been internationally acknowledged for many years. It is mentioned by Kemp (2014:10) that “school social work dates back to 1907 and was started in New York City, Boston, Chicago and New Haven”. A study conducted by Van Sittert (2016) shows that in America, school social workers provide services in a variety of schools and address a variety of issues, such as child abuse, neglect, violent behaviour, disciplinary issues, divorce, and separation. These problems are addressed by means of contact between parents and the social worker. The government of South Africa recognized the value of school social work as a component of the educational system as early as 1973 (Kemp, 2013). In accordance with section 29 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA) Act no. 108 of 1996, the South African National Department of Basic Education is responsible for providing basic education that is both accessible and of high quality to South African learners. Though the Department of Education is mandated to provide affordable, high-quality education, barriers to learning are social aspects that require further support services such as social workers to enhance accessible quality education.

However, there are many challenges in South Africa, including barriers to learning. Most barriers to learning challenges are within the learner, schools, and families (Bojuwe, Moletsane, Stofile, Moolla and Sylvester, 2014). The DBE (2010:09) highlights that “historically disadvantaged, black African schools’ access to education is hindered by various barriers to learning”. These barriers to learning include “weak family system, poverty, unemployment, inequality, unsafe communities, poor parenting, and other socioeconomic vulnerabilities” (DBE, 2010:09). In view of this, Berger (2013) asserts that Education White Paper 6 indicates that all learners must be given the support they need to reach their greatest potential, and learning barriers must be removed. Therefore, social workers should be earmarked by the Department of Basic Education to provide

psychosocial support in addressing barriers to learning. “It is because of the existence of barriers that the Department of Education in Limpopo considered the appointment of social workers temporarily in 2017” (Vergottini & Weyers, 2020:126). Therefore, the Department of Basic Education should permanently employ social workers to address social issues, including barriers to learning amongst school learners. Van Sittert (2016) reported that the use of school social workers has grown in significance within the DBE in South Africa. Hence, Kemp (2017:01) indicated that “social work is crucial in addressing barriers to learners’ education as well as the social and emotional challenges that hinder their development”. Van Sittert and Wilson (2018) added that interventions by school social workers can be quite important in helping learners succeed academically. To improve the learner's academic performance in the classroom, intervention is required. It is against this background that the researcher intends to explore social work services in addressing barriers to learning among learners in public schools.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

School learners are faced with different challenging realities in their educational journey such as barriers to learning. These barriers take on several forms, but they are only exposed when learning fails or when learners leave the program. The barriers to learning experienced by school learners lead to poor educational outcomes and school dropouts. A study by Mouton, Louw and Strydom (2013) notes that learners in South African schools’ face challenges such as violence, low moral value, absenteeism, and truancy. In South Africa, more than 200 000 children are out of school due to COVID-19 (Damons, 2021). Children lose enthusiasm in learning and leave school because of forced school closures, poverty, and extended absences (Damons, 2021). Makgotha (2021) concurs that some young people have been compelled by unemployment to hunt for jobs to support their families. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2022) indicates that cyberbullying amongst learners was higher than 16% in 2019-2020.

In a study conducted by Kwabena (2014) in Vhembe District, 76% of cases of students leaving school are a result of poor performance, peer pressure, substance misuse, and a lack of enthusiasm to learn. In Vhembe District, 76% of cases of students leaving school are a result of poor performance, peer pressure, substance misuse, and a lack of

enthusiasm to learn. This figure shows various barriers faced by learners in their learning. A study conducted by Tshifura (2012:9) shows that “in Vhembe, most learners that drop out of school are from poor or low-income families”. According to Tshifura (2012), between 3% and 6% of learners encounter emotional and behavioural barriers, which need to be addressed so that they do not affect learners’ academic performance and their future. Therefore, social workers have a crucial part to play in addressing barriers to learning as they are the ones that offer social services to learners who encounter the identified barriers.

1.4 AIM OF THE STUDY

“The aim is the brief and concrete statement of what the researcher plans to investigate” (Terre-Blanche, Durrheim and Painter, 2006:84). The study's aim allowed the researcher to focus on its purpose and how it was carried out (Bryman, 2012). Therefore, the aim was to assess social work services towards addressing barriers to learning in public schools in Sibasa Circuit, Vhembe District. The achievement of this aim is enhanced by the attainment of the objectives.

1.5 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The following objectives were pursued in the study:

- To establish the views of participants regarding their understanding of barriers to learning.
- To describe the types of barriers to learning encountered by learners in public schools.
- To identify social work measures used to address barriers to learning.
- To assess the influence of social work services in addressing barriers to learning in public schools.

1.6 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following questions were posed to guide the study:

- What are the views of participants regarding their understanding of barriers to learning?
- What types of barriers to learning do learners encounter?
- Which social work measures are used to address barriers to learning?
- What influence do social work services have in addressing barriers to learning?

1.7 RATIONALE

Several factors prompted interest in the current study. The researcher's interest in barriers to learning arose from an observation that many learners experience difficulties in achieving their educational goals. There are various reasons why learners encounter obstacles to learning. The researcher chose not to focus on the barriers to learning in the classroom and in the education system, as there is extensive information on these in the field of education. Thus, the researcher decided to investigate social work services towards addressing barriers to learning that learners encounter. The researcher was motivated to begin this type of study by the paucity of studies and literature on social work services aimed at removing barriers to learning, particularly in Limpopo Province. The motive behind the researcher's passion and determination was to explore whether social work services provided to those with learning barriers are addressing their needs or assisting learners.

Some of the literature that addresses social work intervention to barriers to bullying (Masilo, 2018). Van Sittert (2016) looks at the role of social workers within the framework of inclusive education. Kemp (2013) focuses on the role of school social workers regarding the management of violence in schools. There is scarcity of literature specifically geared towards uncovering social work services towards addressing barriers to learning in public schools. By conducting this study, the researcher hopes that the findings will inform the Limpopo Department of Education about the importance of having social work services in schools.

1.8 DELIMITATION AND BACKGROUND OF SIBASA CIRCUIT

This study was conducted in two public schools in Sibasa Circuit in Thulamela Municipality, Vhembe District, Limpopo Province, South Africa. The study explored social work services towards addressing barriers to learning. This study consists of Tshivenda-speaking learners, educators, and social workers. Vhembe District Municipality has four local municipalities, namely Makhado, Collins Chabane, Thulamela and Musina. This area shares borders with three countries, namely Zimbabwe, Botswana and Mozambique. The circuit shares borders with Tshinane and Mvudi Circuits in Thulamela Municipality. The study was conducted at Raluswielo and Ralson Tshinane Secondary Schools situated at Sibasa Circuit. Raluswielo has 326 learners whereas Ralson Tshinane has 518 learners. The South African Local Government estimates that the population of Vhembe District is 1.2 million (2009-2011).

In Vhembe District Municipality, youth under the age of 20 make up 50% of the population. “Twenty-four percent (20.4%) of young people are reported to use drugs, with alcohol being the most commonly abused one compared to tobacco, glue, and dagga (marijuana), which tend to be school learners” (Mabasa, 2018:18). When compared to youths older than 20, high school students are rising faster in number and to have a higher prevalence of substance abuse (Mabasa, 2018). Vhembe District has a total number of 329 high schools: 36 independent high schools and 293 public high schools. However, Sibasa Circuit has 11 public secondary schools. Therefore, the study seeks to explore social work services towards addressing barriers to learning in public schools in Sibasa Circuit, Vhembe District.

1.9 DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

The concepts that follow are important in the study and are defined below:

1.9.1 Barriers to learning

Barriers to learning are defined as conditions that make it difficult for the system to accommodate diversity, result in a breakdown of learning, or hinder students from accessing educational resources (DBE, 2010). Visser (2010) states that barriers to learning are things that hinder learners from gaining the benefits of education and these barriers may be present in the learner themselves, in the classroom or

educational setting, or in the broader social, economic, and political context. In this study, the term barrier to learning means any form of obstacle or restriction that may make it difficult for learners to access education.

1.9.2 Inclusive Education

Pillay (2019:13) explains inclusive education as assessing “education at all local schools within their resources, attending regularly scheduled classes, and receiving encouragement study, participate and contribute to all aspects of school life”. Furthermore, Swart (2004) in Van Sittert (2016:06) defines inclusive education as “a practice where the needs of all learners are satisfied in the classroom and schools, regardless of their age, aptitude, socioeconomic background, talent, gender, language, HIV status, and cultural origin”. In this study, inclusive education is the provision of educational experiences for all learners irrespective of any form of barriers to learning. In this study, inclusive education is the provision of educational opportunities for all students, regardless of learning impediments of any kind.

1.9.3 Learner

A learner is anybody receiving instruction and training from a program or learning institution is referred to as a learner (DBE, 2010 The South African Schools Act no 84 of 1998). Oxford Dictionary (2007:522) defines a “learner as a person who is learning a subject or skill”. In this study, the term learner refers to a person who acquires knowledge, or skill through study or practice in an enabling environment. Furthermore, learner in this study refers to learners within the identified schools.

1.9.4 Learner support

Learners’ support is any type of support provided to learners who face barriers to learning to help them get through those barriers (DBE, 2010). Erradu (2012) explains learner support as a broad range of activities that are offered to learners to enable them to have equal opportunities for success at school. However, Vlok (2016) indicates that learners experiencing barriers to learning need support to enable them to enter and participate in the normal classroom. Where such support is provided, the learners can be given the chance to achieve, grow, and develop

in a supportive environment that is sensitive to their individual requirements (Pillay, 2018).

1.9.5. School Social Work

School social work is the application of social work principles and methods within the educational system to provide comprehensive social work services to support learners, parents, educators, and the school when there are psychological and social barriers present on the learning site (Vergottini, 2019). Furthermore, the Practice Standards for School Social Workers of Australia (Australia Association of Social Workers, (AASW), 2008:7) states that school social work refers “to social work services provided in school settings, where the achievement of learners' potential is the main objective and where working methods involve coordinating and influencing the actions of the schools, family, and community to reach this goal”. School social workers in this study refer to social workers employed by the Department of Education as learner support agents.

1.10 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework that informed the study is based on Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, which was employed to reinforce and strengthen this study. “The theory explains the direct and indirect influences on a child's life” (DBE 2010:5) and focuses on the various ecological contexts that a person encounters with and the impact they have on that person (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Swart and Pettipher (2011) indicated that the ecological systems theory offers a framework for comprehending how different systems influence one another and how learners and other systems interact, impact, and relate to one another.

This suggests that if there is no balance in one system, it destabilizes the other systems. Bronfenbrenner's four levels of interacting system, that it, microsystem, mesosystem, macro-system, exo-system, and chronosystem, are particularly useful in understanding the effect of barriers to learning on learners. Based on these levels of systems, Mubi (2020) indicated that levels of systems help in the unravelling of the complexities of circumstances that lead to barriers to learning. Furthermore, Tuswa (2016:46) explains that “the ecological system theory can be crucial to the success of an intervention and in

child development, as its theory assists in understanding what is happening within the classroom, schools and families are systems”. This theory helps in comprehending the barriers to learning that occur in South African schools (Van Sittert, 2016). The primary goal of ecological system theory is to meet a child's needs without affecting those of others (O'Conner and Braverman,2009). Since the theory examines a child's growth within the framework of the system of interactions that make up his or her environment, it has been thought to be pertinent to this study. It helps the social worker to understand the condition in the classroom, schools, and families. The ecological system theory is employed in social work when providing client services, hence it is pertinent to the study. The theory is based on the notion that people and environments interact and change each other in the process. The theory also helps in understanding barriers to learning that appears in the educational setting. Therefore, the researcher was able to improve understanding of social work services in addressing barriers to learning by outlining the interrelationships between and within the systems by utilizing Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory.

1.11 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The findings of the study will serve as a benchmark for other schools and municipalities in Vhembe District as well as Limpopo Province in addressing barriers to learning. The study will assist the Departments of Education and Social Development in creating and implementing an integrated policy on barriers to learning. With reference to school social work intervention strategies, it will offer knowledge to social work education. To be able to address issues with learners in rural areas having trouble in the learning environment, incorporate all relevant life skills, methods, and theoretical frameworks with barriers to learning intervention approaches.

The study will assist the DOE in evaluating the value and relevance of school social workers in removing barriers to learning. The findings will be used by social workers to provide services at schools in rural areas that are grappling with learning difficulties on a contextual level. Additionally, it will give social work professionals insight into how learners are impacted by learning barriers in the educational environment. Additionally, it

will educate learners in rural schools about the effects of barriers to learning. The research will also operate as a reference. to inform learners about the impact of barriers to learning.

1.12 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology was described in the following chapter:

1.12.1 Research Approach

A qualitative approach was used during the study. This approach was suitable for this study since qualitative research strives to give participants the chance to describe the study's subjects in their own terms (Boeije 2010). It was crucial for this study to get the viewpoints of school social workers, learners, and educators regarding social work services in removing barriers to learning. By using a qualitative research methodology, the researcher was able to reflect more on human experience and develop theoretical findings that are more difficult to translate into numerical data. During this study, social work services that address barriers to learning in public schools were explored.

1.12.2 Research Design

The research design of this study was exploratory. Neuman (2011) argues that exploratory research focuses on areas that have not yet been investigated to generate new ideas and a more specific research issue. De Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delpont (2011) stated that exploratory research allows the researcher to develop an understanding of a circumstance, phenomenon, or person. The exploratory design assisted the researcher in examining new interests where the study subjects were relatively new (Babbie & Mouton, 2012). An exploratory research design was used to acquire a greater insight of social work services that address barriers to learning.

1.12.3 Research Setting or Context

A research setting is “an area or location where the study will be conducted” (Rubin and Babbie, 2011:579). For this purpose, the study took place in two public secondary schools in Sibasa Circuit in Vhembe District of Limpopo Province. These two schools were selected due to their accessibility to the researcher. These were government schools. The researcher chose these schools based on the high number of learners with barriers

to learning that includes leaving school, teenage pregnancy, and substance abuse. These barriers have an impact on their education.

1.12.4 Population and Sampling

The population of this study included social workers, educators, and learners from two selected public schools in Sibasa Circuit, Vhembe District.

Purposeful sampling was used to select participants that meet specific requirements of the study (De Vos et al, 2011). The researcher selected public schools that are receiving social work services since 2017 until now. The researcher also selected two social workers, two educators and 20 learners from the two schools. This means that the participants comprised two social workers, one educator and 10 learners per school. The learners identified experienced barriers to learning and received social work services from the school social workers.

1.12.5 Data Collection Method

Two methods of data collection were used, namely, one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions (FGD). More details are in chapter 3.

1.12.6 Data Analysis

Boeije (2010:50) describes “data analysis as a process of dissecting data into its component parts in order to understand the study as a whole and draw conclusions from it.” Furthermore, analysis of qualitative data is based on an interpretive philosophy that aims to look at the symbolic and meaningful content of the data (Maree, 2010). The data was analysed thematically and transcribed verbatim. The researcher adhered thematic steps adapted from Braun and Clark (2006), which are step 1: familiarizing yourself with your data; step 2: generating initial codes; step 3: searching for themes; step 4: reviewing themes; step 5: defining and naming themes; and step 6: producing the report (Refer to chapter three for more details).

1.13. Quality Criteria

It is necessary to make sure the study findings and interpretations are precise. To confirm the validity of the study, four criteria were considered: credibility, transferability,

dependability, and confirmability (Creswell, 2014). (Chapter 3 will have further information)

1.13.1 Credibility

Creswell (2014:) stated that credibility is the extent to which findings show a reliable analysis. As asserted by Boudah (2011) the credibility of the study is a component of quality. Credibility was ensured by identifying schools that had social workers for a certain period and was enhanced as the information gathered was confirmed by the researcher's supervisors.

1.13.2 Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which results are transferable to other contexts (Babbie & Mouton, 2010; Kumar, 2011). Transferability was safeguarded by capturing each participant's perspective so that it provides dense data on lived experiences. To ensure transferability, the researcher explained the study setting and the environment in which it was done.

1.13.3 Dependability

Kumar (2011) indicated that the dependability of the study is the degree to which another researcher could carry out the same investigation using the same methods and make the same decisions and get to the same conclusions. De Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delport (2011) argue that dependability refers to the extent to which results may be confirmed by another researcher and their consistency over time and repeated use. The researcher clearly demonstrated the data gathering, sampling, and data analysis techniques used in the study, ensuring dependability.

1.13.4 Confirmability

"Confirmability is the extent to which the results could be verified or corroborated by others" (Kumar, 2011:185). It is the degree of neutrality in the findings of the research study (Babbie & Mouton, 2010). The researcher used an independent coder and consulted the research supervisor to confirm the analysis and findings of the study.

1.14. Ethical Considerations

Research ethics are defined as principles that refer to standards and agreements that protect the right of research participants (Nicholas, Rautenbach and Maistry, 2010). Several ethical considerations were employed in this study.

Ethical permission was obtained from the University of Venda's Research Ethics Social Sciences Committee (RESSC). The required approval to conduct the study was also obtained from the Limpopo Department of Basic Education (See the attached documents as Appendix A and B).

The researcher adhered to the following ethics when interacting with participants:

- Informed consent, participants were made aware of the study and what it was all about for them to choose whether they what to participate or not. The researcher created a consent form with all the relevant information. The participants were given consent by signing the form. For learners, the researcher asked the school principals for permission to interview them and asked permission from their parents or guardians of those who are underage. The researcher also asked learners to sign the child assent form.
- To ensure their free involvement, the Participants were made aware that taking part in the study was completely their choice and that they could stop at any time without facing any consequences.
- The researcher ensured that no harm befell the participants. They were given the interview schedule to peruse before the interview started so they could identify questions they were uncomfortable answering. There was no question that they were not comfortable with.
- The study's confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed by taking precautions to keep participant information private. The results were presented using pseudonyms. Participants were asked for their consent to record the interviews on audio. All the recordings are retained on the researcher's personal computer, which was secured by a password and was only accessible by the researcher.

1.15 CHAPTER LAYOUT

This study comprised five chapters with the following layout:

Chapter 1: Introduction of the study

This chapter consists of the introduction, background to the study, problem statement, aims and, research questions, rationale, delimitation, the definition of concepts, theoretical framework, research methodology, and chapter layout of the study.

Chapter 2: Literature review

In this chapter, the researcher reviewed the literature on social work services, school social work, and barriers to learning in South Africa and in other countries.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

This chapter provides a summary of the research approach, design, and technique, as well as the research methodology that will be used. The methods employed to collect data including the sample procedures, setting, and research participants were then discussed. The study also covered and discussed the ethical and trustworthiness standards that were upheld.

