

**Exploring the influence of socioeconomic status on equitable access to
secondary education in Lesotho: A case study.**

By

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DECLARATION

I, Mokete Bendly Nyaphisi (200401495), declare that

1. The research described in this thesis, except where otherwise indicated, is my original work.
2. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.
3. This thesis does not contain other person's data, pictures, graphs or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other researchers.
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Signed:

Mokete Nyaphisi

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ACRONYMS

SES	Socio-Economic Status
EFA	Education for All
MOET	Ministry of Education and Training
MOSD	Ministry of Social Development
LIEP	Lesotho Inclusive Education Policy
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
LSEN	Learners with Special Education Needs
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
FEO	Fair Equality of Opportunity
ESP	Education Sector Plan
CGP	Child Grant Programme
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
SEU	Special Education Needs Unit
NSDP	National Strategic Development Plan
NSPS	National Social Protection Strategy

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- Appendix I Interview protocol for learners
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ABSTRACT

Getting through the gates of a school is nothing but just a physical entrance to education that is not enough as a learner living in poverty might be not confident to the way they look in their uniform relative to their affluent counterparts. Such a poverty-stricken learner might be too hungry and neither feel acceptable nor ready to participate in a learning process at a relatively equal basis with their well-off counterparts. These poverty features translated to lack of learning amenities that account for such learners to be referred to as learners from poor socioeconomic background or learners of low socioeconomic status (SES). Thus, poor socioeconomic background positions such learners at disadvantageous starting point of learning, and this denies them equitable access to education which must be governed by not only physical presence at school, but also by a sense of feeling belongingness and acceptance substantiated by availability of adequate resources to participate in the learning process to achieve good academic grades. Globally, poverty has adversely affected access to education and Lesotho is not an exception with her secondary education level being the worst affected relative to primary and tertiary as the costs at secondary level are borne by parents. In a country of about 2,1 million people, only 10.7% of youths in the lowest wealth quintile are enrolled in secondary schools compared to 61% of those in the highest quintile. It was against this backdrop that the current study with a qualitative case study design engaged 32 participants in semi-structured interviews, focus group discussion and a review of documents to explore access to secondary education for learners of low socioeconomic status (SES).

The study has established that Lesotho education system limits access to education to disability inclusion. While the study fully acknowledges that disability acts as a barrier to access to education, poverty also adversely affect inclusive education which is buffer to equity in education. While Lesotho government pays school fees for vulnerable learners, access to secondary education is hindered by socioeconomic challenges such as lack of food, cosmetics, stationery, and money for transport. This subjects the learners to feeling of helplessness and low self-concept. Furthermore, parents of such learners fail to participate in their children's education due to their low level of education. Additionally, lack of basic skills on ensuring equitable access to education among teachers has

resulted in a failure to properly identify and support learners of low SES. Furthermore, educational policies and practices fail to establish proper strategic actions to promote equitable access education must be embraced through to inclusive approach for vulnerable categories of learners beyond disability. Guided by social justice theory and capability approach which are the lenses that view access to education as a human right issue than an opportunity for a selected few, the study argues that learners of low SES must be afforded more learning resources that would incapacitate them to equitably participate in learning process and attain good academic achievement.

The study concludes that access to secondary education for learners of low SES is remarkably low and lacks equity since the current measures that are deemed inclusive education in Lesotho simply translate to physical access which is integration of learners with disability in regular schools without proper support. Furthermore, while some learners of low SES are subjected to the education system that does not account for socioeconomic barriers they encounter, and when there are no social support frameworks, such learners may not learn as much as those without barriers. It is therefore recommended that inclusive education policies and plans should establish strategies that expand target coverage beyond disability to socioeconomic aspect. Policy enactment should stimulate collaboration between families, schools and other stakeholders to ensure holistic development of learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This study explores how socioeconomic background influences equitable access to education for vulnerable learners such as orphans and the poor in Lesotho. According to the World Bank (2015), Lesotho is among the top ten most unequal countries globally. Between 2002 and 2018 Basotho who lived below poverty line made 60% of the population and majority live in rural areas relative to 28% who live in urban areas (World Bank, 2019). Poverty is the key contributing factor to unequal educational opportunities as research shows a difference of 30% participation between primary school children from the poorest wealth quantile and those from the richest wealth quantile with the margin expanding further at secondary school level where costs are mainly paid by parents (Ministry of Education and Training, 2019). A United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (2018) report indicates that up to 51% more children from richest wealth quantile participate in secondary education than peers from the poorest wealth quantile.

Against this backdrop, the current study sought to go beyond the statistics to explain the experiences of learners, parents or guardians and teachers of the influence of socioeconomic background to equitable educational access. In this chapter I first outline the global policy context and practical experiences on the influence of socioeconomic context to educational access before narrowing the discussion to existing literature locally leading to a description of statement of problem. Then I describe the aims, objectives and research questions followed by a justification for conducting the study. The chapter ends by briefly describing the theoretical framework that underpins the study and the research methods adopted.

1.2 BACKGROUND

1.2.1 International treaties on equitable access to education

The global community has long treated access to education as a human rights issue than an opportunity for the select few. For example, expressed in article 26 (1) and (2), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (1948) declares education as a human

right. Similarly, the United Nations Declaration on the Right of the Child (UNDRC) (1959), in principle 7, states that each child is entitled to receive free and compulsory education. This is echoed by article 28 of the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) which proclaims the need to educate all children, and member states are mandated to eliminate discrimination in education (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, (UNESCO) 1994). The 1990 international conference on Education for All (EFA) held in Jomtien, Thailand, states that countries must ensure equity and fairness in education delivery, hence the need for countries, including Lesotho, to ensure that education provision is equitable. Another crucial forum on education was held in Dakar, Senegal in 2000 where member states set targets and values on ensuring EFA. Among its mandates, EFA is also charged with the responsibility of promoting access to equitable and inclusive education for children in difficult circumstances including those from remote and poverty-stricken communities (UNESCO, 2000, p. 23).

The World Education Forum in Incheon held in 2015 proclaimed access to education is the most transformative force for building a better future for all children, across the world (UNESCO, 2015). The forum established education agenda 2030 article 5 of which envisions an inclusive and equitable quality education inspired by a humanistic idea based on human rights, dignity and social justice (UNESCO, 2015, p. 9). Basically, this new outlook is captured by Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 which reads, 'Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all' (United Nations, 2015, p. 17). However, Socio-Economic Status (SES) remains a critical barrier to learning and development for many families globally.

1.2.2 Effects of SES on access to education

Globally, research indicates that efficient education systems such as those in developed states, create structures that are totally dedicated to the monitoring of inclusive and equitable access to education. The Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), composed of 35 countries (including Australia, Ireland, Portugal, Sweden, United Kingdom, Spain and France), (2012, p. 25) indicates that learners' socioeconomic status (SES) exerts an important influence on their learning and development given a number of factors at play including but not limited to parents' low educational level, negative attitudes towards schooling, and the inability of parents to

support their children due to poverty. Learners who come from families characterized by these factors are likely to perform badly or drop out of school and are referred to as at-risk (Koball, Heather, et al., 2011, p. 3).

Research in the United States of America (USA) acknowledges that SES has critical influence on educational outcomes. For example, American Psychological Association (APA) (2007), states that across many states, SES has shown great influence on learners' academic performance. Families with low SES send their children to public schools many of which are notorious for failing to provide adequate education and this results in poor academic achievement for the poor compared to their affluent counterparts in private schools who also access extra tuition (American Psychological Association, (APA) 2007, p. 6). The U.S. Department of Education (USDOE, 2014b) states that, from 1990 to 2012, the status dropout rates for those in higher income families remained consistently and significantly lower than the rates for those from families with lower incomes. Similarly, between 1990 and 2012, significant gaps in college-going rates persisted across income levels (USDOE, 2014a, p. 2).

Woessmann (2010) studied the link between students' test scores and the school attended, school policies and practices, students' family background and parental involvement in education in Massachusetts, in USA. The study found that children from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds lacked foundational education skills which had long-lasting negative effects on economic and social outcomes (Woessmann, 2010, p. 26). Connell (1994) examined patterns of schooling for children from poor backgrounds in the United States of America and argues that the way schools address poverty has significance to educational outcomes of learners involved. He observes that children from poor families are the least successful on academic performance, the least able to enforce their claims or insist their needs to be met, yet the most dependent on schools for their educational resources (Connell, 1994, p. 125). Lack of support and motivation by parents bear detrimental effects on schooling aspiration among learners, affects their academic achievement and competing power in economic market resulting in what Connell calls a self-sustaining "cycle of poverty" where low aspirations and poor support for the children lead to low educational achievement, which in turn leads to labour

market failure in the next generation (Connell, 1994, p. 129). Therefore, educational policies that ensure proper learning resources for all must be developed if the cycle of generational poverty is to end.

Further, Coleman, Campbell, Hobson, McPartland, Mood, and Weinfeld, (1966) assert that an individual's family background or socioeconomic status (SES), has a critical influence on academic achievement. Coleman et al. (1966, p.101) depict SES from two angles: home context including neighbourhood, a parents' educational background, source of income etc. and school environment such as its resources including the type of influence and motivation learners get from peers. Furthermore, Coleman, (1968, p. 88) argues that a student's family background is far more important than school social composition and school resources for understanding student outcomes. Schools are remarkably similar in the way they relate to the achievement of their pupils given multiple inequalities within one school and they could be found in any other school (Coleman 1968, p. 89). Contemporary researchers agree with Coleman et al. (1966)'s contention. For example, replicating Coleman's statistical measurement on EEO, Borman and Dowling (2010) conclude that Coleman et al. (1966)'s observation that student's family background is far more important than school social composition and school resources for understanding student outcomes. The argument retains its currency since only 40% of the differences in achievement can be found between schools (Borman & Dowling, 2010, p. 1203). However, Borman and Dowling (2010) note that schools exacerbate inequalities given teachers' bias, favouring White and middle-class learners and greater within-school curricular differentiation and lack of learning resources. These debates have raised a need to explore how learner's socioeconomic background and the position of a school influence academic achievement in Lesotho.

Socioeconomic background affects caregiving which plays a major role in academic achievement. In a study conducted in Germany, Friedhelm (2013, p. 15) indicates that childhood impressions result from the interactions between adult caregivers and home environment shape individual skill formation evident on academic scores and achievement over the life cycle. The view is reinforced by Cunha, Heckman, Lochner and Masterov's (2006, p. 801) theory of life cycle skill formation which predicts that exposing

children to less and/or low-quality education early in their lives negatively affects their future skill acquisition. That is, the theory predicts that when young children are in a less stimulating environment, staying with parents who are less involved in their education, they are likely benefit less from schooling and subsequently attain low test scores. On the other hand, McKay (2016, p. 100), in study conducted in Australia, suggests that careful use of technology offers learners the option to study at times and in places that best suit them.

Scholars in Africa have explored the influence of SES on academic performance. For example, a study conducted by NuhuAbubakar, Gorondutse, and Ibrahim (2016, p. 45) in public and private secondary schools in Nigeria revealed that socioeconomic elements such as parental education and occupation effect on students' performance, with mostly learners from poor families scoring lower marks relative to their affluent counterparts. Similarly, Adeyemo & Babajide, (2012), in a study conducted Nigeria, found the relationship between the socio-economic disadvantage and students' academic achievement in physics to be significant where a child suffers parental and material deprivation and care due to divorce or death, or absconding of one of the parents.

Additionally, in a study done in Keumbu Division in Kenya, Onyancha, Njoroge & Newton (2015, p. 332) established that the lower the parents' socio-economic status, the lower the students' average grade and number of points in performance while the higher the parents' socio-economic status led to higher the academic performance of the students. Nadenge-Gabriel (2016, p. 54) investigated critical parental socio-economic factors affecting the academic achievement of learners in urban informal settlements in Westlands District in Nairobi County and found that learners from poverty-stricken background, especially double orphans, waste a lot of time out of school to fend for their siblings subsequently affecting their performance negatively.

Hunt (2008, p. 52) reviewed national education plans of 40 countries, including Lesotho, and conducted in-depth case study evaluations on policies from Cambodia, South Africa, Timor Leste and Bangladesh. The study found that getting children from disadvantaged groups into school and learning continues to be a challenge they hardly gain initial access to school and are most likely to drop out once there. That is, orphans, migrants, lower

caste/scheduled tribe children and children from minority language groups in many, but not all, contexts have disrupted access to education, and are more prone to drop out as highly evident in Timor Leste and Cambodia (Hunt, 2008, p. 53). In reflecting on Motheo district in South-Africa, Mosia (2009) observes that farm (rural) schools suffer from what Hay (1994) called milieu deprivation- learners in such schools came from poverty-stricken families characterised by, among others, no electricity to study at night, parents who were not educated hence lack of support to their children's education, and children who walk long distances to schools leaving them too tired to study properly.

1.2.3 Legal frameworks operational in Lesotho Education System

Lesotho, like many states globally, is signatory to several regional and international treaties and protocols that oblige member states to promote a just and equitable education system (UNESCO, 2014, p. 6). The country responded to the global call for universal access to education through the Poverty Reduction Strategy (2004/2005–2006/2007) that stipulates promotion of Education for All (EFA) policies within a sustainable and well-integrated sector framework which is clearly linked to poverty reduction and development strategies. The Education Sector Strategic Plan (2005-2015) was the master plan guiding all education stakeholders, including private providers, on how to achieve universal education for all (Ministry of Education and Training, 2005).

Ntho, (2013, p. 12-13) observes that Education Act 1995 which was meant to provide guiding principles for implementation of the national constitution failed to make secondary education free. In enacting Education Act 2010 the Government of Lesotho sought to make education accessible for all as primary education is declared free and compulsory (Kingdom of Lesotho, 2010). Additionally, the Children's Protection and Welfare Act declares education a human right (kingdom of Lesotho, 2011). This act also prohibits child labour. Despite the efforts of the Government of Lesotho to effectively implement the legal frameworks on education sector, learners from families with low socioeconomic status continue to suffer lack of learning resources especially when they transit to secondary education (Kingdom of Lesotho, 2014, p. 9). Given poor socioeconomic conditions faced by many Basotho, the current study explores the influence of SES access to education.

1.2.4 Influence of Socioeconomic Status on Learning and academic achievement in Lesotho

In Lesotho, equitable access to secondary education is hindered by poor socioeconomic conditions of many Basotho families. Lesotho is one of the poorest countries in the world with an estimated 57.1 % of the population living below the national poverty line, and 34.0 % are below the food (or extreme, below M138 or US \$ 10 per adult per month) poverty line, with expenditures below minimum food requirements (Lesotho Bureau of Statistics, 2014, UNICEF, 2017, p. 44). Evidently, this extreme poverty adversely affects learning and academic achievement of learners enrolled in secondary school relative to their primary level counterparts. For example, in 2015 statistics indicate that compared to 122% gross attendance at primary education level, gross attendance at secondary level is only 61%, (Ministry of Health, 2016, p. 14), this indicates that children outside the official primary school age level are attending school.

The current study explores the influence of socioeconomic status on equitable access to education to secondary education. Studies have been conducted on evaluation of free primary education programme and how the country has performed in EFA enforced by MDG 2. Most of these studies investigate issues such as repetition, dropout rates, availability of learning facilities, completion rate and transition to secondary education (Ntho, 2013; Moshoeshe, 2015; Lekhetho, 2013). Generally, findings for these studies indicate that even though Lesotho is relatively on track on universalizing education, there are challenges to the efficient attainment of this goal. Parents from families with low SES could not afford buying uniform, transport fees and they do not adequately motivate children for schooling (Ntho, 2013, p. 40; Lekhetho, 2013, p. 404; and Moshoeshe, 2015, p. 38).

Other studies indicate that there is high teacher-pupil ratio and shortage of classroom space and this affect quality of education (Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ), 2007, p. 3; Seotsanyana & Matheolane, 2010, p. 39). Learners from low SES, especially those in rural areas, are less likely to access primary education, suffer lack of parental support, experience high rate of dropout, poor academic achievement and failure to complete primary education (Khati, Khati & Makatjane, 2009, p. 13; Nyabanyaba, 2009, p. 52; Urwick, 2011, p. 242; Ntho, 2013, p.

6; World Bank, 2005, p. 13; Tanga, 2015, p. 182). Other studies indicate that secondary school learners, especially those of low SES, continue to suffer from lack of financial support from both parents and Government of Lesotho and they therefore score low in academic performance and this exacerbates employment (Pillay, 2010, p. 72; World Bank, 2016, p. 2)

A critical review of literature on access to secondary education in Lesotho found only one study that has a relatively related focus as the current study. Mosia and Lephoto (2015) conducted a qualitative case study to explore how schools are supported and empowered to be inclusive of learners' psychosocial needs. The study compared data generated from interviews with documents published by MOET. The study reveals that though MOET claims to have trained teachers on counselling to provide psychosocial support to vulnerable children, teachers were not aware of the training; the school lacked systematic methods of assessing learners' needs, and psychosocial support was found to be minimal and lacked continuity (Mosia & Lephoto, 2015, p. 87). The study did not interview relevant MOET officials on the dissonance between the Ministry's reports and teachers' views. Hence the need for the current study to give a holistic view of causes and effects of learners vulnerability from all relevant stakeholders including learners themselves in recognition article 12 of the 1985 UN Convention on the Rights of a Child which indicates, "...even very young children – given the time and opportunity, demonstrate not only that they have views, experiences and perspectives to express, but that their expression can contribute positively to decisions that affect the realization of their rights and wellbeing" (UNICEF, 2011, p. 8).

1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Equitable access to secondary education for learners from families of low socioeconomic status is a serious challenge worldwide. UNESCO (2015, p.10) indicates that despite remarkable improvement of universal education enforced by MDG 2, some 58 million children and 70 million adolescents worldwide are out of school, and an estimated 100 million children in low- and middle-income countries, drop out of school due to poverty. Moreover, 130 million children are still not able to read, write or count adequately while some 757 million adults, nearly two-thirds of whom are women, lack the literacy skills that would allow them to participate fully in twenty-first century workforce (UNESCO, 2015, p.

11). Additionally, inequality in accessing education has also increased, with the poorest and most disadvantaged least likely to attend school and, when they do, to complete the primary cycle and acquire basic literacy and numeracy skills (UNESCO, 2015, p. 11-12).

Compared to primary and tertiary education, financing secondary education appears to be a challenge to most of families in Africa as the World Bank (2016, p. 5) reveals that in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) households contribute up to 49% of total expenditures for junior secondary education and 44% for senior secondary education, compared with only 30% for primary and 22% for tertiary. Furthermore, in SSA few children receive scholarship; 22% at junior secondary and 40% at senior secondary, compared with 60% in higher education. These discrepancies have led to underrepresentation of poor learners and learners belonging to rural areas in secondary schools especially in poverty-stricken countries like Lesotho (World Bank, 2016, p. 5).

Lesotho has an estimated 200 000 children who have been orphaned (UNICEF, 2012, p. 2), of whom 32 860 were in secondary schools in 2008 (Bureau of Statistics, 2010, p.2). With time the number of orphans increased. For example, according to 2014 Education Statistics Report, out of the total enrolment of 128,473 pupils in registered secondary schools, 41.4% (53,187 pupils are orphans) had lost either one or both parents through death (Bureau of Statistics, 2015, p. 45). In a country of less than two million, this marks a significantly large number and that should have serious policy implications as a number of these orphans get excluded from secondary education due to cost. According to Kingdom of Lesotho 2013 Education Statistics Report, (2014, p. 25), only 10.7% of youth in the lowest wealth quintile are enrolled in secondary school compared to 61% of those in the highest quintile. While government and different non- governmental organisations (NGOs) sponsor orphans at this level, there is still a problem of transparency in the selection process for qualifying children (Ntho, 2013, p. 30-31).

Furthermore, a 2014 report on how Lesotho performed on Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) showed that access to education is much lower for learners living in the disadvantageous mountain districts and in the lowest wealth quintile (Kingdom of Lesotho, 2014, p. 19). Conclusion of the report has established that unless efforts could be made to bring all disadvantaged children into school, Lesotho seemed unlikely to meet

MDG Goal 2 in 2015 (Kingdom of Lesotho, 2014, p. 20). Against this background, the current study was set to unpack experiences of secondary school learners on access to education and suggest the ways in which Lesotho policies and practices could improve to enhance access to an inclusive and equitable quality education as stipulated in Sustainable Development Goals 4 of the agenda 2030.

1.4 RESEARCH AIM, OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS

1.4.1 Aim

This study aimed to explore access to secondary education for learners of low socioeconomic status.

1.4.2 Objectives

Specific objectives of this study:

- a) To describe how learners of low socioeconomic status explain influences on their access to education and academic performances.
- b) To explore how parents of low socio-economic status respond to the learning and social needs of their children.
- c) To explore how secondary schools, respond to the learning and social needs of learners of low socioeconomic status.
- d) To suggest ways in which education policies and practices in Lesotho may be improved to promote equitable access to secondary education.

1.4.3 Research questions

The main research question of the study is as below:

How accessible is secondary education for learners of low socioeconomic status?

The following are the specific questions of the study:

- a. How do learners of low socioeconomic status explain influences on their access to education and academic performances?
- b. How do parents and secondary schools respond to the learning and social needs of learners of low socioeconomic status?

- c. How do secondary schools respond to the learning and social needs of learners of low socioeconomic status?
- d. What are the ways in which education policies and practices may be improved to promote equitable access to secondary education?

1.5 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

For Lesotho to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of 1: No poverty, 2: Zero hunger, 3: Good health and wellbeing, 8: Decent work and economic growth, and 10: Reduced inequalities, SDG 4: promotion of inclusive and equitable quality education is the pillar against which other goals rest. Thus, there is need for Lesotho to ensure equitable access to quality education. Ensuring equitable access to education runs concurrently with enhancement of inclusive education as UNESCO (2005, p. 29) asserts that inclusion is about access to education in a manner that there is no discrimination or exclusion for any individual or group within or outside the school system. The current study therefore explores existing educational policies and practices in Lesotho as they relate to equitable access to education for learners from low socioeconomic background. The OECD (2012, p. 7) asserts that equity goes together with quality; and investing in high quality schooling and equal opportunities for all from the early years to at least the end of upper secondary, is the most profitable educational policy. According to Rawls (1971, p. 6) major social institutions, like secondary schools, are mandated to distribute fundamental rights and duties and determine the division of advantages from social cooperation for those who struggle at early stages like learners from families with low SES. A failure to do this just and fair duty result in inequality.

Despite the fact that secondary education is meant to prepare learners for further education and training and for the world of work, it is not free, and this leads to low enrolment levels at the senior-secondary level (Ntho, 2013, p. 31). According to World Bank (2013), Lesotho's inefficient and low-quality secondary education system does not align with inclusive growth and contributes to the country's high unemployment rate of 25%. Basically, if absence of a sound basic education in Lesotho impedes further development of technical and professional skills at the post-secondary level and hinders

the student's ability to participate in the economy (World Bank, 2013, p. 10), the country may fail to achieve SDGs in 2030.

Furthermore, studies have established that secondary education level in Lesotho is rated as one of the most inaccessible systems in the world with poverty being one such influential factor for exclusion (World Bank, 2016, p. 5). Though the introduction of free primary in 2000 rapidly increased Net Enrolment Rate (NER) at secondary level to almost double, only 10.7% of youth in the lowest wealth quintile are enrolled in secondary school compared to 61% of those in the highest quintile (Kingdom of Lesotho, 2014, p.1). To this extent, there is need to equalise learning opportunities for all learners at secondary education level as successful completion of secondary education maximizes opportunities to access tertiary education and opens doors for acceptable socioeconomic status. The goal of the study is therefore to suggest methods through which educational policies and practices in Lesotho could be improved so as to promote equitable access to education to buffer sustainable development path to 2030 particularly SDG 4.

1.6 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is underpinned by two theoretical lenses, namely the social justice theory and the capability approach. The theory of social justice argues that in a just society the liberties of equal citizenship should be taken into consideration by the major social institutions whose duty is to distribute fundamental rights and duties and determine the division of advantages from social cooperation (Rawls, 1971, p. 6). The study therefore argues that Ministries of Education (through injection of resources in schools) are responsible to promote the socioeconomic rights of disadvantaged learners such as those who come from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds. A fair distribution of fundamental human rights and resources will ultimately promote social justice and equity in indispensable sectors such as educations. For example, Terzi (2014, p. 484) argues that equity is when social and institutional activities assure 'equal consideration to all' and provide equal entitlement of every child to education and equitable opportunities despite their individual differences such as socioeconomic background.

The capability approach describes a person's independence to achieve an esteemed performance as "dependent on social arrangements" (Toson, Burrello & Knollman, 2013,

p. 492). According to Sen (1999, p. 17) education and health care are the social opportunities which are dependent on state actors. These social opportunities require a political will on the part of government to “complement individual opportunities of economic and political participation and also help to foster our own initiatives in overcoming our respective deprivations.” Sen (1999, p. 78) maintains that denying educational opportunities to any group offends their functionings and capabilities, Functionings refer to what people usually do or “actions and states that people want to achieve and engage in” (Terzi, 2014, p. 485). On the other hand, capabilities are the real and authentic opportunities that citizens have “to achieve valued functionings” (Terzi, 2014, p. 485). Lack of resources deprives learners from low socioeconomic status capabilities to reach their maximum potential (Wilson-Strydom, 2011, p. 412).

Learners from poor families lack resources to enhance their educational opportunities (Connell, 1994) and it can safely be argued that their academic achievements (functionings) in under-resourced schools do not reflect their genuine desires. This study argues that while learners from low SES have physical access to schools, the extent to which they are afforded meaningful social and academic opportunities to learn like peers from high SES needs scrutiny (Waetjen, 2006, p.206). Therefore, in employing the two theoretical lenses, the current study was set to explore issues of equitable access to education and the extent to which existing Lesotho educational practices and policies promote equitable access to education for learners from families of low socioeconomic status.

1.7 DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section entails an explanation of research paradigm, design, approach and methods of data collection and analysis.

1.7.1 Research paradigm

This study is a single case study (Yin, 2014, p. 16) which adopted an interpretivist paradigm. Interpretivist researchers believe that the reality consists of people’s subjective experiences of the external world according to Willis (2007, p. 90) is an adoption of an inter-subjective epistemology and the ontological belief that reality is socially constructed. Interpretivist perspective entails individuals’ effort to understand the world they live in and an appreciation that individuals develop personal meanings about the world resulting in

a complexity of views on one issue (Creswell, 2014, p. 37). Thomas (2003, p. 6) asserts that an interpretive paradigm portrays a world in which reality is socially constructed, complex, and ever changing. Similarly, Crotty (1998) argues that the basic generation of meaning is always social, arising in and out of interaction with a human community. This connotes that the process of qualitative research is largely inductive; the inquirer generates meaning from the data collected in the field as Nieuwenhuis (2007, p. 59) states that interpretivist paradigm seeks to understand life from how people view it themselves. Therefore, the use of interpretivist perspective enabled me to explore the lived experiences of learners from families of low socioeconomic status on how they access secondary education and the effect on their academic performance.

1.7.2 Research approach

The study adopted a qualitative approach. Creswell (2009, p. 4) describes a qualitative approach as a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. According to Punch (1998, p. 174), qualitative approach is employed for studying and analysing spoken and written representations and records of human experience, using multiple methods including interview, observation, focus group discussion and document analysis. Marguerite, Dean, and Katherine (2006, p. 21) add that in qualitative research approach, studies are carried out in a naturalistic setting in which case researchers ask broad research questions designed to explore, interpret, or understand the social context. This approach was suitable for this study because the researcher sought to explore how participants understood the influence of socioeconomic factors on their learning and how they perceive the effects of such factors should be addressed through educational policies and practices.

1.7.3 Research design

The study adopted a single case study design described by Gillham (2000a, p. 1) as an investigation to answer specific research questions whereby a researcher sought evidence from case settings. According to Yin (2003, p. 1), case studies are the preferred strategy when “how” and “why” questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context. Yin (2003, p. 4) further points out that a case study explores a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries

between phenomenon and context are not clearly defined. Babbie and Mouton (2001, p. 281) postulate that case studies take multiple perspectives into account and attempt to understand the influence of multilevel social systems on subjects' perspectives and behaviours. In this regard, the researcher employed several data generation methods such as focus group and individual interviews, document analysis, to reach an in-depth analysis which is a unique feature of a single case study (Creswell, 2014, p. 14). Socioeconomic status of a learner is a multi-faceted social phenomenon that the current study explored while described the degree of equity in secondary school education.

1.7.4 Participant selection

For this study purposive sampling method was used which is a deliberate choice of participants due to the qualities they possess (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim 2016, p. 2). As a researcher I did not know much about learners from families with poor socioeconomic background, schools or teachers who were who taught them, the Ministry of Education officials conversant with equitable access to education and available educational documents, therefore, purposive sampling was employed. Kumar (2014, p. 155) opines that when little is known about key sources to data, snowball sampling becomes another critical technique. The researcher decided what needed to be known and individuals who could and were willing to provide the information by virtue of knowledge and experience. This involved identification and selection of individuals who were proficient and well-informed with problems and prospects of access to education for learners from families of low socioeconomic status (Creswell & Clark, 2011, p.18).

The study identified 34 participants from which data would be generated. They were 10 Grade 11 and 12 learners (3 males and 7 females) from low SES and a parent or guardian for each learner, 11 teachers inclusive of the principal and deputy principal as well as three officials from the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET). The learners were identified as vulnerable from the Ministry of Social Development (MOSD) database and were beneficiaries of its bursary for orphans and vulnerable children (OVC). Five of the 10 learners performed well in their studies while the other five were described low performing as per school records provided by the Deputy Principal.

1.7.5 Data collection methods

The study generated empirical data through semi-structured individual interviews, a Focus Group Discussion with key informants and, document analysis. Semi-structured individual Interviews were found suitable for the study as they are a naturalistic conversation between an interviewer and respondents (Nieuwenhuis & Smith 2012, p. 133). It is through interviews that a researcher can pursue specific issues of concern that may lead to focused and constructive suggestions (Shneiderman & Plaisant, 2005).

