

**HIGH SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAMS' MECHANISMS FOR
SUPPORTING VULNERABLE LEARNERS IN THEIR
ACADEMIC WORK**

by

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DECLARATION

I, 'Mampaqqa Anna Hlojeng, am declaring that this study conveyed in this doctoral degree document **(HIGH SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAMS' MECHANISMS FOR SUPPORTING VULNERABLE LEARNERS IN THEIR ACADEMIC WORK)**, deferred to the Department of Postgraduate Studies: Education, in the Faculty of Humanities at Central University of Technology, Free State, is my own self-dependent effort which had not been hitherto submitted to any university. It has been taken to plagiarism test, thus, efforts were done to acknowledge the resources.

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CERTIFICATION

The signatories below are certifying and recommending to Central University of Technology, Free State the acceptance of this Doctoral thesis by 'Mampaqqa Anna Hlojeng titled **High School Management Teams' Mechanisms for Supporting Vulnerable Learners in their Academic Work** in fulfilment of the request for the Doctor of Education in the Faculty of Humanities, Department of Postgraduate Studies: Education

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I dedicate this thesis to various people as outline below:

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the mechanisms used by high school management teams (SMT) to support vulnerable learners in their academic work. The study's five central objectives are: to examine the challenges that necessitate high school management teams to support vulnerable learners in their academic work, evaluate the solutions which school management teams put in place to support vulnerable learners in their academic work, discuss the conditions under which the high school management teams' mechanisms depend on in supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work, anticipate the plausible threats that could hinder high school management teams' mechanisms for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work, and to examine indicators of success in the support offered to vulnerable learners in their academic work. This research's theoretical framework is drawn from the Contingency (situational) theory in the operationalisation of the afore-mentioned objectives. The research is founded in the interpretive research paradigm and deep-rooted in a qualitative research design. Data was collected from three high schools in Lesotho and three from South Africa through focus groups and in-depth interviews. Seventy-six participants were purposively selected, comprising of two Principals, three Deputy Principals, twenty three Heads of the Departments (HoDs), twelve teachers and thirty six vulnerable learners. The collected qualitative data was analysed through thematic analysis. An empirical data confirmed the out-of-school and in-school challenges that necessitated high school management teams to support vulnerable learners in their schoolwork. Several home factors, such as poverty, health needs, rape, overcrowded accommodation, separated siblings, family relations, inadequate safety measures, child labour and unacceptable social behaviour of vulnerable learners contribute towards the academic underachievement of vulnerable learners; hence necessitated the SMTs in supporting vulnerable learners. Again, the study notes that school-based factors that include school administration and admission criteria, shortage of instructional materials, financial problems, teachers and teaching-related factors, teachers' attitude towards vulnerable learners, absenteeism and failure to implement plans and policies affect the vulnerable learners. Various support mechanisms are placed to lessen these challenges that emerged from the study. These include using boarding accommodation for vulnerable learners who have home problems; the provision of

help to learners by principals and teachers; allowing vulnerable learners to pay fees not only with cash but with other forms such as food grains and domestic animals; offering counselling sessions to vulnerable learners; implementation of school-based book rental scheme strategy; and executing a school curriculum that is accommodative to vulnerable learners. As way forward, stakeholders said they would set plans and policies and implement them. The study notes that success of the above solutions depends on the following conditions: a dedicated team; unifying vision; prioritisation and priorities; collaborative planning; policy provision; appropriate facilities, infrastructure and resources and monitoring and reflection. However, there are plausible threats that are anticipated to hinder high school management teams' mechanisms in supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work. These anticipated threats are: absence of the established coordinating team; lack of vision; risks that may hinder the procedure of priorities; threats to collaborative planning, threats to policy provision, limitations to appropriate facilities, infrastructure and resources and threats to monitoring and reflection. Nonetheless, the study notes that there are indicators of success in supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work which were employed during conduction of this study. These successful support mechanisms are: the positive role of a dedicated team in supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work; the impact of the vision; prioritisation and priorities functioning; collaborative planning; the importance of the policy provision; the significance of appropriate facilities, infrastructures and resources and successful monitoring and reflection.

This study concludes that stakeholders that are dedicated, visionary, who prioritise, collaborate, guided by policies, have appropriate facilities, infrastructure and resource, monitor and reflect on academic outcomes, enable the vulnerable learners to improve in their academic activities and achieve better results. This study recommends an active economy, an improved healthcare system in poor neighbourhoods, and the implementation of poverty alleviation programmes in poor communities. In addition, internal and external stakeholders must work together and utilise all available resources optimally to fulfil educational goals of learners from all socioeconomic categories.

Key words: academic work, school management teams, support mechanisms, vulnerable learners.

LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ARVs	Antiretrovirals
CGPU	Children and Gender Protection Unit
COSC	Cambridge Overseas School Certificate
COVID-19	Corona Virus Disease of 2019
DCS	District Council Secretary
DoE	Department of Education
ECoL	Examination Council of Lesotho
EHP	Extended Hours Programmes
FPE	Free Primary Education
GCE	General Certificate of Education
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HoD	Head of Department
IQ	Intelligence Quotient
JC	Junior Certificate
LBECP	Lesotho Basic Education Curriculum Policy
LePHIA	Lesotho Population-based HIV Impact Assessment
LGBTQI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex people
LGCSE	Lesotho General Certificate of Secondary Education
LPPA	Lesotho Planned Parenthood Association
LUNDAP	Lesotho United Development Assistance Plan
MoET	Ministry of Education and Training

MoF	Ministry of Finance
MoSD	Ministry of Social Development
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NPOVC	National Policy on Orphans and Vulnerable Children
OVC	Orphans and Vulnerable Children
RCL	Representative Council of Learners
SA	South Africa
SADC	Southern African Development Countries
SBM	Site-Base management
SB	School Board
SBST	School Based Support Team
SBSTT	School Based Support Team Teachers
SCO	Sisters of Charity of Ottawa
SGB	School Governing Body
SMT	School Management Team
SRC	Students Representative Council
STIs	Sexually Transmitted Infections
TRSB	Teacher Representative in School Board
UK	United Kingdom

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

This research explores mechanisms used by high school management teams (SMTs) to support vulnerable learners in their academic work. This study is guided by the challenges that justify the need for high school management teams to support vulnerable learners in their academic work. The study also addresses the solutions to those challenges, conditions, threats and indicators of success in supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work. As a result, this chapter discusses the background of this study, statement of the problem, research questions, aim, objectives and the significance of the study.

1.2 Background of the study

Vulnerable children are children who, because of death, have one or no parent at all, lack elementary necessities to survive, live in high-risky conditions, and whose prospects for health, growth and development are seriously impaired (Hlojeng & Makura, 2020). Mostly, these impacts are as result of HIV/AIDS (Hlojeng & Palmer, 2021) and lately due to the Corona Virus (COVID-19) pandemic (Bessell, 2022). For this study, vulnerable learners are orphans (paternal, maternal, double and social) affected and/or infected by the COVID-19 and HIV/AIDS and whose fees are paid for by different bursary schemes because of their family upbringing that is socio-economically underprivileged. Globally, the situation in schools is such that, 5.7% of learners are not vulnerable while 68.0% are vulnerable, 22.7% more vulnerable and 3.7% are the most vulnerable and they also confirm that schools' underperformance is fuelled mostly by the growing numbers of vulnerable learners (Hlojeng & Makura, 2022).

South African schools have various vulnerable learners and some of these are unable to achieve academically because of the impact of social and economic

issues, violence and being or living in child-headed families (Bialobrzeska, Randell, hellmann, and Winkler & 2012). The government has made several interventions intended to improve education and yet, vulnerable learners in schools found in rural areas remain to receive low quality education that is characterised by high failure rate unlike their urban colleagues in South Africa (Myende, 2014). It is anticipated that, the unfavourable conditions of rural South African schools are linked with vulnerable learners' academic underachievement.

The United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF) (2003) noted that Lesotho has reported prevalence higher than was ever thought possible among the sub-Saharan countries. Kimane and Mohale (2007) also state that the state in Lesotho is worsening and predicting that it will remain the same in the coming decades because, as noted by Lesotho Population-based HIV Impact Assessment (LePHIA, 2017), there are at least 13 000 adolescents and young people who are newly infected annually. This implies that statistics of vulnerable children in Lesotho grow daily. It also implies that the rapid spread of the HIV/AIDS and lately COVID-19 pandemics, continues to fuel the numbers of vulnerable children because the parents' death from the pandemic leaves the children without the important networks of protection provided by their parents.

The UNICEF Lesotho Humanitarian Situation Report (2016) also reveals that there existed 310015 affected teenagers, 69 000 vulnerable children in need of social safety nets, 534 508 who were at risk of food insecurity and at least 725 000 children who were likely to be affected. The above-noted the prevalence statistics are important in that they include the school age population which is the focus of this study. After introduction of Free Primary Education (FPE) in 2000, Lesotho experienced increased learners' enrolment at post-primary schools. However, the retention of learners' enrolments in post-primary schools is challenged by vulnerable learners' repetition, their high absenteeism and the 28.2% drop out rate noted as the result of fee policies that lower access for education among the poorest families (Lesotho Basic Education Curriculum Policy (LBECF), 2021). Mosia (2022) adds that for many Basotho school aged children, post primary education is the most inaccessible level of education because of high costs for parents and its opportunity

skews towards those in the better wealth quintiles, as parents or guardians from low wealth quintiles cannot afford the fees.

Underperformance of Lesotho vulnerable learners tracked from 2007 when the government started supporting them in post-primary schools where only 20% of them passed Form E (Hlojeng & Makura, 2022) and more than 50% of them repeated grades in 2019 (MoSD, 2020). Furthermore, vulnerable learners in Lesotho who were already suffering from extreme poverty endured by COVID-19 in two years as high data costs and scarcity of gadgets among others led to vulnerable learners' failure in their schoolwork (Sengai, Mokhele & Makumane, 2022).

Based on the background above, this study seeks to explore the high school management teams' mechanisms for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work as this implies that there is a need to revisit the educational system and reestablish how vulnerable learners can be supported.

1.3 Statement of the problem

As the background of this study above confirms, vulnerable learners underachieve in schools (Ministry of Education and Training [MoET] 2013; Hlojeng, 2014; Pillay, 2017; Motsa & Morojele, 2019; Ministry of Social Develop [MoSD] 2020). This is also noted by Hlojeng and Makura (2020) in their observation that higher percentage of vulnerable learners is underprivileged thus impacting negatively on their academic work. These negative effects include frequently unexplained absenteeism from school contributing to their high failure rate (Hlojeng & Makura, 2022).

Traditionally, vulnerable children were supported by extended family structures, as shown by Kimane and Mohale (2007). These structures are overstretched and have been destroyed largely by the HIV/AIDS and COVID-19 pandemics; thus, many households are headed by young people (Bless, 2005). Therefore, various children are vulnerable and go to school without parental support.

Despite the financial support from the government and other departments, vulnerable children attend school poorly, and thus end up underperforming.

Currently, post-primary schools have trouble in attaining high passing scores due to the presence of large numbers of vulnerable learners (Hlojeng & Palmer, 2021). This overall problem is worrisome to stakeholders in education. Therefore, this study explores the high school management teams' mechanisms aiming at supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work to regulate the origins of the present problem.

1.4 Research approach

The qualitative research approach is employed in this research. This is the approach which focuses on understanding phenomena from the perspectives of the participants (Hammarberg, Kirkman & de Lacey, 2016). It involves collecting non-numerical data (Roller, 2017), such as interviews, observations and textual analysis (Mohajan, 2018) to explore meanings, experiences and social processes in depth (Ataro, 2020). Therefore, this approach is chosen for this study because of this research having interest in the way participants observe and describing their lives (Lichtman, 2023). This study explores why vulnerable learners underachieve in their academic work and how SMTs support vulnerable learners in their academic work. These questions are, thus, concerned with the meanings, perceptions and experiences (Ellis and Hart, 2023) of vulnerable learners' academic underachievement and thereby necessitating a qualitative research approach.

1.5 Research design

This research used a comparative research design. The researcher compares the Lesotho and South Africa high school management teams' mechanisms for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work. The researcher examined closely both phenomena of analysis to establish the extent to which they differ and/or appear similar (Ahram, Kollner & Sil, 2018). Both units were investigated over a substantial time (Longren, 2019) and a comparison of those various units made to make similarities and differences between comparable thoughts between cultures Kroneberg (2019) or within cultural diversity (Plumper, Troeger & Neumayer, 2019). This was carried using a variety of tools useful for clarifying shared social phenomena (Simmons and Rush, 2019), placing cultural values in context (Goerres, Siewert and Wagemann (2019) and for analysing culture differences (Turner, 2019).

1.6 Research questions

The following are the main and sub-questions:

1.6.1 Primary research question

How do high schools' management teams support affect vulnerable learners in their academic work?

1.6.2 Secondary research questions

1.6.2.1 Which challenges justify the need for high school management teams to support vulnerable learners in their academic work?

1.6.2.2 How do high school management teams solve the problems that hinder vulnerable learners from passing?

1.6.2.3 Under which conditions do the high school management teams' mechanisms depend on to support vulnerable learners in their academic work?

1.6.2.4 Which are the plausible threats that could hinder high school management teams' mechanisms for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work?

1.6.2.5 Which are the possible indicators of success in supporting vulnerable learners affect in their academic work?

1.7 Aim of the research

This research is aiming at creating answers to the problem questions as set out above and to explore high school management teams' mechanisms for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work.

The following objectives are derived from the above-mentioned aim of the study:

1.6 Objectives of the research

1.6.1 To provide the explanation for the high school management teams to support vulnerable learners in their academic work.

1.6.2 To evaluate the solutions that the high school management teams put in place as mechanisms for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work.

1.6.3 To discuss the conditions under which the high school management teams' mechanisms depend on in supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work.

1.6.4 To identify threats that could hinder high school management teams' mechanisms for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work.

1.6.5 To highlight possible indicators of success in supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work.

1.7 Research significance

This research contributes to the new knowledge in educational professional studies on SMTs and teachers' development. It also reveals the gap in high school management teams' mechanisms for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work and policies. The results of this study can be utilised by different ministries or organisations interested in supporting vulnerable learners, researchers, policymakers and teachers. This study inhibits extensive generalisation, but it is hoped for readers who will find it resonating with their own contextualisation.

1.8 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the study background, statement of problem, research questions, aim, objectives that guided the study direction and research significance.

The next chapter looks at the theory and concepts lensing this research.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORIES AND OPERATIONAL CONCEPTS

2.1 Introduction

This research aims at exploring high schools' management teams' mechanisms in supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work. To attain this aim, the chapter addresses the educational management theories and theoretical framework that specifically underpins this study. The operational terms informing the study are also defined.

2.2 Theoretical framework

2.2.1 Introduction

This study is based on educational management. As such, educational management and leadership theories were discovered appropriate in guiding this research. There are several management theories which can be used to analyze and understand the high school management teams' mechanisms in supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work. Wilkinsons and Cave (1987) stated that there are various management theories which can be applied to achieve organizational objectives and goals. They are Contingency (situational) theory, the Scientific management theory, the Classical management theory, Bureaucracy theory and Human relations theory. These theories are discussed below:

2.2.2 Contingency (situational) theory

This theory is founded by Fred Fiedler. Contingency (situational) theory is defined by Setiawan, Firdaus and Putra (2019) as a leadership skill that leaders adjust their techniques to suit their situation. This situation is explained by Woods (2019) as conditions amongst the employees that intensify the achievement of the set activities. This situational theory emphasises that what the manager does is contingent to the put series of situations (Yalokwu, 2002). Buttressing this notion,

Tsolka (2019) posits that there are various conditions that are influencing the institutional production. Thus, the contingency (situational) theory needs to be considered, especially in this era where vulnerability and other new factors hinder learners' success. Warrick, Milliman and Ferguson (2016) aver that the existence of conditions enhances specific leadership skills mostly suitable. Hence, McAdam, Miller and McSorley (2019) view this theory as an 'if-then' form of relationship theory.

Nonetheless, the results differ because the situations differ (Bhagat, 2017); and as a result, a technique that worked before the existing higher numbers of vulnerable learners will not necessarily be valid when their numbers are too high. Uslu (2019) notes that, strategies which were effectively applicable in certain circumstances, may not operate in another. The task of the managers is to identify which technique will work in each situation, under these particular circumstances and at this particular time of high numbers of vulnerable learners. This technique should contribute greatly to the attainment of the management goals that include achieving a high pass rate among vulnerable learners. Furthermore, Van der Westhuizen (2002:83) postulates that leaders must establish the approach that suits their situations, and that people must be positioned in a state that is paramountly suitable to their way of doing things.

The School Management Teams are expected to employ appropriate managerial skills to manage any given situation (Lang; 2019; McAdam, Miller & McSorley, 2019; Setiawan, Firdaus & Putra, 2019; Tsolka, 2019; Uslu, 2019; Woods, 2019) to mitigate the challenges faced by vulnerable learners. This is where the contingency (situational) theory becomes relevant. Organisations require adaptable and situational analyses to proffer solutions needed to overcome or solve the problems (Henkel, Marion and Bourdeau, 2019; Lauk, 2019; Yulk, Mahsud, Prussia & Hassan, 2019).

This study opines that contingency theory is appropriate for this research in that, it gives a microcosmic interpretation of a prevailing situation. This study unpacks the

SMTs' mechanisms in supporting vulnerable learners, challenges they (SMTs) face in running schools and in trying to obtain good academic results. In essence, to expect a school with an enrolment of almost all vulnerable learners, living in poverty, affected and infected by HIV/AIDS and COVID-19 and with other burdens, to get equal marks as a school with a few or no vulnerable learners at all or virtually not affected or infected learners, is ridiculous (Chakravorty, Hubert & Marchand 2018; Gorard & Smith, 2004). Therefore, considering effects of COVID-19, HIV/AIDS and orphanhood by the concerned, the schools with many poor, vulnerable children will bring out results that are at least as equal as those with a few poor and vulnerable learners.

2.2.2.1 The essence of Contingency theory

The situational theory was found in the mid-1960s by a scientist called Fred Fiedler based on the personalities and features of leaders (Perrow, 1967). This theory is stating that there is no single perfect blueprint in leading any organisation (Lang; 2019) and thus, a certain leadership style becomes fit and effective for the given circumstances (Harrison, 2018; Zaccaro, Green, Dubrow & Kolze, 2018). As a result, a combination of different leadership styles should be employed. Hence, the leadership style and its link with a favourable situation resulted in the term "situational control" (Lagstedt and Dahlberg, 2018; Rockstuhl, Ang, Ng, Lievens & Van Dyne, 2015).

The Situational theory to leaders was proposed because of two earlier research programmes which focused on effectiveness of leaders' behaviour (Filho, Aubertin & Petiot, 2016; Vroom & Jago, 1995). Although numerous collections on leaders' behaviour were initially picked out using questionnaires (Hekel, Marian & Bourdeau, 2019), two kinds of behaviours confirmed to be particularly representative of effectiveness of a leader (Stripling, 2019). The first behaviour considered leader behaviour (Yukl, Mahsud, Prussia & Hassan, 2019). It includes building good rapport (Mooijman, van Dijk, van Dijk & Ellemers, 2019), interpersonal relationships (Muchiri, McMurray, Nkhoma & Pham, 2019), and showing support and concern for

subordinates (Kim & Yukl, 1995). The second focused on initiating structure leader behaviour (Walumbwa, Hsu, Wu, Misata and Christensen-Salem, 2019). Carter, Gonzalez-Mule, Mount, Oh and Zachar (2019) assert that the behaviour provides structure, in forms such as assignments, plans and schedules, ensured tasks completions (Bauer, Perrot, Liden & Erdogan, 2019) and goal attainment (Rodriguez-Carvajal, Herrero, Dierendonck, de Rivas & Moreno-Jimenez, 2019).

House (1996) noted that, further study using interviews tools was conducted. The procedures of the set production that were assessing effectiveness of the leaders' behaviours were gathered. The results were the same although they were named this behaviour 'relation oriented behaviour' (Lauk, 2019) and 'task-behaviour' (Yukl et al, 2019). This line of research was later extended by Blake and Mouton (1964) to propose that, the effectiveness of a leader scores higher on both these behaviours (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969).

2.2.2.2 The applicability of the Fiedler Contingency theory to the study

Fiedler's situational theory emphasised situational framework of leading any organisation. It explains the link between the leading techniques with the favourable situations (Fiedler, 1964). The theory's first step involves identifying the leadership style (Muller, Zhu, Sun, Wang & Yu, 2018). Leadership is static and it is gaged with 'least preferred co-worker' scale (Fiedler, 1986), which requires one to imagine about somebody with whom he or she has least enjoyed working with (Ivanoska, Markovic & Sardzoska, 2019). The leader then rates how he feels about this individual for each feature and adds up the scores. If the entire marks are higher, the leader is possibly relationship-oriented (Fiedler 1986). If the total score is lower, the leader is possibly more task-oriented (Fiedler, 1964).

The next stage involves determining the situation favourableness of a leader in certain condition. This is influenced by three different features as described by Fiedler (1986) who emphasised that situations are favourable to the leader if all three

these dimensions are high. These three empirically derived dimensions are discussed below:

Leader-member relationship: This is the stage of faith and assurance that a leader of the team has in the leader. The most trustworthy and influential leader is in a more favourable situation than the one who is not.

Task-structure: This is the duty that leaders carry out – clearly organised or vaguely structured. An unorganised task makes team members and leaders have little understanding of how to attain them, hence unfavourable.

Leader's position power: Leaders have power for directing the employees and awarding or punishing them. The more power the leader has, the more favourable his situation. Fiedler classifies power as either strong or weak.

As this theory indicated earlier, the best way to organise is depending on the natural surroundings the organisations should be relating (Scott, 1981). Thus, it can be settled that there is no best way or approach of managing any organisation. That is, diverse situations call for altered approaches in handling, managing and solving matters. Organisations are often embracing irregularities thus require adjustable conditional resolutions to resolve such matters. Other circumstantial dynamics include change in demands and services, changes in government policies and laws and changes in the environment or climate change.

The Contingency approach is, therefore, of great importance to this study in that it gives an interpretation that, the prevailing situations of poverty and the high numbers of learners orphaned, affected and infected by HIV/AIDS and COVID-19, may be challenging to the SMT and teachers' attempts to run schools toward obtaining good results for many vulnerable learners. This means that there is still much work to be

done in this area before relying on a theory to be more informative than simply collecting and analysing data.

2.2.3 Scientific Management Theory

This theory is proposed by Fredrick Taylor (1870's) who believes that there are defined principles which work with an organization design. The first principle is to develop science for each element of a man's work, thereby replacing the old rule of thumb method, then scientifically select, train, teach and develop the worker, as opposed to having the individual do all this on their own. The second principle is to co-operate with the people to ensure that all the work is done according to the principle of science, divide the work and responsibility equally between the management and the workmen with each doing that for which he is best fitted.

Scientific management theory is based on time and motion study, and integrates with workplace design, machine engineering, materials and psychological principles. Scientific managers hope to extract the greatest amount of efficiency from workers. According to Van der Westhuizen (1991), Taylor believed that in the time framed production and that such standardised time should be put down for every task. He further believed that payment be related to work delivered and that work should be related to the ability of the worker. He also advocated that the manager should shoulder the responsibility of planning a task which is physically possible for the worker and that managers should determine scientifically the best method of management and control and then apply those principles. Lastly, it says the organization should be designed in such a way that various activities of the industry are effectively co-ordinated.

2.2.4 The Classical Management Theory

This theory is advocated by Henry Fayol. Unlike Taylor who emphasized the role of workers' concerns, Fayol emphasized the top management role. Van der

Westhuizen (1991) stipulated that; Fayol gives attention to the fourteen principles of management.

The first principle is division of labour. This should happen at both management and workers' levels. This is mainly to deliver more and better work with the same input. The second principle is the authority and the responsibility: Authority is the right to give commands but also to demand obedience. Authority and responsibility are inseparable. Responsibility is the result of authority. There is distinction between official and personal authority. Authority and responsibility are also linked to reward and punishment. The third principle is discipline which is about obedience, application and behavior which demands respect. Discipline will improve if communication channels are clear. The fourth principle is unity of command which requires that, employees should receive orders from one person who is supposedly someone in charge and they should be responsible to that person. This principle differs from the fifth principle called unity of purpose which states that there should be one common purpose for the manager and the group and a plan for achieving this purpose. Unity of purpose helps the organization to function as one unit.

The sixth principle is subordination of individual interests to those of the organization. The individual interests should be channelled in such a way that they serve the interest of the organization by identification with the organization. This could be achieved if examples are set by fairness and supervision. Rewarding staff is the seventh principle where staff should be rewarded in accordance with the service they render and should take place in such a way that satisfies both the employer and the employee. Rewards should consider the cost of living but should also serve to motivate and boost the employee's morale. The eighth principle is centralization. Centralization and decentralization should always be present to a greater or lesser extent. Centralization depends on the situations and its purpose is always the optimum utilization of the abilities of the entire personnel. Depending on the circumstance, this results in the managers deciding for themselves how much authority he will wield and how he will leave responsibility to workers. Hierarchical structure is the ninth principle. It is the structure of authority in an organization, and

it entails unity which is not always the most effective. The success of various activities depends on being dealt with swiftly without necessarily passing through the formal channels. This includes channels of communication and decision-making activities.

Another tenth principle of management is order. Fayol believes in the creation of social order and orderliness of the resources. Orderliness assists effectiveness, and each person or appliance should have a specific place and everyone should be aware of this. Fairness is the eleventh principle which includes discipline and justice. Loyalty and commitment may be achieved from personnel if the manager is friendly, fair and just in his behavior. The other principle is constancy of personnel. A new worker needs time to acclimatize to the new workplace. If there is rapid movement of staff, unproductivity results and the continuity needed for productivity may be disrupted. If this occurs repeatedly, it may result in no task being carried out satisfactorily. The thirteenth principle is initiative: the intelligent worker attains his great satisfaction from planning. Workers need freedom and space to show initiative. So, it is the manager's duty to encourage initiative for renewal in the organization. The last principle is called *esprit de corps*. This indicates that unity is strength. Harmony and unity should be personal contact and communication.

For this study, the Classical Management Theory functions are very important in school management systems because schools will have to come up with plans for vulnerable learners' performance thus identify their objectives, then organise and put in order of priority and preference the resources which are available to support them.

2.2.5 The Bureaucratic Theory

This is the theory proposed by Max Weber. It is also referred to as the "ideal type". Weber thought bureaucratic organizations are most known for carrying out important control over human beings. According to Sergiovanni and Starratt (1979), this theory sets out the characteristics of an organization. Authority is embodied in the office and

not in the person. There is a clearly defined hierarchy which determines each official's office and duties. Appointments are made according to ability and specialization. Patterns of behavior and regulations are clearly prescribed. Promotion is based on seniority. Decision making is only done by the top official and then moves down through the ranks of the hierarchy to subordinates. The last characteristic is that, there are fixed salary scales for each office with relevant pension benefits.

Nell (1981) indicates that the Bureaucratic theory promotes specialized performance and the most economic utilization of human potential and resources, but which the same time it is the logical, regulated form of organization in which individual is protected.

2.2.6 Human Relations Theory

Human Relations theory is a perspective associated with Elton Mayo (1920s). Mayo is best known for the pivotal studies that were prompted by the famous Hawthorne Effect between 1924 and 1927. In this theory, Mayo gave rise to the large body of work directed at informal structures. Mayo advocates the fact that organizations have informal groups and recognizes their existence and importance in organizations. Kibiya (2013) posits that the results of the Hawthorne studies show that the group dynamics and social make up of an organization are an extremely important force either for or against higher productivity.

It is when concepts such as "group dynamics", "teamwork" and organizational social system came into being. This is since Mayo's theory was the first to take note of the importance of human beings in the organizations. Van der Westhuizen, Erasmus, Janson, Mentz, and Theron (1996:74) asserts that, "the value of this study was that it gave rise to an open organization mode - for the first-time human beings were really given recognition in organizations and efforts were made to make them happy." The

central theme of this theory is recognition of human beings in the organization and the freedom that they deserve to be given.

The above discussed theories are available and associated with the management roles which could be used for the various organizational contexts. For this study, the Contingency theory is adopted to be suitable to address the phenomenon of enquiry. It is reckoned as the utmost appropriate theoretical framework to explore the high school management teams' mechanisms for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work. This is so because it points out that it is not the organization that is managed but the situation. It goes further to indicate that various situations need varied leadership styles. So, in managing support mechanisms for vulnerable learners in their academic work, not one style is best, various styles need to be used, hence explains the applicability as a framework that guided this research.

2.3 Definition of concepts

The following concepts inform this research as they are described in different dictionaries, diverse encyclopaedias, literature and researcher's own definitions. These terms include vulnerable learners, school management team, support mechanisms, educational management, academic underachievement, academic work and the explanation focusing on the link between vulnerable learners' academic work and educational management.

2.3.1 Vulnerable learners

It should be underscored that, as Motsa and Morojele (2022) highlighted, the concept "vulnerability" does not stick to the joint explanation. The setting of those living with this notion defines their vulnerability. Children may be vulnerable because of different reasons. This is why the National Policy on Orphans and Vulnerable Children (NPOVC, 2006) defines a vulnerable child as any single or double orphaned, or abandoned, or has no means to survive and/or exposed to abuse, exploitation, and criminalisation thus, requires care and protection. Vulnerable

children embrace orphans and children who live on the streets, with challenging behaviour and in need of legal and other forms of protection (Armoon, Griffiths & Mohammadi, 2023; Masten, 2018). Vulnerable children also comprise of children who are physically, psychologically, emotionally, or sexually abused (Baird and Connolly, 2023), neglected children (Sattler, 2023), children who behave in a way that may injure them (Kourti, Stavridou, Panagoui, Psaltopoulou, Spiliopoulou, Tsolia, Sergentanis and Tsitsika, 2023).

Different scholars categorise vulnerable children as children engaged in child labour and in commercial sex work (Greenbaum, Klapan, and Young, 2023), those with disability (Allan, Winters, Jeglic, 2023), children who frequent the company of immoral persons, infected or affected by HIV and AIDS and other chronic diseases (Lombe, Mabikke, Enelamah and Chu, 2019, Matthew & Collin-Vezina, 2019), children whose parents are delinquent and children who cannot be supervised by their parents or guardians (Munongi and Mawila, 2023). Seddighi, Salmani, Javadi and Seddighi (2019) also state that children in households with sick persons who do not practice universal precautions due to ignorance are vulnerable children. UNICEF (2005) refers to vulnerable children as the children who fit in to the emotional and social high-risk group. These children face discrimination, are stigmatised and undergo grievances and emotional disorder (Lind, 2019). Sometimes, such vulnerable children are living with frequently sick parents' children lack access to elementary social needs as a result, escalates their exposure to hazardous life (Bernal & Attanasio, 2019).

In line with these definitions, this study defines vulnerable child as child who, because of death, have one or no parent at all, lack elementary necessities to survive, live in high-risky conditions, and whose prospects for health, growth and development are seriously impaired. In many occasions, this is because of HIV/AIDS and lately due to the Corona Virus pandemic. They are thus orphaned (paternal, maternal, double and social) and are affected and/or infected by the COVID-19 and HIV/AIDS, hence their school fees are paid for by different bursary schemes.

2.3.2 School Management Team (SMT)

The SMT is a group of leaders gathered to work on a specific task or function in an institution, which is school in this context (Business Dictionary, 2019). They set out objectives, prioritise activities, employ methods appropriate to achieve such plans and lead the team's decision-making process (Ntseto, 2015). Similarly, Alberts (2016) defines the SMTs as the hierarchical structures in the school setting whose major responsibility is to properly run the school daily. The afore-mentioned definition is taken further by Benoliel and Somech (2016) in their assertion that this group is a team liable to plan, organise, lead and supervise the school activities.

There are other significant definitions of the SMT to be considered here. Kgadima (2006) defines SMT as the main executive body which should be widely represented. The body should take collective decision (Mogashoa, 2013) and promote teamwork (Badenhorst & Koalepe, 2014). The SMT as also defined by Mathipa, Magano, Mapotse and Matlabe (2014) is a leadership group of people which guide, direct and assist in teaching and learning arena. In defining SMT as a concept, Aaron (2008) postulates that it is a group of stakeholders in schools who hold official leadership positions within the school's organisation and ensure that governance is dispersed to others (Buyl, Boone & Hendriks, 2014) irrespective of status (Benoliel, Shapira-Lishchinsky, Schechter & Klein, 2016) or authority in the hierarchy (Benoliel & Berkovich, 2017).

Available literature on the SMTs also outlines the constituents of these teams. Ntseto (2015) states that, SMT consists of the head-teacher, deputy principal(s), and HoDs. In contrast, Sumintono's (2017) SMT encompasses the principal – chairperson; vice principal (academic) – member (chairperson for academic committee); vice principal (student affairs) – member (chairperson for co-curricular committee); warden and matron (four members); house teachers (six members); class teachers (three representatives) and student leaders (two councilors as student representatives).

In relation to above literature, this study considers the SMT to be a group of overseers in a school comprising the headteacher, its deputy, HoDs, class-teachers, classroom teachers and student leaders who are responsible to plan, organise, lead, control and ensure that leadership is disseminated to other colleagues. The study argues that the mentioned stakeholders play a fundamental part in promoting holistic support to vulnerable learners in their academic work. Class teachers and classroom teachers are expected to give information on how they support vulnerable learners. The teachers are heavily involved in the teaching and learning thus, playing main role in producing the school's pass rates. Teachers exercise management directly in their positions in the classrooms and even outside. They also serve on different committees, such as disciplinary, entertainment, casualty, guidance and counselling, and sports committees. The student leaders are included in defining this concept because there are vulnerable learners who are leaders in their own position. The student leaders should provide an insight and communicate how they are supported by their SMTs in their academic work.

2.3.3 Educational management

To “manage” in the context of education is viewed by Yalokwu (2002) as to plan, organise, lead and control the activities of the organisational fellows and using all the organisational properties to attain the planned objectives. Yalokwu (2002) reckons management as a process since all educational leaders, irrespective of their individual aptitudes, are engaging in interconnected actions to accomplish their looked-for aims. Van der Westhuizen (1994) adds that management is a particular kind of duty in education which consists of the authoritative responsibilities carried out by person(s) in an authoritative position and in a particular area of regulations to let constructive education to transpire.

Management involves striving at achieving the goals set for the organisation, which means that a manager of any organisation tries to achieve certain outcomes which differ from one institution to another. For instance, a school's set goal is to equip the

students with a balanced education that will enable them to earn their living (Van der Westhuizen, 1994), and this does not exclude the vulnerable learners.

The above meaning of management indicates that managers use all organisational resources to achieve their objectives. This means that learners (vulnerable learners included) are the mostly significant human resources of any schools. Therefore, the role of management is to mobilise all human resources, from the manager to the messengers, and the material resources to achieve the objectives of the system.

In the context of this research, educational management elucidates on understanding and exploring the extent to which the managers perform their tasks or functions in areas such as dealing with learners. Most of these learners are vulnerable and are at the centre of education. Therefore, any learner's academic underachievement indicates the failure of the main objective of the management's task at the organisation. In other words, educational management concept helped the researcher to explore the degree to which the SMTs plan, organise, lead and control the learners who are vulnerable to achieve success.

2.3.4 Academic underachievement

According to Gorard and Smith (2004), underachievement means a lower attainment than would be expected by an observer. According to the statistical analysis document of the Cambridge Overseas School Certificate (2015), school's performance is poor if it is below a 50% pass average. Therefore, academic underachievement means obtaining poor grades on the intelligence tests at school (Bush, 2016). In the case of the learners, academic underachievement means failing to proceed to the next class through passing the tests and examinations.

Academic underachievement is pivotal concept in this research as it aids in understanding vulnerable learners' academic underachievement in the context of South Africa and Lesotho schools.

2.3.5 Relationship between vulnerable learners' academic work and educational management

According to Van der Westhuizen (1994), the four management tasks (which are planning, organising, leading and controlling) that are carried out in education, do not occur in an empty space. Specific activities in educational field are being managed through those four management tasks. This indicates that vulnerable learners are in the area of management in that they are an area in the field of education and must be managed through those four functions. That is why vulnerable learners' academic underachievement is of great concern in this study because their presence in the schools is at a higher level now than before as argued earlier. As a result of their state of vulnerability, the principals and teachers may be aware of the challenges contributing to the vulnerable learners' academic underachievement and they must have the skills to deal with these learners and their problems.

2.4 Conclusion

Chapter two addressed the theoretical frameworks underpinning this research. It also reflected on concepts informing the study.

Chapter three will critically review literature which is related to the research questions of this study.

CHAPTER THREE

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

3.1 Introduction

The main objective of this research is to explore high school management teams' mechanisms in supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work. A review of literature on the challenges and solutions relating to high school management teams' mechanisms for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work is presented here as a stepping stone to achieve this aim. Literature that discusses the conditions, threats and indicators of success in supporting vulnerable learners in their academic is also reviewed.

3.2 Literature review

3.2.1 The challenges that hinder vulnerable learners to pass are:

3.2.1.1 Industrial revolution

The emergence of children's vulnerability in the industrialized countries can be traced before the existence of HIV/AIDS and COVID-19 pandemics that were unfolding during the time of this research. According to Kidd (1999), this vulnerability began with the industrial revolution which disrupted the families' livelihood conditions where most of the people lived on agriculture for their livelihood. In the 18th and 19th centuries, impoverished rural population witnessed a dramatic change in their lives (Makape, 2008). Further events, noted by Makape (2008) which included famine, civil wars, crop failure, collapsing economies, unemployment, high divorce rate, traditional practices and other disasters, made it not easy for the cultural structures to pull through leading to rise in number of destitute people.

Estyn (2013) also points out that the industrialization conveyed inequality amongst culturally adhered persons breaking up as labourers migrated to town. This resulted in several children being deserted by the impoverished parents who did not afford

caring for their children owing to this influx into cities. The problems of these vulnerable children were attended to by housing them (Estyn, 2014). Poor children were institutionalised in workplaces helping them in acquiring ethics, education and independence (Estyn, 2016a).

It is vital to clarify that the vulnerable children's education in the well established countries is potential due to the fact that the industrialised nations have stable social, cultural and political conditions. As a result, the provision of education for underachieving vulnerable learners is made easier by the strong social security programmes where the developed countries set funds aside that are meant to assist people with their welfare needs.

3.2.1.2 Trauma

Trauma, as suggested by Demie, Lewis and McLean (2007), may contribute to the poor academic achievement of vulnerable children. Demie et al. (2007) maintain that the after-effects of civil war had a great impact on the pupils in Somali. Children with trauma portray behaviours such as difficulty to settle in and concentrate (Miller, 2018), they lack motivation (Graham, 2018), they withdraw (Schickedanz, Halfon, Sastry & Chung, 2018), they are depressed (Debiec, 2018), aggressive (Black & Fernando, 2014) and/or irritability (Allen, 2016). In addition, Dorn, Hancock, Sarakatsannis and Viruleg (2021) point out that COVID-19 hit historically disadvantaged children hardest and left them traumatised with the majority of Black schools, especially from low-income families, witnessing massive dropouts of vulnerable learners. Thus, the pandemic had not just impacted on their academic work but also on their welfare and broader psychological well being with the mental health repercussions indicative of trauma suffered.

The trauma of disconnecting with parents, parents disowning their children during economic difficulty and worst witnessing their family members suffer from a disease or die, has affects many children heavily. Even though the studies cited above were

undertaken outside Lesotho and South Africa and are not specific to vulnerable learners, they are relevant to the condition of vulnerable learners' academic underachievement in Lesotho and South Africa because realities such as parents' deaths render all learners vulnerable lead to underachievement in schools because all the learners, irrespective of their location, may suffer trauma too, which this study is yet to discover.

3.2.1.3 Social and legal status of vulnerable children

Bless (2007) points out that, vulnerable children's communal and lawful statuses as minor, deny them assets legacy's right. This deprivation can contribute to the vulnerable learners' academic underachievement. The productive resources, such as land and capital (McFarlane, 2018), are important assets the orphans can use to create wealth (Williams, 2015), sustain livelihoods (Sara, 2015) and draw on regarding their school needs. Therefore, a denial of property inheritance unsettles the orphaned learners, and their school needs may suffer.

Bless (2007) points out further that customary law dictates that the status of being a minor for a male child continues up to the time when he marries. This means that it is only after marriage that a male orphan can be allowed to exercise his rights to own and dispose of property. While marriage is a determining factor for male children to attain the responsibility to property inheritance, female persons remain minors forever under the customary law (Bless, 2007). The minority status means the law regards children as minors such that their property rights usually get violated despite any policies formulated to protect children. This indicates that for vulnerable learners can only succeed in schools if policies and laws on education and the rights of children are written in their first language and implemented.

Efforts to make the children and other people concerned aware of these rights should be made as this has the potential to make vulnerable learners perform better because their problems would have been lessened. Some of the studies reviewed

above, such as Bless' (2007), were conducted in the villages and not in a school context, but they are related to this study in that, the experiences endured by an orphan at home is reflected in an orphan's academic work. That is, orphans whose properties are illegally possessed by anyone cannot be expected to pass because they may worry about this dispossession and may lose focus of their studies.