Chapter 4: Data analysis and interpretation

In this chapter, the results of the data analysis are presented. Identification of the themes, sub-themes, and categories, as well as comparison and contrast with related literature, are done.

Chapter 5: Summary of Major findings, Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter summarizes the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the research study. The limitations of the study are discussed, and recommendations are made for future research.

1.14 SUMMARY

This chapter has covered the introduction and background to the study, problem statement, aim, and objectives of the study, research questions, rationale of the study,

delimitation of the study, definition of concepts, theoretical framework, research methodology, and chapter layout. Chapter two covers a review of the literature.

CHAPTER TWO

ASSESSMENT OF SOCIAL WORK SERVICES AND BARRIERS TO LEARNING IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study was to explore social work services towards addressing barriers to learning in public schools in Sibasa Circuit, Vhembe District. The aim of the review of the literature was to help the researcher locate data relevant to the study's context and to inspire additional research into the problems under investigation. This chapter reviewed literature with the subheadings: school social work, the history of school social work, the definition of barriers to learning, and categories and types of barriers to learning. Contemporary measures to address barriers to learning, social work services provided to learners in the public schools of South Africa to address barriers to learning and the theoretical framework that guided this study were also elaborated in this chapter.

2.2 SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK

Internationally, school social work is defined by the Encyclopedia of Social Work (NASW, 2012:4) as “an application of social work principles and methods to the advantage of the goals of the school”. Furthermore, the Practice Standards for School Social Workers of Australia (AASW, 2008:7) states that school social work refers to "Social work services offered in a school setting, where the main objective is the realization of learners' potential, and where the working methods involve coordinating and influencing the efforts of the schools, family, and community to reach this goal."

In the context of South Africa, school social work is defined as a branch of social work that seeks to help learners make the most of social chances to reach their full potential as well as to address psychosocial barriers that exist in the context of learning sites for students, parents, and schools (Kemp, 2013). School social work emphasizes that the full spectrum of social work techniques may be applied in educational settings, but they must be primarily focused on addressing the various barriers to learning. These barriers can be found in learners' personal lives, but they can also be present in their surroundings. A

wide range of services and strategies are used in school social work to address learning obstacles that have an influence on learners' lives. School social workers render services such as violence prevention, case management, grieving support, and crisis intervention (Van Sittert and Wilson, 2018). Reyneke (2018) argues that school social work not only benefits learners' academic achievement and general well-being in a safe and healthy learning environment but that it also improves teachers' comprehension of the social context of the student. Reyneke (2018:84) further indicates that "It's crucial to include parents who encounter social barriers while working with learners".

"School social work is well established in many countries and is now being introduced in others to help schools address issues like learning barriers, physical and mental health problems, drug use, adolescent pregnancy, and learning difficulties; family issues like domestic violence, divorce, child abuse, homelessness, and family illnesses; and issues within the school system like discrimination, bullying, and ineffective staff discipline" (Huxtable, 2021:1). The literature above shows that not only learners with barriers to learning need the support of school social workers, but as well as those learners' teachers and parents. They need support and guidance on how to address learners who encounter learning barriers.

2.3 THE HISTORY OF SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK

2.3.1 THE HISTORY OF SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK INTERNATIONALLY

For many years, social workers in schools have been valued on a global scale. This shows that these workers have a crucial part to play in assisting the educational system in achieving its goal of educating learners. It is mentioned by Kemp (2014) that school social work was first founded in New York City, Boston, Chicago, and New Haven, Connecticut in 1907. The development of school social work correlated with the introduction of compulsory school attendance laws (Huxtable, 2016).

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the United Kingdom made school attendance mandatory, followed by Canada in the 1870s and the United States in 1918 (Van Sittert, 2016). "In the USA the school social workers were known as the *visiting teachers*, a term that dates back to the end of the 19th and early 20th century" (Pearman and Burrows,

1955 Cited in Van Sittert, 2016:23). By the 1930s, the title of school social worker had been formally established. These visiting teachers had begun to use a social work approach (Vergottini, 2019). Since the 1930s, school social work has grown significantly, with various countries establishing such services. In Canada, school social work began in the 1940s, evolving from earlier truancy and school attendance work into a full-fledged social work service with boosting school attendance as a primary goal (Huxtable, 2021). Furthermore, Huxtable (2021) added that between the 1940s and 1970s, school social work grew in the Nordic countries, focusing on social care rather than school attendance to assist all learners to reach their full potential.

In the 1940s, the Netherlands instituted school social work. It used to focus on special education for several years, but now it offers a more comprehensive service. “Finland, Argentina, and Singapore began offering services for school social work in the 1960s” (Vergottini, 2019:39). In the 1970s, Hong Kong, Australia, Germany, Poland, Iceland, Croatia, and India all followed. From 1976, social workers were employed in schools in Britain (Kemp, 2014). In the 1960s, the region of Buenos Aires in Argentina saw the beginning of school social work. The development of the profession was inhibited by rapid economic and social change since it lacked the resources and status to reach its full potential. It is believed that the title changes from school social worker to social assistant and rules permitting non-social workers to occupy the position undermine the professional identity of social workers (Huxtable, 2021). In Germany and Hong Kong, school social work began in 1970 to assist pupils in resolving social and emotional issues (Huxtable and Blyth, 2002, cited in Kemp, 2014).

Early in the 1980s, there were 93 student guidance officers in Hong Kong working with 477 primary schools, while 91 more social workers were working with 297 secondary schools. (Huxtable & Blyth, 2002). International school social work has a long history of steady but slow growth and expansion. As a result, more than 36 countries around the world now have some type of official school social work service (Huxtable, 2016). The literature shows that school social work was established to help schools handle barriers to education. It shows that Services provided by school social workers vary by state. But

they all have one thing in common, to help learners that are encountering barriers that are detrimental to the learner's success so that they can attain their full potential.

2.3.2 THE HISTORY OF SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK IN AFRICA

Social work in Africa started in Ghana, and it may be credited to the efforts three major groups: “Christian missionaries; voluntary agencies, and tribal societies” (Huxtable and Blyth, 2002 cited in Kemp 2014:11). These organisations founded numerous charities for the needy families in close collaboration with ethnic societies (Huxtable & Blyth, 2002). To assist learners in remaining in school and ensuring that their needs are satisfied so they can benefit from it, the Ghana Education Service established a school welfare program in the 1960s (Huxtable, 2021). From there the school social work started spreading throughout the African continent.

2.3.3 THE HISTORY OF SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK IN SOUTH AFRICA

The necessity for social workers in schools was recognised in South Africa in the late 1940s. In 1948, the Transvaal and Natal Education Department began appointing specific teachers to address some of the social welfare issues in schools. Yet, social workers addressed the child's social functioning and interactions in the community, at home, and in the classroom, whereas these teachers primarily paid attention to the cognitive (Kemp, 2014). The Transvaal province established positions for school counselors with teaching degrees in 1958.

The intention was for them to address emotional and behavioral issues in schools, but as their only training was in teaching, this did not pan out. After that, a course in school counseling was developed, and school counselors were hired (Vergottini, 2019). Van Sittert (2016) adds that from 1967 onward, these school counselors were assigned in the Cape. They were known as guidance teachers. Due to an increase in social problems at schools, the government acknowledged the relevance of school social work in the education system in 1973 (Kemp, 2013). However, the South African Council for Social Services Professions (SACSSP) only realized in 2009 that school social work needed to be acknowledged as a specialized field. In 1983, KZN appointed the first school social worker, and the other provinces soon followed (Kemp, 2013). School social work has started to take on a bigger role in how the South African educational system responds to

the difficulties its learners are facing, especially since the early 2010s. But, up until now, its deployment and application have not been consistent across all nine provinces, with some having a very full service and others having none (Vergottini & Weyer, 2020). This inconsistent reaction to the numerous difficulties that South African learners confront may be seen as a sign that local school social work services need to be expanded. Despite, the fact that school social workers are needed, there are still provinces with no such workers. At present, there are no permanent school social workers in schools in Limpopo Province. In 2017 the Limpopo Department of Education employed 180 social workers on a temporary contract basis.

They called them learner support agents (LSA). These social workers were divided among the four districts in the province. Each district got almost 45 social workers, which was not enough as some districts had more schools. Vhembe District also received social workers. Sibasa Circuit got only six social workers which was nothing as it has thirty-one schools. This ratio puts pressure on social workers and the circuit. It is found that one social worker is allocated three schools, and he/ she had to divide days among these schools. The question will be what happens to the learner whom she was providing social work service in the three to four days that she is not around?

All schools in South Africa, not only those in the Vhembe District, require social workers because barriers are increasing because the world is changing. Also, the COVID-19 Pandemic did worsen the problems. Social workers are needed in schools to provide social work services because if learners experiencing barriers to learning are not assisted in an appropriate way, this oversight can lead to serious consequences for learners and the country, such that they may move out of the education system and be involved in anti-social activities. In South Africa, social work in schools is centred on the idea of inclusive education (Kemp 2013).

This indicates that all learners, despite their circumstances or potential barriers to learning, have the right to receive mainstream education (Van Sittert, 2016). School social workers provide services in accordance with inclusive education. Social workers have the responsibilities to make sure that each learner is valued as an individual regardless of any unique characteristics such as race and social-economic status (Tariq,

Khan and Bashir, 2020). Every learner should be able to participate in the learning process, and their unique learning peculiarities should be recognised and supported for them to reach their goals (Tuswa, 2016). Every child has a right to education regardless of one's circumstances. School social workers have a duty to see to it that learners are not excluded due to their situation. In the past, learners with any form of disability were excluded from mainstream schools. They had their own schools, which were called special schools.

The goals of inclusive education are to foster a supportive environment, maximize the learner's potential, and raise their expectations (Erradu, 2012). Inclusive education also supports and guides teachers on how to handle learners who experience social problems (Matlala, 2015). Pillay (2019:18) affirms that in “Inclusive Education all learners should be provided with the opportunity to attend and be welcomed by the neighborhood schools where they can enroll in right age, regular classrooms and get help to study, contribute, and engage in all parts of school life”. Pillay (2019:19) further says that “they should participate in all elements of school life and attend their regularly scheduled classes with support”.

Inclusive education can be thought of as an approach that aims to remove barriers to learning and participation and provide resources to support learning and participation (Nel, Muller and Rheeder, 2011). Social workers have an impactful part to play in inclusive education. Yadav (2016) mentions that social workers as facilitators have the role to safeguard and care for society's most vulnerable individuals and groups by enhancing human welfare and reducing discrimination against children with special needs and other types of social injustice. Through intervention services, identifying barriers, assessing, and evaluating such barriers, as well as prevention, school social workers provide distinctive contributions to a coordinated approach to schools (Richard, Gilbert, O'Connor, Hogan and Smith, 2022). They collaborate, consult, and advocate to deliver these services.

Based on the above discussion, it seems that school social workers play a vital role in the lives of learners who are overcoming learning challenges. They must ensure that these learners have equal opportunities with those that do not have barriers and are not

excluded from any school activities. School social workers can also educate communities and parents about the constitutional protections put in place for learners with barriers. Awareness can help change people's perceptions of learners' barriers. To ensure that learners with difficulties attend school and exercise their right to free and compulsory education, school social workers can collaborate with teachers, learners, the community, families, and neighborhood residents. Social workers must teach learners to accept diversity both within and outside of the school.

2.4 DESCRIPTION OF BARRIERS TO LEARNING

“Barriers to learning can be thought of as issues and challenges that learners face that have an impact on their academic performance and develop throughout the education system as a whole” (Department of Basic Education, 2010:10, Van Sittert and Wilson, 2018:2). Barriers to learning are “factors that cause the system’s inability to accommodate diversity, as well as those that cause breakdown learning or dissuade learners from using instructional resources” (Conway, 2017:21). Volk (2016) further mentions that identifying and removing barriers is one of the main goals of inclusive education. Learners encounter different barriers to learning which affect their journey to learning. Different situations or circumstances such as home or in the community, specific classroom or school experiences, or health conditions or disabilities contribute towards barriers to the learning process (DoE, 2010).

Other barriers include the learner self in the classroom or either inside the educational system or within the larger social, economic, and political context (Visser, 2002). These barriers show themselves differently and only appear when exclusion becomes visible (Matlala, 2015). Kemp (2014) also stated that sometimes it is difficult to pinpoint long-term barriers in the learner or the system that could be removed by enabling practices and procedures. However, those barriers may appear during the learning process and are temporary in nature (Landsberg, Kruger and Nel, 2011; Matlala, 2015). In other words, barriers to learning are factors that cause the system to be unable to accommodate learner variety, cause learning breakdown, or hinder learners from receiving high-quality education. These barriers take on many forms, but they only become visible when learner fails or when learners leave the system or are removed from

it. These barriers may require various interventions or strategies to avert them from causing learning breakdown or keeping learners out of the formal educational system. Barriers to learning affect both learners from rural and urban areas. However, the intensity might not be the same as the resources are not equally distributed. It also differs in terms of whether the school is private or public. Learners from private schools may not face the same barriers as learners from public schools. The same is said with schools in urban and rural locations where most rural schools are characterized by poverty, HIV/AIDS, GBV, malnutrition, and so on. However, barriers affect all kinds of children, and may have a different impact on them.

Barriers to learning have an effect on learners' personal, emotional, behavioural and social well-being (Nel et al, 2011). Unfortunately, a huge number of South African learners are unable to overcome barriers to learning and continue to be excluded from mainstream schools due to both extrinsic and intrinsic situations (Volk, 2016). Based on several barriers to learning, social work services play an important part in addressing barriers to learning in schools.

2.5 CATEGORIES AND TYPES OF BARRIERS TO LEARNING

Landsberg, Kruger and Nel (2011) indicated that the system's ability to effectively monitor and cater to the various requirements of the learner population is crucial to preventing barriers from arising. Kemp (2014) identified six issues in South African schools that can contribute to barriers to learning and academic success, substance abuse, truancy, teen pregnancy, rape, bullying/violence, and HIV/AIDS are among them. From findings by Tuswa (2016), it is obvious that barriers to learning must be overcome for the child to work optimally in all aspects of his or her life. The barriers not only affect the child academically but also other aspects of his or her life. That is why barriers to learning need to be attended to as soon as they become visible. It is expected that the learner may be facing some challenges in his or her life.

The different categories and types of barriers to education that learners may face are outlined here in sequence: The Department of Education (2010) stated three categories of barriers to learning, namely, extrinsic, intrinsic, and systemic barriers. Each category encompasses its type of barrier to learning.

2.5.1 Extrinsic learning barrier

Extrinsic barriers are barriers that occur outside the learner (The Department of Education, 2010). The various types of extrinsic barriers are outlined hereunder:

2.5.1.1 Socio-economic (poverty) barriers

In our communities, poverty is a major issue that has an impact on how affordable education is. “Poverty is the inability of families to provide for their fundamental requirements, such as food and shelter” (Baloyi, 2020:20). Learners from low-income families are often unable to provide educational expenses such as uniforms, books, stationery and travel. Mafokwane (2017) asserts that inadequate resources make it challenging for learners to achieve the same levels of academic success as learners from wealthy backgrounds. Hunger is a common phenomenon among low-income learners. Munaka (2016) affirms that it has been shown that a learner who is hungry and fatigued will frequently become unfocused, which affects learning.

Learners could be more absent from school, drop out, or perform poorly in the classroom due to hunger (DoE, 2010). Tuswa (2016) concurs those learners from families where no one works are more likely to abandon their studies and look for additional employment to support their families. One could deduce that it is difficult for a learner to engage in effective learning in a hungry stomach. Children from households experiencing poverty are more prone to consider alternative ways to feed themselves as a means of combating poverty. “Due to poverty, many teenage girls can resort to dating older men for money and food, and some engage in commercializing sex to earn money which will deter their educational performance or even lead them to drop out due to various reasons like pregnancy or diseases” (Ramulomo, 2014:12). Boy learners could engage in stealing or be involved in the selling of drugs to address their hunger.

2.5.1.2 Bullying phenomena

Masilo (2018) and Singo (2017) describe bullying as persistent, deliberate, cruel acts or words or other behaviors imposed on a child or children by another child or children. Bullying affects learners both emotionally and physically. The National Disability Authority (NDA) (2014) contends that Bullying has both immediate and long-term repercussions. not only for bullies and victims, but also for schools, teachers, parents and bystanders.

Bullied learners often develop concentration problems and learning difficulties (Jan and Husain, 2015). Furthermore, De Wet (2007:192) highlighted that “learners who are victims of bullying frequently experience psychological problems, a higher incidence of illness and disorders linked to chronic stress, and a reversion to more immature behaviour”. Masilo (2018) affirms that bullying undeniably affects the victim, and learners who are victims of bullying may have impaired concentration, a decrease in academic performance, skip classes, and even decide to quit school.

Jan and Husain (2015) indicated that bullying can also cause mental health problems and physical injury. Ragozzino and O’Brien (2009) reported that bullying affects not just the victims but also bystanders who may experience emotions such as rage, fear, remorse, and grief. Witnessing peers being abused repeatedly can have detrimental consequences for bystanders just like it does for the victimized children. Bullying incidents involving learners continue to dominate local and international news coverage. Ramothwalo (2021) reported in Sowetan Live that a 15-year-old learner from Mbilwi Secondary School, a well-known school in Vhembe District, Sibasa Circuit committed suicide after a video of her being bullied by a fellow pupil went viral (Sowetan Live, 2021).

The aforementioned statement implies that bullying most frequently seems to be observed when it manifests as physical violence. Cyberbullying is a form of deliberate bullying in which the perpetrator spreads rumors about another person or shares embarrassing pictures to feel strong (Staples, 2016). This shows that bullying is a barrier to learning as it can lead to a learner to drop out of school or kill him or herself. School social workers can help prevent and address bullying.

2.5.1.3 Teenage pregnancy

Throughout the world, teenage pregnancy has been a significant impediment to female learners' educational success and has increased at an alarming rate among school-aged children in South Africa. It is also a big problem in the country (Nkosi and Pretorius, 2019). Matshotyana (2010:9) indicates that teenage pregnancy has “negative or harmful effects such as school attendance, academic performance, financial impact, emotional behaviour, and relationships”. Malahlela (2012) concurs and stated that frequently, dropping out of school and teenage pregnancy go hand in hand. Pregnancy comes with

many issues, such as dropping out of school, and the inability to balance schoolwork and motherhood. This becomes a roadblock to education for the learner is unable to further her studies due to babysitting or giving attention to motherhood responsibilities. Furthermore, Lethole (2019) states that teenage mother is frequently absent from class and school, fail to complete assigned classroom tasks and activities, and overall do poorly compared to their peers. Teenage parenting denies learners the chance to focus on their education.