In addition to individual interviews, one Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was conducted with teachers. A FGD technique makes use of the human ability to tell stories and is therefore particularly suitable for provision of better access to people who are not outspoken (Bromley et al. 2003, p. 13). Through FGD rich data can emerge through interaction within the group and sensitive issues that could have been missed in individual interviews, may be revealed. According to Lewis (2003, p.13), the quality of an FGD depends on the experience and skills of the moderator, who needs to be capable of thinking, listening and managing time at the same time. The researcher was the moderator and facilitated discussion at the same time as maintaining the theme of the research.

A third method of generating data for this study was document analysis in which selected documents are interpreted by the researcher to give voice and meaning around an assessment topic (Bowen, 2009, p. 31). Silva (2012, p. 141) point out that document analysis should focus on "...the meaning of the document, the situation in which it emerges, and the importance of the interaction that results from the document". This data collection method entails careful, focused reading and re-reading of data, as well as coding and category construction with emerging codes and themes like to "integrate data gathered by different methods" (Bowen, 2009, p. 32). The current study analysed public documents including student performance reports, mission statements, annual reports, policy manuals, student handbooks, strategic plans, and syllabi (O'Leary, 2014, p. 41).

1.7.6 Data analysis method

Qualitative data analysis is "working with the data", organising them, breaking them into manageable units, coding them, synthesizing them to discover patterns, concepts, themes, perceptions, values, experiences etc. (Nieuwenhuis 2007, p. 99). The study

adopted and Interpretative Phenomenological Analyses (IPA) as an ideal approach for analysing data from this study. The IPA involves detailed examination of participants' lifeworld, experiences and perceptions or account of an object or event, as opposed to an attempt to produce an objective statement of the object or event itself (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 122). Interpretive phenomenological Analysis expounds how participants make sense of their world and how the researcher made sense of participants' experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 53). As state by Kawulich and Holland (2012, p. 239), the current study used the IPA's approach of looking at individual cases and subsequently comparing cases to identify convergent and divergent themes.

1.7.7 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness lies at the heart of empirical data in qualitative research. According to Shaw (2010, p. 182) trustworthiness is the transparency with which a researcher collects and analyses data for a study and this compares to concepts such as validity and reliability in quantitative research. Qualitative validity, according to Stake (1995, p. 88) means that the researcher checks for the accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures, while qualitative reliability indicates that the researcher's approach is consistent.

To ensure trustworthiness, the researcher ensured that he created rapport with participants to enable a safe and trusting relationship where they can give information freely in the interviews and focus group discussions (Stake, 1995, p. 88). Additionally, different data sources were used for triangulation so as to build a coherent justification of findings for the study (Erzberger & Kelle, 2003, p. 516). For example, data were generated from various sources such as semi-structured individual interviews, FGD and document analysis.

The study used constant comparison whereby one piece of data, for example, an interview, was compared with previous data and not considered on its own enabled the researcher to treat the data as a whole rather than fragmenting it (Anderson, 2010, p. 4). Constant comparison also enabled the researcher to identify emerging/unanticipated themes within the research project. The study used member-check; that is, after transcribing data, transcribed interviews were sent to the participants to validate what they said (Creswell, 2014, p. 201).

1.7.8 Ethical considerations

Deyle, Hess, and LeCompte, (1992, p. 618) note that ethical considerations are important for qualitative research because data are collected through establishing certain relationships with participants. Firstly, permission was sought from the authorities of the sampled secondary school, relevant authorities in Ministry of Education and Training, Ministry of Social Development and parents for involving minor learners in the study. Then the Informed consent were sought from informants of the study. This implies that informants had the right to decide whether to participate in the study and were free to withdraw from it when they needed to (Ogletree & Kawulich, 2012, p. 68). The researcher's relationship to these study participants was built and such rapport was maintained throughout the research period to obtain important information.

Being mindful of Deyle, et al.'s (1992, p. 54) caution regarding how information is gained and divulged, the researcher was explicit in describing the purpose of his investigation with these study participants. Babbie (2014, p. 65) opines that social science research can cause psychological harm such as being upset, worrying, feeling guilty or frightened. In this regard, the researcher will caution the informants that participation has potential of appealing to memories and experiences which could affect them emotionally. Therefore, the researcher will ensure no harm by conducting interviews in the most convenient venue to the participant. Also, confidentiality will be assured to the study's informants and you need to go on and say, how you will cite data in the study while maintaining confidentiality. Additionally,

1.8 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter introduces the background of the study by discussing international treaties and policies on equitable access to education. The background includes the exploration of global trends on how socioeconomic status affects children's learning and development, the legal frameworks operational in Lesotho education system as well as the influence of socioeconomic status on learning and development in Lesotho. Next, the chapter describes how the status quo in educational provision is untenable globally and for Lesotho specifically. Against the backdrop of a problem statement for the study, the research aim and objectives are described as well as questions that the study intends to address.

The chapter also describes the rationale for carrying a study on access to secondary education in Lesotho, and then goes to discuss the theoretical lenses underpinning the study. The chapter ends with an explanation of research methods and methodology adopted for the study namely, a qualitative case study and the principles that underpin qualitative data collection and analysis such as trustworthiness of the study and ethical principles followed in collecting data from human subjects. Lastly, an outline of preliminary chapters for this study is stated below.

1.9 DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS

1.9.1 Learner's socioeconomic background

A learner's socioeconomic background entails elements such as parents' educational level, family income as well as support from community (neighbourhood) (Coleman, et al. 1966, et al. p. 307).

1.9.2 Access to education

While UNESCO (2005, p. 22-23) describes access to education as universal provision of opportunities to participate in defined minimum level of education for all, for the purpose of this study access to education refers to measures to ensure the following four values namely: presence, acceptance, participation and achievement.

a. Presence dictates that a learner has not gained meaningful access to education if they are too hungry to concentrate in class, or if their teacher does not arrive to teach them (Russell, 2009, p. 21). Therefore, learner's presence at schools entails complete participation in daily class activities without education provision in segregated settings (Humphrey, 2008, p. 42).

b. Acceptance means that education is established in a way that it is adequately satisfactory to learners, and it is relevant and culturally appropriate (UNESCO, 2015, p. 12).

c. Participation means taking part in each of the phases of lifelong learning and development. (Otero & McCoshan, 2005, p.23; Humphrey, 2008, p. 42, Russell, 2009, p. 22).

d. Achievement is based on the proclamation that there is a need to focus on well-defined learning accomplishments (value functionings) as a major outcome of the education process if equitable access to education is to be achieved (UNESCO, 2005, p. 15).

1.9.3 Inclusive education

Inclusive education refers to securing and guaranteeing the right of all children to access, presence, participation and success in their local regular school. Inclusive education calls upon neighbourhood schools to build their capacity to eliminate barriers to access, presence, participation, and achievement in order to be able to provide excellent educational experiences and outcomes for all children and young people (UNESCO, 2020, p.18).

1.9.4 Poverty

In the context of the current study, poverty as the absence or inadequate realization of certain basic freedoms, such as the freedoms to avoid hunger, disease, illiteracy, and so on (Sen 2001, p. 5; United Nations 2004, p. 9).

1.10 PRELIMINARY OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

The successive chapters of the study entail the following:

Chapter Two presents the two theoretical lenses adopted by this study namely social justice theory and capability approach.

Chapter Three discusses the link between socioeconomic status and the provision of education focusing on principles equality and equity.

Chapter Four discusses literature on socioeconomic status and its influence on learning and development.

Chapter Five outlines the research methods and methodology adopted by the study.

Chapter Six presents and analyses the findings of the study.

Chapter Seven discusses the findings, draws conclusions and recommendations from the study.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes theoretical lenses that underpin the study namely, social justice and capability approach by first giving a brief explanation of the context and complementary nature of the two theoretical perspectives as employed in the current study. Then each model is explained. Social justice is described as a philosophical concept and then as a theory that explores concepts of equity and equality, distributive and formative concepts. Next, capability approach is discussed in relation to concepts such as opportunities and functionings. Finally, the application of both social justice theory and capability approach on access to education is explored.

2.2 CONTEXT OF THEORETICAL LENSES

To explain inequalities in educational opportunities resulting from learners' socioeconomic disadvantage, this study adopted the capability approach as a widely influential theory in promoting social justice in education by stressing equity as the key principle in educational access. Commitment of the world on the adoption and attainment of the SDGs and 2030 agenda emphasizes, among others, the need for access to education for all which goes beyond accommodation of learners within the physical space, to ensuring equitable access to quality education (United Nations, 2015, p. 17). In an effort to effectively ensure the equitable access to education of good quality, educational policies and practices must conform to principles of social justice thereby responding to the needs of all learners. Commonwealth Education Hub (2016, p. 1) states that one of the major challenges facing equitable access to education is the backlog resulting from lower attendance and participation by marginalised groups of learners such as those of low socioeconomic status. This backlog is heightened by education system's failure to understand and embrace social justice in the learning process. Novak (2000, p. 1) notes that the difficulty some scholars have in making sense of social justice starts with the term as it lends itself to multiple interpretations.

According to Hytten and Bettez (2011, p. 8), almost everyone in education industry seems to share at least a rhetorical commitment to social justice, especially as one routinely expresses the belief that schools should help to provide equality of opportunity. However, this commitment barely recognises diversity that exists among learners resulting from

unequal access to resources to make use of those opportunities. It is therefore mandatory that while major social institutions like schools ensure equal consideration to all and provide equal entitlement of every child to education, they should as well recognise, acknowledge and respect individual differences with socio-economic status being of the significant differences (Terzi, 2014, p. 484). To this extent, Kodelja, (2016, p. 12-13) argues that

“...the actual idea of equality of educational opportunity is clear: it does not matter to the student how “equal” his or her school is in comparison with others; what counts is whether at the end of schooling he or she is adequately prepared to compete with others, to obtain the desired position in society irrespective of his or her social background. At the same time, it is not important to society to “equalise schools” in a formal sense, but rather to ensure that every child – irrespective of his or her social background – enters adulthood as well prepared as possible, in order to be granted the opportunity for full participation.”

Kodelja’s (2016) argument is rooted from Coleman, Campbell, Hobson, McPartland, Mood, & Weinfeld, (1966)’s assertion that a school is successful only if there is a reduction in the degree to which the child’s access to opportunities is dependent on their social origin, and this is the main imperative of social justice in education. Among different lines of reasoning about how social justice may be achieved in education, there are two prominent perspectives in place for the purpose of this study, namely, the institutions-centred approach of Rawls’ (1971) social justice and the human-centred approach of Sen’s (1985) capability approach. The first perspective is rooted in the idea of achievement of justice in society. Thus, the main idea of the social justice, as described by Rawls’ (1971) theory, interrogates the kind of societal organization that rational persons would choose if they were in an initial position of independence and equality, and setting up a system of cooperation. The institutions-centred approach assumes that social justice could fade away if policies and practices that perpetuate oppression of disadvantaged and marginalised groups remain unchanged (Young, 1990, p. 41). In the context of education, formal and institutionalized arrangements governed by educational policies in schools could promote equity by increasing opportunities for disadvantaged

learners such as those from families of low socioeconomic status, to access educational institutions and necessary resources for learning (Santiago, Wadsworth, & Stump, 2008, p. 49).

Sen (2009) links the two perspectives underpinning the current study when he describes social justice as a “momentous concept” with comparative questions that are inescapable for any theory of justice intending to give guidance to public policy or personal behaviour. According to Sen (2009, p. 401), a theory of justice that can serve as the basis of practical reasoning, must include ways of judging how to reduce injustice and advance justice, rather than aiming only at the characterization of perfectly just societies. Sen (1971) terms this view a human-centered approach which adheres to the idea that social justice may be achieved by comparing ways in which people’s lives may flourish, and thus ascertaining which one is just (Boyadjieva, & Ilieva-Trichkova, 2017, p. 3). The human-centred perspective advocated by Sen’s (1985) capability approach thus puts Rawls’ institutions-centred perspective into practice that governs daily behaviour of human beings, including learners.

As proposed by Sen (1985), this study has bridged these two theoretical lenses for mutual enrichment as both provide better value when applying social justice on access secondary to education for learners from poor socioeconomic background. As Nussbaum, (2009, p. 232), observes, “capability approach encompasses a ‘partial theory of social justice’ and a normative framework for the assessment of human development. Basically, bridging the two perspectives together is premised on the argument that the opportunity to access education is not a guarantee. Not every learner will achieve the desired educational outcome despite their determination to do so. Thus, opportunity does not imply the absence of all obstacles between a learner and the desire to pass at school (Westen, 1997, pp. 24–25). In this regard, governments should ensure equity in a level playing field that gives every learner suitable initial opportunities at their starting points, by giving more learning resources to the neediest. By doing so, inequality in distribution of learning resources becomes a means of achieving equity (Bobbio, 1995, p. 26). Therefore, encapsulated in social justice principle, equitable starting points of learners are argued to presuppose the prohibition of discrimination (Sartori, 1996, pp. 181–182).

In this way learners would have their capabilities or potentials (McClintock, 2016, p. 5) well maximised to achieve desired outcomes at school (Terzi, 2005, p. 449) as proclaimed by Sen's (1985) capability approach.

This imperative idea of bridging the Rawlsian and Sen's perspectives to explain access to education, instead of looking at them as rival ways of reasoning for justice, was previously proposed by Brighouse and Unterhalter (2007). While there are similarities between the capability approach and social justice, capability approach goes further to combine a normative idea of how to link this practice beyond education to a wide range of economic development issues such as redressing poverty, policy making and education measurement (Brighouse & Unterhalter, 2007, p. 252).

Learners from poor social background are not responsible for their lack of opportunity to good quality education (Mason, 2001, p. 763) and as Scheffler (2005, p. 6) asserts, a basic problem that arises here is to determine "which factors should be counted among people's circumstances, and which should be subsumed within the category of choice". Based on this assertion, schooling practice is unjust if it reproduces the advantages and disadvantages of brute luck and transforms these advantages and disadvantages into unequal positions in a competition for rewards or statuses (Dworkin, 2000, p. 285–287). Adhering to the mandate embraced by social justice, governments should therefore spend more effort and resources on education of children disadvantaged by their family backgrounds.

As a mandate championed by social justice, the capability approach may be used provisionally to determine the practices that allow for equitable treatment within school systems by providing children the capabilities to accomplish their valued functionings and stressing the principles of well-being (Terzi, 2007). Terzi (2014, p. 486) argues that the level of justice in social and institutional arrangements should be evaluated based on their recognition of individual differences, and the extent to which they provide each individual the opportunity to benefit from resources, given his/her choices and individual differences. Education, according to Sen (1992), is one of the few fundamental capabilities essential to human well-being. Terzi, (2014, p. 486) further posits that school systems, as institutional arrangements, uphold social justice if they provide equal educational

opportunities for individuals to approach the level of well-being that extends to a conception of good life. It can therefore be safely argued that if children have equitable powers and capacities to claim their rights to education, as proposed by theory of social justice, their opportunities in flourishing academically and ultimately economically could be guaranteed.

Accordingly, equality of opportunity is not only determined by the kind of school a learner attends, but the significant issue is that schools should acknowledge and put into cognizance any differences that exist between children of different social origin at the beginning of schooling (Coleman et al., 1966, p. 71). In schools, these inequalities are constantly maintained by nature, society, and culture (Renaut, 2007, p. 193). This view of social justice is premised on the argument that equal opportunities refers to the fact that in any given school learners are never equally gifted, as they have not all had the same luck in their different family socioeconomic backgrounds. Therefore, learners from families of low socioeconomic status should be compensated by being given enough resources so as to enable them participate in learning process in an equitable manner as with their wealthier counterparts. As Renaut (2007, p. 192–193) notes, the compensation is “...no longer about a chance, but justice... not any justice but compensatory justice, which corrects the wrongs that have occurred to someone in the past”.

Other theorists understand social justice as availability of equal opportunities in competitive procedures designed for the allocation of scarce resources and the distribution of the benefits and burdens of social life (Jacobs, 2004, Sher, 1988). The scholars argue that those procedures should be governed by criteria that are relevant to the particular goods at stake in the competition and not by irrelevant considerations such as race, social class, gender, ethnicity, or other factors that may hinder some of the competitors' opportunities at success (Jacobs, 2004, p. 10; Sher, 1988, pp. 119–120). This equality of opportunity is argued on the following 3 conditions suggested by Fishkin (1983, p. 6): (1) each individual should have equal access to the process of competition for advantaged social positions; (2) the rules are (a) the same for everyone, (b) known in advance, and (c) connected to the process of competition for advantaged social positions (e.g., carrying out a particular task or performing a job); and (3) the best/most qualified

candidate wins. This view of social justice, if not addressed, would perpetuate inequalities in essential life spheres such as education whereby only socioeconomically privileged learners will succeed in learning living behind their non-affluent counterparts.

The view of social justice adopted for this study coincides with an egalitarian interpretation of equal opportunities. That is, enabling any individual learner, irrespective of any morally arbitrary factors such as gender, race, religion, socioeconomic status, etc., to achieve an equitable starting point in the process of competing for academic outcomes, as it would be both unjust and unfair, to have a situation “when one person is worse off than another through no fault or choice of her own” (Temkin, 1993, p. 13). These morally arbitrary factors are beyond one’s control and it is “unfair for one person to be worse off than another due to reasons beyond her control” (Segall, 2008, p. 10). This resonates with Scanlon’s (2003) argument that inequality should “not disrupt the fairness of on-going competition” (Scanlon, 2003, p. 205). Moreover, according to Rawls (2001, p. 43), fair equality of opportunity, should require not merely that learning institutions and social opportunities be open in the formal sense, but that all learners should have a fair chance to compete in accessing and participating in them.

Complementary to social justice theory, capability approach advocates for granting every learner, regardless of their origin or socioeconomic status, some capabilities or tangible opportunities to achieve desired outcomes at school (Terzi, 2005, p. 449). Walker (2006: 165) articulates that a capability is a potential functioning that might include doings and beings such as being well nourished, having shelter and access to clean water and food, being mobile, being well-educated, being safe, being respected, taking part in discussions with your peers, and so on. As Unterhalter (2007) observes, the current study argues that for social justice to be put into educational practice educational authorities evaluate education systems in the least developed countries. In this regard capability approach urges that when making evaluations in education, policy makers should look not just at inputs like teachers, hours in class, or learning materials or outputs, but also consider human capital such as parental education, family’s source of income and home environment surrounding life of a learner (Unterhalter, 2007, p. 75).

2.2 CONCEPTUALISATION OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

The contemporary world is full of inequalities where some people have the means to access and make use of social services while for others are denied their rights to equitably access social institutions rendering such services. In 1971, John Borrdley Rawls, an American moral and political philosopher, identified the basic structure of society as the primary subject of social justice and viewed justice as the first virtue of social institutions (Wenar, 2008, p. 28). Rawls (1971, p. 4) asserts that society is just and well-ordered when it is not only designed to advance the good of its members but also effectively regulated by a public conception of justice. Thus, it is a society in which everyone knows and accepts the same principles of justice, and the basic social institutions generally satisfy these principles for all to enhance their personal growth.

Furthermore, it is often unclear in any practical terms what scholars mean when invoking a version of social justice as it applies to education programme development, curricula and learning opportunities. Rizvi (1998, p. 47) asserts that the immediate difficulty in understanding social justice is the multiple layers of meaning which can hinder achievement of fairness if not well perceived. It is therefore critical to define parameters within which to apply social justice in education. A proper understanding of social justice provides a good framework for its application in education. Similar to Rawls (1971), McClintock (2017), closely links justice with important institutions in our world especially the judicial branch of government whose duty is to protect and enhance human rights in accessing social services. Thus Rawls (1971, p. 6) rightly asserts that it is the duty of social institutions to help citizens claim their rights in accessing fairly allocated resources. In delivering this significant mandate, institutions such as schools should observe issues of equity and moral rightness as these are significant concerns of social justice (McClintock, 2017, p. 6). In the context of education, these concerns could be achieved by ensuring full and equal participation of all groups in education that meets their needs (Bell, 1997, p. 3). Further, Young (2011, p. 41) and Murrell (2008, p. 81) posit that social justice in education involves a deposition towards recognising and eradicating all forms of oppression and differential treatment existing in the practices, procedures and policies of social institutions. Lynch and Baker (2005) speak about equality of conditions in ensuring social justice in education. Thus, social justice in a school advocates for

equitable access to resources, recognition, love and respect of marginalized learners such as those from socioeconomically disadvantaged families (Lynch & Baker, 2005, p. 132; Carlisle, Jackson & Georg 2006, p. 57). Generally, scholars advocating social justice come from various philosophical positions (Hyttén & Bettez, 2011, p. 11; and Rizvi, 1998, p. 48) observe that, there are three broad philosophical traditions which explain social justice namely, market individualism, social democratic and liberal individualism.

2.2.1 Market individualism

The market individualist emphasizes that people are entitled in relationship to their efforts. For example, Nozick (1974) supports market individualist perspective on social justice which advocates that justice is primarily concerned with the distribution of property based on the three ideas: (1). Justice in acquisition: how one first acquires property rights over something that has not previously been owned; (2). Justice in transfer: how one acquires property rights over something that has been transferred (e.g. by gift or exchange) to a person by someone else; (3). Rectification of injustice: how to restore something to its rightful owner, in case of injustice in either acquisition or transfer. Thus, justice is about respecting people's rights, especially the rights to property and self-ownership (Nozick, 1974, p. 162). Following Nozick's argument, Rizvi (1998, p. 49) argues that what counts in market individualist perspective is the justice of the competition marked by the way the competition was carried out and not its outcome. This tradition is silent about those individuals whose socioeconomic circumstances deny them natural rights to own property, and inability to secure and utilize resources to improve quality of their lives.

2.2.2 Social democratic perspective

While the market individualism claims that social justice is enhanced when peoples' natural rights are respected in relation to ownership and utilisation of resources, social democratic perspective considers justice in relation to the needs of various individuals, emphasizing a more collectivist vision of society (Hyttén & Bettez, 2011, p. 10). The social democratic perspective emphasizes the need for governments to establish and champion modern social democracy characterized by policies aimed at curbing inequality, oppression of underprivileged groups and poverty emanating from inability to secure basic needs (Hoefler, 2013, p. 29). This includes support for universally accessible public services like care for the elderly, childcare, education, health care and workers'

compensation (Meyer & Hinchman, 2007, p. 137). Even though social democratic perspective considers the needs of people as individuals in society, its principle of collectivism gives a group priority over an individual thus neglecting diversity that exists among individuals in a group.

2.2.3 Liberal Individualism

In his work on social justice, Rawls (1990) embraces the idea of liberal individualism which can be described as a philosophical position upon which he developed his view on justice. Contrary to social democratic philosophy on social justice, Rawls (1990) asserts that individualism overrides community/group and therefore enhances justice. He sees each person as possessing an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of society cannot override. This human holiness does not allow that the sacrifices imposed on a few are outweighed by the larger sum of advantages enjoyed by many if truly the liberties of equal citizenship are taken into serious consideration (Rawls, 1990, p. 11). In further substantiating his assertion on individualism overriding group, Rawls (1999) has come up with two principles governing justice in its practicality more especially when considering diversity that exists among people: (1) the “Liberty Principle” where each person should have equal right to an extensive system of equal basic liberties; and (2) the “Equality Principle” where a departure from social and economic inequalities would be reviewed so that those inequalities are to the greatest benefit for the least advantaged in a group (Rawls, 1999, p. 53). Thus, for Rawls (1999), the equality principle requires the rearrangement of social and economic goods to be guided by considerations of opportunity and by the differences that arise from individual circumstances.

Additionally, Hytten and Bettez (2011, p. 11) indicate that the liberal individualism may help to come up with criteria for making assessments or judgments about whether educational policies and practices are fair and that marks the central issue behind social justice in education. This assertion provides the basis for the current study as it focuses on how educational policies and practices are implemented to accommodate learners’ individual arising from socioeconomic backgrounds. Attainment of social justice in education results from equitable learning opportunities for all learners measured by the extent to which they are supported to learn despite circumstances in their society (Kastning, 2013, p. 10). Basically, Rawls (1971) argues that efforts should be made to

compensate for the socioeconomically disadvantaged and fill the gap that exists between them and their affluent counterparts. Salmi and Bassett (2014, p. 362) opine that access is promoted if there are sufficient opportunities that enable learners from disadvantaged backgrounds succeed at school.

2.3 SOCIAL JUSTICE AND ITS THEORETICAL CONCEPTS

Social justice theory emanates from the philosophy of individual liberalism as discussed above. Wenar (2008, p. 17) sees Rawls as the main proponent of social justice theory in which social justice is equated to fairness. Rawls (1971, p. 6) argues that in a just society the liberties of equal citizenship should be taken into consideration by the major social institutions whose duty is to distribute fundamental rights and duties and determine the division of advantages from social cooperation, hence the name institutions-centred perspective. Alongside with his theory of social justice, Rawls (2001) developed a concept he calls Fair Equality of Opportunity (FEO) which argues for social offices and positions to be formally open to all so that similarly talented and motivated people should have a roughly equal chance to attain these positions, independent of their social class background.

When applied to education, the FEO principle supports closure of achievement gap between the rich and the poor with the same high talent potentials, assuming that these children can be identified (Rawls, 2001, p. 42). In other words, the Rawlsian principle of FEO advocates for the elimination of the effects of social background and economic class on educational achievement (Rawls, 2001, p. 43-44). This view of social justice theory is better explored alongside other views to make it practical within the education system. That is, a single way of operationalizing of theory of social justice is not sufficient and literature reveals that contemporary notions of social justice coexist with expressions of equality, equity, inclusion, human rights, distributive, and formative justice (Brighthouse, 2003, p. 473; Hytten & Bettez, 2011, p. 2; Bates, 2007, p. 21; Sturman, 1997, p. 1; Kastning, 2013, p. 7).

2.3.1 Equality and equity

Equality in educational context is commonly understood as a kind of education system whereby every learner has the same education and promotes fairness and justice by giving everyone the same thing (Jacob & Holsinger, 2008, p. 4). Equality also refers to a

social ideal in which society regards and treats its citizens as equals, and the contention that certain rights should be distributed equally among citizens (Nelson, Adjunct & Clarke 2009, p. 4). Therefore, one may argue that based on the element of equality, governments should create reasonable opportunities for poor people to develop their capacities and to participate in and fully benefit from education. Moreover, lack of such opportunities often results in major differences in the educational success or efficiency among society members and this may ultimately suppress social and economic mobility among poverty-stricken people (Chungmei & Orfield, 2005, p. 47). Therefore, to curb this discrepancy, underprivileged members of the society must receive government support in order to give everyone a chance to participate fully in the learning process despite their socioeconomic differences (Kastning, 2013, p. 10).

Recognition of the differences that exist among people and the extent to which those differences can affect their capability to utilize the resources available for all, is what equity embraces in relation to social justice (Roemer, 2002). Roemer (2002, p. 458) points out that sometimes peoples' differences and/or history can create barriers to participation in learning processes. This suggests that education authorities must move beyond equality, ensure equity whereby every learner is equipped with enough resources to make use of opportunities availed through equality principle. The concept of 'equity' is close to 'fairness' but distinct from the idea of 'equality' in the sense that it always involves either equality of treatment or equality of outcome (McCowan, 2016, p. 646). Thus, it may be fair to treat learners in different ways if they have specific needs, such as poor socioeconomic background, that would otherwise present barriers.

As one of the dimensions of equity, fairness embraces a situation whereby everyone has the same opportunities to learn regardless of the circumstances into which they are born (OECD, 2007). Fairness basically means making sure that personal, social and economic circumstances do not become obstacles to achieving educational potential and this is a dimension critical for achieving inclusive education and ensuring a basic minimum standard of education for all (OECD, 2007, p. 10). Moreover, inclusive education brings about equity by transforming schools and other centres of learning to cater for learner diversity such as gender, linguistic and ethnic minorities, rural populations, those infected

and affected by HIV and AIDS, poverty-stricken masses, and those with disabilities (UNESCO, 2017, p. 13).

Hence Waetjen (2006) posits that, academic scores alone may fail to give true depiction of the concept of access because functionings may be achieved without capabilities enhanced. This gives rise to an assertion that access should be translated into meaningful social and academic opportunities to learn (Waetjen, 2006, p. 205-206). Basically, access to education transcends physically available at schools to ensure full participation in all academic activities and achievement of desired outcomes (Humphrey, 2008). Moreover, equitable and quality education is a rights-based initiative which indicates that the design of the education system must ensure that everyone has access to education (UNESCO, 2017, p. 1). Arguably, attainment of such equitable education system has potential to reduce inequalities, develop teacher and system capabilities, and encourage supportive learning environments, as discussed next.

2.3.2 Distributive justice

Equity could be ensured if recognition of human diversity becomes a fundamental requirement in the distribution of social resources (Rawls 1971). The social justice theory explores an idea of distributive justice that is meant to compensate individuals for misfortune (Salmi & Bassett, 2014, p. 360). That is, society needs to positively change the random distribution of goods and services to enable beneficence for disadvantaged members of society through positive discrimination (Gewirtz, 1998, p. 472) whereby the most marginalised individuals receive more relative to their affluent counterparts. Reducing inequalities from education system and pedagogical practices and creation of supportive learning environment are crucial efforts to promote justice in education thereby securing access for everyone. As Rawls (1971, p. 6) observes, the redistribution of resources is enforced through protection of human rights by social institutions guided by policies and normative practices in place.

The way policy implementers view distributive justice has potential to shape, inform or deform peoples' preferences on social services (Walker, 2003, p. 172). For example, Forsyth (2006, p. 388) indicates that in some practices, equity in distributive justice suggests that members' outcomes should be based upon their inputs. This conveys an

argument that an individual who has invested large amounts of input should receive more from the group or an institution than someone who has contributed very little. In educational setting, a failure to consider the diversity of learners and the inequalities that would otherwise hinder their competitive participation, would mean an unfair view of justice. Thus, those learners from poor socioeconomic background could not participate as efficiently as their affluent counterparts (given availability of resources) and therefore they could not attain high quality educational outcomes. In his philosophy of liberal individualism, Rawls (1971) has also come up with principle of distributive justice, which he calls the Difference Principle. The difference principle permits diverging from strict equality so long as the inequalities in question would make the least advantaged in society materially better off than they would be under strict equality (Rawls, 1971, p. 5). Additionally, another distributive justice norm called need (Forsyth, 2006, p. 389), suggests that those in greatest need should be provided with more resources needed to meet those needs. This resonates with Gewirtz's (1998) positive discrimination or affirmative action whereby the least advantaged individuals in a group should receive more resources than their better off counterparts.