On the same matter, Kimane and Mohale (2005) postulate that there are informal and unlawful practices that are used to manage orphaned children's property. Kimane and Mohale (2005) state that, children generally have no legal standing in law to assert their rights over property when they are not assisted by an adult. As a result, orphaned children's properties are amenable to being underutilised (Kasedde, Doyle, Seeley & Ross, 2014), neglected (Kelley, Brazg, Wilfond, Lengua, Rivin, Martin-Herz & Diekema, 2016) or abused by some relatives (Bilson, 2017). In addition, Ngema (2015) states, in concurrence with the above observed views on customary law and children that children are regarded as minors and are not allowed to own property. Thus, minors cannot own any property other than a few personal items (Ngema, 2015); everything else belongs to the head of the family. All in all, this means that for orphans to defeat and escalate their production, especially at schools, they may require to exchange their possessions into essentials that may sustain their livelihoods.

Just as Bless's (2007) study, Kimane and Mohale's (2005) and other studies in this section were taken outside the field of education. They did not relate to the orphans' academic underachievement and thus, there is a need to carry out a study that is mostly focused on this aspect of learners' performance in education.

3.2.1.4 Abuse, discrimination and stigmatisation

Kimane (2004) articulates that the loss of both parents, especially if such deaths are associated with HIV/AIDS, results abuse, discrimination and stigmatisation of the orphaned child. Vulnerable learners can be abused by others (Islam, Minichiello &

Scott, 2014), discriminated against (UNAIDS, 2017) and stigmatised by others (Campebell, Skovdal & Gregson, 2010) if they knew of such a loss. In addition, the recent COVID-19 linked with prolonged school closures fuelled abuse, vulnerable learners' marriage and unintended pregnancy (Sengai et al, 2022). As a result, learners who are abused, discriminated against and stigmatised will find it very hard to pass at school.

3.2.1.5 Gender disparity in education

Gender disparity among the vulnerable learners may be one of the factors which necessitate SMTs to support vulnerable learners in their schoolwork. Gender disparity is an old phenomenon (Jha and Kelleher, 2006). Jha and Kelleher (2006) viewed that, traditionally, girls have been disadvantaged in most parts of the globe and that this continues to be so even today. According to Bless (2007), gender roles and perceptions perpetuate poverty among girls, as indicated by the low levels of girls who have access to school. Despite governments' introduction of bursary scheme policies, most girl orphans appear to have dropped out of school because of their increased household responsibilities (Bless, 2005; & Twala, 2018). These household responsibilities include caring for sick siblings (Pillay, 2018) and subsequently providing financial support to their families (Pillay, 2016) following the death of their siblings (Bless, 2007). Tagurum, Chirdan, Bello, Afolaranmi, Hassan, Iyaji and Idoko (2015) argue that where chances for domestic work are offered, girl child is employed out, even to well of families, in return for school fees and other necessities. This says these learners would be left with no option but to shift schoolwork down the line of their priorities because they would be overwhelmed with masses of household responsibilities hence have not enough time to study, resulting high levels of academic underachievement among such vulnerable learners.

Education for girl children is confronted with obstructions (Brambaifa, 2019) because of public bias (Charity, 2016) which immeasurably affects the girls' enrolment (Thapa & Sarkar 2019). Realising this barrier, various governments implemented mitigations like Education For All (EFA) policy to encourage gender balance in the educational

systems (Abraha, Dagne & Seifu, 2019). Free EFA seems to favour boys due to many social and economical obstructions affecting girls (Abur & lyoho, 2019). For instance, guardians and parents in the rural areas discourage girl children from acquiring post-primary education because they consider it to be too much and fearing that they might have problems in getting educated husbands thus hindering them from being good wives (Mulugeta, 2016).

Bilyaminu, Baba, and Purokayo (2017) add that some guardians who would be raising girl children view educating girls as waste of their money because they will in future get married to educated men hence, they decide to educate boy children than girl children. Another example is that poor families push their girl children to get in to early marriage to decrease burden on them (Schaffnit, Urassa & Lawson, 2019). The logic is that the early marriages result in few children for elders to care for. Otherwise, they drop out of school and get into early marriage to help families financially by working (Sarfo, Yendork & Naidoo 2020).

Although girls continue to be more disadvantaged in education and face inequalities in many ways, Sandstrom and Besselaar (2016) and Psaki, McCarthy and Mensch (2017) argue that the emerging trend of boys' underachievement also needs attention, especially in terms of underperformance and in some cases under participation. Nyabanyaba (2010) also reveals that boy orphans, particularly those from the highlands, frequently fail in school and their daily schooling is interrupted by herding the animals while girls are accessing education. Kemoli and Mavindu (2014) elaborate further that boy orphans are often abused and end up herding animals. Kelley et al, (2016) also state that boys are sent out to cattle posts deep into mountains, where they face severe climate environments and are entirely denied right to education. Mosia (2022) adds that the pastoralist nature of Lesotho's economy makes boys drop out to be herders for their own families that practise subsistence farming or labour sold cheaply to farmers with large herds.

Early marriage is the only way out of abuse against the girls, while the boys continue to suffer (Tagurum et al., 2015) as they are one of the main groups that remain outside the fold of modern education due to some of the agricultural practices, such as continuous cattle heading which clashes with the demands of schooling leading to the boys' academic underachievement or even prevent them from being exposed to formal education at all. Furthermore, the low value given to education due to cultural practices, such as initiation schools for boys and early marriages for girls, competes with schooling (Jha & Kelleher, 2006). This means that even non-orphaned children become vulnerable due to poverty that forces them to fall victim to child labour and abuse by their parents and guardians (Kidman & Palermo (2016), and because more value is given to cultural activities than school.

The study by Jha and Kelleher (2006) was conducted on all children; they were not specific to underachieving vulnerable learners, but since the factors were general to all children, vulnerable children are hence included herein. Although Bless (2005, 2007) carried out his study outside the educational context and was looking at orphans and the gendered rights of poverty and inheritance, his findings go a long way in explaining why vulnerable learners underachieve academically in schools because it is not possible for such learners to care for sick siblings, provide financial support and simultaneously concentrate on schoolwork. Likewise, Nyabanyaba (2010) did not look specifically at high school management teams' mechanisms meant at supporting underachieving vulnerable learners in their academic work. Likewise, Nyabanyaba (2009) did not specifically focus on vulnerable learners but on all children, which might have prevented him from getting enough in-depth information on the experiences and challenges faced by vulnerable learners. Both studies (Nyabanyaba, 2009, 2010) were not framed in the educational management context as this study intends. Even though Nyabanyaba's studies were in the context of education, there may be other new discoveries that might be arrived at by other studies, such as this one, hence, the need to carry out new studies.

Even though Nyabanyaba (2009) considered the above-noted factors as influence to accessing and retaining basic education of OVCs, his findings are related to high

school management teams' mechanisms for supporting underachieving vulnerable learners in their academic work. He observes that the influence on the access and retention of OVCs and young people may also contribute to the academic underachievement of vulnerable learners. The major difference between this study and his, as indicated above, is that Nyabanyaba's (2009) study did not contextualise the vulnerable learners' issues in school management, as this study intends to do.

The effects of all these limited educational opportunities for vulnerable learners hinder their future development. This situation indicates long-term changes in the historical feature of African countries where more vulnerable learners than non-vulnerable learners attain formal educational levels (Bless, 2005). Education is recognised, all over the world, as an effective transformation tool for empowerment (Brambaifa, 2019) and the manpower drive for societal development (Hussaina, 2019). Annamma, Anyon, Joseph, Farrar and Geer (2019) are of the same opinion that education contributes to the intellectually growing and developing society. Education is an obligatory pre-requisite for developing the persons to draw an all-rounded contribution (Matthews and Collin-Vezina, 2019) in the growth procedure by obtaining aptitudes (Watkin & Looney 2019).

However, the reviewed literature above reflects that, in the context of this study, vulnerable children, both boys and girls, academically underachieve because of their different experiences which deprive them from school. Depriving both boys and girls from getting educated violates the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (2030) agenda which advocates for the equal participation of every child in education, regardless of gender and economic status. Therefore, this study seeks to explore the mechanisms put in place by high school management teams to support vulnerable children because a progress made by any community can be judged by their attempts at alleviating gender disparities (Keski, 2018). Ultimately, there should be equal educational participation (Nabbuye, 2018; Catherine & Salome, 2018).

3.2.1.6 Poorly resourced schools

The inequalities in school aftermaths encountered by vulnerable learners before COVID-19 pandemic are prominently worsened. Motlalepula, Mokhampanyane and Schlebusch (2022) contend that students from low socioeconomic backgrounds and those who attend schools in areas with high rates of poverty are more likely to exhibit subpar and unsatisfactory academic performance. This is because schools are given value in relation to their external examinations marks and yet some are underprivileged hence underperforming (Nyabanyaba, 2009). Therefore, poorly resourced and non-achieving schools experience low student enrolments, which also leads to low finances income (Tang, 2022). In addition, Proffitt (2022) states that poorly resourced, and non-achieving schools are poorly regarded for instruction and services they provide. This is blamed for the negative perceptions on schooling (Azhari & Fajri, 2022). Schools fail in skilling and opening new positions for children, as argued by Maree (2022).

Thomas, Barraket, Wilson, Rennie, Ewing, and MacDonald (2019) and Drane, Vernon and O'Shea (2020) also point out that vulnerable learners undergo continuous stumbling block broad up by digital exclusions; they cannot afford to access and are unable to use these devices. These divisions exist between vulnerable learners from poor socio-economic background and able children (Blasko, Costa & Schenepf, 2022). Notably, the COVID-19 pandemic proved that inadequate technology access impacted negatively on vulnerable learners. Orphans for instance, lacked cash to purchase protective equipment to shield them from corona virus (Whitley, Beauchamp & Brown, 2021; Sengai et al 2022). COVID-19 exacerbated the vulnerable learners' troubles for it fuelled their miseries to their existing bleak live.

3.2.1.7 School legal documents

Schools are mandated by law to operate within a given legal frame and learners are compelled by law to remain in school and pass. It is difficult to consider these laws practically and appropriately applicable when the above factors, noted from the

literature review, still exist. In South Africa for instance, the Free State education department's "raising the bar, closing the gap, and assisting learners in all grades," is pertinent to the aim of "closing the gap and leaving no learner behind" (DSL, 2018). According to Motlalepula, et al (2022), this slogan strives to close the widening academic gap that is seen amongst learners to ensure that lower-achieving learners from disadvantaged backgrounds achieve academic proficiency. However, Saifi and Mehmood, (2011) underprivileged position of vulnerable learners impacts negatively on their performance while students who perform well academically are children from economically well-off families while students who experience difficult socioeconomic circumstances are likely to encounter unfavourable prospects of academic performance due to the impact of poverty (Altschul, 2012).

In Lesotho, compulsory attendance is sound and clearly articulated in Education Act (2010) and its amendment (2021); a document particularly meant for primary school learners with parents or guardians. The Act is silent about the learners at secondary and high school where most of the vulnerable learners are heads of their families. It also does not indicate what happens if attendance is compulsory and the learners do not comply; thus, there is a need to further amend the legal documents in education. This study intends to study the underachieving vulnerable learners who are at high school level, learners who are believed to be old enough and responsible. Where a learner is an adult and returns to school after an absence, he or she is forced by the school (Supervision and Management) Regulation (1988), Part II, Section 6, to give reasons for absenteeism orally or in writing, as the headmaster requires. The questions remain; what should the principal do with those reasons? What should be done if the learners do not come back at all? Lesotho's legal documents in education are silent about the answers to all these questions.

3.2.1.8 Unemployment and poverty

Children's academic success is significantly and favourably impacted by their parents' socioeconomic level. Maluleke (2014) agrees that students from better socioeconomic homes have greater parental involvement and support in their

education, which empowers and encourages them to pick up the necessary abilities, information, attitudes, and values linked to academic success. Motlalepula et al (2022) add that learners from strong socioeconomic backgrounds perform better academically than those from poor socioeconomic backgrounds.

According to the School (Supervision and Management) Regulation (1988:840), Part II, Section 3, paragraph (a), (d) and (f), “a pupil shall attend classes punctually and regularly, dress neatly when attending school, and take such tests and examinations as required by or under the order”. The School (Supervision and Management) Regulation (1988) also states that it is the duty of the principal to perform the duty of registering learners and ensuring their every day school attendance recording it consistently and establish and maintain, retain, transfer and dispose of records in respect of every learner enrolling in school. The regulations about the pupils do not exclude vulnerable learners. Nevertheless, Ganga and Chinyoka (2010) argue that unemployment and poverty are important drivers of vulnerable learners’ repetition and finally dropping out, thus both drivers make it difficult for the principals to perform their tasks stated in the legislation mentioned above. According to Mosia (2022), lack of basic resources that aid learning like light at home to do homework, having no books, going to school on an empty stomach as poverty is rife in vulnerable learners’ homes lead vulnerable to underperform in schools. Kim (2022) cites poverty as playing a major role in increasing the dropout rates with poverty’s other effects which prevent learner’s ability to meet the schools’ needs. COVID-19 generated socio-economic factors which impacted negatively to vulnerable learners (Bessell, 2022).

Therefore, it can be assumed that poverty contributes to the vulnerable learners’ academic underachievement in schools. The failure to meet the schools’ needs usually forces the vulnerable children to drop out or be frequently absent from school with a lot of content being covered while they are away. In addition, while there are some interventions attempting to help vulnerable children, many of them are slightly helped or they are totally not aided at all. The funds exclude the extra expenses, such as bus fare and other meals; they only cover basic school fees (Stewart,

Watson & Campbell 2018). There is usually no one to care for most of vulnerable learners and they end up as dropouts, a reality confirmed by McCluskey (2017) causing less on follow ups on their academic work and financial support. Bessell (2022) adds that existing inequalities exacerbate poverty and puts relationships under pressure with highly deleterious consequences for children.

Available literature also focuses on family conditions. In South Africa and Lesotho, the first severe corona virus locked families in their houses resulting to their unemployment, hunger and separation from protecting societal nets and deprived family members of the needs they required for caring for their little ones (Jamieson & Blerk, 2022; Juros, 2022). In addition, Ridge (2013) notes that orphans provide evidence of the impacts of vulnerability. Once the fathers die, mothers are compelled to look for the job in supporting their family members. In this case, orphans are left with their grandparents, which is an option for whose results do not always work because children often feel that they are being denied of parental care and support abandoned, hence a child who feels this way cannot concentrate on his or her studies (Choi, Kuhner & Shi 2022). Such differences cause challenges on their educational endeavours, which are too hard for them as vulnerable children to handle and ultimately affects their performance at school in a negative way.

Therefore, it can be deduced that the vulnerable children's entrance into school contexts for learning exposes them to environments that consist of teachers and other learners that differ from them which can unsettle these children. These vulnerable children bring with them a different upbringing and a different childhood that impacts on how they define their schooling and life as a whole hence, they are likely not to get high achievement. Vulnerable children bring along their problems and challenges into the school context, which make them to stand out as different from their peers. These differences and burdens that the vulnerable children carry present as challenges to their learning.

3.2.1.9 Parental involvement and education

Yates (2008) argues that both parents are needed for the education of their child because the absence of one or both results in the children's academic performance declining. Likewise, Mishra and Assche (2008) advocate that orphans minimally attend the suitable grades of their level and age. Mishra and Assche (2008) further note that children whose parents are both dead are particularly underprivileged and that maternal orphans are most disadvantageous in schools' issues than the paternal orphans.

The study by Mishra and Assche (2008), which though contextualised in the United States of America (USA), is imperative for this study. It is important to contextualise Mishra and Assche's (2008) study and determine the conditions of the vulnerable learners' performance in the USA to South Africa and Lesotho, although the norms and cultures differ. It is again worth reflecting on the above researchers' findings that education is an important step towards breaking the vicious factors that many of the children in Lesotho and South Africa are caught up in. Therefore, there is an urgent need of a study that explores high school management teams' mechanisms for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work.

3.2.1.10 Home environment

The school experiences of vulnerable learners do not begin when they get into the school setting or end when the school day ends (Wright, Mannathoko and Paric, 2009), thus highlighting the complex nature of the learning environment (Hlojeng & Makura, 2022). Learners do their studies, write their homeworks and get ready for schooling in their family settings and how they are preparing at home has a huge bearing on their performance at school (Kusumaningrum, Siagian, Beazley, 2022). This is confirmed in Gilavand's (2016) observation that underachieving vulnerable children live difficult lives in their home contexts, which results in their struggling at school and with their educational experience.

Therefore, the home-based situation contributes an essential part in children's learning. Home exists within the communities, where the people have different perspectives of vulnerability, and as a result, the way in which communities perceive vulnerability and treat the weak and disadvantaged also contributes to the vulnerable child's schooling performance (Humble & Dixon, 2017). Evidently, vulnerable children living in institutional environments stand the chance in completing school than those that live in home-based care (Apedaile, DeLong, Sang, Ayuku, Atwoli, Galarraga & Braitstein 2022).

3.2.1.11 The effects of travelling to school

Morojele and Muthukrishna (2013) say another important challenge that hinders vulnerable learners' achievement at school is the distance covered to and from school. Most of the vulnerable learners do not afford bus fares, which exposes to various risks with girls particularly to gender-based-violence (GBV) on their unsafe journey to and from school (Rueckert, 2019). Mosia (2022) adds that most post primary schools are far from many learners' homes, hence making it difficult for vulnerable learners to attend regularly especially in the rainy season.

Clearly, the distance that the learners travel to and from school daily and their experiences of the journeys have an impact on the way they perform at school. Long walking distance and unfavourable experiences on the journey to school result an unpleasant view of school and negatively affect vulnerable children's schooling.

3.2.1.12 Lack of parental warmth

Being deprived from parental care owing to negligence, deceased or preoccupied parents, cause vulnerable learners to portray unacceptable social behaviour in school setting (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2004; Zahn-Waxler, Shirtcliff & Marceau, 2008), which eventually affects their academic work (Chen, Byrne & Velez, 2022). These vulnerable children live a grim life and are very likely to have emotional problems that negatively impact on their schoolwork (Menheere & Hooze, 2010). In addition,

Bergland (2013) postulates further that the poor attachment experienced by, vulnerable children lead to behavioural problems, which effect negatively in the way they relate to others and adjust to school settings. Haimi and Lerner (2016) also state that these kinds of children feel rejected, insecure and difficulties in formulating long-term social relations beyond the school. Finally, Stone (2013) notes that, in concurrence with the above-reviewed observations, noted that vulnerable learners had difficulty in dealing with the negative emotions they carry.

The attachments noted above are critical for this research because the behaviour that vulnerable children reveal in school environments, equates with the type of relations they have with other learners and teachers, which, in turn, affects their school results.

3.2.1.13 School and societal exclusion

Vulnerable learners are prone to exclusions from school. Walton (2018) notes that, vulnerable learners experience various problems such as being financially exempted as they try to fit into the school environment. Walton (2018) maintains that the exclusions are mostly linked to poverty, hardships, deprivation and marginalisation. The exclusions also occur differently in accordance with the contexts. Social exclusion, for instance, involves vulnerable children deprivation from basic needs (Jinot, 2018) and society isolating them to the issues which matter the most (Albalat, Martinez, Garcia, 2022). The vulnerable learners in school situations are easy objects of exclusion. The in-school community socio-economically excludes vulnerable learners (Parejo, Reche, Marin, Maldonado, 2022). Estivill (2003) agrees that it is natural to except inferior beings. Priyanka (2018) further reasons that exclusion in schools is ongoing for over ages now. That is, in-schools community negatively label disadvantaged learners (Siperstein, Ballard, Jacobs, Rodriquez & Shriver, 2022). Such labelled learners are treated differently from others and those excluded are forced to adapt to their social placement (Nieminen & Pesonen, 2022).

Vulnerable learners' lives are stigmatised (Peterie, Marston, Humpage, Mendes, Bielefeld, Staines, 2022). Strassburg, Meny-Gibert and Russell (2010) observed principals denied the vulnerable learners' registration, expelled them from school, punished them for default on school fees payment, denied them to sit for their examinations, withheld their results owing to the fee debts, forced the caregivers to work in the school for debts settlement and denied them sit in classrooms. Vulnerable children endure restrictions that prevent them from accessing educational spaces and activities. In theory, education in Africa is free but practically, uniforms, stationery, remedial classes, examination and building fees are compulsorily paid for by parents and/or guardians (Rueckert, 2019). These often-high expenses and the payments required from school trips result in the exclusion of vulnerable children (Horgan, 2007). Most of the vulnerable children go to school without eating and hence, they can hardly afford to pay for trips, which leave children from wealthy backgrounds to go on school outings.

State processes, societal perceptions and behaviours also contribute to the vulnerable children's challenges in access. Government policies, purportedly made to help vulnerable children, also exclude vulnerable children (Mohlokwana, 2013). The required documents in accessing government grant seem to be the greatest barrier. In addition, peers also exclude vulnerable children by, for instance, mocking them for not having fashionable clothes (Horgan, 2007). Lekule (2014) expresses that, vulnerable children are unhappy since their educators' distance themselves and are not friendly to vulnerable learners.

Collins and Coleman (2008) add that they feel unhappy for the reason of their plight, thus they poorly interact with their teachers. These are reasons enough to affect the schools' performance of vulnerable children negatively. A review of studies on the experiences of vulnerable children at schools is imperative. There is not much in the available literature, which proves that the schools are being inclusive of vulnerable children. This observation proves that the educational systems still have a lot to do to help vulnerable children attain the best of their educational capacities.

3.2.1.14 Unjust and unfair treatment of vulnerable children

Exclusion is not considered as the only challenge that vulnerable children face in the school context as teachers also subject the vulnerable students to unfair and unjust treatment (Motsa & Morojele, 2016; Pretsch, Ehrhardt, Engl & Risch, 2015), shout at them (Kraft & Bleiberg, 2022) and intimidate them (Horgan, 2007). Teachers also punish these learners differently from others (Davilla, 2010; Horgan, 2007). Vulnerable children may lack necessities, such as uniforms (Chikoko & Khanare, 2012), resulting them to feel inferiority complex and objects of ridicule by their peers (Roberts, 2022). Worst, non-vulnerable learners fear playing with vulnerable learners due to an uninformed terror of associative vulnerabilities such as the view that they will contract the HIV virus (Nyabanyaba, 2009).

3.2.1.15 Rebelling and acting outside social norms

Vulnerable learners are stubborn, show rebellious behaviour, disobey rules and authority both at home and at school (Shantone and Nunan, 2022), resistant to being punished (Blazar and Kraft, 2017; Motsa and Morojele, 2016) resulting to their dismissal and/or being discriminated by their educators (Mattheis, 2022). In addition, vulnerable learners end up dropping out (Vanner, Holloway and Almansori, 2022), a situation perpetuating poverty and engaging in illegitimate actions (Levi-Sudai & Neagu, 2022). These children also end up having children without having means to support and educate their offspring (Smiley, 2012). Therefore, the cycle of poverty, crime, and dependency on governmental assistance will never end. Their disobedience is in most cases because of stress (Fernandez, Heng & Eng, 2022). Mosia (2022) adds that unruly behaviour that vulnerable learners display is mostly due to their exposure to stressful situation at home and school context. Their rebellions and behaviours outside the social norms are their ways of making the adults aware that they need help (Stone, 2013).

Suffice to say, nobody can replace the deceased parent in the heart of an orphan, but supportive revised educational strategies are needed to provide them, as vulnerable children, with productive education that will help them live their lives well.

3.2.2 The mechanisms that are put in place to support vulnerable learners

3.2.2.1 *Support institutions*

There are institutions that provide necessities such as psychological services to disadvantaged learners that academically underachieve (Makape, 2008). The formal institutions that offer support include the private organisations, spiritual organisations, and public members with grants (Khoo, Mancinas & Skoog, 2015). Apedaile et al (2022) say the institutionalised vulnerable learners are completing school than those that are living in their homes. Institutions allow vulnerable children to visit their relatives during schools' holidays and when necessary (Theron & Rensburg, 2018). Informal institutions, such as extended family members, older siblings and other communities also provide support (Shabalala, Lannoy Moyer & Reis, 2016).

It should be noted that although Makape (2008) may have provided support mechanisms that could help vulnerable learners in their academic work, her study is based on the orphans outside education. That is why the study did not identify the specific support the vulnerable learners get from the schools. Makape (2008) only explored the arrangements for the care of the orphans outside education and did not consider how this care affects this kind of children's learning at school. It can, however, be noted that the formal and informal institutions' establishment and strengthening this support may mitigate the vulnerable learners' academic underachievement in schools.

However, there are studies, in contrast to Makape's (2008), which indicate that children who are nurtured in institutions are not taught about their tradition, and as a result, grow up not knowing their identities (Burlaka, Serdiuk, Nickelsen, Tkach and Khvorova 2018; Cantwell, 2005). Khoo et al. (2015) point out that children who grew in institutions such as orphanages face various difficulties in relationships. A higher

number of children from this kind of background suffer from poor emotional health and wellbeing (Estyn, 2016b). However, Estyn (2017a) notes that, in a study on some Wiltshire primary schools, the best schools are maximising their learning potentials and provide emotional literacy support assistance to learners. Various developments and factors should be considered to ensure the success of the strategy for vulnerable learners. Estyn (2015b) proposes the development of a “Closing the Gap” website. Critical thought must be given on how to get the most out of the funding in terms of outcome. The above strategy of supporting underachieving vulnerable learners is successfully practised and carried out in many Wiltshire schools (Borough, 2018; Estyn, 2018a). As a result, there is a need for Lesotho and South Africa to adopt the same strategy. It is still important for this study to be carried out so that more solutions related to Lesotho and South African context can be discovered.

Furthermore, it must be noted that the above reviewed studies focussed on the society and culture outside Lesotho and South Africa. The observations derived from a study of vulnerable learners in Netherlands, for instance, are certainly different from those based on the vulnerable learners in Lesotho and South Africa. Thus, research needs to be undertaken in both countries because society and cultures differ. Nonetheless, these studies are important to this research as they can aid in noticing the similarities or differences with the Lesotho and South Africa contexts.

It is clear up to this end that, vulnerable children in Lesotho and South Africa need to be taken care of in their own homes and not in institutional care facilities. This placing in informal institutions will avoid the above-mentioned sufferings, which may also negatively affect their schoolwork. That is why other than formal institutions, Makape (2008) proposed informal arrangements that care for vulnerable children, which could be understood in this study as a strategy to support underachieving vulnerable learners in their academic work at schools because a child that is well cared for has less to worry regarding their learning.

Nevertheless, informal institutions also cause an increment of domestic burdens on vulnerable children, such as caring for other siblings and others in the house (Motsa & Morojele, 2022). They experience imbalance between their schoolwork and household chores. Their condition was worsened by corona virus because parents and guardians have suffered job and income losses, and this resulted in less or no subsistence income and cuts in remittances thus raising the need for child labour as a coping mechanism in times of crisis (Kim, 2022). There is a marked change in the way society treats vulnerable children. Kimane and Mohale (2007) assert that in the olden days, vulnerable learners used to be loved and cared for, but these days there are too many vulnerable children, largely due to HIV and AIDS. Motsa and Morojele (2022) state that the bulk of vulnerable children are taken care of by grandparents cannot support them. Grandmothers provide the most sustainable, long-lasting and, more than often, emotionally charged and secure care and support to orphaned children than other relatives (Motsa & Morojele, 2022).

Kimane and Mohale (2007) observe that the agricultural economy was robust in the past, which is unlike the reality in the present age where grandmothers are performing this function under tremendous strain because of poverty and acute food insecurity. It is significant to point out that the costs of caring for vulnerable children, particularly on school-related costs, are too high and unaffordable for the grandmothers. Therefore, most of the school needs of orphaned children are experienced under the grandparents' care and these remain unmet. A significant majority of these grandmothers are overwhelmed and extremely impoverished, which undermines their ability to provide satisfactory care to the orphaned children. In addition, Bless (2005) points out that people who are not related to the orphans and other close relatives used to join to take care of the orphans. Nonetheless, nowadays people care only for their own children. According to Bless (2005), close relatives helping orphans if they are benefiting from assets left by their late parents, which suggests that nobody selflessly cares for and meets the orphans' school needs. The failure to meet these needs affects the orphaned and by extension other vulnerable children's performance at school.

It should be underscored that orphaned learners are more vulnerable than non-orphaned learners in their academic work (Mishra & Assche, 2008). Orphans are irregular in schools than the non-orphans that they stay with. Similarly, an orphaned learner staying with a relative or caregiver is not that much enrolled in schooling as those who live with close relatives (Mishra & Assche, 2008). Thus, there is no comfort zone for these orphans, and it can be assumed that they underachieve academically because they are not regular in school.

The above literature on formal and informal support mechanisms highlights that neither formal nor informal institutions give enough support mechanisms for vulnerable learners in their academic work. This says insufficient support mechanisms by their homes, their villages and their country prevent any expected high academic achievement from these vulnerable learners. This support, which is needed, would replace that which would be given by the parents. Hence, this research is exploring high school management teams' mechanisms for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work.

3.2.2.2 Policies

As indicated earlier in this chapter that poor socioeconomic conditions impact negatively on vulnerable learners' schoolwork, education in South Africa has created policies to help students who are directly affected. Such intervention programs are listed in Motlalepula (2022): Extended Hour Programmes (EHP) were created and put into place in 2017 with the sole purpose of helping learners who are at risk of failing or who are significantly impacted by low socioeconomic backgrounds. These programs are presented once a week, after school on Monday to Friday. Weekend and holiday sessions are held on Saturdays and Sundays in some schools to fill in any curriculum gaps that the students may have. To completely review the tests and examinations from the terms to get ready for the preliminary and final examinations, they are also continued during the Easter, winter, and spring breaks. Learning Centers (the Kutlwano Project): These lessons run all year long concentrating on refining learners' improvement in Mathematics and Physical sciences since Dr. Tate

Makgoe, the MEC, places a high priority on these two topics. Incubation, walk-ins, and matric camps are interventions that isolate learners and use e-drilling, past examination questions, IBPs, and topic advisers and lead teachers to coach them to improve their performance. Schools with limited space permit walk-ins, and SMTs actively monitor attendance and make follow-ups with troubled students.

In Lesotho, the NPOVC (2006) articulates the mechanisms that can be put into place in supporting vulnerable children. The policy states that the ministries will, in cooperation with other service providers, attempt empowering the families to nurture OVCs. In the researcher's own observation, most of the support mechanisms stipulated in this policy have not yet been put into place by the government of Lesotho, hence an absence of these support mechanisms means that the vulnerable children continue to suffer.

Although the NPOVC (2006) policy was established for the Department of Health and not for education, the support mechanisms suggested in it are strategies that would be fruitful to vulnerable learners if put into practice, since health and education complement each other. It is only when children are good in health that they can learn, listen attentively in class and pass their grades. The implementation of this policy is also likely to alleviate the challenges faced by underachieving vulnerable learners in their academic work; thus, there is a need for the policy to be put into practice to minimise vulnerable learners' problems that hinder their progress in schools.

There are also international calls for the transformation of educational policies and practises focusing on vulnerable children. The USAID (2008) notes that educational policymakers should remodel the academic discourses. The schools must strategise on a curriculum that answers to the requirements of the vulnerable learners and takes cognisance of their necessities and single circumstances. The USAID (2008) added that in-service training workshops should be conducted by the individual governments to train educators with skills enabling them to identify and empathise

with the plight of vulnerable children. These workshops are anticipated to equip educators to help vulnerable children.

The governing body must facilitate that all teachers are attending these seminars, as a selective attendance tends to create a division among teachers as it has often been observed that the responsibilities overwhelm the concerned teachers, while the other educators solely focus on teaching (Wood & Goba, 2011). They again reveal that it is normal for one teacher to be delegated to monitor absenteeism, stigmatisation and help vulnerable learners with their emotions which is a heavy load and is less effective. Clearly, this results in the concerned teachers suffering from stress owing to the loads that the vulnerable learners share with them and the absence of teamwork to help these learners in school.

3.2.2.3 School management team's and teachers' support

There are documented roles of school management teams and teachers in supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work. Motlalepula et al, (2022) noted identification, referrals and feeding schemes as some of the management teams' roles aimed at supporting vulnerable learners. Identification of vulnerable learners is vital; it starts with class managers and subject teachers who tend to pick up issues as they teach. This then results in the provision of the required support, such as food, where there is need. The national school feeding programme in South Africa supports elementary schools by providing food and nutritional education.

Nyabanyaba (2009) states clearly that the specific strategies put into place by the SMT and the teachers help vulnerable learners in their academic work. He states that schools have information bulletins/bords that describe how the teachers contribute to keeping the affected children in the schools and the expectation that they should take the affected to counsellors when they need help. Nyabanyaba (2009) points out further that the teachers also assist poor children during after school times. According to him, the schools intervene in the social problems by sourcing funds for the disadvantaged learners. Hence, schools can be seen here as more than just a place to learn but also as a centre for social support. It would be

wise for Lesotho and South Africa to identify vulnerable children's needs at the earliest stage so that their underachievement in schools could be mitigated.

Nyabanyaba's (2009) study is important in this research because it reports that, individual schools recognised linkages between the community and the vulnerable children seeking support for the vulnerable children and these schools have become central with SMTs that play a pivotal part in supporting vulnerable children. Nyabanyaba (2009) asserts further that in some communities, children no longer must travel extensive kilometres to and from school, which ensures that the learners would not need any money for transport because they will be close to the schools.

Nyabanyaba's (2009) findings were established more than ten years ago and yet the issue of learners' vulnerability is still evident, hence the need to keep on discovering new findings. That is, it is reasonably clear that Nyabanyaba (2009) established support mechanisms of teachers to vulnerable learners, but as he conducted the study in the year 2009, it may perhaps be argued that there are other, new support mechanisms that need to be discovered in recent studies, such as this one. For example, Nyabanyaba (2010) argues that teachers should be trained to identify and support the learners who are about to drop out to be psychosocially supported in some schools. However, according to him, this currently happens in a less uniform way and is sometimes not effective, which shows that newer and more revised strategies must be put into place in this epoch of a swelling number of vulnerable children and HIV/AIDS to help these children stay at school and pass.

The importance of managing the schools through the SMTs and the teachers cannot be over emphasised. Collins and Coleman (2008) underscore the major role played by SMTs in regulating the vulnerable learners' social live and modelling their identities arguing further that this role makes the school either build or break them. Therefore, it is important for a school to master this task for the sake of the vulnerable children, as their social backgrounds are very shaky. This position is supported by the UNICEF (2009) that school spaces must be child friendly to

accommodate vulnerable children. That is to say, the schools must be inclusive and advocate for the rights of the vulnerable children, make them visible and prepare them to be assertive. Furthermore, Mitchell (2011) notes that, the establishment of building a secure base for the vulnerable children and building their self-esteem and self-efficacy can be of great help in this regard because the self-esteem of vulnerable children is usually adversely affected by their stressful situations. Education that is appropriate and effectively acknowledging the needs of vulnerable children is important.

Sadowski (2013) asserts that vulnerable children need people to listen to, rather than people feigning attention towards them. He added that they need educators considering them as the difficult human beings that vulnerability has caused. This says teachers should be aware that the vulnerable children have challenges, hopes and dreams for the future and, need teachers who will offer guidance in the right direction. The absence of a mutual teacher-learner relationship is likely to result in the vulnerable learner's problems continuing to being ignored, hence leading to their underachievement. Providing food through the school feeding program is another way through which schools could support the education of vulnerable children (Birdsall, Levine & Ibrahim, 2005). This is, however, threatened by the rationalisation of fees in Lesotho, whereby food is costly, and the learners pay fewer fees. As a result, schools spend more money on food than what they earn.

Therefore, the above reviewed literature shows that the basic job of a manager is to perform the functions of management in his or her organisation, regardless of the type of organisation or level of management with which one is concerned. Broad areas of skills, necessary for performing the management task effectively, should be considered. A school principal needs more than skills to succeed thus, management tasks and areas are regarded as particularly important, especially in this era where orphaned learners are a great challenge.

3.2.2.4 Community support

It takes the whole village to raise a child. This suggests that, not only the schools should be responsible for vulnerable learners' academic underachievement. The community must collaborate with the school in diverse means to assist vulnerable learners to progress in education (Estyn, 2016a). Various strategies should be used to alleviate vulnerable learners' academic underachievement in schools. While Estyn's (2016a) study focused only on parental support, this study includes the whole community since some vulnerable learners include double orphans.

This chapter disclosed that research on vulnerable learners' academic achievement is lacking. Some of the studies reviewed here were undertaken outside Lesotho and South Africa. A few that were conducted in Lesotho are based in Maseru and are not necessarily focused on education. These studies include those by Bless (2005), Bless (2007), Kimane (2004), Kimane and Mohale (2005), Kimane and Mohale (2007) and Makape (2008). A few education-based studies undertaken in Lesotho, such as Nyabanyaba (2009) and Nyabanyaba (2010) dwelt much on vulnerable children outside the educational management.

In addition, these studies were undertaken some years ago; hence, there is a need for fresh studies due to an enormous growing number of vulnerable learners. Vulnerable learners aging 18 and above, are left out in almost all these studies because they are considered over-age, yet they suffer just like those who are under-age. The difficulty of finding specific research on the high school management teams' mechanisms seeking to support vulnerable learners in their academic work indicates the need for some empirical research of this kind.

3.2.3 The conditions under which the support mechanisms depend on

Accountability, public agencies, resilience and teaming up with different stakeholders in ensuring that the vulnerable learners are assisted to perform better in their

academic work are necessary (Wulczyn, Smithgall & Chen, 2009). A successful implementation of the support mechanisms for vulnerable learners in their academic work can only succeed with the efforts of supportive learning communities. Supportive communities promote effective support mechanisms as they can provide skills to help SMTs, teachers, learners and parents. Even though many of the community members may be illiterate, they still have skills that could assist educators and learners. In addition, the implementation of some of the support mechanisms requires funding, so there is a need for adequate funding from government and from non-governmental organisations. Constant funding should be provided to support infrastructure and developments at schools.

3.2.4 Threats that hinder the support mechanisms for vulnerable learners

Lack of commitment by stakeholders is anticipated to be hindering the support mechanisms for vulnerable. According to Nhlapo (2014) threats that hamper the success of strategies are lack of commitment from participants to engage in projects. Beside lack of commitment, SMTs and teachers' resistance to change can also hinder success and in this context, the negative attitudes towards the vulnerable learners would be the main threat to the implementation of the support mechanisms (Hlojeng & Palmer, 2021). In addition, the workload is one of the major threats that perpetuating teachers to resist change (Myende, 2014) in supporting vulnerable learners.

Time also threatens the implementation of the support mechanisms for vulnerable learners as these mechanisms require more time to implement and bring about quick change (DBE, 2012). Resistance to collaborate by stakeholders hinder plans, effective explorations of working mechanisms and appropriate evaluation strategies (Ocholla, 2007). Cooperation can be a threat when the school does not have the mechanisms and structures required in supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work. Participants might be horrified by the researcher as they might feel they are incapable (Dearman & Alber, 2005) resulting into feeling unwanted and

resisting efforts to bring about change. If the participants do not comply with the policies and documents, this may change the focus of what the study is trying to accomplish (Perraton, 2010; Osuji, 2009).

3.2.5 Indicators of success in supporting vulnerable learners

It is necessary to consider evidence of success from practitioners to apply them as guiding principles and detect gaps in supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work. If this support succeeds it could be considered as improved educational knowledge (Broadbent, 2002). If learners achieve successfully, this will lead to improved educational outcomes (DoE, 2012). An optimal involvement of other stakeholders out of school in ensuring that the learners obtain and implement skills in improving their own and others' economic lives is always meaningful (DoE, 2011). This demonstrates a strong link between out-of-school stakeholders' participation and the schools' capacity to gather from different forms of capital at place inside and out of school's borders (Gretz, 2003).

3.3 Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the relevant literature related to this research. The chapter also discussed the challenges that justify the need for the high school management teams to support underachieving vulnerable learners in their academic work and the solutions that are put in place as mechanisms supporting underachieving vulnerable learners in their academic work. Finally, it established the conditions under which the high school management teams' mechanisms depend in supporting underachieving vulnerable learners in their academic work and highlighted possible indicators of success in supporting underachieving vulnerable learners in their academic work.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

Research methodology is the processes followed in studies to attain the aim articulated for research (Demant and Ravn, 2020). It is also an organised set of procedural rules that studies are based and conclusions informed by the generated study data is evaluated (Polgar & Thomas, 2020). Similarly, methodology refers to how data is gathered, interpreted and generalised (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2020).

Based on the above definition of the research methodology, this study focuses on high school management teams' mechanisms for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work. This chapter clarifies how it sought to meet its objectives by describing the overall methodology employed throughout the study. Consequently, this chapter outlines the research paradigm, research design, research method and research instruments used in this study. Population and sample are also described. A discussion of data collection procedures will follow while the techniques regarding how the data was analysed are also highlighted. The chapter ends with an outline focusing on this research's ethical matters.