A study by Nkosi and Pretorius (2019) shows that teachers reported that school attendance is largely affected by teenage pregnancy. Babysitting arrangements and a child's health also interfere with their ability to attend school. This is because in most situations, teens are left to take care of their own children, which makes it difficult for them to balance education and childcare. Malahlela (2012) indicated that teenage mothers tend to experience psychological, economic, and social issues that can interfere with the process of developing their own identities, cause depressive symptoms, become overly dependent on their parents, cause high levels of frustration, and make it difficult for them to establish and maintain healthy personal relationships.

Teenage pregnancy was a major problem in Vhembe District in 2018. SABC News (16 October 2018, 4:39 PM) reported that the Limpopo Department of Health revealed that in one school outside Thohoyandou, 36 learners fell pregnant. This indicated that teenage pregnancy is one of the major barriers to learning.

2.5.1.4 Peer pressure

Peer pressure is a serious problem faced by many learners in today's social and educational environments. During this stage, the teen or adolescent learner starts to distance himself from his parents because he values peer acceptance more (Murugesan & Lazmey, 2019). Peer pressure is a phenomenon wherein we frequently allow our friends' personal choices and worldviews to influence our own (DUhall & Beniwal, 2017). Learners give in to peer pressure because they want to belong and be accepted by their friends (Kilonzo, 2013). Arsiwala (2019) avers that the purpose of peer pressure is to alter a person's perspective to persuade them to engage in a particular behaviour. DUhall and Beniwal (2017:259) further state that "due to peer pressure, learners sometimes go

against the school and home rules”. They start skipping school, smoking, and sneaking out of the house. Peer pressure is often one of the main reasons that learners go against norms, and often seek a way to rebel against what they think is the right approach to things. It deprives the concentration and motivation of an individual to excel in their academic performance at school. Based on what various authors said, most learners fall to peer pressure because they want to impress their peers or want to fit in the group even though they know that what they are doing is wrong. This behaviour leads some learners not able to proceed with their schoolwork.

2.5.1.5 Substance abuse

Mabasa (2018:1) avers that “the scourge of substance abuse among young people today is perhaps one of the riskiest health behaviours that have ever been discussed, and it is rising at an alarming rate around the world”. Abidullahi (2019) defined substance abuse as a serious, chronic disease that has a high mortality and morbidity rate that impacts both the individual and their family. In South Africa, illegal drugs are so widely accessible and inexpensive that learners can afford to purchase them (Maluleke & Manu, 2017). As a result, learners abuse substances. Nzama and Ajani (2021) assert that there is an increase in substance abuse among learners despite several intervention measures that are in place.

Studies conducted by Mabasa (2018) and Nzama and Ajani (2021) show that peer pressure is one of the predictors of learners’ substance abuse. Maluleka and Manu (2017) affirm that learners who abuse substances misbehave or show negative behaviour such as lack of concentration, disrespect to teachers and other school authorities, physical violence, and verbal abuse. Nzama and Ajani (2021) concur that substance-abusing learners are more likely to are more likely to have bad educational results, drop out of school, act aggressively in the classroom, be absent from school frequently, and befriend troubled peers. From the information gathered, substance abuse is among barriers to learning as it contributes towards learners’ inability to go to school and concentrate on learning activities, and misbehave, which in the end leads to them being unable to learn properly.

2.5.1.6 Lack of parental involvement in their children's education

Gororo (2016) indicated that as parents are the primary caregivers for their children and the most important resource in the educational system, their active involvement in the teaching and learning procedure is essential for successful learning and growth. If parents are not interested in their children's learning and their involvement is not facilitated and promoted, learning will suffer. Tuswa (2016) indicates children's success in accomplishing their goals is threatened or hampered if parents don't get involved and support them. Lara and Saracosti (2019) argue that children whose parents have low involvement have lower academic achievement. "It appears that many parents in rural regions do not understand the crucial role they play in the education of their children and are therefore unprepared to fulfil their learning obligations" (Mafokwane, 2017:19).

Effective learning and development depend on parents' active involvement in the teaching and learning procedure, according to the White Paper 6 of 2001. Munje and Mncube (2018) affirm that parents' formal and informal involvement in their children's schooling can help the child's social and emotional growth. A study conducted by Ntekane (2018) shows that learners who have parents or other caregivers who are interested in their education do better on tests, earn better grades and have better social skills and behaviours. Tuswa (2016) states that social difficulties such as parents who are illiterate, have HIV/AIDS, alcohol dependent, destitute and jobless, or who are embarrassed of their children because they have disabilities., can also pose barriers to learning.

Engelbrecht, Green, Naicker and Engelbrecht (2008:55 in Gororo (2016:38) pointed out that "the best possible parental involvement in a child's education is supported by new laws and regulations in South Africa, and these laws emphasize that parents should be included in the process of identifying obstacles and ways to remove them". Mkhuma (2012) avers that a learner, a teacher, and the learner's parent are all involved in the procedure for identifying learners who encounter learning challenges. Gororo (2016) further mentions that if parents could be made fully aware of their significance in addressing barriers to learning, they would get actively involved and assume complete responsibility for supporting their children. Therefore, it can be said that Parental involvement in their children's education is crucial, and it motivates them to work hard and

be dedicated to their studies. Parental participation in children's education assists parents as they will be able to help where their children are failing to progress, and when the child is doing good, they will be able to encourage him or her to do more. By being involved, they will be able to help their children with schoolwork and pay attention to their behaviour.

2.5.2 Systemic barriers

Systematic barriers are barriers within the systems that block the learner from obtaining education such as policies and discrimination based on language, gender, religion, and otherwise. The following are some of the systemic barriers:

2.5.2.1 Inadequate policies and legislation

Government regulations and policies that control and orient the educational system might be the root cause of some learning barriers. This is particularly true when such laws don't adequately protect learners from unfair treatment (Tuswa, 2016). For example, policies for assessment should be created to enable learners to be assessed based on their needs and abilities. Gororo (2012) indicated that at the moment, all learners are subject to the same assessment standards and procedures, which is detrimental to those who face learning challenges because of disability.

Every child has the right to education, according to Act 108 of the Republic of South Africa's Constitution. However, in accordance with the Department of Education's Policy on Measures for the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy, teachers may "suggest" that learners take a leave of absence for up to two years (Ramulumo and Pitsoe, 2013). This may pose a barrier to learning as pregnancy on its own can lead to a barrier. This may lead the learner not to return to school because two years is a long time, and if the learner returns to class only to discover that the curriculum has changed, he or she may find it difficult to catch up and end up dropping out.

2.5.2.2 Discriminatory attitudes towards learners

As stated in Education White Paper 6 (2001), negative and unfavorable attitudes about cultural diversity seem to be significant barriers to learning. Learners themselves, teachers, the school, the family, the community, and society can all be sources of attitude barriers, which frequently include prejudices against learners who encounter learning

barriers due to disabilities (Gororo, 2012). Brenick, Schachner, Carvalheiro and Karr (2018) state that discriminatory attitudes based on race, class, gender, culture, disability, faith, capacity, sexual orientation, and/or other traits manifest as barriers to learning when aimed at learners in the educational system.

Geven, Batruch and van de Werfhorst (2019) highlighted that some teachers discriminate against or have a negative attitude towards a learner because he/she is from a different ethnic group. They may even call that learner, not by his name but by the ethnic group. Teachers' or fellow learners' negative attitudes towards a learner can erode the learner's self-confidence, causing her or him to drop out of school. Discriminatory attitudes towards learners can be seen by refusing to mark the learners' work. This contributes negatively to the learner, and it becomes a barrier to learning. The learner can end up hating school or dropping out altogether.

2.5.3 Intrinsic barriers to learning

Intrinsic barriers are barriers found within the learner such as medical conditions and disabilities. The following types of intrinsic barriers to learning are discussed.

2.5.3.1 Medical Conditions and Disabilities

Some children are unable to finish their education due to barriers that are within them. Volk (2016) states that medical conditions or disabilities can restrict learners' access to learning and can influence learners' social, behavioural, and emotional health. Furthermore, Volk (2016) highlighted that these learners generally have unpleasant school experiences, such as feelings of loneliness and isolation, negative self-concepts, low self-esteem, stress, and anxiety. Kabuta (2014) points out that these feelings may likely affect their academic performances. Learning breakdown happens for learners with disabilities when their unique requirements are not satisfied because of barriers in the classroom or in society at large (Tuswa, 2016). Matlala (2015) indicates that being in a wheelchair does not necessarily mean that a learner cannot read or write, focusing on the disability rather than the learner as a whole may result in hurdles. Koneckl, Iovrencic and Jervis (2016) highlighted that a number of problems that affect learners with disabilities in a number of cases result in prolonged studies or in learners not finishing their studies.

Based on the above statements, these may cause barriers to learning. For example, learners with a disability may face stigma and discrimination, and there may be erratic attendance and drop out of school. Medical conditions may lead learners to be more frequently absent from school.

2.6 CONTEMPORARY MEASURES TO ADDRESS BARRIERS TO LEARNING

Barriers to learning are a challenge to learners' progress in school. Therefore, the South African government developed ways of addressing this challenge. The DBE in collaboration with the DSD agreed to have social workers in schools to solve learners' learning challenges. This was done to establish a setting that is favourable to learning. When barriers to learning are not removed, the learner is affected in a variety of ways, including but not only poor performance, anger, and rebellious and compulsive behaviours (Kemp, 2014). The following addresses how the two departments (DBE and DSD) established measures to address barriers to learning.

2.6.1 Department of Education strategies for addressing learning barriers

The Department of Basic Education acknowledged barriers to learning and that learners need psychosocial support (DBE, 2016). DBE established a plan called "Psychosocial Support Strategy for Learners in the South African Educational System 2015-2020" (DBE,2016:17). The strategy's main goal was to outline the types of psychosocial support that are available in educational settings to help identify learners' psychosocial needs and show how current services and procedures may be used to help those learners to get the help they need (Vergottini, 2019). "Present school social work services are also driven by this approach" (Vergottini and Weyers, 2020:133). Adversities have a negative impact on children and youths' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral development, which affects learning (Department of Basic Education, 2016).

To cope with learning barriers, the South African government has developed many educational policies that integrate elements of the systems approach which are Education White Paper 6 of 2001, The Care and Support for Teaching and Learning Conceptual Framework of 2010, the Department of Basic Education's Psychosocial Strategy (2016) and the Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support (SIAS) policy. SIAS provides teachers with knowledge on how to recognize the needs of different types of students as

well as instructions on ways to modify the curriculum and learning environment for students with various requirements (DOE, 2014). In addition, the SIAS policy offers instructions for creating a school-based support team (SBST) to assist students who encounter learning barriers. (DOE, 2014). Mubi (2020) indicates that SBST has been tasked with the duty of enabling learning support procedures in cooperation with the referral teachers, learning support educators, District-Based Support Teams (DBST), and other outside stakeholders. Therefore, these policies and structures assist or guide educators on how to engage with learners with barriers to learning, including referrals to social workers.

2.6.2 Department of Social Development: Social work intervention strategies to address barriers to learning

To make sure that learners enter the classroom physically and mentally prepared to learn, school social workers employ a variety of evidence-based strategies. They use a strength-based strategy that sees organisations and learners as components of systems. (Yadav, 2016). Furthermore, Zastrow (2017) stated that social workers are well informed about evidence-based interventions to help clients and constituents, such as individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities, accomplish their goals. Social workers are taught intervention methods at universities, and when they leave, they have knowledge of different intervention methods and how to apply them.

However, school social workers administer prevention programmes to promote the healthy development of all children while also offering early intervention assistance to learners who are at risk (Reyneke, 2018). To promote learners' growth and development, school social workers employ a variety of techniques, including one-on-one counseling, focused group interventions, small group activities, classroom-based projects, school-wide programs, and parent training (Dibble, 2009). Although there are many different types of preventative programmes, evidence-based practice supports a resilient perspective that connects the family, school, and community (Dibble, 2009). Heinrich (2021) strongly asserts that to effectively intervene and resolve learner issues, community and school support networks must be included. School social workers work with an interdisciplinary group to help a learner that is experiencing barriers to learning

holistically. A study conducted by Masilo (2018) revealed Casework, groupwork, community work, and research are among social work intervention techniques that are employed. These interventions are typically given by school social workers to at-risk students who exhibit one or more academic, emotional, behavioural, or psychosocial issues. Heinrich (2017) mentions case management, positive behavioral supports and interventions, and cognitive behavioral therapy are three intervention strategies that school social workers frequently employ.

2.7 SOCIAL WORK SERVICES PROVIDED TO LEARNERS IN SOUTH AFRICAN PUBLIC SCHOOLS TO ADDRESS BARRIERS TO LEARNING

School social workers are especially qualified to identify and explain learning difficulties. School social work includes a wide range of services and strategies that address barriers to learning that affect learners' lives. They collaborate, counsel, and advocate to offer these services. The following services had been identified as being extremely effective at removing barriers to learning and have been shown to do so time and time again (Kemp, 2014)

2.7.1 Barrier identification

Lack of support for students who encounter learning obstacles is likely to have an adverse effect on their ability to perform in class since these students are likely to demonstrate poor concentration, forgetfulness, a low threshold for annoyance, and damaged interpersonal interactions (DOE, 2010). Mkhuma (2012) reported that a crucial first step in providing effective support is identifying learners who encounter barriers to learning. However, it is expected of educators to be able to recognise learners and offers support.

School social workers recognize obstacles to learning that are not academic, and teachers are the ones that can identify a learner that is encountering any barrier as they spend more time with them in the classroom. Mkhuma (2012) adds that teachers have a variety of difficulties when trying to identify learners who have learning obstacles. The Department of Education (2016) identifies some of the indicators that may help in identifying learners:

- Poor or deteriorating school performance.
- Frequent lateness or absence from school.
- Loss of interest or withdrawal from activities and interaction with other learners.
- Difficulty in remembering or making decisions as they are often worried about their personal circumstances or situation at home.
- Change in appetite resulting in weight loss or gain.
- Lacking materials for schooling.
- Noticeable neglect of personal hygiene and dress.
- Not doing or completing their homework on time.
- Lack of or no parental involvement in the child's schooling.

Mudau (2004) argues that a learner who experiences barriers to learning makes himself/herself known because he/she appears, acts, or behaves differently from what is normally the case. Mkhuma (2012) avers that the identification of learners who face learning obstacles should be done in accordance with the inclusive education philosophy, which holds that barriers to learning might be present in the system and that accommodating each learner's learning preferences is preferable to attempting to determine what the learner is lacking. When learners who encounter barriers don't receive enough support, it's likely that it will have a significant impact on how well they perform in class. Therefore, school social workers are as well assisting in identifying barriers to learning that manifest from a social work perspective.

2.7.2 Assessment

Social work assessment can be at a psychosocial level in its intervention. The psychosocial assessment can be a relevant tool to render services to learners experiencing barriers to learning. A psychosocial assessment is a social worker's overview of the issues that need to be resolved (Glickr, 2005). The school social worker can, in assessing barriers to learning, consider psychological, social, and educational aspects. Furthermore, he or she can also zoom into resources and consequences in assessing learners subjected to barriers to learning. The social worker considers several variables, such as the physical or mental illness and its effects, the findings of

psychological tests, the client's legal situation, descriptions of the problems, the assets and resources already available, the prognosis or prediction of the outcome, and the strategy used to address the issues (Glickr, 2005).

Dibble (2009) adds that individual development, behaviour, social-emotional functioning, and adaptive functioning are typically included in assessments conducted by school social workers. Dibble (2009) further explains that school social workers now use assessment as a practical strategy that emphasizes problem-solving and intervention. School social workers utilise an ecological perspective to examine the individual in the context of relationships with other people and his or her environment. When it is thought that a learner's family circumstances may act as a barrier to their academic progress, they may also conduct assessments of that situation.

Other team members from the school base can use the social worker's assessment as a foundation to help create inclusive and child-friendly programs and strategy. Assessment helps the social worker to decide the degree of intervention and the type of service to address the learner's barrier (Tariq, Khan and Bashir, 2020).

2.7.3 Counselling

School social workers offer counselling to learners to address their social, emotional, behavioural, educational, economic, cultural, and mental health issues (Dibble, 2009). Reyneke (2018) points out that school social workers provide counselling to ensure that learners who are suffering from physical and emotional deprivation continue their education. The social workers offer counselling to individual learners, groups dealing with the same barrier to learning, and sometimes with their families (Social work degrees, Online). Dibble (2009) asserts that to ensure that all elements affecting a learner's ability to learn are examined and treated in a systematic systemic way, school social workers use an ecological approach.

Tariq, et al (2020) affirm that the social worker's main focus is on the learner's larger environment, which includes his or her parents and friends, in order to improve the learner's academic, emotional, and social well-being. For instance, a learner experiencing the barrier of teenage pregnancy may find it difficult to accept the pregnancy and may

also be stressed because her parents are angry and disappointed. The social worker would have to provide counselling to the learner and the family so that they can deal with the issue and be able to support each other emotionally. Tariq, et al (2020) further mention that counseling can assist learners who are facing adjustment problems and emotional problems that are keeping them from attending school.

2.7.4 Crisis Intervention

There are barriers to learning that need immediate intervention. Strydom (2021) avers that crisis intervention is a sort of service where the social worker offers urgent assistance to someone who has been through a traumatic event or an emotionally intense circumstance. This kind of assistance can take many forms. From conflict resolution and anger management to sudden counselling services, school social workers must be ready to help learners comprehend and develop social interaction tools to ensure their personal and academic progress (Angy, 2020).

A crisis could be rendered to a learner incapable of managing stress, trauma, sadness, and other emotions. As a result, an individual or family is no longer able to conduct business as usual and is unable to handle the crisis using their usual methods (Strydom, 2021). The author further highlighted that a lack of crisis management skills can result in emotions of helplessness, poor concentration, interpersonal conflict, rage, despair, denial as well as eating and sleeping issues, alcohol or drug misuse, depression and anxiety. Ahmad (2018) argues that Crisis interventions' main objectives are to restore stability and provide a safe atmosphere. Spencer (2019) adds that the goals of crisis interventions are to prevent more harm, listen, treat emotional needs, provide resources and coping mechanisms, and move the situation closer to resolution. Crisis intervention brings the learner's life back into balance and lessens the impact of barriers to learning.