Sunhee and Seoyong (2014) support affirmative action for it seeks to achieve goals such as bridging inequalities in employment and pay, increasing access to education, promoting diversity, and redressing apparent past wrongs, harms, or hindrances. In educational context, learners from poor families are better off given more resources than those who come from affluent families to capacitate them achieve their educational outcomes. In this view of distributive justice for equitable distribution of resources as a desirable state, inequality can only be justified to benefit the least advantaged (Bankston, 2010, p. 174; Rawls, 1999, p. 12). Drawing from Rawls' (1971) institutions-centred approach, Arneson (2007, p. 84) argues that institutions should be established and sustained to operate in conjunction with individual choices to maximize the primary social goods holdings of those with least resources.

In principle, the most marginalised individuals such as learners from poor socioeconomic backgrounds have equal rights to the most extensive system of personal liberty compatible with a system of total liberty for all (Rawls, 1993). More importantly, social and

economic inequalities have to be reviewed so that they are both to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged in society (Rawls, 1999, p. 5–6). These will enable them to realise their potentials and enjoy their freedoms to do and/or be what they so wish.

2.3.4 Formative justice

Complementary to distributive justice in the preceding discussion, formative justice extends the discussion on the recognition that, as living organisms, people are continually busy making of themselves what they can and desire to become in the company of others (McClintock, 2016, p. 5). Basically, formative justice arises as persons and groups, facing their future, find more potentialities confronting them and such potentialities are referred to by Sen (1985), as capabilities and they are based on the question of what a person can do or be. This carries a conception of justice that breaks from analyses of actualities (thus what has been or is now the case) in favour of an awareness and management of one's potentialities (what is possible). Formative justice aligns with social justice described by Amartya Sen's (1985) Capability Approach discussed next.

2.4 CAPABILITY APPROACH

The capability approach was developed by Amartya Sen in 1985 as a set of interrelated theses in welfare economics, particularly on the assessment of personal well-being, poverty, and inequality (Mitra, 2006, p. 236). Literature reveals that capability approach is not a theory that can explain poverty, inequality or well-being but can serve as an important constituent for theory of social justice (Robeyns, 2005, p. 96). The core characteristic of the capability approach is its focus on what people are effectively able to do and to be; that is, on their capabilities or potentials (McClintock, 2016, p. 5). Terzi (2005, p. 449) describes capabilities as tangible opportunities afforded to people so that they can achieve desired outcomes. Related to capabilities are functionings which are referred to as actions and states that people want to achieve and engage in (Terzi, 2014, p. 485). Both Capabilities (opportunity freedoms) and functionings (achievements) as view by Sen (1985, p.10), are influenced by individual circumstances, relationships with others, social and economic conditions, and contexts which create spaces for opportunities to be realised (Wilson-Strydom, 2011, p. 412; Saith 2001, p. 10).

In the context of education, Sen's (1985) capability approach suggest that if learners are exposed to adequate learning resources, supporting environment, and have freedom to

choose what they can do at school (capabilities), they can attain more satisfactory outcomes (functionings) than they otherwise could without compensation for their disadvantageous background (distributive view of social justice). Therefore, denying learners resources is an injustice. Fraser (2008, p. 16) articulates that justice is participatory parity that should overcome injustice by dismantling institutionalized obstacles that prevent poverty-stricken learners from participating on a par with their affluent counterparts. Henceforth, the current study proposes that it is when governments have afforded learners living in poverty some capabilities (Walker, 2006, p. 165) that they would have their functionings translated into to their potential in academic achievement. It is apparent that theory of social justice and capability approach could practically complement each to describe equitable access to education for learners from marginalised groups including those from poor socioeconomic backgrounds.

2.5 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

To investigate how socioeconomic inequalities, affect access to secondary education, the study was lensed by capability approach as a model which puts social justice theory into practice. Thus, social justice occurs when individuals have access to social, cultural, political, and economic resources. Capability approach deals with practical examples of events and processes that illustrate how social justice should be implemented on daily activities. Based on social justice, the study argues that learners from poor social background are not responsible for their lack of opportunity to good quality education. As proclaimed by liberal individualistic view of social justice, through social institutions such as schools, governments should promote human rights and capabilities which are opportunities afforded to poverty-stricken learners so that they can achieve desired academic outcomes which are functionings as dictated by the capability approach.

Complimentary to social justice theory is equity which advocates for recognition of the differences that exist among learners and the extent to which those differences can affect their capability to utilize the resources and/or opportunities available through equality principle. To ensure that those differences indeed do not affect learners' capabilities to make use of educational opportunities, proponents of distributive justice argue for positive

discrimination whereby the most socioeconomically marginalised learners should be given more resources relative to their affluent counterparts.

CHAPTER THREE: THE LINK BETWEEN SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS AND EDUCATION

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter gives conceptual understanding of socioeconomic status (SES) and describes how socioeconomic factors could influence the learning process and academic development. First, the chapter explains international and regional policies which champion equitable access to education thereby advocating for removal of socioeconomic barriers to learning and development based on the principle of human rights. Second, it explores equitable access to education in relation to the four values namely presence, acceptance, participation and achievement. Access to education is premised on principles of human rights that underpin inclusive and equitable quality education in relation to learners' socioeconomic conditions. Learners' socioeconomic influences such as level of parents' education, career and income, types of neighbourhood and gender inequality issues are also discussed. Finally, the chapter explores the influence of school resources on access for learners of low socioeconomic status.

3.2 RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH TO ACCESS TO EDUCATION

It can be argued that equitable access to education may not be achieved unless poverty is uprooted. Ending poverty and the enhancement of inclusive and equitable quality education for all are two intertwined SDGs that must be approached using rights-based approach (UNESCO, 2017). If the two global mandates are met, especially access to secondary education for all, the global poverty rate would be more than halved (UNESCO, 2017, p.1). It is a general principle of the UN that 'Poverty is a denial of human rights' (UNPD, 2003, p. iv). In this regard, human rights may seem withdrawn ideals if a family starves and cannot protect itself from preventable illnesses and other poverty related distresses that could deny children access to education (United Nations, 2004, p. iii). The most significant feature of a human-rights based approach to poverty reduction is that it is clearly based on the norms and values set out in the international law of human rights (United Nations, 2004, p. 1). Reinforced by universally recognized moral values and legal obligations, international human rights policies provide a persuasive normative framework for the formulation of national and international poverty reduction policies, including

Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRSs) (International Monetary Fund and International Development Association, 2003, p.67). These policies address poverty and fundamental human rights to life aspects such as equitable access to education as discussed below:

3.2.1 International policies on access to education

Access to education has been acknowledged through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) as a fundamental human right (United Nations General Assembly, 1948). Article 1 of UDHR as well Article 5 of the World Declaration on Education for All (EFA) (1990) proclaim that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. In consideration of this significant universal mandate of enhancing the right to education, the importance of equal access to education has been observed and emphasized repeatedly in international conventions established in various international forums (UNESCO, 2018). Both the 1948 UDHR and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) of 1966, state that education shall be equally accessible to all (UNESCO, 2018, p. 11).

While other international human rights instruments are not specific on the enjoyment of socioeconomic rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1966) explicitly emphasizes social and economic rights. Article 5 of the convention, in compliance with the fundamental obligations laid down in its article 2, obliges States Parties to prohibit and to eliminate racial discrimination in all its forms and to guarantee the right of everyone notably in the enjoyment of the economic, social and cultural rights (Right to Education Project, 2014, p. 5). Furthermore, section III, number 11 of United Nations Millennium Declaration declares that Member States should engage in every effort to free their citizens from the miserable and dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty, to which by the year 2000, more than a billion of them were subjected (United Nations Millennium Declaration, 2000). Over twenty years ago the international community resolved to create an environment that is conducive for socioeconomic development and elimination of poverty (United Nations Millennium Declaration, 2000, p.4). The extent to which this has been attained and effects on education thereof is the subject matter of this study.

Given the failed commitment of ensuring that all children have their rights to education well respected and protected by 2015 (United Nations Millennium Declaration 2000, p. 5), learners from poverty-stricken families cannot not claim their rights to education resulting in continuous cycle of poverty (UNESCO 2016, p. 14). Thus, the right to education should be enhanced and enjoyed as guaranteed to allow learners develop up to their full potential (UNESCO, 2016, p. 14). As asserted in the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1989) education of the child needs to be directed to development of their personality, talents, mental and physical capabilities to their fullest potential (United Nations General Assembly, 1989). Making education accessible is a fight against poverty as postulated by Sen (1999) considering that “poverty is deprivation of one’s full potential to do or become as they so desire” (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 2014, p. 7). Therefore, education should be universally accessible even to those learners whose poor financial background often denies them such opportunity (UNESCO, 2015, p. 10).

Principally, State Parties are mandated to create opportunities to acceptable level of learning as the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action proclaims that every child has a fundamental right to education and must be given the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning (UNESCO, 1994). This contention is rooted from the participating states’ mandate that education systems should be designed, and educational programmes implemented to take into account the wide diversity of these characteristics and needs including those learners with socioeconomic deficiencies (UNESCO, 1994, p. 6-7).

Generally, countries across the globe have recommitted to make education inclusive as Article 5 of Education 2030 Framework for Action proclaims that the education 2030 agenda should be inspired by a humanistic vision of education and development based on human rights and dignity; social justice; inclusion; protection and ethnic diversity; and shared responsibility and accountability (UNESCO, 2015, p. 9). The new view of equitable access to education is encapsulated in the proposed SDG 4 that reads: “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” (United Nations, 2015, p. 17). This marks transformative and universal target in an effort to attend

to the 'unfinished businesses' of the EFA agenda and the education-related MDGs. The international human rights policies as adopted by participating countries inform the establishment of regional legal framework to address similar educational issues as discussed below.

3.2.2 Regional policies on access to education

In Africa, certain policies and protocols have been developed which mandate member states to improve socioeconomic conditions of poverty-stricken learners to expand access to secondary education and enhance their learning and development (African Union Commission, 2016, p. 10). These include the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1999), the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) Protocol on Education and Training; the SADC Revised Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RRISDP) (2015-2020), and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) (2007).

Article 11 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1999) guarantees the right to education for all children in Africa thereby compelling state parties to ensure equal opportunity and general accessibility to education without discrimination for all persons. State Parties are under a general obligation in respect of all the economic, social and cultural rights in the African Charter to at least ensure economic accessibility of education (African Commission on Human and People' Rights, 2017). Ensuring economic accessibility means State parties should ensure that secondary education is accessible for vulnerable children such as the poverty-stricken masses of rural settlements (African Commission on Human and People' Rights, 2017, p. 10). Accessibility of education by poverty-stricken learners should also ensure that abilities of such individual learners are realized and nurtured. The promotion of an individual's capacity and enhancing holistic development of their cognitive and creative emotional abilities to reach full potential is proclaimed by Article 13(3) of African Youth Charter (African Union Commission, 2006, p. 20).

Southern African Development Community (SADC) treaty provides a legal framework for economic cooperation and integration between countries in the Southern African region (SADC, 1997) so as to promote sustainable and equitable economic growth and socio-

economic development. This would ensure poverty alleviation and eradication, enhance the standard and quality of life of the people of Southern Africa and to support the socially disadvantaged groups such as learners living in poverty through regional integration (SADC, 1997, p. 1). Furthermore, having realized continuous impact of poverty on education access, SADC member states developed a Revised Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (2015-2020) the objectives of which include improvement of monitoring and analysis of poverty trends in the region, increasing access to quality and relevant education and other areas for social and economic integration and development (SADC, 2017, p. 9).

New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD)'s main commitment is to put Africa on sustainable development path as well as improving human development through improvement of socioeconomic circumstances of poor African families so as to enable them to afford their children's educational expenses (NEPAD, 2007, p. 1; Commonwealth Education Partnerships, 2007, p. 179). Similarly, in addressing the crisis of poverty, African Union (AU) encourages a partnership among member states to establish poverty reduction programmes such as school feeding and education grants in schools to help those learners whose parents cannot meet the children's basic needs (African Union, 2016, p. 13).

In general, both international and regional communities commit that their citizens would have equitable access to education through recognition and adoption of human-rights oriented policies.

3.3 UNDERSTANDING EQUITABLE ACCESS TO EDUCATION

Beyond issues of equality and human rights is a great concern on social and economic differences that affect learners' individual abilities to participate in education, and this is central to equity. This calls for a distinction between equality and equity in how they apply in access to education. Jacob and Holsinger (2008, p. 4) define equality as the act of being equal in terms of quantity, rank, status, value, or degree while equity considers the social justice ramifications of education in relation to the fairness, justness, and impartiality of its distribution at all levels or educational sub-sectors especially its accessibility of the most marginalised citizens.

UNESCO (2018, p. 17) indicates that while equality can be applied across individuals, groups or countries, and to different indicators, equity can be applied with different understandings of the wider ramifications of the distribution of education. In his work of social justice, Rawls (2001, p. 42-43) says that inequalities are to be attached to offices and positions open to all, under conditions of fair equality of opportunity, but argues that they should be the greatest benefit of the least-advantaged members of society. In this regard equity equals “fair equality of opportunity” which connotes that governments could distribute educational inputs unequally to compensate the least advantaged learners, thus redistribution (UNESCO, 2018, p. 32, Barrett & Tikly, 2012, p. 7; Savage, Sellar & Gorur, 2013, p.162). Equity has two dimensions namely fairness and inclusion; fairness involves ensuring that personal and social circumstances, for example socioeconomic status, do not become obstacle achieving educational potential while inclusion entails ensuring a basic minimum standard of education for all (OECD, 2007, p. 11).

An OECD report (2019, p. 22) states that equity in education means that a school must provide equal learning opportunities to all learners so that they achieve similar levels of academic performance in key cognitive and psychosocial domains, such as reading, mathematics and science, and self-confidence and social integration respectively. The OECD (2019, p. 6) indicates that some 11% of socioeconomically disadvantaged learners across OECD countries such as Algeria, Hong Kong, Iceland and Montenegro, score in the top quarter of science performance in their own countries. Thus, equity brings resilience even in the socioeconomically disadvantaged countries. As Maitzegui-Onate and Santibanez-Gruber (2008) observe, unlike equality, equity is more just and empowering. Thus, equity encompasses an element of social justice and frees itself from being limited to the practices of equality which, theoretically, are not necessarily fair (Maitzegui-Onate & Santibanez-Gruber, 2008, p. 375). Accordingly, equity acknowledges the existence of unequal treatment in education process to “make equal” starting points for groups from disadvantaged backgrounds.

In line with Sen’s (2009, p. 5) capability approach, Marginson, (2011, p. 28) argues that the significant rationale for promotion of equitable access to education is its potential to advance human freedoms. Similarly, Unterhalter (2009, p. 417) states that understanding

equity should be associated with a belief about people's access to powerful knowledge and importance of everyday relations of respecting each other in spite of whatever differences. The advancement of human freedom and opportunity for learners of all socioeconomic backgrounds in any school setting is argued to promote quality education. To determine the extent to which an education is equitably accessible, research suggests an assessment of the extent to which the following four values are addressed, presence, acceptance, participation, and achievement:

3.3.1 Presence

Presence refers to allowing learners to get through the school gates which is an important but an insufficient measure of access. Centre for Legal Studies (CLS) (2009, p. 21) indicates that a learner has not gained meaningful access to education if they are too hungry to concentrate in class, or if their teacher does not arrive to teach them. If justice is to be done, every learner's presence at schools entails complete participation in daily class activities without education provision in segregated settings (Humphrey, 2008, p. 42). The acknowledgement and respect for individual differences requires that educational institutions should be designed in such a way that there is equitable entitlement of every child to education throughout their presence in school (Terzi, 2014, p. 484).

3.3.2 Acceptance

Acceptance means that education is established in a way that it is adequately satisfactory to learners, and it is relevant and culturally appropriate (UNESCO, 2015, p. 12). Acceptance should involve the use of harmonious language of instruction to every learner, prohibition of corporal punishment, recognition and respect of social, economic and cultural diversity as well as preferential access (McCowan, 2016, p. 1). That is, acceptance of learners of low socioeconomic status education is the one that is free from discrimination. Beiter (2005, p. 19) argues that access to education is an indispensable measure of education system which is free from all sorts of discrimination. This connotes that those learners who are from disadvantageous background such as low Socioeconomic Status (SES) should not be discriminated against but rather be provided with enough resources for them to fully participate in education. This could be enhanced by equality of opportunity in learning process, and quality teaching which ultimately

improve learning outcomes and successful progression through education (UNICEF, 2011, p. 11).

Acceptance is vital for the survival rate for learners of low socioeconomic status within an education system and this is dependent on the kind of treatment learners get from teachers and their affluent counterparts (Gomez, Allen, & Clinton, 2004, p. 112). For example, unequal allocation of teacher's attention has many reasons, one of which may be the learner's socio-economic status (Irajzad, 2017, p.131, Parker, 2013, p. 43). Therefore, if a learner comes from a family of low socioeconomic status, their confidence becomes lower since they feel unaccepted and unfit to interact with teachers and their affluent counterparts. This stratification in terms of socioeconomic status (high versus low) presents a challenge to achieving educational equity (Ramburuth & Hartel, 2010, p. 154). Madani (2019, p.102) argues that reduction of all types of discrimination including social, and economical discrimination, is critical for the enhancement of educational quality. In a school with predominance of learners from high socioeconomic status, learners from low socioeconomic status may feel threatened and feel unaccepted (Ramburuth & Hartel, 2010, p. 15), and distance themselves from their in-group (Ramburuth & Hartel, 2010, p. 155).

3.3.3 Participation

UNESCO (2005, p. 22-23) describes access to education as universal provision of opportunities to participate in defined minimum level of education for all. On the other hand, Otero and McCoshan (2005) perceive access to education as participation in each of the phases of lifelong learning and development. According to these authors, participation means that an individual has had the opportunity to experience an education or training opportunity to their full potential (Otero & McCoshan, 2005, p. 17, CALS, 2009, p. 22). Participation goes along with contribution to and enjoyment of civil, economic, social, cultural, and political development, through which human rights and fundamental freedoms can be enhanced (UNICEF 2007, p. 11). Basically, access to education is the capacity to participate in and receive a good quality education (Humphrey, 2008, p. 42; UNESCO, 2005, p. 15). Accessing good quality education is influenced by several factors including but not limited to individual and family socioeconomic factors, cultural factors, political motivation, and policy formulation which are geared toward education

achievement (Commonwealth Education Hub, 2016, p. 2). Equitable access to education, progresses to participation which leads to academic success (Gidley, Hampson, Wheeler, & Bereded-Samuel, 2010, p.146),

3.3.4 Achievement

Consortium for Research on Education, Access, Transitions and Equity (CREATE) (2008, p. 1) argues that access to education must be approached not simply by looking at enrolment figures but also at other indicators such as survival rates, completion rates and assessment about educational quality and process. Equitable access to education could also be understood through academic achievement. Achievement is based on the proclamation that there is a need to focus on well-defined learning accomplishments (value functionings) as a major outcome of the education process if equitable access to education is to be achieved (UNESCO, 2005, p. 15). That is, to add more strength to meaningful access to education, learners should not only be able to participate fully in education, but they must also attain good academic outcomes. Additionally, true access to education mandates social and educational institutions to equalise people's capabilities by giving necessary human and financial resources that support them to achieve the functionings they have reason to value (Terzi, 2014, p. 486). Related to achievement, individual and social development are some of the attributes of meaningful access to education. However, in most of the developing countries such as Lesotho the socioeconomic conditions of a learner restrict enjoyment of meaningful access to education (CLS, 2009, p. 26; Commonwealth Education Hub, 2016, p. 20).

Concerted efforts to overcome barriers limiting the presence, acceptance participation and academic achievement of learners are needed for every learner, regardless of family socioeconomic background, to equitable access to quality education through the principle of inclusive education (UNESCO, 2017, p. 13; Gidley, Hampson, Wheeler & Bereded-Samuel, 2010, p. 123) as discussed in the following section.

3.4 Inclusive education

The current study argues that to ensure equitable access to education, education systems must establish relevant strategies to combat socioeconomic barriers to education. It is therefore imperative to discuss how inclusive education must be understood in relation to equitable access to education prior to discussion on the influence of socioeconomic factors

on equitable access to education. UNESCO (2005, p. 10) asserts that inclusive education involves adopting a broad vision of Education for All which is substantiated by social justice. Through its slogan of 'All means All' UNESCO, (2020, p. 18-19) articulates that achievement of inclusive education would then translate into equitable access to education by addressing the spectrum of needs of all learners, including those who are vulnerable to poverty, marginalisation, and exclusion. Literature reveals inclusive education is a shift away from related terms such as special education and integrated education (Maringa, McConkey & Myezwa, 2014). In principle, inclusive education replaced special education which was unable to meet all the requirements of the healthy society with equal opportunity to access education for everyone (Andriichuk, 2017, p. 98). Therefore, to understand the term inclusive education, it has to be conceptualised in relation to its differential features from the terms: special education, special units and integrated education as they relate to how inclusive education came into being (Maringa, McConkey & Myezwa 2014, p. 26). UNESCO, (2005, p.9) indicates that Special education has been provided as a supplement to general education provision, in other cases it has been entirely separate.

Special education is a "specially" designed instruction to meet the unique needs and abilities of exceptional learners (Montenegro, 2007, p. 2). Maringa et al. (2014, p. 28) point out that special education assumes that there should be a separate group of children who have special education needs and such children are referred to as "special needs children". The group of children with special education needs, comprises of learners with physical, sensory, intellectual or multiple impairments (Stainback & Stainback, 1996, p. 4). On the other hand, special units refer to special classrooms or buildings, generally with special teacher, solely for children with special educational needs (Maringa et al. 2014, p. 28). Special education practices were then moved into the mainstream through an approach known as "integration" (UNESCO, 2005, p.9). Integrated education is viewed as the process of bringing children with disabilities into an ordinary school but focusing on the individual child fitting into the existing school system and doing little to adjust the system (Maringa et al., 2014, p. 28). In other texts, the term is used synonymously with mainstreaming whose purpose is to ensure possible differences among Learners with Special Education Needs (LSEN) and their "normal" counterparts are eliminated as far as

possible (Lynas, 1986, p. 63). Learners are considered integrated if they spend any part of the school day with regular class peers (Salend, 1999, p. 10). Similarly, MoET (2019, p. 1) defines integration as the process of placing persons with disabilities in existing mainstream education institutions with the understanding that they can adjust to the standardized requirements of such institutions including existing contextual arrangements as well as the curricula provision and educational facilities. Following this definition, the general connotation is that integration is the process of ensuring placement of Learners with Special Education Needs (SEN) in a venue or setting without considering the quality of education provided (Winter & O'Raw, 2010, p. 12).

The other disadvantageous feature of integration is that the placed LSEN are expected to “compete on as near equal terms as possible with normally hearing pupils” (Lynas 1986, p. 63) based on “assimilation” perspective of integration. Education authorities who use assimilation also adopt a principle of normalisation where nondisabled people standards are used to assess normality and anyone else has to conform or be judge atypical (Thurman & Fiorelli, 1979, p. 342). This practice does not cherish social justice and lacks principle of equity since it does not recognise innate deficiencies that would otherwise be put into cognizance by the proponents of inclusive education. In the long run, the concept of integration was quickly abandoned in favour inclusive education following the Salamanca World on Special Education (Hausstätter & Jahnukainen, 2014, p.119). On the other hand, inclusive education covers diverse learners far beyond disability perspective. The effective way of responding to the diverse needs of all learners (including LSEN) should start with transforming the existing education system from a system of separate/segregated education (isolating special education from regular education) to a single integrated system (Swart, Engelbrecht, Eloff, Pettipher & Oswald, 2002, p. 177). This is imperative for guaranteeing social justice to every learner because public institutions such as schools are duty-bound to champion and distribute human rights (Rawls, 1971, p. 6). Furthermore, if society is in favour of inclusion, and parents as well as schools are willing to implement it in education, governments are more likely to provide necessary policy guidelines and financial support (Pijl, Meijer & Hegarty, 1997, p. 152).

The shift from special education to inclusive education was given a major boost by the Salamanca Statement. The final report of the World Conference on Special Education- Access and quality indicates that the concept of special educational needs should include, besides people with disabilities, all those who are experiencing difficulty on a temporary or permanent basis, who are repeating continually their school years, who are forced to work, who live on the streets, who live far from any school, who are extremely poor, who are victims of wars, who suffer abuses, or who are simply out of school, for whatever reason (UNESCO 1994, p. 15). In this regard, schools that design their policies and practices in a way that respond to and acknowledge these differences qualify to be inclusive. Salamanca Statement proclaims that regular schools with an inclusive orientation are: "...the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, building an inclusive society, and achieving education for all." (UNESCO, 1994, p.16). Armstrong, Armstrong and Spandagou (2009, p. 9), argue that special education by definition does not highlight or promote the need for wider participation for all learners around the world embraced by principles of equity, human rights, social justice and human diversity.

Based on the argument above, Maringa et al. (2014, p. 28) view inclusive education as the process of restructuring of cultures, policies and practices to respond to the diversity of learners with various special needs in their localities. The idea of restructuring of policies and practices is encapsulated in Magnusson, Goransson and Lindqvist's (2019) understanding of inclusive education. Magnusson et al. (2019, p. 71) view inclusive education as the set of political ideals, even decrees for educational practice, ranging from specific definitions and foci on learners with special needs or disabilities, to broader ideals of "creating Education for All (EFA)". EFA and inclusion focus on access to education, but inclusive education means that access to education should be without discrimination or exclusion for any individual or group within or outside the school system" (UNESCO, 2005, p. 29). Therefore, to smoothen access to education for any child with disadvantaged background; it being disability or poverty, practices and policies of educational institutions should accommodate everyone. Engelbrecht and Green (2007, p. 42) rightly point out that inclusive education is about changing and transforming the education system to accommodate all children, regardless of the strength or weakness in

any area and have them become part of the school community. In so doing, diverse needs of learners, including those of low socioeconomic status, would be met (Nutbrown & Clough, 2006, p. 42; Hence, Clancy & Goastellec, 2007, 146; Gidley, Hampson, Wheeler & Bereded-Samuel, 2010, p. 123).

Inclusive education further entails the process of ensuring that personal and social circumstances, for example socio-economic status, do not become obstacles to achieving educational potential for learners from poor background (Santiago, Tremblay, Basri, & Arnal, 2008, p. 13-14). In this regard, schools should eliminate barriers to access, presence, participation and academic achievement in order to provide excellent educational experiences and outcomes for all children. Slee (2019, p.7) argues that inclusive education responds to educational underachievement and diminished social opportunities of all vulnerable learners including those living in poverty and those displaced by conflict or natural disasters. This definition is rooted from UNESCO's adage that "...every learner matters and matters equally" (UNESCO, 2017, p. 12).

Central and highly imperative to the creation of the necessary context for the development of inclusive education are national policies on inclusion, local support systems and appropriate forms of curriculum and assessment (UNESCO, 2009, p. 18). Moreover, inclusive education brings about equity by transforming schools and other centres of learning to ensure equitable access to education all children of both genders, from linguistic and ethnic minorities, rural populations and diverse socioeconomic background (UNESCO, 2017, p. 13). Further inclusive education obliges teachers to be prepared to teach learners from poverty and work with those who have been traumatized (Izard, 2016, p.19). One of the ways to work harmoniously with the low socioeconomic status learners is learner engagement.

Engagement involves loving, caring and motivating learners in doing learning activities (Jensen, 2013, p.1) and refers to stimulating constructive behaviours, emotions or affect, and cognitions (Furlong, 2014, p. 1). Furthermore, learner engagement has a behavioural component which comprises of social and participatory actions that are visible indicators of the degree to which a poverty-stricken learner could be connected to school and other significant units such as community and family neighbourhood (Jimerson, Campos, &

Greif, 2003, p. 23). Equally important is psychological which refers to the affective aspects of learner connectedness, such as positive feelings toward school, teachers, and peers (Jimerson et al., 2003, p. 23). Related to psychological component is cognitive component which Jimerson et al. (2003, p. 23) describes as involving learners' sense of self-efficacy, level of motivation, perceptions as well as beliefs towards their teachers and peers. For example, learners who perceive teachers and peers as caring tend to develop a positive sense of academic self-efficacy and have future aspirations coupled with clear, developmentally appropriate expectations and are more likely to be engaged in school and other social contexts (Furlong, 2014, p. 4).

Additionally, inclusive education as a social arrangement created on behalf of children and youth, may be considered to be difficult if children and youth are often not perceived to be equipped with the ability to decide and communicate their own valued functionings (Dalkilic & Vadeboncoeur, 2016, p. 128). Writers advocating for education within the framework of capabilities, (Terzi, 2007), often overlook the support of children in determining valued functionings in favour of adult decision-making on the matter. Moreover, equal educational outcomes can only be achieved if more educational resources are devoted to the less talented and those from a socially and economically impoverished background. Basically, equity in educational opportunities as well as opportunities should be open to all with 'a fair chance to attain them' (Rawls, 1971, p. 73).

Beneficiaries of the inclusion project should all have their voices heard (Haug's, 2003b, p. 9). Inclusive education is thus the process of securing and guaranteeing the right of children to access, participation and success in their local regular schools (Slee, 2019, p.9). Enhancement of such rights should go hand in hand with equity which recognizes and emphasizes learners' diversity but as this study maintains, that despite globally recognised slogans such as 'leaving no one behind' mandating education systems to respond to learner diversity, schools remain ill-equipped. As du Plooy and Zilindile (2014, p. 197-198) note, inclusive education, as influenced from the West, has been preoccupied with physical access without tangible methods of ensuring epistemological access. Universal access to education has failed to account for the multiple contextual influences on equality of educational opportunities (du Plooy & Zilindile, 2014, p.198) including the

families' socioeconomic resources as buffers (Lacour & Tissington, 2011, p. 527) at secondary school level where costs, for many developing countries, are borne by parents.