4.2 Research paradigm

The research is premised in interpretive paradigm. Interpretive paradigm is guiding this study since it focuses on understanding the lives of the vulnerable people (Lin, Cranton and Lee, 2019) and how they interrelate with people that surround them (Jefford & Sundin, 2013). In addition, it aims at comprehending how the people independently give sense to the world (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). The interpretive research paradigm is employed in this research to get into the research field and explore the voices of the participants (Youth Voices, 2018; Nkoane, 2010) and understand their living conditions (Branquinhon, Cerqueira, Ramiro & Matos, 2018). The researcher employed this paradigm to understand the interpretations

(Merriam & Grenier, 2019) that SMTs, teachers and vulnerable learners give regarding high school management teams' mechanisms for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work, the interactions that they have with vulnerable learners' schooling (Kumar, 2019) and how this affects the vulnerable pupils (Myers, 2020).

The interpretive paradigm is the suitable paradigm employed in this research as it is sensitive to power issues (Stoecker, 2018). The researcher dealt with power matters between herself and the participants (Nelson, 2017). Straight up types of power that perpetuated domination were eradicated (Tetui, Coe, Hurtig, Bennett, Kiwanuka, George and Kiracho, 2017), through the emphasis that the SMTs, teachers and vulnerable learners are equal despite their status as perceived by society (Halliday, Kern, Garrett & Turnbull, 2018).

The study is about vulnerable children who have less power in society, hence, power dynamics had to be considered to get desired information (Newman & Farren, 2018). Individual's experiences constitute the truth (Lindsay, 2010). Based on this comprehension and the participants' descriptions, this research discovered how participants construct support mechanisms experiences for vulnerable learners. Therefore, the interpretive paradigm was chosen as the lens through which the study could explore high school management teams' support mechanisms that sought to transform the vulnerable learners' marginalised lives and bring change (Cusack, Cohen, Mignone, Chartier & Lutfiyya, 2018).

The interpretive research paradigm falls within the broader perspective of the theoretical framework employed as the lenses for this research. The researcher thus concludes that the interpretive research paradigm, which is influenced by theoretical framework infused in this research, values participants as experienced people having the capacity in contributing to the high school management teams' mechanisms for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work. Despite of status, nationality or any other factors qualified to be involved in this cooperative

research focusing on the high school management teams' mechanisms for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work, all persons were included.

4.3 Research approach

Only the qualitative approach, with its detailed (Cresswell, 2015), flexible (Roller and Lavrakas, 2015), sensitive (Mohajan, 2018) and natural characteristics (Kalu and Bwadya, 2017), is suited to produce adequate sociological accounts. This approach develops from the one that sociology adopted (Jamshed, 2014), which in turn incorporates a philosophical view of what the world is like and how humans have knowledge of it (Sherif, 2018). This implies that the main preference for the qualitative research approach by the researcher is if there is one thing which differentiates people from other living things, is their capability to talk.

4.4 Research design

This research used a comparative research design. The researcher compares the Lesotho and South Africa high school management teams' mechanisms for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work. The researcher examined closely both phenomena of analysis to establish the extent to which they differ and/or appear similar (Ahram, Kollner & Sil, 2018). Both units were investigated over a substantial period (Longren, 2019) and a comparison of those various units made to make similarities and differences between comparable thoughts between cultures Kroneberg (2019) or within cultural diversity (Plumper, Troeger & Neumayer, 2019). This was carried using a variety of tools useful for clarifying shared social phenomena (Simmons and Rush, 2019), placing cultural values in context (Goerres, Siewert and Wagemann (2019) and for analysing culture differences (Turner, 2019).

4.5 Research instruments

This qualitative study purports to analyse a phenomenon from the participants' sentiments and through qualitative tools (Sullivan & Forrester, 2019). This was achieved by collecting data through interviews (Orb, Eisenhauer & Wynaden, 2001). The researcher opted to generate the data through interviews because they focus on

comprehensive (MacDougall and Darbyshire, 2018) and on the innate sequence of incidents (Leech, Collins and Onwuegbuzie, 2017), extracted meanings (Gerber, Abrams, Curwood and Magnifico, 2016; Ditchfield and Meredith, 2020) and were decided upon based on theoretical statements from the literature review (Chamberlain & Hodgetts, 2020; Robin, 2015).

4.5.1 Focus group interviews

Focus group interviews pathways beyond the personal interaction of an interviewer and informant (Roulston, 2020) thus, collected qualitative data for this study. They are employed in this research to provide a live discussion (Hamilton and Finley, 2020; Cele 2006) on how vulnerable learners are supported by SMTs in their academic work. Focus group interviews also helped in getting collective views (Kumer and Urbanc, 2020) and opinions of participants (Hennink, Hutter and Bailey, 2020) rather than their individual observations and feelings (Cohen et al. 2007).

It is through focus group interviews that the researcher elicited rich data (Tritter and Landstad, 2020) while addressing the power imbalances that can characterise traditional interviews (Burns, Gallant, Fenton, White & Hinch, 2019). An interview guide was used to generate data to understand high school management teams' mechanisms for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work, to ensure that all parts of research questions are covered (Pietila, Nurmi, Halkoaho & Kyngas, 2020), hence guided me on when and how to ask certain questions (Elfenbein & Schwarze, 2020). All focus group sessions were conducted during a time conducive for all participants.

4.5.2 In-depth Interviews

In-depth interviews, also called individual interviews (Roulston, 2020), were used to collect data from principals and to complement the focus group interviews in the case where participants individually shared information. In-depth interviews were conducted to acquire deep understanding (MacDougall & Darbyshire, 2018) of the

vulnerable children's experience, emotions and views (Milena, Dainora & Alin, 2008). Carrying out the indepth interviews to enable the participants, who were reserved in focus group discussions to have a relatively safe place to talk about their solo experiences (Petintseva, Faria & Eski, 2020a).

These kinds of interviews are a suitable qualitative data collection instrument employed for different purposes (Wilson, Onwuegbuzie & Manning, 2017). Thus, they were employed in this research to collect detailed data from the participants regarding high school management teams' mechanisms for supporting underachieving vulnerable learners in their academic work. The researcher used the individual interviews to collect specific data about this phenomenon (Bakhtin 1996). Moreover, interviews were used because they allowed flexibility to question the respondents (Shotter, 2012). Therefore, I examined the matters in detail throughout the interviews (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011). Therefore, this tool played a critical role in uncovering the high school management teams' mechanisms used to support vulnerable learners in their academic work.

The detailed interviews were employed to inspire a more relaxed and interesting participation by the participants (Liu, 2019). One of the main advantages that compel the choice of this instrument is that I elicited some gestural communicative signals from some of the respondents and this included discomfort, stress and problems that they experience (Dikko, 2016; Shotter, 2010). This helped the researcher to adjust to the variations necessary to minimise any anxiety (Yuksel & Yildirim (2015). This tool was used to direct the discussion, but it did not detain any further material which could rise (Connelly & Peltzer, 2016). There were follow-ups where necessary (Petintseva, Faria & Eski, 2020b) and probing questions (Demant & Ravn, 2020) to foster clarification (Logan, Paras, Robbin & Zechmeister, 2020).

Both focus and in-depth interviews were tape recorded (Hinton & Ryan, 2020) after the participants permitted the researcher to (Brown, 2020) who were assured of confidentiality and anonymity (Goodwin, Mays& Pope, 2020). They were held in

spaces which participants were feeling free and that did not any interference (Pietila, et al 2020). Children, who consisted part of the study's respondents, are very sensitive to power relations in their setting, so the researcher was very cautious with the location where the interviews were conducted (Hamilton & Finley, 2020). The privacy of the learners and teachers was maintained (Opie, 2020). This also allowed the participants to be free to air out their thinking and experiences. The discussions were conducted in English, but in cases where it was necessary, Sesotho interpretation was used, and the interview later translated.

4.6 The population and sample

4.6.1 Population

The selection of targeted population for this research is all principals, all Heads of the Department, selected teachers and vulnerable learners in selected post-primary schools in Lesotho, Leribe, Hlotse and South Africa, Thabo-Mofutsanyana, Ficksburg. It should be noted that a study which explored high school management teams' mechanisms for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work in Lesotho and South Africa, would have all Lesotho and South African schools as the population of the study. However, obtaining data from every school in Lesotho and South Africa would be virtually impossible, hence the need to select a sample of schools from the population.

4.6.2 Sample

The sample of this study consisted of the total of 76 participants from three post primary schools in Hlotse and three secondary schools from Ficksburg. The researcher selected a total of 28 SMTs, 12 teachers and 36 vulnerable learners. The researcher selected 76 participants from six schools to gain insights from variety of participants from different schools. They provided an insight into their own situation (Ghuri, Gronhaug & Strange, 2020). The principals or deputy principals, HoDs and teachers took part in the study because they gave information about the vulnerable

learners, since they deal with them. They are within the teaching arena for the minimum of ten years and contribute a major part in the production of the schools' pass rates. They exercise management directly in their different positions, in the classrooms and even outside. They also serve on different committees, such as disciplinary, entertainment, casualty, guidance and counselling and sports committees where they interact in different setting with learners hence, serving on these different committees, they provided the required data about the vulnerable learners' academic work. Vulnerable learners participated in this study because nothing for them should be without them (Branquinho, Cerqueira, Ramito & Matos, 2018).

4.6.3 The sampling procedure

This research used a purposive sampling procedure. This criterion was used to identify individuals for the study because of its suitability to inform an understanding of the research problem and phenomena being studied (Creswell, 2007). Individuals were selected based on their possession of the characteristics being sought in the research (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007) and their ability to provide the richest data related to the study to gain depth of understanding to the issue (Hennink et al 2020; Mcmillan and Schumacher, 2010) which also aligns with the goals of the interpretive paradigm. Through the school principal, the appointment was set with the respondents. Interviews were then conducted and were recorded, transcribed and analysed. The Sesotho language responses were translated to English.

4.7 Data analysis technique

This is a qualitative study and so the researcher engaged in a thematic analysis (Mihos, 2020) of the qualitative data to make sense of it (Mays, 2020; Chapman, Hadfield & Chapman, 2015) in relation to respondents' descriptions of the condition (Chowdhury, 2015). The analysis also noted the patterns (Mayring, 2015), themes (Ngulube, 2015), categories (Kristiansen, 2020, Neale, 2016, Rogers, 2011) and regularities (Kyngas, 2020, Male, 2016) evident in the collected data.

The subsequent sections highlight how each of research questions guided the study while generating data towards the high school management teams' mechanisms for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work.

4.7.1 Research question 1: What are the challenges that justify the need for high school management teams to support vulnerable learners in their academic work?

Data which answered this research question was obtained from the individual and focus groups interviews by directing questions to participants who elicited their comprehension of the challenges that justify the need for high school management teams to support vulnerable learners in their academic work. Recordings and transcriptions of their replies were made. Codes, categorised themes and comparisons were made.

4.7.2 Research question 2: How have high school management teams' mechanisms been supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work?

Focus group discussions and individual interviews were carried out with participants on issues related to high school management teams' mechanisms that support vulnerable learners in their academic work. The participants' narrations were recorded manually and electronically. Data was analysed for their content and categorised accordingly, to discern any patterns or themes. The theory enabled the researcher to constantly interrogate the data. The aim was to deepen an understanding of the Lesotho and South African educational context through rich, thick and deep descriptions of the respondents within the setting of this methodological orientation.

4.7.3 Research question 3: Under which conditions do the high school management teams' mechanisms depend for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work?

After the participants' deliberations on different solutions to the challenges that justify the need for high school management teams to support vulnerable learners in their academic work, another focus and individual interviews were held and these concentrated on the conditions that high school management teams' mechanisms depend for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work. This was essential since no matter how significant a support mechanism is, the solution would be just an ordinary collection if the situations for accomplishment were not met. The participants discussed circumstances important in guaranteeing the achievement that respond to the problems. Recordings and transcription of the interviews were made. The researcher read and got meanings on the transcribed data.

4.7.4 Research question 4: What are the anticipated plausible threats that could hinder high school management teams' mechanisms for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work?

Focus groups discussions and indepth interviews were held on the threats that the SMTs, teachers and learners anticipated in implementing the solutions to the problems. The rationale here was that, regardless of how principled the notion is, it is possible to come across several risks which may endanger any efforts to recover vulnerable learners' situations if not managed well. Thus, the participants illustrated several risks and they also proposed various possibilities of how to go through these threats.

This study employed the contingency theory, qualitative design and comparative method to analyze data which was transcribed and thereafter analyzed through a thematic approach. That is, naming, categorising, comparing classifying, and labelling data was done. Extreme care was taken in the recording.

4.7.5 Research question 5: What are the indicators of success in supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work?

Data that responded to the above research question was gathered through from the focus group discussions and in-depth interviews. The SMTs and teachers assisted with the debriefing of the vulnerable learners that were to be interviewed. The recordings and transcription were made.

4.8 Ethical considerations

The researcher had to make sure that participants are not affected physically, socially and psychologically by this study hence considered the following ethics:

4.8.1 Permission

The researcher requested to collect data and I was given ethical clearance by the Central University of Technology (CUT) (see ethical clearance certificate appendix 1). The Lesotho Ministry of Education and Training and the Department of Education in South Africa were approached through the Education Officers in charge to authorise data collection in schools. They were given a letter from CUT that sought consent from the two ministries to allow her to conduct an empirical study and it was given. The letters written by Education Officers were used to select the schools. They responded positively by allowing the researcher to conduct the research. Various groups were approached, and these permitted their contribution by their signatures on the consent form (see appendix 7 and 9). By doing this, the researcher complied with Grotz and Leonard (2023) idea that scholars need to make sure that the entire appropriate people are encountered to permit the study before beginning to collect data.

4.8.2 Voluntarism

Taking part in this study was not compulsory. The respondents were notified of the aim of this study, its anticipated results (Pietila et al, 2020), and chose to participate or not devoid of being threatened (Asian & Tuncay, 2023). Similarly, Brear and Shabangu (2023) argue that no participant should be indebted to take part in the study progression thus, participants that are willing to end the participation, must do

so devoid of any ramifications. Moreover, work progress needs to stay noticeable and be opened for recommendations from others during the research (Grotz & Leonard, 2023).

4.8.3 Confidentiality

It is ethical to consider confidentiality issues in research. In honour of this, the researcher agrees with the Keller and Abowd (2023) who specify that scholars should be acquainted with the members' right to confidentiality and should grant them their entitlement to privacy and being anonymous, except if they wish to renounce this right. Hence, the researcher guaranteed all participants that their answers were handled with confidentiality except if they chose to be associated openly with specific hint. The researcher included the confidentiality clause in the permission letter (see appendix 2).

4.8.4 Harmlessness

The researcher avoided potential harmful impact to participants by guaranteeing them that, in line with Mertens (2005), the researcher intended to maximise avoidance of unwated harm. It was also emphasised that this study would neither pursue, hurt nor expose them to any harm throughout the study.

The issue of vulnerable learners is very sensitive, thus, to adhere to ethical consideration, the researcher assured the participants that the presence of vulnerable learners would be treated with caution, sensitivity and that not in any way did this study purported to harm them (Goodwin et al, 2020). The steps taken were treated with respect and care while conducting this study with participants.

4.8.5 Withdrawal

Academics are obliged to be acquainted with the informants' right to withdraw anytime they wish, and the researcher should make her participants aware of it (Shallwani & Mohammed, 2007). In compliance with this ethical obligation, the researcher was in

accord with this code and throughout the research, and the participants were made aware that they had the freedom to quit at any period in the research when they so wished to do so.

4.9 Conclusion

The chapter discussed the research methodology utilised to generate data. The research paradigm, research design, research method, and research instruments used in this study were described and the reasons for choosing them substantiated. The chapter also described the population and sample of the study. It also described the data collection procedures used and how the data to be collected would be analysed. Finally, the ethical considerations of the study were discussed in this chapter.

The next chapter focuses on the presentation of data, its analysis, interpretation and discussion thereof.

CHAPTER FIVE

DATA PRESENTATION, INTERPRETATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents, interprets, analyses and discusses the data collected through focus groups and individual interviews on high school management teams' mechanisms in supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work. The thematic analysis was used to analyse focus groups and individual interviews. The data from Lesotho schools was compared to that collected in South African schools.

The chapter starts with an explanation of the areas of data collection and the participants' biographical information. It then presents, interprets, analyses the challenges that justify the need for high school management teams to support vulnerable learners in their academic work, followed by the solutions to those challenges. Next, the chapter considers the conditions, threats and indicators of success in supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work.

5.1.1 The data collection site

The qualitative data were collected in six schools. Data for Lesotho were collected from three schools which are named school A, school C and school E. All the three schools are in a township called Hlotse, in Leribe district. That of South Africa was collected from school B, school D, and school F which are found in a township called Ficksburg in Thabo-Mofutsanyana municipality. The study used alphabets and acronyms to name the schools and the participants in this report. This is protecting identities of the participants and their schools. The sample had both male and female learners from Grade 8 to 12. The educators were males and females, and they had a staffroom where they sit when they are not in classes, mark learners' work and discuss official and unofficial issues. There were also offices for the principal and deputy principals.

5.1.2 Biographical information

The SMTs and teachers, who participated in this study, had Diploma in Education, to Master's degree in Education qualifications. It is anticipated that the teachers' qualifications empowered them to be cognisant of the national laws on education and numerous mechanisms which could be employed to resolve problems in their own context. These participants' experience ranged from seven to thirty years. A lengthy experience inferred that they were seasoned practitioners who were responsive to vulnerable learners' challenges, solutions, conditions, threats and indicators of success in supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work.

Thirty-six learners participated in focus group interviews. Each school's group comprised of three boys and three girls. The inclusion of both boys and girls in both countries purports to compare their experiences in their vulnerability. The participating learners' ages ranged from 14 to 21 years.

Both individual and focus group interviews were held in English language. However, some of the respondents' code switched between Sesotho and English. In such cases, the researcher later translated the Sesotho versions of the responses into English but with caution to retain the original text meanings. The participants' direct words are italicised.

In addition, the researcher used letter codes to conceal the identities of the research sample. Letter codes are presented in a table below:

Table 5.1.2.1 Letter codes

School	SMTs (principal/Deputy, HoD)	Teacher	Vulnerable learner
Lesotho school A	LSMT1 (Deputy)	LT1	LMVL1
Lesotho school A	LSMT2 (HoD)	LT2	LMVL2
Lesotho school A	LSMT3 (HoD)		LMVL3
Lesotho school A	LSMT4 (HoD)		LFVL1
Lesotho school A			LFVL2
Lesotho school A			LFVL3
Lesotho School C	LSMT5 (Deputy)	LT3	LMVL4
Lesotho School C	LSMT6 (HoD)	LT4	LMVL5
Lesotho School C	LSMT7 (HoD)		LMVL6
Lesotho School C	LSMT8 (HoD)		LFVL4
Lesotho School C	LSMT9 (HoD)		LFVL5
Lesotho School C			LFVL6
Lesotho School E	LSMT10 (Principal)	LT5	LMVL7
Lesotho School E	LSMT11 (HoD)	LT6	LMVL8
Lesotho School E	LSMT12 (HoD)		LMVL9
Lesotho School E	LSMT13 (HoD)		LFVL7
Lesotho School E	LSMT14 (HoD)		LFVL8
Lesotho School E			LFVL9
South Africa School B	SSMT1 (HoD)	ST1	SMVL1
South Africa School B	SSMT2 (HoD)	ST2	SMVL2
South Africa School B	SSMT3 (HoD)		SMVL3
South Africa School B	SSMT4 (HoD)		SFVL1
South Africa School B			SFVL2
South Africa School B			SFVL3
South Africa School D	SSMT5 (Principal)	ST3	SMVL4
South Africa School D	SSMT6 (HoD)	ST4	SMVL5
South Africa School D	SSMT7 (HoD)		SMVL6
South Africa School D	SSMT8 (HoD)		SFVL4
South Africa School D	SSMT9 (HoD)		SFVL5
South Africa School D			SFVL6
South Africa School F	SSMT10 (Deputy)	ST5	SMVL7
South Africa School F	SSMT11 (HoD)	ST6	SMVL8
South Africa School F	SSMT12 (HoD)		SMVL9
South Africa School F	SSMT13 (HoD)		SFVL7
South Africa School F	SSMT14 (HoD)		SFVL8
South Africa School F			SFVL9

The above table shows that three schools in Lesotho and three in South Africa participated in this study. All the six schools are public school. One principal from Lesotho and one from South Africa were part of the SMTs, while three were Deputy Principals in the cases where the principal was not taking part. One school did not

have either principal or deputy; only HoDs represented the SMTs. Two teachers and six vulnerable learners per school took part in this research. The composition of different participants in this study helped the researcher to generate an in-depth, multifaceted understanding of a complex matter in its real-life context. That is, it helps the researcher to understand the people and situations in great depth.

The tables below present the summaries of the context of the participating sample and profile of the participants respectively:

Table 5.1.2.2 Context of the participating sample

School	SMTs	Teachers	Focus group	Learners	Focus group
A	4	2	A1	6	A2
B	4	2	B1	6	B2
C	5	2	C1	6	C2
D	5	2	D1	6	D2
E	5	2	E1	6	E2
F	5	2	F1	6	F2
Total	28	12	40	36	36

Individual interviews were held for principals or deputy principals in the case where the principal was not participating. HoD, teachers and vulnerable learners participated in the form of focus groups. The SMTs and teachers from different schools took part in this study because they gave broader information about the vulnerable learners, since they deal with them. They also serve on different committees, such as disciplinary, entertainment, casualty, guidance and counselling and sports committees where they interact in different setting with learners hence, serving on these different committees, they provided the required data about the vulnerable learners' academic work. Vulnerable learners participated in this study because nothing for them should be without them.

Table 5.1.2.3 Participants' profile

Position	Age group	Male	Female	Married	Widow(er)	Single	Black	Others (specify)
Principal/Deputy	50-65	2	3	3	2	0	4	1 (Pakistani)
HoD	40-65	5	18	22	1	0	23	0
Teachers	30-65	3	9	12	0	0	12	0
Vulnerable Learners	13-22	18	18	0	0	36	35	1 (coloured)

Due to their age and marital status, participants seem to have humanity in helping vulnerable learners with their basic needs. Vulnerable learners, regardless of their positions in school, age, gender and race still underachieve in school. The race of the participants aided in devising support mechanisms relevant to the context they are in.

Table 5.1.2.4 Education of the participants

Position	Number of years at school	Grade passed	Diploma obtained	Degree obtained	<Degree
Principal	10+	0	0	0	2
Deputy principals	10+	0	0	2	1
Head of the Department	10+	0	0	11	12
Teacher Representative in School Board	10+	0	0	1	2
School Based Support Team Teachers	10+	0	3	3	0
Class teacher	10+	0	2	1	0
Representative Council of Learners (SA) or Students Representative Council (Lesotho)	4-9	11-12	0	0	0
Class Representatives	1-7	8-12	0	0	0
Vulnerable Learners	1-9	8-12	0	0	0

Principals or their deputies, HoDs and teachers are within the teaching research site for the minimum of ten years, and contribute a major part in the production of the schools' pass rates. They exercise management directly in their different positions, in the classrooms and even outside hence gave required information for this study. Other participants had a diploma to postgraduate educational qualifications with not less than ten years teaching experience, which then assisted them to give the factors that aid them to understand vulnerable learners' situation differently from someone who might not learned anything about a child centred approach.

Vulnerable learners, regardless of their positions and grades in school, still experience challenges that justify a need for them to be supported. Most vulnerable learners seem to have repeated grades owing to the challenges they faced as a result of their vulnerability.

5.2 Challenges that hinder vulnerable learners to pass

The participants addressed the first objective of the study by answering, through individual and focus groups, the following question: What are the challenges that justify the need to support vulnerable learners in their academic work?

The following two main themes emerged and are categorised into sub-themes.

5.2.1 Out-of-school factors

Participants articulated that vulnerable learners live difficult lives in their home contexts and that this results in their struggling at school. It was also pointed out that homes exist within the communities, where the people have different perspectives on vulnerability. Hence, the way the communities treat and perceive vulnerability also constitutes the vulnerable child's schooling performance as the following sub-themes evidence:

5.2.1.1 Poverty

The participants from South Africa and Lesotho provided similar responses on poverty as one of the challenges that justify the need for high school management teams to supporting less fortunate pupils in their academic work. Some of the participants answered as follows:

I live in the shack while my father lives in the main house but most of the time he lives with his mistress at Clocklan. So, I'm sometimes fed by the community, and I pay back by being sent everywhere. Sometimes I only eat at school, let alone during weekends and holidays. (SMVL1).

My state of being a double orphan is worse, but having no one to support me with my essentials is a double disadvantage. (SFVL4).

We have no electricity at home, so I don't read when I'm at home. (SFVL9).

We identify them by not concentrating in class because they would have not eaten when they left home. So we take it from there. (Group F1).

We see through their behaviour; they don't concentrate in class, later when you try to find out what is happening with them, they tell us that they left home without food. Another boy in Grade 11 didn't have even the meagre table to read on at home. (Group D1).

Most of our vulnerable learners here live with relative and they are so many in one house that they don't have enough food to eat. They get the mercy of others in order to eat. During winter time, they shiver with cold because they don't have warm clothes. (SSMT10).

Double orphans particularly, don't have support system at home, so they are tired in classes as a result of hunger, (LSMT10).

Vulnerable learners come from disadvantaged families. Their uniforms and school shoes are shabby; oversized, torn and dirty. It's hard for them to get food. They are expelt for fees and they go forever or come back after struggling to get it. (Group E1).

Lack of school fees lead them to drop out of school, or if they manage to manipulate, their results are withheld hence they don't benefit from them. (Group C1)

They can't afford little contributions that are paid here at school. At times they're expelt for some documents required by their bursary scheme. When they return, theywould have missed lots of classes leading to their failurel. (Group A1)

I don't have meals at home; I rely on school kitchen meals. (LFVL8).

My house is not conducive for learning; furniture and food! Truely, nobody concentrates in class while hungry and I'm unable to pass under this environment. (LMVL3).

It is apparent that, both South Africans and Basotho vulnerable learners share similar experiences of poverty, which plays a major role in affecting their academic work in a negative way. The example of this is highlighted in the above words of South African male vulnerable learner (SMVL1) that *"I live in the shack... I'm fed by the community"*, Lesotho School Management Team (Group A1) *"They can't afford little contributions that are paid here at school...they're expelt..., leading to their failure"* and a Lesotho male vulnerable learner (LMVL3) that: *"Truely, nobody concentrates in class while hungry"*. This indicates that vulnerable learners can learn at optimal levels if they eat, unfortunately, they do not eat enough. When they do not consume enough food, their ability to learn is negatively affected. Food is essential for the improvement of the learners' academic performance and cognitive functioning. Juros (2022) opines that inherited poverty exacerbates vulnerability of children. Choi et al, (2022) also declare that poverty is the chief driver of vulnerable learners' school drop-outs and the grades repetition.

SMTs too are aware that poverty affects the vulnerable learners' academic work in a negative way. The example of this is taken from focus group of Group F1 that *"We identify them... So we take it from there"*. The understanding is that they do not end at identifying them; they further take steps to support them. A response from them above indicates that they had the power, noted by contingency theory, to arrange means and ways which effectively support vulnerable learners. They portrayed an understanding of power exercised by SMTs as note in the way they influence others' decisions to make other stakeholders available to support vulnerable learners. The

power revealed above is in relation to appropriate ideas to dealing with the support mechanisms for vulnerable learners in their academic work in this context.

5.2.1.2 Health needs

Participants from South Africa and Lesotho pointed out that the vulnerable learners' health needs are a challenge that justifies the need to support vulnerable learners in their academic work. The following responses confirm this:

We come to know about their HIV/AIDS status when they become sick. We have about three learners who died because of it; they were not taking their treatment. (SSMT5).

Joale 'na ke na le laki ea bana ba bangata ba ratang ho fihla ba mburetsa ka tabahali e kana (hand gestures). U utloe ba ntjoetsa hore ba posethifi. Ba bang ha u ba sheba u bone ba sa bontše. (I have the luck of many vulnerable learners who bombat me with huge bad news. You would hear them telling me that they are HIV/AIDS positive, when you look at some of them, you won't tell that they are). (ST3)

We normally discover infected vulnerable learners during examinations when they appear not to have written. When we follow up, we discover that they had gone for their ARVs and missed the exams. I so wish they could open up and cooperate by telling us their problems so that we find solutions together. (Group B1)

HIV positive learners become extremely sick because they default from taking their ARVs in fear of asking for the permission at school for their refill and as a result of starvation. (Group E1).

I have a list of HIV/AIDs infected learners. Their state requires them to have proper meals at home, but they can't afford meals. They leave taking their medication because no one follows up on them and they finally die. (LT3)

They frequently become ill, but they don't afford to pay for their meds thus, they stay in their families till they get well. So, they don't attend most of the classes, and no remedial classes are given to them to catch up. (Group A1)

At times we don't afford food, so, I don't take my meds on empty stomach. Hunger and sickness make me become weak and lack concentration in performing my schoolwork. (LMVL2)

It (SR) asked for number of learners referred to health facility..., we do refer them but we don't document the statistics hence I must admit I don't accurately fill that part, (LSMT10)

The above responses indicate that South African and Basotho vulnerable learners have health challenges needs. In South Africa, they seem to prioritise their health and shift learning activities, such as examinations, down on the list of their priorities because they do not trust their teachers to share their state and in the search of solutions to their plight. In Lesotho, the principal confessed that she did not document the number of learners referred for health facility as required by SR, hence making it difficult to follow up on such learners. Documenting such statistics correctly

and accurately would serve as evidence that vulnerable learners are taken in to consideration and are supported.

It is also observed that orphans who fall sick find it difficult to health requirements. This indicates how the learners cannot afford health care provisions hence the existence of social inequalities yet, as noted by Nolte and Downing (2019), caring for sick learners is vital for schools to promote. Denying learners the care they deserve in turn violates learners' human rights hence the concerned principals neglect their responsibility stated in the School (Supervision and Management) Regulations, 1988). As put by contingency theory, the organisations (schools in the case of this study), should be opened system which needs to be cautiously administered to fulfil and stabilise interior necessities and to acclimatise to situational circumstances.

5.2.1.3 Rape

In our discussion with participants, it was established that vulnerable learners in South Africa and Lesotho are raped while some of them are born as a result of that raped; a challenge that fuels their failure rate, hence necessitates support. In their horrified utterance, vulnerable learners narrated that:

... ba fihle ba re buretse feela ka hore baa reipuo, ha u batla ka batho ba baholo ba ikarabellang ho bona, u sibolla hore ba ikarabella ho motho oa femili a sebetsang hole koana. Ha ba robetse bosiu motho oa kena a fihle a bete hona ho ho holoanyana a Grade 11 now. Hona ho re, bana ba lulang ba le bang ha baa bolokeha. (They come and bombat us with news that they are raped, when you investigate the whereabouts of their older guardians, you discover that they are raised by the family member working afar from here. When they are asleep, the older one in Grade 11 now experience rape. This says child-headed households are not safe. (ST3).

I was taught sex while I was still in primary school at the very tender age by the old mothers and sisters in the village and even my older female relatives. I think that is rape. My deceased great grandfather told me that all young boys undergo the same experience to help in becoming strong men, hence reprimanded me not to tell anyone anymore. A video of those many incidents play day light in my head even when I'm in class, hence I'm underperforming. (LMVL9).

I was raped my own uncle when I was ten. He silenced me with a skirt. When I was thirteen, he did it again. This time he purchased school dress for me. He knew I was in dire need of it since we were punished at school. When I was in Grade 10, he initiated raping me ones more, but I fled away. Now he stopped providing basic needs for me. The fact that I lost my virginity to him haunts me I thought of committing suicide as my own grandma keeps yelling and telling me to keep shut when I try to share with her what happened. I cannot do well in my studies under this condition. (LFVL3)

It is worst with us girl orphans with disability who stay at the boarding for deaf down there. We can't speak for ourselves and it is not save where we stay. We're not given total care. Community takes

advantage of us. They rape us and justice isn't always done by courts to address such cases. We can't pass because this is inwardly troubling us. (LFVL2)

We LGBTQI community suffer rape the most. We are labelled and called names. No wonder why some of us commit suicide; this is toxic! I always report it and I'm usually referred to what is called counselling where I'm monotonously told to forgive, forget and pray. How do I forget when the society is still in my case and still hurts the most? Should I bury my experiences and memories and pretend all is well? We're entitled to fundamental human rights too. (LMVL2)

I have just discovered that I was born as the result of my mother being raped and this is disturbing me lately so much that I don't focus in my school work. I have never shared this with anyone here at school. Unfortunately, my mum is no more to give me answers. I can't even ask family members that are whispering it because I hate them. (SMVL8).

Such sobbing and heart-breaking discussions were regularly complemented by suicidal declarations. Luckily, they did not die because they are born for a purpose. Until they fulfil that mission, they will continue to survive since they did not give up on schooling.

Vulnerable learners who stay on their own are raped because they have no elders to save them from rape as ST3 indicates. This study uncovers that, not only girl children are raped, but boys too, are, as LMVL9 confirms it. Unfortunately, it is out of bounds for Basotho children to discuss sexual intercourse matters with adults (Allen, 2018). That is why the great grandfather and the grandmother in the LMVL9's and LFVL3's utterances above constantly rebuked the respondents to shut up when reporting the alleged sexual violation. This severe traditional prescription does not stop the rapists from their act they have cash muscles, which they misuse to mute the survivors; they exploit them by donating essentials which they cannot resist and any reporting of the sexual assault results in an end to the benefits (Hlojeng & Makura, 2020).

This denotes that community starts with an individual and society largely impacts on child's development in many ways. This is deep beyond words. Adults as leaders seem not to build good rapport that is suggested by contingency theory in section 2.2.2.1 which could save vulnerable learners from challenges such as rape. The reality that they are raped and that they are born as a result of rape, like it is the case with SMVL8, worry the survivors to an extent that they do not concentrate in their

studies. Household relationships must be key sources for holistic support, especially for orphaned children whose support is contingent to families for growth demands.

This act of violence in the above conversations, confirms dimensions of the abuse of authority against vulnerable children. The matters of safe neighbourhoods and shelter from the environment, as suggested by contingency theory are big challenges for vulnerable learners. They require emotional, physical safety and accepted within the community to fulfil their potentials in toto.

It is deduced from this data that vulnerable learners are powerless; thus, they rely on justice and orders of the courts to secure them. However, the words by LFVL2 “*they rape us and justice isn’t always done by courts to address such cases*” admit that the vulnerable learners are neglected and the courts do not support the oppressed victims, which encourages the rapists to legitimise and endure, the act which, on the other side, impacts to vulnerable learners’ academic underachievement. Security and law are not taken care of.

Lesotho is renowned as a peaceful country, but peace interpreted as non-existence of war is valueless to vulnerable learners who are suffering rape. Peace lasts if human rights of vulnerable learners are free and respected, hence the ‘if-then’ model of contingency theory.

5.2.1.4 Overcrowded accommodation

The South African and Lesotho participants pointed out that, vulnerable learners live in overcrowded homes. The vulnerable learners bemoaned:

We have a case of a learner who stays with the grandmother and the other five grandchildren only in the name of benefiting from their social grant because she doesn’t care for them. Just imagine five children in one house! (Group D1).

I don’t do school work while at home due to home chores coupled with lot of noise in the house. All of us grand-children stay with my grand-mother and since I’m the older and only the only girl, I ensure that I clean, cook and take care of my grandmother. (SFVL1)

I'm liable to take care of the eight since I'm oldest. (LFVL1)

The above data shows that South Africans and Basotho vulnerable learners lived in crowded space. The vulnerable learners' families should meet specific conditions considering the sizes and numbers of heads housed in one place. The need for the vulnerable learners' privacy to study is overcrowded thus, confronted with learning constraints such as excessive noise levels (Hlojeng and Makura, 2020). This is suggesting difficulty for vulnerable learners to prepare schoolwork at home, which consequently result in poorly obtained pass marks.

5.2.1.5 Separated siblings

Orphans that do not live under the same roof with their siblings highlighted this as a challenge that hinders them to perform to their best:

Our sister stays in Bethlehem while my brother in Fourisberg. Besides the fact that they send money only when they remembered, they don't come home. Wish we could sit and share some of the things bothering me, I long for their sisterly and brotherly love. (SFVL2)

Absent parents contribute to their children's vulnerability and underperformance in school. Separated and divorced parents involve their children in their fights. So they feel their parents don't love them, hence resort to suicide. (ST5)

I fail because I always worry about my nine years old sister who lives with relatives burdened with home chores. (LFVL2)

When I first learned, he was deprived of to Grade 8, I cried. I could have passed Grade 10 if it were not because of his problems. (LMVL3)

It is understood that, vulnerable learners that are separated with their siblings wallow in constant worrisome about long distance separation. This worry stops them from concentrating on their schoolwork. A further conclusion here is that there are power dynamics discussed by contingency theory in section 2.2.2.2 that are at play in the definition of the vulnerability of the learners and orphans as noted in LFVL2's words that "*my nine years old sister... burdened with home chores*". The elders misuse their authority and power to authenticate inequality (Hlojeng & Makura, 2020).

5.2.1.6 Family relations

Vulnerable learners blamed their negative family relationships for their academic underachievement. Rage was written all over their faces and it is this blame that impacts negatively on their schoolwork. Therefore, one can deduce that it is difficult

for an angry mind to focus on studies as this resulted in their underperformance. They explained thus:

They are not well taken care of at home yet they receive their grants; they chew their money which is meant to cater for their basic needs. You would see them shivering with cold in winter because their caregivers don't provide them with warm clothes (ST4).

We discover them when they, out of nowhere, just burst in to tears in classes. When we ask, it is then that they disclose that they are victims of domestic violence. So their mental state doesn't allow them to learn in classes. (Group D1).

I stay in my grandmother's house. There is tension amongst her children which in turn affects me because they want me to take sides. As a result of this, they don't meet my school need fully. (SFVL7).

My heart goes to kids with absent parents. This year alone, we established lots learners whose vulnerability is as a result of their parents being in second marriage because of death or divorce. These learners don't perform well in their studies. (SSMT1).

My mother passed away long time ago. My father quarrels with our step mother every month end because he doesn't sleep home and comes back drunk. He uses most of his salary to buy alcohol not to the things needed in the house. Everytime when I visited them, they bad-mouth my mother to a point where I told myself not to visit them anymore. So my father creates an excuse that he nonger support me because I don't visit them. (SMVL7).

My father died a tragic death. He was brutally killed by my mother's boyfriends. I think I still mourn his death; hence, I don't do well in my studies. My mother refuses to perform ritual cleansing for me because she says he's my father not hers. (SFVL3)

Before my father passed away, he sold our fields and his home. I'm worried of how I will live should my uncles expel me in their house. (SMVL2).

My mother couldn't pay my fees when I was in Grade 8 in 2018. In 2019, I struggled worse with fees until last quarter when I was denied to write. She claimed she didn't have money but I know she wasn't telling the truth, it was only because she wanted my father to take charge. I was torn apart between both of them because they were divorced. I had to repeat Grade nine in 2020 because of their conflicts. They are better of now when they are no more. (LFVL7).

I knew my father only before he died. I don't see an eye to eye with the so called my mother (finger gestures indicating quotes). She just came to vicinity right now when I'm able to make my own ends meets wanting me to go and stay with her. I can't stay with her now when she left me get married in RSA whi I was newly born. I can't trust her now, she better stay where she is now and leave me alone. I thought she was bad-mouthed until I witness that she badly conducts herself. I blocked and deleted her in all social medias. (LMVL9).

I don't know who my father is. My mother too abandoned us. We stayed alone at home for too long because no one wanted to stay with us; people hate burdens. Now I stay with my great grandmother with her three older children. I greet them, they don't respond. I happen to fail, they were angry at me and lost hope that I would make it up to this far. The male one hates me the most because she whips me for no reasons. He calls me sekhoaloana (stunted child), sekhoaloana (illegitimate child) and many other belittling names. I didn't bring myself to the world; as to how I was brought to earth, only my parents should be blamed for it, not me. (LFV4).

My mother and sister died of HIV/AIDS they got from my father and I swear I won't forgive him for infecting all of us. Worst, he abandoned us! His mistress denies him from supporting us I often repeat grades because of these. (LMVL2).

The above data confirms that vulnerable learners from both South Africa and Lesotho blame their family relations for their academic underachievement in schools; a challenge that justifies the need for them to be supported. It is this blame that they put on to their family members that resulted non-acceptance of their situation and lack of concentration to their studies. However, the parents and guardians seem to have lost the values of respect and humility. The father, for instance, slept around and abandoned his family as put by LMVL2 who elicited his unprincipled acts that are communally unacceptable among the social order. The use of the words, “*I swear I won’t forgive him for infecting all of us*”, does not shift the blame to reconciliation. A father deserting his children is against the critical values of accountability and responsibility declared by contingency theory in section 2.2.2.2. On the other hand, the social need of love is explicit in LMVL2’s conversation. This male vulnerable learner took it upon himself to care for his sick family and so his selflessness, which resulted in him missing school, owing to taking care of his family, cannot be overemphasised.