2.7.5 Prevention programmes

Prevention programmes are aimed at preventing learners who have not encountered barriers to learning. School social workers carry out prevention programmes to encourage healthy development for all learners and provide early intervention support to those who are at risk (Dibble, 2009). Reyneke (2018) asserts that to ensure that fewer kids require

extensive psychosocial counselling, preventative programmes should be implemented. Preventing barriers to learning and dealing with those that already exist might undoubtedly aid learners in concentrating more on their academic work and so increase access to education (Reyneke, 2018). There are many different types of preventative programmes used by school social workers to prevent and address barriers to learning. The prevention programme aims at preventing the first-time use of substances. This programme refers to initiatives designed to keep learners from abusing drugs. The programme provides services that aid in preventing substance abuse and provide knowledge, instruction, and communication on the dangers of substance use and how to avoid it (Madisha, 2018). The anti-violence programme is used as a means of combating bullying and gender-based violence.

School social workers also provide programmes aimed at the prevention of teenage pregnancy. Furthermore, Reyneke (2018) points out that social workers may create parenting programmes and put them into action to help parents discipline their kids more successfully. In view of the elimination of corporal punishment in the house, parents will need to learn about suitable alternative disciplinary tactics. The above-mentioned services provided to make sure that a learner realizes their maximum potential within the confines of the educational system. The learner outcomes associated with school social work services include raised levels of academic success, safety, attendance, social-behavioural competence, and family and community involvement.

2.8 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK IN EDUCATION AND SOCIAL WORK

The study adopted the ecological system as the theoretical framework. To comprehend and address learning impediments, the Department of Basic Education embraced the ecological systems theory (DOE,2010). The theory, which was developed by Bronfenbrenner, focuses on the various ecological contexts that a person encounters with and the impact that has on that person (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Swart and Pettipher (2011) indicated that ecological systems theory offers a framework for comprehending how different systems influence one another and how learners and other systems interact, impact, and relate to one another. The goal of the ecological system is to build a system where all barriers to learning are acknowledged and the needs of learners who

experience them are met according to Education White Paper 6 (2001). Clark (2007) recognizes that the interaction of various systems in the learners' life have an impact on how they operate, social work and inclusive education should be viewed from an ecological point of view. Because different systems in their surroundings have an impact on learners who experience learning barriers, the framework must be used to understand them. The theory suggests that if there is no balance in one system, it destabilizes the other systems. To put it in another way, what occurs at home affects what occurs in the classroom. If the child's home and school environments are examined, it may become clear that the child's behaviour is indicative of a barrier in either setting. Bronfenbrenner's four levels namely, microsystem, mesosystem, macro-system, exo-system and chronosystem are found to be particularly useful in trying to understand the impact of barriers on learners.

Based on these levels of systems, Mubi (2020) indicated that they help in the unravelling of the complexities of circumstances that lead to barriers to learning. Mubi (2020) furthermore mentions that the microsystem is the system that the learner has direct interactions with such as family, other learners, peers, teachers, playgrounds, and places of worship. This level significantly affects the learner's behavioural tendencies. A learner's development will benefit if they have a close, nurturing relationship with their parents. Conversely, a learner will suffer if their parents are distant and unloving. This may lead him or her to look for love outside or get involved in dangerous situations just to get the attention of the parents.

At the mesosystem, the learner engages in direct and active interaction with two or more micro-systems, which can be in contact between home and school. The theory goes on to say that certain interactions between microsystems might either improve or cause problems in the development of the learner. For example, the growth of the learner would be positively impacted if his or her parents and teachers got along and had a good relationship, as opposed to negatively impacted if they did not. The involvement of parents in their learning has a positive impact as they can work with educators to recognize and solve any obstacles that the learner might be facing. The ecosystem is a system that has an indirect influence on the learner, however, the learner is impacted by

the setting's existence. The parent may have a bad day and take his frustration on the child. This can lead to a barrier as the situation may affect the child emotionally and may be resolute to abusing substances as a coping mechanism.

The macro-system represents the broader community and how things are and how they influence the other systems around the learner. It includes values, attitudes, the economy, laws and customs. For example, a learner living in a poor neighborhood would experience different development than a learner living in a wealthy neighborhood. Lastly, the chronosystem looks at the changes that happen over a period and how they influence the interaction between different systems. For example, if the learner's parents' divorce, this will have an impact on his or her life as he or she will have to go and live with one parent.

Tuswa (2016) furthermore explains that the ecological system theory can play a vital role in the intervention process and in the development of the child, as it helps in understanding the circumstances in the classroom, schools, and families as systems. This theory helps in comprehending the obstacles to learning that occur in the South African educational environment (Van Sittert, 2016). Figure 2.1 describes the applicability of structures of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory in the study by referring to the microsystem, mesosystem, ecosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem.

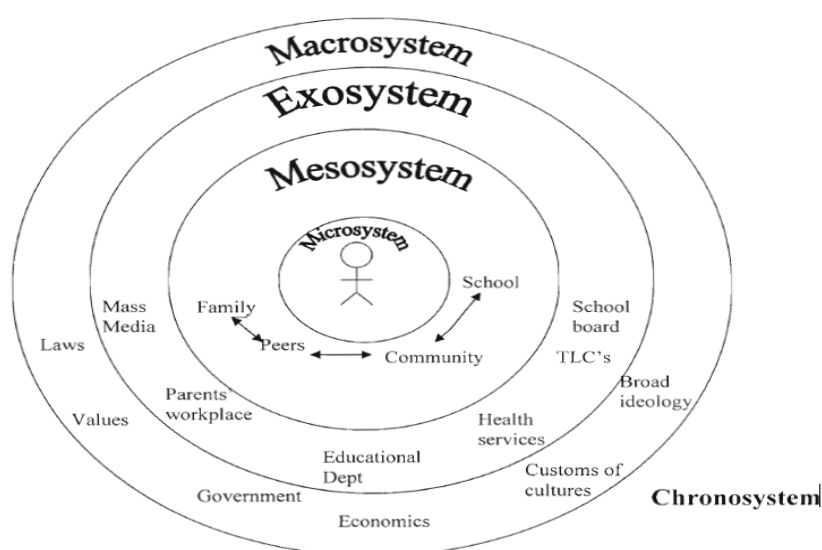


Fig.2.1: Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory on contextualized child development (Tuswa, 2016)

In the context of social work, the ecological systems approach aids in problem assessment and is used to help provide services to clients by examining various systems in their environment that affect their functioning. The theory is based on the notion that environments and people interact and change one another over time (Van Sittert, 2016). This is echoed by Tariq, et al (2020), who state that the important viewpoint on the function of a social worker in an inclusive educational context is provided by ecological systems theory. The social worker serves as an enabler and facilitator to meet the needs of children with impairments by connecting them with crucial resources, which entails a holistic and integrated approach (Tariq et al, 2020).

School social must consider the wider picture and comprehend the impact that the home, community, and social environment have on how an at-risk youngster interacts with others at school rather than just intervening in the school setting. The Ecological Systems Theory offers the theoretical foundation required to pinpoint systems that may be problematic for the learners (Heinrich, 2017). The theory helps social workers to understand the situation in the class, schools and families as a system. It also aids in comprehending obstacles to learning that appear in the educational setting. Therefore, the researcher will be able to improve understanding of social work services in addressing barriers to learning by using Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory by outlining the interactions between and within the systems.

2.9 SUMMARY

The literature review gives a thorough explanation of the role of school social workers within the inclusive education framework, particularly regarding overcoming barriers to learning that have a detrimental influence on learners' performance. The types of barriers to learning faced by learners in public schools were addressed. The literature reviewed the intervention measures put in place by the Department of Social Development and the Department of Education through social work interventions to improve learners' academic performance. Services rendered by school social workers to address barriers to learning were highlighted. This study's theoretical framework shows how social work is grounded in an ecological perspective, meaning that interactions between a learner and the various systems in his or her environment have an impact.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the research methodology utilized by the researcher to undertake the study. Leedy and Ormrod (2012) define research methodology techniques a researcher uses to make sure that their work can be analysed and modified. Mafokwane (2017) adds that the research methodology entails collecting information from participants using different instruments and analyzing and interpreting the data in preparation for the discussion and presentation of findings. Additionally, research methodology outlines the steps that must be taken during the study process. This section outlined the research approach, research design, population and sampling, data collection methods and tools and data analysis. Pilot testing, quality criteria and research ethical considerations are also included in this chapter.

3.2 RESEARCH APPROACH

The study used the qualitative approach to undertake this research project. Rubin and Babbie (2011) explain qualitative research as a method that deliberates more on human experience and produces theoretical observations that cannot easily be reduced to numerical figures. Qualitative research is concerned with understanding people's choices in life, the meanings they assign to their experiences, and their emotions around their circumstances (Newby, 2010). Furthermore, Silverman (2013), asserts that qualitative research methods emphasize the depth of the data collected because the researcher has no prior knowledge of the study.

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) explain that the qualitative approach allows the researcher to interact directly with the participants, enter their lives, and gather more information and understanding of the research question. Qualitative research involves going out to a setting and studying it first-hand. Thus, researchers employing this method are not only interested in how people talk about things; they are also interested in how their settings or context shapes what they have to say (Creswell, 2018). This approach enabled the researcher to access educators, social workers and learners at schools. As

a result, the researcher had the chance engage in direct communication with the participants and gain knowledge and insight about social work services that are rendered in addressing barriers to learning in schools in Sibasa Circuit in Vhembe District.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

A research design is a “plan or blueprint of how one intends conducting the research” (Babbie and Mouton, 2014:10). A research design as described by Burke and Larry (2012) is a strategy for how to respond to research questions. The researcher utilized an exploratory research design. The purpose of exploratory research design is “to gain a broad understanding of a situation or phenomenon as little was known” (Bless, Higson-Smith and Sithole, 2013:35). The exploratory research design allowed the researcher “to gain insight and comprehension of the subject researched” (Babbie and Mouton, 2012:80). It allowed the researcher to gain insight and comprehension of the subject researched. The chosen exploratory design assisted the researcher in becoming acquainted with the fundamental details, participants, and issues at hand. The researcher was able to create a solid mental image of what was happening, come up with questions, create procedures and determine the path of future study. Semi-structured one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions were used to collect data.

3.4 RESEARCH SETTING OR CONTEXT

The research setting is “an area or location where the study will be conducted” (Rubin and Babbie, 2011:579). For this purpose, the study took place in two public secondary schools in Sibasa Circuit, Thulamela Municipality in Vhembe District of Limpopo Province. Vhembe District Municipality has four local municipalities, namely, Makhado, Collins Chabane Municipality, Thulamela and Musina. The figure below shows the geographical position of these municipalities. Thulamela Municipality is the focus of this study.



Fig 3.1 Vhembe District Municipality (Profile: Vhembe District Municipality 2020)

Thulamela was selected because it is reported that learners from this municipality who are under the age of 20 years use substances. Those two schools were selected due to their accessibility to the researcher. These were public schools that were both close to one another and roughly 5 kilometres from Thohoyandou. The two schools belong to the same cluster and are supervised by the same curriculum advisor. One school is in a rural location, while the other is in a semi-urban one.

They both differed according to learner enrolment. When the study was conducted, Ralson Tshinanne School had 518, and Raluswielo School 326, learners. Raluswielo School was selected because it was placed in the last position in the whole circuit because of the poor performance of matriculants. Ralson Tshinanne School was chosen because it was one of the schools characterized by learners' bad behaviour, such as coming to schools with weapons, fighting with teachers, a high percentage of teenage pregnancy and substance misuse. The schools were chosen because they had social workers who rendered social work services to learners with barriers to learning.

3.5 POPULATION AND SAMPLING

3.5.1 Population

Rubin and Babbie (2011:359) state that “is the entire group from which the sample is drawn.” The population of the study permitted the researcher to compile a sample of those being researched to draw findings (Babbie, 2016:116). Learners, educators and social workers (learner support agents) made up the population of this study. There are 293 public schools geographically scattered around Vhembe district. About forty-five social workers were employed in the district and they were distributed amongst the four municipalities in the district. Each municipal office got twelve social worker which the divide according to their circuit. Of which Sibasa circuit got four social workers. The study focused on two public secondary schools in Sibasa Circuit (Raluswielo Secondary School and Ralson Tshinanne Secondary School). Raluswielo School is situated in Sibasa and Ralson Tshinanne School is situated at Ngovhela. They are within 2 kilometres from each other. Learners that encounter learning barriers were involved in the discussion to learn more about their perspectives on the social work services that were provided to them to overcome such barriers.

3.5.2 Sampling method and procedures

Sampling is the procedure used to choose a subset of the population for research (Maree, 2010). The sampling method applied was non-probability. McMillan and Schumacher (2014) define non-probability sampling as a process in which the likelihood of choosing population members is known. The researcher, therefore, employed purposive sampling, in which people are chosen because they belong to a specific group. Therefore, the selection of people is not random (Wilson and MacLean, 2011). The researcher's use of her judgment to choose individuals with the specific traits necessary for the study was made possible by the purposive sampling method.

Purposive sampling was used to select two public schools that have been receiving social work services since 2017. From these schools, the sample was drawn and consisted of two social workers (LSA), two educators, and 10 learners from selected schools. There was one educator and 10 learners from each selected school. The above-mentioned participants were selected in terms of the inclusion of criteria (Daniel and Sam, 2012).

Participants were selected guided by the following inclusion criteria:

Learners

- Learners were in grade 11 or grade 12 and between the age of 16 and 18 years.
- Learners had attended school social work services because of barriers to learning.
- Both genders have received social work services.

Social workers

- Social workers are employed by the Department of Basic Education as learners' support agents.
- Social workers had registered with the SACSSP (South African Council for Social Service Professions).
- Social workers had at least a minimum of two years of experience working with learners who experience barriers to learning.
- Social workers may be of any age, gender, or race.

Educators

- Educators were coordinators of the CSTL programme.
- Educators had at least five years' experience.

Sampling procedure

The participants were recruited via face-to-face interactions and phone calls. The researcher went to the schools and asked the principal to request educators who oversee the CSTL programme if they were willing to be interviewed. Then an appointment was set up, and information about where and when to conduct the interview was discussed. The interview with the educators took place in their offices during school hours. The researcher asked permission from the school principal to request learners who could take part in the study. The researcher thereafter requested the learners to volunteer and to participate in the study. The learners that were willing to participate in the study, their parents signed parents' consent form as a form of agreeing that their child can take part in the study.

An appointment was set, and information was provided about the meeting place and time which was after school on the school premises. The researcher called social workers (LSA) and enquired about their willingness to take part in the study and willingness to be interviewed. They agreed, and then an appointment was set up, and information about where and when the interview would be conducted was discussed. The interviews with the social workers took place after working hours in their offices. The study's objective was explained to the participants before the interviews, and given clarity that their participation is voluntary.

3.6 PILOT STUDY

A pilot study is a scaled-down or smaller version of the larger study that will be carried out later (Wheeler, 2010). Magnusson and Marecek (2015:70) defined pilot test as “an instrument that helps refine the interview guide or revise researchable questions”. The researcher conducted a pilot study of the interview schedule with a small group of carefully selected people who are equivalent to the research participants. This was done to find areas where the interview schedule needed improvement, to practice interview skills including fluency in questioning, and to increase the questions' capacity to elicit rich and pertinent information. The participants in the pilot study were omitted from the study's final sample. Five learners, one social worker, and one educator were selected for pilot testing.

The pilot study helped the researcher to identify and combine related themes on the interview schedule to prevent repetition. For instance, two questions that addressed the same concept were combined. The pilot study also helped the researcher to formulate other questions that were not covered in the interview schedule. For example, the interview schedules of learners had four questions. The researcher realised that she needed to add three more questions as she was not getting the data hoped for.

3.7 DATA COLLECTION METHOD AND TOOL

Burns and Grove (2013:44) note that data collection is “a systematic way of gathering information that is relevant to the research process”. It is the process of acquiring data to answer the study's questions (Creswell and Clark, 2011). McMillan and Schumacher

(2013) mentioned that data collection is an important stage in most research projects. Two methods of data collection were used, namely, one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions (FGD). The study comprised 24 participants: four participants (02 educators and 02 social workers) for semi-structured one-on-one interviews, and 20 participants (learners) for focus group discussions. Two focus group discussions comprising five participants each and one focus group comprising ten participants from each secondary school were conducted.

3.7.1 Interviews

Maree (2010:87) notes that an interview is “a two-way conversation which involves the interviewer asking the participants questions to gather information and understand their thoughts, beliefs, opinions, and behaviors”. “The interview process is flexible and spontaneous and permits the researcher to probe issues” (Kumar, 2011:144). The researcher utilized a semi-structured interview schedule when interviewing social workers and educators (De Vos et al, 2011). The schedule is meant to collect data in qualitative studies. Semi-structured interviews were employed by the researcher because they enable questioning and clarification of responses.

Through direct communication with individuals, the researcher was able to gather information. One-on-one interviews lasted for approximately 1 hour and 20 minutes with each participant. Interview with educators were conducted in their school offices. The privacy of the participants was respected. Interviews with social workers were conducted in their offices. The researcher agreed with each participant on the date, time and place for the interviews. All the interviews proceeded without any interruption. During the interviews, field notes were taken, with the participants' consent, the interviews were recorded on an MP3 recorder.

One of the participants (educator) did not allow the researcher to record him and take notes of some information he was saying. His reasons were that some issues are sensitive but will provide the researcher with a precise background and understanding of other issues being researched. The recording enabled the accurate capturing of information and allowed the interviewer to focus on the interview proceedings rather than

on taking notes. The MP3 recorder file was saved on the researcher's computer which is password protected. An interview schedule was used as a data collection tool. The schedule included several questions that allowed the researcher to obtain information on the phenomenon of the study (see Appendix F). The researcher asked questions one by one as written on the interview schedule and recorded educators' and social workers' responses. Questions were clarified when participants did not understand. An interview schedule was written in English, and when the participant did not understand the question, the researcher translated it into Tshivenda so that the participant could understand and be able to give accurate answers.