The aim of inclusive education is to improve learning and participatory process of all learners including those vulnerable to exclusionary pressures. Thus, inclusive education must overcome existing barriers especially those that emanate from socioeconomic circumstances to access to quality education (Mariga, McConkey & Myezwa, 2014, p. 26). An inclusive approach to education is one that strives to promote quality in the classroom (UNESCO, 2005, p. 16). In order to move towards quality education, changes are required at several levels.

Quality education

Chapman and Adam (1998, p. 2) define quality education as inputs (numbers of teachers, teacher training), processes (amount of direct instructional time, extent of active learning), outputs (test score, graduation rates) and outcomes which involves performance in subsequent employment. Similar to Babalola (2004), Madani (2019, p.101) states that quality of education refers to the worth of education with reference to its learners, learning environments, content inputs, the teaching-learning processes and the outputs/outcomes. Oji (2007, p. 90) indicates that the quality of input refers to the worth of teachers, trainees, textbooks, technology of delivery, and tasks or curriculum while quality of the process deals with the worth of teaching learning process that involves lesson plans, delivery methods, classroom organization and control, student-teacher interactions, pupils' participation, assessment and evaluation, marking etc. The author further says that the quality of outcome and output involves the academic achievement and attainment, value added through education, results of internal and external examinations (Oji, 2007, p. 90)

UNESCO (2004) has observed two principles to define quality education. Firstly, there is a need to recognize the cognitive development of learners as the major objective of all education systems. The second definitional principle stresses the role of education in promoting the values and attitudes of the learners and in nurturing their creative and emotional development (UNESCO, 2004, p. 29). Furthermore, a school can be said to promote quality education if it creates an environment that is healthy, safe, and gender

sensitive, well managed classrooms and provide adequate resources and facilities for learning (UNICEF, 2000, p. 4).

Tikly and Barrett (2007) identify three dimensions of quality education namely inclusion, relevance and participation. Tikly and Barrett (2007, p. 3) argue that inclusion should be understood as the opportunity to achieve, and not just in terms of access to schools. The distribution of resources is a key in inclusive education and it should be based the notion of capability approach which recognises individual's ability to convert resources into educational outcomes (Tikly & Barrett 2007, p. 3).

While inclusion involves distribution of educational resources and ability possessed by individuals to effectively make use of those resources, relevance on the other hand concerns what outcomes emanate from the utilization of those resources (Barrett & Tikly 2012, p.3). Relevance relates to socioeconomic context and human development needs of individual learners which, from capabilities perspective, enhances opportunities of learners to lead sustainable livelihoods in their diverse local environments (Barrett, 2007, p. 3). Enhancement of opportunities should therefore target the most marginalised groups such as those learners who are from low socioeconomic families (Barrett & Tikly 2012, p. 4).

Participation relates to the recognition that every learner, regardless of their socioeconomic status should be granted chance to contribute in decisions that affect them (Fraser 2007). This feature of social justice involves social arrangements that permit all to engage in social life equally as peers. On the view of justice as participatory parity, overcoming injustice means dismantling institutionalized obstacles that prevent marginalised people from participating at par with their affluent counterparts and as full partners in social processes such as learning (Fraser, 2007, p. 27). Inclusive education is part of the process of social inclusion. Thus, the whole community has an essential role to play in the growth and development of its young people (Van Roekel, 2008, p. 1). Barrett and Tikly (2012) argue that good quality education arises from interactions between three overlapping contexts, namely the policy, the school and the home and community context. Each context should be analysed in order to ensure that enabling inputs and processes have the effect of closing the gaps that sometimes exist between

contexts and creating greater synergy and coherence (Barrett & Tikly 2012, p. 5). For example, there might be 'implementation gap' between a national policy and how it is implemented at the school level which requires engaging with the experiences and views of teachers, parents and community, ensuring that initial and continuing professional development opportunities are consistent with the demands of new curricula and other initiatives, and providing support for schools in implementing and monitoring change (Barrett & Tikly 2012, p. 5).

It can be argued that governments must address the 'learning gap' that often exists between learning that takes place in schools, home and community context of learners by focusing on the health and nutrition of learners and working with parents to create an enabling home environment to support learning especially for those families with lack of socioeconomic resources. This coincides with Colby and Misker's (2000, p. 4) argument that quality education should involve learners who are healthy, well nourished, and ready to participate and learn, supported in learning by their families and communities. Furthermore, Van Roekel, (2008, p. 1), pinpoints that parents and family members play pivotal role in a child's education and the broader community too has a responsibility to assure high-quality education for all learners regardless of their socioeconomic status.

3.6 UNDERSTANDING SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

Many countries around the world have long accepted that they must strive for inclusive education, as a global mandate (Pijl, Meijer & Hegarty, 1997, p. 114) so as to facilitate access and participation of all learners in mainstream education. Inclusive education covers learners from diverse backgrounds including those whose socioeconomic background denies them access to fully participate in education. Poverty eradication and enhancement of inclusive education is a combined effort to realise peoples' rights to education declared through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948). However, the focus has, for the most part, been on persons with disabilities to the detriment of factors that have potential of influencing academic performance among learners from low socio-economic status (UNICEF, 2016, p. 49).

A learner's socioeconomic background entails elements such as parents' educational level, family income as well as support from community (neighbourhood) (Coleman, et al.

1966, et al. p. 307). These elements emanate from family institution which Abdu-Raheem (2015, p. 123) views as responsible for the development of the child's physical, cognitive and moral dispositions. The family is the first, the smallest, but the most important unit of a child's social organization. Collectively, these elements constitute a person's SES. Coleman (1968) asserts that SES should be perceived by reviewing the interaction between three forms of capital namely; financial capital, human capital and social capital. Capital refers to resources and assets needed to advance life of a human being (Coleman, 1968, p. 98). Krieger et al. (1997), similarly, indicate that capital is linked to historic ideas about SES, such as social and material resources and it brings into focus the important dimension of social relationships and community connection.

According to Coleman (1968, p. 98-99), human capital refers to parent's education, and financial capital means parents' income while social capital is related to interaction, networking and bonding among learners and parents as well as community at large. Goldin (2014, p.1) adds that human capital refers to the stock of knowledge, habits, social and personality attributes, including creativity, embodied in the ability to perform labour so as to produce economic value. This connotes that attributes of human capital have potential of determining one's financial capital since education opens doors to employment where a person is able to earn income to spend on daily needs. Curtiss (2012, p.2) asserts that financial capital refers to the purchasing power or medium that represents saved-up financial wealth, usually in the form of currency, which is used by firms or individual entrepreneurs to invest and/or to start a business, that is, to purchase or acquire physical capital.

Furthermore, Ostrom (2001, p.172) postulates that regardless of whether or not intended, social capital is viewed as an investment in social relationships that make available to individuals, a stock of resources raising returns from individual and joint efforts. Thus, as people interact, they tend to share livelihoods through resources and other necessities such as education and business transactions. That is, it is through the interaction of these three forms of capital that one's SES is determined as either high or low (Coleman, 1968, p. 98). Low SES translates into poverty (UNDP, 2006, p. 3; Wadsworth, Raviv, Reinhard, Wolff, Santiago, & Einhorn, 2008, p. 310) which is characterised by material lack or want,

thus lack or little wealth or low quality of assets such as shelter, clothing, furniture, personal means of transport and poor access to services including educational services (UNDP, 2006, p. 3-4). A learner coming from a family deficient of the three forms of capital is defined as living in poverty or simply “poor” (Santiago, Wadsworth, & Stump, 2011, p.228, Gweshengwe & Hassan, 2020, p.6). This forms the basis why low SES is used interchangeably with poverty in some literature.

Poverty could also be looked at by employing Capability Approach (CA) of Amartya Sen (UNDP, 2006). Sen (2001, p. 5) indicates that poverty is the lack of capability to function effectively in society, and inadequate education can thus be considered a form of poverty. CA further defines poverty as the absence or inadequate realization of certain basic freedoms, such as the freedoms to avoid hunger, disease, illiteracy, and so on (United Nations 2004, p. 9). These freedoms are determined by how far a state considers and respects its people’s fundamental human rights in participating in essential life spheres such as education. Deprivation in these freedoms is viewed as poverty (UNDP, 2006, p. 3). Maximization of peoples’ freedoms is a way of reducing poverty and comes with realization and respect for human rights. A major contribution of a human rights approach to poverty reduction is the empowerment of poor people, expanding their freedom of choice and action to structure their own lives (United Nations 2004, p. 14). Freedom to choose what one desires to do or become, and the ability to do or become so is determined by one’s access to relevant resources or services such as education (Sen, 1992, p. 46; Bakhshi, Hoffman & Radja, 2003, p. 2-3).

3.7 THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIOECONOMIC FACTORS ON EQUITABLE ACCESS TO EDUCATION

It has been established that poverty emerges as the most significant barrier to accessing education (White, 1982, p. 478; UNICEF, 2014, p. 7). Scholars such as Adams (1996, p. 23) argue that the low SES has negative effect on the academic performance of learners because of the basic needs of learners that remain unfulfilled and thus denies them opportunity to fully participate in learning process. To this extent, access to education for such poverty-stricken learners is not up its fullest potential if their participation and academic achievement as values governing equitable access to education (Otero & McCoshan, 2005, p. 17; Terzi, 2014, p. 486) are low. This results in a gap between the

rich and the poor noticeable in the case whereby learners from families with high SES outsmart those who are from poverty-stricken families. Results of a study by Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA, 2010, p. 35) confirm that children from poor families lag behind those of higher social classes in developing performance and competences. Poor academic achievement among the poverty-stricken learners is the result of their cognitive deficiencies. Correspondingly, Heyneman and Loxley (1983) contend that academic development is influenced by both out-of-school and in-school conditions. Learners from families of high SES have a competitive advantage over their poverty-stricken counterparts to achieve higher scores leading to easier college admission (Crosnoe & Schneider, 2010). Parents with better social, human and financial capital provide more instrumental resources for their children to succeed (Crosnoe & Schneider, 2010, p. 95).

3.7.1 Cognitive deficiencies

McLoyd (1998, p. 198) argues that the reason for the deficient cognitive abilities of learners from impoverished families is that they are subjected to stress during pregnancy or receive insufficient developmental stimulus from their families. Solga, Stern, Rosenblatt, Schupp, and Wagner, (2005, p. 98) assert that learners with the same cognitive and educational competences perform clearly worse than their counterparts from more privileged family backgrounds. Starting from as early as age 5, children from poverty-stricken families are more likely than their more affluent peers to present developmental delays in literacy and numeracy and this is more serious in secondary education which is a steppingstone into tertiary level (UNICEF, 2015, p. 53). Moreover, poverty does not only hinder cognitive development in childhood, but also casts a negative influence over adolescent academic achievement as well (Conger, Conger, & Elder, 1997, p. 308).

Additionally, learners of low-SES often portray cognitive problems, including short attention spans, high levels of distractibility, difficulty monitoring the quality of their work, and difficulty generating new solutions to problems (Alloway, Gathercole, Kirkwood & Elliott, 2009, p. 618). In the long run many children who struggle cognitively either act out (exhibit problem behaviour) or shut down (show learned helplessness) Buschkuehl & Jaeggi, 2010, p. 478). Additionally, Armstrong (2010, p. 49) observes that poor diets result

in vitamin deficiencies, particularly B vitamins, and anaemia, which can cause long lasting neurological deficits when untreated. Asthma and lead poisoning are both common among children living in poverty, can negatively impact brain function and interfere with learning and learner's general functioning and behaviour in the classroom (Armstrong, 2010, p. 49). With these deficiencies, learners living in poverty may portray pessimistic and demotivating sense of self-concept in the form of lack of confidence and low self-esteem.

3.7.2 Learner self-concept

The developmental delay in literacy and numeracy among the poverty-stricken learners is further exacerbated by their feeling of low self-esteem (US Department of Education, 2003, p. 20). The low self-esteem is rooted from their parents' inability to afford their learning costs as Ridge and Millar (2008) observe that poverty-stricken learners choose not to inform their parents about education trips and other school costly activities for they know that their parents could not afford them. Understood from the perspective of the child, this can be seen as a coping mechanism to avoid the stress that may result from asking for money at home (Ridge, 2011, p. 83; Hooper, Gorin, Cabral, & Dyson, 2007, p. 148). However, this tendency often results in shame and humiliation among the poor learners. Jo (2013, p. 515) argues that shame and humiliation can result in isolation thereby corroding social relations and breaking down social capital. Thus, a poverty-stricken learner would feel lonely and unfit to befriend other learners whose socioeconomic conditions make them better-off fulfilled with adequate social connections. Shame, whether felt or anticipated, epitomises the threat to any social bond between a learner and their social learning environment (Chase & Walker, 2013, p. 752).

Additionally, social class, translated in SES (APA, 2007), gives rise to self-labelling among affluent and non-affluent learners and this affect their self-confidence respectively, and this ultimately affect their academic performance. For example, learners who come from poor families label themselves 'hard interdependence' (Stephens, Markus, & Phillips, 2014). This emanates from their long exposure to higher levels of material constraints and fewer opportunities for influence, choice, and control, and as such, these learners tend to afford an understanding of the self and behaviour as interdependent with others and the social context that demand them to develop some academic resilience to cope

with adversity (Stephens, Markus, & Phillips 2014, p. 615). Moreover, social class also opens up the potential for affluent learners to hold prejudiced attitudes and to engage in discriminatory behaviour towards those from a lower SES of which the end result is poor academic performance (Kraus, Piff & Keltner, 2011, p. 248). On the other hand, those who grow up in affluent, middle-class contexts tend to develop 'expressive independence'. The affluent learners worry far less, if ever all, about making ends meet or overcoming persistent socioeconomic threats which reinforce the independent cultural ideal of expressing their personal preferences, influencing their social contexts, standing out from others, and developing and exploring their own interests and capabilities in education (Stephens, Markus & Phillips, 2014, p. 615).

3.7.3 Influence of home-social environment

Social learning environment of a learner is primarily determined by their parents since parents are imperative pillars of the academic lives of their children. They should be able to influence, maintain and develop their children's interests, creativity and tolerance, and their consistent positive involvement in the learning process and educational activities. "A child's capability to succeed in school depends on how successfully the child is managed by his /her parents in the home environment. It is an environment where the child learns the skills, attitudes and behaviour which could mould them into a productive and successful student..." (Vellymalay, 2012, p. 16). As Vellymalay (2012, p. 16) argues, not every child comes from a home that could provide them with the requisite educational resources necessary for their academic success. In this regard, a parent's socioeconomic status plays an important role in providing these educational resources and it imposes the greatest impact on the child's educational outcomes. Compared to their affluent counterparts, parents in economically deprived circumstances do not afford learning facilities for their children and to send them to the best schools (Bloom (1995 XII–XIII; Singer 2009, p. 283). As a result, their children are less able to perform well if enrolled in schools (Heckman, 2000, p.15).

Similar to home environment, family neighbourhood, has potential of instilling certain attitude towards learning by exposing learners to elders (parents) and even peers who have already given up on education (Oyserman & Destin, 2010, p. 1002). If children form their identity in a context that provides no example of how academic achievement might

be relevant to their personal goals, they are likely to have a negative attitude towards education which is a robust predictive factor in academic success (Blackwell, Trzesniewski, & Dweck, 2007, p. 258). As Murdock, (2009, p. 451) observes, contexts in which learners are able to view academic achievement as a realistic aspect of their group identity and develop positive images of that identity can foster motivation. Therefore, if justice is to be done, governments have to allocate more resources to families with low socioeconomic status so as to enable them get fully involved in the learning process of their children the same way as their affluent counterparts (UNICEF, 2009, p. 85).

3.7.4 Parental involvement in the learning process

Home is regarded as the “first school of the child” while a parent as “the first teacher”. A parent is considered as the main teacher because the child spends most of their time at home rather than at school. Basically, a child learns various things from home through interaction parents (Singh, Horo, & Singh, 2016, p. 26). As many scholars have argued, parental role in their children’s education is very significant for their learning and cognitive development (Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins & Weiss, 2006, p. 660, Midraj & Midraj, 2011, p. 57-258). Parental involvement leads to a child being educated both at home and in school (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005, p.164). Standing (1999, p. 58) postulates that parental role in education is an activity that involves a range of pedagogical and educational tasks including the provision of a positive learning environment, and the organisation of routine household tasks that fit the school day. Parents who do not get involved in their children’s educational process are considered to be capable of repressing and destroying the motivation and ability of their children through neglect and indifference to their achievements (Al-Matalaka, 2014, p. 146). Thus, lack of support and engagement by poverty-stricken parents can correlate with diminished reading development and general performance of learners (Evans, 2004, p. 81). On the other hand, Ferrara and Ferrara, (2005, p. 77) articulate that parental involvement in school promotes increased achievement, less aggression, increased attendance, and increased graduation rates.

As Machen, Wilson, and Notar (2005, p. 334) observe, low socioeconomic status does not only negatively learners’ self-concept but that of their parents too; while parents may want to participate, they are less comfortable around teachers due to inability to afford

good clothes, cosmetics and hair making that would otherwise heighten their confidence. Moreover, poor parents do not only lack the experience of higher education to give specific advice to their children on how to succeed academically but they also do not have a helpful social network as such “think educational issues are solely the teacher’s responsibility” (Lareau, 2003, p. 239-243).

3.7.5 Parents’ occupational status

Among other reasons that parents from low socioeconomic background fail to support their children with schoolwork is lack of time given their low occupational status. Ratcliff and Hunt, (2009, p. 504) observe that the said parents are often working all of the time to take care of their families, and they have no time to participate in their child’s education. On the other hand, parents holding high occupational status have more resources to meet the needs of their homes, while parents holding the low occupational status have limited resources and therefore spend a lot of their time enhancing their livelihoods. As Kalil (2005, p. 177) observes, unstable or insufficient funds limit parents’ ability to purchase resources and goods: schooling, housing, food and cognitively enriched learning environment that are indispensable for their children’s successful development and academic performance. Furthermore, lack of guidance and support from parents of low occupational status is one of the primary reasons their children are less likely to attend school despite the parents’ aspirations and involvements (Jordan & Plank, 2000). That is, learners from lower socio-economic status backgrounds and ethnic minorities are often the victims of lower academic performances, completion of fewer years of schooling and lower career aspirations for their parents’ socioeconomic circumstances inclusive of occupational status, are primarily demotivating (Jordan & Plank 2000, p. 106). Moreover, low occupation status of parents provides feel too belittled and shameful to interact with teachers when they are supposed to participate in their children’s academic activities (Machen, Wilson, & Notar, 2005, p. 34).

Contrary to the observation above, learners whose parents are of high occupation status get involved in both school and home-based learning support activities and parents have direct communication with their children making them attain superior school grades than those from less involved parents (Kingsley (2011, p. 380). To this extent, poorly performing learners often get unmotivated is because of lack of hope and optimism in

learning (Odéen et al., 2012, p. 249), and often show depressive symptoms (Butterworth, Olesen, & Leach, 2012, p. 370). They usually succumb to such discouraging statements such as "I give up...I am useless" resulting from learned helplessness (Robb, Simon, & Wardle, 2009, p. 386). Such statements as Irvin, Meece, Byun, Farmer & Hutchins, (2011, p. 1237) reveal, are symptoms of a stress disorder and depression which are repetitive in families given that parents' low occupational status is also determined by their educational background.

3.7.6 Parents' educational attainment

Similar to parents' occupation, parents' education also influences a learners' good performance as this would come as inspiration to such learners stemming from the message from parents that education is important (Smith, 2004, p. 53). Fundamentally, educated parents convey their expectations and belief more effectively and influence their children to adopt a more positive view of education while illiterate parents may have expectations, but fail to guide their child properly or direct them to aspire for high academic success (Singh, Horo & Singh 2016, p. 26). Additionally, low educational status puts parents at disadvantageous state as they are less likely than middle-class parents to adjust parenting demands of their children with higher needs. For example, Paulussen-Hoogeboom, Stams, Hermanns, & Peetsma (2007, p. 451) point out that many poverty-stricken illiterate parents do not know what to do with children who have learning difficulties such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), attention seeking behaviour or when they are in their teenage stage. In the long run, less educated parents with low-income experience chronic stress which affects their children through chronic activation of their children's immune systems and drain available resources with long-reaching effects (Blair & Raver, 2012, p. 310).

Additionally, Kim (2009, p. 349) observes that cultural capital such as the quality of language parents use and the educational atmosphere of the family have the greatest effect on a child's academic achievement. Basically, parents with higher level of education are more likely to enhance children's academic skills thereby communicating and interacting with them with enthusiasm (Vellymalay, 2012, p. 22). On contrary, parents with low educational levels do not tend to regard learning as a value, and as a result of their attitudes and low self-esteem, they neglect education of their children to the 'experts', the

teaching staff (Bauch & Goldring, 1998, p. 32). When stressed about health care, housing, and food, parents or caregivers of low education status, are more likely to be grumpy and less likely to offer positive comments to their children (Risley & Hart, 2006, p. 87). Learners from such discouraging poor families are likely to drop out and their school failure increases because they are exposed to relational adversity at home (Spilt, Hughes, Wu, & Kwok, 2012, p. 1193). On contrary, parents with high education status monitor their children more often and they use child friendly language that motivates their children. They are able to describe their children's best and worst subjects as well as their teachers and coaches (Evans, 2004, p. 81). Friendly and motivating communication between parents and children increases the chances that those children will succeed in schools for they need a social and emotional connection to a role model and in turn the role model needs to give the children an indication that they are loved (National Centre for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2004, p. 5).

3.7.7 Family distresses

Evans, Kim, Ting, Teshler, and Shannis, (2007, p. 349) argue that distress affects brain development of a child, academic success, and social competence. A number of scholars observe that distress also impairs children's behaviour, reduces attentional control, boosts impulsivity and impairs working memory thereby reducing cognitive capacity of learners (Evans & Schamberg, 2009, p. 6546; Liston, McEwen, & Casey 2009, p. 914; Patterson, 2002, p. 3). Family distresses such as death and divorce often result in poverty and this is detrimental to children's education. The absence of one parent because of divorce or death has a negative influence on a child's degree of educational achievement (McLanahan & Sandefur 1994, p. 45; Ku, 2003, p. 17). In fact, couples with low-income are more likely to divorce than middle- and high-income couples. Scholars from parental absence school of thought assert that because of the psychological and practical effects of losing a custodial parent, the academic achievement of a child tends to decrease. For example, Jeynes (2002) argue that there are certain advantages that children from socioeconomically stable families tend to enjoy more advantages and develop well relative to children from non-intact and poor families. These advantages include emotional stability and stress that can result from having only a single caregiver in the home, if for instance, the father is absent. Jensen (2013, p. 27) observes that two

caregivers offer the luxury of a backup, when one parent is at work, busy, or overly stressed, the other can provide for the children so there's always a stabilizing force present. Parental absence reduces the access that a child has to his or her parent leading to the decline in a child's academic achievement (Jeynes, 2002, p.190). Furthermore, cognitive development of children from families with socioeconomic status and fewer household resources are at stake because they become more stressed as they are exposed to environment with adverse life events and these events create early risk of learning delays as well as behavioural and emotional problems (Skowron, 2005, p. 45; Gordon, 2003, p. 191). Such toxic events include both physical and mental abuse, and neglect (Evans, 2004, p. 80; McLoyd 1998, p. 196; Middlemiss, 2003, p. 294).

Sato and Lensmire, (2009) observe that learners living in poverty portray the following behavioural features: 1. laugh when disciplined as a "way to save face in matriarchal poverty"; 2. argue loudly with the teacher; 3. make angry responses; 4. make inappropriate or vulgar comments; 5. physically fight because they "do not have language or belief system to use conflict resolution"; 6. always have their hands on someone else; 7. cannot follow directions because "little procedural memory is used in poverty" and "sequence is not used or valued"; 8. are extremely disorganized because "planning, scheduling, or prioritizing skills" are "not taught in poverty"; 9. complete only part of a task because they have "no procedural self-talk" and "do not 'see' the whole task"; 10. are disrespectful to the teacher because they "may not know adults worthy of respect"; 11. harm other students, verbally or physically; 12. cheat or steal because of "weak support system, weak role models/emotional resources"; and 13. talk incessantly because "poverty is very participatory (Sato & Lensmire, 2009, p. 366).

Additionally, Pogrow (2009, p. 409) points out that when teaching poor students, information seems to go "in one ear and out the other" as they have not mastered an "initial, specialized, thinking development stage" influenced by "home language," which these learners may not have had experience with (Pogrow, 2009, p. 410). On the other hand, Cuthrell, Stapleton, and Ledford (2010) observe the notion that poor learners enter school linguistically disadvantaged because they have been deprived of literacy-promoting experiences as young children. Therefore, the following section discusses the

influence of type of school, whether public or private, and its socioeconomic resources, on learners' performance.

3.8 THE INFLUENCE OF SCHOOL RESOURCES ON ACCESS TO EDUCATION

Children from low SES are, as Connell (1994, p.147) opines, "the least successful by conventional measures and the hardest to teach by traditional methods". Coleman (1968) suggests that schools do not provide teaching and learning opportunities that could reverse the negative effects of learners' SES background on academic development. That is, schools have no influence on learners' performance unless there could be programmes particularly designed to undo damage caused by learners' socioeconomic disadvantage (Coleman et al., 1966). The quality of schooling has been touted as a critical resource for enhancing equitable access to education (Heyneman & Loxley, 1983, p. 1192). The extent to which equality of educational opportunities can be realised has been questioned in various literature. It is alleged that educational systems are biased against the poor through meritocracy, and investments in education perpetuate rather than prevent class-based disparities (Heyneman, 2005, p. 123). The quality of schooling for vulnerable learners is critically affected (Heyneman & Loxley, 1983, p. 1193), if schools that must serve as sources of support have potential to serve as sources of strain (Skovdal & Campbell, 2015, p. 182) due to lack of learning amenities.

Schools as institutions should have values and beliefs cherished to supplement efforts of teachers in teaching learners from poor living conditions (Bandura et al. 2001, p. 206; Eccles et al. 1998, p. 235). Additional to values and beliefs, school characteristics such as grade span; learner-teacher ratio; location; school size and learners' backgrounds are important to constraining or promoting the educational achievement of rural youth from poor communities (Irvin, Byun, Meece, & Farmer, 2011, p. 1236). Irvin et al., (2011, p. 1238) further state that factors that determine academic achievement among rural youth in poor communities include recruitment and retention mechanisms, class size (i.e., learner-teacher ratio) but not school size. Central to all of these characteristics, poverty has detrimental impact on the social teaching and learning process, relationships between learners and parents, and the teachers who serve them. Social and economic differences that emanate from those relationships are like to affect teaching and learning processes negatively if they are not acknowledged and well nurtured, and more often

than not, the most affected are learners from poor socioeconomic families (Goddard, Tschannen-Moran, & Hoy, 2001; p.13), as discussed below:

3.8.1 Teachers recruitment and remuneration

Literature reveals that teachers are part of highly imperative social agents influencing motivation and can even have an impact on learners' school commitment or disengagement as well as performance (Goddard, Tschannen-Moran, & Hoy, 2001, p. 13). In an education system characterized by poorly trained, badly paid and ineffective teachers, learners are unlikely to gain quality education and sufficient learning opportunity and this often reinforces performance inequities among learners since those living in poverty will lag behind compared to their affluent counterparts (UNICEF, 2016, p. 61). These performance inequalities are made worse by teacher absenteeism, lack of classroom planning, and lack of learning supportive resources (Gayle & Pimhidzai, 2013, p. 10-11). Additionally, lack of hygiene and sanitation facilities can also inhibit enrolment and contribute to poor attainment and high drop-out levels among learners (Nadeem, 2011, p. 221; UNICEF 2003, p. 71). Furthermore, one of the threats to access to education is schools' lack of financial resources which often results in a school's failure to pay teachers and this ultimately affect learners' performance (Brannelly & Ndaruhutse, 2008, p. 6).

3.8.2 Qualifications of teachers

Teacher qualifications have been said to determine pedagogical practices in schools affecting the quality of education and access thereof. Pedagogy entails function or work of teaching, that is, the art or science of teaching, education instructional methods (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) 2009a, p. 42). Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2002:10) view pedagogy as the instructional techniques and strategies that allow learning to take place. It refers to the interactive process between teacher/practitioner and learner and it is also applied to include the provision of some aspects of the learning environment including the concrete learning environment, and the actions of the family and community. Alexander (2008, p.1) argues that pedagogy is one of most important aspects of the quality of education and its aspects may act as barriers to enrolment, attendance, and learning. For example, learners may not want to go to

school because there are not good teachers in the schools to teach them properly (Dryden-Peterson, 2009, p. 12).

Teacher should go extra mile to understand learning conditions of poverty-stricken learners and how such conditions affect their performance. If teachers are ignorant or uninformed of such crucial aspect, they may think that poor children slouch, slump, and show little effort because laziness or that of their parents (Economic Policy Institute, 2002). Literature argues that parents from poor families work as much as parents of middle- or upper-class families do and there's no "inherited laziness" passed down from parents (Economic Policy Institute, 2002, p. 6). As Bennett (2008) points out if teachers training programme does not focus on multicultural education regarding poverty and its impact on education, there will always be a gap in pre-service teachers' understanding of the needs of learners in poverty (Bennett, 2008, p. 252). Bennett (2008, p. 252) suggests that since teachers live middle-class life their lifestyle does not harmonise with low-income learners and may not have awareness of their learners' economic backgrounds or mount a culturally responsive teaching. Teachers should therefore see learners as individuals, not as a collective if social justice is to be done. Haberman (2010, p. 82) shares similar sentiment and echoes out that there is actually a "pedagogy of poverty," a form of teaching poor learners that has become accepted but most of education authorities give it least attention. Haberman (2010) has identified the following effective ways of teaching learners in poverty: involving learners with explanations of human differences, helping learners see major concepts as opposed to isolated facts, allowing learners to be involved in planning their activities, grouping learners heterogeneously, and actively involving learners in their own learning. Haberman (2010, p. 87), argues that these teaching strategies can help to "create an alternative to the pedagogy of poverty".