5.2.1.7 Inadequate safety measures

Vulnerable learners who live with no one else feel they are exposed to danger, hence a challenge that justify a need for them to be helped out. This is how they put it in their own words:

Everything that happens in my house reflects on my studies. After my siblings abandoned us, I lived with my grannies at Mahobong and I left my younger brother alone. Both of us felt in isolation. Lately, Tumi was moved from our home to Khanyane, while I ran away from my uncle’s sexual abuse to boarding. When schools close, I spend school holidays at home, and I at all times get frightened to sleeping alone. If they are able to still furniture, blankets, pots and many items in the house, it says any harm could occur unto me any time. (LFVL3)

It is construed that when secured environment, suggested by contingency theory, is not offered, learners are harmed and feel insecure. The above described conditions concurs with observations made by Fabian (2019), Riley, Evans, Anderson and Robson (2019) that security requirements comprise protection from any harm, feeling safe, orders, laws, stabilities and free from fear. The humanness of Pembroke (2019) and becoming humans, is destroyed by the inhumane community leaving the vulnerables at the mercy of rapists (Hlojeng & Makura, 2020). A girl child, living in such dangerous environments, is exposed to high jeopardy of rape.

Therefore, the interpretation from the above data is that vulnerable learners' rights are violated such that they end up losing hope on their communities that they are failing to protect them.

5.2.1.8 Child labour

Child labour was cited by participants as a challenge that justifies the need for high school management teams to support vulnerable learners in their academic work. Some of the key participants' responses are as follows:

Most of our learners here head their families. It is this state that forces them to provide for other younger siblings. We hire people working in our houses because we also can't afford coupling our work as teachers with household activities. What more of a child heading the family who has to provide for the family, does home chores as well as school work? (Group A1)

Before I go to school every day, I bath my younger cousin, feed her, and take her to crèche. I dodge afternoon classes too because I'm bound to collect her from school. Her mother works just too far to provide for us. My grandmother can't afford looking after my cousin, taking her to and from school because she's too old and sick. (SMVL3).

My aunt's partner deserted her because of us, so nobody works for us. The little she earns at piece-jobs is not enough for her children and us. So, when I get home, I make lot of money; I sell wild roses and thatch. Those make a lot of cash, enough for our living. (LMVL3)

The responses above indicate that the vulnerable learners' academic underachievement is linked to the prevalence of child labour, as also argued by Nyabanyaba (2010), Bless (2007) and Jha and Kelleher (2006). These scholars indicate that the household chores of the vulnerable children include looking after sick siblings, which rests quite heavily on these children. SMVL3 confirms Kimane's (2004) argument that domestic work is even worse for the orphans adopted by young relatives, who have to work in return for school needs. Therefore, the data above concurs with the view that this kind of child labour is child abuse (Bless, 2007). Children should not perform parental roles because that hinders their learning and, there is no way that these vulnerable learners could pass when they have all these chores to perform.

Some teachers did not consider the above-mentioned work as child labour. They instead thought that they were helping the orphans and the orphans would help them in return. That is, some teachers make the orphans to do domestic work and they pay them through the provision of their needs:

I always help out by adopting girl orphans every time each of them completes school here. The current one is older than my girl. The previous one was her age-mate. They help my family in small chores like cleaning the house, laundry, cooking, drawing some water and I thank them by school needs. (LSMT1).

Although LSMT1 above felt like she is helping, it is a burden for the orphans to carry because these home chores prevent them from engaging in their studies. This suggests that the teachers have unfavourable power of money over the vulnerable learners and use this to exploit them. It also highlights the existence of unequal power relations (described by contingency theory in section 2.2.2.2) between the vulnerable learners and those who look after them as noted in the reality that LSMT1's own children are of the same age as these orphans or even older and yet they are not engaged in these "small chores" to which she refers. It is deduced in her response "they help my family in small chores" that her children are helped by even the younger orphans she says she adopts.

Similarly, SMTs indicated that in the case of their vulnerable learners with deaf disability, the language barrier between the members of the family and the deaf learners adds to their child labour, a situation considered to turning them into slaves. The deaf learners do not have the chance at home to share anything with family members, except for labour. LMVL2 indicated that when he is home, he does the entire job alone because that is the only thing he can do. He further indicated that he has stepbrothers of his age while others are even older than him, but unless he finishes the chores, the stepmother does not allow him to come to school when schools reopen. The issue of child labour was unconsciously made evident by his stepmother in a parents' meeting (which was meant to request parents and/or guardians to permit their children to take part in this study) at school –

Hole sena saka se matla hampe! Masimo ane aka kaofela oa a lema kaofela, jarete eaka ea tlokoma ke botala, patsi e haka e thiba letsatsi! Haka ho makhetha ana a ts'abehang ke setholo sena sa ka.

(This imbecile of mine is very energetic; he ploughs all my fields and garden, I've got lot of wood because of him and my yard is so clean it hurts).

Seemingly, parents cannot draw a line between child's duties and child labour. It is even worse when a learner is hindered to come to school because of the work given at home. On top of vulnerable learners who are victims of labour, they are also called stigmatising and discriminating names. LMVL2, for instance, is labelled "sehole" (imbecile) and "setholo" (the dumb one), instead of "ea nang le bokooa ba kutlo le puo" (deaf).

Without doubt, poverty results in vulnerable learners who cannot afford health services and who become involved in sexual relationships, resulting in early unintended pregnancy and sicknesses. Rape and child labour are also because of poverty, all of which result in the academic underachievement of vulnerable children.

5.2.1.9 Unacceptable social behaviour

Unacceptable behaviour of vulnerable learners is quoted as pivotal in perpetuating their underperformance in school. Respondents mentioned that:

Drugs and alcohol are leading causes of our vulnerable learners' academic underachievement here at this school. When they used drugs and alcohol, they don't cooperate. Surprisingly, community members are perpetrators of this behaviour. They sell drugs and alcohol to these learners. Worst, most unprotected sex practices among vulnerable learners happen when they are drunk, resulting pregnancy which in turn disturbs their concentration on their studies. These also affect other pupils in their learning space. (Group B1)

Boys claim to get solace from drugs while girls engage in multiple concurrent relationships. They sell themselves at night. During lessons, they sleep because they are tired. When we dig deeper, we reveal they started not sleeping home as early as when they were in primary level. (Group D1).

Every year, a number of girls falling pregnant increases. Two years ago, we had twenty-three. (Goup C1).

Their mother rented them a house near my house. The older one doesn't sleep there, she comes to school by chance and when she comes, she oversleeps in class. That signals she doesn't sleep at night. (ST6).

Vulnerable learners are gangsters, they rob us. Our deputy is the victim of most of them. You remember the one you met in the corridor this morning...? We all refused to write a testimonial for him. (Group F1).

Vulnerable learners misbehave more than any other children here at school, when you rebuke them, they become defensive. They plainly steal others' belongings and deny it. They are greedy (SSMT11).

It is not easy to help them because they are drug addicts, bullies, stubborn. (Group E1).

Vulnerable learners are problematic. We are also told by guardians and parents that they come home late telling lies always and they don't want to be reprimanded. (LT4)

They are violent; they are always involved in fights. They have anger issues. They attack us in front of other learners. So we decided that, they push their own agenda and we will do the same (SSMT14).

Most of them get stuck at Grade 10, then they start troubling us with bad behaviour such as smoking dagga and finally dropping out. If you could look at it closely, high drop rate is experienced in Grade 8 and 10. At Grade 8, they drop because they don't adjust to high school life while in Grade 10 they repeat it for several times until they despair, hence drop out. (SSMT4).

Based on the above data, it can be argued that there is no collaboration between the community and School B study since some of the members of the community were suspected of selling alcohol and drugs to learners. There is also no cooperation between learners and their teacher. This is taken from words of SSMT14 that *"They attack us in front of other learners. So, we decided that they push their own agenda and we will do the same"* and Group F1 that *"they rob us, and our deputy is the victim of most of them... We all refused to write a testimonial for him"*. This indicates that the inability to create sound relationships suggested by contingency theory in section 2.2.2.2 is one of the challenges that worsen these learners' vulnerability. According to the participants above, issues such as alcohol, drug abuse, unsafe sex and unintended pregnancies amongst vulnerable learners disturbed their schooling especially attempts at improving and sustaining academic performance. This response extract also resonates with the observation by the WHO (2009) that adolescents' alcohol consumption is commonly high amongst Black Africans, that leads to early and unintended pregnancies and STIs.

The vulnerable learners' respondents also disclosed that they have an intercourse in return of economic gains from adults. The responses on how this relationship leads to their academic underachievement included the following:

My life depends on elderly males inclusive of my own teachers. I'm not under age, so there's nothing immoral about it. It's even nicer when we mix this business with alcohol and some substances. (LFVL2).

Similarly, participant LFVL3 submitted thus:

Sugar daddies provide me with my necessities. I go for abortion when I become pregnant because they are not negotiable about protected sex. My terror to use contraceptives is that they cause infertility and I don't want to be a barren. Nevertheless, I can't deny that I underperform due to these abortions which give me nightmares. Besides, their partners call me now and then, they reported me to the principal and the teachers judge me.

Furthermore, LFVL3 revealed in separated discussion about likelihood of being empregnated by men that she every time had abortion. Her “terror” to become “barren” triggered her to reject contraceptives. Her other anxiety stemmed from the wives of these men, who frequently phoned her, reported the matter at school and resulting into the teachers seeing her as the prostitute.

It should be noted that it is not only girls who have casual sexual relations in exchange of their essentials; male vulnerable learners also do. This is confirmed in the responses below:

I fall in love with women of the same age as my mum. Their spouses are looking for me from the principal and they want me dead. I fall in love with them because they provide airtime, money, laundry, food and all that a woman can offer her husband. However, this backfires because their husbands look for me even at school. This disturbs my studies as some of the teachers know about it. As an alternative to cutting the notes, I would rather take care by not falling in love with women whose husbands are working at Force Department. I really can't afford losing the support from married women. (LMVL1).

A similar response by LMVL2 notes that:

Compared to falling in love with my agemates, I also prefer wives because they never miss contraceptives, so I enjoy mpilo (unprotected sex) with them. This conduct condones my school undeperformance since I always get caught. I'm quite aware it's unacceptable behaviour that impacts negatively in my schoolwork, but I'm sorry I'm addicted.

The data above confirms that vulnerable learners from low socio-economic background are entangled in unethical relationships such unprotected sex which in turn leads to unintended pregnancies and other sexually transmitted diseases, later contributing to their academic underachievement. These activities violate the processes of becoming a person with ethics (Hlojeng and Makura, 2020) and the respect of human dignity (Quan-Baffour, Romm & McIntyre-Mills, 2019). The Lesotho Code of Good Practice (2011) forbids conjugal love between educators and learners,

emphasising that doing so contravenes criminal act against learners. Teachers act in *loco parentis* hence they should be the first line of child protection.

5.2.2 School factors

It was also observed that there are school-based challenges that influence vulnerable learners' academic underachievement, hence, the need for the high school management teams to support vulnerable learners in their academic work. Several sub-themes emerged during individual and focus groups interviews with participants focusing on this issue.

5.2.2.1 Administration and admission criteria

The schools' administrative practices and admission criteria in both countries were perceived by participants as having an influence on the vulnerable learners' academic underachievement. Some of the participants' responses to the issue of schools' administrative practices and admission criteria in relation to the vulnerable learners' academic underachievement were as follows:

They have just written first term; out of 20 vulnerable learners matriculating, only 8 passed. I'm going to address them to make more effort to pass. (SSMT10).

By virtue of being public school, our school automatically attracts vulnerable learners. Unfortunately, their vulnerability makes them not to pass. Therefore, it is necessary for them to be helped out so that they could perform just like learners in private school who are not vulnerable. (SSMT5).

Since its establishment, our school was recognised as meant for orphans. There are more than twelve schools around here. Some are private schools while others are church schools. For so long, we were the only school which operated as government school. For this reason, we always had vulnerable learners dominating the enrolment. (Group E1).

The main focus for administration; both the department and the SGB pressurise us to produce good results, but there's no way that this could be done before we address vulnerable learners' challenges. We are told to attend them after classes, but there are some that need immediate attention during teaching and learning. So we have no time to thoroughly pay attention to vulnerable learners' challenges. (SSMT4).

We are too loaded. We don't have a specific time for vulnerable learners; we organise lots of meetings for compliance, build files and sort lot of things. Some teachers I head cheat; they give learners lots of assignments per day, and then give them answers to copy so as to build the evidence of curriculum coverage at expense of proper teaching. Who benefits? Find out when results are out. (SSMT12).

I must admit once again that for these many years I have been the principal, I haven't been administering vulnerable learners' issues very well yet I'm given statistical return tool to guide me. I

want to make an example about the enrolment information part in this tool which requires that in each stream, I identify orphans in terms of their type and gender. I most of the time omit or provide incorrect information because in most cases, class teachers do not update their classroom attendance lists and their registers, so I would be in hurry to meet deadline submission of this tool. (LSMT10).

Most of learners admitted at this school are vulnerable because our principal goes places hunting them. They are full in those classes down there. If you look at them, you would tell that they are from humble backgrounds. They don't take long though; most of them dropped out, some repeat classes while some of them are just pushed to the next classes by principal without actually passing and without our consent. (LSMT2).

It's quite challenging to teach the mind-set full of social problems and expect such a mind to perform well in schools. We admit just too many vulnerable learners full of problems that affect their learning, hence they underachieve. (LSMT1).

SSMT10 and SSMT5 confirmed that vulnerable learners underachieve in their academic work. That is why SSMT10 even submitted that, as part of administration, talking to them would influence them to improve in their schoolwork. The utterances by SSMT5 and Group E elaborated how admission criterion is the challenge that justifies a need for vulnerable learners to be supported. The example of this is seen in their words that, due to their state of being vulnerable, vulnerable learners underachieve, hence there is a need for them to be supported for them to pass.

The response by SSMT4 conveyed the message that vulnerable learners' academic underachievement is because of not varying leadership styles proposed by contingency theory in section 2.2.2.2. The words "*The main focus for administration...pressurise(s) us to produce good results*" confirm that SSMT4's leaders are more task-oriented without balancing it with human relations as required by contingency theory. Leaders seem to look at SMTs fulfilling tasks without keeping good relations with them. They thus seem to have developed defence mechanisms. This is so in that, instead of improving learners' performance, they "*organise lots of meetings for compliance, build files and sort many things*" (see SSMT12 above) to prove that they are working yet at the end, learners' work is not as good as their beautiful meetings, files and evidence. This is because they are "*pressurise(d)*" as put by SSMT4, to develop proving skills instead of being assisted to improve their approaches that would benefit even vulnerable learners.

Lesotho's principals do not perform their responsibilities as LSMT10 admitted that *"...for these many years I have been the principal, I haven't been administering vulnerable learners' issues very well yet I'm given statistical return tool to guide me ..."*. Principal always decided to either leave out or incorrectly fill the required data and blames time factor and class teachers for not updating pupils' attendance information. This paints the principal as not performing her duty of ensuring that, teachers too perform their duties. It is also the principal's duty to register the pupils and to provide correct statistical returns. Failure to perform these duties evidence the principal's incompetence, negligence and underperformance Education Act (2010) section 19(4).

On the other hand, there are other Lesotho principals who personally recruit learners from poor backgrounds, although some participants argued that principal's *'hunting'* of these vulnerable children from their homes is just a strategy of increasing the school's enrolment for money. The statement by LSMT2 that: *"they are full in those classes down there"*, clearly indicates that the vulnerable learners learn in unfavourable environments, which exacerbates their underachievement. The recruited vulnerable children are admitted at the school under study in large numbers, which leads to congestion in the classrooms. This is a violation of the Lesotho Sector Strategic Plan (2005-2015) which stipulates that classrooms must adhere to a maximum of 45 learners per classroom.

The principal allegedly decided (albeit, against the teachers' advice) to take failed vulnerable learners to the next classes. This is evident in LSMT2's utterance that *"some of them are just pushed to the next classes by principal without actually passing and without our consent"*. Plainly, the principal drew her power from the School (Supervision and Management) Regulation (1988) to promote the pupils she considered fit to the next grade. However, in accordance with the above utterance, it was improper for the principal to promote the learners to the next classes if they were not fit, since they did not meet the set criteria. The principal uses her authority and power to oppress others. This power of the principal leads to unfavourable

situations (as postulated by contingency theory in section 2.2.2.2) not for only teachers but also for the learners who she thinks cannot produce better results.

Notwithstanding some SMTs blaming the underachievement on the principal, they conceded that learners from humble social backgrounds impacted on their performance. The principal seemed to sympathise with such learners and went on to search for them in their villages and brought them to the school. This practice depended on individual learners' circumstances articulated by contingency theory in section 2.2.2.1. It was always the vulnerables since they could not afford to enrol.

The participants persisted in insisting that the school administration and admission criteria affected vulnerable learners' performance. Below are their submissions:

Students with problems consider this school appropriate for them, thus, they are admitted in large numbers. Such pupils include among others vulnerable learners that were not admitted in other schools, expelled from their previous schools because they have failed and because of many other problems. This kind of admission is a challenge in that, they are already hopeless and it's their background that contributes to their academic underachievement. (LSMT4)

Vulnerable learners that we teach here have low Intelligence Quotient (IQ) by virtue of birth, so there is no way that they could be expected to produce high percentage pass rate. They did not obtain good passes from their previous schools, and they are admitted in this school. So what miracle is it expected from us? You can't press water out of the stone, never! We worked so hard as school to admit helpless cases and rejects. We called for this, we actually hunted them, and this made better students not to come to our school. Chances of reducing the failure rate are very slim in as long as we continue administering the school this way. (LT2).

The statement by the LSMT4: “*vulnerable learners that were not admitted in other schools, expelled from their previous schools because they have failed and because of many other problems*”, confirms the general existence of a culture of exclusion of vulnerable children. Non-vulnerable learners receive education freely and without any constrictions while vulnerable learners are excluded from receiving education due to reasons beyond their control. There are also dynamics of power at play here inferred by contingency theory in section 2.2.2.2 where other principals use their authority to perpetuate inequality in that they admit and give access to education to the non-vulnerable learners while vulnerable learners are not given this opportunity.

The school principals' admission of children at schools, regardless of their backgrounds, is a sign of humanity. A good social practice regime should not marginalise other learners in the school community. For instance, it is inhumane for a teacher to label learners as having “*very low intelligence quotients by virtue of their birth*” since nobody is born stupid. Thus, the contingency theory propounds that teachers should employ methods that are highly effective in any given situation. Instead of tagging the vulnerable learners as: “*rejects, hopeless and helpless cases*”, the teacher's role is to identify the approaches that will contribute to the attainment of the best results in any given situation.

5.2.2.2 Insufficient instructional materials

The insufficient teaching and learning materials for vulnerable learners were perceived as the school-based challenge which necessitates vulnerable learners to be supported with. This is expressed in responses made by several participants:

Our principal misuses funds. I know that principals are given M2 500.00 book allowance for each vulnerable learner and thereafter M500.00 yearly. But our principal never mentioned the M2 500.00. These vulnerable learners do not have books and it's very hard to teach learners without them. Bursary scheme just give book allowance without any follow up. In the case of our school, it doesn't look like even that M500.00 ever come because they do not even have cheaper ones, worth less than this amount. (Group E1).

Vulnerable learners particularly lack academic needs. The M220.00 government rental books scheme doesn't include exercise books and other textbooks for other subjects. They are given four books for four subjects only and when you get in class, you only get three learners with those four books for the whole class. They can't even afford college exercise book costing M5.50. Some learners still pay the M220.00 though, but there are still no learning materials, furniture, extra computers and equipment. It is true that society around the school took certain school properties but headmaster seems to be doing nothing about this yet we are towards end of the year. (Group A1).

I raise a Grade 11 orphan back home, and I went for a quotation of her text books. They range well above M5 600. You can just imagine in the case of our orphans here with no guardians to buy them books. We cannot expect them to pass without books. Bursary schemes don't give such amount of money for books or books themselves. They give school only M500.00 as book allowance which doesn't even come at times. (LSMT2)

We do not have textbooks, exercise books and other necessary stationery for learning. In a computer room, a huge group of us share one computer. So, we cannot be expected to do well in our studies when our learning is not aided by these learning materials. (LMVL2)

Our Sesotho teacher needs six textbooks, four quire note book, classwork and tests books. The government buys all other textbooks other than the Sesotho ones, they say they are cheap, but they are not because they cost more than M1000.00. If we can't afford food at home, it's worst with books. (Group E2).

Teachers expel us for calculators, instruments and other school material needs. Failure to meet such needs makes us to stealing them from others. (Group C2).

We wish we could be helped out not only by our teachers but also by others in our villages. (Goup F2).

One of the major contributing factors to the academic underachievement of vulnerable learners is that, they lack learning materials, as bemoaned by all the Lesotho participants. They said the sponsored vulnerable learners are not given books and stationery, hence, making it difficult for learning to take place. Even when learners pay M220.00 for a government book fee, the books are not enough for all the learners, while some are damaged. This hampers the sustainable social change of the learners recommended by contingency theory, for it is hard for them to learn if there are limited numbers of books or none. Books are the resources suggested by contingency theory as tools and materials needed to perform the social practice. In their absence, the vulnerable learners continue to fail. Lack of books for the learners makes it difficult to teach, which is reason enough for failure. Failure at this level of education has implications that one is likely to fail in life, in most of the cases because those who fail, can hardly be employed in industries or admitted to tertiary institutes. Unfortunately, progress, in this case, is disrupted by the failure to meet lower-level needs, such as books.

On the other hand, the response by the group of HoDs and teacher above that *“our principal never mentioned the M2 500.00”* indicates that the principal does not build a good rapport, interpersonal relationships and does not show support for his subordinates, as suggested by the contingency theory. This is because the group does not know what is wrong with learners not getting books paid by the MoET and other bursary schemes. This poses a problem in terms of communication by the principal to the other subordinates. If the group allows the wrongs to go unchallenged, the impression is created that those wrongs have the approval of the majority.

The conditions described above are not favourable for instruction to take place. Books, stationery and computers are part of resources needed to help learners to perform, thus, lack of books most probably leads to the continued failure of

vulnerable learners. It emerges from Lesotho focus group of teachers (Group A1) that the school principal was blamed for the lack of planning on the acquisition and management of resources. The accusations were levelled at her for not arranging learning materials on time. The blame shifted to the principal noted here may be linked to the observations made by Kamper (2009) Fullan (2007), Sanders (2006) and Coleman, and Earley, (2005) that a school's effectiveness is linked to a strong principal leadership that makes school to attain best results for the school.

However, the idea is that everybody must be resourceful to the people they are serving (Braithwaite, 2009). This contests the educators' perception that the condition should have been attended to solely by the headmaster. It also questions the rational behind educators isolating themselves from administering schools. Hence, the researcher noted the existing unseen obstacles that prevented teachers, from taking part in administering the school every day. Nonetheless, the teachers' thoughts and rational are connected to the conception that principals are entrusted with power, elicited in contingency theory, to drive their school forward. This study is for the idea that, it is the duty of the principal, HoDs and teachers to make sure that the school is best administered (Rainey & Honing, 2012).

Another matter tabled while in discussing insufficient instructional materials issue was that, people around school stole school properties. Teachers noted that, there existed some hostility between these stakeholders where the society around school looks at educators as foreigners. At the same time the teachers did not acknowledge the community, as a result, the school continued to be distant from the public. The school has barely recognised the optimistic benefits they could gain from the public while the public had also not acknowledged its part in the school. This is again evidenced by vulnerable pupils' that they loved if the school management could establish strong relations between the school and the public as also proposed by contingency theory. The learners also stressed that guardians should ensure that their children do their schoolwork. Likewise, learners specified that a culture of collaboration and care for their school by in-school and out-of-school members could aid in refining their schoolwork.

Therefore, in-schools and out-of-school community must establish a sense of solidarity that aids public and societal involvement for this interrelationship to materialise.

5.2.2.3 Financial problems

Financial problems were cited by several participants as an impediment leading to the underperformance of vulnerable learners. One SMT member lamented:

Unlike in private schools, we don't make money that we could put aside to cater for the needs of vulnerable learners. So if I help, I don't help at my position capacity, but as a person. (Group D1).

Most learners are vulnerable, thus, they are paid school fees mainly by Ministry of Social Development and other bursary schemes. So, payments delay or there is no payment at all. The government has rationalised fees, so they pay half of that rationalised fees. We are at the end of the year now and they have not paid fees at all. When payments delay or do not come at all, feeding in particular suffers together with many things that require money to run a school. (LSMT3).

Money is needed to run the school because the success of plans and activities relies on the availability of funds. This relates well to the contingency theory (Section 2.2.2) that in this situation, certain structural and management strategies are most suitable to solve certain problems. The study considers it imperative that the fees policies for vulnerable learners should be clear to all the stakeholders. Even though the participants emphasised that they fail because of lack of finances, Yalokwu (2002) observes that most organisations fail, not because of insufficient funds, but because of their poor management.

Nonetheless, participants continued to argue that, lack of finances contributed to the academic underachievement of vulnerable learners:

We are always told that government hasn't paid our fees, but we are never told when it has paid. I'm wondering if government hasn't paid in my five years here. We are denied to fight for our rights because we are threatened and reminded that we are vulnerable sympathised at by the school. (LMVL3).

We are really on financial crisis. Debts are all over and the MoSD doesn't pay, so we cannot make them pass under these conditions. Lack of finance causes conflict amongst stakeholders and let our learners here to strike. One of the main things they complain about is poor diet. They sometimes learn

with empty stomach because we rely on bursary schemes that sponsor vulnerable learners, so if the money doesn't come, they continue suffering. (LSMT2).

Financial problems result in clashes between learners, the school and the parents who are paying fees, the school and the other staff members, the school and the shops and the other institutions owed by the school. The conflicts emerge because the principal would promise to pay when the vulnerable learners' bursaries pay, which does not always come. Therefore, the vulnerable learners ride on the backs of a few non-vulnerable learners who pay their school fees. The non-vulnerable learners and their parents thus do not tolerate this, consequently causing conflicts that, in turn, negatively affect the school's performance because the environment full of conflicts is not conducive for learning. (LSMT3)

The SMT members further submitted that the non-vulnerable learners ended up being reluctant to pay fees too. When they are sent home for the non-payment of fees, they do not readily return and they go to better performing schools after passing, leaving their debts at the former school. The school is an entity relying on fees for operations such that some staff members, (both academic and non-academic) that would be owed by the school sued the principal. Some long-service staff prolonged their stay while waiting for their salaries while some learners who owed the school did not always get their external academic results on time.

If the school environment were conducive enough for learning and if all the facilities that help them pass were in place, vulnerable learners would be forced to forget about their state of being vulnerable and their problems at home. Unfortunately, the schools facilities are inadequate due to the financial challenges experienced at the schools. It is noted that the Lesotho school under study has inadequate funds as the data above reflects. The lack of funds impeded the school's ability to support projects, pay its private employees and meet the other obligations that need money. Therefore, it can be concluded that the non-availability of finances hampered vulnerable learners from achieving.

5.2.2.4 Teachers and teaching-related factors

An equally perplexing assertion proffered by participants regarding the challenges that justify the need for SMTs to support vulnerable learners in their academic work was the teachers and teaching-related factors. Participants opined that:

Parents are the strong drive to school management team, teachers and learners for ensuring learners' good performance. A fear of what a parent will say when their child isn't given classwork and failing isn't there in both teachers and administration because most of us here are orphans. (LFVL1)

We are not well taught by some of our teachers here. My granny doesn't raise sensitive issues such as this one in parents' meetings for fear of support that might be withdrawn. I get lots of help from the school so she feels she will offend management and staff. (LFVL3)

Vulnerable learners have developed negative attitude towards the teachers whose text books are not offered by the book rental scheme. They have to buy them on their own because the government excluded them in the scheme believing that they are so cheap that everyone can afford buying them, but it always hit on vulnerable learners the most because they can't afford to buy them. (Group E1).

We are just too loaded. It is not easy to attend to vulnerable learners' matters and then teach at the same time. (Group F1).

In line with contingency theory, the culture of a school influences people's behaviour in the school regardless of the parents' presence or absence. Teachers who are not performing their tasks at school do not consider the learners' future important. SMTs likewise do not perform duties in accordance with the Education Act (2010), Part IV, Section 21. They do not regulate the amount of work assigned to learners, as enunciated in the School (Supervision and Management) Regulation (1988). On face value, the SMTs and the teachers do not diligently perform their duties as enshrined in this regulation. Consequently, the principal bears the brunt of teachers' abrogation and dereliction of their duties as stipulated under Sub-regulation (1) of the said Act. These scenarios result in the learners and parents (who are under the school's bursary scheme) not expressing their discontent on this matter due to the fear that their children will be denied the desired teaching and help from the school. The power dynamics and relations tend to be tilted against the vulnerable elements in society. Hence, freedom of expression is curtailed.

5.2.2.5 Teachers' attitude towards vulnerable learners

The participants also reported that certain educators had undesirable approach towards vulnerable learners. This challenge appears to be a major problem in the vulnerable learners' academic work. Both the South Africans and Basotho participants submitted that:

You see 'm'e, the negative attitude that my teachers portrayed to you, is the same attitude they give to vulnerable learners; they dislike them. (SSMT10).

These learners expect too much; when you try to open up to them, they take advantage. They want to be treated like our own children like giving them pocket money. We have our own burdens, but they don't shy away from seeking help; they are tiring us. (Group F1).

I hate the attitude of some of the teachers towards me. I didn't know when I first came here that certain hairstyles are prohibited. Instead of addressing me properly, they told me my grandmother can't even afford my uniform, but I have gold teeth and fancy hairstyle. Was that really necessary? (SFVL1)

Teachers brought visitors in our classes to take a list of some of us who can't afford pads. I didn't register because I couldn't face that humiliation in front of my classmates. (SFVL2)

Teachers keep on yelling at us, especially when we have failed. Yes, we are sponsored. For this reason, every teacher expects us not to fail. Most of them torture us with negative words. We experience threatening language and humiliation from our own teachers. They make us lose confidence to do well, they force us feel useless, despair and lose hope. (LFVL2)

I hate my Sesotho teacher; she is so inconsiderate. She tells us that her Sesotho textbooks are cheap that we can afford to buy on our own. I don't have such money, not when in our house we can't buy even maize meal costing M100.00. (LFVL8).

Some of our female teachers help us with material needs, but when we do any mistakes, they remind and embarrass us in front of others. They expose us by complaining that we play even when we are helped out. We are reluctant to share our problems with our teachers because they disclose what we shared in private with them. (LMVL1)

Contingency theory encourages relational interactions, displaying care and appreciation for junior staff (section 2.2.2.1). However, the way in which teachers threaten learners, humiliate them and many others is indicative of systematic marginalisation of the vulnerable learners. The preceding data shows that the teachers also contributed to the perpetuation of some forms of inequality. Horgan (2007) revealed that some teachers intimidate and shout at vulnerable learners just as LFVL2 above alleged that teachers “*keep yelling at*” them. A similar challenge of the teachers' attitude towards the vulnerable learners emerged in Tanzania where the teacher ill-treated the vulnerable learners (Lekule, 2014). Therefore, one understands the power dynamics evident here since the teachers use their authority and power to disseminate disparities.

5.2.2.6 Absenteeism

According to the participants, vulnerable learners have the highest rate of absenteeism from school. This result in them repeating grades finally dropping out:

The part-time job they get in order to survive makes them not to be ambitious for their school work. (SSMT10).

They go for their check ups during lessons, hence absent. (Group E1).

We still have learners who can't afford transport, who travel long distances on foot, thus are not regular to school and finally drop out. (ST2)

Vulnerable learners have highest frequency in absenteeism and nothing serious is done by us subject teachers, class teachers, principal, school management, guardians and/or parents. We do not care much about their being absent. We do not also take action even when we see registers and attendance forms recording these learners' absenteeism and drop out. (LT1)

The teachers' responses cited above confirm that absenteeism is common among vulnerable learners. It can be read from the above caption that if the learners leave schools, they are likely to indulge in socially unacceptable behaviours leading to imprisonment. Obligatory measures are instituted when the learners are not attending school regularly. Therefore, it is up to all stakeholders to ensure that learners attend school on a regular basis as contingency theory section 2.2.2.2 advised that it is the responsibility of all the leaders in their school hierarchical order to possess the capacity to evaluate the situation, frame and employ managerial strategies that best suit their situation. Learner absenteeism violates the school law stated in the School (Supervision and Management) Regulation (1988), Part II, Section 3, Subsection (a), which stipulates that a pupil shall attend classes punctually and regularly. Conversely, the use of the pronouns "we" and "us" shows a clear understanding of accountability and responsibility of contingency theory; thus, the 'we' of the African ethos Verhoef and Michel (1997).

Furthermore, the vulnerable learners themselves confirmed that they did not attend school regularly. Their responses to the question why they absent themselves from school are illuminating as noted below:

I get to school late and knock off before school out every day because I take my younger cousin to and from crèche everyday. I think this is absenteeism. (SMVL3).

I had to miss lots of classes last year to register my name for my late parents' moneys, rental flats and the land in Maseru and Maputsoe to be mine. If I fail again, no need to come back to school. Uhm..., though it may sound offensive, I have lot of money, thus, school is just a waste of time for me now, sorry to say! (LMVL1)

Sometimes it is due to starvation. At times I would be expelled for uniform, instrument, fee and other school needs. Another main reason is that my father married another woman after my mum died of HIV/AIDS. He expelled me in a house. He took assets and the furniture. My teachers advised me to go to CGPU for help. So, I went there for so many days of school hours. (LMVL3)

I collect my ARVs during school hours. This collides with school schedule resulting in to putting health as precedence and shifting school down the priorities. Besides, caring for ill family members in the house affects my attendance. (LFVL1)

I have been absent for too long because I was expelled as I was thought to be pregnant. Besides, I don't come to school every time I'm on my monthly periods because of period pains. I also feel uncomfortable and shamed sitting beside my male neighbours in the classroom in fear of sudden leakage and I become absent when I don't have sanitary towels. (LFVL3)

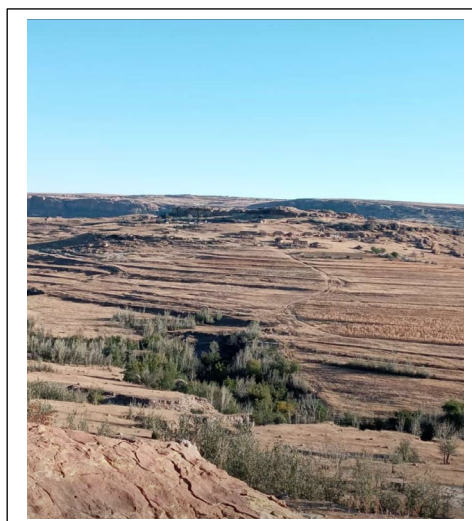
I left boarding this year due to some challenges I encountered there. I think the situation right now is from bad to worst. Sometimes I run short of money for transport to school. Walking long distance to and from school isn't always safe for me. We are compelled come for a morning study before seven; this makes me absent myself when I don't have bus-fare. Other than that, my grandmother considers some topics such as reproductive health, sexuality education and puberty adolescent taught at school to be taboo, so every time they are taught, I don't come to school. (LFVL2)

We don't always have transport to and from school. So we walk on foot, cross the river which lately is full because of lots of rain. So we go via bridge which is more than 5kms away and we douse in rain with the books. (Group E2).

Because we don't afford daily bus fares, our regular attendance is affected by rainy and cold seasons. Rivers, dongas and valleys are barriers to our consistent attendance. Besides crossing the river when we come to school, we also boycott classes when it is cold because we don't always have school shoes and proper warm uniform. (LMVL2)

The picture below was brought by Lesotho male vulnerable learner (LMVL2) showing the nature of the terrain and distance they travel every day to and from school:

Figure 5.2.2.6.1 The picture of the distance travelled everyday by Lesotho male vulnerable learner (LMVL2) to and from school:



The deduction here is that, almost all vulnerable learners who took part in this research do not attend lessons regularly. There are various reasons for the

absenteeism. These include giving less value to the school and feeling that they have enough money (from inheritance etc after a parent's death) to make a living. For instance, the money that LMVL1 above has, overwhelms him such that he feels he has it all. The words, *"if I fail again no need to come back to school"* and *"I have lot of money, thus, school is just a waste of time for me now"*, are clear proof of this.

On the other hand, for some other vulnerable learners, food, shelter, uniforms, instruments, fees and other school needs they do not have, are the prerequisites without which they cannot attend school. Thus, a social structure discussed in contingency theory marginalise vulnerable learners. It is also lucid that vulnerable learners academically underachieve because they are irregular at attending school and cannot focus on their studies. The data by LMVL3 above exposed various aspects such as oppression, exploitation, abuse of power and dominance because the learners' properties are used against their best interest. It can be understood that these properties are important to them because they sustain their living.

Finally, the teachers' referring the vulnerable learners to the CGPU exposes a rich synthesis of justice, law and order. Some vulnerable learners attend to their own medications and the treatment of their siblings while learning takes place at school, as a result, they miss a lot of content. The missed content is not always easy to cover in catch-up activities and this finally leads failure in their examinations.

A female vulnerable learner (LFVL3) above admitted that she was impregnated by her teacher and then later underwent an abortion. She is an orphan who financially relies on her male teachers and sugar daddies. Other contingency factors are in government policy or law (see section 2.2.2.2). So, school principals are authorised to exclude learners with their regulations because no child shall be denied education on account of pregnancy or other cultural rites and practices. Eventually, the teenage mothers carry the burden while the perpetrators (in some cases teachers) are never reported to authorities. Discriminatory practices by educators are also common among such girls (Catherine & Salome, 2018; Groves, 2016).

5.2.2.7 Failure to implement plans and policies

Participants perceive failing implementations in planning and policies is a challenge that justified the need for high school management teams to support vulnerable learners in their academic work that in turn influences their performance. This is confirmed in some the SMT members' responses:

We have a clear vision that includes vulnerable learners. The fact that we didn't have principal for too long resulted lack of both devotion and cooperation that led to not achieving our vision, (SSMT2)

There's a plan here which is called Annual Stastical Return, all the information about vulnerable learners mme Hlojeng, is in there. We fill it every year, leave the copy in our files here at school, submit one copy to the district and another third copy to headquarters for no use. There's never in a single day a follow up is done on the information we fill in that form, (LSMT10).

We are aware that we have more vulnerable learners than any other type of learners here. That's why we plan and set policies to remedy the situation, but we never consistently put them into practice. We did not take responsibility for the plans we have produced that could have helped vulnerable learners to pass. We filed them away in cabinets. (LSMT4)

We have set ourselves the promotion strategies of learners proceeding from one class to the next, but we always violate them fearing that vulnerable learners' scholarship would end. We sympathise instead of doing justice to vulnerable learners. So, nobody sympathises with them at ECoL when they are marked their external examinations. Automatic promotion has been happening here even before COVID-19. (LSMT1)

The captions above show that plans and policies are required to assist the schools in its quest to support vulnerable learners. Any school should have readily available plans and policies to promote learners' academic achievement. The presence of plans and policies dovetails with the notion of the contingency theory. The '*clear vision*' highlighted by SSMT2 above can be interpreted as the plan at place for supporting vulnerable learners, which she feels it is not implemented because they do not have the permanent principal resulting lack of both dedication and collaboration leading to non-achievement of their vision in toto.