3.7.2 Focus Group Discussions

Focus group discussions (FGD) were utilized as an interviewing method with learners. Moreover, FGD was conducted to gather data on participants' opinions of social work services' in addressing barriers to learning. The focus group discussion also promotes a variety of answers and perspectives on social work services. It is a rapid method for gathering data from many participants, and it gives participants a chance to learn from one another through discussions (Bless et al, 2013). It is significant because as discovered by De Vos et al (2011), it enables the researcher to gather a concentrated amount of data and encourages the emergence of ideas from participants. Prior to focus group interviews, participants were gathered in a classroom, recruited with the help of the school's principal, and were informed verbally and in writing about the goals of the study and the requirements for participation.

In this study, the researcher conducted three focus group interviews with twenty learners from two secondary schools. These learners were chosen because it was believed that they would provide the most information about social work services in removing learning barriers. One group consists of 10 learners. This was done because most participants were in grade 12 and were in the middle of mid-term tests where they were preparing themselves for book camp and trial exams. It was going to be difficult to access them later. The learners were from one school. The other two groups consisted of five learners each. Each group had both genders from different grades. Learners were not grouped according to gender or grade but participated due to their availability at the time agreed

upon. This made it easier to acquire different viewpoints and gave the patterns that did emerge more credibility. The researcher took notes on the participants' verbal and nonverbal interactions during the session.

Before the interviews, participants were made aware of the informed consent form they would need to sign and the usage of MP3 recorders. Prior to the interview, the recorder was set up and made apparent to the participants. The researcher encouraged the participants to speak one at a time to avoid distortion in the recording. The participants and the researcher agreed that the recorder will be paused if there is something that they did not feel comfortable for it to be recorded. The significance of the study and the tools utilized were explained to the participants. The researcher used an interview schedule so that participants did not deviate from discussions. The duration of each group discussion was roughly one hour and forty-five minutes.

The researcher tried to take notes during the interview and record the participants' exact words and phrases. Data analysis was done using field notes after each session. The first focus group discussion was conducted during school hours. The interview was interrupted by other learners who wanted to know what we were doing. They were going in and out of the classroom that the researcher was allocated. Interruptions made participants lose focus and the researcher had to remind them what we were discussing. The researcher, with permission from participants, ended up locking the classroom for the sake of continuity. Due to this, the other two focus groups were done after school to avoid interruptions.

3.8 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis is a procedure of interpreting the data the researcher has gathered and looking for what lies beneath the surface content (Whittaker, 2012). Furthermore, data analysis involves interpreting written and visual material (Creswell, 2014). Thematic analysis was used. Boeije (2010) describe thematic analysis as dissecting specific data points to understand the research as a whole and draw conclusions from it. Data for this study was divided into smaller groups that included concepts, thoughts, and perceptions. This study gathered information to identify similar themes in the participants' perceptions

of their experiences. Following the review of the results, common information was gathered to create themes.

The researcher followed thematic steps adapted from Braun and Clark (2006) when analyzing data, which are:

Step1: Familiarizing oneself with the data

After gathering the data and transcribing the interviews, the researcher reviewed the transcripts several times. to become familiar with the information. During this procedure, initial concepts were recorded.

Step 2: Generating initial codes

The researcher prepared a list of her original concepts before beginning to code the information and spotting some intriguing patterns. Across the full data set, this was carried out methodically. The researcher then gathered the data related to each code.

Step 3: Searching for themes

The codes were reevaluated by the researcher, and the codes were compiled into probable themes.

Step 4: Reviewing the themes

Themes were analysed to determine their value before being "mapped." A "map" of analysis was created by evaluating the themes in connection with the coded extracts and the complete data set.

Step 5: Naming the themes

The researcher refined the information, and gave each theme a distinct name

Step 6: Producing the report

Throughout the preparation of the report, analysis was carried out to hone the details of each theme.

3.9 QUALITY CRITERIA

Every effort was taken to maximize trustworthiness throughout this study. Throughout the research, the researcher deliberately tried to uphold the standards of trustworthiness. “Trustworthiness is a technique for guaranteeing the accuracy of qualitative research without sacrificing relevance” (Mahlo, 2011:97). Additionally, trustworthiness refers to the degree to which the data is credible, believable, and reliable (McMillan and Schumacher, 2010). To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, four criteria were considered: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

3.9.1 Credibility

Given (2016) defined credibility as the ability to represent the participants’ multiple realities in the research findings so that they are authentic and genuine to people with similar beliefs. Furthermore, credibility is to ensure that the conclusions accurately reflect the reality being studied (Bless et al., 2013). Credibility was ensured by employing member checking, which involved having the study subjects confirm the researcher’s interpretation of what they had stated in focus groups and semi-structured one-on-one interviews after the interviews had been transcribed and analyzed. This was done by sending copies to a few participants to check the accuracy of the interviews. The participants indicated that everything was in order and accurate.

3.9.2 Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which results can be used in different contexts (Kumar, 2011). Mabasa (2018) described transferability as how qualitative research shows that the research study’s findings are transferable or generalizable, that is, that they can be used in different situations unrelated to the one in which the study was conducted. Transferability shall be safeguarded by capturing each participant’s perspective so that it provides dense data on lived experiences. However, transferability is strengthened in the study by including thorough explanations of the research process and technique used in the study. To ensure transferability the researcher described the research methods in great depth, stating and explaining the study’s parameters in detail.

3.9.3 Dependability

Thyer (2010) argues that dependability guarantees that the same methods can be applied to yield the same results in a different study. Given (2016) argues that dependability refers to whether findings would be consistent if the inquiry should be replicated with the same participants in similar settings. To guarantee dependability, the researcher outlined the procedures and processes of this study in clear detail. This made it possible for readers of this study report to fully comprehend how the mentioned techniques were effectively used to ensure their dependability and reliability.

3.9.4 Confirmability

Given (2016) indicated that confirmability is about ensuring that the findings emerge from the participants. Volk (2016:25) adds that confirmability “entails the details of the methodology used in the study”. The researcher checked with the study's research supervisor to make sure the analysis and conclusions were correct. The researcher took reflective field notes throughout the research process to ensure that the findings correctly reflected participants' opinions and experiences rather than the researchers. Also, the researcher gave a thorough description of the methodology employed as well as the justifications for selecting the preferred strategy over alternatives in the study.

3.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations are “norms or standards for conduct that distinguish between right and wrong and determine the difference between acceptable and unacceptable behaviours” (Hoyle & Harris, 2012:134). Ethics in research are defined “as principles that refer to standards and agreements that protect the right of research participants” (Nicholas, Rautenbach & Maistry, 2010:200). Several ethical considerations were employed in this study:

3.10.1 Permission to conduct the Study

Ethical permission for this study was obtained from the University of Venda's Research Ethics Social Sciences Committee (RESSC). The required approval to conduct the study was also obtained from the Limpopo Department of Basic Education (See Appendix B).

3.10.2 Entry to research site

After receiving approval to conduct the study from Limpopo Provincial Department of Education Ethics Committee, the researcher submitted the letter to the Circuit Manager to seek permission for access to their schools. The Circuit manager granted the researcher permission and identified possible schools that meet the criteria and forwarded the principals' names and numbers to the researcher. Following the approval, the researcher then wrote a letter to the proposed school principals which had all the details and information about the study so that they will know what the study is all about. Then, the researcher went over the procedure for gathering data with the principals for access to the learners, educators and social workers.

3.10.3 Informed Consent

Babbie (2016) states that informed consent means that participants must be told of the purpose of the study, be aware of all potential outcomes, and provide their informed consent before participation. Neuman (2011) states that permission alone is not enough in the research study. Therefore, participants need to be fully informed about what they are being requested to participate in so that they can make an informed decision. The participants were informed about the study and what it is all about so that they to choose whether they want to participate or not. All participants signed the consent form. Learners' parents also signed the declaration of the consent form to indicate that they agree that their children be part of the study. Before taking part in the study, learners under the age of 18 signed the "child assent" document (See Appendix D and E).

3.10.4 Voluntary Participation

Leedy and Ormrod (2014) defined voluntary participation as the fact that nobody ought to be coerced into taking part in a study. Participants were made aware that taking part in the study was completely voluntary and they had the right to withdraw at any time without suffering any negative effects. No deceit of any kind was employed to guarantee participation.

3.10.5 No harm to Participants

Leedy and Ormrod (2014) note that research that involves human subjects should be carried out in a way that minimizes risks or potential harm. Babbie (2010) asserts that social research participants should never suffer harm, regardless of whether they voluntarily participate in the study. Participants were given with an interview schedule to read before the commencement of the interview so that they could identify questions with which they are not comfortable. The study did not harm them physically or emotionally.

3.10.6 Debriefing of Participants

De Vos et al (2011) argue that during debriefing, participants get the opportunity, after study, to work through their experiences and its aftermath, and it is where they can have their questions answered and misconceptions removed. When working with participants and seeing that there is a need for debriefing, the researcher will refer them to relevant people or institutions. There were no cases where they were harmed emotionally or psychologically that needed to be referred to either social workers or psychologists or to any relevant people or institutions.

3.10.6 Confidentiality and Anonymity

Confidentiality means handling information in a confidential manner, which alludes to a contract between parties limiting access to confidential information (Babbie, 2016). Participants were informed that their names would remain confidential, and that any information or material discussed while collecting data for the study would be treated in confidence. Prior to the study, confidentiality was respected and communicated with potential participants. Confidentiality was maintained by keeping the data confidential and by restricting access to the data to only the researcher, and her supervisors. Also, anonymity was ensured by omitting any names in the final research report. Pseudonyms were used in the presentation of findings as stated by Leedy and Ormrod (2013). Participants were asked for permission to audio record the interviews, but only the researcher knew who they were. The researcher is the only person with access to the password-protected laptop where all the data are kept. The digital recordings and transcriptions will be preserved for five years after the study is published, after which they will be destroyed.

3.10 SUMMARY

In this chapter, the researcher concentrated on the research methodology, described the research approach and research design, and demonstrated how the technique attempted to answer the study's research questions. The discussion covered both the sampling strategy and the ways in which data was gathered. Furthermore, included are a description of the data analysis process and a discussion of ethical consideration. The following chapter will focus on analyzing and interpreting the data.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to present data collected during individual interviews with two social workers and two educators; and focus group interviews with twenty learners from two selected public schools in Sibasa Circuit in Vhembe District. The aim of the study was to explore social work services towards addressing barriers to learning in public schools.

The findings of the study were analysed, interpreted and related to relevant existing literature. The researcher used an analysis of qualitative data. Thematic analysis was used to transcribe the data verbatim by Braun and Clarke (2006), which are familiarizing the researcher with data; generating initial codes; searching for themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes and producing the report. The chapter includes a discussion of the findings and conclusions of the study.

4.2 BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION OF PARTICIPANTS

The researcher felt that it was crucial to provide participants biographical information. To comprehend their background considering their responses, information is required. The detailed biographical information of the participants is presented in Table 1, Table 2 and Table 3.

Table 4.2.1: Biographical information of educators

Participants	Age	Gender	Position	Working experience	Profession
Educator 1	53	Male	Head of Department	30 years	Teacher
Educator 2	57	Male	Deputy Principal	35 years	Teacher

Table 1: Illustration of biographical information of educators

Table .1 reveals that the participants of the study have been working for thirty years. All participants were males and occupy different positions in their school. They are all qualified teachers.

Table 4.2.2: Biographical information of social workers (LSA)

Participants	Age	Gender	Position	Working Experience
Social Worker1	38	Female	Learner Support Agent	3 Years
Social Worker2	34	Male	Learner Support Agent	3 Years

Table 2: Illustration of biographical information of social workers

The table 2 reveals that all participants are employed as learner support agents and have been working for three years. Table 2 further reveals that both male and female participants took part in the interviews. All participants are in their thirties.

Table 4.2.3: Biographical information of learners

		No. of participants
Age	16 years	4
	17 years	6
	18 years	10
Gender	Male	7
	Female	13
Grade	Grade 11	6
	Grade 12	14

Table 3: Biographical information of learners

The table 3 reveals the age ranges, gender, and grade of the participants. 20 learners participated in three focus group interviews. The participants ranged between the ages of 16 and 18. Most participants were females and in grade 12.

Table 4.2.4: Key for interpreting findings from one-on-one semi-structured interviews and focus groups.

Key Of Abbreviations	
ED1	: Educator No 1
ED2	: Educator No 2
SCW1	: Social Worker No 1
SCW2	: Social Worker No 2
FP1-FP20	: Focus Groups Participants

4.3 DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS STRATEGIES

One-on-one interviews were used to collect the data with the educators and social workers (LSA) and three focus group interviews with learners. The interview schedule was written in English and translated into Tshivenda for participants to be able to respond. The analysis of the interview data conducted with the selected participants was transcribed *verbatim*. The researcher began by categorizing the codes after which she began to code the data to find the patterns in the data that answered her research questions.

The different themes that emerged from this data were used to gain a deeper understanding of social work services in addressing barriers to learning in public schools. The researcher used a variety of data collection techniques, including focus groups and one-on-one interviews, to produce the various themes that were explored.

4.4 FINDINGS DISCUSSION

Table 4.2.5: Findings revealed four major themes which are tabled and discussed below:

Theme	Sub-theme	Category
1. The participants' understanding of barriers to learning.	1.1. Understanding of the term barrier to learning 1.2. Identification of learners with barriers to learning 1.3. The effects of barriers to learning on learners	1.1.1. Explanation and descriptions of barriers to learning. 1.1.2. Types of barriers commonly experienced 1.2.1. Indicators of barriers to learning
2. Contemporary measures to address barriers to learning.	2.1. Social workers' roles and services in addressing barriers to learning	2.1.1. Support to learners using social work methods. Subcategories: This includes support to learners on individual level and through group work, provide psychosocial services, conduct educational talks, and linkage to other service providers
3. Measures required to improve the current social work services offered to learners experiencing barriers to learning	3.1. Collaboration with other stakeholders.	3.1.1. Parental involvement.

<p>4. Participants' views on the influence of social work services to address barriers to learning.</p>	<p>4.1. Change learner's behaviour. 4.2. Improved school attendance and performance. 4.3. Ability to cope with life challenges.</p>	
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Theme1: Participants' understanding of barriers to learning

In this theme, two sub-themes are discussed, as well as the categories related to each sub-theme. In the first sub-theme, the researcher outlines how participants understand barriers to education. In the two categories of this sub-theme, the focus is on the explanation and description of barriers to learning, and the types of the barriers.

Sub-theme 1.1: Understanding of barriers to learning

The two categories of this sub-theme include the participants' explanation and description of barriers to learning and the types of barriers.

• Category 1.1.1. Explanations and descriptions

The understanding of barriers to learning emanates from data collected from participants. The findings from the participants were transcribed verbatim, supported by the researcher's views and the relevant literature to strengthen the arguments. In some instances, where the participants outlined common revelations, data saturation was considered to manage the data properly. The data was analysed based on the three categories of the participants, namely, learners, educators and social workers. Their responses are recorded as follows based on their understanding of barriers to learning.

The following are responses from learners in terms of their understanding of barriers to learning. The responses are quoted verbatim as follows:

"It is situations we face that lead to us not doing schoolwork appropriately or in the right way". FP1

"These are obstacles that disturb a learner from studying, for example when as learners we leave our classes to go to other classes and when we come back in the class, we find it occupied and we just end up eating outside and not studying while others are learning". FP2

"I think it is a challenge that disturbs learners from learning, especially what happens in schools". FP6

“Barriers are things we think about when we are at school, like different things that are happening at our homes”. FP8

“Challenges that a person is facing, like stress and home crisis”. FP11

“Things that cause learners not to pay attention at school like thinking about what is happening at home”. FP14

“Barriers to learning includes family problems, teenage pregnancy, substance abuse, and bullying in class”. FP17

“Boyfriend/Girlfriend relationships enable learners to lose focus on schoolwork, for example thinking of his or her relationship while at school”. FP20

When asked what they think barriers to learning are, educators said that:

“Barriers to learning are obstacles that hinder learners to learn. These are internal and external factors that act as obstacles to the effective learning of the learner. Some barriers come within the child him/herself, some from the outside source, the one from within can be attitude or spiritual”. (ED1).

“To me, barriers to learning refer to challenges, obstacles, troubles, or problems that may hinder learning. Something that could disturb learners from learning here in the school that what we call barriers to learning”. (ED2)

These responses were exclusive to social workers. Based on the responses provided, participants showed an understanding of what barriers to learning are, though they describe them in different ways. Other participants mentioned that they view the home environment as a barrier to learning. Furthermore, a number of participants also indicated that barriers to learning can be relationships like a boyfriend/girlfriend. Educators also showed their understanding of barriers to learning by indicating that they are internal or external factors that hinder a learner to cope with learning.

The responses tally with the DoE (2010:16) and Visser’s (2010:9) argument that the term "barriers to learning" describes challenges that the educational system, the classroom or school environment, or the individual learner faces that limit them from accessing learning

and advancement in a wider social, economic, and political context. In other words, barriers to learning are factors that cause the system to be unable to accommodate learner variety, cause breakdown of learning, or hinder learners from receiving high-quality education. The findings show that participants had an idea of what barriers to learning are. They were confident when they were explaining what they think barriers to learning are. The researcher asserts that barriers to learning are factors that cause the system's inability to accommodate diversity, as well as those that cause a breakdown in learning or deter learners from using instructional resources. Furthermore, DoE (2010) adds that learners often face challenges in their learning process because of situations at home or in the community, specific classroom or school experiences, health conditions or disabilities which the study confirmed.

Category 1.1.2 Types of barriers to learning commonly experienced

This category has five sub-categories which will be discussed hereunder.

This category reports on the types of barriers to learning that learners experience in the selected schools. Therefore, there are sub-categories drawn below to unpack the types of barriers to learning as outlined by the participants of the study. These types of barriers prevent learners from succeeding academically and reaching their goals. The types of barriers to learning identified by the participants include teenage pregnancy, substance abuse, peer pressure, bullying and poverty. These types of barriers to learning as identified by the participants were discussed below as sub-categories.