3.8.3 Teacher-learner trust

According to Goddard, Tschannen-Moran, and Hoy, (2001) teacher-learner trust makes schools better places for learners to learn, perhaps by enabling and empowering productive connections between families and schools, and thus enhancing poor learners' performance (Goddard, Tschannen-Moran, & Hoy, 2001, p. 14). The value of trust has potential of fostering equality of opportunity for all learner's even those who come from lower socioeconomic strata (Yell, 1995, p. 403). In the long run, teacher-learner trust

would enable teachers accept learners of low socioeconomic status, and these learners would feel part and parcel of learning system and would therefore develop strong self-efficacy and resilience (Bandura et al., 2001, p. 206). A feeling of belongingness at school enhances academic adjustment and is especially beneficial for youth experiencing poverty and other family hardships (Finn, 1989, p. 141; Juvonen, 2006, p. 273). Moreover, trust and belongingness promote academic motivation and retention of learners (Finn, 1989, p.142). Hardre and colleagues further point out that competency and value beliefs predict academic achievement, educational plans, and success expectations among rural high school learners who are prone to poverty (Hardre and Hennessey, 2010; Hardre et al. 2009).

3.8.4 Classroom Environment

Classroom environment is a “classroom climate” that involves the social, emotional, intellectual and the physical aspects of learning process (Bierman, 2011, p.2). Bierman (2011, p. 2) asserts that a classroom environment created by the teacher through goal-setting, appropriate challenges, and empathy for the learners may bring some major factors contributing to learner achievement as learners experience the classroom as not just an intellectual space, but also as a social, emotional, and physical environment which affect their academic achievement and subject anxiety. Cuthrell, Stapleton and Ledford, (2010) rightly argue teachers should make inclusive lesson plans, initiate activities that are appropriate and meaningful, and create a classroom that is high in challenge and low in threat for every learner. Basically, it is of great importance for teachers to design effective forms of communication with families and integrate community resources so as to pave ways to recognise and fully accept learners of low SES in learning process (Cuthrell, Stapleton, & Ledford, 2010, p.110).

Schools can have only a limited influence on closing the achievement gap between learners who live in poverty and their more affluent peers unless school improvement as well as classroom management are combined with broader social and economic reforms to accommodate every learner regardless of their SES. Without such a combined effort, the mandate for schools to fully close achievement gaps not only will remain unfulfilled, but also will cause people to foolishly and unfairly condemn schools and teachers

(Rothstein, 2008, p. 8). However, Holland (2007, p. 56) asserts that as teachers work hard, even the poorest children can attain high standards of achievement.

3.8.5 School size and learner-teacher ratio

Education practitioners are encouraged to be cognizant of school size and teacher-learner ratio to create a conducive learning environment for poor learners. Smaller schools have smaller learner-teacher ratios which enhance teacher practice and consequent learner perceptions of teaching and motivating strategies while, advantages of large schools, include but not limited to, greater resources and funding, attraction of highly qualified teachers (Hardré & Hennessey, 2010, p. 27). Moreover, in a school with more diverse and advanced courses, learners are likely to experience achievement gains due to small class size, more teacher relatedness (Irvin et al., 2011, p. 1238; Koc & Celik, 2015, p. 68), and the lower incidence of violence usually prevalent in smaller schools (Hardré & Hennessey, 2010, p. 27). Johnson, (2011, p. 105) argue that in schools with smaller learner-teacher ratio, teachers can spend more time with each learner and check their progress and can provide a more individualized teaching. In this regard, teachers could make effort and create time to assist learners whose very socioeconomic conditions have already put them in a disadvantaged position.

Nye et al. (2000b, p. 150) observe that in both urban and rural schools, smaller teacher-learner ratio or class size have been found to produce better educational outcomes. This may be more beneficial for those learners whose socioeconomic circumstances put them at-risk of underachievement and minority background (Konstantopoulos & Chung, 2009, p.153; Nye et al., 2004, p. 99).

3.8.6 Geographic Location of a school

Geographic location of a school has been found to influence access to education. Many poor learners are from rural areas and as Nadeem (2011, p. 221) observes, learners from rural areas attain low academic achievement relative to their urban counterparts. Moreover, when school is in a geographically isolated area, youth tend to have lower educational aspirations because post-secondary schooling is not needed for local job opportunities in most rural industries (e.g., agriculture, manufacturing, resource extraction, or service) (Elder et al., 1996, p. 424). For many rural youths, pursuing post-secondary educational opportunities also involves moving away from their home

communities and this lowers youth's aspirations to maintain their connections to family and community (Hektner, 1995, p. 14; Howley, 2006, p. 79). Furthermore, schools that are in geographically remote areas experience considerable difficulty in recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers, especially in high-need areas such as mathematics, science, and special education (Barley & Brigham 2008; Monk, 2007, p.174). Rural school lack of resources and rural learners might be particularly exposed to certain risks like failure and dropout, illiteracy, and unfinished studies (Boix, Champollion, & Duarte, 2015, p. 40-41).

Cuthrell, Stapleton and Ledford (2010, p. 110) opine that in an effort to ensure good performance of learners living in poverty, school administrators should hire and retain teachers who believe in their learners, increase collaboration throughout the school, use creative scheduling, and spend money on things that work. To this extent, education authorities should enhance working conditions of teachers and efficiently implement relevant policies that champion justice and equity for both teachers and learners. In this regard, such schools could be inclusive education, if they effectively combat discriminatory attitudes, create welcoming communities, build an inclusive society to achieve education for all.

3.9 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

Access to education is accepted globally as human right issue that embraces an element of equity enforced by international and regional treaties and policies which are adopted by participating countries. These treaties inform the establishment of countries' legal framework addressing barriers to equitable access to education such as lack socioeconomic resources. Commitment by international and regional communities to ensure that their citizens have full excess to education through recognition and embracement of human-rights oriented policies embrace values governing inclusive education namely: presence, acceptance, participation, and achievement. Inclusive Education is the process of restructuring of cultures, policies and practices to respond the needs diverse learners such as those with disabilities and those living in poverty. Inclusive education does not support segregation of the learners with special needs but assumes that it is the way policies and educational approaches are designed, that hinder equitable

access and not unique need and features of learners that deny them equitable access to learning opportunities and resources in general.

The chapter notes that a learner's socioeconomic background has a significant influence on their access to education as well as their performance. A learner's socioeconomic background entails significant other elements such as parents' educational level, family income as well as support from community. It is through the interaction of these three forms of capital that one's SES is determined as either high or low. Low socioeconomic status measured by is a clear manifestation of poverty. Poverty in this chapter is viewed a denial of human rights, and that of a learner's freedom of function or become as they so wish. Eradication of poverty and the enhancement of inclusive and equitable quality education for all are two intertwined Sustainable Development Goals.

Child's capability to succeed in school depends on how successfully the child is managed by his /her parents in the home environment. That is, low occupational status, poor education and unreliable source of income of parents are some of the SES factors that decimate children's motivation and opportunity to learn and develop up to their capability. This often results in cognitive and developmental delays in literacy and numeracy along with feeling of shame and low self-esteem. Furthermore, primitive and poverty dominate social and context have potential of instilling negative attitude towards learning by exposing learners to elders (parents) and even peers who have already given up in being educated. Furthermore, the chapter establishes that teachers are part of highly imperative social agents influencing motivation and can even have impact on learners' school commitment or disengagement as well as performance.

CHAPTER FOUR: GLOBAL, REGIONAL AND LOCAL LITERATURE ON THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS ON ACCESS TO SECONDARY EDUCATION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

While many countries are signatory to international conventions on enabling access to education only a handful has made remarkable progress on this mandate. For many the commitment is hindered by inadequate socioeconomic resources which decimate learning and development. Problems also arise from inefficient policies on access to education. This chapter discusses the extent to which socioeconomic factors affect access to secondary education globally. Discussion reflects how policy enactment and general educational practices, in purposively selected countries, address poverty as a barrier to secondary education. Then, literature on the influence of socioeconomic factors on access to secondary education and academic achievement across the selected countries are reviewed. This review is in line with conceptualization of equitable access to education that centres around four values; presence, acceptance, participation and achievement. Finally, the discussion narrows down to the African region and ends with review of literature on access to secondary education in Lesotho.

4.2 GLOBAL TRENDS ON ACCESS TO SECONDARY EDUCATION

Globally, access to education is accepted by governments as a human right that must embrace the principle of equity. Between 2006 and 2015, equity in education, measured by how much variation in performance and explained by learners' socio-economic status, has improved among PISA participating countries (Bulgaria, Chile, Thailand, United States, Brazil, Denmark, Germany, Iceland, Mexico, Montenegro, Korea and Slovenia) (OECD, 2017). Of all the participating countries in PISA, the United States stands out as the country where the impact of learner's socio-economic status on their performance in school weakened the most, and where the likelihood that disadvantaged learners perform at high levels increased the most (OECD, 2017, p. 2). On the other hand, in 2011, South Korea was ranked the topmost country in PISA results and this was boosted by high participation of parents in the education of their children (Peuch, 2011, p. 9). Secondary

education in South Korea is known to be most accessible to followed by Slovenia and Poland (OECD, 2017, p. 44).

In 2012 across OECD countries, (Austria, Canada (Manitoba, Ontario, Québec and Yukon), Czech Republic, France, Greece, Ireland, Netherlands, Spain and Sweden, almost one in every five learners did not reach a basic minimum level of skills to function in today's societies and this indicated lack of inclusion (OECD, 2012, p. 9). Generally, learners from low socio-economic background in these countries are twice as likely to be low performers, implying that socioeconomic circumstances are obstacles to achieving their educational potential, and this indicates lack of equity (OECD, 2012, p. 12). Furthermore, in 2014 the international student achievement tests in secondary education level point to desperately low levels of learning in many low- and middle-income countries (OECD, 2014, p. 4). A survey by PISA (2014) indicates that two thirds or more of secondary school learners in Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Indonesia, Jordan, Peru, Qatar and Tunisia were performing below Level 2, a marker of baseline proficiency in maths. The findings further indicate that less than 1% of the learners were performing at the top two levels (OECD, 2014, p. 4). Moreover, an average of 23% of learners in the high-income OECD countries was low-achieving, and 13 per cent performed at the top level (OECD, 2014, p. 4-5).

A comparative study between 41 OECD richest and middle economy countries by Bruckauf, Chzhen, Cuesta and Gromada (2018) assessing educational inequalities in established that some learners from low socioeconomic status do far worse than others mainly because of, among other reasons, socioeconomic differences such as parents' education and occupation, influence of mother-tongue and neighbourhood (Bruckauf, Chzhen, Cuesta & Gromada, 2018, p. 5, 7). The study further reveals that secondary education in all the countries has large gaps between their best and worst performing learners. Of all the countries, Malta is the most unequal country following Bulgaria, Israel and France, while Latvia is the least unequal following Ireland, Spain, Denmark and Estonia (Bruckauf, Chzhen, Cuesta & Gromada, 2018, p. 5, 7).

Research in Europe reveals that social background in relation to caregiving plays a major role in academic achievement. For example, a study by Friedhelm (2013, p. 15)

conducted in Germany found that childhood impressions resulting from the interactions with adult caregivers and home environment may be beneficial or detrimental and shape individual skill formation evident on academic scores and achievement over the life cycle. Friedhelm's argument is reinforced by Cunha et al. (2006)'s theory of life cycle skill formation which predicts that exposing children to less and/or low-quality education early in their lives negatively affects their future skill acquisition. In other words, the theory argues that when young children are in a less stimulating environment, for example, staying with parents who are less involved in their education, they are likely to acquire less education from schooling resulting in poor performance in achievement tests (Cunha et al., 2006, p. 322). Moreover, Rover and Van de Werfhorst (2017) analysed inequalities in educational achievement scores from persons with low socioeconomic and/or migration background from data collected by Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) involving both primary (grade 4) and secondary (grade 8) learners. The study established a huge magnitude of socioeconomic inequalities across European countries like Finland, Germany, Belgium, Austria, and the Netherlands (Rover & Van de Werfhorst, 2017, p. 27-28).

The influence of SES on academic performance has also been explored in Africa, Latin America and Asian Countries result indicate that expansion of access to education remains relatively low as there are more or less 30 million children that are unschooled in Africa (African Union Commission, 2016, p. 13). Research for Equitable Access and Learning (REAL) (2018, p. 3) notes that the largest percentage of population in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) does not have adequate access to secondary education. Moreover, access and learning outcomes vary widely within and between countries, indicating that evidence of good practice is not being identified or shared, and the effective use of evidence to inform policy is not the norm (REAL, 2018, p. 3). Statistics show that overall pyramid of the African education as it stands now, shows a broad base with 79% at primary level, a very narrow middle section of 50% at secondary level and a miniscule top of 7% at tertiary education (African Union Commission, 2016, p. 13). After completing primary school, many learners in Africa find it difficult to attend secondary schools close to home. The Africa-America Institute (2015, p. 2) study has established that across

Africa, secondary schools can accommodate as little 36% of qualifying secondary learners and this makes secondary education largely reserved for a privileged few.

As research has established, USA and its developed counterparts, still have families who are socioeconomically backward and learners from such families do not do well at school. For example, (Güven, 2019) investigated the relationship between socioeconomic status and the mathematics achievement of 4,500 8th-grade learners in five countries namely: Iran, Singapore, Slovenia, Turkey, and the United States of America. In these countries, school related factors, instructional strategies, teacher related factors, and family related factors have been looked carefully to assess factors that help learners to increase their achievement. The study established that out all these factors, SES plays a major role in learners' academic achievement (Güven, 2019, p. 98). Thus, learners from those families with high SES perform well relative to those from poor families. The study also highlights that student's academic achievement greatly improves with the change in their SES.

Besides low academic attainment, learners from low SES are also known to have high dropout rate. Katten and Szekely (2017) examined trends and factors in school dropout at the Upper Secondary Education (USE) level across Latin America, and found that despite an increase in overall school enrolment rates at the USE ages, dropout rate has not only remained at high levels, but had increased markedly in several countries. From the data of 234 cohort groups of secondary learners across 18 Latin American countries including Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil and Uruguay, the study revealed that SES is the key factor behind the high dropout rate among secondary learners and schools fail to respond to more vulnerable learners such as those stricken by poverty (Katten & Szekely, 2017, p. 27). In examining how family-level factors, particularly parental education and household wealth, are associated with the likelihood of children dropping out of school in Mexico, Alcaraz (2020 p. 9) found that parents' education and social status clearly influence their children's educational outcomes with the poverty-stricken learners at risk of dropping out.

In a study on educational quantity and quality in 11 African countries: Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, Spaul and Taylor (2015) discovered exceedingly low levels of literacy and

numeracy in learners. The study reveals that in Zambia, Malawi, and Mozambique the low levels of literacy and numeracy learning in secondary schools are cause for grave concern. Additionally, in all countries under study, the access-to-literacy gap between rich and poor secondary school learners is considerably large (Spaul & Taylor, 2015, p. 344). In another study on governance assessment activities conducted by African Governance Monitoring and Advocacy Project (AfriMAP) and Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA) (2013) in several countries including Benin, the DRC, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Swaziland and Zambia, learners at secondary schools were found to encounter a lot of challenges concerning access to education. Across all the countries under study, access to secondary education is hindered by poverty related challenges such cost of uniforms, transport, poor nutrition and lack of motivation from parents and neighbourhood (AfriMAP & OSISA, 2013, p. 40). As evident in the above discussion, poverty becomes a barrier to access to education in both developed and developing countries. This is exacerbated by policy inadequacies in education.

Using data from Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), from six SSA countries namely; Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, Uganda, and Zambia that eliminated school fees at some time since the early 1990s, Langsten, (2017) assessed levels of retention and established that all the countries were also relatively successful in retaining learners in school. Moreover, fee abolition sometimes precipitates the pattern of proximate determinant rates seen in SSA and other programmes such as school construction, conditional cash transfers, feeding programmes, efforts to reduce child work responsibilities, improving child health etc., can also encourage learners to enter and remain in school (Langsten, 2017, p. 172-173). Absence or lack of these significant initiatives results in high dropout for learners from poverty-stricken background. Thus, the failure of a state to invest much needed resources to improve teaching and learning in secondary education weakens access for vulnerable learners (Mughal, Aldridgea, & Monaghanb, 2019, p. 60).

Diaz-Serrano (2020) conducted a study to describe the impact of lengthening the duration of compulsory education on the progression of children from primary to secondary

education using panel data of low-income and lower-middle-income countries (Chad, Comoros, Georgia, Guinea, Haiti, Lao PDR, Lesotho, Liberia and Madagascar) from period 1996–2017. The study discovered that in the context of low-income countries, where most of the families are unemployed, poverty-stricken, unable to meet learning needs for their children and live at the subsistence level, it would not be surprising that compulsory education laws would not have the expected effect (Diaz-Serrano, 2020, p. 7). Additionally, based on 49 empirical studies representing 38 countries (including Bangladesh, Botswana, Bolivia, Swaziland, Nepal, Papua New Guinea and South-Africa), and a sample of 2,828,216 grade 12 learners published between 1990 and 2017 to explore international variations in achievement gaps across countries, Kim, Cho, and Kim (2019, p. 907) argue that developing countries might benefit from educational policies that are distinct from those implemented in developed countries, although there is a strong tendency to borrow and follow developed countries' educational policies. The key argument is that the least developed countries would benefit more from policies supporting school quality, but there should be needs-based policies that are targeting specific low-SES families to ensure quality education (Kim, Cho & Kim, 2019, p. 907).

Involving both primary and secondary schools from 37 developing countries regions in Latin America, Africa and South-East Asia, Harltgen, Klasen & Misselhorn (2008) did qualitative analysis of the distribution of access to the education system in educational outcomes overtime. The study revealed that Sub-Saharan Africa shows the lowest educational outcomes, Latin America has an average while Asia has relatively higher level of educational outcomes (Harltgen et al., 2008, p. 32). The study further established that the very poor populations are the ones that lag behind in their educational outcomes (Harltgen et al., 2008, p. 32). Croucha, Rolleston, and Gustafsson (2020) described the relationships between average levels of learning achievement across countries including China and Vietnam, changes in average levels of learning achievement, the inequality of distribution of achievement and the proportion of learners learning at or below an absolute minimum. The study asserts that improving equity at schools requires focusing more attention/resources on the most socioeconomically disadvantaged learners characterised by low learning levels and poor performance more than by social or other inscriptive disadvantage.

Generally, literature indicates that even though, governments have policies in place to ensure education for all, learners from poor socioeconomic background still lag behind their affluent counterparts. This calls for more serious educational policy enactment strategies that are in favour of the poverty-stricken learners if justice and equity are to be achieved.

4.3 SOCIOECONOMIC INFLUENCE ON ACCESS TO SECONDARY EDUCATION IN SELECTED COUNTRIES GLOBALLY

Selection of countries from which global trends on access to secondary education are discussed was based on unique features of each country. For example, People's Republic of China (PRC) is the world's most populous country with free compulsory education which consists of primary school and junior secondary school between the ages of 6 and 15. India is the second-most populous country and the most populous democratic state in the world. On the other hand, South Korea is one of the top-performing OECD countries in reading literacy, mathematics and sciences and its education has high regard globally. United States of America (USA) spends more on education per student than any nation in the world and it is the only country where it is believed SES does not deny children access to education. Even though United Kingdom (UK) became the world's first industrialised country, children from prosperous backgrounds are more likely to be in good or outstanding schools while disadvantaged children are more likely to be in inadequate schools.

4.3.1 Access to secondary education in China

The Peoples Republic China has made a remarkable progress in expanding participation in secondary schools in recent years in order to meet the country's fast-evolving economic and manpower needs (OECD, 2016, p. 12). Although senior secondary education is not part of compulsory education in China, statistics indicate that in 2014, 95% of junior secondary graduates continued their study in senior secondary schools (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2015). This is a great improvement in this country since in 2005 only around 40% of junior secondary graduates attended senior secondary schools (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2005). Furthermore, China has embraced educational quality by substantially enhancing investment in expanding teacher training (Chapman et al. 2000, p. 301).

Article 9 of the 1995 of Education Law of the People's Republic of China (1995, p. 2), states that every citizen, regardless of occupation, property status shall enjoy equal opportunities for education according to law. Additionally, Article 4 of Compulsory Education Law of the People's Republic of China of 1986, as amended in 2006, proclaims that every child who holds the nationality of the People's Republic of China and has reached the school age shall have equal right and obligation to receive compulsory education, regardless status of family property (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2006, p. 1).

Despite the said education progress in China, the country still encounters disparity in education. Large percentage of China's population is in the rural setting and this country cannot grow socioeconomically if its villages do not prosper, and its economy cannot be stabilized if its rural areas are unstable (Liu, 2006, p. 1). The rural areas of china lack certified and qualified teachers, and this greatly attribute to the urban/ rural disparity of educational quality and this gives rise to a situation where the neediest children are often paired with the least qualified teachers (Sargent & Hannum, 2005, p. 157). Ayoroa et al. (2010, p. 99) write that although the central government makes initiatives to provide funds for underdeveloped areas, obstacles such as corruption, low productivity, and local interest (based on a lack of cultural sensitivity) have hindered their efforts. A study by Wang, Li and Li (2014, p. 11) which examined the relationship between Chinese students' SES and their mathematics achievements established that Chinese students' SES exerts significant influence on their mathematics achievements, and several important constituents of SES, such as parents' education and family income, stand out among others. In this regard, learners who have a chance of getting better mathematics achievement are those whose parents hold high social and economic power. Thus, learners from families with high socioeconomic status, are able to spend much more time and money on studying and have greater chance to obtain better mathematics achievement (Wang, Li & Li 2014, p. 12).

A literature study by Wang & Zhu (2009) indicates that Chinese urban families spend a high proportion of family income on their children's education exerting pressure on poor families to spend most of their income or even get into deb trying to enable their children

receive good education. Thus, many families, especially those from a low socio-economic background, believe that “school education” is the only way to improve their current living conditions (Wang & Zhu, 2009, p. 15). Using secondary data on policies and trends over the past 40 years for preschool, primary/junior high school, and high school, Medina and Rozelle (2018) describe the policy and trends in rural education in China to highlight challenges that faced by China’s rural school system. The study reveals that despite the considerable advances in rural schools’ expansion, two important challenges remain. Firstly, as a result of poverty, China’s rural school children are experiencing alarming rates of developmental delay in cognitive abilities. Secondly, some learners are anaemic and cannot see the blackboard while other have worms in their bellies and these have adverse impact on their academic performance (Medina & Rozelle, 2018, p. 109).

Additionally, Li Xu and Xia, (2020) examine the possible role of self-concept in the relationship between SES and school academic achievement among 345 junior high school learners (age range = 9–17 years) at a junior middle school in Lanzhou, China. The findings show that self-efficacy mediated the relationship between SES and anticipated and actualized school performance. Thus, children’s academic achievement is indirectly associated with SES through the mediating effect of self-concept across cultures whereby learners from families with a high SES often show a positive self-concept, which is associated with much better academic school performance relative to their poverty-stricken counterparts. The poverty-stricken learners usually experience more economic hardship, a lack of resources, and higher threats to social identity such as negative stereotypes regarding their intellectual ability and these give rise to chances of poor performance (Li, Xu & Xia, 2020, p. 45).

Involving 4596 learner in secondary 38 schools in rural China, Gao, Yang, Wang, Mina, and Rozelle (2019) did a survey to examine the relationship between student peer relations and dropout behaviour in rural China’s junior high schools. The study findings demonstrate that in rural China, while studies have mostly focused on poverty-related factors behind a student’s decision to drop out, it is also important to recognize that many learners drop out because of poor integration among peers in school (Gao, Yang, Wang, Mina, and Rozelle (2019 p. 141-142). Clearly China has made remarkable investment in

education for the growth of her economy, but factors such as poverty, difficult terrain, high threats to social identity are the barriers to access to education for learners from poor socioeconomic backgrounds.

4.3.2 Access to secondary education in India

India has more than 1.4 million schools and more than 230 million enrolments and is home to one of the largest and complex school education systems in the world along with China (Parruck, Ghosh & Sheppard, 2014, p. 6). The country has recognised the importance of education in national development through the Twelfth Plan (2012–2017). The Indian government has committed to improve the quality of secondary education thereby ensuring that educational opportunities are available to all segments of the society (British Council, 2014, p. 10). As provided in Title VII, Part A, Subpart 1 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, India has established grants that provide assistance to elementary and secondary schools for programmes serving Indian learners living in poverty (Department of Education India 2016, p. 9).

Under the Rashtriya Madhyamik Siksha Abhiyan (RMSA) initiative, with over 200,000 secondary school in India, the government of India is attempting to achieve universalization of secondary education and ensure delivery of high-quality educational inputs (UNESCO, 2016, p. 17). In addition, the country strives to provide an opportunity for the nation to realize the vision of universal secondary education through the establishment of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) mandate under the Companies Act, 2013. However, the engagement of corporates in the education sector, through CSR, has been addressing only a few of the challenges afflicting the secondary education system (Pranav & Sivakumar, 2018, p. 202).

As to ensure equitable access to education for all including learners living in poverty, companies coordinated by CSR, engage in activities which, among others, provide financial assistance to students, sponsor nutritious meals in schools, and in very few instances, companies provide technical training to teachers (Pranav & Sivakumar, 2017, p. 481). However, this imperative initiative faces some challenges due to lack of support from the child's family towards education, lack of support for holistic development, and poor health (Gohain, 2016). Gohain (2016, p. 50) observes that lack of family support

towards education is pertinent in rural areas of India where children are expected to assist with the chores at home and family occupation to supplement earnings for the family.

Despite the above-mentioned initiatives by Indian government, home background factors such level of income, parental involvement, parental education etc., have impact on access to education among learners. Being born into the poorest households in India carries a widening learning 'penalty' relative to children from the richest household which manifests in 19% gap in learners' ability to subtract in mathematics (Pauline & Alcott, 2015, p. 13). Parents' education background is one of factors of measuring SES and it carries some disadvantages on learners, especially girls, from such parents. For example, UNICEF (2016) observes that by age 11 Indian girls and boys who come from the richest homes and have educated parents, enjoy a huge academic advantage over other children. Furthermore, the most advantaged boys and girls are about six times more likely to learn basic reading and mathematics skills than girls from the poorest households whose parents were not educated (UNICEF, 2016, p. 39).

Singh, Horo, and Singh (2016) conducted a descriptive survey to find the relationship between parental education and the performance of learners and established that parents who take interest in their children's studies, go through their books, give them time and are aware of the trends of education, see better performance by their children. Furthermore, a home where the child is loved, wanted and cared, gives him/her fair opportunity of growth (physical, emotional, social) which is ultimately reflected in the academic performance (Singh, Horo, & Singh 2016, p. 29). Similarly, Bhat, Joshi and Wani (2016) conducted a descriptive analytical study on 120 learners of secondary schools to identify factors that lead to the students' academic achievement. The results of the study indicate that socioeconomic status is the significant factors in academic achievement as poverty prevents an individual to gain access resources for learning (Bhat, Joshi & Wani, 2016, p. 35-36).

Using a sample of 102 males and 98 females in age range of 15 to 19 from five higher secondary schools of Lucknow city Uttar Pradesh (India), Ahmar & Anwar (2013), conducted a quantitative study to examine the effects of gender and socio-economic status on academic achievement of higher secondary school learners of Lucknow city.

The study found that males from higher socio-economic background achieve better academically compared to males from low socioeconomic background because their parents provided all the necessary facilities regarding their children education, health and understand their problems related to adolescent period which affect their academic achievement (Ahmar & Anwar, 2013, p. 18). In addition, the findings show that girls belonging to low socio-economic status are generally busy in their household work with her mother in very early stage of their life and are deprived of time and facilities required for attaining good academic scores (Ahmar & Anwar, 2013, p. 18). Despite its complex educational system along with China, equitable access to education remain a serious challenge.

4.3.3 Access to secondary education in South Korea

South Korean education system is pervaded with passion for learning referred to as “education syndrome” originating from the age-old Confucian belief that man can be made better through education and that only the most educated should govern the country and society in general (Kim-Renaud, 2005, p. 5). Education policy in Korea is highly focal on the provision of equal educational opportunity for all and this was evaluated to be successful (Yoon, 2014, p. 173). Republic of Korea has as high as 91% 25-34-year-old youth who have completed upper secondary education followed by Slovenia and Poland (OECD, 2017, p. 44). Moreover, the country was one of the OECD’s top performers in mathematics, reading and science in PISA 2012, and students’ socio-economic background had less impact on 15-year-olds’ performance in mathematics than in other OECD countries (OECD, 2016, p. 3). In 2011, Korea was ranked the topmost country in PISA results and this is boosted by high participation of parents in the education of their children (Peuch, 2011, p. 9).

Despite the remarkable success in achieving access to secondary education, Korea faces a particular set of problems related to education policy, arguably caused by an intensified gap between the rich and the poor in their level of education due to excessive investment in private education (Yoon, 2010, p. 3). The fact that Korean society views education as a means of moving up in social class and creating wealth has resulted in many Korean citizens losing confidence in public education (Yoon, 2014, p. 2). Parents devotedly pay for private tutoring with family wealth resulting from Korea’s economic development which

started from as early as 1960 (Donhee, 1983). Since this period the inequality in educational opportunity has been continuing to widen, fuelled by level of family income (Donhee, 1983, p. 318). As a way of addressing this gap, the Korean government established strategies to reduce private educational expenditure as its comprehensive and middle-short term educational policy (Korea Educational Development Institute, 2003). This policy has five focal areas: (a) the use of E-learning education materials as 'compensatory class after school', to negate the need for private tutoring after school; (b) the acquisition of excellent teachers; (c) a teacher evaluation system, to ensure the quality of public education; (d) the expansion of student choice at all levels of the education system; and (e) improvement of the university entrance system (Yoon, 2010, p. 88).