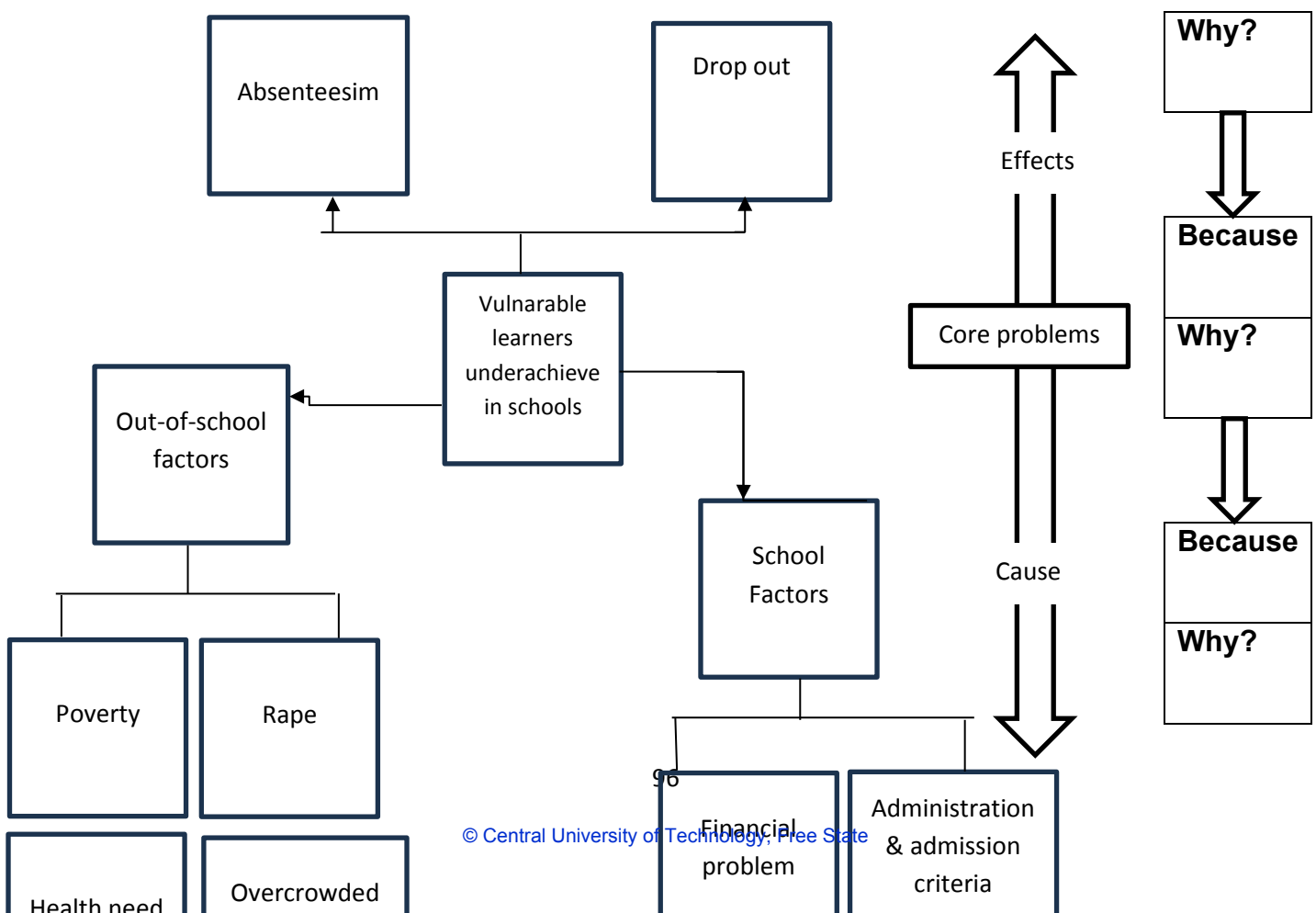
The '*Annual Statistical Return*' (SR) that the LSMT10 is referring to above, is collected by all Lesotho schools in terms of section 21(a)(i) of the Education Act (2010) which provides that the principal shall within two months of the commencement of a new school year, provide accurate statistics returns, organise, manage, run and lead the school daily based on the given statistics as may be stipulated in the regulation. However, the principal seems to be incompetent and negligent in performing this duty. This is because she does not feel it is her duty to

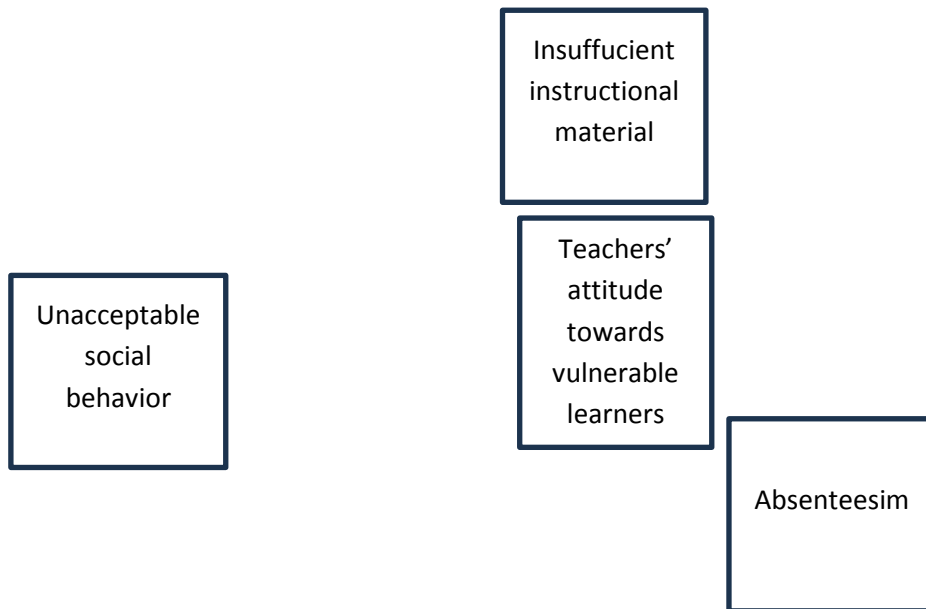
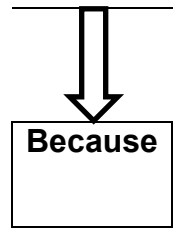
use the information in the SR for planning purposes and improvement of education in the school, instead, she is waiting for district and headquarters officers to come and perform her duty in a school she is a principal to. She spelt this clearly in her words that ‘we submit one copy to the district and another third copy to headquarters for no use, there’s never in a single day a follow up is done on the information we fill in that form.

Participants alleged further that the vulnerable learners’ scholarships are withdrawn once they have failed. The school A’s motto is ‘strength of the weak’, hence the principal believes that the promotion of learners who do not even qualify for the promotion strengthens these learners because they would stay at home after failing. Therefore, the principal promotes them, even if they fail, to strengthen them and to keep their scholarships. The understanding is that the source as to why the vulnerable learners underachieve has to be uncovered before assuming that they should be denied scholarships because they do not work hard.

The tree below summarises the challenges that hinder vulnerable learners to pass:

Figure 5.2.2.8 Problem tree





5.3 The support mechanisms put in place for vulnerable learners

The respondents addressed the study's second objective, through individual and focus groups interviews that engaged with the question: How have high school management teams been supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work? Several themes were established from the responses to this question. The following themes emerged:

5.3.1 Accommodation provision

The stakeholders realised the vulnerable status of learners that come to their school, thus devised support mechanisms to meet them halfway. The following statements express some of the participants' views on the issue of learner vulnerability and accommodation:

Most of us learners here are from afar and full of problems. As a result, some classes and school hall are turned in to residences to accommodate us. (LFVL3)

Our school is in partnership with the community with rental flats nearby. Those flats are turned to school boarding. These serve to help even students who cannot afford to eat thrice a day at their

homes. Some orphans do not have their own homes; the school sort of adopts such children and they become its own in a way. (LSMT1).

Boarding offered by the school can be interpreted as an eligible location suggested by the favourable environment of contingency theory, according to which it must adhere to certain conditions to qualify as suitable students' accommodation. This also strikes the contingency theory affirmation of SMTs strategy in which the leaders manage to adapt their style to suit the situation. Makape (2008) is of the same opinion that there are informal and formal institutions offering shelter for the vulnerable learners.

Long journeys and unfriendly experiences along the way make school unpleasant for vulnerable children and affect their schooling negatively. Therefore, the school's effort to provide accommodation for vulnerable learners minimises the long kilometers they are travelling. The accommodation also rescues learners from child labour, overcrowded accommodations hunger and rape at home that hinders their home study and abates absenteeism. Even though a facility, such as accommodation (in this case school boarding), is a necessary condition, some nations like Basotho, may not have capacity to avail them in large scales (Mafa, Mpofo & Chimhenga, 2013; Sweet, 1986).

Although the community in the vicinity of School A does not support the school with its children's enrolment in this school, the principal seems to understand that the success of boarding depends on one of her duties, as postulated in the School (Supervision and Management) Regulation (1988), Part IV, Section 13(x) that she has to promote and maintain a close co-operation with the residents and, where applicable, the business and industry of the community. She is in partnership with the community with rental flats nearby. These flats are turned into boarding residences. This serves to help the vulnerable learners who cannot afford to eat three meals per day at their homes. Schools that provide food for the learners have a way to attract learners to the schools and decrease the rate of absenteeism, as

articulated by Birdsall et al. (2005). By so doing, the children would fare well in their schoolwork and have positive schooling experiences.

5.3.2 Principals' roles

The former principal in school B seemed to have solved the differences they had with the out-of-school society for possible areas of cooperation meant to support vulnerable learners:

The previous school principal attended public gatherings to talk to the public about the institute and potential cooperation. It's best if the relationship is fixed again by the coming headperson because there's a lot the community helped us with by then in supporting vulnerable learners. (SSMT2)

The above response confirms that the headmaster built strong relationships with the local people around school as the means of support mechanism for vulnerable learners. As SSMT2 noted, the principal facilitated public participation which lead to communication from both sides. It can be assumed that school leaders have power (noted by contingency theory in section 2.2.2.2) and they are recognised by the public for their headship positions. Although SSMT2 is held responsible for shifting an obligation to the headmaster, it worths acknowledging that there is power at place seen here. His submissions that the head leader's duty is to attend the public gatherings to establish social rapport, is linked with power gained through positions and based on the males dominate as leaders. However, the community norms accords the headmaster with the task of generating rapport (also affirmed by contingency theory in section 2.2.2.1) between these two parties viewed as one of the first key steps towards school management teams' mechanisms for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work.

Similarly, principals' roles in Lesotho are viewed as part of the school management teams' mechanisms for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work. According to the participants, the principals do all they can to minimise the vulnerable learners' challenges that are negatively impacting on their academic work. With their own words, they said:

She goes places searching for us vulnerable children in the villages and brought us here. She finds scholarships for us. Sometimes she does not succeed finding the scholarships for all of us. It is in cases such as these ones that she, through school charity funding scheme, takes responsibility of sponsoring us. Sometimes principal's family (Sisters of Charity of Ottawa (SCO) helps us with food, payments of other fees and school needs. (LMVL2)

Principal is in debts in every shop around here and everywhere else in trying to help vulnerable learners believing that, she would pay back when loan bursary schemes for vulnerable learners give money. (LSMT4)

We don't pressurise guardians and parents to pay school fees at expected time; we give them time. We don't usually expel them unless the parents or guardians don't show up to table their problems. (LSMT5).

Villagers, guardians, and parents dump vulnerable children here and don't do anything for them; they know sister [principal] will take care of everything. (LT1)

Every year, I take five Grade 12 vulnerable children amongst the chosen! I reduce my food for them. We fast with my wife for them to give them hope that atleast when they have food, they can concentrate in class. I don't help them as principal though; but at personal level. (SSMT10).

What the principal has done most of the time, after dishing out food, you know the left overs, he instructed the food handlers to give them to us instead of taking them to dustbin. (Group F2).

The importance of schools, managed by the SMT, especially the principal, cannot be overemphasised, as the SMT plays a major role in regulating children's social lives and modelling their social identities. Clearly, schools, through the principals, can be seen as more than just a place to learn, but also a centre for social support. The villagers, guardians and parents presented themselves as not committed to ensuring sustainable social change for the vulnerable learners because they dump them at school without doing anything for them.

It is observed that the experiences of the disadvantaged are however taken seriously by some of the principals as reflected in the data above. In this way, they support the struggle against inequality for the betterment of vulnerable learners. Therefore, the principal's strategies and activities mitigated the learners' poverty and financial crisis at this school.

The contingency theory emphasises that what the principals do in action is governed by the specified conditions (Yalokwu, 2002). Thus, efforts by principals noted here indicate a clear understanding of the contingency (situational) theory. Therefore, the task of the principal in this case was to discover which techniques in this specific

condition, under these specific circumstances and at this specific time of a high number of vulnerable learners, best contributed to the attainment of the management goals. The principals did all they could to support vulnerable learners in their academic work.

5.3.3 Mode of school fees payment

An analysis of the responses indicated that money and other forms of payment were used by the vulnerable learners to pay fees at school A. This is confirmed in the responses below:

Management allows vulnerable learners to pay with animals, crops and any other material in place. They are sometimes exchanged for cash. Again, vulnerable learners who can't afford uniform are left behind while non-vulnerable learners are sent home for fees and uniform. (LSMT3)

I for one cannot afford to pay with anything. For these many years that I have been repeating different classes, I'm not sponsored not only due to this repetition but also for my age; I am never expelled for any fee though. (LMVL1)

The above data indicates that the SMT searched for the root cause of the challenge at hand and found mechanisms to mitigate it to allow vulnerable learners to pay with anything, which shows compassion. Unlike in some schools where the principals expelled learners who owed the school or punished them for defaulting on the payment of school fees (Strassburg, Meny-Gibert & Russell, 2010), principal in School A did not and the principal in School C sparingly does. As a result, the vulnerable students were allowed to sit for examinations without settling all the school fees and the school would not withhold their results. In addition, the principal did not force the caregivers to toil at school to settle their debts. The difference in these schools, in comparison to other schools, is that learners who had not paid their school fees also got desks in the classes. This says, the skills employed in this school, differ, because the situations differ; a technique that worked in this school did not necessarily work in other schools hence the relevance of situational theory fits in here.

According to the Education Act (2010), Part V, Section 21, Subsection (b), (c), (d) and (j) respectively, the principal is the chief accounting officer of the school and is responsible to the school board for the control and use of the school funds. He or she must maintain or generate income and control the expenditure of the school, must prepare an annual budget for the school and submit it to the school board for approval, and must, within three months of the end of each school year, submit a financial statement of the school to the school board for its approval. In line with this, the participants further postulated that:

It is these principal's duties that enable her to sit with board members, parents and teachers to device modes of payment. (LSMT1).

If it were not because of parents agreeing to pay with anything in place, we wouldn't be this far. Again, literacy on commercial subjects enhanced the success of this factor. (LSMT4)

SMT oversees organisation, management and day-to-day running and leadership of the school. For this role to be a success, it needs a set of participants in certain roles. In this case, the participants are the board members, parents, principal HoDs, teachers and learners who ensure that the vulnerable learners receive the same education as the others. Sitting together as a team to devise a means of payment is an induced idea of shared human subjectivity that promotes a community's good through an unconditional recognition and appreciation of individual uniqueness and difference (Eze, 2008).

It is, therefore, correct to surmise that the mode of payment is successful in this school because the stakeholders understand that certain things or matters in the field of education, more specifically in the school, must be managed by means of four management tasks, namely planning, organising, leading and controlling. Van der Westhuizen (1994) advocates these as a condition that makes this factor a success.

5.3.4 Teachers' role

It was indicated in section 5.2.2.5 that vulnerable learners are faced with a challenge of teachers who were negative towards them. However, as indicated by participants, there were few individual teachers who went all out to support vulnerable learners in their academic work. They stated that:

We have SBST which used to support vulnerable learners; I guess it's high time that it becomes active again. (ST2).

As SBSTs, there isn't that much we are doing. After teachers and other learners have identified them, ours is just to refer them to DBST. (Group F1).

After identifying vulnerable learners, we give their parents/guardians some piece job to do in our families so that they in turn support our learners. (SSMT3).

Teachers help us in different ways; they contribute money and meet our needs and give us some job to do during weekends and school holidays. (Group D2).

Ones we see them restless in classes, we know that something is wrong. So we interview them as teachers and try to find reasons behind, so they narrate their problems and then we refer them accordingly. (Group D1).

They report to us when they left home without food. We also spot those who take long without uniform. So as teachers, we pop out our money from our own pockets for such learners. We also help them by providing small chore to do over the weekend in our homes. We pay them so that they could buy their needs (Group E1).

We provide food for them, either from our homes or sharing our lunch boxes with them to eat during morning break time for those who come with empty stomachs. We also mediate to ask absent parents and guardians to take responsibility, even to the parents that have been separated or divorced (Group C1).

This year for instance, we contributed the examination fee for two Grade 11 orphans, who were discussed in a staff meeting that they were going to be removed at ECoL because they didn't pay the exam fee. We felt compelled to contribute from our pockets and pay for them. (LSMT2).

I have observed teachers identify those kids and buy them uniform to be same as others. (LSMT5).

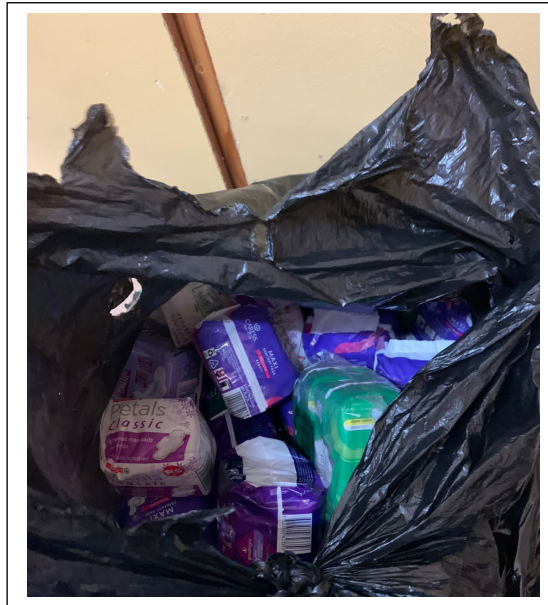
Some of the teachers share their lunch boxes with us. I, for instance, go to her place every morning to eat. LFVL6).

Some teachers take charge; they ensure that our fees are paid. They go to an extent of adopting us. (LMVL8).

Teachers help us with our basic needs. Sometimes they give us tangible things like sanitary towels, soap, clothes and many things. (LFVL2).

Below is the picture of the sanitary pads at school A kept in the staffroom for vulnerable learners. Each willing teacher brought a packet of them and they do it every time they get finished:

Figure 5.3.4.1 The picture of sanitary towels from teachers in School A kept in staffroom for vulnerable girls



The teachers cited above sacrificed, shared, took the vulnerable learners seriously and supported them in their struggle against inequality and search for their upward mobility. In addition, the mechanisms put into place by the teachers to empower the vulnerable learners validate that they are leaders who determined the style which suits the situation, as suggested by contingency theory.

The data above displayed contingency theory which advocates for the activities carried out by managers to help the vulnerable learners in their academic work in this given situation. Unlike the teachers in Tanzania, as cited by Lekule (2014), some teachers participated in this study have at least a minimal interaction with their learners. This practice could be a result of schools and teachers caring, loving and sharing their emotions with the learners, or the result of the teachers training themselves, as observed by Lupton (2006). Therefore, it cannot be denied that the schools where the teachers and learners worked together towards educational excellence did well in the examinations.

The success of this support mechanism depends on the teachers' spirit of humanity to others. Although they earn little salary, they selflessly and tirelessly share with the vulnerable learners to provide for their basic needs. They make the vulnerable children in the schools visible and the practices of the schools inclusive, advocate for their rights, prepare the vulnerable children to face the world and help them against future vulnerability. The teachers try to make schools centres of care and support –

After our discussion with you on the problems we identified, we decided to practise few solutions that could work for us. We succeed by helping vulnerable learners to identify their goals. We offered praise and enhanced their coping strategies. Building a secure base for them, building their self-esteem and self-efficacy is of great help in this regard. (Group F)

Clearly, this research had started bringing about the difference in School F because immediately after discussing the challenges that hinder vulnerable learners from performing well in their studies, participants started trying out some strategies that could aid them to lessen vulnerable learners' underachievement. This is taken from the words of focus Group F members that: *"After our discussion with you on the problems we identified, we decided to practise few solutions that could work for us"*. They provided basic needs of the vulnerable learners, constructed a protected base for the learners and enhanced their self-esteem and self-efficacy. These practices show their understanding of Maslow's hierarchy of needs that it is only when vulnerable learners have fulfilled these needs that they can reach the highest pitch of the pyramid by achieving academically (Riley, Evans, Anderson and Robson, 2019). This also is in line with Nyabanyaba (2009) who states that in schools, there are descriptions of how the teachers contribute to keep the affected children in the schools.

Other than in School F South Africa, same sentiments were shared in Lesotho by focus group members in School A that,

We make kids, especially vulnerable ones, to work harder than they think they could. We make hopeless ones feel they are winners. We've got a motto to make our classrooms and school environment to be a place where they feel safe and secure. We have started educating them not only to be successful in life but also to be happy so that they know the value of things not price. (Group A).

The teachers must ensure that the schools fulfil certain conditions in order to qualify as schools. For instance, as the focus group members of School A illustrated, they make the *“hopeless ones feel they are winners”* and they make the *“school environment to be a place where they feel safe and secure”*. The researcher noticed that the school emblem has the words, *‘Strength of the Weak! Peace Makers’*. This, coupled with the above data, shows that a condition that makes this theme a success is when the teachers are strengthening the weak and paying closer attention to the children at risk who may fall behind in school if their educational needs are not addressed. The safety and security offered by this team are in line with Maslow’s hierarchy of needs that when offered, the learners can shine at school (Hale, Ricotta, Freed, Smith & Huang, 2019).

Another condition that supports the effectiveness of the teachers is refining them to improve their knowledge on how to deal with vulnerable learners, thus to subscribe to the epistemological stance that knowledge is socially constructed (Grant & Grant, 2023). It is therefore important to ensure that there are other members in the team who have a deeper understanding of how to deal with the vulnerable learners at school. Therefore, in the team, there were three members who had studied towards a B.Ed. honours degree and one who had a Master’s degree whose doctoral studies are in progress. Their deeper understanding of how to deal with the vulnerable learners at school was noted during one meeting in the following discussion:

Are these solutions given above practical though? (LT1)

The response was,

In my doctoral studies now, I learned that one of the main conditions under which vulnerable learners could improve their performance is by teachers being trained to offer learners counselling and psychological or psychosocial support or having such an officer providing such service here at school. (LT2).

Another member of the team added,

We’re an inclusive school catering for learners with deaf disability, but not trained on it. So if we could be trained, the teachers and interpreters will know their roles and responsibilities because at some point, you would see an interpreter who at first was trained to be a teacher, intrude by teaching while

the teacher who has slight clue on sign language pin points loop holes on an interpreter and that creates conflicts. So training will resolve this. (LSMT1)

This discussion confirms that the participants must have qualifications in order to be eligible to play a particular role in a particular social practice. A lack of skilled participants in an institution, such as this one, means that ineligibility plays a huge role in teaching. For vulnerable learners to achieve, all the stakeholders have to perform their tasks. Increasing the number of training opportunities substantially for the teachers and principals at the bachelors to doctorate levels in a wide area of specialities to include the academic, technical and vocational subjects areas, is also important (Gordon, 2012). This will ensure that all the schoolteachers are professionally trained and qualified to teach before they enter the teaching service.

The conditions above were seen in School A, which became evident in the meeting where the teachers emphasised the very same matter –

We admit not-so-bright-learners who do well in technical and vocational subjects offered here. Again, subjects such as development studies teach them life skills relevant to their vulnerable situation. So the situation of learners being affected by vulnerability at school is new phenomenon, thus teachers need to go to school to learn about it. (LSMT2).

We need to take firm and immediate action to remodel our system of education on those of Singapore, Barbados, Cuba, German, China and India so that we can learn from some of the world's best practices and successful model of nations who have used education to reshape, redevelop, and prosper their societies. (LT1)

Our schools, as well as urban, suburban, rural communities and village councils need to improve physical education, recreational facilities, media houses, musicians, and family education programs to facilitate the physical, recreational, social development of our youth and adults alike. (LSMT3)

Nan (2013) adds that the school principals and deputies must be selected and trained more carefully to manage the schools better daily, as also suggested by the situational theory.

One other solution to vulnerable learners' problems that is anticipated to support the effectiveness of the teachers is discipline. In a question of how this is possible, the participants said,

Schools have to employ more male teachers so as to ensure that every school has equal number of male and female teachers. This would go a very long way in improving the level of discipline of vulnerable learners. Also, it would provide both males and females students with more positive role models since many of vulnerable learners have no such role models at home. (LSMT3).

Evidently, the teachers go beyond teaching the learners in the classes by playing pivotal roles and going beyond teaching to remedy the situation.

5.3.5 Counselling services

The participants pointed out that the disobedient learners' irregular and rebellious behaviour are mitigated by counselling such learners. They also stated that teachers employed lay counselling where it was needed –

My teachers referred me to rehabilitation centre. I think I'm recovering well now because there's difference in my academic work lately. I want to pass. (SFVL1)

I kneel down and pray for them, God is great. I motivate them. Look, well known academic, intelligent people come from poor background. I usually tell them to look at Mandela, he didn't do Maths, but he's adored by the whole world. So they should excel in what they do best. I tell them not to compare themselves with the rich. (SSMT10).

We involve social workers and police officers where necessary. (Group D1).

We involved police last year for learners who abuse drugs, that counselling session made a difference. (Group E1).

It (SR) asked for number of learners referred to ... counselling and to CGPU, we do refer them but we don't document the statistics hence I must admit I don't accurately fill that part, (LSMT10)

I was born HIV positive. My teachers referred me to the clinic for medications. I lost my parents and a sister; they took me to counselling. Relatives wanted to possess my parents' properties, my teachers advised me to take them to CGPU. So, there are descriptions of how some of our teachers support us in order to keep us affected and infected children in schools by taking us to counsellors when there's such need. They also counsel us here at school. (LFVL1).

One of our duties in the committee I'm delegated to, is to counsel students, attend to them, provide casualties services and refer them where appropriate. (LT2).

Like contingency theory has brought to light in section 2.2.2.2, the teachers and other counselling service providers could be regarded as power elites who ratify, endure, authenticate, exploit and dominate the powerless. Instead of these teachers condoning this behaviour, they empower vulnerable learners through counselling and referring them where necessary. The counselling prepares the vulnerable learners for their academic, career, personal and social development and hence,

helps the learners to be self-actualised. As required by the School (Supervision and Management) Regulation (1988), the principals, in collaboration with the teachers, give attention to the health and comfort of the pupils and provide the guidance and counselling of the pupils with respect to their duties. Counselling vulnerable learners is in line with the observations made by Nyabanyaba (2009) that there are descriptions of how the teachers contribute to keeping the affected children in the schools and on taking them to counsellors when they need help.

LSMT10 articulates that they support vulnerable learners through referring them to institutions such as CGPU and counselling units. However, she admitted that she inaccurately and incorrectly filled the statistics in the SR. This violates the certification made by the principal in this document that it had been completed according to instructions in there and that the information given is accurate and complete.

As a church school, School A participants indicated that they help vulnerable learners to grow academically, mentally, socially, physically and spiritually. Religious knowledge is taught as a subject at this school with the school also holding yearly retreats, for the purposes of counselling and teaching the learners about God. The school rules compel every learner to go to church every first Friday of the month, every Sunday and when the church requires them to do so, while the boarders go every day. All these efforts are made with the intention of supporting all the learners, particularly the vulnerable ones, to pass. Therefore, these efforts are made to relate the educational programme to future success and counselling has a better chance to exist and to carry out its functions because the school is a church school –

Being a religious school, stakeholders around this school are spiritually nurtured; a factor that enabled counselling condition to be an accomplishment. Enriched catholic ethos helped learners to be counselled through attending retreats and church services. The presence of counselling units around Hlotse also enable this condition to be successful. Religious knowledge is not only taught as a subject at this school; but to also spiritually nurture learners. (LSMT3)

Social matters, such as religion, influence what people perceive to know and how the mentioned social matter has an impact on the construction of the knowledge. In the

data above, religion positively influenced and affected counselling the vulnerable learners because it spiritually nurtured them. It further relates how the teachers deal with errant, deviant and dissident learners in the school community. It is up to the teachers and school community to use the fire of experience and the wheel of social control to mould the vulnerable learners into pots that may be of general use because they are born formless, like a lump of clay. Any imperfections should be borne by their teachers and the teachers should always seek to redeem them. As Makape (2008) affirmed, formal and informal institutions serve as enabling factors in counselling the learners for their academic underachievement. Also, many more teachers, as proposed by Nan (2013), need to be trained as counsellors and social workers to better assist the principals and parents to manage deviant learners. Observably, the schools have the substantial ability to bring the vulnerable learners' capacity into shape to recover quickly from their vulnerability.

5.3.6 Book rental scheme

The book rental scheme is one of the solutions put in place to support vulnerable learners in their academic work. The participants at school A explained the book rental system in this way:

Our school had link with one school in Wales which helped our school with many things among which are the books. They are rented and school sometimes replaces them. The school has its own book rental scheme for the upper grades, with the purpose of helping especially vulnerable learners to afford books for a less price that would help them in their academic work. (LSMT2)

The M220.00 government bursary school doesn't cover all books. So our school has established another scheme especially for the upper grades where parents and/or guardians pay around M2000.00 for all books costing far more than M5000.00. We lent such books. Some of us don't even pay for the book scheme because we don't afford. (LMVL3)

The success of the book rental scheme in supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work was made possible through the collaboration of the School A and other schools in Wales, which started empowering the school by buying textbooks for the learners. The second factor that serves as an enabling support mechanism is the parents' accountability to rent books for their children. A teacher added,

Wales gave us capital and we took it from there. Even parents never disappointed us; they rent books for their children. (LSMT2)

In view of the above, the collaboration between the two schools and the parents' accountability are in line with the literature review chapter. The collaboration and accountability in the data above are also discussed in the contingency theory. Indeed, power resulted in a positive attention to the matters that sustain and transform the vulnerable learners. The SMTs and the teachers tried their best to support vulnerable learners in their academic work by creating a supportive environment and providing basic needs, such as books. Provision of books rental schemes to vulnerable learners, confirms contingency theory strategy in section 2.2.2 that organisations require adaptable and situational analyses to proffer solutions needed to solve the problems.

5.3.7 The school curriculum

The curriculum was perceived as preparing learners, in this case vulnerable learners, to enter the careers of their choices with confidence:

Our vision is to provide a curriculum of quality education that equips learners with not only academic knowledge but life skills in order to produce responsible citizens for a changing and developing world, so we can't leave out vulnerable learners. (SSMT4)

Our school curriculum is very broad. At the high school level, about 15 subjects are in the curriculum, among which four subjects are compulsory and the rest are elective. The reason for this is that we are aware of the calibre of the students engaged in this school. Most of the subjects done here are meant to help them live. Even if they don't follow academic life after here, practical subjects such as Design and Technology, Agriculture, Computer, other subjects like Accounting, Commerce and Life Skills subjects like development studies and LBSE will help the learners to earn living after. (LSMT2)

The curriculum we offer here is very important. It prepares learners with expertise that will help them not to depend on someone, say by hiring, these ones will hire themselves for it promotes self-reliance. (LSMT1)

The communities in both countries under study strive to construct and maintain equal opportunity for the learners. As the contingency theory states, what the managers do in practice, depends on the given situation. The curriculum in both countries is contingent to the type of the learners they admit in schools. This serves as a technique identified to attain their vision. Guidance, the courses of study and where applicable, the vocations or future educational programmes to which the courses of study lead and the requirements for admission, are provided by the school, as required by the School (Supervision and Management) Regulation (1988). However,

the participants pointed out that the broad curriculum of this school and its stated benefits were threatened by a lack of funds.

The resources serve as an enabling factor in assisting the broad curriculum with functioning. These resources, discussed in contingency theory section, are needed to perform a practice or some part of it which may connect with other practices. In the words of one of the participants –

Long time ago, the school used to have more than 900 learners. There were not so many vulnerable learners as today. Their parents were employed and readily paid that expensive fee of this school. The number of learners forced us to employ more teachers and build more classes to accommodate this broad curriculum. The enrolment has declined but at least it left us with resources for our beneficial wide curriculum. (LSMT3).

It was observed that the stakeholders are aware of the calibre of the learners engaged in schools. Most of the subjects offered at school are meant to help them live. Even if the learners do not go to tertiary schools after post primary education, the teachers argued that the practical subjects, such as design and technology, agriculture, computers and other subjects, such as accounting, commerce, life skills and development studies prepare the learners to earn a living after high school.

It should be noted that, although there were high levels of commitment by both the SMT's and teachers towards supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work, there was a clear indication that many vulnerable learners still underachieved academically. Hence, there is still need for more strategies to support vulnerable learners in their academic work. As way forward, participants insisted on implementing plans and policies as the support mechanism that would help vulnerable learners in their academic work.

5.3.8 Implementation of school plans and policy

In a question of what can be done further, to successfully support vulnerable learners in their schoolwork, the participants noted that the vulnerable learners could

be supported successfully in their academic work through the implementation of the set activities, plans and policies aimed at supporting vulnerable learners. The participants' responses below reflect their views on the implementation of activities, plans and policies:

We need to go back to our policy where we used to team up, cooperate and communicate in order to achieve plans set for vulnerable learners. (Group B1)

Your question of how I document vulnerable learners' issues here at school stimulates me to unfile and do something about vulnerable learners' information documented in annual statistical return, (LSMT10).

Just like when we have an international HIV/AIDS day, there should be a day for us vulnerable learners too! Campaigns, trainings, clubs, competitions on dramas, poetries, debates, songs and presentations on our vulnerability should be done. (LMVL1)

There is no support beyond sensitising school and out of school community; engaging other ministries; maximising community involvement; creating sense of ownership; encouraging partnership between learners, teachers, parents, community, NGOs and others. (LT2)

I think this study serves as the reflection; a wake up call for us to go on with the support mechanisms that we already had but this time we need to implement and monitor activities we plan for. We feel a need to continue supporting them. It is true that we have been trying to support them but we were haphazard in doing so. (LSMT1)

Yes, I agree, drawing the plan of those support mechanism will help us get into a mission to be accomplished, where we should have to set objective and identify strategies which will help us to achieve both our objective and purpose. The plan will have to be posted on our walls so that we don't file and forget. (LT1)

We should put the support mechanisms in order of priority and preference. We should also discover the resources for the tasks and set targets. (LSMT4)

We, participants of this study, should become a technical working team that ensures the implementation of the support mechanisms. We should share work with others, coordinate and control the use of resources. We should also have to carry out supervision by ensuring that activities are in standard, correct problems occurring and finally assess the results, compare them with set targets and objectives, give feedback, motivate and do adjustments for future. (LSMT3)

The plans and policies are the tools that are needed to run the school. In accordance with contingency theory, they are proven to be especially typical of effective initiating structure leader behaviour. The learners are compelled by the power of law to remain in school and pass. The teachers are also forced to abide by the rules as the plans and policies for the schools are mandated by law and should be implemented within a given legal frame.

5.4 Conditions under which the support mechanisms depend on

The respondents addressed the third study's objective in the individual and focus groups interviews where they attempted to respond to the question: Under which conditions do the high school management teams' mechanisms depend for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work? The following section discusses the conditions:

5.4.1 Dedicated support teams

The respondents showed that the dedication of all stakeholders is an important condition necessary for the support of vulnerable learners' academic work. This is because all stakeholders have the responsibility to achieve the set goals:

...I also pray for us to become one team here at school in helping these learners. It is necessary that we all become committed so that we succeed helping them. (SSMT10).

The statistical return document just taught me that there is Learner Care and Welfare Support Coordination Unit in our ministry. I commit myself to contact them as it is the necessary to partner with this unit to help our learners here. (LSMT10).

If the majority of male teachers could decide to team up with us, we shall become even a very stronger team and we will cover many vulnerable learners. (Group C1).

We will succeed only if we involve the out-of-school community mainly to accelerate access to funding school material. We will also benefit knowledge that will come as recommendation to empower vulnerable learners. (Group B1)

All SMTs are members of SBST, but it's like only one member is dedicated. If they could all team up and become dedicated in to supporting vulnerable learners, the rest of us will just follow. (ST1)

Teamwork makes a dream work. It instils confidence, engages different expertise, so it is necessary to have a dedicated team as support mechanism for vulnerable learners. (LSMT3)

Evidently, the team will manage tasks and coordinate skills. This says the support mechanisms for vulnerable learners require cooperation for social change of contingency theory.

5.4.2 Unifying vision

The vision, according to participants, has ability to oblige them to possess, share and implement its mandates. The statements below confirm this:

Clear vision spells out our plan to support vulnerable learners in their academic work. We should first and foremost draw it, frequently refer to it so that it monitors our progress. (SSMT4)

Team members who plan to establish support mechanism for vulnerable learners show care about these learners' development. The extension of educational opportunities and support programme to these learners. (LSMT2)

Participant emphasised the importance of a clear vision and its role in clarifying the problem such that it must be put first to be voiced. They pointed further that a vision directs and determines progress for supporting mechanisms for vulnerable learners. The vision serves as a state under which number of support mechanisms for vulnerable learners can be achieved. It is up to the SMTs, as pronounced by the contingency theory, to employ methods that are highly effective in this given situation.

5.4.3 Prioritisation of vulnerable learners' needs

The participants of this study highlighted the significance for identifying the priorities defining the agenda for vulnerable learners' support mechanisms. The participants suggested that a procedure of classifying parts that the support mechanisms can be set should be noted ahead of relevant ones. Participants further show that, the present support mechanisms may not be appropriate for all vulnerable learners' challenges. This requires that, the study procedures on what required to be focused on to recover the support mechanisms for vulnerable learners. Participants in school B for instance, wanted to begin with an identification of the challenges that justify the need for them to support vulnerable learners in their academic:

Ms Hlojeng, stakeholders are knowledgeable and skilled, but vulnerable learners have lots of problems; it would be at ease to distinguish support mechanisms that are addressing those problems if we start by identifying them. (Group B1).

Much as we agreed that we and the public will resolve our problems, public doesn't have it all to resolve challenges affecting vulnerable learners in their schoolwork. (ST2).

We completely get the reason not to look down upon us and think we have lot of problems as vulnerable learners, but we suppose it's not easy to look at present support mechanisms unless we know the ones we need. Let's first establish the challenges to fix followed by the solutions and then establish what can be used to fix them. (Group B2).

Participants above noted that, understanding the challenges hindering the anticipated support mechanisms for vulnerable learners in their academic work would make the process of identifying such support mechanisms with ease because

they would have known which mechanisms were needed. Beginning with an identification of the challenging issues is significant in that it would lead to identifying valuable support mechanisms.

The Lesotho participants held the same view that priorities lead to identifying expected result:

We have been ignoring the mandate of our ministry that, as schools, we are encouraged to have self-reliance projects. It is necessary to start prioritising crop farming, poultry, piggery, dairy and other projects necessary to support vulnerable learners so that later on when these ones are successful, we do commercial farming, (LSMT10).

Prioritisation helps us to concentrate on important matters and make the most out of resources. (LSMT4)

We had chance of considering our necessities. We settled on priorities that will make our school work easier. Other than human resources, we must have stationery, food, clothes, cosmetics etc to be taken care of at initial stage. (LMVL3)

The above response data give emphasis to the value of the arranging basic needs to enhance working conditions and to increase the opportunity to succeed in supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work. Therefore, it is understood that, prioritising basic needs for vulnerable learners serves as a condition favourable to the improvement of supporting vulnerable learners in their school work.

It is understood that the elementary needs supporting vulnerable learners according to LMVL3 include several stakeholders. For example, required stationery can be attained from the School Supply Unit (SSU) and bookshops while food, clothes and cosmetics are acquired from different government ministries, NGOs and the community. This inevitably implies that high school management teams need to strategise while dealing with multidimensional issues as contingency theory also puts it.

5.4.4 Collaborative planning of SMTs

Collaborative planning enhances the high school management teams' mechanisms for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work. The response below confirms this:

We will fully support vulnerable learners if I start first by stimulating class teachers to accurately fill attendance registers and class prefects to be loyal in filling absenteeism forms. This will help me to fill annual statistical return on the page that requires number of learners who dropped out and establish major reasons for leaving hence follow up on those reasons and try to see how we could help such learners, (LSMT10).

Re se re ile ra lula 'moho hoba u tlohe 'm'e Hlojeng ra lekola le ho lotomanya lintlha tsa rona tsa ho tšehetsa bana bana, re entse moralo o re khonisang ho phetha boikemisetso ba rona ka litšehetso tseo. (We assembled together after you left Ms Hlojeng with the purpose of identifying and prioritising our support mechanisms for these vulnerable learners. Again, we came up with a strategy which allowed us to achieve our objectives about those support mechanisms). (SSMT2).

Based on LSMT10's direct words, there is a need for collaboration of stimulated stakeholders, such as class teachers and class prefects, for vulnerable learners' support mechanisms to succeed. In performing this task, the principal would be observing her duty stated in School (Supervision & Management) Regulation, (1988) section 13(b) of developing co-operation and co-ordination effort among the members of the school. To fulfil this task, she would require teachers' and class prefects' accuracy and loyalty in filling attendance registers and absenteeism form which will inform the SR.

The statement, 're *entse moralo*' (we came up with a plan) by SSMT2 above, clearly indicates that the stakeholders had developed strategies to support vulnerable learners in their academic work. Clearly, this made a condition favourable to participants achieving their intention "*boikemisetso ba rona*" concerning those support mechanisms. The notion, '*lekola*' means, 'scrutinise', 'question', look into and 'explore'. Similarly, the word '*lotomanya*' translates in to arranging in a specific order, prioritising and organising. As a result, the remarks done by SSMT2 underscored that team working supporting vulnerable learners' academic work facilitated and enhanced the conducive environment to establish such support mechanisms. The task of the managers according to contingency theory is to identify techniques that will work on the given situation which will best contribute to the attainment of the management goal. One of those techniques that would influence the school outcomes is by embracing collaborative planning.

SSMT1, LT1 and LFV2 respectively shared the sentiments expressed by SSMT2 by adding that:

We easily delegated duties in relation to our abilities and skills without disturbing our work and living conditions. (SSMT1)

Planning in collaboration with outside school community enabled us to attain successfully the listed activities from their available resources. The plan done together with not only school community but also with out-of-school community enhanced all stakeholders' participation (LT1)

We collaborate in implementing these strategies in to practice. (LFV2)

In accordance with the participants, dividing activities amongst respondents and other stakeholders impacted meaningfully to the developed support mechanisms for vulnerable learners. The result of sharing responsibility has also created favourable environment for high school management teams' mechanisms on how to support vulnerable learners in their academic work. Collaborative planning is an empowering approach which allows the participation of all stakeholders.

5.4.5 Policy provision to support vulnerable learners

Policies guide and instil orderliness, thus, the participants noted the importance of developing policy as the condition necessary for the effective support of vulnerable learners as noted below:

There's a Learner Care and Welfare Support part in annual statistical return which ask whether my school has policy on gender based violence and HIV/AIDS issues. It further asks for school community members (learners, teaching staff, non-teaching staff, parents/guardians and school board/community) who received information about rules and guideline and mode of communication for each category. I normally do not fill this part because we don't have such policy. It's high time that we initiate formulating such policy because it will be specific to supporting vulnerable learners, (LSMT10).