Sub-category 1.1.2.1: Teenage pregnancy

The findings from one-on-one interviews and focus groups shown that teenage pregnancy is one of the major barriers to learning that learners encounter, especially girls. A number of participants said the following during the individual and focus group (learners) discussions:

“The pregnancy disturbs my studying routine at school because I was experiencing different challenges, I was always sick and not knowing how to go to

school, fighting with my parents and the father of a child I was pregnant with". (FP11)

"The pregnancy was stressing me a lot because I did not know what to do and I was depressed". (FP2)

"I had impregnated a girl, and the challenge was bigger than me to an extent that I could not even focus on school. While teachers are teaching, I would be focusing on building a family and not the lessons. I used to wonder if my family will treat my pregnant girlfriend well". (FP18)

"Teenage pregnancy is also happening because girls sometimes spend much time with boys and end up engaging in sexual activities which lead to pregnancy". (FP5)

"Even learners in the first grade (grade 8) are pregnant". (FP20)

Educators' responses were captured as follows regarding pregnancy as a barrier to learning:

"Teenage pregnancy is also one of the fast-growing crises at school, and it disturbs learners though at the early stages we don't face many challenges when they are about to give birth, we experience challenges since they start to miss classes so they can go and give birth and it means they will have to rewrite their exams, others are sleeping at school, others missing school to go to the clinic for check-ups and it set as a barrier to their learning". (ED1).

"Pregnancy makes learners miss school. Like now during the exam, a learner may experience some complications with her pregnancy, and she must go home or clinics for a day or more and that means they are missing exams and that may lead her to repeat a grade". (ED2)

Responses from social workers were captured as follows:

"When we talk about teenage pregnancy, we don't talk about girls only we also talk about boys because girls do not impregnate themselves rather, it is boys at school or other men outside of school. I once got a case, where a learner was pregnant

and not getting support from home and the boyfriend was in the same class and saying the pregnancy is not his, he also found a new girlfriend in the same class, and it was depressing the pregnant learner and distracting her concentration in class". (SW1).

"Teenage Pregnancy is when a learner who still has a bright future fall pregnant while still young. It is tough for a learner to concentrate on schoolwork while she is pregnant because of the morning sickness and being bullied by classmates since nowadays they no longer have to stay home because of pregnancy". (SW2).

The study results show that teenage pregnancy does not only affect learners academically, but also their physical health, mental well-being, and the teen's family both boy and girl. The study results are consistent with Malahlela's (2012) argument that school dropout and non-attendance are frequently linked to teenage pregnancy. The responses as well confirm Nkosi and Pretorius' (2019) assertion that teenage motherhood impacts negatively on the learner's concentration in the classroom, due to drowsiness and exhaustion. All these lead to poor performance and failure.

Some participants' responses tally with Matshotyana's (2010:1) assertion that "the stigma associated with pregnancy can result in depression, social marginalisation, low self-esteem, and subpar academic performance". The study found that some participants had conflicts with their parents. Malahlela (2012) agreed that some parents compel their daughters to leave home because they cannot accept the pregnancy and they fear it will bring shame to the family. Therefore, pregnancy is considered a barrier to learning based on explanations provided by the participants.

Sub-category 1.1.2.2. Substance abuse

Substance abuse was identified as another barrier to learning. Below are views outlined by a significant number of participants (learners) from focus groups:

"I was an addict. I was smoking cannabis excessively to an extent that was not normal at all". (FP3).

“I used to smoke cannabis, during class time I used to go out and smoke, when I come back high, I would disturb others seeking attention, so they will focus on me”. (FP7).

“I was on substance abuse smoking cigarettes, but my friends advised me that I'm taking the wrong path”. (FP8).

“I used to smoke with my friend, both cigarette and cannabis and I used to sell to other learners and other people where I stay. I used to smoke in the morning, during break time, after school, and even during period time. I would hide cannabis in my lunch box so that securities cannot find them”. (FP12).

“Smoking Cannabis is leading, others come drunk, smelling alcohol, and it's irritating me if they are seating next me”. (FP16).

The following are responses from educators:

“Learners are getting themselves into drugs, particularly smoking cannabis, copying others... They also abuse alcohol, hence many areas have a place where people buy and drink alcohol and, in some cases, those places are not even more than a kilometer away from school, so they run away during break time and go to drink.... They do this because where they sell alcohol opens mostly around break time consequently, they come back drunk after the break with a changed behaviour completely”. ED1.

“In this school learners smoke cannabis so much to an extent that they don't stay in class... They don't attend the first periods and after the break, they don't return to class... Some of the learners become aggressive towards the teachers after smoking those drugs and some make fun of the teachers”. ED2

Responses from social workers were captured as follows:

“In the morning before coming to school they smoke and smoke again during break time, most of them smoke in the toilets. I used to follow them but because they use boys' ablution as their smoking area, I would stand at a distance to avoid cases,

but I would see learners smoking in there. When they come back to the class, they start displaying strange behaviours and not paying attention to the teachers. Mostly the learners who smoke are in grade 12, grade 11, and grade 10 learners, and eventually, the grade 8 will start craving and they might end up smoking too. I also ask the reason why they are smoking when I gather them into a group and most reply that they saw their peers smoking and others would reply that they started to smoke because they saw some of their family members smoking". (SW1)

"When learner starts to drink, they tend to abuse it, to an extent where they end up sleeping in where they were drinking. Even though it is written that it is not for sale to person under 18 learners do care. For example, what happened in Eastern Cape where underage youth died in a tavern. This problem is being reported to all social workers in South Africa because it is disturbing teachers, and they cannot even teach well". (SW2)

Social workers further stated that all barriers are linked to one another; the one happens because of the other. To support this statement, one participant said:

"Youth crime has a lot to do with substance abuse because once they are addicts, they must try by all means to get these substances and as a result learners start to steal and get arrested, it is the social worker's responsibility to defend that learner in court". (SW2).

Results from interviews show that substance abuse is one of the major problems encountered by learners. It does not only affect boys but also girls as they also indulge in substances. The study revealed that substance abuse is also a barrier to learning. Learners who are under the influence of dagga or liquor tend to be unruly. They cannot concentrate anymore; they lose focus on their schoolwork and their disruptive behaviour affects all learners in that specific class. There are numerous indications learners are abusing and using drugs. Another interesting fact that emerged was that they abuse substances because of peer pressure, and take after their parents, older brothers, or friends at home.

The study results are in consistent with a study done by Mabasa (2018) and Nzama and Ajani (2021), who aver that peer pressure is one of the predictors of learners' substance abuse. The findings confirm Nzama and Ajani's (2021) assertion that substance abuse amongst learners is associated with poor academic performance, declining grades, aggressive behaviour in the classroom, absenteeism from school, dropping out of school and affiliations with deviant peers. Maluleka and Manu (2017:15) concur that learners who abuse substances "misbehave or show negative behaviour such as lack of concentration, disrespect to teachers and other school authorities, physical violence and verbal abuse".

Sub-category 1.1.2.3: Bullying

Bullying was identified as a major barrier to learning in the study. This is what the participants (learners) said about this phenomenon:

"I was a bully and a short-tempered learner, I used to bully other learners and because of that, I was expelled from school. When I try to find another school, they couldn't also let me in because of my past behaviour". (FP1)

"I was made to write homework forcefully by other learners who were older than me and if I don't write they would wait for me at the school gate and beat me or promise to harm me if I don't do their homework. I used to write because I feared them because they are older than me and because I did not want to be bullied and that made me lose focus on my own schoolwork as I would concentrate more on the bully's work. That led me on hating school and wanted to leave school".'(FP4)

"Other learners used to take my pocket money, and they were forcing me to smoke cigarettes. They used to also take my lunch box and force me to write their homework". (FP6)

"Learners from grade 12 would demand money from me which I would not have and, they would tell me that they don't care where I get it as long as I give them what they want". (FP15)

"Other learners used to call me offensive names.' (FP17)

The following are responses from educators:

“Learners are bullying one another these days and they are most into social media bullying. Especially girls are into cyberbullying, for example, they would have a misunderstanding here at school by the end of the day their misunderstanding would be on social media Facebook mostly. They would be saying nasty things and body shaming the other person. We had so many incidents that we had to call even the parents and police as it was going out of hand. We had another kind of bullying where learners took other learners’ lunch money and lunch boxes, made others do their schoolwork, and name-calling. Some bullying incidents we are not aware of because some learners do not report and some, we hear about them from fellow learners”. (ED2).

“There is also bullying at school where we find learners fighting and making offensive jokes”. (ED1)

Social workers’ responses relating to bullying as a barrier to learning are captured as follows:

“Yoooh, these kids are bullying one another. Learners give one another a tough time, they bully each other physically, financially, emotionally, and cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is the one leading and it also led learners to commit suicide”. (SW1).

“There is physical bullying where you find them fighting physically and there is also cyber bullying which happens on the internet. If one learner shows up at school wearing some unusual clothes, they take pictures and make it go viral on social media and it affects a learner’s self-esteem and confidence and it distracts the learner”. (SCW2)

The findings of this study show that bullying disrupts the learning and teaching process. The findings also revealed that learners bully one another without thinking about the consequences of their behaviour. The findings confirm Masilo (2018), who reiterates that bullying undeniably affects the victim, as the learners who are victims of bullying may have impaired concentration, decrease in academic performance, skip classes, and can

eventually leave school. De Wet (2007) adds that bullying can also cause mental health problems and physical injuries.

Singh (2014) supports the view that victims may be lacking confidence and may experience feelings of vulnerability, embarrassment, and low self-esteem. Bullying affects learners daily and is a persistent issue. All learners are impacted by this issue, including those who bully, those who are bullied, and those who witness interpersonal violence. However, bullying based on the study occurs in different forms, like physical attacks, name-calling, cyber-bullying, fights and forcing others to do things out of their will. All these become a barrier to learning as learners feel unsafe and live in fear for their lives.

Sub-category 1.1.2.4: Peer pressure

Teen peer pressure is also identified as a barrier to learning. A significant number of the participants (learners) said the following during the focus groups discussions:

“During lessons time I would go out of school premises with my friends to the tuck shop and drink cold drinks. We used to just wait for other learners until they are done attending so we can go home at the same time. I met some female friends who loves partying, and they would invite me to a house party during weekdays, so I had to run away from school and go change clothes because I used to come with clothes to change into in the school bag, then we go to the party and come back late. My father is very strict, and he locks the gate at 6 pm and if you arrive late, it means you won't enter, so I would go to sleep at my friend's home even though I used to get in through the window because it would be around 1 AM so that her mother does not see me, she was also strict. It used to disturb my schoolwork and I was no longer studying, consequently, I failed grade 12 and I am now repeating it for the second time. I used to think my friends are living a better life”. (FP14)

Educators' responses based on peer pressure as the barrier to learning were captured as follows:

“Learners influence one another. You may find a learner coming from a dignified family but after meeting another mannerless learner, they start to drink alcohol, disrespect teachers, eventually come to school drunk, and also start smoking cannabis because of peer pressure”. (ED2)

“These learners influence and sometimes pressurize one another. We have learners that can study at home and there are those who can only study during the day and the available time is during school studies. The ones that can study at home have good resources such as study tables and other study materials. You find that learner disturbing, and telling him to stop studying here at school, you will study at home like me. The learner will stop even though he knows very well why he is studying here but because of the pressure from fellow learner he will stop and that leads him not to do well in his schoolwork”. (ED1)

Social workers' responses based on peer pressure as the barrier to learning were captured as follows:

“There are two types of peer pressure, negative and positive peer pressure. Negative peer pressure is when they are influencing each other on bad things and positive peer pressure is when they are influencing each other on good things. However, we only tolerate positive peer pressure because it can help learners to be successful hence, they compete in good things and not negative peer pressure because it's about unacceptable behaviour. I attend the negative one, learners are influencing one another to do bad things, and the one that is being influenced cannot refuse because they want to be accepted and to fit in the group”. (SCW2)

The findings revealed that learners influence one another towards unacceptable behaviour, such as skipping lessons and going to parties during school days. The study findings tally with those from a study by Arsiwala (2019), which says that the purpose of peer pressure is to alter a person's perspective to persuade them to engage in a particular behaviour. Furthermore, DUhall and Beniwal (2017) assert that due to peer pressure,

learners do the same things that learners in the same age or social group do to be liked or respected by them, and they may start drinking heavily because of this. Peer pressure is often one of the main reasons that learners go against the norms and often seek a way to rebel against what they believe is the right way of doing things.

Sub-category 1.1.2. 5: Poverty

Poverty was mentioned as one of the most significant problems that affects learners in selected schools. The following responses provide details of the accounts of the participants during the interviews, basically from educators' and social workers' perspectives:

“Where we are is not a high-class area and we have many learners that are affected by poverty. Some don't have food at home and others come to school without eating. They start comparing themselves with others, comparing their uniforms with those of other learners, their lunch boxes with those of their fellow schoolmates that have all the necessary fruits. We give learners food here at school but those coming from privileged family do not eat the food we offer at school, as a result, those who eat the food, we offer at school starts to consider themselves inferior and it affects them psychologically as well as their self-esteem”. (ED1)

Social workers' responses based on poverty as a barrier to learning were captured as follows:

“Lack of proper school uniform bother the learners as they start comparing themselves to others, consequently it eventually disturbs them from schoolwork. Other learners cannot afford school uniforms because they only rely on child support grants, and it cannot afford complete school uniforms. As a result, a learner may feel like an outcast if not wearing the same as other learners”. (SCW1)

“You would find learners being affected by family problems, maybe the lack of food and clothes, and comparing themselves to others. Consequently, it can bother a learner and it can eventually disturb them from schoolwork because they would

observe how others are dressing, especially on Friday when it's a casual day they would be checking how good others are dressing and it is because of poverty. I used to also find parents emphasizing that there is not enough food at home because grant money cannot afford enough groceries". (SCW2)

The findings revealed that poverty is another barrier to learning as some learners go to school without eating and they cannot afford to buy proper school uniforms. They also show that learners compare themselves with those who can afford to carry lunch boxes and do not eat in the school feeding scheme. The findings agree with a study conducted by Munaka (2016), which states that a learner who is hungry and fatigued will frequently become unfocused, which affects learning.

Mudau (2004) adds that learners who go to school hungry have emotional difficulties that impair their learning and growth. They experience emotional problems which affect school performance (DoE, 2010). Furthermore, the Department of Education (2010) concurs that learners who are poor experience stigma and discrimination because they cannot afford proper school uniform and other learning materials.

Sub-theme 1.2: Identification of learners with barriers to learning

This sub-theme reports on how educators identify learners encountering barriers to learning. It has two categories which outlines various indicators to the educators.

Category 1.2.1. Deterioration of schoolwork performance

When educators were asked about how they identified learners, they responded as follows:

"Their Performance starts to drop, if they were bright learners that are good in subjects like mathematics, science, or any other subjects eventually we find their Performances dropping generally. That is how we notice that there might be a problem but most of them cannot speak to us as learners because even us as teachers sometimes we cannot get to the bottom of the matter since we are not specialists on that aspect". (ED1).

Category 1.2.2. Behavioural changes (withdrawal, self-neglect)

In this category, the participants showed their ways of identifying learners with barriers to learning. Participants' responses were captured as follows:

“Sometimes their behaviour changes and maybe the learner was an obedient and understanding learner at school, but now he is doing the opposite. You can see the changes in the learner, maybe he was a neat person, but he is no longer taking care of himself. They used to participate but he is no longer participating, or he was quiet but apparently, he is noisy and says irrelevant things”. (ED1)

“Learner withdraws from peers; you find him or her sitting alone not with other learners. Sometimes we are able to identify learners with barriers to learning because they will be frequently absent from school and also by irregular attendance they come today, tomorrow they don't come. Some learners eventually drop out and that serves as an indicator that there is a problem”. (ED2).

Findings indicate that educators at the selected schools still used intuition to identify learners who encounter barriers to learning that are prevalent at their school. Findings also indicated that educators are able to identify learners encountering barriers to learning by observing changes in the learner's performance and behaviours. These findings agree with the DoE (2010) with respect to how educators can identify learners with barriers to learning. The DoE stated that learners' school performance deteriorates or starts to perform poorly. Learners are frequently late or absent from schools, and or completing their schoolwork on time.

Furthermore, Mkhuma (2012:62) indicated that “changes in behaviour including hostility, anxiety, or moodiness; evident neglect of personal cleanliness and attire; lack of interest in activities or withdrawal from relationships with other learners may serve as indicators that the learner is experiencing barriers to learning”. Mudau (2004) argues that a learner who experiences barriers to learning makes himself/herself known because he/she

appears, acts or behaves differently from what is normally the case. This suggests that barriers to learning are within the learner.

Sub-theme 1.3: The effects of barriers to learning on learners

This sub-theme reports on the effects of barriers on learner school performance. These barriers prevent learners from completing their tasks and from moving forward and being successful. It is evident from the data that barriers faced by that learner had a negative impact on their school performance. In instances where the participants outlined common revelations, data saturation was considered to manage data properly. A significant number of participants said the following during the focus groups discussions:

“It disturbed me a lot because I was a bright student always in the top 10 and top 5 but then my performance dropped. When I get to grade 10, I was no longer prioritizing my schoolwork and no longer participating in class, I was even failing easy things. I was no longer studying because my attention was on alcohol and partying with friends”. (FP7).

“I was no longer studying since I was always with my friends’ attending parties and it is the same reason why I am repeating grade 12. I used to just write exams without even studying, I would just answer 2 questions out of 10 questions and be the first one to finish writing, and the consequence of it is that I failed all subjects including my home language "Tshivenda". (FP14)

“When I was pregnant, I would sometimes miss classes since I had to go to the clinic for antenatal care. I was no longer studying, I was failing all the subjects, and even now I am repeating grade 12 because of that”. (FP2)

“I was no longer paying attention to teachers because my mind was always thinking about a lot of work I would have when I get home, like cooking, and sometimes would not do some homework, eventually I was even failing tests”. (FP4)

“The girl I impregnated had to quit school and it caused me stress because I was wondering if she will ever be able to come back to school and continue with her

studies. It affected my studies because I couldn't concentrate also thinking of how I have ruined her future". (FP18)

"Because I was an addict, I was missing another period because sometimes I would be smoking during those period slots. Sometimes I would be available in the class but not paying attention because I would be thinking about the profit, that I would make out of selling cigarettes". (FP16)

"Smoking also disturbed my studies, because whenever I get money, I used to think of buying cannabis and when I come back to class, I would find a teacher already ahead, when it was time to write I used to be clueless about what to write because when others were getting lessons I would not be around". (FP3)

"I was no longer writing my homework, but I used to just pay others to write for me and I was failing". (FP1)

"It affected my marks a lot because bullying made me think I am old enough to even disrespect my teachers and I think after that they never marked my scripts like others; they were very strict when marking my scripts because of my behaviour". (FP4)

The findings revealed that barriers to learning encountered by learners affect their academic performance in one way or another. They miss classes, leading some of them to fail, and had to repeat the grade. This shows that the effects of barriers to learning have severe consequences on the child's academic and personal life and are risky because learners end up missing class time and subsequently dropping out of the system (DoE, 2010). Learners end up being dropouts because they cannot cope with the pressure of work that has been missed.