However, Yoon (2014, p. 5) notes that the above-mentioned policy initiatives had very little impact as parents continued to pay for private after school education to enable their children to achieve higher scores and university admission. In 2003, the government established 'Education Welfare' which is a type of education presenting equally both opportunity and quality of education (Hyeyoung, 2003). Basically, the Education Welfare was intended to prevent a lack of education for underprivileged children and students, to improve their academic and physical ability, as well as building decent personalities and meeting cultural demands (Hyeyoung, 2003, p. 254). Another strategy was the provision of learners with supplementary learning material to study at home via internet in order to ease the cost of private tutoring and to eradicate the education gap in secondary education (Severin & Capota, 2011) as the private tutoring's expenses burden the family budget and deepens parental distrust towards school education in favour of private tutoring (Kim & Han, 2002, p. 13).

In a qualitative study, Ho (2012) identified a series of complex processes and mechanisms that turn the differences in parents' education level and occupational status into the gaps between their children's academic achievements. The study highlights that, on one hand, highly educated parents tend inspire educational aspirations and academic enthusiasm in their children through their early and deep involvement in a long-term educational strategy. Thus, they repeatedly teach their children to have aspirations toward higher professional status as well as a competitive attitude in academic

performance. On the other hand, the less educated working-class parents do not emphasize the importance of having a high level of education and 'a good educational background' to their children (Ho, 2012, p. 247).

Involving 441 twelve- to fourteen-year-old Korean adolescents, Bae and Wickrama (2015), carried out a study to examine pathways through which family socioeconomic status may influence adolescents' academic achievement. The study established that many Korean parents equate their children's success in school with their own achievements and allocate their families' economic and human resources in order to maximize educational opportunities for their children. Basically, the results of the study indicate that parents who lack human and economic resources do not only experience low psychological well-being but also face the negative cognitive outcomes of their children (Bae & Wickrama, 2015, p. 1031). Additionally, learners from families with a low SES are not only exposed to unfavourable family environments, such as insufficient monitoring and interactions with parents, but also experience low academic success at school, which may aggravate their weak relationships with their parents through failing to meet parental expectations (Bae & Wickrama, 2015, p. 1031).

Kim (2018) investigated how a newly introduced school choice policy affected achievement gaps between private and public high schools in South Korea. The results of the survey demonstrate that academic achievement in private high schools is not significantly different from that of public high schools when there is no competition and student sorting between these two types of schools. The study established that competition and autonomy among learners minimally affect the gaps in performance between public and private schools. However, the study demonstrated that high-achieving learners (mostly from affluent families) tend to self-select into private schools, which dramatically increased private school achievement relative to that of public schools that are often opted for by learners from socioeconomically disadvantaged families (Kim, 2018, p. 156). Thus, school choice can be exercised in a way that increases segregation against learners from families of disadvantaged backgrounds and that diminishes equity. Generally, South-Korea is on track in the enhancement of access to secondary education, however the educational inequality that exist between private and public types of

education disqualifies the country from achieving 100% equitable access. Though the country is less populated than India, parental participation is the key to its higher ranking in academic achievement in secondary level.

4.3.4 Access to secondary education in United States of America (USA)

The United States of America (USA) boasts of some of the seminal studies into the influence of socioeconomic background on access to education. Coleman et al. (1966) involved 4,000 schools and 600,000 learners to investigate unequal educational opportunities in public schools because of an individual's race, religion or nationality. The results of the study were surprising, as they were contrary to the expectation that the main cause of unequal learning achievements of white and black children resided in the inequalities such financing, equipment, curriculum, etc., between schools frequented by whites and schools in which blacks were educated (Coleman et al. 1966, p. 70). Instead, the study has identified two imperative issues: firstly, that the black learners included in the survey have a "serious educational deficit at the start of education which is obviously not the result of school" and, secondly, that "they even have a more severe deficit at the end of schooling, which is apparently at least partly the effect of education" (Coleman et al., 1966, p. 73).

Basically, the noted differences in learning between schools were attributed to the social environment provided by each school and the nature of the educational level and aspirations of non-black children and the education of teachers in schools (Coleman et al., 1966, p. 73–74). In this regard, Coleman et al.'s (1966, p. 71) argument that equality of educational opportunities "does not imply only 'equal schools'", but equally effective schools whose effects will outweigh any differences that exist between children of different social origin at the beginning of schooling, contemporarily applies in many schools (Kodelja, 2016, p. 12-13).

Using qualitative design, Connell (1997) examined patterns of schooling of children affected by poverty in America. From his findings, Connell (1997) maintains that the way schools address poverty has significance to educational outcomes of learners involved. He observes that children from poor families are the least successful on academic performance, the least able to enforce their claims or insist their needs to be met, yet the

most dependent on schools for their educational resources (Connell, 1994, p. 125). In this regard, lack of support and motivation by parents and caregivers bear detrimental effects on schooling aspiration among learners, academic achievement and competing power in economic market. This could result in what Connell calls a self-sustaining “cycle of poverty” where aspirations and poor support for the children lead to low educational achievement, which in turn leads to labour market failure in the next generation (Connell, 1994, p. 129).

Much has changed in USA since the 1960s and 1990s. Statistics show that in United States Census Bureau, 43.6 million people lived in poverty in 2009, and this was the third consecutive annual increase in the number of people living in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). This alarming poverty crisis translates into more than one in five American children living in homes without sufficient financial means (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010, p. 4). However, in 2017 the United States stood out as the country where the impact of a student’s socio-economic status on his or her performance in school weakened the most, and where the likelihood that disadvantaged learners perform at high levels increased the most (OECD, 2017, p. 2).

In order to assist learners living in poverty, United States of America has established some programmes. Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 was enacted in response to the demands of communities during the civil rights movement that more be done by the federal government to address poverty and limited educational opportunity for people of colour (Title I of the act) (Leadership Conference Education Fund, 2017, p. 1). In 2002 the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, was enacted to support every needy learner, regardless of race, income, home language, or background (Leadership Conference Education Fund, 2017, p. 1). Furthermore, USA established other initiatives to offer families and children the socioeconomic support and services necessary to improve lives of learners living in poverty. For example, through Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004, USA government provides lunch meals for poverty-stricken learners (National Centre for Children in Poverty, 2007, p. 37).

Among other initiatives to enhance access to education in USA, in 2015 ESEA was enacted with the mandate of engaging parents and families in schools on behalf of their

own children. Thus, ESEA (P.L. 107-110) proclaims that parents, families, and their communities should be consulted in decisions that impact all children, both provide meaningful opportunities to shape the educational system so that it is more responsive and accountable to the interests of children in public schools especially those who have been historically marginalized and excluded from decision concerning their education (Leadership Conference Education Fund 2017, p. 6). Even though USA has come up with pieces of legislations that sparked interest in education, the achievement gap experienced by low-income learners across the country still persists (Pettigrew, 2009, p. 22; Reardon & Fahle, 2017, p. 21). This is depicted in several studies some of which are outlined below.

In 2012 Inter-American Development Bank conducted a survey on the academic scores among secondary school learners. The findings of the study indicate the average gap between the poorest and richest learners of the same age in the region was equivalent to two years of schooling (Oviedo, 2015, p. 4). On the other hand, studies in the United States of America acknowledge that socioeconomic status (SES) has critical influence on educational outcomes. For example, American Psychological Association (APA) (2007) states that across many states, SES show great effects on academic performance as families with low SES send their children to public schools many of which are notorious for failing to provide an adequate education, and this results in lower marks by poor children relative to those of their affluent counterparts whose parents could afford private schools and extra after school tutorship (APA, 2007, p. 6).

Woessmann (2010) conducted a qualitative study to assess the link between student test scores and the school learners attend, school policies and practices, students' family background and parental involvement in education in Massachusetts, in United States of America (USA). The study reveals that substantial long-lasting negative effects of early years of education on economic and social outcomes are particularly high for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, whose home environments may not provide them with the foundation skills necessary to prosper at later educational stages (Woessmann, 2010, p. 26). As studies indicate, USA has gone through several socioeconomic challenges, however they decreased as revealed by OECD (2017). Compared to South-Korea whose

quality of secondary level education is enhanced by parental involvement, USA appears to be the topmost country where impact of learner's SES on their performance weakens due to her large economic muscles.

4.3.5 Access to secondary education in United Kingdom

The start of the 20th Century has seen the United Kingdom (UK) came up with reforms in education system with a mandate of widening access to what has historically been described as an extremely elitist system (Hansen & Vignoles, 2015, p. 5). These reforms are based on the 1944 Butler Education Act (7 and 8 Geo 6 c. 31), which was meant to address the country's educational needs amid demands for social reform that had been an issue before the Second World War began (Brian, 1974, p. 5). Following this Act, UK has a huge range of schools with widely differing funding arrangements, governance, and legal obligations chiefly to assist learners living in poverty and these initiatives did exist during elitist education system (Harry, 2003, p. 184). For example, Education Act 1944 made it a duty of local education authorities to provide school meals and milk to poverty-stricken learners (Harry, 2003, p. 185). Being in a family poor enough made one to qualify for free school meals in Scotland (Scottish Executive Publications, 2006, p. 8).

Following the formulation of Education Reform Act 1988, all children of compulsory school age (5 to 16) receive a full-time education that is suited to their age, ability, aptitude and socioeconomic background. Additionally, UK education authorities established Children and Young People Funding Package (CYPFP) whose mandate was to reduce underachievement and improve the life chances of children and young people by enhancing their educational development and fostering their health, well-being and social inclusion through the integrated delivery of the support and services necessary to ensure that every child has the best start in life (DENI, 2006, p. 3).

Despite the efforts by UK to enhance lives of learners living in poverty, there is still evidence that learners from low SES families suffer academically. Poverty in UK is rooted in the lack of opportunities among parents with low skills and low qualifications and such parents are less likely to work, and if they do work, they are more likely to have low earnings. To this extent, where parents have to make a choice between low income and long hours, it is difficult to give children good life chances and this adversely affect

academic performance of the children (Hirsch, 2007, p. 3). The relationship between poverty and low achievement at school is depicted in studies discussed below.

Using data on over 3 000 youth from financially disadvantaged backgrounds, Considine and Zappala's (2002) study describe the extent of socio-economic, family, individual and contextual factors on school educational performance. The study found that parental educational attainment, housing type and student age as reflected by school level were all statistically significant variables and predictors of academic performance. Essentially, the study establishes that even within a group with considerable financial disadvantage, socioeconomic status as reflected by the level of parental education was a key predictor of student academic achievement (Considine & Zappala, 2002, p. 105).

Even though England has a state system of free education aimed at entitling all young people to high-quality teaching and learning regardless of their socioeconomic background and situation, studies show that there are some parts of this country where learners living in poverty are suffering academically. For example, Royal Society (2008) explored the link between SES and participation and attainment in science in England and found that schools from areas of more affluence are more likely to enjoy better facilities in terms of school laboratories, equipment and pupil-teacher ratio and this increases learners' participation and performance (Royal Society, 2008, p. 2). On the other hand, learners in rural schools lose interest in taking science subjects for they could not afford expensive science equipment given their families' low SES (Royal Society, 2008, p. 2). In Wales, before children start school, those from more prosperous backgrounds overtake those from poorer ones in terms of language, social and emotional development (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2013, p. 2).

Blanden and Gregg's (2004, p. 22) study focused on the relationship between family income, the adolescent's decision to stay on in education beyond the age of 16 and his/her levels of educational attainment, and it revealed that there was a consistent impact of family income on educational attainment in the UK, which has huge implications for inequalities in educational outcomes. Moreover, in Britain, a child born into the bottom social class is still more likely to leave school with no qualifications, to live in relative

poverty and to die younger than their peers born into the professional classes (United Kingdom Government's Social Exclusion Unit, 2004, p. 4).

Horgan (2007) investigated the impact of poverty on learners' experience in Northern Ireland UK and established that poorer children get used to the fact of their social position from a very early age; they accept that this will be reflected in their experience of school that they are not going to get the same quality of schooling or of outcomes as better-off children. Furthermore, the findings establish that for children growing up in poverty, have life itself as a struggle and are keenly awareness and worry about non-educational issues such as clothes for non-uniform days, the walk to and from school, vandalism and so on, and ultimately have less energy to focus on their education (Horgan, 2007, p. 66). Moreover, the poor learners are more likely to be under pressure from parents to do well in the test and to think that their current scores would have implications for the rest of their lives (Horgan, 2007, p. 66). Despite reforms and initiatives UK has engaged in to enhance access to education, and that it is the first country to become industrialised relative to other large economic states such as USA, some regions of this country still have families living in poverty and their children lag behind in academic performance and full participation in learning compared to their affluent counterparts.

4.4 SOCIOECONOMIC INFLUENCE ON ACCESS TO SECONDARY EDUCATION IN SELECTED AFRICA

Relative to other global regions, access to secondary education in Africa, especially Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) remains remarkably low due to the region's poor socioeconomic conditions. To depict this challenge literature was sourced from countries with unique characteristics. For example, Kenya is the third-largest economy in sub-Saharan Africa after Nigeria and South Africa. Education system in Kenya has been influenced by the political factor inherited from British colonial era to date, and this has resulted in lack of local stake holders' representation in education policy formulation (Mackatiani, Imbovah, Imbova & Gakungai, 2016, p.60, Elder, 2015, p. 25). Nigeria is the most populous country with the largest economy in the African continent, and provides free, government-supported education, but attendance is not compulsory at any level. Zimbabwe was selected due to its large investments in education since independence and having the highest adult literacy rate in Africa in 2013. Furthermore, despite its high poverty levels,

with more than two thirds of the population living below the international poverty line, Tanzania has enjoyed political stability since it gained its independence in 1961 and this has contributed enormously to the country's ability to focus on national development issues including education (United Republic of Tanzania, 2018, p.6). On the other hand, South Africa is an industrialised country with the second-largest economy in Africa after Nigeria but the country is ranked in the top ten countries in the world for income inequality.

4.4.1 Access to secondary education in Kenya

After its independence, Kenya has realized an urgent need of to ensure provision of education and training to her citizens. Articles 43(1)(f), 53(1)(b) 54 and 55(a) of the Constitution of Kenya (2010) declare education as a right for every Kenyan while the Kenya Vision 2030 underscores the importance of education in ensuring relevant human and social capital for sustainable development. The Constitution also guarantees every child the right to free and compulsory basic education (Republic of Kenya, 2019, p. 3). In honouring this provision in the national constitution, government of Kenya has committed to fund education and this commitment is driven by the Sessional Paper No. 1 of 2005 on a Policy Framework for Education and Research and the Second Kenya Education Sector Support Programme (KESSP II) as well as by the Basic Education Act, 2013 (Mutegi, Muriithi & Wanjala, 2017). Furthermore, the government of Kenya launched Free Tuition Secondary Education (FTSE) in January 2008 to increase transition from primary to secondary by 70% in all districts (Ohba, 2009, p. 12). FTSE dictates that the government meets the tuition fees of KSHs 10,265 per student, while the parents meet other requirements like lunch, transport and boarding fees for those in boarding schools, besides development projects. Despite this initiative, there is still high illiteracy, low quality education, low completion rates at the secondary level, high cost of education and poor community participation (Mutegi, Muriithi & Wanjala 2017, p. 16697).

Studies have indicated that in Kenya there are many families who are not able to finance their children's education with the likelihood of the children to lack most academic necessities and therefore have their performance affected. For example, Gabriel et al. (2016) investigated critical parental socio-economic factors affecting the academic achievement of learners in selected secondary schools in urban informal settlements in Westlands District in Nairobi County. The study reveals that parental occupation, their

involvement in learning activities and effective parent-teacher relationship were facilitating factors (Gariel et al., 2016, p. 54). The study findings also indicate that parents' low ability to finance education, coupled with the poor status of physical and instructional resources were inhibiting factors to students' academic achievement in the study locale (Gariel et al., 2016, p. 54).

In its study, CREATE (2009) reviewed free secondary education and the way it influences access to education for the poor in rural Kenya. According to the study findings, the costs of the first-year preparation for day secondary school are about eight times the monthly income for employed parents, 12 to 17 times for self-employed parents and 19 to 20 times for peasant parents engaged in casual work (CREATE, 2009, p. 9). Mutegi, Muriithi and Wanjala's (2017) study involving 25 school principals and 23,275 household heads revealed that in as much as the government is trying to promote equity by giving equivalent amount of money KShs 10,265 to every child who is in secondary school, the money is too little to sustain a child in secondary schools. The study also established that to meet the shortfall schools compel parents to pay additional fees in form of motivation fees, boarding fees, building fees, among other payments (Mutegi, Muriithi & Wanjala, 2017, p. 16698).

Furthermore, in his investigation of critical parental socio-economic factors affecting the academic achievement of learners in selected secondary schools in urban informal settlements in Westlands District in Nairobi County, Gabriel (2016) established that learners from poverty-stricken background, especially double orphans, waste a lot of time out of school to fend for their siblings subsequently affecting their performance negatively (Gabriel, 2016, p. 54).

Similarly, Karue and Amukowa's (2013) analyses factors that lead to poor performance in Kenya certificate of secondary examination in Embu district found that factors that negatively affect performance in day secondary schools are related to unfavourable home environments. Home environments in this regard included lack of reading materials, many household chores, poor lighting, bad peer company, lack of proper accommodation, chronic absenteeism emanating from lack of school fees, admission of weak learners at form one entry, inadequate instructional materials, and physical facilities (Karue &

Amukowa, 2013, p. 105). In another study that was meant to explore the current inclusive education system in Kenya, Elder (2015) has observed that Kenyan education system lacks adequate representation of stakeholders, and this is one of the barriers to inclusive education in addition to poverty, lack of access to clean and health facilities. The author maintains that it is impossible to build inclusive communities without gathering input and value from stakeholders in local communities (Elder, 2015, p. 25). The author therefore proposes that learners, parents, teachers, administrators, and government officials should collaborate within their local communities and identify the strengths and barriers of their local educational systems in order to enhance inclusive education (Elder, 2015, p. 25). Even though Kenya is the third-largest economy in sub-Saharan Africa after Nigeria and South Africa, the country still has low access to education for youths due too lack of reading materials, burdening children many household chores, poor lighting, bad peer company, lack of proper accommodation etc.

4.4.2 Access to secondary education in Nigeria

Chapter 11, Section 18 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999, p. 29), commits to ensure the following: (a) equal and adequate educational opportunities for all at all levels of the educational system; (b) promotion of science and technology; (c) eradication of illiteracy through the provision of free compulsory universal primary education, free university education, and free adult literacy programme. The constitution says nothing about secondary education. Having realized the gap between the poor and the rich and to make education affordable by children of lower-class families, especially in Imo State, the government, Government made education free for all learners from primary to the University level, but there is deviation in the academic performance of learners from various backgrounds (Onwukwe, Anyanwu & Agommuoh, 2017, p. 3).

Nigeria is one of the African countries hit by poverty and this has negatively affected access to education. According to Nwagwu (2004, p. 3), corruption puts the economy in a parlous state money disappears into private accounts thereby making some individuals billionaires while many remain in destitution and penury. Studies have depicted poverty as a serious barrier to education. In study involving 1000 learners of both genders from public and private secondary schools, NuhuAbubakar, Gorondutse and Ibrahim (2016)

observe that parental education, occupation and socioeconomic status have large effects on students' performance, with mostly learners from poor families scoring lower marks relative to their affluent counterparts. Adeyemo and Babajide's (2012) study in senior secondary school physics involving 55 physics learners found that the relationship between the socio-economic disadvantage and students' academic achievement in physics is significant where a child suffers parental and material deprivation and care due to divorce or death, or absconding of one of the parents, the child's schooling may be affected as one parent, especially a mother, may not be financially buoyant to pay school fee, purchase books and uniforms, such a child may play truant, thus adversely affecting school performance (Adeyemo & Babajide, 2012, p. 8).

Ohanele & Nwafor (2016) conducted a survey examining influence of socio-economic status of parents on academic performance of public senior secondary school learners in Imo State. The study reveals that parents from both high and middle socio-economic status (SES) provides facilities at the higher extent compared to parents from low socio-economic. The findings of the study also indicate that parents with high socio-economic status are voluntarily more involved in extra curricula activities of their children while those of middle-income status were less involved (Ohanele & Nwafor, 2016, p. 18). Joseph and Olatunde (2011) sought to explain how the location of schools relates to academic performance of learners in Ekiti state of Nigeria between 1990 and 1997. The study established that the geographical location of schools has influence on the academic achievement of students. Thus, rural urban dichotomy in terms of academic achievement of learners as highlighted in the review of literature has been attributed to various causes including uneven distribution of resources, poor school mapping, facilities, problem of qualified teachers refusing appointment or not willing to perform well in isolated villages, lack of good roads, poor communication, nonchalant attitude of some communities to schooling among others (Joseph & Olatunde, 2011, p. 34). Ovansa, (2017, p. 14) explain that in Nigeria, families with higher socio-economic status have educational facilities at home for their children to manipulate very early in life. They encourage their children to study when they are back from school and persuade the underachieving ones to see the school counsellors, and this goes a long way to improve academic achievement of the adolescent children (Ovansa, 2017, p. 15)

Furthermore, Agupusi (2019) engaged in longitudinal historical narratives to explore two families in Nigeria with identical socioeconomic backgrounds to explain gaps in educational attainment of families with the same initial socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. This study showed that when parents' educational appreciation is low or neutral, children depending on parents' desire for education could not make it (Agupusi, 2019, p. 221). It also affects a child whose high education attainment depends on his/her parents' financial support. The fundamental argument is that level of appreciation towards education is one of the major contributing factors to persistent educational inequality and poor intergenerational education mobility in many societies. Basically, Nigeria, one of the highly populated countries, has high inequality of educational opportunity with the low socioeconomic families having their children lag behind their affluent counterparts in terms of academic performance. Poverty and corruption appear to have fuelled this inequality.

4.4.3 Access to secondary education in Zimbabwe

Since its independence in 1980, access to education in Zimbabwe has remained one of this country's major priorities and the country has made some reforms in the education system focused on making them suitable in line with the principle of 'Education for all' (Kanyongo, 2005). The government expanded the education system by building schools in marginalised areas and disadvantaged urban centres, accelerating the training of teachers, providing teaching, and learning materials to schools (Kanyongo, 2005, p. 66). Introduction of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) from 1992-1995, made a serious turning point for the economy of Zimbabwe (UNESCO, 2017). One of the main objectives of ESAP was to cut down government expenditure and introduce user fees on social services. ESAP's imposition of user fees effectively barred easy access to education for hundreds of thousands of learners from poorer households (UNESCO, 2017, p. 3).

Later during the Third Decade 2000-2010 (Lost decade), the new millennium marked Zimbabwe's deep political, economic and social challenges which affected the once most developed education system in the continent. During this crisis period one of the major changes that drastically affected access to education was that social expenditure on education decreased by more than half as the government was slowly moving towards

failure to finance for its education (UNICEF Zimbabwe, 2011, p. 19). Towards the end of 2008, most schools were shut down due to thousands of teachers leaving the profession, some leaving the country for greener pastures and an economic crisis which led to hyperinflation (UNICEF Zimbabwe, 2011, p. 20). Following this crisis, parents including those living in poverty had no alternative but to pay fees for secondary education, and boarding schools are usually very expensive and majority of learners went to day secondary schools because they were the cheapest. However, compared to boarding and private schools, the quality of education in most day schools was poor (Kanyongo, 2005, p. 66).

UNICEF (2014, p. 12) report that in some poverty-stricken communities, parents living below the food poverty line cannot meet any of their basic needs and suffer from chronic hunger with an estimated 6.6 million people including 3.5 million children in Zimbabwe suffering from this extreme form of deprivation. Children growing up in such conditions usually find it difficult to do well in school and are susceptible to dropping out of school because the families cannot afford school fees and other accessories required by schools (UNICEF, 2014, p. 12-13). Similarly, an investigation into the causes and effects of poverty on academic achievement in the Thandanani community in Insiza district by Moyo (2013) revealed that that death of breadwinners; unemployment and lack of education are the prime causes of poverty which negatively impacts on the academic achievement of students. Most poverty stricken eat two meals a day, walk long distances to school and arrive late for lessons and are usually suspended from attending lessons for failure to pay fees on time thereby losing valuable learning time (Moyo, 2013, p. 2112).

Independent studies have revealed a myriad of socioeconomic factors affecting delivery of education in Zimbabwe. For example, Nyoni, Nyoni and Garikal (2017) found that the type of school leadership by the head, career guidance, teacher-pupil ratio, qualified and dedicated teachers as well as discipline and order are the major internal factors affecting students' academic achievement. External factors were identified as family socioeconomic status, school-community relations, distance or proximity to the school and witchcraft practices (Nyoni, Nyoni & Bonga, 2017, p. 10). In studying factors affecting achievement in ordinary level Mathematics in Secondary schools in Zimbabwe with

Gweru District, Chirume and Chikasha (2014, p. 202) found that factors affecting achievement included curriculum or syllabus related resources or school-based causes, teacher competency, socio-economic forces, examination systems and students' perceptions. Mandina's (2013) study of Zhomba Cluster Secondary Schools in Gokwe District, established that poverty and financial constraints are critical behind drop-out of learners. The study revealed that school dropout is also primarily grounded in school problems such as school distance and inadequate teacher- student relationships, inadequate resources and facilities as well as an irrelevant curriculum that fails to meet the needs of individuals' vocational aspirations and intellect (Mandina, 2013, p. 88).

Using data collected between 1998 and 2011 in a general population cohort in eastern Zimbabwe, Pufall, Eaton, Nyamukapa, Schur, Takaruza and Gregson (2016) describe education trends and the relationship between parental education and children's schooling during the Zimbabwean economic collapse of the 2000s. The study establishes that rising parental education helped to sustain high levels of school education during this period. Consequently, the authors conclude that the relatively high education levels found amongst today's youth in Zimbabwe partly reflect increases in their parents' education following the country's independence in 1980. Thus, children of parents with greater levels of education continued to be more likely to have positive education outcomes (Pufall, et. al., 2011, p. 32). In another study, Wei, Salama, and Gwavuya (2015) examined the impact of orphanhood on children's access to education and found that while household wealth status and caretaker's education status are the main factors affecting access to education, orphan-hood is a consistent and substantial risk factor behind in adequate access to secondary education. They further demonstrate that double orphans are considerably worse than single orphans in most cases of limited access to education in Zimbabwe (Wei, et. al., 2015, p. 69). Generally, chronic poverty hitting the Republic of Zimbabwe has severely affected access to secondary education with learners from the least socioeconomically disadvantaged families being the worst victims despite the country's larger investment in education relative Kenya and Nigeria

4.4.4 Access to secondary education in Tanzania

History reveals that since independence, education has been a national priority for successive Tanzanian governments, yet, millions of Tanzanian children and adolescents

do not gain a secondary education or vocational training as expected (Human Rights Watch, 2017, p. 3). One of the pillars established by the Republic of Tanzania is the 2014 Education and Training policy whose mandate is to increase access to secondary education, and to improve the quality of education. This mandate is enforced by section (2) of the constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania (URT) of 1977 which proclaims that every person has the right to access education, and every citizen shall be free to pursue education in a field of his choice up to the highest level (United Republic of Tanzania, 2005, p. 16).

Following the establishment of the 2014 Education and Training Policy, Tanzanian government issued out circular number 5 which directs and obliges public bodies to ensure that education at the lower secondary schools is free for all children (URT, 2016). This mandate meant that parents were no longer required to pay the 20,000 shillings fees that were charged to day school learners and 70,000 shillings charged for learners in boarding school (URT, 2016, p. 8). Contrary to this requirement, Education Circular No.3 of 2016, required parents to make contribution for their children's education by purchasing uniforms for school and sports activities, exercise books and pens and pay for the medical expenses of their children (URT, 2016, p. 8).

Other programmes that Tanzanian government has developed to improve access to secondary education, include Secondary Education Development Programme I (SEDP I) which was implemented between 2004 and 2009, building on the national goals of secondary education provision. SEDP I was meant to strengthen strategies of poverty reduction so as to make the lives of secondary learners living in poverty and other vulnerable youth acceptable (United Republic of Tanzania, 2010). The said strategies include Tanzania Development Vision 2025, the National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty (NSGRP – commonly referred to by its Kiswahili acronym: MKUKUTA), the Education and Training Policy of 1995, and the Education Sector Development Programme (ESDP, 2001) (United Republic of Tanzania, 2010, p. vi-vii).

Despite, the above-mentioned initiatives to enhance access to education there is high rate of failure especially at secondary level. Tanzanian government provides very few realistic alternatives for several million learners who do not pass the PSLE or drop out

halfway through lower-secondary education, without completing basic education (Human Rights Watch, 2017). Moreover, return to secondary education is possible if learners enrol in private centres to study, but many learners lack the financial means and information to pursue this option due to their socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds (Human Rights Watch, 2017, p. 8). As example of an independent study by Komba et al (2013) examined factors affecting academic performance of ward secondary schools in Moshi district and Moshi municipality. The following were found to hinder good performance; limited number of teachers per subject and number of learners per class, lack of conducive teaching and learning environment, and shortage of teaching and learning materials (Komba et al., 2013, p. 220). Other factors included employment of unqualified teachers, lack of reliable libraries and laboratories, weak communication among teachers, parents, learners, and poor classroom attendance by teachers (Komba et al., 2013, p. 221).

In his literature review study, Komba (2017) explores ex ante students' learning outcomes associated with the existing accountability relationships in public pre-primary, primary, and secondary schools. The findings indicate that financial accountability is affected by head teachers' lack of financial management skills, bribery, and the provision of flat grants to all students. The findings suggest that there is a lack of an effective quality assurance framework to ensure education improvement and effective school performance (Komba, 2017, p. 10). In 2017, Tanzanian government abolished school fees and other contributions and the government expects that many children from the poor families will have access to secondary education (Elimu, 2017, p. 9). However, studies indicate that lack of financial management skill hinder good academic performance as Godda (2018) reveal in a study that investigated the management capacity of heads of public secondary schools in the enactment of Free Secondary Education (FSE) policy in Singida municipality.