It's crucial to have policy that backups vulnerable learners' support mechanisms in school because it gives us a basis, guide and way to formulate the envisaged strategy. (LT2).

It is not necessary to construct the new policies from start while there are already plenty at place through which we can source what we feel can be of use to us. (SSMT4).

For the support mechanisms for vulnerable learners to succeed, this will depend on the condition that policy is provided as articulated by the above participants. The rules and guidelines would cover physical safety in school, stigma and discrimination towards such learners. The policy would also include grievances and disciplinary

procedures in case of breach of the regulation described in the rules and guidelines in the policy. Viewing the present plans on the matter was emphasised in both schools Lesotho and South African schools. Other situational factors according to contingency theory are changes in policy or law. The participants started a procedure towards formulating plans and policies to facilitate conditions conducive for high school management teams to establish mechanisms on how to support vulnerable learners in their academic work. The areas covered in this study had neither plans nor policies on the implementation of the support programmes for the vulnerable learners.

5.4.6 Appropriate facilities, infrastructure and resources for vulnerable learners

Participants asserted that vulnerable learners require suitable resources in order for support mechanisms to be relevant:

There's a need for principals' inservice training on annual statistical returns because we fill it for the sake of it and nobody cares about the correct and accurate information we submit and nobody supervises it. Had it been inspectors monitor the implementation of this tool, vulnerable learners would be fully supported in school, (LSMT10).

The resources which are supporting, guiding and facilitating teaching and learning interventions are in a form of people (like public leaders, SMTs, teachers, learners) or non-human (such as proper accommodation facility, workshops and/or in-service trainings) guide and direct in to helping vulnerable learners to pass. (LSMT2).

It is true that we have interpreters in our classes, but there are some of us who can still learn with hearing aids, so we are in need of them. (LMVL2).

Participants above identified the basic resources as conditions necessary for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work and specified clearly that they remained vital to ease such support mechanisms conditions for vulnerable learners. LSMT10 identified training need and monitoring of the implementation of resources for principals to understand vulnerable learners' support and frame it within the correct and accurate practices in schools. The reasons advanced to categorising these resources as basic and yet the respondents in a focus group discussion were quite cognisant that LSMT2's intentions were not to downplay resources such as learning tools.

The participants held the view that all these facilities, infrastructure and resources would contribute towards conditions that are conducive to supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work. McAdam et al (2019) see contingency theory as an 'if-then' form of relationship theory (section 2.2.2). That is, *if* appropriate facilities, infrastructure and resources are put in place to support vulnerable learners' academic work, *then*, this can greatly help in attaining organisational aims among which is the high pass rate of vulnerable learners. Therefore, facilities, infrastructure and resources for vulnerable learners are indeed important to support vulnerable learners' learning because facilities such as accommodation will remedy challenges of absenteeism, child labour, their insecurities, rape, overcrowding at home, and the long distance that the vulnerable learners travel to and from school.

5.4.7 Monitoring and reflection on the support of vulnerable learners

According to both South Africans and Basotho participants, monitoring and reflection are the conditions that they need to depend on to support vulnerable learners in their academic work:

It is important to monitor and to reflect on the set activities. We need to judge expected results which will assist in taking informed decision about future support mechanisms. (Group B1)

Reviewing timeously challenges, solutions and strengths we experience in a process of supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work is fundamental conditions needed after which we will need to plan for way forward. (LT1).

The initiating-structure-leader-behaviour of contingency theory (section 2.2.2.1) provides structure which ensures that tasks are completed, and goals are attained. It is through monitoring and reflection structures that SMTs can fulfil this.

The tree below summarises the conditions under which the support mechanisms depend on:

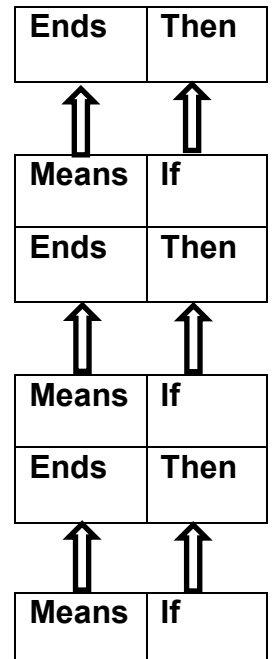
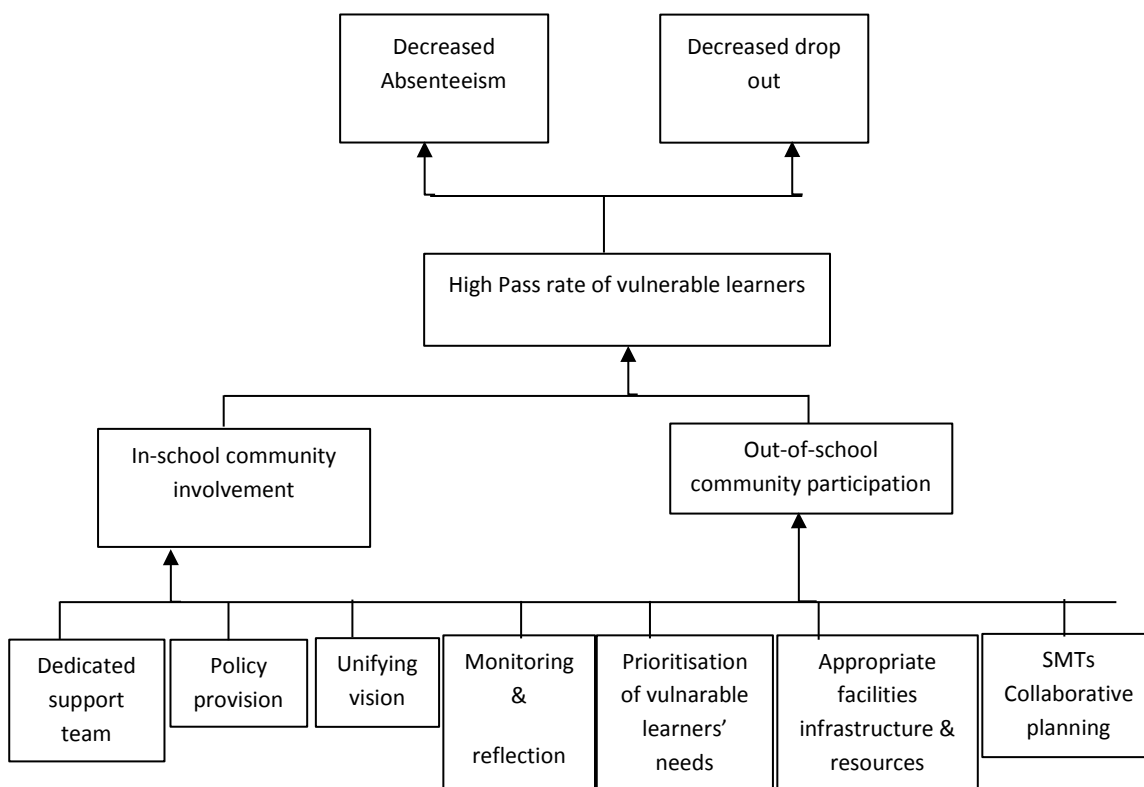


Figure 5.4.8 Solution tree



The tree above summarises that underachievement in their academic work because they absent themselves from school which leads leads them to drop out. Their absenteeism, drop out and failure rate can decrease if dedicated in-school and out-of-school of school community could cooperate in supporting vulnerable learners. This is possible if such communities have resources, policy and vision guiding them. This is also possible if their set activities are monitored and evaluated.

5.5 The possible threats hindering the support mechanisms

The participants addressed the study's fourth objective through individual and focus groups interviews that attempted answering the question: What are the anticipated threats that could hinder high school management teams' mechanisms for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work? The following section discusses the threats:

5.5.1 Absence of the established coordinating team

Participants say high school management teams' mechanisms for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work can be put at risk if there is no technical working group elected democratically by the different stakeholders representing all levels:

Bosieo ba bookameli bo tlamehang ho ikarabella le ho etsa liqeto bo ka sitisa litšehetso tsa barutoana ba valnerebole. Feela hee SBST e tlameha ho fana ka tlaleho khafetsa hore ba lokelang ba lule ba tseba hore ho etsahala'ng. (Absence of the principal has the potential to derail the support mechanisms for vulnerable learners thus could threaten those mechanisms' existence. The SBST will have to take responsibility, but they have to give the report regularly so that stakeholders are updated). (SSMT3)

The threat is, if the technical working group is not elected considering democracy, the team will not possess total directive to deliver rigorous headship, for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work. (LT2)

A translation of the statement, “bookameli bo tlamehang ho ikarabella” hints at the management being accountable on behalf of stakeholders. This indicates that the power expressed by contingency theory in section 2.2.2.2 is bestowed on the principal to make decisions that would benefit all. The words “bo tlamehang” mean that one is “obliged to”, and so the principal is in this context entitled to decide in the

interests of others. This says absence of the principal denotes no governance committed to directing the support mechanisms for vulnerable learners to the unwavering objectives and goals.

SSMT3 further explains that the SBST, which could be considered as coordinating team, is “*obliged to*” report constantly “*ba tlameha ho fana ka tlaleho khafetsa hore ba lokelang ba lule ba tseba hore ho etsahala’ng*”. This highlights that any failure by the coordinating team to report to the stakeholders would leave these stakeholders uninformed about the progress of the implementation of the support mechanisms put in place. This also implies that the mechanisms will not be monitored, and this can render the elected coordinating team as ineffective. This will also threaten coordinating team not to reach preset goals. It is also imperative to note that, giving the stakeholders immediate and regular report gives interpretation that the authority over the support mechanisms rests with its members.

Even though the election exercise may be time consuming in the case of school A, it validates the group since the fellows would have been nominated by them. The members will also represent the aspirations of each sector. For this reason, absence of a buy-in from the team in formulating and implementing support mechanisms for vulnerable learners is another critical threat that can hinder the mechanisms that support vulnerable learners in their academic work. This absence may result truancy and resistance to policy directives articulated by contingency theory.

5.5.2 Lack of vision among stakeholders

Participants in both South Africa and Lesotho schools argued that it may be problematic to productively reap support mechanisms for vulnerable learners without shared vision:

Re na le lilemo tse ngata joale sekolong mona re se na moetapele. Joale esale ho tloha ka nako eo... ha ho na ... chebelo-pele e ka sehlohlolong menyetla ea ho thusa bana bana ba mofuta ona (For many years now, our school has been running without a principal to monitor and evaluate some acts like this one... there is no ... vision of prioritising opportunities of helping this kind of children). (Group B1).

Ha re n'o khona ho tsoelella ka meralo ena e metle ntle le hore re utloane le hore re be le chebelo-pele e le 'ngoe... (We can't be successful with these noble plans unless we cooperate and achieve joint objective. (ST1).

If vision is not there; conflicts, tension, etc between stakeholders reign which will in turn threaten the formulation, implementation and achievement of the support mechanisms for vulnerable learners, (LSMT1).

The utterances by a focus group of South African teachers (Group B1), indicated that the absence of a principal at a school threatens and undermines the implementation of monitoring and evaluation efforts that determine if programmes, such as supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work, would have achieved their intended outcomes, strive at creating accountability and ensure the most effective use of the resources. However, this study argues that it is everyone's responsibility, including the teachers, to trace programmes and evaluate their sustainability requiring measured durable results. This says it is the responsibility of all stakeholders to adapt, implement, monitor and evaluate activities and plans of the school to suit the situation as contingency theory in section 2.2.2 over Woods (2019).

A further deduction, drawn on the focus group B1's responses is that vision is vital in supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work. However, their use of the phrase, "*ha ho na chebelo-pele*" (there is no vision) implies that the vision's absence makes it difficult to administer the support mechanisms for vulnerable learners in their academic work. This is also translated in to saying the vision (*chebelo-pele*) brings support to vulnerable learners in their school (*ho tlisa tšehetso ho bana ba tlokotsing sekolong sa rona*).

The above sentiments lead to the conclusion that if the vision is there in any institution about any activity, it tends to pull together the stakeholders. The word 'vision', in lieu of the usual word 'objective', is usually preferred since it proposes that the aims have capacity to inspire participation (Nhlapo, 2014). It can be understood that lack of a vision conveys serious threat to developing, implementing and attaining successfully the support mechanisms for vulnerable learners in their academic work.

The lack of a uniting vision indicates division and unfavourable environment, hence contradicts with contingency theory advocacy in section 2.2.2.2.

5.5.3 Risks hindering prioritisation process

Identifying less paramount priorities before the most basic ones will threaten SMTs in supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work. This is reflected in some statements of the participants in Lesotho and South Africa:

Identifying unimportant priorities before the supreme, can threaten mechanisms that are meant to support us. (Group B2).

We should put the urgent activities and the elementary support mechanisms before anything else on our priority list. (LSMT3).

The deduction made from the above data is that the support mechanisms to be employed should allow the prioritisation of the objectives first. Thus, the study considered the absence of the prioritisation as an inherent threat that could disrupt the support mechanisms for vulnerable learners. The “*priority list*” anticipated by LSMT3 can be interpreted as an example of a structure which could ensure task completion and goal attainment of contingency theory.

5.5.4 Threats to collaboration among support teams

The participants highlighted the importance of collaborative planning without which is a threat:

...ha ho na tšebeliso-‘moho, empa ha re khona re ntse re ba thusa motho ka bonngoe! Feela monyetla oa ho tlisa tšehetso ho bana ba tlokotsing sekolong sa rona ha o ka hlaha re ka o ananela. (...no cooperation, but when we manage, we still individually help them! However, we will welcome the opportunity of bringing the support for vulnerable learners in our school should that arise. We need guidance that can take us to where we say we want to go). (Group B1).

Until we collaboratively ensure that our plan is noted down, we may still experience confusion. Even the Bible warns us to. (SSMT2).

Vulnerable learners are depressed, lonely and they are introverts. They don’t interact with anyone, they don’t socialise or discuss school work with their school mates, they don’t mix with other peer mates because they feel they don’t fit in. They are reserved; they don’t open up to us, hence making it difficult for the rest of us here at school to help them. (Group D1).

Vulnerable learners don't work with us; they have developed negative attitude towards certain teachers' subjects which they have to buy books outside, as if they don't feel for them. (Group E1).

Fickburg is rough because we most of the time deal with drug addicts learners. We are unable to help them to leave drugs when there are still major gangsters of suppliers outside there who don't cooperate with us. When you try to help learners to leave drugs, then you interfere with 'mino oa korieana gang, bo-terene and seakhi (accordion music gang); you know them better because you come from Lesotho. So, that's the threat because re ba thusa ntse re khutla (we don't fully help them in fearing for our lives). (SSMT5).

Because of their pride, it is very difficult to help them. Sometimes they reject whatever we offer to them. (Group C1).

The sentiments by Group B1 above suggested that absence of teamwork among themselves weakened them. They underscored that the lack of cooperation among them, when they should, results in a failure to attain the intended results. Seemingly, there is a need to provide people with guidance on how to cooperate and in that way attain unity. Furthermore, the required guidance should enable them to control their differences shared goal, which in this context is to provide support to vulnerable learners in their academic life. Teachers had identified techniques such as a need for cooperation or unity amongst stakeholders, which could be interpreted as best contingency theory strategies contributing to the attainment of the management goal of supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work.

Group B1 also admitted that they worked as individuals and not as team to administer vulnerable learners' issues. This lack of a unified approach can be tracked back to the imbalance and dominance impacts of old individualistic approaches over social cohesion. Respondents insisted that they could only work together after someone provided them with guidance on strategies that resolve their problem. This portrays them as disempowering themselves, thus lacking a vision on the support mechanisms for vulnerable learners, on the direction, focus and resources and not attending to vulnerable learners' problems and needs, nor engaging with the affected participants, which perpetuates no success in supporting vulnerable learners.

The above data also implies that planning for the support mechanisms for vulnerable learners may not succeed if there is no collaboration, thus the 'if-then' form of

relationship of contingency theory. In compliance with the Bible, SSMT2 believes that a plan for the support mechanisms for vulnerable learners must be written down as the strategy to address threats linked with an unrecorded plan, without which there might be confusion. The plan, which contingency theory also recommends in section 2.2.2.1, had to be written for orderliness and for the activities to be implemented systematically.

Lesotho data by LSMT4 corroborated with South Africa by SSMT2 in that:

We must frequently review our plan gearing towards our purpose. We must also monitor alignment of our tasks, allocate resources, timeframe and people accountable for each activity. If we fail to do so, we're likely to get lost and be troubled. (LSMT4).

Participant LSMT4 itemised activities to consider while planning, arguing that failure to consider them had the possibility to disrupt the support mechanisms for vulnerable learners in their academic work. Identification of items by LSMT4 links with contingency theory which emphasises that the work of the leaders is to discover the techniques which impart in attaining the management goals. LSMT4 emphasised that the plan should be reviewed, frequent assessment to implement, give advice to consider activities alignment, resources allocation and delegating persons accountable. The rationale behind these was, as quoted by LSMT4, to circumvent 'getting lost', which can be interpreted as missing targets. The other reason he cited was that of being 'troubled', understood in this research as symbolic to impending threats through which the support mechanisms for vulnerable learners coordinating team would be involved.

Participants articulated in section 5.3.3 that the effectiveness of the principal's attempts at empowering vulnerable learners in their academic work is hindered by the inability to secure scholarships for all of them, implying that, not all service providers are cooperative. The participants in that section also noted that the guardians, villagers and parents dumped vulnerable learners at the school and yet, did nothing further to support the school and the learners. Hence, the principal's

work is marked by various difficulties, the major one being running the school at a loss.

Likewise, the support mechanisms put into place by teamed up teachers in section 5.3.3 are not long-term measures for vulnerable learners to live on. Again, their work is threatened by the fact that, vulnerable learners are just too many so much that the teachers could not afford to assist all of them since not all teachers are interested in taking out their money for learners due to the low salaries they earned.

5.5.5 Threats to policy provision

According to the participants, policy for the support mechanism for vulnerable learners should abide by the law. However, they noted that not all of them were conscious of the legitimate intervention concerning accessible education, as such, there was likelihood continuation of lacking reference to the legislation. Therefore, the participants consider this as risk since it threatens the sustainability of the visualised support mechanisms:

Are we to develop new law or policy for vulnerable learners' support mechanisms? Can't we just use the law in place already? Anyway, if we have to come up with a policy, it has to be aligned with the current law and let's not forget to abide by it. (SSMT1).

The threat that SSMT1 enlightened focus group members with was connected to inconsistency policy according to the relevant law over the support mechanisms for vulnerable learners, which she considered undesirable. Policies or laws are situational or contingency factors bringing about positive change in an institution such as school (section 2.2.2).

Furthermore, SSMT3 responded to some of the issues raised by SSMT1. He differentiated between a policy and the law:

The policies are principles of activities adopted by, say a department in a school setting, while legislations set out the law that must be followed. That's why a policy should have aim, conduct, vision and other aspects uniting people under one organisation. (SSMT3).

The problem is implementation. I have just discovered that there is learner care and welfare support in our ministry. In the SR, I'm asked if my school has policy on HIV/AIDS and GBV. It also asks about rules and guidelines covered on physical safety in school, stigma, discrimination, grievances and discipline procedures in case of breach of the regulation. But we ignore this part always. (LSMT10).

This research benefited from SSMT3's response, as he drew the the policy structure for the support mechanisms for vulnerable learners thus confirmed to other colleagues that policy must be compatible with the legislation. Obviously, the badly built policies lead to unsuccessful plans. For example, policy, as cited by SSMT3, must aid stakeholders incordially addressing their differences. This is attained by adhering to policy that is founded on valuable evidenced data formulated through participatory procedures. Conflicts and different opinions among the stakeholders in the cooperative policy design procedure are unavoidable, as a result, it is vital to base policy creation processes by embracing principled values thereof.

5.5.6 Hindrance to appropriate facilities, infrastructure and resources

A further potential risk to the support mechanisms for vulnerable learners' academic work was linked to inappropriate skills, incompetencies and inexperience that may enhance the effectiveness of facilities, infrastructure and instructional material utilisation:

We buy books for them, they leave them at home, and they tell us they are heavy, or that they will get stolen. You really can't understand vulnerable learners (Group E1).

If the SBST members are not cautious, they may not sense severe risks allied with different facilities. (SMVL1)

As teachers, we need to learn to keep the secrets that these learners entrusted us by sharing to us in confidence. (Group D1).

Because teachers are not counselling professional human resources, this reality threatens the counselling facility's good intention it seeks to achieve. This is because counselling that is not well considered and cautiously handled tends to cause obstacles to successful strategies seeking to support vulnerable learners.

The support mechanisms for vulnerable learners' academic work, according to participants, comprised of the teaching and learning material that pupils must aid their learning with. They said appropriate resources, facilities and infrastructure are prerequisite for the support mechanisms' success. However, according to the participants, the threat to the book rental scheme was that, not all learners afford to pay. Besides, learners leave them at home claiming that they are heavy, or that they will get stolen, they lose and sell them. Again, most of the books are worn out and difficult to replace due to financial constraints.

Ironically, the participants in 5.3.3 stated that, vulnerable learners paying with goods instead of money had deteriorated because more people were affected socially and economically because of COVID-19 and could not afford to buy animals and crops for the vulnerable learners to pay their fees with. As a result, it became difficult for the school to procure services and resources that required payment by cash.

Participants also indicated that there are threats that prevented accommodation from effectively serving as support to vulnerable learners' academic work. Vulnerable learners were accommodated in large magnitudes both in school and out of schools' rental rooms, but COVID-19 caused most of these learners to be accommodated in few numbers. For those who rented out of school, there were socially unacceptable behaviour that vulnerable learners showed, such as use of drugs, indulging in sexual behaviours and unreported absenteeism. Participants further indicated that delays in the payment of rent from bursary schemes and non-payment in some cases resulted in conflict between the principal and owners of the residences rented out to the learners. The participants also pointed out that the bursary schemes were reluctant to pay boarding fees because the school, in fact, is not a boarding school. Further challenges included the difficulties with feeding the learners and in providing necessities, such as hot bath water, especially in winter. The school was also struggling with building study rooms, providing boarding and a dining hall for the boarders. Finally, the participants stated that some vulnerable children who were staying permanently at school were tormented due to lack of identity.

5.5.7 Threats to monitoring and reflecting on support for vulnerable learners

The participants highlighted the significance of monitoring and reflection for the plan to support vulnerable learners to be sustainable. The failure to conduct monitoring and reflection would seriously threaten the support mechanisms for vulnerable learners' academic work. This is because there would be no data collected to recover instruction:

Mathata ao re ka tobanang le 'ona ke a ho hloka tsebo e kaalo hore na hobane'ng re sa tšehetsoe, ka hoo re sitoe ho tsoela pele. (The problems we can face are insufficient [evidence] information of why there is no support for us. This [absence of evidence] is affecting our progression). (Group B2).

After you left, we agreed to do what is called baseline monitoring first to assess current situation, identify gaps and come up with correct interventions for these vulnerable learners we have here. We had already discussed that vulnerable learners are minimally supported and there were matters which resulted others to leave school. This may seriously threaten the plan to be developed and implemented that must be sensed promptly by monitoring and reflection. (LT1).

The view by South African focus group of vulnerable learners above is that lack of sufficient information regarding their support mechanism, can disrupt progression in issues affecting them. The insufficient information interpreted to be exhaustive enough and related to the subjects under consideration. Similarly, progress “tsoela[o](-)pele” is interpreted as having possibility to stimulate pointers of achievement which may be measured. In essence, Group B2 focus group discovered that it was authoritative to hold reflection and monitoring sessions. This would avert the problem and threats that might befall vulnerable learners' support mechanisms caused by insufficient and related information. Therefore, the processes of critical reflection should consider the varied opinions of the members, which must be open for vigorous argument and discussions.

5.6 The indicators of success in supporting vulnerable learners

The members addressed the final objective of this research through individual and focus group interviews that attempted this question: What are the indicators of success in supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work? The following section discusses the indicators:

5.6.1 The optimistic duty of devoted members

Participants stated that the technical working team helped by identifying the members who were eager to effectively and efficiently implement and monitor the support mechanisms for vulnerable learner:

The SBST members seem to be committed now because we have important outcomes such as identification of the stakeholders who are keen to support vulnerable learners in their academic. Out-of-school community provides so much service that there was no way we could have achieved if it was not because of their dedication to try to implement the support mechanism on our behalf. For instance, there is one community member who sewed 120 uniforms for vulnerable learners and she promises to supply them every year free of charge. Again, different stakeholders have now broad different types of cosmetics for vulnerable learners after we have involved them. (ST1)

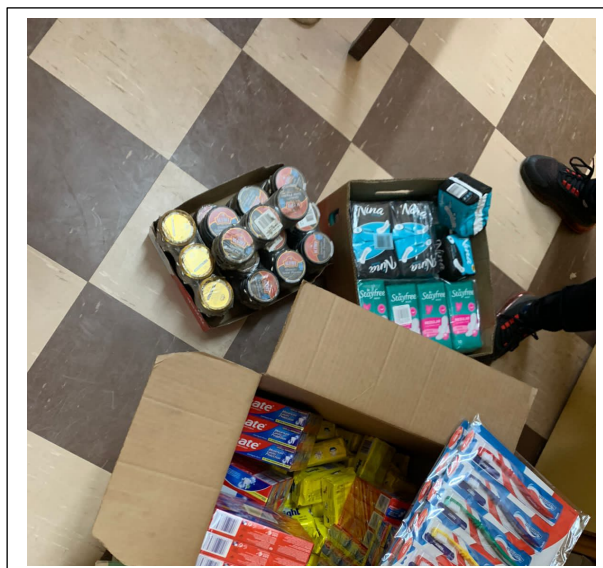
They normally thank us during their farewell ceremony that we really helped them. (Group C1).

After you left, we decided to form Student Representative Council (SRC) where amongst them we have learners responsible for students' behaviour and welfare, uniform and students' cleanliness. This team has already started helping us identify vulnerable learners. (LSMT5).

We have established village learning groups in our different villages. We are now empowered with study skills such as individual learning, peer teaching and collaborative learning skills. Village members monitor our regular school attendance and support us in different ways. (LMVL2)

The photograph below shows the cosmetics that different stakeholders provided to vulnerable learners. This effort is the result of the positive role played by a dedicated team in finding support mechanisms for vulnerable learners.

Figure 5.6.1.1 The picture of cosmetics from different stakeholders in School B for vulnerable learners:



It was important for participants to find the persons to take part in establishing the support mechanisms for vulnerable learners and say what their participation means to the accomplishment of its objectives. The partners of the technical working team, in the case of school A, were vulnerable learners, non-vulnerable learners, teachers, district education inspectorate, parents, school board, out-of-school community, NGOs and other departments such as health workers, local social workers, the police and other service providers. Similarly, the partners at school B were school community members and out of school community. Decision-making is also juxtaposed by contingency theory for the possible implications of performance.

5.6.2 The success of the shared vision

The shared vision compelled the participants to identify the challenges, solutions, conditions and the risks enhancing the effective support mechanisms for vulnerable learners or impede progression, respectively. For this study, the vision purports to promote the success of the vision for fruitful support through contingency theory, as confirmed by the responses below:

I learned that individuals are joint by a shared aim. Our aim that joined us, for example, was development and implementation of mechanisms intended to support vulnerable learners in their academic work. (SSMT3).

We have a vision that was jointly embraced as a direction that some of the support mechanisms are already pursued. We developed it ourselves and others who wished to support vulnerable learners' academic work. (LT2).

Vision successfully played the key part in generating discrete institutional identity, unifying stakeholders promote their devotion.

5.6.3 Prioritising the needs of vulnerable learners

The participants remembered their actions during prioritisation:

In 2019, we were taught about depression symptoms and I began to realise I had those symptoms. From that day, I told myself that I should prioritise my studies over depression so that I become a

better person in future. The fact that I'm in this grade this year is the clear indication that I won already. (SFVL5)

We agreed that all the actions be done respecting the situations and set time that is not under the power of the SBST while they are constant with our aim. (ST2)

We placed the activities such as formulating village learning groups and ploughing establishing clubs activity. (LSMT4)

We saw that some of the issues do not clash with teaching and learning. We then said all those categories that we agreed upon, such as sensitising school and out of school community; engaging other ministries; maximising community involvement; creating a sense of ownership; encouraging partnership between learners, teachers, parents, community and NGOs, should be attended during the December to January holidays. (LMVL1).

ST2 above pointed out that the SBST were respecting and submitting opinions to the schedules of the other affected organisational structures hence complying with social structures of contingency theory in section 2.2.2.2. It was critical for this research to consider schedules as it was central to prioritisation process.

Likewise, the activities in school A were itemised but not argued so that comprehensive list could be collected. The respondents freely suggested during the brainstorming session with the coordinating team tasked with compiling. However, the list appeared messy, and this prompted some vulnerable learners to ask how the itemised issues were put in order.

Again, learners were skilled by out-of-school community (Redcross, Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Coordination and Disaster Management Authority) to plough at least keyholes in their homes and small plots at school and sow the seeds that they were given to earn a living. According to the participants, a local community member lent his field to the school so that it could be used to feed learners especially the vulnerable. Below are the pictures of such field and a picture of a keyhole from one of the vulnerable learner's home ploughed by her:

Figure 5.6.3.1 Field



Figure 5.6.3.2 Keyhole



The coordinating team facilitated, after the focus group session, a procedure of determining on the key classifications that were used to identify matters that were categorised, as “*under the same class*”, that in this case is refer to as an itemised record executing the same purposes. This is further clarified by LMVL1 in the outline of examples items on the list of a class.

5.6.4 Collaboration to support vulnerable learners

Participants highlighted, in one of the focus group reflection sessions, the processes which they facilitated in developing a cooperative strategy supporting vulnerable learners. The participants’ responses to this effect were:

Planning together was really fruitful. For example, the cooks package food for vulnerable learners after school so that they go and eat with their family members at home. Vulnerable learners are identified by our non-academic staff because they live in the villages with them, so they know them very well. Also, our non-vulnerable learners helped in reporting their classmates who are vulnerable. Teachers too, cooperate by easily identifying them in classes. (SSMT2)

I approached different service providers. I approached Pick n Pay manager to sponsor them and they give left overs and items that are about to expire. I also find donars for them. I have friends in China. Every year, they phone me looking for learners from remote areas, I give them vulnerable learners’ names, if they succeed, they let me know and there’s never time they return them. (SSMT10).

Sometimes the shoprite people come to ask for learners to go and work in their shop during school holidays, so the principal normally gives them vulnerable learners, they are the first priority. (Group F1).

After you left 'm'e Hlojeng, I communicated with members to look at our learners' enrolment by residential status, Grade and Sex as indicated in form (SR) guiding us. We discovered that other than total day learners, our school is dominant with number of day learners in rented accommodation where they control themselves and misbehave. They are turned into husbands and wives, they use drugs and they dodge classes. We were also aware that most of them are learners whose guardians dumped them to these residences to reduce burdens in their homes. We held public gathering with landpersons to negotiate them to help us in monitoring these children and it was a successful meeting, (LSMT10).

Our key aim of coming up with strategies was accomplished by dividing it into portions that were our precedence parts. We had then deliberated and scrutinised mechanisms for attaining each of the important parts. I was pleased by the brilliant way and the capability which members portrayed in this regard. (LSMT3).

We planned for priorities we approved, we assigned people in charge through agreement bearing in mind what was required to accomplish. (LT1).

The table below presents a plan that was collectively drawn by the school A participants. This plan is pasted in classrooms, staffroom and in offices.

Table 5.6.4.1 The support mechanisms plan for vulnerable learners for the year 2021-2022

Activity	Target group	Responsible person(s)	Time frame	Outcomes
Encourage partnership between academic staff, non-academic staff and learners	academic staff, non-academic staff and learners	LSMT1, LT2, LFVL3, prefects Mrs Ntsiki (cook)	Daily	Curbed absenteeism, repetition, and drop out by vulnerable learners. Reduced negative attitude towards vulnerable learners, free communication, increased academic performance
Hold public gatherings, campaigns and raise awareness about vulnerable learners	Five feeder villages	Chief, LSMT4, Counsellor, LT1, LMVL1	6 th -19 th Dec 2021, before schools reopen beginning every year	Retained vulnerable learners in school through maximising community involvement
Engage out-of-school community, education officers, other Ministries and NGOs	district education officers, other Ministries and NGOs	LSMT2, Mr Tefo (casualty teacher) LMVL3 Parent's representative	03 rd January 2022 and when a need arises	Network resulting increased socioeconomic support for vulnerable learners
Raise funds for vulnerable learners	Out-of-school community and school community	Fund raising committee	Monthly	Increased financial support for vulnerable learners
Establish clubs that will support vulnerable	Vulnerable learners	LSMT2, LFVL4, LMVL2, Mr Tema	17 th January 2022	Improved academic performance

learners in their academic work	(parents' representative in the school board)	particularly of vulnerable learners
Monitor and reflect on the activities	All stakeholders Coordinating team	Quarterly Drawn monitoring tool, identified successes, challenges and plan for the way forward

The information presented above evidence collective planning for the support mechanisms for vulnerable learners evolved from the participants' concerted efforts. This is corroborated by LSMT10 where landpersorns agreed to work together with the school to curb misbehaviour of learners residing in their rental houses. The agreement indicates success in supporting vulnerable learners because they would, as a team, promote and maintain proper order, discipline, close co-operation with residents and business industry of the community.

The collective planning is also apparent in language usage which was including others by SSMT2, LSMT3 and LT1. For example, plural pronouns they articulated comprised 'our' and 'we'. It is also shown that LSMT3 possessed capabilities that she never had as indicated when she appreciated the brilliant way they collaborated with the various stakeholders when they drew plan. She also cherished the capability they had plan's progress. In addition, it was observed that the members could have not donated their expertise generously if they did not buy-in the vision to develop plan (Williams & Ronan, 2013; Leach & Sabatier, 2005).

5.6.5 The policy to support vulnerable learners

The policy offered participants a basis, guide and way to support vulnerable learners in their academic work. Participants elaborated thus:

My interest to stay long in this research was due to skills I learned that policy inspires delivery of learning chances fairly. I took it as binding to help all vulnerable learners. (SSMT1)

The agreement entered in between the school and members board which in turn helped us to curb conflicts between us and others. Again, it was easier for the SB to agree to cooperate. (LSMT3).

It is evident that SSMT1's awareness of the plan's specifications on accessing equal education obliged her to continue participating in this study. The information about policy which she obtained encouraged her to meaningfully take part in supporting vulnerable learners. She contributed through hard work, expertise and information. It seems that SSMT1 gathered her leverage from the policy, for this reason, it is deduced that she sees herself owning same obligation as the people tasked to implement the country's legislation.

Similarly, LSMT3, who was also SB member, played a significant role in the agreement. Her response confirmed that a conjointly decided upon policy, can restrain disrupting conflict implied thus, she embedded contract amongst the team members and the school lessened the prevalence of conflicts. Therefore, her response confirmed that the mutual agreement was instrumental to demolishing inherent power struggles articulated by contingency theory. In addition, the ability of the policy to harmonise the working environment (Sayed, 2002) is evidenced SSMT1 and LSMT3.

5.6.6 The significance of appropriate facilities, infrastructure and resources

The participants highlighted the necessity for decent facilities, complete infrastructures and suitable resources to succeed in supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work. The participants stated that:

It didn't matter how many facilities, infrastructure and resources we have, if we didn't know how to use them, they would have never been enough to support vulnerable learners. We've developed a strong relationship with out-of-school community, other ministries and NGOs concerned with a child. They are involved and we get resources from them anytime they are needed. (SSMT4).

There's a huge difference now, village health workers ensure that we don't miss school due to collecting our medication every month. We use community hall to study. In the hall, there is a lot gained after having a relationship with other learners not only from this school but from other different schools. We're supervised by local community. They also administer remedial lessons since most of our educators commute. They ensure that we come to school at all times. Former vulnerable learners motivate us to attend school regularly and they tip us on how to deal with our schoolwork. (LFVL1).

As for some of us who couldn't afford boarding fees, learning materials and other needs, funds were raised while others got from the sponsors. The bridge was constructed by the community. Our regular attendance is no longer affected by dongas and valleys which were obstacles to our regular presence at school. (LMVL2).

The picture below was provided by LMVL2, showing the foot bridge that was constructed by the stakeholders for vulnerable learners who cannot afford transport fare to and from school. The bridge also assisted the rest of the community.

Figure 5.6.6.1 The picture of footbridge constructed by community member for vulnerable learners who cannot afford transport fares to and from school



In the efforts towards providing support for vulnerable learners, the participants were empowering themselves with the applicable information. The love they had for their task granted them the assurance to face obstacles. For example, participants went to District Council Secretary (DCS) responsible for the community hall to request him to hand it for school activities. They understood that the DCS did not have any authority to reject them to utilise the property they own for their own good. In addition, the responses indicated that the parties involved in the support mechanisms for vulnerable learners in their academic work realised the need of and had to work together with other stakeholders.

5.6.7 Monitoring and reflection on the support mechanisms

The participants also reflected on the monitoring of the support mechanisms. One of the focus group meetings, which reflected on the plan for support mechanisms for vulnerable learners, noted that:

Activities that were supposed to be performed by the public were attempted timeously because we planned hence we were not ready to ruin it. We ensured that they understood we were not bullying them, instead, determined to contribute positive change. (SSMT3)

We succeeded to monitor and reflect on our planned activities. (LSMT1)

We agreed to do baseline, progress and impact monitorings. As a result, we have already started to monitor our plans. (Group A1).

The progress reports were compiled and evaluated. Below is school A's progress report based on an evaluation of the support mechanisms for vulnerable learners for the year 2021-2022 which was done at the end of the first quarter March 2022:

Table 5.6.7.1 Progress Report

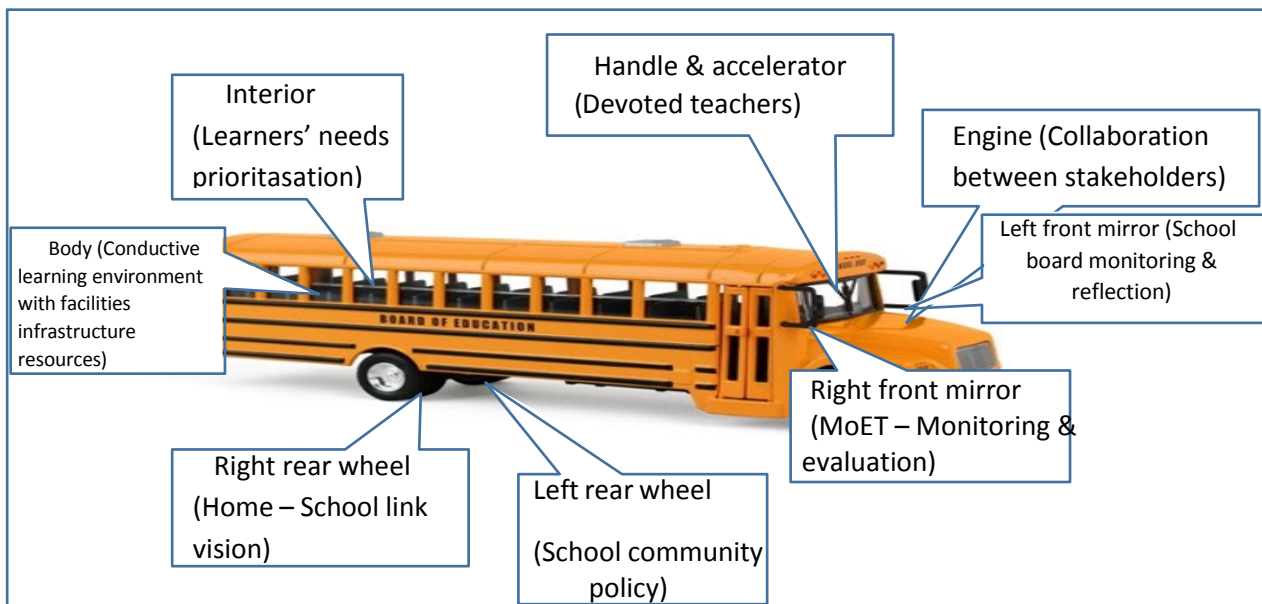
Action	Owner	Deadline	Resources/funds	Successes	Challenges	Way forward
Encourage partnership between academic staff, non-academic staff and learners	LSMT1, LT2, LFVL3, prefects Mrs Ntsiki (cook)	Continuous	Human resource	Expected outcomes are met. School community and out of school community successfully identified vulnerable learners, reported them to the responsible committee which in turn took the required action.	Vulnerable learners do not reveal their problems to the authority	Revise conducive platforms for vulnerable learners to share their problems. Suggestion box will be at place
Hold public gatherings, campaigns and raise awareness about vulnerable learners	LSMT4, Chief, Councillor, LT1, LMVL1	19th December 2021	Humans resource, financial support	Other than successfully exiting the limit of holding public gatherings and awareness in different villages, the media like radios, social media, and the church, etc, was used to campaign and raise awareness. Hence, more vulnerable learners who paid fees with anything at place were retained. The public ensured that all vulnerable learners	Financial constraints. Unable to pay exam fees for vulnerable learners whose guardians/parents paid with animals, crops, etc	Auction will be considered

				were at school and ensured that their needs were met		
Engaged out-of-school community, district education officers, other Ministries and NGOs	LSMT2 , Mr Tefo (casualty teacher) LMVL3 Parent's representative	03rd January 2022 and when a need arises	Skills	Networking with these stakeholders resulted in an increase of the socioeconomic support for vulnerable learners. The out-of-school community constructed a bridge, provided community learning centres, such as halls and huts, for learners to use while not at school. Unemployed qualified teachers did community service in different villages where they supervised these learners and identified those that did not attend school regularly and, discovered why they were not and acted accordingly	For a longer time, there was no fuel for other ministries' transport	Personal transport for officers and school van will be used
Raise funds for vulnerable learners	Fund raising committee	Monthly	Cash	Other than the funds we already had, we now have different sponsors, fund raising activities like raffles, tea breaks during meetings, career day, funny days and concerts	Some learners could not afford to contribute money and thus, absented themselves during fund raising activities' days	Register will be seriously taken to establish reasons from those that will be absent and support them accordingly
Establish clubs that support vulnerable learners	LSMT2 , LT1, LMVL2, LFVL4, Mr Tema	17 th January 2022	Human resource, Support seeds	We founded agricultural surety club, social peer club and study clubs. We sourced other successful vulnerable learners to come to school to motivate learners	Some of the club activities interrupted teaching and learning	We will try to reschedule them after school, during school holidays and weekends
Monitor and reflect on the activities	Coordinating team	Quarterly	Human resource. Monitoring and reflection tools	We succeeded in monitoring and reflecting on the planned activities	Reports were not submitted on time	The team for each activity will have to report monthly before presenting to the main technical team and all stakeholders

Participant SSMT3 was cognisant of the codes that reinforced the discussions of the support mechanisms for vulnerable learners. The assertion that “*we were not bullying*” shows that the participants did not suppress the views of the other stakeholders. However, indications are that the members acted conclusively in their purpose to attain what they were directed to accomplish. It was also observed that the team members’ critical activities considered the social structures around school. The participants succeeded because of their concentration on the goals and plans that were repeatedly reviewed working together with the social structures. This shows that a monitoring and evaluation system enables continuous surveillance aimed at assessing the local development projects’ impact on intended beneficiaries.