Theme 2: Contemporary measures to address barriers to learning

This theme outlines one sub-theme with one category and four sub-categories. The sub-theme focuses on measures of addressing barriers to learning. The sub-theme in this category includes the role played by social workers in terms of services that they provide in addressing barriers to learning.

Sub-theme 2.1: Social workers' roles and services in addressing barriers to learning.

Category 2.1.1 Support to learners using social work methods

Social workers have a defined function to play in the educational system when it comes to helping learners get past obstacles to learning that they are facing. Therefore, the sub-categories drawn below relay the participants' understanding of their roles and services in addressing barriers to learning. This includes support to learners on individual level and through group work, providing psychosocial services, conducting educational talks, and linkage with other service providers.

Sub-category 2.1.1.1 Support to learners on individual level and through group work

The participants indicated that they offer support to learners who experience barriers. This was described by social workers in this way:

"I use case work to an individual, for instance, if a pregnant learner is being bullied by her classmates, I sit down with her and I tell her that it happens, being pregnant is not the end of school you can still concentrate and makes it.... I also do group work, especially If I see that there are many learners with the same problem for instants, I will gather all learners who smoke and talk to them, trying to find out reasons why they are smoking. We also take about the consequences of substance abuse and the impact of abusing substances on academic and personal life...I also conduct groups with pregnant learners were talk about the challenges they are facing and their coping skills. With them was more of a support group". (SCW 2).

"I provide counselling to learners so that they can accept the situation they find themselves in. I would counsel learner(s) that cannot accept the home poverty situation, we used to sit and talk that they should not focus on the situation at home for it is not their poverty their future is in their hands. If you focus too much on the parent's poverty it means you will also experience the same poverty". (SCW2)

Findings show that social workers support learners at an individual level and through group work. This finding is supported by Masilo (2019), who avers that social worker can provide counseling using these methods. Kemp (2014) concurs counseling is one of the responsibilities of school social workers. VanSittert and Wilson (2019) indicate that Individual counseling aids learners in recognizing their issues, while group work assists them in handling specific situations. Individual sessions may assist the learner to change their behaviour and make him/her aware that what they are doing is unacceptable. For instance, if they are bullying others.

Sub-category 2.1.1.2 Provide psychosocial services to learners

Sometimes barriers faced by learners affect them emotionally to a point where they depress them and lead them to have suicidal thoughts. So, social workers assist learners to improve their social functioning. Participants feel that they had to be supportive of learners who were not receiving from family. This was described by a participant in the following way:

“I provide psychosocial counselling to learners that cannot accept their situation and cannot cope with the situation they are facing which affects them emotionally. I once has a case, where a learner was pregnant and she was not getting support from home, and on top of that the boyfriend was in the same class and he was saying that the pregnancy is not his...the boyfriend found a new girlfriend in the same class and that whole thing was depressing the pregnant learner, I had to talk to her because she was not coping at all. I had to assist her to understand her situation and teach her to cope with the situation. Also became she had no support system neither the so-called boyfriend nor her family was not supportive”. (SW2).

Findings show that learners received psychosocial counselling and support from social workers for them to accept and cope with the situation they are in, and to enhance their social functioning. These findings are in line with Potgieter (1998), who avers that the counsellor’s role is to restore the social functioning of a client by assisting them to understand their situation and educate them how to deal with the challenging situation. Potgieter (1998) further indicated that the counsellor offers support to the client system.

Moreover, the findings are also supported by Zastrow (2017), who indicates that the counsellor's role essentially involves the use of therapeutic techniques to address social issues and to improve learners' social functioning.

Sub-category 2.1.1.3 conduct educational talks

Learners sometimes experience barriers because they lack knowledge and are not aware of the consequences of their actions or behaviour. Participants mentioned that they do not only educate learners who have been affected, but also even those who are not affected as a preventative measure. Those who are affected are educated with the hope that they will be aware of the consequences, especially those who are bully and abusing substances. The participants also educate the learners to impact the skills and knowledge that will enhance their life and be able to accept and cope with their situations. Participants said the following:

“I used to also educate them about things they do not know about teenage pregnancy, I would tell them all the steps that they should go to clinics, and they used to listen though they used to keep it secret. However, I used to know from the nurses if there is a pregnant learner because they used to go to the clinic for a check-up, and thereafter nurses would give me the names of those pregnant learners and then I go to the class to find them, and conduct group works with them”. (SCW1)

“I also educate people through awareness campaigns for instance on substance abuse, where I try to teach the impacts of substance abuse and I sometimes invite people who were addicts and have recovered so that they share their experience and warn them that abusing substances can even lead them to jail. Sometimes I even request prisoners, so that they can tell their stories on how they started by drinking things they can't afford and ended up committing a crime such as hijacking people so that they can satisfy their bodies by those drinks”. (SCW2)

Findings show that social workers equip learners who are experiencing barriers to learning with knowledge and skills that will enable them to overcome the barriers. These

findings are in line with Zastrow (2010:71), who avers that the “role of the educator involves giving information and teaching them adaptive skills”.

Sub-category 2.1.1.4 Linkage to other relevant service providers

There are other social work services that school social workers cannot render fully. If they cannot render a certain service, they refer the case to the relevant stakeholder or service provider. Participants mention that they work hand in hand with other service providers such as area social workers, psychologists and health professionals. When a learner is experiencing barriers that need further attention, they would refer them:

“There are cases that I had to refer to the area social workers so that they can take it further, for instance, in the case of poverty I refer so that they can assist the child to get food parcels from the Department of Social Development (DSD)”. SCW2

“If I see that the learner is addicted to a substance and I tried to intervene, but my intervention is not working, I refer him to the area social worker, who will see how to help the learner and if he needs rehab the area social worker will arrange everything”. (SCW1)

Findings indicated that school social workers cannot render all social work services because there are other obstacles to learning that need to be removed by other professionals. The findings show that those social workers refer learners to the relevant personnel that can assist them. These findings are in line with Zastrow’s (2017) argument that brokers link clients with community resources.

Theme 3: Measures required to improve current social work services offered to learners experiencing barriers to learning

This theme addresses the enhancement of social work services as in terms of participants’ responses. Therefore, the sub-theme below unpacks the enhancement of social work services outlined by participants of the study. This includes collaboration, participation and involvement of other stakeholders.

Sub-theme 3.1: Collaboration with other stakeholders

The participants indicated that it is important to collaborate with other professionals to render effective social work services to learners encountering barriers to learning. The subsequent responses provide details of the accounts of the participants during the interviews:

“Social workers do not work alone; they have to work with other professionals to assist in addressing barriers. Collaborating with police officers would help if they can come and talk to learners about the consequences of abusing substances and prison life because it makes a difference if it is the police talking than if it's me a social worker because learners fear the police though nowadays learners are not like then learners who fear police officers... and that will be a good thing if they can come at the beginning of every quarter. It will be also good to work with nurses from the local clinics so that they can talk to learners about any health topic of their choice, such as personal hygiene, when it's breast cancer month they would talk to learners about breast cancer, teenage pregnancy broadly, HIV/AIDS and other things that the social worker cannot address fully. Psychologists as well so that they can provide any learners that need any psychological support”. (SCW1)

“Collaborating with other professionals will be very helpful as you know that there are some barriers that are out of our scope of work and also others, we can intervene to a certain point which would need someone to take over...Collaborating with other professionals will help the learners to get all they need without limitation as a social worker I would know who or where to refer my learners and know that they would be assisted without being sent from one pillar to another. Collaborating with other professionals will help us to render effective social work services to learners”. (SCW2)

Findings indicate that collaboration between school social workers and other professionals is necessary as there are other barriers that need to be addressed by someone else other than social workers. Findings also show that collaboration can help reduce or remove some of the barriers faced by learners. These findings are in agreement with Kemp (2014), who affirms that collaboration with other professionals helps school

social workers identify learners who need services for school social work. School social workers collaborate with other members of staff to share their expertise and to incorporate the abilities of others to aid a learner with barriers to learning. VanSittert (2016:25) supports this by stating that “the school social worker also collaborates with specialists like psychologists, physicians and psychiatrists”.

Category 3.1.1. Parental involvement

The participants indicated that the involvement of parents will enhance the services provided and may reduce or eliminate barriers to learning. The participants said the following regarding parental involvement:

“Parents have responsibility for making sure that if their child leaves home in the morning saying he is going to school, he is really going to school. Parents should not leave all responsibilities to the teachers. If parents see their child taking a weapon to school, they should not allow that child to leave home with it and said the teacher will see what to do when he gets there with a weapon. In other words, am saying that parents should get involved in their children’s education. Parents should ensure that a learner does not go out with a weapon, and they should put all weapons safely, if they have guns at home, they should make sure are locked in a safe place. A learner is not only a teacher’s responsibility but also a parent’s responsibility and parents should ensure that a learner is going to school to learn and not disturb or bully other learners at school”. (SCW1)

“Parents have an important role to play in their child’s life whether personal or academic life. They need to be always aware of what is happening in their child’s life. Provide time to spend with their child and go to school to check on their child’s academic performance... if parents are involved so of those barriers won’t even be existing and some would be easy be addressed if they are involved. Do you know what’s painful? Some parents don’t even reply to invitations from teachers or social workers, and those who do would say they have no idea how to teach, forcing teachers to do it. Some would say learners are educators’ responsibilities when they are in school, so they don’t get involved in what happens during school hours. ... What I have noticed is that some learners get involved in substance just

because they seek the attention of their parents. So, I think if they work with us, we will be able to overcome some of the barriers as some just need their involvement". (SCW2)

From the findings, it is evident that the that parental involvement in their children's education is very significant. Parents are their children's first teachers as they grow up. One of the contributing causes to the learning obstacles that students must overcome may be their lack of enthusiasm and involvement in their children's education. The findings are supported by the White Paper 6 (2001), which states that effective learning and development depend on parents participating actively in the teaching and learning process.

Mkhuma (2012) concurs that parents are viewed partners alongside teachers and other professionals in ensuring appropriate education for children. If parents are not interested in their children's learning, and their involvement is not facilitated and promoted, their children's learning will suffer (DOE, 2010). Tuswa (2016) is also of the opinion that if children do not receive the requisite encouragement from their parents to achieve their goals, successful learning is threatened and hampered.

Theme 4: Participants' views on the influence of social work services to address barriers to learning

This theme addresses participants' views on the influence of social work services on barriers to learning as per learners', educators' and social workers' responses. Therefore, there are sub-themes drawn below to unpack the participants 'views on the influence of social work services as outlined by participants of this study. Therefore, three categories emanated from this sub-theme, namely, changes in the learner's behaviour, improved school performance, the ability to cope with school activities and life challenges are discussed below.

Sub-theme: 4.1: Changes in learners' behaviour

All participants (learners) said they have received social work services. These services had a positive influence on their lives. In some instances, where the participants outlined common revelations, data saturation was considered to manage the data properly.

The following are responses from learners in terms of the influence of social work services in their lives. The participants' responses are quoted as follows:

"It is a positive influence because I was able to change, I started to respect my teachers, and I was able to perform better again in schoolwork, I became competitive again was in the top 5, and reunited with my parents at home".

"They were helpful to me because I was able to change my life before I could quit school and become a street kid".

"It helped me to differentiate between good friends from bad friends, it helped to choose good friends, also to make the right decisions, and be able to say no to what I did not like and yes to what I like".

"At first, I was not seeing any influence but as time goes by, I started to see a role they were playing because they helped me to deal with situations and know how to handle issues. If it weren't for the social worker, I do not know where I would be".

"I think they are helpful because what I was doing then could have landed me in jail but when I spoke with social workers, they told me that I can change my life and I am a good person now".

"Social worker helped because I started to gain confidence again, I started to enjoy everything happening to my life".

"The social worker helped a lot because I started to feel free at school and no longer scared of bullies after receiving social work services. The social worker also spoke to those who were bullying me, and they stopped. I also started to perform well again".

"The social work services that I received helped me to deal with situations I was in and now I know how to handle issues if I come across one".

Yes, because teenage pregnancy and bullying were mitigated because of social work services rendered".

“What I found is that, having a social worker at school had a great influence because teenage pregnancy high rate was decreasing, and the substance abuse rate also decreased... Learners started to fear doing things that are not school related since there was someone just dealing with these issues, particularly unlike teachers who would just touch a little on the issue or not even attend to the problem the learner is facing. I still remember there was a year they did very well in grade 12 results, I think the pass rate was 98% and I saw there are changes”. (SCW2).

“I think they are very vital because as educators, we are not prepared to handle social problems even if we see that the learner is having some challenges there is nothing much we can do, but social workers can influence learners to change their behaviours to good behaviours, they can also coach, counsel, and advice. Having a social worker in our school helped so much because the rate of teenage pregnancy, substance abuse, and bullying was very low. Even learners were enjoying the sessions they had with the social worker... They would attend all the group sessions”. (ED1)

Sub-theme 4.2: Improved school performance

“Social work changed my life because I became a focused learner, I developed a love and care for my child, my parents were also helping me to raise the child, and my academic performance improved”. (FP20).

“Social worker helped a lot because after listening to her I then decided to stop smoking weed and start to focus on my studies and if it wasn't for the social worker I wouldn't be here.” (FP8)

“Social workers helped me because they helped me to find a new school after being fired and also helped me to concentrate on my schoolwork again”. (FP1)

As a school, we saw that the services that were rendered worked when our matric pass rate was 98%. It is important to have social workers at school so that learners do not go and seek help outside school”. (ED1)

Sub-theme 4.3: The ability to cope with life challenges

"Social work services helped me because now I can cope with any stressful event and am able to understand whatever situation am facing will eventually pass".

(FP6)

"I went to a social worker because of teenage pregnancy, she spoke to me and I got to understand that it happened but life has to go on even though I had a child when I was still a teenager that does not stop me from achieving my dream". (FP5)

"They helped me because if it wasn't for social work services I would not be here, I now have a good future ahead of me". (FP3)

"Social worker helped because I started to gain confidence again, I started to everything happening to my life". The social worker helped me through my pregnancy and was disturbing my schoolwork. Because I wanted to abort the child, but social workers helped me to understand, accept my situation, and to ignore what people say. I realised it's not right to abort a gift given by God". (FP11)

"Social work services are important as they restore the love of school through counselling.... They help learners to cope with school and social problems. Those services make teaching easy for us as we only focus on learning and teaching".

(ED2)

Social workers' responses based on the impact of social work services on the barrier to learning were captured as follows:

"They help learners, especially learners who are vulnerable such as learners from child-headed households and those who are staying with the elderly. Learners have a sense of belonging knowing that they have someone to talk to.... Those services offload a lot of burden on the teachers, as I have mentioned before those teachers should not spend much time dealing with learners facing barriers but if there are social workers a teacher will focus on teaching because the social worker will be dealing with learners' issues. Parents also benefit from these services, as they help them to deal with the challenges they have with their children".

(SCW1)

Findings show that social work services had a positive influence on learners. This shows that after receiving services, their lives changed for the better. The findings also revealed that some learners overcome the barriers, and others were able to cope with them. Van Sittert and Wilson (2018) mentioned that school social workers provide comprehensive support and services issues affecting all learners' social, emotional, intellectual, and physical needs. The effectiveness of social work services should be demonstrated by rising learner outcomes in the areas of academic success, physical and psychological safety, better mental and behavioural health, improved attendance, socio-emotional competencies, and family and community involvement.

4.5 SUMMARY

This chapter presented the research data on the exploration of social work services that address barriers to learning in Sibasa Circuit public schools. Focus groups and one-on-one interviews were employed to gather the data, and the researcher used interview schedules to guide the interviews with research participants. The interviews revealed that learners are facing barriers to learning that prevent them to succeed in their education. Different professionals need to work together to address barriers to learning that learners are experiencing. Parents must be urged to support and care for their children by being made aware of their responsibility for their education.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The study explored the social work services that address barriers to learning in public schools in Sibasa Circuit, Vhembe District. This study was conducted using a qualitative approach to explore social work services towards addressing barriers to learning in public schools. Using the use of purposive sampling, twenty-four participants who met the inclusion criteria were chosen. Data was collected through semi-structured one-one interviews and focus group discussions using an interview schedule. Every session was audio recorded, and the recordings were verbatim transcribed. The data were analyzed and coded using thematic analysis, and the results were contrasted with the information from the literature review. Four main themes emerged from the coding of the data. Findings were presented. To address the research topic, the study has proposed the following objectives:

- ❑ To establish views of learners regarding their understanding of barriers to learning.
- ❑ To describe types of barriers to learning encountered by learners in public schools.
- ❑ To identify social work measures used to address barriers to learning.
- ❑ To assess the influence of social work services in addressing social barriers to learning in public schools.

5.2 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The researcher interviewed two educators, two social workers, and twenty learners from two selected schools, and analysed data collated and collected. The research questions served as the process' guiding principles, and the researcher made sure that the data participants supplied was pertinent to the study question. The themes that arose from the data analysis are used to offer an overview of the results. The following themes emerged: participants' understanding of barriers to learning, which include definitions and types of barriers to learning, indicators of barriers to learning, and the effect of barriers to learning. The second theme is contemporary measures to address barriers to learning, which

includes social workers' roles and different types of services to learners with barriers to learning. The third theme is measures required to improve the current social work services offered to learners experiencing barriers to learning. The last theme is participants' opinion on the influence of social work services in addressing barriers to learning.

5.2.1 Participants' understanding of barriers to learning

5.2.1.1 Understanding of barriers to learning

Barriers to learning are issues with the educational system, the learning environment, or the learner themselves preventing him/her from accessing learning and growth (DoE, 2010). Visser (2010) concurs that barriers to learning are things that keep learners from benefiting from education. These barriers might be found in the learner themselves, in the educational setting or institution, or within the broader social, economic, and political context. The question that sought the participants' understanding of barriers to learning was answered and the conclusion drawn is that barriers to learning are challenges that disturb learners from learning. Participants of the study understood what barriers to learning are.

5.2.1.2 Types of barriers to learning

The types of barriers to learning identified by the participants include teenage pregnancy, substance abuse, peer pressure, bullying and poverty. The research findings indicated that those types of barriers prevent learners from succeeding academically and impede them from reaching their goals.