4.4.5 Access to secondary education in South-Africa

Section 29 of the Constitution of Republic of South-Africa declares that every person has a right to the right basic education, including adult basic education. Meaningful access, which entails regular attendance, appropriate achievement, progress on schedule, successful completion, is not yet achieved in South-Africa (Republic of South-Africa,

2017, p. 3). Moreover, despite her relatively high expenditure per child than most African countries, access to secondary education and academic achievement still remain low with notably poor on basic literacy and numeracy tests and high drop out and grade repetition (CREATE, 2008, p. 3). Literature shows that since the demise of apartheid and the introduction of a constitutional democracy in 1994, South Africa's political transformation has not been matched by social and economic transformation, with the majority of the country's residents continuing to live in poverty that has great impact on access to education especially at secondary level (Hochfeld, Graham, Patel, Moodley, and Ross, 2016, p. 8). For example, Bayat, Louw and Rena (2014) investigated the nature and causes of underperformance of senior secondary school learners with special focus on socioeconomic factors in Cape Town and found that factors such as lack of access to health services, poor diet and improper housing made many learners malnourished and sick resulting in absence from the school. These factors were also accountable for underperformance among senior secondary school learners (Bayat, Louw & Rena, 2014, p.194).

A literature review study on the quality of education in South Africa in a period between 1995 and 2011 revealed that South Africa has the worst education system of all middle-income countries that participate in cross-national assessments of educational achievement (Spaull, 2013). Spaull (2013, p. 8) argues that while the low-level equilibrium that South Africa finds itself in has its roots in the apartheid regime of institutionalised inequality, this fact does not absolve the current administration from its responsibility to provide a quality education to every South African child. The National Development Plan (NDP) share a similar sentiment and concedes that quality of education for most black children is poor and this reduces the earnings potential and career mobility of those who do get jobs and limits the potential dynamism of South African business (NPC, 2012, p. 38).

Statistics show that South-Africa has 26 percent of illiteracy and functionally 38 percent of innumeracy despite completing 6 years of formal full-time schooling (Spaul & Taylor, 2015, p. 25). Learners from disadvantaged areas suffer from lack of proper home learning resources and parental support. For example, Mosia (2009) observes that farm (rural)

schools in Motheo district suffered from what Hay (1994) called milieu deprivation as learners in such schools came from families with no electricity to study at night, parents were not educated hence lack of support to their children's education and children walked long distances to schools leaving them too tired to study properly. As Roodt (2018, p. 4) observes, learners with access to educational resources at home such as books or the internet, and whose parents are themselves highly educated are likely to do well in schools than their poverty stricken counterparts (Roodt, 2018, p. 4).

In analysing the causes and consequences of the weak outcomes of South Africa's education system Mlachila and Moeletsi (2019) established that geographic location and socio-economic status are among powerful factors behind poor academic performance in South-Africa. Although funding is not the primary cause of lagging performance, distribution of resources may be problematic (Mlachila & Moeletsi, 2019, p. 5). Spaul (2011, p. 7) observes that many of South Africa's learners, most of whom are black, attend dysfunctional schools and achieve below national and international standards. In a survey investigating factors behind the drop-out in South-Africa Dieltiens and Meny-Gibert (2012) discovered that poverty remains a factor in school drop-out despite pro-poor policies to address barriers to access. This is partly because poor learners continue to be faced with other access costs: uniforms in particular remain a burden for poor households and in some cases a barrier to access (Strassburg et al., 2010, p. 2). Moreover, the survey highlights that very few children and youths aged seven to 18 are now categorically denied access to schools due to non-payment of fees or other access costs, or not having the required uniform (Dieltiens & Meny-Gibert, 2012, p. 140). Additionally, Kyei & Nemaorani's (2014, p. 86) case study conducted to establish some factors that affect the performance of grade 10 learners in the Limpopo concludes that parents' socioeconomic status, age, sex, location of the school, the type of school-private or public, the average number of learners in a class and competence in English language are factors affecting students' academic performance in grade ten.

Generally, in Africa access to secondary education diminishes day by day despite the countries' efforts to enhance it through legal framework and funding programmes. This is the case even in countries such as Kenya where access to education has remained a

priority since its independence. Even though African countries like South-Africa spend a lot of money of financing secondary education, there is still high rate of illiteracy and dropout. Chronic poverty in Zimbabwe worsens the situation of those learners from low socioeconomic status.

4.5 ACCESS TO SECONDARY EDUCATION IN LESOTHO

4.5.1 Introduction

This study was based on the premise that access to education could be an achievable dream if Lesotho were to have clear and relevant strategies in implementing inclusive education. Lesotho is one of the least developed countries in the world; therefore, poverty is likely to negatively affect education opportunities of many learners. The Mountain Kingdom is a party to several international commitments to increase access to education and has introduced some initiatives aimed at improving access to basic education in response to its commitment to international policies and declarations (Nyabanyaba, 2009, p. 9). Furthermore, the country has also committed to endeavour in way of improving her education system to achieve agenda 2030 including that of inclusive and equitable quality education (UNESCO, 2015, p. 17). This section firstly describes historical trends in the history of inclusive education in Lesotho. Then the chapter discusses experience of Lesotho with Human Rights Instruments and declarations on access to secondary education and then reviews literature on how socioeconomic factors hinder access to secondary education in Lesotho.

4.5.2 Inclusive education and its historical trends in Lesotho

Literature reveals that inclusive education in Lesotho has been following a trend of changes and development. Guided by Lesotho's 1989 education policy, a feasibility study was conducted with the help of an external consultants (Mittler & Platt, 1996) and it was concluded that the implementation of inclusive education was possible in Lesotho. This was followed by introduction of Special Education Unit (SEU) in 1991 by MoET with the mandate of supporting the attainment of education for all (Urwick & Elliott, 2010, p.144). Through SEU, the Ministry committed to "...promote integration / inclusion of LSEN into regular school system at all levels of education system to enable them to acquire appropriate life skills and education" (MoET, 2008, p.1).

Furthermore, SEU was tasked with mandate of training teachers, during school breaks, in 10 pilot primary schools about inclusive (special) education practices. The selection of 10 pilot schools was considered to be cost-effective for creating a group of schools that could act as demonstration schools and work with neighbouring schools on IE implementation (MoET, 2003). Research further reveals that training of teachers in schools continued into the 1990s, when external evaluators (Mittler and Platt, 1996) recommended that the training programme continue by adding 10 new schools as “registered” special education schools per year (Urwick & Elliott, 2010, p.144).

The idea of inclusive education was then expanded to tertiary schools. For example, in 1996, the Lesotho College of Education (LCE) was the first institution of higher learning to adopt the idea of inclusive education training. The college therefore engaged two foreign-aid workers to introduce inclusive education concept into the existing professional studies pedagogical curriculum. At this time, the LCE also became autonomous from the Ministry of Education and its units (Lesotho College of Education, 2007). However, LCE experienced shortage of human resources that were required to promote the inclusive education as an independent programme. Among other reasons, for this shortage was that foreign aid workers were supposed to be replaced in 1999 by a Lesotho national faculty member who studied in the United Kingdom from 1996 to 1998 – but the arrangement was in fact never fulfilled (Lesotho College of Education, 2007, p. 12-13).

Furthermore, between the period 1998 and 2004, inclusive education remained a component in LCE, but no formally trained lecturers taught the subject matter. In 2004, a lecturer with extensive training in special education began teaching at LCE, and revived the inclusive education component (Johnstone and Chapman, 2009). In the year 2015, there were five special education lecturers at LCE. To date, LCE offers a module in special education (with an IE component) to all student teachers in their first year of study. Those who are interested can proceed to do an Advanced Diploma in Special Education which is a one-year programme that focuses on the areas of hearing impairment, visual impairment and learning disability. Those who are specialising in hearing impairment and visual impairment also do a module in learning disability (Lesotho College of Education, 2007, p. 12-13). In 2009, National University of Lesotho (NUL) introduced special

education programme in the Department of Educational Foundations. This programme takes four years and is offered as a second major subject for secondary-school teacher trainees (www.nul.ls).

4.5.3 Experience of Lesotho with human rights instruments on access to secondary education

Generally, Government of Lesotho (GOL) has declared access to education as human right and, the initiative to fulfil this declaration is reinforced by both international and local human rights instruments. One of the instruments compelling Lesotho to adhere to enhancement of socioeconomic conditions of her poor citizens is the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) (1966). Article 13 of the covenant proclaims that state parties must recognise the right to education and ensure that education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity, and shall strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms (ICESCR, 1966, p. 4-6). Article 2(1) of the covenant emphasizes the respect to the domestic implementation of the socio-economic rights (ICESCR, 1966, p. 2).

Furthermore, Article 32 of African Union on the Charter of the Rights and Welfare of the Child (AUCRWC) (1999) explicitly provides for the protection of children and young persons from social and economic distresses. Based on the mandate of the AUCRWC (1999), Lesotho, through Ministry of Social Development (MOSD), has had the Child Grants Programme (CGP) from 2008 aimed at enabling vulnerable children to go to school (UNICEF, 2016, p. 2). Reinforced by CRC, MOSD annually supports 25, 000 vulnerable children including learners living in poverty through education bursaries from the national budget (Government of Lesotho, 2014, p. 37).

Apart from international human rights instruments, Lesotho has a number of laws and strategic plans that are meant to enhance access to education. For example, the constitution of Lesotho (1993) has provisions for protection of fundamental human rights and freedoms and access to education. For example, section 28 (c) of the constitution proclaims that secondary education is to be made accessible to all by every appropriate means and progressively making secondary education free (Kingdom of Lesotho, 1993, p. 42). As per section 26 (2) of the Lesotho Constitution, this would further promote equality of opportunity and full participation in all spheres of public life including education.

Nonetheless, the extent to which socio-economic rights have been provided for in the constitution is drastically shallow. Chapter 2 of the Lesotho constitution, which provides for fundamental human rights and freedoms, but does not proclaim socioeconomic rights as enforceable by law. Socio-economic rights are laid down in chapter 3 of the Lesotho Constitution which provides for principles of the state policies which are not protected by law. However, section 12 (a) (i) of Education Act of 2010 states that public schools are funded by GOL charge such fees as approved by the minister of education and training whose responsibility also involves approving education grants for vulnerable learners including those born from poor families (section 13 (a) and (b) of the act) (Kingdom of Lesotho 2010, p.171-172).

Children's Protection and Welfare Act (CPWA) of 2011, which guides the implementation of Education Act of 2010, (Ntho, 2013, p.12), is a vehicle to prioritize planning, decision-making and investment in child protection in different spheres of life including education. The act declares education as a right and outlaws any form of discrimination or barrier to facilitate children's access to education (Government of Lesotho, 2019, p. 43-44). For example, Part II, Principle 11 (1) of the CPWA proclaims that a child has a right to education, adequate diet, clothing, medical attention (Kingdom of Lesotho 2011, p.471). Reinforced by CPWA, Government of Lesotho (GOL) has established National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS) 2014/15 – 2018/19 whose primary goal reads: "to prevent and reduce the economic and social vulnerabilities of the most disadvantaged and socially excluded segment of the society" (Kingdom of Lesotho, 2015, p. 1). According to the NSPS, social protection is a collection of all public and private initiatives to reduce the economic and social vulnerability of the poor, vulnerable, and marginalised groups such as learners born from families of low socioeconomic status (UNICEF, 2017, p. 3).

Additionally, Lesotho has responded to the global call for universal access to education through the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) (2004/2005–2006/2007). In principle, the strategy stipulates that Lesotho government should promote EFA policies within a sustainable and well-integrated sector framework clearly linked to poverty reduction and development strategies. One of the key objectives of PRS to be achieved over period of 2004/05-2006/09 was to ensure that all children have access to and complete quality

basic and secondary education (MOET 2008, p.11). Furthermore, Lesotho established National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP 2012/2013-2016/2017) whose focal area is the provision of programmes and curricula to meet the demand of the developing states and to cater to industry specific needs while fighting poverty which is one of the barriers of access to education.

Among other poverty-stricken countries, Lesotho has an allocation of 13% of her Gross Domestic Production to education in terms of budgeting for 20015/2016. With this outstanding feature, Lesotho is one of the countries which rank high among countries in Africa that prioritize education in their budgets (kingdom of Lesotho, 2016, p.16). Among other developments in enhancing access to education, GOL has formulated Education Sector Plan 2016/2017-2025/2026 whose areas of focus are, among others, mitigation of poor retention rates and improvement of academic achievement (MoET, 2016, p.20). The sector plan's long-term goals include improvement of access, quality and equity in education (MoET, 2016, p.21).

Despite the ratification and adoption of the above-mentioned human rights instruments including the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) by Lesotho, there is inefficient execution of provisions under these instruments and other pieces of legislations on education (Kingdom of Lesotho, 2014). This challenge exists alongside with shortage of guiding regulatory documents for the implementation of the legal frameworks in regard to issues such as poverty and lack of equitable access to education (Kingdom of Lesotho, 2014, p. 9). Similarly, MoET (2019, p. 26) observes that weakness of Lesotho education system is the limited implementation of policies and plans, and weak quality assurance mechanisms. Moreover, according to World Bank (2015, p.9), Lesotho is ranked among the ten most unequal countries, at the same time, one of the poorest countries in the world. Additionally, despite good work done by MOSD through Lesotho CGP and Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) Bursary, evidence shows many school children continue to suffer. For example, while the OVC Bursary partly caters for school fees, CGP could not continue caring for the learners living in poverty with other needs other than food and groceries (Tanga, 2013). Such additional needs include, among others, shoes,

uniform, transport and fees for recreational facilities (Tanga, 2013, p. 28, Kingdom of Lesotho, 2017, p. 34).

The country has an estimated 57.1 % of the population living below the national poverty line, and 34.0 % are below the food (or extreme, below M138 or US \$ 10 per adult per month) poverty line, with expenditures below minimum food requirements (Lesotho Bureau of Statistics, 2014, UNICEF, 2017, p. 44). Extreme poverty mostly hits the rural areas of Lesotho. For example, between 2002 and 2018, Basotho who lived below poverty line was 60% in rural areas relative to 28% in urban areas (Government of Lesotho, 2019, p. 27). Furthermore, scourge of poverty in rural areas of Lesotho denies male children their right to education thereby forcing them to herd livestock as way to earn money to support siblings (World Bank, 2013, p. 15, Kingdom of Lesotho, 2014, p. 11). These disparities result in inequalities in education sector.

The alarming poverty rate is exacerbated by low educational status. For example, households headed by the uneducated (61 %) had poverty rates twice as high as households headed by someone with higher education (30 percent) (World Bank, 2015, p. 14). Lesotho Demographic and Health Survey (2014) indicates that there were only 10% of both men and women who have completed secondary school or gone beyond secondary school (Ministry of Health, 2016, p. 13). The survey also establishes that educational attainment increases with household wealth among women and men; with 30% of women in the wealthiest households having completed secondary school or beyond compared to less than 1% of women in the poorest households.

Poor socioeconomic conditions among Basotho promote inequality in both enrolment and attendance at secondary level. For example, according to Lesotho Education Statistics Bulletin 2018, Net Enrolment Rate (NER) and Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) for Lower Secondary School (LSS) are 42% and 80 % respectively while NER and GER for Upper Secondary School (USS) are 29% and 39% respectively. Further, Statistics indicate that transition from primary to secondary school is at around 60-70% annually given the cost barrier incurred for high school education (Kingdom of Lesotho, 2014, p. 58). Moreover, some of the secondary schools in Lesotho do not admit children with lower academic

results yet in most cases, underperforming learners at schools are those learners from poor socioeconomic backgrounds (PISA, 2012, p. 47).

The root cause of inequitable access to secondary education is lack of socioeconomic resources resulting in an inability of parents to afford school fees for their children and shortage of secondary schools especially in remote areas (Kingdom of Lesotho, 2016, p. 21). As evident in the above-mentioned challenges, many of these legislative instruments, both international and local, are not employed to the fullest potential especially in the fight of poverty (Kingdom of Lesotho, 2014, p. 11). It is therefore imperative to explore some reports and empirical studies that unpack the influence of socioeconomic factors on learning and development as these are pertinent to equitable access in the context of Lesotho.

4.5.4 Current Research on access to secondary education in Lesotho

It has already been established that one of the major threats to Lesotho is lack of access to education for children who are from low socio-economic status. This problem is mostly predominant at secondary level. For example, according to Education Statistical Bulletin (2018), Gross Environment Rate (GER) in 2017 was 60.45%, while the Net Enrolment Rate (NER) in the same year was 43.3%, and this is affected by fees and a shortage of secondary schools in remote areas (UNICEF, 2017, p. 3). Furthermore, lack of learning facilities further exacerbates learning conditions for children from poverty-stricken families.

Lack of teaching and learning resources is highlighted by a survey involving 368 primary school teachers, conducted by Mateusi, Khoaeane and Naong (2014) to examine how inclusive education policy was implemented in Lesotho primary schools. The findings of the survey indicate that schools lack resources to create physical access, is a barrier to support an inclusive curriculum or adequately train teachers for inclusive education (Mateusi et al., 2014, p. 267). Similarly, a qualitative study involving 39 participants including 10 from four mainstream primary schools and five participants from a high school, by Mosia (2014, p. 301) reveals that barriers to inclusive education in Lesotho include, among others, lack of support and resources dedicated for inclusive education

as well as lack of proper skills among teachers especially in relation to assessment/placement mechanisms.

A literature reviewed by Lekhetho (2013) explored some of the factors hindering access to free primary education. The study reveals that many children remain out of school because parents cannot afford additional educational costs such as school uniforms and transport. The study also establishes that because of grinding poverty especially in the rural areas, young boys of school-going age in child-headed families, look after livestock or engage in other forms of child labour in order to support their siblings (Lekhetho, 2013, p. 404). Additionally, Lesotho's geographic set up could hinder access to education especially in rural mountainous zones of the kingdom. In its Country Status Report on the education sector of Lesotho, the World Bank (2005, p. 13) observes that in terms of educational outcomes, Basotho children who live in rural poor households and whose parents are less educated, are less likely to attend school and more likely to repeat and drop-out. Similar to Lekhetho's observation (2013), World bank (2005) notes that boys in Lesotho are less likely to attend school and more likely to repeat and dropout than girls. Moreover, children in two districts, namely Quthing and Qacha's Neck, which are more remote and mountainous, were less likely to attend school compared to those in Maseru district which is more undulating and urban (World Bank, 2005, p. 13).

Apparently, the geographic setup affects education in terms of retention of learners, progression and completion patterns. Khati, Khati & Makatjane (2009) conducted a case study to elicit quantitative information on retention and completion of primary school education. The findings of the study show that the average overall wastage is higher in rural than in urban schools. That is, while half of pupils in rural schools did not reach standard 7, the comparative figure for urban schools is 23% (Khati, Khati & Makatjane, 2009, p. 13). Additionally, in his qualitative study meant to explore the effects of national policies associated with "Education for All" in the highlands of Lesotho, Urwick (2011, p. 242) notes that parents in or near the highlands, in addition to being poorer and less literate, had less faith in the outcomes of primary education. But for parents in the urban areas, for example, who were typically employed in factories or by the security forces, the range of opportunities conferred by primary education was more visible (Urwick, 2011, p.

242). Also, in rural areas learners especially those who could not afford transport fees, travel long distances and this discourages them from schooling. Similar to other studies in Lesotho (Lekhetho 2013; &World bank 2005), this study reveals that boys drop out of school to go to initiation while some engage in herding as means to care for their families (Urwick, 2011, p. 242). However, the study like others fail to describe the kind of support schools provide to curb poor access resulting from SES influences hence the current initiative.

The value of extended family as alternative primary caregiving institution in Lesotho seems to deteriorate due to HIV and AIDS which is one of the severe factors heightening poverty in the country. Tanga (2013) conducted a qualitative study on the impact of the weakening support of extended family on the education of double orphans in Lesotho through in-depth interviews with participants from 3 of the 10 districts in Lesotho. The findings of the study revealed that combined effects of economic crisis and HIV and AIDS have resulted in extended families not being able to care for the needs of the orphans adequately, whilst continuing to accept them into their households. Tanga (2013, p. 182) argues that many extended families and other community members are shifting their traditional responsibilities to the government and many NGOs flooding the country. However, these options do not adequately satisfy the needs of orphans and the worst affected area of an orphan's life is education that is usually sacrificed to meet their own needs and those of their younger siblings. Tanga goes further to argue that the public assistance of R100 (US\$10 — exchange rate as of May 2013) provided by the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) since 2002 was inadequate given the effects of inflation. The policy governing this programme should be revisited if Lesotho is to achieve Sustainable Development 1 (No poverty) which reads “End extreme poverty in all forms by 2030” (United Nations, 2015, p. 17).

Nyabanyaba (2009) conducted a qualitative case study to explore factors influencing access and retention, in secondary schooling, of orphans and other vulnerable children living in high HIV prevalence areas of Lesotho. The study revealed that many children struggle to remain in school as a result of a variety of socio-economic challenges and cultural practices, but particularly the impact of HIV and AIDS and extreme poverty

(Nyabanyaba, 2009, p. 52). The study also indicated that many children, particularly boys in the rural areas, are forced to drop out of school because of poverty or the loss of one or both parents while girls were reportedly forced to interrupt their schooling to look after younger siblings or ailing members of their families or eventually opt out of school into early marriage to escape extreme poverty (Nyabanyaba, 2009, p. 52).

Inequity in education financing in Lesotho means that other levels of education, more notably, secondary level, are inadequately supported. Pillay (2010) conducted a qualitative study on higher education financing in Lesotho results of which revealed that, compared to higher education which is allocated 40% of the national budget, secondary education lags behind in terms of access by learners from families with poor socioeconomic background (Pillay, 2010, p. 72). Using mixed method approach, Mosia, Makatjane, Leseba and Malunga (2019) carried out a study to assess GOL on its progress regarding SDG 4: ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities. From their study findings, Mosia et al. (2019, p. 22) showed concern that secondary education remains the only formal education that receives less funding to ease burden on parents while there is high rate of drop-out of learners at that level (World Bank, 2019). As argued by Mosia et al. (2019, p. 22), unless there is a major intervention to increase funding the most vulnerable such as learners from low socioeconomic background to access secondary education, GOL may not fulfil the mandate of “leaving no one behind”. National Manpower Development Secretariat (NMDS) which is the main arm Lesotho government bursary uses a merit-driven selection process and this does not give those learners from poor backgrounds the opportunity to access higher education given their low academic scores (Pillay, 2010, p. 72).

Moshoeshoe (2015) conducted a quantitative study to analyse changes in educational achievement, educational inequality, and their determinants at primary level in Lesotho during the period between 2000 and 2007. The study established that educational achievement increased during this period due to changes in grade repetition, teacher effort, speaking English at home and school social capital. Moshoeshoe (2015, p. 38) observes that most of the changes in mathematics and reading scores remain unexplained. The author suggests that there are potentially other intangible school quality

variables and student family background factors that could have significantly influenced educational performance after the FPE programme hence the need “to unpack the influence of those factors that are currently unobserved in our data” (Moshoeshoe, 2015, p. 39) as an obvious area for further research. The absence of a sound basic education impedes further development of technical and professional skills at the post-secondary levels and hinders the student’s ability to participate in the economy as the World Bank (2016) states that Lesotho’s inefficient and low-quality primary and secondary education system is not conducive to the goal of inclusive growth and contributes to the country’s high unemployment rate of 25%. High levels of repetition and dropout at primary and junior secondary suggest that children are not acquiring the basic skills that lay the foundations for future learning (World Bank, 2016, p. 2).

Although the studies explored above do not directly explore access to secondary education, they have highlighted some challenges facing education system in Lesotho generally. Such challenges include socioeconomic related challenges, difficult terrain, low retention, drop-outs, poor education financing system and lack of teaching and learning facilities such as classroom, furniture, uniform, textbooks etc. in primary education level. However, one study has a relatively related similar focus as the current study.

Mosia and Lephoto (2015) conducted a qualitative case study, using in-depth interview with 5 teachers from primary level and 7 teachers from secondary level, to explore how schools are supported and empowered to be inclusive of learners with learning and development needs. The study also analysed reports published by MOET and the findings of the study reveal that MOET’s documents on learners’ annual registration, including learners with disabilities and orphans, indicate that the ministry spends a lot of money on bursaries and training teachers on counselling. Contrary to this, teachers denied that they were trained on counselling. The study also discovered that schools lack systematic methods of assessing learners’ needs, and psychosocial support is minimal and lacks continuity (Mosia & Lephoto, 2015, p. 87). Moreover, teachers mostly focus on their teaching load in overcrowded classes while oblivious of learners’ individual psychosocial needs. This supports the claim that learners’ social context of learning as

entrenched in their background, and affective well-being are not given necessary attention especially in Lesotho, hence the current study.

Mosia and Lephoto (2015)'s study has some shortcomings. Firstly, the dissonance that exists between MOET's reports and teachers' perceptions could have been further explored by interviewing relevant MOET officials since they are implementers and overseers of the ministry's policies. It failed triangulate data. Triangulating data sources adds validity to the study (Creswell, 2009; Yin, 2009; Stake, 2010). Moreover, perceptions of the vulnerable learners were not included and this is violation of learners' rights to be heard on the issues that affect them as dictated by article 12 of the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of a Child. "...even very young children – given the time and opportunity, demonstrate not only that they have views, experiences and perspectives to express, but that their expression can contribute positively to decisions that affect the realization of their rights and wellbeing" (UNICEF, 2011, p. 8).

With this picture of Lesotho on education as revealed by the above explored studies, there is heightened doubt whether the country will attain the agenda 2030 targets. The current study focused on access to secondary education for learners from poor socioeconomic background and the responsiveness of policies governing inclusive education while also suggesting the ways in which those policies and practices could be improved.

4.6 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

Research on access to secondary education establishes that international community has improved policies and administrative practices inspired by advancement of human rights in education. However, poverty has dramatically hampered this development. United States is the top country where the impact of a learner's socio-economic status on his or her performance in school weakened the most, and where the likelihood that disadvantaged learners perform at high levels increased the most. Korea is ranked the topmost country in PISA results and this is boosted by high participation of parents in the education of their children. More significantly, Korea has the highest access secondary education followed by Slovenia and Poland. This is because education policy in Korea is highly focal on the provision of equal educational opportunity for all and his was evaluated

to be successful. Countries such as China still lag behind in attaining equitable access to education largely due to socioeconomic inequality between urban and rural regions of the country. Basically, in rural areas access is mostly difficult compared to the urban areas.

Furthermore, policies in countries such as Tanzania emphasize eradication of illiteracy and provision of free and compulsory education up to secondary level. However, these countries still experience poor access to secondary education. In addition to the challenges facing education in Nigeria, is corruption which undermines efforts at managing resources earmarked for education. Chronic poverty in Zimbabwe worsens the situation of learners from low socioeconomic status. Despite a huge South Africa spends on education, the country is said to have the worst education system of all middle-income countries.

Lesotho is one of the countries which rank high among countries in Africa that prioritize education in their budgets. However, scourge of poverty in rural areas of the Mountain Kingdom, like in many other countries, denies male children their right to education thereby forcing them to herd livestock as way to earn money to support siblings. Lesotho is ranked among the ten most unequal countries, at the same time, one of the poorest countries in the world. Literature reveals the root cause problem of lack of equitable access to secondary education is lack of socioeconomic resources resulting in an inability of parents to afford school fees for their children and shortage of secondary schools especially in remote areas.

The chapter has established that socioeconomic rights are just mentioned in chapter 3 of the Lesotho Constitution which are provided as principles of the state policies not protected by law. Although the constitution does not treat education as a human right legislation such as the Child Protection and Welfare Act of 2011 have been developed to protect a child's right to education. The country has established strategies to fight poverty and partly finance secondary education, however, lack of teaching and learning resources, high rate of dropout, repetition of classes, gender inequality, and difficult terrain, have made access to secondary education remains a challenge especially for children with disadvantaged socioeconomic background. It is against this background that the current study is set out to explore and analyse socioeconomic factors act as

barrier to access to secondary education and the responsiveness of policies governing inclusive education.

CHAPTER FIVE: RESEARCH METHODS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter deals with research methods for the study. Firstly, it describes an interpretivist paradigm as perspective that underpins the current study. Interpretivist belief and philosophical assumptions are described in line with how the current study was set to unpack reality. A description of the reasons behind my choice of methods and processes that followed in conducting the study is provided. Then, research approach, design, data collection and analysis methods are presented. The chapter gives an explanation of how I observed and upheld research ethics. Lastly, it explains means through which I ensured trustworthiness of the study.

5.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

According to Olsen, Lodwick, and Dunlop, (1992, p. 16) a paradigm implies a pattern, structure and framework or system of scientific and academic ideas, values and assumptions. Thus, a paradigm inherently reflects our beliefs about the world we live in or want to live in (Lather, 1986a, p. 259). The current study adopted an interpretivist paradigm which is rooted from philosophy of Interpretivism. In Grix's (2004, p. 82) terms, interpretivism is a "response to the over-dominance of positivism" since it rejects the notion that a single, verifiable reality exists independent of our senses. Guba and Lincoln (1994, p. 109) articulate that positivism assumes that reality exists, and it is precise and accurate (quantitative view) whereas, post-positivism assumes that this 'reality' is constructed as human beings interact with each other in their social interaction (qualitative view).

The interpretivist view of post-positivism assumes that everyone has unique experiences, perceptions and beliefs, and no reality exists out of these three aspects (Morgan 2014, p. 38). In similar terms, post-positivism accepts and seeks multiple perspectives, being open to change, practicing iterative and emergent data collection techniques, promoting participatory and holistic research (Willis, 2007, p.583). As guided by the interpretivist paradigm, I a belief that the reality of secondary school learners' experiences of their learning environment and the knowledge acquired from those experiences is subjectively

constructed from context rather than objectively determined and perceived (Carson et al., 2001, p. 5; Reeves & Hedberg, 2003, p. 32).

When applying interpretivist paradigm, I was also eclectic from a constructivist paradigm which states that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their social world, (Crotty, 1998, p. 42). Suitable for complimenting interpretivist paradigm, the aim of constructivism, is to "engage in research that probes for deeper understanding rather than examining surface features" (Johnson, 1995, p. 4) and it facilitates toward that aim.