The picture below summarises the indicators of success in supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work in a form of School Bus Model

Figure 5.7 School Bus Model



The school bus model above put emphasis on the fact that, vulnerable learners’ well performance is dependent on support mechanisms put in place for them by all which

can be effectively and efficiently accelerated if they are handled by devoted and collaborative stakeholders who are aided by vision, policy, adequate facilities, infrastructures and resources to operate. It is also important for stakeholders to monitor and reflect on the set activities.

5.8 Conclusion

The above chapter presented, interpreted, analysed and discussed the data. The chapter outlined the area of data collection and the participants' biographical information and then explained the challenges that justify the need for high school management teams to support vulnerable learners in their academic work. The chapter also focused on the high school management teams' mechanisms for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work. Finally, it detailed the conditions, threats and indicators of success in supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work.

It was noted that the participants worked hard to develop and implement the high school management teams' support mechanisms for vulnerable learners in their academic work. The reviewed literature was infused in this chapter and it resonated well with a majority of the findings of this study. The situational or contingency theory emphasised the challenges that justify the need for high school management teams to support vulnerable learners in their academic work. The theory guided the solutions, conditions, threats and indicators of success in supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work.

The next chapter will present the study's summary, the conclusions and the recommendations

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of the study and draws conclusions with a view to making recommendations on mechanisms that the high school management teams can use to support vulnerable learners in their academic work. The study was organised according to the challenges that justify the need for the high school management teams to support vulnerable learners in their academic work, solutions of those challenges, conditions, threats and indicators of success objectives.

6.2 Summary of the findings

The overall objective of this research was to explore the high school management teams' mechanisms for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work. The researcher sought to achieve this objective by gathering relevant data from SMTs, teachers and vulnerable learners in six schools consisting of three in Lesotho and three South Africa. Data was generated through individual interviews and focus groups. The data was coded into themes, analysed and interpreted into findings. The key findings from this study are summarised below.

6.2.1 Research question 1: Which are the challenges that justify the need for high school management teams to support vulnerable learners in their academic work?

The researcher made conclusions following an analysis of the responses from the participants' individual and focus group interviews, literature review and contingency theory. The themes that emerged were categorised in to out-of-school factors and in-school factors as summarised below:

6.2.1.1 Out-of-school factors

Vulnerable learners live difficult lives in their home contexts as a result, they struggle at school. Families exist within the community, where individuals have different perceptions on vulnerability. Therefore, the way the communities treat and preserve vulnerability also constitutes the vulnerable child's schooling performance.

6.2.1.1.1 Poverty

Poverty intensifies the vulnerability of learners, causing them to fluctuate between the levels of classes. The needs, as suggested in both the literature and the collected data evidencing that vulnerable children are living problematic lives in their household settings, that results in struggling at school and with their educational experience, must be fulfilled to enable all learners to achieve academically. Vulnerable learners find it much harder to learn because of poverty and the situation is made worse if they fail. These students usually do not have the basic needs for education, such as pens and exercise books, which contributes to their academic underachievement. In addition, they fail their grades because they cannot study or concentrate effectively because of lack of enough food to eat at home. Similarly, the environment at their homes does not allow them to study and, therefore, they underachieve academically.

The above-noted circumstances force vulnerable learners to carry the duties of looking after themselves and their siblings because their relatives cannot accommodate them. The poverty which the learners also experience makes teaching and learning difficult as they would be hungry, lacking proper clothing or living in unsafe environments. Poverty is, therefore, main trigger to school dropouts and the repeat of levels. In this situation, the contingency theory would call for the achievement of the elementary necessities by eradicating poverty as a serious goal in the African traditional community and corresponds to the idea of humanity since each society has a moral duty to care.

6.2.1.1.2 Health needs

It was found that vulnerable learners face huge health challenges. The data collected from both countries shows that vulnerable learners, particularly orphans, underachieve academically because most of them are sick and have nobody to take care of their health needs. They learn at optimal levels only if they are healthy. These learners also do not eat enough, as shown earlier, which leads malnutrition and other illnesses. The learners' failure to consume enough food affects their ability to learn effectively as food improves cognitive functioning among the learners and enables academic performance.

However, because of poverty, vulnerable learners, such as the orphans, cannot afford food supplies or health service payments when ill. Those who can afford the payments are advised to eat before and after taking the medication prescribed at health services stations, a situation that makes the vulnerable, such as the orphans, unable to follow proper medication practices because of a lack of food at their homes. This is evident in the case of Antiretrovirals (ARVs) medications that must be taken with or after the consumption of food, and yet a lack of food forces orphans and other vulnerable children not to take their medication when there is no food.

6.2.1.1.3 Rape

It was established from the empirical evidence that some vulnerable learners are raped by their family members and community members, which exacerbates their academic underachievement. Data collected from Lesotho demonstrates that security and the law are not taken care of. Therefore, vulnerable learners are neglected because the family members do not support the oppressed victims, which encourage the rapists to legitimise the act in turn worsening the vulnerable learners' academic underachievement. Some learners keep quiet about their trauma of rape owing to social disparities in the community. In addition, the victims are not reporting rapes because their rapists exploit them by providing them with basic needs in return and if they report the rape, the benefits cease. However, the fact that they are raped haunts them severely to the extent that they cannot focus on their studies. Adults as

leaders seem not to build good rapport that is suggested by contingency theory in section 2.2.2.1 which could save vulnerable learners from challenges such as rape.

6.2.1.1.4 Overcrowded Accommodation

The extent to which a child prepares at home determines part of their performance at school. The researcher also found out that the vulnerable learners' achievement is hindered by congested conditions at their homes. There is no enough space to study and the learners face learning difficulties such as extreme noise.

6.2.1.1.5 Separated siblings

The data showed that some vulnerable learners separated from their siblings while some single orphans do not stay with their other parent. It was found that this separation hinders their positive performance at school. The data collected showed that the vulnerable learners cannot perform to their best while at school because they would always be worried about their siblings left at home with relatives. The vulnerable learners who do not stay with their family members worry a lot about what is happening with their siblings and this worry prevents them from focusing on their studies. Therefore, it was observed that vulnerable learners' siblings are interdependent on one another and if they are separated, they would not function well at school and most likely in all spheres of life.

6.2.1.1.6 Family relations

One of the huge challenges confronting the vulnerable learners is the blame that goes around in their families, which is found to have negative effects on their academic work. An analysis of the collected data showed that the learners cannot forgive their parents for infecting and/or affecting them and their siblings with HIV/AIDS. Most vulnerable learners ended up repeating classes more than once because they missed school to take care for their sick families. The worst part is that some of the children are abandoned by their parents. Children desertion by their

parents is against the critical values of accountability and responsibility declared by contingency theory. These vulnerable learners also expressed anger and blamed their relatives and siblings. It is difficult for an angry mind to focus on studies, and it results high chances of academic underachievement.

6.2.1.1.7 Inadequate safety measures

It was found that the vulnerable learners, who stay on their own, feel unsafe at their homes. The data collected show that the learners were deserted by the members of their families and felt isolated. In addition, the vulnerable learners go home during school vacations and usually feel insecure to sleep alone. Worse still, the conditions at some of their houses were deplorable as the windows were broken and doors had no locks, which meant that something evil might happen to them at any period. The learners could be harmed because of the lack of security and more importantly the sense of insecurity resulted in academic underachievement.

In addition, this deplorable accommodation poses huge risks to the vulnerable girl children. The girls in such homesteads stood a chance of being raped. Their homes were frequently ransacked, and they would lose their belongings due to theft by their neighbours and/or other people. Therefore, the girl child and other vulnerable learners, underachieve academically because of the insecurity and exposure to other risks at their own homes in the absence of their parents and older siblings. The secured environment, suggested by contingency theory, is not offered, thus, learners are harmed and feel insecure. In general, whatever happens back at home is quite visible and reflected in learners' schoolwork because, in this kind of atmosphere, their schoolwork is suffering, resulting in academic underachievement.

6.2.1.1.8 Child Labour

It was found that child labour contributes to the academic underachievement of vulnerable learners. The home chores put a lot of weight on the children, and they end up lacking time to study. The literature review and the collected data showed

that although every child needs a parent, vulnerable learners must parent their families, which is some form of family responsibilities and work that affects them both physically and psychologically. Household chores for girls, including looking after sick siblings, are a heavy load on these children. Even the teachers hire people to work in their houses because they also cannot cope with their work and household activities. As for a child-headed family, they do everything to support the family, which is a heavy load that affects their performance at school.

Domestic work is even worse for orphans who are adopted by young relatives and other people who would be trying to help these children with their school needs. Some teachers let the orphans do domestic work for them and pay them by providing them with their needs. The orphans become the breadwinners while they are still at school because they are forced by their parents' deaths to head their homes. This says vulnerable learners do not have time to study at home while giving their time to make money and shifting the schoolwork down their priorities. Therefore, it was found that vulnerable learners have less chances of succeeding academically owing to the various housework and family responsibilities that they must cater for. This suggests that adults have unfavourable power of money over the vulnerable learners and use this to exploit them as contingency theory in section 2.2.2.2 highlights the existence of unequal power relations.

6.2.1.1.9 Unacceptable social behaviour

This research observed that vulnerable learners experience on drugs, alcohol and substance use due to various factors that include peer pressure. Some of the members of the community were suspected of selling alcohol, drugs and substances to learners. This indicates the inability to create interpersonal relationships suggested by contingency theory in section 2.2.2.1. Young people engage in risky behaviour as they are eager to experiment new things. However, there is no way that a drugged mind could be expected to do well in academic work. An analysis of the data collected showed that vulnerable learners were no different because they are also youngsters who wish to explore. It is even worse for the orphans because they

are more fragile and felt that they did not have parents to fear when they explore alcohol and drug abuse.

The noted risk factors that included alcohol, drug and substances use contributed to unplanned pregnancies. Most of the risk-taking behaviour, such as unprotected sex, occurs among the young people after consuming alcohol or other substances. This resonates with the point noted in the literature review chapter that there is generally high alcohol consumption amongst adolescents. A deficiency of financial support for the vulnerable girl children forces them to engage in sexual relationships to gain financial support from older men whom they cannot negotiate save sex. This affects their studies, and some fall pregnant, abort or drop out of school. Both vulnerable girl learners and boy learners engage in spontaneous sexual affairs in return for their necessities. The adults know that the orphans have no parents to report the assault to and they are poor, such that they have sex with them, reward and bribe them by providing for their needs.

6.2.1.2 School factors

The study noted there are school-based factors that lead to the academic underachievement of vulnerable learners and necessitate high school management teams to provide support for vulnerable learners in their academic work. Several sub-themes emerged during individual and focus groups interviews with participants focusing on this issue and they are follows:

6.2.1.2.1 Administration and admission criteria

It was noted that administration challenges necessitate high school management teams to support vulnerable learners in their academic work. The collected data indicated that the absence of a principal at school results in a further absence of reflection that contribute to determine programmes such as supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work has achieved its intended outcomes. However, this study discovered that it is everyone's responsibility, including the teachers, to track

the mechanisms and measure sustainable matters required to achieve measurable lasting results. In the cases where the principal is there at school, there is a need to invent techniques that require construction and maintenance of desirable social structures and do not marginalise vulnerable learners in the school community. It is thus important for all stakeholders to work together in supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work as it is the responsibility of all stakeholders to adapt the implementation of monitoring and evaluation style to suit the situation as contingency theory in section 2.2.2 aver that if certain situational factors exist, then certain organisational and managerial variables are most appropriate.

The schools are forced to admit too many vulnerable learners with problems that affect their learning, and these learners underachieve. Vulnerable learners learn in unfavourable environments and are not well cared for. The unfavourable learning environments for learners are against situational favourableness which contingency theory advocates for in section 2.2.2.2. The collected data showed that the unfavourable conditions were linked to the admission of large numbers. In addition, the students are not well taught because their parents are not there to follow up on their schoolwork. As a result, the principal and the teachers would be relaxed, knowing that nobody would bother them regarding vulnerable learners' academic work.

Therefore, it was noted that not enough efforts were made at the schools to support the vulnerable in their academic work. The disadvantaged learners are powerless, thus excluded from obtaining quality education as the teachers did not apply enough effort to teach them because they held the view that these learners were not good enough to pass, while the parents did not follow up on their children's schoolwork. Ultimately, this negatively affects their academic performance.

Finally, the researcher argues that if the management of the school is weak, the teachers also tend to be weak. The teachers most likely do not do their work effectively and efficiently if the principal does not stand by the principles and policies

of the school. The learners, in turn, become unruly once they notice the principal is not an effective manager and hence, the pass rates never improve.

6.2.1.2.2 *Insufficient instructional materials*

It was found out that one of the major challenges that necessitate high school management teams to support vulnerable learners in their academic work is the insufficient instructional materials. The teachers' view is that the condition must have been solemnly attended to by addressed by the school principal. The teachers' thinking can be related to the notion that principals have been entrusted with power, elicited in contingency theory, although it is the duty of the principal, HoDs and teachers to drive their school forward.

Sponsored vulnerable learners at Lesotho high schools are not given learning materials such as books and stationery hence making it difficult for them to participate actively in the learning processes. For example, learners pay M220.00 at Junior Certificate (JC) level as a government book fee, but the books are not enough for all the learners, while some are damaged. This correlates with the collected data in that, vulnerable learners fail because their school needs are not met. Lack of learning materials for the learners makes it difficult to teach and accounts for the affected learners' failure. This failure has further implications in that one is likely to fail in life because those who fail will probably not be employed in industries or be admitted to tertiary institutions.

Some of the responses in the data collected showed that people around school stole certain school properties. This creates divisions and widens those divisions that already existed. The school is established within community that can contribute invaluablely towards the development of education. Therefore, there is a need for school and the public to cooperate and create support mechanisms that will assist the vulnerable learners to academically achieve, hence the interpersonal relationship of contingency theory in section 2.2.2.1 is implied.

6.2.1.2.3 Financial problems

The outcomes from the analysed data indicated that financial problems were a major hindrance to the SMTs efforts to support vulnerable learners in their academic work. This is because most learners whose school fees are paid mainly by the MoET and other bursary schemes are vulnerable, and yet, the payments are delayed and sometimes the payments are not paid. Delays and failure to make payments create a lot of conflicts between the different groups with feeding schemes and many other things that require money to run a school being severely undermined.

Therefore, the results from an analysis of the data showed that lack of money is a challenge that hinders the SMT from supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work. The schools cannot buy resources and other materials to facilitate learning. This data also shows that the plans and activities in support of the vulnerable rely on the availability of funds to succeed or fail. The participants agree that the efforts fail because of a lack of money, which is against Yalokwu's (2002) opinion in literature section that most organisations fail because of poor management and not due to insufficient funds. Therefore, the researcher found that teaching and learning are more effective when the relevant resources and facilities that require funds are available and are well managed.

6.2.1.2.4 Teachers and teaching-related factors

Teachers and teaching-related factors were also noted as challenges that justify the need for high school management teams to support vulnerable learners in their academic work. Most of the vulnerable learners do not have parents who are responsible for their education, and this exposes them to risks such that the SMT members and teachers end up taking advantage of them. This agrees with the data collected, which indicated that parents were the strong drive behind the SMTs, teachers and learners to ensure the learners' good performance.

It was noted in the data that parents are the centre of everything, and their loss would mean that the SMT and the teachers also lose their responsibilities. The reality is that teachers and the SMTs do not fear what the parents would say after the learners have failed especially when parents and guardians do not come to the parents' meetings. The few who attend feel undermined as their freedom of speech is hindered because they fear losing the support of the school. This suggests that if the school did not have many orphaned children, the parents would be there to follow up on the learners' work and they might not be underachieving.

However, this study found that every school has its own culture and there is a link between the school culture and its effectiveness, school development, academic achievement and its stakeholders' discipline as also argued by contingency theory. Thus, there is a need for school culture to positively influence how the stakeholders perform their duties and responsibilities in the school, regardless of the parents' presence or absence.

6.2.1.2.5 Teachers' attitudes towards vulnerable learners

The teachers' negative attitudes act as a major hindering factor to efforts seeking to mitigate the vulnerable learners' academic underachievement. This is the violation of contingency theory which encourages interpersonal relationships, showing support and concern for subordinates (section 2.2.2.1) In line with this study's findings, the collected data showed that the vulnerable learners are subjected to threatening language, humiliation and a lack of attention from their teachers. The teachers feel that vulnerable learners cannot make it at school because they are hopeless. The teachers do not work hard enough, and believe that because vulnerable learners have failed already, they do not deserve more effort to help them.

It should be noted that vulnerable learners are very sensitive and fragile people who need to be handled with care, which is not the case with some of the teachers. The teachers are expected to be their learners' role models, but some hurt the learners

emotionally, mentally and physically, instead of giving them psychosocial support. The teachers treat the vulnerable learners negatively and they draw negative conclusions about them before they know them. Some teachers do not listen to the vulnerable learners nor give them attention. Therefore, learners do not relax and do not share their problems with their teachers to allow them to let off stress while the teachers fail to address the vulnerable learners' problems and instead ridicule them. These are enough reasons that contribute to the vulnerable learners' academic underachievement.

6.2.1.2.6 Absenteeism from school

This research discovered that vulnerable learners have the highest rate of absenteeism and that this resulted in the learners repeating levels and leading to their dropping out of school. The data collected shows that the learner dropouts indulge in socially unacceptable behaviour and some end up in prison. No serious effort is made to rectify the problem of absenteeism because the subject teachers, class teachers, principal, school management and parents do not care much about their absence. It was also noted that no action is taken after the register books, attendance forms and inspections confirm the learners' absenteeism and drop-out rates. Hence, there would be no support provided to learners that would not be at school.

The observed vulnerable learners' absenteeism is in agreement with the observations derived at from the literature review section that many of the vulnerable learners struggle to attend school even after high levels of commitment from the government and the provision of other bursary schemes to sponsor their education. It is up to all stakeholders to ensure that learners attend school on a regular basis as contingency theory section 2.2.2.2 advised that it is the responsibility of all the leaders in the school hierarchy to obtain the capacity to scrutinise the condition, formulate and employ management strategies which work best for this given circumstances.

6.2.1.2.7 Failure to implement plans and policies

Laws, policies and plans best contribute to the attainment of the management goals as articulated by contingency theory in section 2.2.2. However, this study established the failure to implement plans and policies as another challenge that justified the need for SMTs to support vulnerable learners in their academic work. It was noted from the data collected that the stakeholders are aware of the high enrolments of vulnerable learners than any other type of learners at their schools. Thus, they planned and set policies to remedy the situation. However, they never put them into practice, and there were no follow-ups or monitoring and evaluations to ensure that the policies and plans were implemented and determine the success thereof. The teachers further admitted that they did not implement their strategic plans consistently. The teachers had filed away plans and policies in cabinets. They also pointed out that they did not take responsibility for the plans they have produced and yet these could have helped in supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work.

6.2.2 Research question 2: How have high school management teams been supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work?

The reviewed literature and an analysis of the collected data were carried out to address the above challenges. The contingency theory also resonated with these challenges. The following was noted:

6.2.2.1 School boarding accommodation

It emerged during the study process that school A is not a boarding school and yet had to devise a support mechanism to meet the learners attending the school halfway. The data showed that only learners with problems and from afar attended this school. As a result, some classrooms and the school hall were turned into residences to accommodate them. The school used to be in partnership with the community and rented flats nearby. These flats were turned into school boarding accommodation while other learners rented some flats in the community.

The above-noted forms of accommodation served to help the poor learners in various ways. They provided for those who could not afford to eat three meals a day at their homes. Some orphans did not have their own homes and so the school housed them. The accommodation also rescued learners from child labour, overcrowded conditions at home prevented absenteeism and other home factors challenges that hindered their studies. Boarding offered by the school is an eligible location suggested by the favourable environment of Contingency theory, according to which it must adhere to certain conditions to qualify as suitable students' accommodation. This also strikes the contingency theory affirmation of SMTs strategy in which the leaders manage to adapt their style to suit the situation.

6.2.2.2 Support from principals

The findings of the study further show that the principals used to do all they could to support vulnerable learners in their academic work. The data showed that principals seemed to have built and fixed the relations with the public to create possibilities of collaborating in supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work. They used to get into different communities searching for vulnerable children who are not at school and bring them to school and provide scholarships for them. This confirms that the school principals built an interpersonal relationship of contingency theory (indicated in section 2.2.2.1) with the local community as a means of support mechanism for vulnerable learners. The findings also noted that, the principal facilitated community involvement that resulted in the division of knowledge accessible from all sides. It can be concluded that the headteacher, as the frontrunner in the school, has power (noted by Contingency theory in section 2.2.2.2) and is identified in the public for his management designation.

6.2.2.3 Mode of payment

The study discovered, with respect to the issue of financial support to vulnerable learners in their academic work that, vulnerable learners were allowed to pay fees at this school in cash and kind. The data showed that the management allowed the vulnerable learners to pay with animals, crops and any other valuable material,

which were sold to get cash and used to feed the students. In addition, the vulnerable learners who could not afford uniforms were left behind, while the other learners were sent home for fees and uniform.

Unlike in some schools in South Africa, where the principals expel learners who owe the school fees the school or punish them for defaulting on the payment of school fees (Strassburg et al., 2010), the schools under study did not. The vulnerable learners were allowed to sit for the examinations without settling all the outstanding school fees and the school did not withhold their results. The relevance of contingency theory comes in here because mode of payment of fees at this school is practised because it depends on the situation given.

6.2.2.4 Teachers' support

The teachers and HoDs used to contribute fees for vulnerable learners who could not afford it. According to the data, they identify needy learners and contributed certain amounts of money to help them with their basic needs. Sometimes they brought the vulnerable learners, products such as cosmetics and toiletries.

Some teachers in the studied schools had interacted well with their learners, as this study discovered. This practice could be because of Lupton's (2007) observation that some teachers are caring and loving and share their emotions with the learners because of the skills they received during teachers' training. Hence, the schools where the teachers and learners work together towards educational excellence do well in the examinations. The findings above display contingency theory which advocates for the activities carried out by managers to help the vulnerable learners in their academic work in this given situation. The teachers, as part of management, had the ability to analyse vulnerable learners' situation, formulated and applied strategies which worked best for this given situation.

6.2.2.5 Counselling services

It emerged from the study that teachers used to counsel disobedient learners that showed irregular and rebellious behaviour. Thus, the teachers helped vulnerable learners to grow academically, mentally, socially, physically and spiritually. All these efforts were made with the intention of helping all the learners, particularly the vulnerable ones, to pass their grades. Like contingency theory has brought to light in section 2.2.2.2, the teachers could be regarded as power elites who ratify, endure, authenticate, exploit and dominate the powerless. Instead of these teachers condoning this behaviour, they empower vulnerable learners through counselling and referring them when necessary.

6.2.2.6 Book rental scheme

It was found that the school A used a book rental scheme to support vulnerable learners in their academic work. In the past, the school had links with a school in Wales which helped with many things such as books. Thus, it was noted from the analysis of collected data that the school had book rental scheme with the purpose of helping the vulnerable learners to afford books at affordable and lower prices. The parents paid around M2000.00 for all the books costing far more than M5000.00. The orphans particularly borrowed these books while some did not even pay any fees. Provision of books rental schemes to vulnerable learners, confirms Contingency theory strategy in section 2.2.2 that organisations require adaptable and situational analyses to proffer solutions needed to solve the problems.

6.2.2.7 School curriculum

The school communities in schools under study used to construct and maintain equal opportunity for the learners. The study findings showed that the curriculum in both schools depended on the nature of the learners. This served as a contingency theory technique identified to attain the management goals. It was noted that the study courses, and where applicable, the vocations or future educational

programmes to which the courses of study lead and the requirements for admission thereto, are provided by the schools.

Most of the subjects offered at these schools are meant to help them in their lives after high school. They equipped the learners with the skills that would help them to be self-reliant. Thus, even if the learners could not go to tertiary institutions after high school, the practical subjects, such as design and technology, agriculture, computers, accounting, commerce, life skills and development studies, would help the learners to earn a living after high school.

6.2.2.8 Implementation of plans and policy

To support vulnerable learners' academic work, the collected data indicated that policies and plans need to be set, implemented and governed. The findings of the study indicated clearly that the schools are governed by the laws to abide by the policies and plans. They set their own plans and policies in relation to the learners they must lessen their underachievement, and this forced the schools to become reliable and facilitate a fair teaching of these learners.

In accordance with Contingency theory, plans and policies are proven to be especially typical of effective in initiating structure leader behaviour.

6.2.3 Research question 3: Under which conditions do the high school management teams' mechanisms depend for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work?

Contingency theory is infused below in various conditions noted from the literature and analysis of collected data as necessary for the successful implementation of the support mechanism for vulnerable learners in their academic work. These are discussed below:

6.2.3.1 Dedicated support team

The representatives delegated to directing, leading, managing the operation of the support mechanisms and influence the social change of contingency theory with the affected persons is central situation. Choosing people based on their status, abilities, knowledge and committed to serving vulnerable learners is vital for supporting initiatives. This study discovered that participants should be given chance to determine procedures to be monitored to form such a team. Again, they must begin by giving the chance to offer to be member.

6.2.3.2 Unifying vision

This research discovered that the construction of the vision that brings unity explains the complexity of the challenge that brings them together was situation favourable to supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work. It is up to the SMTs, as pronounced by the contingency theory, to employ methods that are highly effective in this given situation. It was noted that the involvement of the community and students (both vulnerable and non-vulnerable) allowed the possession of the intended support mechanisms.

6.2.3.3 Prioritising learner support

Prioritisation process is understood as identified technique recommended by Contingency theory which in this situation, under this particular circumstance and at this particular time of high numbers of vulnerable learners, best contribute to the attainment of the support mechanisms goals for vulnerable learners' academic work. Priorities are important condition conducive to supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work as it allowed the interrogation of the issues surrounding implementation.

6.2.3.4 Collaborative planning to support vulnerable learners

The prioritised support mechanisms can be effective and successfully implemented through collaborative planning. The stakeholders' involvement is regarded as important for the success of the support mechanisms for vulnerable learners. The conditions beneficial to supporting vulnerable learners also are contingent on the joint planning. Contingency theory provides planning as a structure to ensure task completion and goal attainment.

6.2.3.5 Policy provision

Contingency theory approves policy provision in that, organisations require adaptable and situational analyses to proffer solutions needed to solve the problems where situational factors include among others change in government policy. Policy provision facilitated main part in this research by directing the participants towards supporting vulnerable learners. Stansbury (2004) also observes that dissent is rare in cases where all stakeholders participate collaboratively and in full.

6.2.3.6 Appropriate facilities, infrastructures and resources

It is essential to have appropriate facilities, infrastructures and resources to effectively implement the support mechanisms for vulnerable learners in their academic work. This research discovered the significance of obtaining the appropriate infrastructure and resources. It is thus important for the members tasked to support mechanisms for vulnerable learners to seriously consider their acquisitions. Certain facilities are attained by negotiating with others. For example, the school A, technical working team negotiated DCS to avail their community hall to the local learners. Therefore, the accessibility of infrastructures and other facilities makes a condition contributing to supporting vulnerable learners. Contingency theory is an 'if-then' form of relationship theory. This means, if appropriate facilities, infrastructure and resources are at place to support vulnerable learners' academic work, then, this can best contribute to the attainment of the management goals among which is the support for vulnerable learners.

6.2.3.7 Monitoring and reflection on learner support

It is worth noting that the core motive behind monitoring and reflection is to regulate the accomplishment of the envisioned objectives. Role assignments ensure task completion and goal attainment (contingency theory in section 2.2.2.1). Thus, this study (through technical working team), initiated monitoring and evaluation in supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work immediately. This was performed through each group leader with a work planned stated duty and action to be achieved within a set deadline. Every group feedback to the whole technical working team on the duty allocated and the progression made about each action. The coordinating team documented each achievement and this assisted in their assessment of progress as opposed to well-stated results.

For this reason, this research articulates the significance of evaluation and reflection as they are determining the joint set results for every activity by technical working team. The organising team, on the other hand, helped the technical working team when they come across problems to achieve its activities by advising where need be. Evaluation is certainly vital since it offers a structure for conducive condition in supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work.

6.2.4 Research question 4: What are the possible threats that could hinder high school management teams' mechanisms for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work?

Informed by Contingency theory and the reviewed literature, this section focuses on the possible risks hindering the high school management teams' mechanisms for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work. Participants identified, assess and evaluate these threats so as to mitigate their impact.

6.2.4.1 Absence of established coordinating team

This research established that, high school management teams' mechanisms for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work could have not been successful without coordinators that included public representation. Failure to involve

the community in school activities means failed ownership without needed successful and sustainable interventions. These stakeholders are not dictated to by powerful authorities as noted by Contingency theory, but are encouraged to get involved in planning and designing in day to day running of the school. The study thus noted that the absence of a coordinating team means misdirection, mismanagement and unfulfilment of anticipated results. Hence, the community and vulnerable learners), would not reap any benefit.

6.2.4.2 Lack of vision

Lack of a vision that coaches teamwork would prevent participants from knowing what vulnerable learners want the team or individuals to achieve regarding the implementation of their support mechanisms in their academic work. It would indicate division, as such unfavourable situation contradicting with the favourableness of the situation suggested by contingency theory to achieve equity and access.

6.2.4.3 Risks hindering prioritisation process of vulnerable learners' support

The inputs and outputs of the support mechanism were listed by arranging them in sequence of priorities, which enabled this research to keep attention on essential matters that required concern. Therefore, this research commends that the members agree on the criterion, procedure and strategies of the prioritised list of matters to be implemented. Coordinators must assist in stimulating cooperation and involving community participation. Procedures is ought not to be forced on members but debated until it is agreed upon in simplest terms and language understandable to all.

6.2.4.4 Threats to collaboration

Collective preparation is needed to jointly decide on issues amongst the members running the same institution. It is done to solve challenges relating to planning. Urgencies that require to be addressed are clearly indicated and members provide orderly tactics to accomplish them. The outcomes should be reached from the

accessible resources. The lack of cooperation therefore prevents capacitation, resources and different capabilities from different stakeholders. Preparations for this research would be worthless, thus, support mechanisms for vulnerable learners would be at a risk.

6.2.4.5 Threats to policy provision

Participants played an important part by visualising the kind of the problem they had, which in this case was lack of support mechanisms for vulnerable learners in their academic work. Lack of collective visualisation inculcating a culture of teamwork could prevent everyone from knowing what the other members of the school community want them to achieve with regard to these support mechanisms. The overarching vision was to enhance the effectiveness of the support mechanisms for vulnerable learner in their academic work. Therefore, sharing vision with the school community is important because when they do not own it, they would not entirely support it hence pose a threat to the support mechanisms.

6.2.4.6 Hindrance to appropriate facilities, infrastructure and resources

The support for vulnerable learners in their academic work should focus on their necessities. Emphasis has been put in this study that the sharing of human and non-human resources is crucial for school management teams' mechanisms which support vulnerable learners in their academic work. The study showed that there is a need for resources, such as books and stationery, for vulnerable learners, and that of facilities such as venues for study purposes and infrastructure such as bridges for learners who cannot afford bus fares. This indicates that the support mechanisms for vulnerable learners cannot be executed with success if vulnerable learners do not have suitable resources without which vulnerable learners face underachievement threat.

6.2.4.7 Threats to monitoring and reflecting on vulnerable learners' support

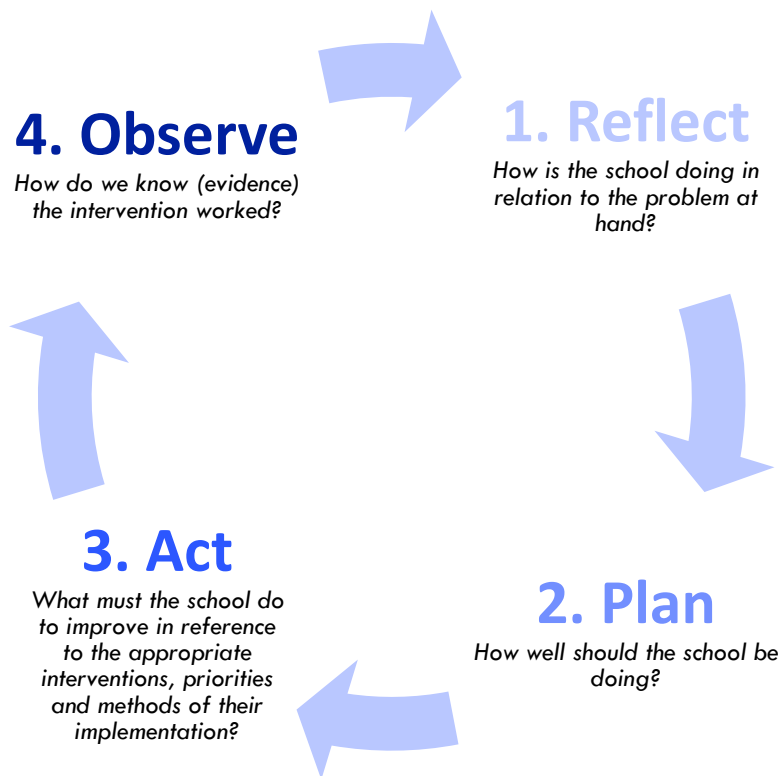
This research discovered that keeping track of activities determines the scope of performance of the several mechanisms supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work. Hence, monitoring and reflection must be done when a plan is employed. Moreover, this research established that it was vital to monitor and reflect on the procedures of supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work. The modifications that were needed were implemented in collaboration with others. This was attained due to evaluation meeting that were held each month of this research period. Therefore, this research is recommending that evaluation is needed for feedback to measure plan accomplishment.

6.2.5 Research question 5: What are the indicators of success in supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work?

In-school and out-of-school community participation and involvement in a plan on how to support vulnerable learners in their academic work, are some of the pivotal factors indicating achievement of the goal. These made both the communities in schools and out toown and sustain the plan. The study showed that community members who were mostly affected were engaged in most of the preliminary discussions. Although keeping up the involvement was challenging, the nominating supervisory team which consisted vulnerable learners stimulated the group to persevere with the project. The team planned, developed action plans, formed technical working team and provided feedback in the evaluation and monitoring of the project.

The diagram below summarises the nature of the processes that indicate success in supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work:

Figure 6.2.5.1 The diagram summarising the nature of the process in supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work:



The circle above shows an opportunity for reflection on the strengths and areas for improvement. The action plan is linked, and priorities included within it stemmed from the key issues identified in data, and subsequent discussion. The actions within the plan set out activities that would require funding and activities that can be completed by making use of the existing stakeholders' time and resources required to improve and for a person accountability that ensures an improvement on each of the indicators. Some of the included action points focused on addressing issues in the short-term and medium or long-term school improvement initiatives. The school management team, in consultation with the community, staff and learners, identified priority actions that were undertaken by the school to improve the situation.

The key feature of this process is that it repeats, on a continuous basis, within each week, month, term, year, and over multiple years. Another key aspect of this process is that it is forward-looking and thus focused on the future. The process is undertaken with the view of improving over time, attaining higher results for the learners, strengthening teaching practices, and making the school operate more

effectively. The process is also evidence-led; the practitioner's reflection, observation, and interventions are guided by actual concrete evidence. Finally, different researchers may manage the process differently because there is no single most correct approach.

6.3 The study's contribution to the new knowledge

The studies reviewed as the background to this study have not given an in-depth direction on what could be an appropriate learning situation in supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work. This research contributed by establishing the in-school and out-of-school community as one unit through empowering all capable stakeholders; making them to avoid and to be aware of superior and inferior complex; and invited them to participate in leading as the important part of a conducive setting for vulnerable learners' support mechanisms to work.

The research again contributes to the assertion that, starting with the necessities is vital to ensure operative support mechanisms. The study is arguing for the built resilient relation between schools and communities and extended the understanding of building this relationship towards the explanations on factors enhancing or destroying such relationships. This research was comparative in nature, but in the process, it provided participants room to discuss their challenges about vulnerable learners and to take action to try to resolve those challenges. Although the researcher is not claiming total attainment in participatory methodologies usage, the experiences exposed numerous problems to conduct this kind of study. Analysis of such experiences might enlighten on the use of the participatory action research methods in general.

This research again contributed to ensuring the total involvement of respondents and that they drive data generation processes. Providing meanings to such data continued to the interpretation stage, which empowered the researcher to determine what is worth reporting with non-exposure and enquiring power which drive the respondents' experiences. Through collaborative evaluation, this research placed

respondents at the heart of this study's procedures and progressed beyond the interpretation stage to a level of considering issues of powers in place and their influence as exploitive instruments and test the way things should be. This study also attempted to write the participants' experiences as they are with their native language (Sesotho) and reported their vocal sound in their first language although they were later translated to English for the purpose of this research English.

6.4 Limitations of the study

Educational studies can never be perfect because of practical problems. Therefore, it is important for the researchers to recognise the problems and limitations in their research and to do what they can to minimise the limitations. This research was conducted at only six high schools; three in the Leribe District of Hlotse in Lesotho and the other three in the Thabomofutsanyana in Ficksburg, South Africa. The purpose was not to generalise outcomes of the study, but if there is that possibility, scholars may find resemblances or dissimilarities in their own educational settings.

This study followed the qualitative approach that does not necessarily concern itself with a huge number of study participants. This meant the limitation of the study lies with the quantity of respondents who participated in this research, which was relatively small and limited to two schools only. However, these results will be illuminative and can be used as a basis for further research.

The qualitative research do not produce the numerical data. Therefore, it was hard to get the frequency rates of the high school management teams' mechanisms in supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work. This study thus accentuate that the qualitative and quantitative designs are interdependent to each other; no design runs sole design can operate best on their own. For most comprehensive outcomes, both qualitative and quantitative data should be collected to ensure that quantitative outcomes can complement the qualitative results. Nonetheless, the

applicability of the research design rests on on the title research. Thus, usage of the qualitative design in this research is justified because the intention was to explore high school management teams' mechanisms for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work and not to measure the prevailing rates.

Gathering the data through focus groups and in-depth interviews can be other impediment of this research, as it might have caused researcher to influence the participants' answers. Academics regularly use these instruments for guiding the discussion which may lead in to directing it to fit their own assumptions, other than allowing the flowing of thoughts from participants. The participants can feel nervous with the privacy of their answers while interacting one-on-one with the researcher. For this study however, the central intention of these instruments was to inspire respondents to display their own comprehension and perspectives. Interviews are needed in instances where the participants require clarity of some questions. Thus, attempted to the greatest extent to circumvent manipulating participants' responses guided them understanding the questions in the manner that they envisioned. Tape-recording the sessions was also a limitation to the study. Some participants did not mind participating but, they were reluctant of being tape-recorded. The researcher was bound to return to confidentiality issues and re-emphasised it.