Participants (learners) mentioned that teenage pregnancy disturbs their learning as they were facing many challenges such as stress. They had to go to the clinic now and then because they would be sick of routine check-ups. Furthermore, participants reported that the pregnancy created problems between them, their parents, and their boyfriends. This was confirmed by educators who mentioned that learners do miss classes due to sicknesses that are related to pregnancy or when they had to go to clinics for prenatal.

The results from this study revealed that teenage pregnancy disturbs learners academically. The results also reveal that teenage pregnancy does not only affect

learners academically, but also their physical health, mental well-being, and the teen's family of both the boy and the girl. The study's results are consistent with Lethole's (2019) argument that the absence from school is frequently linked to teen pregnancy.

Another type of barrier to learning that emerged during data analysis was substance abuse. The study revealed that learners who abuse substances tend to be unruly. They cannot concentrate anymore. They lose focus on their schoolwork and their disruptive behaviour affects all learners in that specific class. Participants mentioned that the use of substances during school hours disturbs lessons. Participants also reported that in some cases, learners start displaying strange behaviours and do not pay attention to teachers, and they become aggressive towards them after taking substances. The results are consistent with findings from conducted research by Maluleka and Manu (2017:15), which found that "learners who abuse substances misbehave or show negative behaviour such as lack of concentration, disrespect to teachers and other school authorities, physical violence and verbal abuse".

Another type of barrier to learning that emerged during data analysis was bullying. Participants argued that they were used to being bullied by learners, and they would force them to write their homework. Others revealed that the bullies would take their money and their lunch boxes, and if they do not give them what they required, they would beat them. Furthermore, participants mentioned that all this affected their school performance as they would not concentrate and would neglect their own schoolwork. The findings confirm Masilo's (2018) argument that bullying affects the victim, as learners who are victims of bullying may have impaired concentration, decrease in academic performance, skip classes, and can end up leaving school.

The findings revealed that learners influence one another in doing unacceptable behaviour, such as skipping lessons and going to parties during school days. Participants mentioned that they would skip classes and go and sit at tuck shops, and friends would influence them to go to parties during school days. Educators mentioned that learners pressurize other learners to use substances and to disrespect teachers. The findings of the study are in line with the DUhall and Beniwal (2017), who assert that due to peer

pressure, learners do the same things that learners of the same age or social group do to be liked or respected by them, and they may start drinking because of this.

Another type of barrier to learning that emerged during data analysis was poverty. The results showed that poverty is a problem since some learners arrive at school hungry. This interferes with their ability to focus in the classroom. Furthermore, participants reveal that some learners lack proper school uniforms, which leads them to compare themselves with other learners, which affects them psychologically as well as their self-esteem. The findings agree with a study conducted by Munaka (2016), which states that a learner who is hungry and fatigued will frequently become unfocused, which affects learning. Learners who are poor experience stigma and discrimination because they cannot afford proper school uniforms and other learning materials (DoE, 2010).

5.2.1.3 Indicators of barriers to learning

The participants demonstrated that their main area of identification focus was on the learners' performance and behaviour change. They revealed that they recognised learners encountering barriers to learning by the change of their behaviour in class and the dropping of their performance. The findings are supported by Mudau (2004), who states that a learner who experiences barriers to learning makes himself/herself known because he/she appears, acts or behaves differently from what is normally the case.

5.2.1.4 The effect of barriers to learning

Barriers to learning prevent learners from completing their tasks and from moving forward and being successful. It is evident from the data the barriers had a negative effect on their school performance. The findings revealed that barriers affect their academic performance in one way or another. This was confirmed by learners when they mentioned that they would miss classes, and that led to some of them failing and having to repeat the grade. It shows that the effects of barriers to learning have severe consequences on the child's academic and personal life and are risky because they end up missing school time and subsequently dropping out of school (DoE, 2010).

5.2.2 Contemporary measures to address barriers to learning.

5.2.2.1 Social workers' roles and different types of services provided to learners with barriers to learning

Participants mentioned that they offer support to learners who experience barriers on an individual level and through group work. Social workers reveal that they provide social work services through group work to learners who are encountering the same barriers to learning. They also reveal that they render individual intervention for a learner that cannot accept or deal with what they are facing. The findings show that social workers support learners on an individual level and through group work. The findings also revealed that participants use casework to learners that cannot cope with the barriers, and group work to those that are facing the same barriers to learning. For example, learners who abuse substances. This finding is supported by VanSittert and Wilson (2019), who aver that individual counselling aids learners in recognizing their issues, while group work assists them in handling specific situations.

Participants revealed that they provide psychosocial counselling to learners that cannot accept their situation and cannot cope with the situation that they are facing, which affects them emotionally. The findings show that learners received psychosocial counselling and support from social workers for them to accept and be able to cope with the situation they are in, and to enhance their social functioning. Van Sittert and Wilson (2018:8) agree that “social workers must provide emotional support to learners as part of their role, and by using their knowledge to establish a supportive environment at schools”.

Participants revealed that they educate learners with barriers to learning. They mentioned that they do not only educate learners who have been affected, but also those who are not affected as a preventative measure. They educate those who are affected with the hope that they will be aware of the consequences, and will stop it, especially those who are abusing substances and bullying. They also educate them to impact the skills and knowledge that will enhance their life and be able to accept and cope with their situation.

The findings show that social workers educate learners with barriers to learning about the consequences of their behaviour. The findings also reveal that learners are educated so that they have the knowledge and skills to deal with barriers. These findings are in line

with Zastrow (2010), who avers that the role of the educator involves giving information and teaching them adaptive skills.

5.2.3 Measures required to improve the current social work services offered to learners experiencing barriers to learning

An element that surfaced during data analysis and was supported by the literature was a collaboration, participation, and involvement of other stakeholders. Participants mentioned that social workers do not work alone, but with other professionals. Furthermore, they indicated that it is important to collaborate with other professionals to render effective social work services to learners encountering barriers to learning. The findings of this study confirmed that collaboration with other professionals can help reduce or remove some of the barriers. The findings are supported by Tariq et al (2020), who affirms that collaboration with other professionals helps school social workers to identify learners who need school social work services.

Parental involvement in children's education is very important. In their children's growth, parents play the role of main educators. Parents are not active in their children's education, according to social workers, and this apathy makes it difficult to effectively address learners' learning hurdles. According to the research's findings, some parents do not participate in their kids' education, attend meetings, or show up at school when asked to talk about their kids' performance.

The findings are confirmed by the Education White Paper 6 (2001), which states that the effective learning and development depend on parents participating actively in the teaching and learning process. The findings of the study also showed that parents leave all responsibilities for their children's education to the teacher. Tuswa (2016) concurs that together with teachers and other professionals, parents are viewed as partners.

5.2.4 Participants' views on the influence of social work services in addressing barriers to learning

Another aspect that emerged during data analysis was the influence of social work services. Participants revealed that the impact of social work services was positive as it helps them deal with barriers that they were facing; and now they can deal with any

challenges that they come across. The finding confirmed that after receiving services, their lives changed for the better and they are able to cope with the barriers to learning.

Van Sittert and Wilson (2018) point out that school social workers provide comprehensive support and services to remove obstacles that affect all learners' social, emotional, academic, and physical requirements. The effectiveness of social work services should show the increasing learner outcomes in terms of academic success, physical and psychological safety, improved mental and behavioural health, improved attendance, socio-emotional skills, and family and community involvement.

5.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study has the following limitations:

- ❑ The study was limited to twenty learners, two educators and two social workers who were purposively selected and sampled from two public secondary schools in Sibasa Circuit in Vhembe District, Limpopo Province. Therefore, the findings of the study cannot be applied to a larger population or other areas as they may not apply to all schools in Vhembe District as the study focused only on the said circuit.
- ❑ The empirical study only used a qualitative technique to collect data, which may have constrained the size of the data set. Mixed-method designs, which combine qualitative and quantitative data, might have been employed to strengthen the insights gained by the complementary approach, produce more complete data, and corroborate the conclusions of the study.
- ❑ There is limited literature in South Africa on social work services that address barriers to learning. As a result, limited recent references could be found.

5.4 CONCLUSION

This study provides a clear picture of the types of barriers to learning experienced by learners and the influence of social work assistance in addressing those barriers. School social workers provide social work services by assisting learners in overcoming their emotional barriers and supporting them individually through group work. This support is done in collaboration with other professionals and the involvement of parents. School

social workers are of the view that with the involvement of parents, some barriers to learning could be prevented or can be detected earlier.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made based on the findings of the study:

5.5.1 Government structures

- The Department of Basic Education should consider appointing school social workers in all provinces to prevent and address barriers to learning experienced by learners.
- The Department of Basic Education should implement crime prevention programmes to school learners to address school violence.
- Teachers should receive adequate training on inclusive education and special education requirements of learners.
- Department of Social Development ought to develop and enhance initiatives aimed at removing barriers to education.
- School social work should be recognised as a specialised field in the social work profession.

5.5.2 Involvement of stakeholders

- Parents should priorities their children's education by being actively involved in their lives, such as by attending parent meetings and paying frequent visits to their children's schools to inquire about their behaviour and academic performance.
- Other stakeholders like communities and church leaders should provide support to learners with barriers to learning.

5.2.3 Future research

- Research can be done on the same topic using different schools. The researcher can sample more respondents who will give more views on the researched topic.

- An information marketing campaign to promote school social work services in the Department of Basic Education may be another potential area for further research

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Ethical Clearance from the University

ETHICS APPROVAL CERTIFICATE

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

NAME OF RESEARCHER/INVESTIGATOR:

Ms T Sikhitha

STUDENT NO:

11530323

PROJECT TITLE: Assessment of Social Work Services towards addressing barriers to learning in Public Schools of Sibasa Circuit, Vhembe District.

ETHICAL CLEARANCE NO: FHSSE/22/SW/01/2403

SUPERVISORS/ CO-RESEARCHERS/ CO-INVESTIGATORS

NAME	INSTITUTION & DEPARTMENT	ROLE
Dr MA Mabasa	University of Venda	Supervisor
Dr MM Mamaleka	University of Venda	Co-Supervisor
Ms T Sikhitha	University of Venda	Investigator – Student

Type: **Masters Research**

Risk: **Minimal risk to humans, animals or environment (Category 2)**

Approval Period: **March 2022 – March 2024**

The Research Ethics Social Sciences 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 forms to the RESC:
 - 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 deviation 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: March 2022

Name of the RESSC Chairperson of the Committee: Prof TS Mashau

Signature




Appendix B: Ethical Clearance from the Department of Education



LIMPOPO
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

CONFIDENTIAL

Ref: 2/2/2

Enq: Makola MC

Tel No: 015 290 9448

E-mail: MakolaMC@edu.limpopo.gov.za

Sikhitha T

Private Bag 5050

Thoyondou

0950

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

1. The above bears reference.
2. The Department wishes to inform you that your request to conduct research has been approved. Topic of the research proposal: **"ASSESSMENT OF SOCIAL WORK SERVICE TOWARDS ADDRESSING BARRIERS TO LEARNING IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF SIBASA CIRCUIT, VHEMBE DISTRICT"**
3. The following conditions should be considered:
 - 3.1 The research should not have any financial implications for Limpopo Department of Education.
 - 3.2 Arrangements should be made with the Circuit Office and the School concerned.
 - 3.3 The conduct of research should not in anyhow disrupt the academic programs at the schools.
 - 3.4 The research should not be conducted during the time of Examinations especially the fourth term.
 - 3.5 During the study, applicable research ethics should be adhered to; in particular the principle of voluntary participation (the people involved should be respected).
 - 3.6 Upon completion of research study, the researcher shall share the final product of the research with the Department.

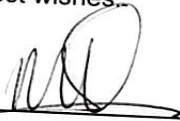
REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH : SIKHITHA T Page 1

Cnr 113 Biccard & 24 Excelsior Street, POLOKWANE, 0700, Private Bag X 9489, Polokwane, 0700
Tel: 015 290 7600/ 7702 Fax 086 218 0560

The heartland of Southern Africa-development is about people

- 4 Furthermore, you are expected to produce this letter at Schools/ Offices where you intend conducting your research as an evidence that you are permitted to conduct the research.
- 5 The department appreciates the contribution that you wish to make and wishes you success in your investigation.

Best wishes



Mashaba KM
DDG: CORPORATE SERVICES

03/06/2022

Date

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH : SIKHITHA T Page 2

Cnr 113 Biccard & 24 Excelsior Street, POLOKWANE, 0700, Private Bag X 9489, Polokwane, 0700
Tel:015 290 7600/ 7702 Fax 086 218 0560

The heartland of Southern Africa-development is about people

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form

My name is Sikhitha Tsireledzo. I am an MSW student at the University of Venda, conducting a study on the assessment of social work services towards addressing barriers to learning in public schools. As part of my research, I would like to discuss with your services that you offer learners experiencing barriers to learning. The discussion will take approximately 45 minutes to an hour. I will require one session with you. You will have access to the interview questions prior the interview, which will be recorded using tape recorder, and thereafter transcribed. You will have access to the transcription in order to verify it. Data generated from the interview will only be used for my study and will not be used for any other purpose without your consent. You are not obliged to participate in the study, and may feel free to withdraw at any time. Your decision not to participate will not disadvantage you in any way. No real names will be used. Every effort will be made to keep your response and data safe. Please be assured that your anonymity and confidentiality will be respected always. You are also expected to maintain the confidentiality of whatever we discuss during the interviews on the assessment of social work services in schools towards addressing barriers to learning.

Thanks for giving consent.

.....

.....

Researcher

Date

.....

.....

Participant

Date

Appendix D: Parents/legal guardian consent form
Dear Parent

My name is Sikhitha Tsireledzo. I am an MSW student at the University of Venda, conducting a study on the assessment of social work services towards addressing barriers to learning in public schools. Your child has been identified as one of the participants of the study. You are kindly requested to give consent for your child to participate voluntarily in the study. You are not forced to allow your child to participate in the study. The discussion will take approximately 45 minutes to an hour. I will require one session with your child. The study will not harm your child in any way and whatever he or she says during the interview will be confidential. Please be assured that your child's anonymity and confidentiality will be respected always.

Thanks for giving consent.

.....

Researcher

.....

Parent signature

.....

Date

.....

Date

Appendix E: Child Assent form

Dear Learner/Child

My name is Sikhitha Tsireledzo. I am an MSW student at the University of Venda, conducting a study on the assessment of social work services towards addressing barriers to learning in public schools. As part of my study, I am expected to collect data from selected participants, and you are one of them. Your best interest as a child is paramount in decisions that affect you to make a choice and to agree to participate in writing if you choose to do so. As a child, proper written permission should have been obtained from parents or legal guardians for you to be approached and invited to participate. This consent is obtained from you after your parents have given and signed permission for you to participate.

I am investigating a problem that is relevant to you in relation to barriers to learning in public schools. The study poses no risks of harm as I will not reveal your information as a participant to avoid embarrassment and psychological harm. I will not harm you emotionally or physically. I will be sensitive to you as a participant and will make referrals to other social workers and psychologists in cases where you are harmed emotionally and psychologically. This includes your acceptance and permission from your parent(s). You are protected from abuse and neglect. Where a case of abuse is identified, the matter will be reported to the area social worker or a nearby police station. The collection of data will take place at your school through individual and group interviews. You are kindly invited to take part in the study. The session will take approximately 45 minutes to an hour. You are kindly requested to read and sign the child assent form provided to you. Your participation is voluntary and anonymous.

Thanks for agreeing to participate.

.....

Researcher

.....

Date

.....

Learner signature

.....

Date

Appendix F: Declaration of consent

Iagree to participate in this research. I declare and understand that the process of participation is totally voluntary. My real name will not be used in any write-up and my response will be treated with confidentiality. I am also expected to maintain the confidentiality of whatever we discuss during the interviews on the assessment of social work services in schools towards addressing barriers to learning. I also understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time. This will not result in any form of disadvantage. Information will be collected by means of interview schedules. I therefore give permission to voluntarily participate in this research study with the following understanding of my rights as a participant:

- I cannot be forced to participate in this study.
- I have the right to withdraw from the study at any given time.
- I have the right to decline to answer any question(s) I am not comfortable with.
- I will remain anonymous, and my name and identity will be kept from public knowledge.
- Any information I reveal during the process of this study should remain confidential, and should only be used for the purposes of this study and for publication.
- I grant permission for any information I reveal during the interview process, with the understanding that data collected will remain in possession of the researcher and her supervisor.

Signature Participant: _____ Date: _____

Appendix G: Interview Schedule Educators

Section A: Profiling the participants.

- Age:
- Gender:
- Profession:
- Working experience:

Section B: Interviewing questions

1. As a teacher, what is your understanding of barriers to learning?
2. What types of barriers to learning are you generally aware of?
3. Which barriers to learning are prevalent at this school?
4. How do you identify learners with barriers to learning?
5. What is your view of the value of social work services rendered to learners experiencing barriers to learning?

Social workers

Section A: Profiling the participants

- Age:
- Gender:
- Profession:
- Working experience:

Section B: Interviewing questions

1. As a social worker, what types of barriers to learning are commonly reported to you?
2. What are your roles in addressing barriers to learning?
3. Which social work intervention measures are you currently applying to address barriers to learning?
4. What measures are required to improve the current social work services offered to learners experiencing barriers to learning?
5. What are the impacts of social work services on barriers to learning?

Learners: Focus group discussion questions

Section A: Profiling the participants

- Age:
- Gender:
- Grade:

Section B: Interviewing questions

1. What is your understanding of barriers to learning?
2. What types of barriers to learning did you experience?
3. What types of barriers to learning are commonly experienced by learners at this school?
4. How do barriers to learning affect your school performance?

5. Have you ever been subjected to social work services due to barriers to learning?
If yes, substantiate your experiences
6. What impact did the social work services have in your life?
7. In your own view, do you think social work services are effectively addressing barriers to learning?

Appendix H: Editorial letter



Stand 507 Caledon village, Email: kubayijoe@gmail.com, Cell 0794848449

01 February 2023

Dear Sir/Madam

SUBJECT: EDITING OF DISSERTATION

This is to certify that the manuscript entitled 'Assessment of social work services towards addressing barriers to learning in public schools in Sibasa Circuit, Vhembe District' by Tsireledzo Sikhitha has been copy-edited, and that unless further tampered with, I am content with the quality of the dissertation in terms of its adherence to editorial principles of consistency, cohesion, clarity of thought and precision.

Kind regards



Prof. SJ Kubayi (DLitt et Phil)