Lastly, the topic is sensitive and thus, some vulnerable learners did not feel free to expose their own or their families' conditions such as the HIV/AIDS statuses fearing of stigmatisation or societal condemnation. This might have brought partial data from them. Some learners are very vulnerable and became emotionally touched during the data gathering process since the matter is sensitive and recalled the past, but the other participants and the researcher had to provide laid counselling in the process.

6.5 Conclusion

This part looks at the conclusions made in this research. This section is led by research questions.

The first research question was: which challenges justify the need for high school management teams to support vulnerable learners in their academic work?

Having presented, analysed, interpreted and discussed all the findings, the researcher concluded that there are home challenges that justify the need for SMTs to support vulnerable learners in their academic work. These include poverty, health needs, rape, overcrowded accommodation, separated siblings, family relations, inadequate safety measure, child labour and unacceptable social behaviour of vulnerable learners. The study also concluded that there are school challenges that necessitated SMTs to support vulnerable learners in their academic work. These included administration and admission criteria, shortage of instructional materials, financial problems, teachers and teaching-related factors, the teachers' attitude towards vulnerable learners, absenteeism and failure to implement plans and policies.

The second research question was: how do high school management teams solve the problems that hinder vulnerable learners from passing?

The conclusion, which is related to this key question of the study, is that to a certain extent, SMTs and teachers try as much as possible in supporting vulnerable learners in their school work. It was noted that the schools provided accommodation for vulnerable learners and built positive relationships with the local community to support vulnerable learners, provided the basic needs, showed compassion by allowing the vulnerable learners to pay fees using alternative tokens of payment, counselled them, rented books with affordable prices and provided curriculum that was responsive to the vulnerable learners' needs. It can be concluded that it does not take millions of dollars to make a difference in vulnerable learners' lives.

It is apparent that the capability of generous SMTs and teachers cannot be astounded the measure the requirement for support. In the same way, crucial

support mechanisms by government are essential but on their own, these interventions are not enough to solve the magnitude of the problems. It could be concluded that sustainable access is required for permanent resolutions in challenges requiring new educational strategies to be established and experienced.

Therefore, the conclusion to the question on what can be done to further support vulnerable learners in their academic work is that an implementation of the set activities, plans and policies aimed at supporting vulnerable learners is important here.

The third research question of this study was: under which conditions do the high school management teams' mechanisms depend on for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work?

The conclusion drawn from the conditions conducive for the support mechanism for vulnerable learners in their academic work is that schools should be a welcoming home for each and every stakeholder for the provision of support for the vulnerable learners. This connects further with treating the school and the community as one to make sure that appropriate facilities are deployed.

This study also concluded that encouraging both bottom-up and top-down styles to reach resolutions creates the best environment for every stakeholder to provide their experiences to the initiative since they both complement each other.

The fourth research question was: which are the plausible threats that could hinder high school management teams' mechanisms for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work?

The absence of an established coordinating team is viewed as a hindrance to the support mechanism for vulnerable learners in their academic work. Lack of vision, risks hampering priorities, threats to collaborative planning, threats to policy

provision, threats to appropriate facilities, infrastructure and resources and threats to monitoring and reflection are also concluded as hindrances to the support that can be offered to vulnerable learners in their academic work.

The fifth research question was: which are the possible indicators of success in supporting vulnerable learners affect in their academic work?

This research also concludes that the optimistic role played by devoted members, impact of vision, prioritising priorities, collaborative planning, the importance of policy provision, the significance of appropriate facilities, infrastructure and resources and monitoring and reflection are clearly indicating the success of supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work is met.

6.6 Recommendations

This study recommends context-specific support mechanisms designed to the perceptible needs and experiences of vulnerable learners to improve their academic work. A structure is required for the inclusion of a broader diversity of vulnerable learners than is currently the case. Such structure should consider how schools are expected to deal with vulnerable learners who cannot afford school needs and any other additional costs required. This is because the challenges facing South Africa and Lesotho are most evident in the growing number of vulnerable learners; a situation largely driven by the state of HIV/AIDS and COVID-19. The vulnerable learners are the victims of the evil machinations of the predominantly adult abusers.

Traditionally, Africans do not have a category of children that are deemed as vulnerable children. Providing support as blood relations, close relative and community at and out of school in nurturing vulnerable children, can lessen the vulnerable children's academic underperformance. These stakeholders are recommended to be responsible, protective and provide vulnerable learners with basic needs.

School supervision through active inspector visits is also recommended. The inspectors are asked to review the schoolwork and report on trends, achievements and the general implementation of policies. The inspectors are also recommended to also provide support and advice to school and monitor the effectiveness of teacher training and teachers on probation, as well as monitor the effects and effectiveness of testing and examinations. The inspectors should also provide advice and participate in the Ministries' policy formulation and use a whole-school team approach to inspection to ensure the evaluation of the school's overall performance. These recommendations will help in identifying vulnerable learners, discover the challenges that hinder them to pass and act accordingly.

Children with disability, LGBTQI group and paternal, maternal and social orphans are considered vulnerable in this study. It is recommended that each group of these learners be subjected to a more in-depth study to gather further data on the topic. This research did not pay attention to how vulnerable learners achieved academically as there are other vulnerable learners who seemed to have progressed to the next grades without repeating any classes. Other than these, there are other schools that seem to be performing well despite the number of vulnerable learners in their schools, hence further research needs to be undertaken to find out what enhances their high pass rates.

6.7 Conclusion of the chapter

The chapter summarised the findings, discussed contribution of the study to the body of knowledge, limitation of the study, conclusions and recommendations.

The next chapter indicates references and appendices

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Appendix 1: Ethical clearance certificate



RESEARCH ETHICS APPROVAL

Date: 16 November 2021

This is to confirm that ethical clearance has been provided by the Faculty Research and Innovation Committee [01/06/16] in view of the CUT Research Ethics and Integrity Framework, 2016.

Ethical clearance number:

[HREIC 06/20/01 ST.]

Applicant's Name and student number	MA Hlojeng 219016474
Supervisor's Name for Student Project	Prof AH Makura Dr June Palmer
Level of Qualification for Student's Project	D.Ed
Title of research project	HIGH SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAMS' MECHANISMS FOR SUPPORTING VULNERABLE LEARNERS IN THEIR ACADEMIC WORK: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF LESOTHO AND SOUTH AFRICA
FRIC approval number	06/20/01

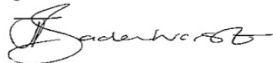
All conditions as set out below have to be met as set out in your LS 262a form.

As this research focuses primarily on human beings you will be ethically responsible for:

- protecting the rights and welfare of the participants;
- gaining the trust and co-operation of all the participants with the assurance that the information collected will be kept confidential;
- informing the participants from the outset that their participation will be voluntary, and that the data collected will be conducted with the consent of the relevant Department(s) of Education and other authorities and participants;
- adhere to the principles of rigorous data collection, analysis and interpretation consistent with the design of the study;
- keeping a data trail for possible auditing purposes and safe-keeping of raw data for a period of three years after publication of the results/findings;
- respecting the confidentiality of the data.

We wish you success with your research project.

Regards



Prof JW Badenhorst
(Chairperson: Faculty of Humanities Research Ethics and Integrity Committee)

Appendix 2: Request for the permission to collect data



Department of Postgraduate studies: Education, Central University of Technology, P.B. X20539 Bloemfontein, Free State, South Africa.

REQUEST FOR THE PERMISSION TO COLLECT DATA AT YOUR SCHOOL

Dear Principal

I am a Doctor of Education candidate at Central University of Technology who wishes to collect relevant data at your school. My academic study explores high school management teams' mechanisms for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work. I humbly request for your permission to visit your school for this purpose.

My wish is to interview you, three Heads of Departments, two teachers and six learners who can be classified as vulnerable. This study is strictly for academic purposes. Permission from the Free State Department of Education has been obtained and is hereby attached. The information obtained from the above listed participants will be held in strict confidence and under no circumstances will their names and your school name be revealed to unconcerned parties. I also promise not to interfere with the normal school day activities. Hence, data will be collected after instructional hours.

I hope that the findings of this study (on mechanisms for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work) will be helpful to you, other schools and the education system at large. Please feel free to contact me at +266 58/62091351 or email me at am.hlojeng@gmail.com or my academic supervisor on +27721021538 or email him at amakura@cut.ac.za

Your co-operation in this regard will be highly valued.

Yours faithfully



'Mampaqqa Anna Hlojeng

Appendix 3: Permission letter from Ministry of Education and Training Lesotho



**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING
LERIBE DISTRICT EDUCATION OFFICE
P.O. BOX 70, LERIBE 300.
TEL: 22400210**

19/11/2021

The Principals
Post-primary schools
Leribe District

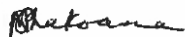
Dear Principals

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH STUDY.

Permission is hereby granted to Ms 'Mampaga Anna Hlojeng to conduct a research study whose title is, **HIGH SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAMS' MECHANISM FOR SUPPORTING VULNERABLE LEARNERS IN THEIR ACADEMIC WORK: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF LESOTHO AND SOUTH AFRICA.** This study will be conducted in post-primary schools in the Leribe district.

You are kindly requested to provide her with the information she may require, and your usual cooperation will be highly appreciated.

Yours faithfully,



Setenane Phakoana (Mr): District Education Inspector – Leribe



Appendix 4: Permission letter from Department of Education South Africa

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



HA LESHOELE
LERIBE
LESOTHO
300

Dear Ms. M. Hlojeng

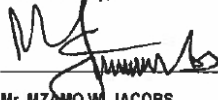
PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE FREE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION: THABO MOFUTSANYANA DISTRICT

This letter serves to inform you that you have been granted permission to conduct research in the Free State Department of Education within the Thabo Mofutsanyana Education District. The details in relation to your research project with the Central University of Technology are as follows:

Topic: High School Management Teams' Mechanisms for Supporting Vulnerable Learners in their Academic Work: A Comparative Study of Lesotho and South Africa.

1. **List of schools involved:** Tlotlisong High School.
2. **Target Population:** One Principal, four Departmental Heads, two teachers and six vulnerable learners at the selected school.
3. **Period of research:** From the date of signature of this letter until 30 September 2022. Please note that the department does not allow any research to be conducted during the fourth term (quarter) of the academic year. Should you fall behind your schedule by three months to complete your research project in the approved period, you will need to apply for an extension. The researcher is expected to request permission from the school principals to conduct research at schools.
4. The approval is subject to the following conditions:
 - 4.1 The collection of data should not interfere with the normal tuition time or teaching process.
 - 4.2 A bound copy of the research document should be submitted to the Free State Department of Education, Room 101, 1st Floor, Thuto House, St. Andrew Street, Bloemfontein or can be emailed to the above-mentioned email address.
 - 4.3 You will be expected, on completion of your research study to make a presentation to the relevant stakeholders in the Department.
 - 4.4 The ethics documents must be adhered to in the discourse of your study in our department.
5. Please note that costs relating to all the conditions mentioned above are your own responsibility.

Yours Sincerely,



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

DATE: 25/04/2022

RESEARCH APPLICATION BY M. HLOJENG, PERMISSION LETTER 22 APRIL 2022. THABO MOFUTSANYANA DISTRICT
Strategic Planning, Research & Policy Directorate Private Bag X20565, Bloemfontein, 9300 - Thuto House, Room 101, 1st Floor, St Andrew Street, Bloemfontein

www.fsdoe.fs.gov.za

Appendix 5: Permission letter for extension

Enquiries: M.Z. Thango
Ref: Permission for Research Extension: M. A. Hlojeng
Tel. 051 404 8808
Email: MZ.Thango@fseducation.gov.za



Ha Leshoele
Leribe
Lesotho
300

Dear Ms. M. A. Hlojeng

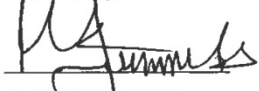
PERMISSION FOR AN EXTENSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE FREE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION: THABO MOFUTSANYANA DISTRICT

This letter serves to inform you that you have been granted permission for an extension to conduct research in the Free State Department of Education within the Thabo Mofutsanyana Education District. The details in relation to your research project with the Central University of Technology are as follows:

Topic: High School Management Teams' Mechanisms for Supporting Vulnerable Learners in their Academic Work: A Comparative Study of Lesotho and South Africa.

1. **List of schools involved:** Boitumelo High School, Marallaneng High School and Tlotlisoeng High School.
2. **Target Population:** One Principal, four Departmental Heads, two teachers and six vulnerable learners at the selected school.
3. **Period of research:** From the date of signature of this letter until 30 September 2023. Please note that the department does not allow any research to be conducted during the fourth term (quarter) of the academic year. Should you fall behind your schedule by three months to complete your research project in the approved period, you will need to apply for an extension. The researcher is expected to request permission from the school principals to conduct research at schools.
4. The approval is subject to the following conditions:
 - 4.1 The collection of data should not interfere with the normal tuition time or teaching process.
 - 4.2 A bound copy of the research document should be submitted to the Free State Department of Education, Room 101, 1st Floor, Thuto House, St. Andrew Street, Bloemfontein or can be emailed to the above-mentioned email address.
 - 4.3 You will be expected, on completion of your research study to make a presentation to the relevant stakeholders in the Department.
 - 4.4 The ethics documents must be adhered to in the discourse of your study in our department.
5. Please note that costs relating to all the conditions mentioned above are your own responsibility.

Yours Sincerely,



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

DATE: 18/04/2023

Appendix 6: Letter to the Parents



Department of Postgraduate studies: Education, Central University of Technology, P.B. X20539 Bloemfontein, Free State, South Africa.

Request for the permission for your child to participate in a research project

Dear Parent/Guardian

I am a Doctor of Education student at Central University of Technology who wishes to collect relevant data from your child with the aim of exploring his/her high school management teams' mechanisms for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work. I have been granted permission by the Free State Department of Education and my institution to conduct the study at your child's school. Therefore, I humbly request for your permission to allow your child to participate in this study. This study is strictly for academic purposes in partial fulfilment of my doctoral degree in Educational Management. The information obtained from your child will be handled in strict confidence and under no circumstances will his/her name or that of his/her school be revealed to unconcerned parties. It is my fervent hope that the findings of this study will be helpful to his/her school, other schools, relevant stakeholders and the education system at large.

Thank you in advance

Motsoali ea khabane

Ke kena sekolo se boletsoeng ka holimo 'me ke na le thahasello ho ithuta hore batsamaisi ba sekolo ba tšehetsa lihase joang mosebetsing oa tsona oa sekolo, ka hoo, ke kopa tumello ea hore ngoana oa hau a nke karolo boithutong bona. Litaba tsohle tse tla tšohloa mona li reretsoe feela ho nthuso lithung tsaka, ka hoo ke tsa lekunutu, 'me lebitso la ngoana ha le na ho hlaha hohang mona. Ke tšepa hore bohle ba amehang batla una molemo boithutong bona. Kea leboha

Yours faithfully



'Mampaq

Appendix 7: Consent form from the Parents



Department of Postgraduate studies: Education, Central
University of Technology, P.B. X20539 Bloemfontein, Free State, South Africa.

PARENTS' CONSENT FORM IN ENGLISH

I hereby confirm that:

- I have been briefed on the research that 'Mampaqqa Anna Hlojeng is conducting entitled "High School Management Teams' mechanisms for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work."
- I understand what my child's participation in this research project means
- I understand that my child's participation is voluntary
- I understand that my child has the right not to answer any questions that they do not feel comfortable with.
- I understand that my child has the right to withdraw the participation in the research, at any time they choose.
- I understand that any information my child shares will be held in the strictest confidentiality by the researcher.
- I hereby request that my child be guaranteed anonymity

TUMELLO EA MOTSOALI/MOHOLISI (PARENTS' CONSENT FORM IN SESOTHO)

Mona ke tiisa hore:

- ke hlalose litsoe likateng tsa lipatlisiso tsa 'Mampaqa Anna Hlojeng ka sehlooho se fuputsang hore na batsamaisi ba likolo tse phamameng ba tšehetsa barutoana ba lihase joang likolong.
- Ke utloisisa hantle hore na ho nka karolo hoa ngoana oa ka boithong bona ho bolela eng
- Ke utloisisa hore ngoana oaka ha a qobelloe ho nka karolo boithutong bona
- Ke utloisisa hore ngoana oaka ha a qobelloe ho araba lipotso tse tla mo hlokisa botsitso
- Ke utloisisa hore ngoana oaka a ka nyahlatsa ka lehare ho nka karolo boithutong bona nako efe le efe ha a batla
- Ke utloisisa hore litaba tsohle tse tla tšohloa boithutong bona e tla ba tsa lekunutu
- Ke kopa hore ngoana oaka a kholisoe hore lebitso la hae le keke la hlahella boithutong bona

Signed by (ho tekenne): _____ on _____ at _____

Parent's signature (motekeno oa motsoali) _____

Signed by (ho tekenne): _____ on _____ at _____

Researcher's signature (motekeno oa mofuputsi) _____

Appendix 8: Information sheet to the participants



Department of Postgraduate studies: Education, Central University of Technology, P.B. X20539 Bloemfontein, Free State, South Africa.

INFORMATION SHEET TO PARTICIPANTS

Dear Participants

I am a Doctor of Education candidate at Central University of Technology who wishes to collect relevant data at your school. My academic study explores high school management teams' mechanisms for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work. I humbly request for your participation for this purpose. The questions that I will ask you during these interviews are merely seeking your opinions on support mechanisms given to vulnerable learners that you may have experienced or witnessed in your school or life.

This study is strictly for academic purposes. Permission from the Free State Department of Education has been obtained and is hereby attached. The information obtained from you will be held in strict confidence and under no circumstances will names and your school name be revealed to unconcerned parties. I also promise not to interfere with the normal school day activities. Hence, data will be collected after instructional hours.

I hope that the findings of this study (on mechanisms for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work) will be helpful to you, other schools and the education system at large. Please feel free to contact me at +266 58/62091351 or email me at am.hlojeng@gmail.com or my academic supervisor on +27721021538 or email him at amakura@cut.ac.za

Your co-operation in this regard will be highly valued.

Yours faithfully



'Mampaqqa Anna Hlojeng

Appendix 9: Consent form from the participants



Department of Postgraduate studies: Education, Central
University of Technology, P.B. X20539 Bloemfontein, Free State, South Africa.

PARTICIPANTS' CONSENT FORM

I hereby confirm that:

- I have been briefed on the research that 'Mampqa Anna Hlojeng is conducting entitled "High School Management Teams' mechanisms for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work."
- I understand what my participation in this research means
- I understand that my participation is voluntary
- I understand that I have the right not to answer any questions that I do not feel comfortable with.
- I understand that I have the right to withdraw the participation in the research, at any time I choose.
- I understand that any information I shares will be held in the strictest confidentiality by the researcher.
- I hereby request that I be guaranteed anonymity

Signed by: _____ on _____ at _____

Participants' signature: _____

Signed by: _____ on _____ at _____

Researcher's signature: _____

Appendix 10: In-depth interviews for Principals

My name is 'Mampaga Anna Hlojeng. I am a doctoral student at Central University of Technology Free State. My study looks at high school management teams' mechanisms for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work. My supervisor is Professor Alfred Henry Makura! Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study. The questions that I will ask you during this interview are merely seeking your opinions on support mechanisms given to vulnerable learners that you may have experienced or witnessed in your school or life. Your responses will be kept confidential and will only be used for purposes of this study. Your names will not be revealed in this study. I promise to handle this issue with care, sensitivity and there will be no intention to harm you in any way, thus you are requested that you expose any threats or harm you sense during the research process. Please also note that you have got right of freedom of withdrawing from the study.

Section A: Demographic Details

1. **Gender:** Male or Female
2. **Age:** A. 25-35
B. 36-45
C. 46-55
D. 56-65
E. 66 and above
3. **Position:** A. Educator
B. HOD
C. Deputy Principal
D. Principal
4. **My school is a:** A. Combined school
B. Secondary school
C. Other (please specify)
5. **My school is located in a/an:**
A. Local/Rural
B. Township
C. City
D. Farm
E. Informal settlement
F. Other (specify)

SECTION B: the challenges that justify the need for high school management teams to supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work

1. What do you understand by a vulnerable learner?
2. How do you relate with vulnerable learners here at school?
3. How do you identify vulnerable learners here in your school?
4. Please tell me the different types of vulnerable learners that you have here in your school.
5. How do you document vulnerable learners' issues here at this school?
6. What are the challenges that justify the need for you to support vulnerable learners in their academic work?

SECTION C: high school management teams' mechanisms in supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work

7. Tell me about how you tried to solve those challenges that vulnerable learners face.
8. What do you think should be done to support vulnerable learners in their academic work?

SECTION D: conditions under which high school management teams' mechanisms depend for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work

9. Under which conditions do those mechanisms depend for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work?

SECTION E: the anticipated threats that could hinder high school management teams' mechanisms for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work?

10. What are the challenges that you face in trying to support vulnerable learners in their academic work?
11. What are the anticipated threats that could hinder you from supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work?

SECTION F: indicators of success in supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work

12. What indicates that you are succeeding in supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work?
13. Is there anything else you wish to say that we might have missed?

Appendix 11: SMTs' and teachers' focus group interviews

My name is 'Mampaga Anna Hlojeng. I am a doctoral student at Central University of Technology Free State. My study looks at high school management teams' mechanisms for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work. My supervisor is Professor Alfred Henry Makura! Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study. The questions that I will ask you during this interview are merely seeking your opinions on support mechanisms given to vulnerable learners that you may have experienced or witnessed in your school or life. Your responses will be kept confidential and will only be used for purposes of this study. Your names will not be revealed in this study. I promise to handle this issue with care, sensitivity and there will be no intention to harm you in any way, thus you are requested that you expose any threats or harm you sense during the research process. Please also note that you have got right of freedom of withdrawing from the study.

Section A: Demographic Details

1. **Gender:** Male or Female
2. **Age:** A. 25-35
B. 36-45
C. 46-55
D. 56-65
E. 66 and above
3. **Position:** A. Educator
B. HOD
C. Deputy Principal
D. Principal
4. **My school is a:** A. Combined school
B. Secondary school
C. Other (please specify)
5. **My school is located in a/an:**
A. Local/Rural
B. Township
C. City
D. Farm
E. Informal settlement
F. Other (specify)

SECTION B: the challenges that justify the need for high school management teams to supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work

1. Here at school, what are the challenges that you face specifically with vulnerable learners?
2. Please describe how the challenges you mentioned above affect vulnerable learners' academic work.
3. How have you observed vulnerable learners relationship to be with:
 - a. Other learners
 - b. Their teachers
 - c. SMTs
 - d. None-academic staff
 - e. Out of school members

SECTION C: high school management teams' mechanisms in supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work

4. How do you, as an SMT member, support vulnerable learners in their academic work?
5. What do you think can be done to support vulnerable learners in their academic work?

SECTION D: conditions under which high school management teams' mechanisms depend for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work

6. Under which conditions do the mechanisms depend for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work?

SECTION E: the anticipated threats that could hinder high school management teams' mechanisms for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work?

7. What are the challenges that you face in trying to support vulnerable learners in your academic work?
8. What are the anticipated threats that could hinder you from supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work?

SECTION F: indicators of success in supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work

9. What indicates that you are succeeding in supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work?

Appendix 12: Vulnerable learners' focus group interviews

My name is 'Mampaga Anna Hlojeng. I am a doctoral student at Central University of Technology Free State. My study looks at high school management teams' mechanisms for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work. My supervisor is Professor Alfred Henry Makura! Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study. The questions that I will ask you during this interview are merely seeking your opinions on support mechanisms given to vulnerable learners that you may have experienced or witnessed in your school or life. Your responses will be kept confidential and will only be used for purposes of this study. Your names will not be revealed in this study. I promise to handle this issue with care, sensitivity and there will be no intention to harm you in any way, thus you are requested that you expose any threats or harm you sense during the research process. Please also note that you have got right of freedom of withdrawing from the study.

Section A: Demographic Details

1. **Gender:** Male or Female
2. **Age:**
 - A. 13-15
 - B. 16-17
 - C. 18 and above
3. **Position:**
 - A. School Prefect
 - B. Class Prefect
 - C. Any other (specify)
4. **Grade:**
 - 8
 - 9
 - 10
 - 11
 - 12
 - Any other (specify)
5. **My school is a:**
 - A. Combined school
 - B. Secondary school
 - C. Other (please specify)
5. **My school is located in a/an:**
 - A. Local/Rural
 - B. Township

- C. City
- D. Farm
- E. Informal settlement
- F. Other (specify)

SECTION B: the challenges that justify the need for high school management teams to supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work

- 1. What do you understand by a vulnerable learner?
- 2. Do you think you are vulnerable? Support your answer
- 3. In which type of vulnerability do you think you are?
- 4. What challenges do you face as a result of your vulnerability?
- 5. How do other people react towards your vulnerability which in turn affects your academic work?

SECTION C: high school management teams' mechanisms in supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work

- 6. Tell me about how you tried to solve the challenges that you face as vulnerable learners.
- 7. How do others (other learners, academic staff, non-academic staff and out of school members) support you in your academic work?
- 8. What do you think can be done to support you in your academic work?

SECTION D: conditions under which high school management teams' mechanisms depend for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work

- 9. Under which conditions do those mechanisms depend for supporting you in your academic work?

SECTION E: the anticipated threats that could hinder high school management teams' mechanisms for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work

- 10. What are the challenges that you and others face in trying to overcome the problems that affect your academic work?
- 11. What are the anticipated threats that could hinder you from getting support you need?

SECTION F: indicators of success in supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work

- 12. What are the indicators of success in supporting you in your academic work?
- 13. Is there anything else you wish to say that we might have missed?

Appendix 13: An example of the transcription

What are the challenges that justify the need to support vulnerable learners in their academic work?

SMVL1: I live in the shack while my father lives in the main house but most of the time he lives with his mistress at Clocklan. Sol'm sometimes fed by the community and I pay back by being sent everywhere. Sometimes I only eat at school only, let alone during weekends and holidays

SSMT1: We're aware that we have poor vulnerable learners. So we have SGB team responsible to support such learners. The role played by this team through me is to enable vulnerable learners to have access to every support they need, unfortunately, we are not dedicated coordinating team. We can always source stakeholders who can help us to participate not only in contributing material things for these learners but also to access their competencies and skills with ease.

Group A1: They can't afford little contributions that are paid here at school for funeral, lent, farewell, fund raising, and many more. Sometimes they're sent home for their parents' death certificates and other documents needed by their sponsors. When they come back, they find much of the content covered and they miss, so they fail.

LMVL3: My home isn't a good place to do schoolwork well; there's no mere table and chair to sit on to study. Let alone food! So, I can't be expected to pass under these conditions. Kannete lela le lapileng ha le na tsebe.

Group B2: Re na le lilemo tse ngata joale sekolong mona re se na moetapele. Joale esale ho tloha ka nako eo... ha ho na ... chebelo-pele e ka sehlohlolong menyetla ea ho thusa bana bana ba mofuta ona, ha ho na tšebeliso-'moho, le moo re ka tšoarisanang hore re atlehe, re ntse re ikemela ka bomong. Feela monyetla oa ho tliša tšebetso ho bana ba tlókotsing sekolong sa rona ha o ka hlaha re ka o ananela. Re hloka tataiso e ka re isang moo re reng re batla ho ea teng.

LSMT2: Most of learners admitted at this school are vulnerable because our principal goes places hunting them. They are full in those classes down there. If you look at them, you would tell that they are from humble backgrounds. They don't take long though; most of them dropped out, some repeat classes while some of them are just pushed to the next classes by principal without actually passing and without our consent

LSMT1: It's quite challenging to teach the mind-set full of social problems and expect such mind to perform well in schools. We admit just too many vulnerable learners full of problems that affect their learning, hence they underachieve

ST2: We still have learners who can't afford transport, who travel long distances on foot, thus are not regular to school and finally drop out.

LT1: Vulnerable learners are most of the time absent at school and nothing serious is done by us subject teachers, class teachers, principal, school management, guardians and/or parents. We do not care much about their being absent. We do not

also take action even when we see registers and attendance forms recording these learners' absenteeism and drop out.

SMVL3: I get to school late and knock off before school out every day because I take my younger cousin to and from crèche every day. I think this is absenteeism.

LMVL1: I had to miss lots of classes last year to register my name for my late parents' moneys, rental flats and the land in Maseru and Maputsoe to be mine. If I fail again, no need to come back to school. Uhm..., though it may sound offensive, I have lot of money, thus, school is just a waste of time for me now, sorry to say!

LMVL3: Sometime it is due to lack of food at home. I cannot come to school hungry. At times I would be expelled for uniform, instrument, fee and other school needs. Another main reason is that my father married another woman after my mum died of HIV/AIDS. He expelled me in a house. He took assets and the furniture. My teachers advised me to go to CGPU for help. So I went there for so many days of school hours.

LFVL1: I'm infected and affected by HIV/AIDS. So ARVs are collected in hospitals during school hours. This collides with school schedule resulting in to putting health as precedence and shifting school down the priorities. Besides, taking care and looking after sick family members at home affect my attendance.

LFVL3: I have been absent for too long because I was expelled as I was thought to be pregnant. Besides, I don't come to school every time I'm on my monthly periods because of period pains. I also feel uncomfortable and shamed sitting beside my male neighbours in the classroom in fear of sudden leakage and I become absent when I don't have sanitary towels.

LFVL2: Sometime I run short of money for transport to school. Walking long distance to and from school isn't always safe for me. Tough school rules like reporting to school before six in the morning make me absent myself when I don't have bus-fare. Other than that, my grandmother considers some topics such as reproductive health, sexuality education and puberty adolescent taught at school to be taboo, so every time they are taught, I don't come to school.

LMVL2: Because we don't afford daily bus fares, so our regular attendance is affected by rainy and cold seasons. Rivers, dongas and valleys are barriers to our consistent attendance. Besides crossing the river when I come to school, I also don't come in winter because I don't always have school shoes and proper warm uniform

How have high school management teams been supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work?

LFVL3: Most of us learners here are from afar and full of problems. As a result, some classes and school hall are turned in to residences to accommodate us.

LSMT1: Our school is in partnership with the community with rental flats nearby. Those flats are turned to school boarding. These serve to help even students who cannot afford to eat thrice a day at their homes. Some orphans do not have their own homes; the school sort of adopts such children and they become its own in a way.

SSMT2: The previous school principal attended community events and talked to the community about the school and possible collaborations. I think it is better if this relationship can be fixed again by the coming principal because there's a lot the community helped us with by then in supporting vulnerable learners

LSMT3: Management allows vulnerable learners to pay with animals, crops and any other material in place. They are sometimes exchanged for cash. Again, vulnerable learners who can't afford uniform are left behind while non-vulnerable learners are sent home for fees and uniform.

ST2: We have SBST which used to support vulnerable learners; I guess it's high time that it becomes active again.

SSMT3: After identifying them, we give their parents/guardians some piece job to do in our families so that they in turn support our learners.

LSMT2: This year for instance, we contributed the examination fee for two Grade 11 orphans, who were discussed in a staff meeting that they were going to be removed at ECoL because they didn't pay the exam fee. We felt compelled to contribute from our pockets and pay for them.

LFVL2: Teachers help us with our basic needs. Sometimes they give us tangible things like sanitary towels, soap, clothes and many things.

What can be done further, to successfully support vulnerable learners in their academic work?

Group B1: We need to go back to our policy where we used to team up, cooperate and communicate in order to achieve plans set for vulnerable learners.

LMVL1: Just like when we have an international HIV/AIDS day, there should be a day for us vulnerable learners too! Campaigns, trainings, clubs, competitions on dramas, poetries, debates, songs and presentations on our vulnerability should be done.

LT2: There is no support beyond sensitising school and out of school community; engaging other ministries; maximising community involvement; creating sense of ownership; encouraging partnership between learners, teachers, parents, community, NGOs and others

LSMT1: I think this study serves as the reflection; a wakeup call for us to go on with the support mechanisms that we already had but this time we need to implement and monitor activities we plan for. We feel a need to continue supporting them. It is true that we have been trying to support them but we were haphazard in doing so.

LT1: Yes I agree, drawing the plan of those support mechanism will help us get in to a mission to be accomplished, where we should have to set objective and identify strategies which will help us to achieve both our objective and purpose. The plan will have to be posted on our walls so that we don't file and forget.

LSMT4: We should put the support mechanisms in order of priority and preference. We should also discover the resources for the tasks and set targets.

LSMT3: We, participants of this study, should become technical working team that should ensure the implementation of the support mechanisms. We should share work with others, coordinate and control use of resources. We should also have to carry out supervision by ensuring that activities are in standard, correct problems occurring and finally assess the results, compare them with set targets and objectives, give feedback, motivate and do adjustments for future

Under which conditions do the high school management teams' mechanisms depend for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work

Group B1: We will succeed only if we involve the community out of school mainly to enhance access to resources as they would contribute funds. The specialist organisations would contribute their specialist knowledge and skills. We will in turn derive benefits from the knowledge. The generated knowledge that comes as recommendations will empower even vulnerable learners.

ST1: All SMTs are members of SBST, but it's like only one member is dedicated. If they could all team up and become dedicated in to supporting vulnerable learners, the rest of us will just follow.

LSMT3: Team work makes dream work. It instils confidence, engages diverse skills, experiences and competencies in the coordinating team. It is therefore necessary to have dedicated team for it would help us curb barriers and hindrances to free flow of ideas.

Group B1: Ms Hlojeng, it is true that our out of school community and school community have skills, knowledge, and many other things they can do to improve vulnerable learners' support mechanisms. However, there are many challenges here in the school and it would be easier to know which support mechanisms could be used to address the challenges if we start by identifying them.

Group B2: Much as we agreed that our school and its community can address its challenges, we don't think it has all that is needed to address some backlogs impacting negatively towards vulnerable learners performing their academic responsibilities.

Group B3: We fully understand why we are not supposed to undermine ourselves and think we have lots of challenges as vulnerable learners but we don't think it's easy to look at available support mechanisms without knowing which ones we need. It is better to look for the challenges to be fixed and then establish what can be used to fix them.

LSMT4: Prioritisation helps to focus on key issues and so maximise impact, using resources as effectively as possible because the identified issues are listed and put in the order of their importance

LMVL3: We had the opportunity to consider our basic needs. We agreed on priorities that could ease our work. We know that beside human resource, we also need facilities/resources such as study material, food, clothes, cosmetics and others as basic to be considered initially.

SSMT2: Re se re ile ra lula 'moho hoba u tlohe 'm'e Hlojeng ra lekola le ho lotomanya lintlha tsa rona tsa ho tšehetsa bana bana, ra ba ra etsa moralo o re khonisang ho phethahatsa maikemisetso a rona ka litšehetso tseo.

LT1: Planning in collaboration with outside school community provided us to achieve the prioritised issues effectively from their available resources. The plan done together with not only school community but also with out of school community enhanced all stakeholders' participation

LSMT2: The resources that support, guide and facilitate education provision can be both human and non-human. These may be proper accommodation facilities, workshops and/or in-service trainings, community leaders and, most importantly, the SMTs and teachers who through guidance and direction can help vulnerable students achieve their goals.

Group B2: Monitoring and reflecting are essential part of evaluation and data feeds into the more overarching process of evaluation, hence to the systematic collection of information conducted during or after a project in order to make judgments about value against anticipated outcomes and to help inform decisions about future interventions

LSMT4: It is imperative to reflect on the working and capacity of the mechanisms for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work, as well as their related areas/aspects so that it can be improved on continual basis. The related areas/aspects may include self-reflection and reflection on the roles of stakeholders, different sections of the public/community, learning and learning programmes. Be warned though to be weary of pertinent and inherent distractors and please attempt to address them earnestly and timely

What are the anticipated threats that could hinder high school management teams' mechanisms for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work?

SSMT3: Bosieo ba bookameli bo tlamehang ho nka boikarabelo le liqeto bo ka sitisa litšehetso tsa barutoana ba valnerebole. Feela hee SBST e tlameha ho fana ka tlaleho khafetsa hore ba lokelang ba lule ba tseba hore ho etsahala'ng.

LT2: The risk is that if the coordinating team is not democratically elected it will not have a full mandate or the capacity to provide sound leadership, effective and efficient management for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work.

ST1: Ha re n'o khona ho tsoelella ka ntho ena e ntle ka ntle le ho utloana le ho ba le chebelo-pele e le 'ngoe...

Group B3: Identifying insignificant and or less important priorities before the most important high impact priorities, may pose a serious threat for the mechanisms that are meant to support us.

LSMT3: If we do not put the basic and critical issues first on our priority list we may find ourselves having wasted time.

SSMT2: If we do not ensure that our plan is written down, there might be confusion

LSMT4: We should revisit our plan regularly to ascertain that our implementation is geared toward our purpose. We should again check the alignment of our tasks, allocation of resources, time and persons responsible for activities. If we don't do that we might get lost and might even be in trouble.

SSMT1: There is the law right? Why are we supposed to formulate another law? [be formulating policy for vulnerable learners' support mechanisms]. Let us just follow the law that is available. Why do we struggle when we have the support from the law? However, if we have to develop policy, it will have to be in line with the existing law and we also have to abide by the law.

SMVL1: If the SBST members are not careful, they might not be able to detect serious threats associated with the resources [facilities and infrastructure].

Group B3: Bothata boo re ka bang le bona ke hore ha re na tsebo e tebileng ea mabaka ao re sa fumantšoeng tšehetso ka 'ona. Sena se ama tsoelo-pele ea rona.

LT1: We had already discussed that vulnerable learners are minimally supported and there were issues that led some to abandon their studies. This could pose a serious threat for the development and implementation of the plan, which should be detected timeously through processes of monitoring and reflection and be addressed decisively.

What are the indicators of success in supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work?

Group B2: The SBST members seem to be committed now because we have important outcomes such as identification of the stakeholders who are keen to support vulnerable learners in their academic. Out of school community provides so much service that there was no way we could have achieved if it was not because of their dedication to try to implement the support mechanism on our behalf. For instance, there is one community member who sew 120 uniforms for vulnerable learners and she promises to supply them every year free of charge

LMVL2: We have established village learning groups in our different villages. We are now empowered with study skills such as individual learning, peer teaching and collaborative learning skills. Village members monitor our regular school attendance and support us in different ways.

SSMT3: This taught me that people are united by a common goal. The goal that united us for instance was to develop and implement mechanisms aimed at supporting vulnerable learners who otherwise would not have had that kind of support.

LMVL1: We even agreed that some of the things do not clash with teaching and learning, we then said all those categories that we agreed upon, such as sensitising school and out of school community; engaging other ministries; maximising community involvement; creating sense of ownership; encouraging partnership between learners, teachers, parents, community, NGOs, we should attend them all during December to January holidays.

SSMT2: Planning together was really fruitful. For example, the cooks package food for vulnerable learners after school so that they go and eat with their family members

at home. Vulnerable learners are identified by our non-academic staff because they live in the villages with them, so they know them very well. Also, our non-vulnerable learners helped in reporting their classmates who are vulnerable. Teachers too, cooperate by easily identifying them in classes.

LT1: We developed a plan for each of the priority areas we agreed upon, we delegated responsible persons through consensus [for each activity and or priority area] taking cognisance of what was needed to achieve our priority areas.

SSMT1: My enthusiasm and longer stay in this study was as a result of the information I got that the policy encourages provision of educational opportunities equitably. I understood that as compelling on my part to stand on my feet and extend my hand for all vulnerable learners

SSMT4: It didn't matter how many facilities, infrastructure and resources we have, if we didn't know how to use them, they would hadnever been enough to support vulnerable learners, we've developed a strong relationship with out-of-school community, other ministries and NGOs concerned with a child are involved and we get resources from them anytime they are needed

LFVL1: There's a huge difference now, village health workers ensure that we don't miss school due to collecting our medication every month. We use community hall to study and in the hall, there is a lot gained after having a relationship with other learners, not only from this school but from other different schools. We're supervised by local community. They also come to school to supervise extra classes since some teachers are not from this area; they travel every day. They ensure that we come to school at all times. Former vulnerable learners motivate us of the school and give some tips on dealing with academic work matters.

LMVL2: For those of us who couldn't afford boarding fees, learning materials and other needs, funds were raised while others got from the sponsors. The bridge is now constructed by the community. Our regular attendance is no longer affected by dongas and valleys which were obstacles to our regular presence at school.

SSMT3: Matters that needed to be addressed by the community were attempted timeously because we had a plan therefore we did not want it to be ruined. We did this in a manner that made them understand that we were not bullies but determined to make a positive contribution.

LSMT1: We succeeded to monitor and reflect on our planned activities.

From : I. Manase (PhD UKZN)10 Laramie

Nienaber Street

Langenhoven Park

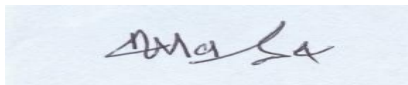
Bloemfontein

Date : 03 January 202

Confirmation of proofreading and editing of Ms Mampaqa Anna Hlojeng's Doctor of Education thesis titled: "High school management teams' mechanisms for supporting vulnerable learners in their academic work"

This serves to confirm that I have proofread and edited Ms Mampaqa Anna Hlojeng's above-noted Doctor of Education thesis. The suggested sentence and language construction changes have been attended to, and as such, the thesis can now be submitted for examination.

Sincerely,



Email: irimanase@gmail.com / Manasel@ufs.ac.za

PLAGIARISM CERTIFICATE

HIGH SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAMS' MECHANISMS

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