Additionally, like constructivist, the interpretivist perspective entails individuals' effort to understand the world they live in and an appreciation that individuals develop personal meanings about the world resulting in a complexity of views on one issue (Creswell 2014, p. 37, Willis, 2007, p. 90). Moreover, Thomas (2003, p. 6) says that an interpretivist paradigm portrays a world in which reality is socially constructed, complex, and ever changing. As Crotty (1998, p. 23) concurs, the basic generation of meaning is always social, arising in and out of interaction with a human community. This connotes that process of qualitative research is largely inductive thereby the inquirer generates meaning from the data collected in the field (Nieuwenhuis, 2007, p. 59; Creswell & Clark 2011, p. 42). The generated meaning unpacks lived experiences from the point of those who live it (Andrade, 2009, p. 43; Smith, 1993 p.5).

Furthermore, I assumed an objective stance when analysing the collected data and looked at the data thoroughly so that it informed me about what is going on in the environment instead of my own preconceptions (Mack, 2010, p. 8; Garrick, 1999, p. 148). Thus, I was concerned neither with prediction nor control but rather narrative descriptions and explanations (Lincoln & Lynham, 2011, p. 5) of the learners' lived experiences. I was guided by the following interpretivist assumptions: (a) individuals as study participants are unique and largely non-generalizable; (b) there are multiple interpretations of, and perspectives on, single events and situations; and (c) situations need to be examined through the eyes of the participants, rather than the researcher (Cohen et al., 2002, p. 22).

As guided by Reeves and Hedberg's (2003, p. 32) assertion, I used the inductive approach instead of the deductive approach as I consider theory as deriving from data collection and not as the driving force of research (Grix, 2004, p. 108; Gall et al., 2003, p. 21). Thus, I held to the belief that an understanding of the context in which any form of research is conducted is critical to the interpretation of data gathered (Willis, 2007: p.4). Specifically, the use of interpretivist perspective in the current research enabled me to explore the lived experiences of learners from poor socioeconomic background and the influence of their background on access to secondary education. In applying the interpretivist paradigm, I was cognizant of the four basic types of assumptions or elements namely ontological, epistemological, methodological and axiological assumptions (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 83), as discussed below.

5.2.1 Ontological assumptions

Literature reveals that ontology is concerned with the "the study of being". Thus, it is concerned with "what kind of world we are investigating, with the nature of existence, with the structure of reality as such" (Crotty, 2003, p. 10). Guba and Lincoln (1989, p. 83) indicate that the ontological assumptions are those that respond to the question "what is there that can be known?" or "what is the nature of reality?". Thus, it embraces the perception of reality, the extent to which a research paradigm believes reality can be studied objectively or whether it is subjective (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 34). Other scholars such as Patton, (2002, p. 134), Richards, (2003, p. 33), and Ormston et al. (2014, p. 4) concur that ontology refers to "the nature of our beliefs about reality".

As applied under interpretivist paradigm, ontology dictates that there is "no direct access to real world...no single external reality...rather, there are multiple realities that reflect various experiences and beliefs of different people in their own communities" (Morgan, 2014, p. 38; Carson et al., 2001, p. 6; Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 204). As Willis (2007, p. 194) states, different people and different groups have different perceptions of the world. Therefore, views about access to secondary education for learners from families of low socioeconomic status differed from one participant to the next and the current study tracked those differences as to generate data that capture the reality under study.

5.2.2 Epistemological assumptions

While ontology is concerned with the “study of being” or “what things are” (Renaud 2018, p. 1), epistemology on the other hand refers to the way of understanding and explaining things; thus “how people know what they know” (Crotty, 2003, p. 3). Similarly, Maynard, (1994, p. 10) points out that epistemology is concerned with “providing a philosophical grounding for deciding what kinds of knowledge are possible and how we can ensure that they are both adequate and legitimate.” Thus, it explains how acceptable and reasonable people’s knowledge is (Bryman (2008, p. 13). Furthermore, Gall, Gall, & Borg, (2003, p. 13) view epistemology as the branch of philosophy that studies the nature of knowledge and the process by which knowledge is acquired and validated. Thus, epistemology is concerned with the nature and forms of knowledge and the ways in which it can be acquired and communicated to the human world (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p. 7; Patton, 2002, p. 134).

The epistemological assumption of the interpretivist paradigm proclaims that a researcher has to interact closely with research participants at their natural setting in order to fully understand their views on how they experience their daily lives and those views construct reality that the study is set to unpack (Andrade, 2009, p. 44; Carson et al., 2001, p. 6). Therefore, in order to get to “the bases of knowledge, in its nature and form” (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2007, p. 7), of how learners from poor socioeconomic background experience learning and development, the researcher had to cooperate and form professionally harmonious rapport with the study participants.

5.2.3 Methodological assumptions

Ellen, (1984, p. 9) views research methodology is “an articulated, theoretically informed approach to the production of data”. Rajasekar et al. (2013, p. 5) describe research methodology as “...the procedures by which researchers go about their work of describing, explaining and predicting phenomena”. Similarly, Crotty (2003, p. 3) defines methodology as “the strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of the methods to the desired outcomes.” This involves strategic plan of action, process or design that informs one’s choice of research methods (Grix, 2004, p. 32). Thus, methodology guides the

researcher in deciding what type of data is required for a study and which data collection tools will be most appropriate for the purpose of their study.

Methodological assumptions of interpretivist paradigm which underpins the current study are rooted in Husserl's philosophical aspect of phenomenology which he defines as "a science that investigates essences, and, moreover, as a science that deals exclusively with "essences and essential relations" (Husserl, 1965, p. 116). Moreover, Mortari and Tarozzi (2010, p. 5) view phenomenology as a "way of thinking about knowledge – a philosophical and theoretical viewpoint – how do we know what we know". This view of phenomenology overlaps with Crotty's (2003) definition of epistemology as outlined above, and the two philosophical lenses namely phenomenology and epistemology embrace an interpretivist/constructivist approach to research (Crotty, 2003, p. 3).

Additionally, Qutshi (2018, p. 220) says that phenomenology is a methodological space within the social science research to study human phenomena at a deeper level of consciousness to analyse and understand lived experiences using Interpretative Phenomenological Approach (IPA). Therefore, IPA is concerned with the detailed examination of particulars, first providing an in-depth account of each case before moving to look for patterns of convergence and divergence across cases (Eatough and Smith, 2015, p. 1).

Methodology of the current study was inductive for I tracked views of participants and noted their divergent attributes as well as their similarities and allowed theoretical themes to be "developed from the observation of empirical reality" (Hussey & Hussey, 1997, p. 13). This interpretive methodology requires that access to secondary education as social phenomena be understood through "the eyes" of participants rather than the researcher (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 21). Thus, general inferences were induced from particular instances and that required me to move from individual observation to statements of general patterns (Hussey & Hussey, 1997, p. 13). The words, phrases and inferential statements of each study participant was tracked and analysed in line with principle of Hermeneutic phenomenology. Smith, (1997, p. 80) describes Hermeneutic phenomenology as a research methodology aimed at producing rich textual descriptions

of the experiencing of selected phenomena in the lifeworld of individuals that are able to connect with the experience of all of us collectively.

5.2.4 Axiological assumptions

Heron and Reason (1997) argue that an inquiry paradigm such as interpretivist must also cover axiological postulation. They posit that axiology entails the nature of value of a researcher and that of study participants, and awareness about what human states are to be valued simply because of what they are" (Heron & Reason, 1997, p. 287). Axiology emphasizes human flourishing which is viewed as adherence to participatory decision making whereby participants voluntarily get involved in a research that unearths their social context and their daily experiences thereof (Heron, 1996, p. 11). Kivunja and Kuyini (2017, p. 28), clearly state that axiology refers to the ethical issues that need to be considered when planning a research proposal. Thus, it considers what value researchers should attribute to the different aspects of research, the participants, the data and the audience to which we shall report the results of our research.

It is therefore in line with interpretivist view that knowledge is co-created between a researcher and research participants (Creswell & Clark, 2011, p. 43), and therefore a recognition and acknowledgement of interaction of the researcher's and participants' values, in the social inquiry (Chilisa & Kawulich, 2012, p. 56). As, Rovai et al. (2014, p. 4) point out, qualitative approach values individuality, culture, and social justice pertinent to research ethics and provides content and a context rich breadth of information which, although subjective in nature, is current. The section below discusses the qualitative approach with these significant features.

5.3 RESEARCH APPROACH

The current study assumed a qualitative approach. This approach was suitable for this study as it answers questions about the complex nature of phenomena (learning experiences of learners from families of low SES), often with the purpose of describing and understanding these phenomena from participants' point of view (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005, p. 94). Creswell (2009, p. 4) states that a qualitative approach is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. According to Punch (1998, p. 174), qualitative approach is employed for

studying and analysing spoken and written representations and records of human experience, using multiple methods including interview, observation, focus group discussion and document analysis. These lived human experiences yield very rich data from “insiders’ perspective” (Babbie & Mouton, 2001, p. 53).

Furthermore, Marguerite, Dean, & Katherine (2006, p. 21) indicate that in qualitative research approach, studies are carried out in a naturalistic setting in which case researchers ask broad research questions designed to explore, interpret and understand participants’ social context and their lived experiences on the phenomenon under investigation. Moreover, the advantage of using a qualitative approach is that new pieces can be added to the research puzzle or entire new puzzles conjured while gathering data, and this can even occur late in the analysis (Charmaz, 2006, p. 14).

Moreover, qualitative researchers have to focus on “...context analysis, explore the deeply rooted causes of phenomena, and highlights the explanations of what happened” (Wu & Wu, 2011, p. 1305). Basically, the researcher made arrangements to interact with research participants in order to unpack the lived experiences of learners from poor socioeconomic background and how this background affects their access to secondary education.

The use of open-ended or non-directive questions enabled me to inspire participants to share their thoughts and experiences (Chilisa & Kawulich, 2012, p. 56; Creswell & Clark, 2011, p. 42) about access to secondary education for learners from socioeconomic backgrounds. This is in line with hermeneutical phenomenology as van Manen (1990, p. 4) defines it as an art of exploring and describing the ‘lived experiences’ of research participants (phenomenology) and the interpretation (text) of the life they have lived and experienced (hermeneutics). More imperatively, as Moustakas (1994, p. 135) advises, in order to capture the true essence lived experiences of research participants, I endeavoured to bracket himself away from the issue that he was investigating. Thus, he set aside his prejudgments, biases, and preconceived ideas about how poverty affects persons from families of low SES (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85; Rodham, Fox & Doran, 2015, p. 62). However, it is significant to indicate that the researcher is unlikely to have a complete access to participants’ world without using his own understanding. As asserted

by Smith (1996, p. 264), I used his interpretive ability and values to influence his interaction with participants to get to the bottom of their views and experiences of learning and development in the selected school.

Interpretivist paradigm proved suitable for this approach because it portrays a world in which reality is socially constructed complex, and ever changing (Thomas, 2003, p.6). Moreover, interpretivist inquirers often opt for qualitative approach for it enables them to understand in depth the relationship of human beings to their environment and the part those people play in creating the social fabric of which they are a part (McQueen, 2002, p.17).

5.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

The current study assumed an in-depth single case study design which is exploratory, descriptive, and inductive (David & Sutton, 2011, p. 165-166). Yin (2012) asserts a case may be a person, an organisation, behavioural condition, event, or other social phenomenon with the boundary between the case and the context not easily distinguished (Yin, 2012, p.33). On the other hand, Simons (2009, p.28) views a case as a problem or activity that researchers intend to investigate. Other scholars such as Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014, p.28) assert that a case represents the unit of analysis that determines what is being studied or simply the focus of study. Based on these definitions of a case, the current study focuses on equitable access to secondary education which is a 'case', social phenomenon (Yin, 2012, p.33), or a problem (Simons, 2009, p.28) that calls for an inquiry through research without territorially limiting it within certain boundaries. The current study used an embedded single case study design. That is, an inquiry into equitable access to secondary education was not only be conducted within the selected secondary school boundaries (Yin, 2012, p.33), but involved parents, ministerial officials and analysis of relevant policies, strategic plans and reports as multiple units of analysis 'embedded' in one case or study focus (Babbie & Mouton, 2001, p. 281).

Yin (2003, p. 7) notes that an embedded single case study is a case study containing more than one sub-unit of analysis. Similarly, Scholz (2011, p. 25) advises that a case is "faceted or embedded in a conceptual grid" which allows to identify key components of

human and environmental systems. As Leedy and Ormrod (2010, p. 137) observe, every detail about the case (equitable access to secondary education) is imperative where the researcher explores the whole pattern rather than mapping the statistical causal relationship of variables (David, 2009, p. 5). This single case study was an empirical inquiry that explored a equitable access to secondary education (the 'case') in depth and within its real-world context (Yin (2014, p. 16, Punch, 2005, p. 148). Pring (2000, p. 40) defines a case study as "the study of the unique case or the particular instant". In addition, Gillham (2000a, p. 1) views a case study as an investigation to answer specific research questions whereby a researcher seeks evidence from multiple case settings. For the current study, such evidence included among others, written reports, policies, strategic plans, and academic records. These pieces of evidence enabled me to take multiple perspectives into account and attempt to understand the influence of multilevel social systems on the study subjects' perceptions and experiences of access to education (Babbie & Mouton, 2001, p. 281).

A case study is claimed to inform the establishment of the following five components: a study's questions; its propositions, if any; its unit(s) of analysis; the logic linking the data to the propositions; and the criteria for interpreting the findings (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p. 322; Stake, 1995, p. 51; Yin, 2002, p. 26). Therefore, when designing the study, I made sure that all these components are cohesive to and consistent among each other (Yin, 2002, p. 26). Furthermore, a case study design is different from others in that: it copes with the technically distinctive situation where there will be many more phenomena of interest than data points, and as one result; relies on multiple sources of evidence (Creswell, 2013, p. 97; Berg & Lune, 2012, p. 325-326; Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 544; Landman, 2009, p. 36-37; Yin, 2011, p. 4; Yin 2009, p. 116; Punch, 2005, p. 144). Apart from secondary school learners from poor socio-economic backgrounds, these multiple sources also included parents, teachers, education documents such as policies, plans and records.

Furthermore, Landman (2009, p. 36-37) argues that case studies are commonly used in the human rights field to assess the applicability of findings from one case to another, generate premises based on evidence from several cases, or establish new

classifications. Generation of data from one unit of study (participant) to another is in line with an ontological assumption that “single reality does not exist” (Morgan, 2014, p. 38). The choice of this design was influenced by interpretivist paradigm which four embraces philosophical assumptions or elements (Ontology, epistemology, axiology and methodology) (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 83) which as Stake (2008, p. 445) argues, are central to the principles of single case study research. Interpretivist/Constructivist paradigm embraces epistemology that orients and informs the qualitative case study research since “most contemporary qualitative researchers hold that knowledge is constructed rather than discovered” (Stake, 1995, p. 99). It is therefore imperative to note that qualitative case study researchers are interpreters and gatherers of interpretations which require them to report their rendition or construction of the constructed reality or knowledge that they gather through their investigation (Stake, 1995, p. 99).

5.5 PARTICIPANT SELECTION

The current study used non-probability method of selecting study participants (Du Plooy, 2009, p. 115; Strydom 2011b, p. 231-234) with purposive sampling (Berg, 2007, p. 64; Maree & Pietersen; 2007, p. 178; Strydom, 2011b, p. 232). Teddlie and Yu (2007, p. 77) articulates purposive /do-theoretical way of participants involves selection of units (e.g., individuals, groups of individuals, or institutions) based on specific purposes associated with answering a research study’s questions”. Additionally, Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim (2016, p. 2), posit that purposive selection of sources entails a deliberate choice of participants due to the qualities they possess. Thus, I decided what needed to be known and set out to find people who can and were willing to provide the information by virtue of knowledge or experience and time (Flick, 2010, p. 13; Cohen et al., 2007, p.115). That involved identification and selection of individuals and groups of individuals that were proficient and well-informed with a phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Clark, 2011, p. 18). Smith et al. (2009, p.48) add that “study participants are selected purposively, rather than through probability methods, because they can offer a research project insight into a particular experience”. As Creswell (2013, p.154) advises, and as a part of the process of selecting participants for a phenomenological research study, I sought participants’ written permission and the written approval of the participants from their learning institution.

In the beginning of data collection, I did not know much about learners who were from families with poor socioeconomic background, teachers who were knowledgeable about such learners, MoET officials who were conversant on equitable access to education and available educational documents, therefore, purposive sampling was employed. Kuma (2014, p. 155, 244) opines that when little is known about key sources to data, snowball sampling becomes another critical technique. Therefore, through snowball technique, I identified and went to the groups which he believed would maximize the possibilities of obtaining data and leads for more data on their question (Glaser, 1978, p. 45). Moreover, I also began by talking to the most knowledgeable people to get a line on relevance and leads to track down more data and where and how to locate oneself for a rich supply of data. As Creswell (2012, p. 206) advises, I selected participants and site that helped me understand the central phenomenon. Moreover, the study participants were homogeneous, and that enabled me to identify and examine convergence and divergence in some detail (Smith et al. 2009, p. 3).

The study participants consisted of 32 participants. They were 10 grades 11 and 12 learners (3 males and 7 females) from low SES and a parent or guardian for each, 9 teachers inclusive of the principal and deputy principal as well as three (3) officials from the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET). The learners were identified as vulnerable from the Ministry of Social Development (MOSD) database and were beneficiaries of its bursary for orphaned and vulnerable children (OVC). Five of the 10 learners performed well in their studies while the other five were described low performing as per school records provided by the Deputy Principal. The brief description of the study participants (using pseudonyms) is depicted in the next section below:

5.6 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF STUDY PARTICIPANTS

1. Thato is a 17-year-old female learner and double orphan in grade 12. She is the first born in a family of 3 children living with their paternal grandmother. Her parents died before they could build a house, so the children live at their grandmother's two single-roomed mud houses without electricity and running water. She is a hard-working learner whose efforts have been rewarded by teachers funding some of her learning needs to complement her grandmother's endeavours.

2. Thato's grandmother is a 74-year-old widowed woman who is a biological mother to the late Thato's father. Although she is a recipient of elderly grant, she is often unable to take care of some of Thato's social and learning needs.

3. Pule is a 17-year-old boy in grade 12 and born of out of wedlock. His mother is mentally challenged from birth. He comes from a village a bit far from the school and lives with one 38-year-old man who is not relative. The man, whom Pule refers to as Uncle, is an electrician he met a few years back when he was on his way home on feet after he was sent away from school because he owed school fees. This stranger invited Pule to live with him in a rented three-roomed house with electricity and running water just a few metres from the school. Pule is one of the well performing learners at the school.

4. Pule's maternal aunt is a 39-year old woman who is not married but have 3 children. She comes after Pule's biological mother and they live together at their parents' house where Pule lives when he is back home during holidays. Other Pule's uncles and aunts are married and have their own families. The family is financially disadvantaged and depends partly on temporary jobs mainly by Pule's aunt who has assumes a position of a caregiver.

5. Sekila is a 16-year-old grade 11 boy who is a double orphan who lives with his paternal uncle's family and their children in a 3-roomed house with water and electricity. His parents passed on when he was a toddler. Sekila went to initiation school under the influence of his uncle, who only did grade 5, and pressure from his peers who were already initiated when he was in grade 9. He continued his studies after initiation and is one of well performing learners.

6. Sekila's paternal uncle is a 45-year-old man whose livelihood largely come from crop-farming and animal-rearing. He is a younger brother to Sekila's biological father. The wife is not working and they partly take care of Sekila's social and learning needs, however, Sekila still remains one of the socioeconomically struggling learner.

7. Nthabeleng is a 16-year-old girl in grade 11. She is raised by her father as a single parent because her mother passed away when she was in grade 8. She is the first born in a family of 4 siblings. Their two roomed house does not have running water and

electricity. Her father did grade 4 and is earning income by doing temporary jobs. Despite her family's background, Nthabeleng performs well at school.

8. Nthabeleng's father is a 46-year old widower who doesn't have a permanent job. He earns his livelihoods from temporary jobs and provides for his family even though the family still struggles financially.

9. Neo is a 17-year-old girl in grade 12 whose parents are both alive and did grade 7 and grade 8 respectively. She is the 3rd born in a family of 5 children. Her mother is a street vendor while her father is unemployed and currently (at the time of interview) admitted for TB at nearby hospital. The family lives two singled-roomed mud houses with no running water nearby or electricity but Neo performs well at school.

10. Neo's mother is a 39-year-old woman is a street vendor selling fruits at local taxi rank to take care of her children and the ill husband who is a TB patient. The family is struggling financially despite the wife's efforts.

11. Mokhali is 17-year-old girl in grade 11. Her parents, who only had primary level education, have divorced and her father has since remarried. She is the first born in a family of 3 children and they live with their mother in a two-roomed rented flat with running water but no electricity. Though she tries to support them, the salary she earns as a textile factory employee is too meagre. Mokhali was impregnated by a 28-year old married man when she was 15 years old. Her academic performance was deteriorating at the time of the interview.

12. Mokhali's mother is a 38-year old divorced woman who works at textile factory. With her too meagre salary, she is trying hard to provide for her children, however she does not manage to cover all their needs.

13. Puseletso is a 17-year-old girl in grade 12 staying with both parents in a 3 roomed dilapidated house without water and electricity. Both parents have primary level education. She is the 3rd born in a family of 5 siblings. The mother is a domestic worker while the father is unemployed, abuses alcohol and is usually abusive to his family when drunk. Puseletso has to use a taxi to get to school and sometimes goes on foot due to lack of money. Her academic performance is below average.

14 Puseletso's mother is a 44-year old domestic worker whose efforts to take care of her family are overshadowed by her husband's violent behaviour when he is under the influence of alcohol.

15. Palesa is a 16-year-old girl in grade 11. She lives with her mother and an elder brother who has physical disability. Their father passed away when Palesa was 9 years old. They live in a two roomed house that has no electricity and running water. Her home is located some distance from the school and the family has to source funds for her school transport. Her mother earns a living as a street vendor. Palesa's academic performance is below average.

16. Palesa's mother is a 51-year old widow who is a selling fruits and snacks at the nearby bus stop. The family's socioeconomic welfare deteriorated after Palesa's brother became physically handicapped as a result of car accident.

17. Keneuoe is a 17-year-old girl in grade 12. She is a double orphan living with her elder sister in a rented one roomed house (no water and electricity) located not far from the school. The sister dropped out of school and works as a domestic worker. They left their parents' house in the remote areas outside Morija in fear of forced marriage. Keneuoe uses public transport to school and her academic performance is below average.

18. Keneuoe's sister is a 23-year old woman who dropped out of school to take care of Keneuoe's social and learning needs. She is working as a domestic worker. The two siblings are financially struggling and sometimes fail to have their needs met.

19. Lereko is 17-year-old boy in grade 12. He lives in a dilapidated single roomed rented house in town and has to source funds to commute to school. He was born out of wedlock and has a sister who got married at the age of 14 years. He left his home in a rural village when his uncles forced him to herd cattle and to go to initiation school. On weekends he does piece jobs in town to earn income for food, cosmetics and other needs. He uses public transport to go to school. Lereko's academic performance is rated as below average.

20. Lereko's grandmother is a 67-year old widowed woman who is Lereko's maternal grandmother. She lives with her two sons and their wives in 3 single houses made of out

stones and mud, and hatched with grass. The family earns the living by rearing sheep and goats even though this does not take care of Lereko's social and learning needs.

5.6.1 Table 1: Brief attributes of the 9 THS participating teachers

Participating Teacher	Gender	Subject Taught	Highest qualification	Years of experience
Principal	F	History	Master's Degree	35 years
Deputy Principal	M	Chemistry	Master's Degree	25 years
Teacher 1	M	Sesotho	Bachelor's Degree	15 years
Teacher 2	F	Biology	Honor's Degree	19 years
Teacher 3	F	Development Studies	Bachelor's Degree	18 years
Teacher 4	M	Mathematics	Honor's Degree	11 years
Teacher 5	F	Life Skills	Bachelor's Degree	26 years
Teacher 6	F	Social Science	Bachelor's Degree	32 years
Teacher 7	M	Woodwork	Diploma	23 years

Interviews were also conducted involving 3 MoET officials who are placed at Special Education Unit (SEU) and their level of seniority hierarchically starts from central to regionals and down to district level as briefly described below:

1. Official 1 occupying office at central level
2. Official 2 occupying office at regional level
3. Official 3 occupying office at district level

The study has analyzed the following documents

1. Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) (2004/2005–2006/2007).
2. National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP 2012/2013-2016/2017)
3. National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS) 2014/15 – 2018/19
4. Education Sector Plan (ESP) (2016-2026)
5. National Policy on Orphans and Vulnerable Children (NPOVC 2006)
6. Millennium Development Goals Status Lesotho Report of 2015
7. Lesotho Voluntary National Review of the implementation of Agenda 2030 report 2019
8. Lesotho Inclusive Education Policy (LIEP) 2018

5.7 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

The current study yielded empirical data through semi-structured individual interviews, a focus group discussion and document analysis (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005, p. 143) as described below:

5.7.1 Semi-structured interview

For the purpose of the current study, qualitative interviews were found to be one of the suitable methods of collecting data and was used to collect data from 10 selected learners, each of their parents, teachers and 3 MOET officials. Smith et al. (2009) view qualitative research interview as a conversation with a purpose which is informed, implicitly at least, by a research question, and informed by phenomenology and interpretivist paradigm. Interviews are meant to open up and develop a relationship with the participants so that their 'live experiences' can be explored and analysed (Smith et al. 2009, p. 57, Johnson, 2001, p. 106). Additionally, Punch (2005, p. 168) posits that an interview method of collecting data enables researchers in a variety of fields to access "people's perceptions, meanings, definitions of situations and constructions of reality".

Specifically, one on one semi-structured interview (SSI) was used to collect data from selected research participants. SSI is a method of data collection in the form of a dialogue that involves open-ended questions, often accompanied by follow-up why or how questions (Adams, 2015, p. 493). As Adams (2015, p. 494) continues to argue, SSI is convenient if a researcher needs to ask probing, open-ended questions and want to know the independent thoughts of each individual in a group. Similar to Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest & Namey (2005, p. 30), Walsham (2006, p. 323) point out that SSIs are also important when researching sensitive topics as was the case in the current study and are appropriate where depth of meaning is important and the research is primarily focused in gaining insight and understanding (Gillham 2000, page 11; Ritchie & Lewis 2003, p.138).

Flick (1998, p. 76) believes that the advantage of face-to-face semi-structured interview is the expectation that the participant's viewpoints are more to be expressed than they would be in a non-face-to-face questionnaire. Moreover, this method involves open-ended questions that are suitable to collect data from participant meanings on how they perceive their world and how they explain or make sense of the important events in their lives (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993, p. 426; Legard et al., 2003, p. 141). Other advantages include the following: they involve the respondents in the research process thereby empowering them; they allow free interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee; they allow opportunities for clarification so that relevant data is captured; they maximise description and discovery; and they offer researchers access to people's ideas, thoughts and memories in their own words, rather than in the words of the researcher (Bless & Higson-Smith, 2000, p. 104-109).

5.7.2 Focus group discussion

Focus group discussion (FGD) was used to collect data from 9 teachers from the selected secondary school. The first discussion involved the principal, deputy principal and two female teachers who were said to have training on inclusive education. The second discussion involved 7 teachers who did not go for psychosocial support training. Bryman (2008, p. 694) points out that a focus group is a form of group interview in which: there are several participants and a discussion facilitator; there is an emphasis in the questioning on a particular fairly tightly defined topic; and the emphasis is upon interaction

within the group and the joint construction of meaning. Merton, Fiske and Kendall (1990, p. 137), argue that the size of the group should manifestly be governed by two considerations: "...it should not be so large as to be unwieldy or to preclude adequate participation by most members nor should it be so small that it fails to provide substantially greater coverage than that of an interview with one individual". Gibson and Riley (2010, p. 61) posit that the focus group consists of between four to eight people that share common qualities and identity whereas Maugham (2003, p. 2) postulates that membership of an ideal focus group ranges from six to twelve subjects.

Then, a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) or a Focus Group Interview (FGI) as Perlesz and Lindsay (2003, p. 29) state, is a technique that makes use of the human ability to tell stories and is therefore particularly suitable for provision of better access to people who are not outspoken and who would normally fear taking part in an individual interview, feeling that they have nothing to say or that they cannot address sensitive issue (Lederman 1990, p. 118; Bromley et al. 2003, p. 13). Krueger and Casey (2000, p. 5) add that a focus group discussion is a carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment. According to Schurink and Schurink (1998, p. 2-5), FGD is characterised by the following: It should consist of a small group of individuals that is homogenous and, relatively, unfamiliar with each other to ensure maximum validity of the findings; It should be conducted in series in order to control observation effects so as to generate reliable data about the respondents' perceptions about the phenomenon on discussion; and It should produce qualitative data, which is focused on a particular issue.

Another advantage of using FGD is that unlike conversations on a one-to-one basis with a stranger, FGD creates opportunity for a wider coverage of the topic as participants can ask each other follow-up questions and critique each other's views (Gibson & Riley 2010, p. 61-62). Through FGD, rich data can emerge through interaction within the group, for example, sensitive issues that could have been missed in individual interviews, may be revealed. I was the moderator and facilitated discussion at the sometime maintaining the theme of the study. According to Lewis (2003, p. 13), the quality of an FGD depends on

the experience and skills of the moderator, who needs to be capable of thinking, listening and managing time at the same time.

5.7.3 Document analysis

The current study analysed public documents including learners' performance reports, mission statements, annual school reports, policy manuals, learners' handbooks, strategic plans of MOET and MOSD. Documents refer to 'social facts' which are produced, shared, and used in socially organised ways (Atkinson & Coffey, 1997, p. 47). Documents help the researcher to uncover meaning, develop understanding, and discover insights relevant to the research problem' (Merriam (1988, p. 118) and can "cast light on many aspects of organisational life" (Forster, 1994, p. 148). They are also essential in helping the researcher to generate new interview questions, and participant observation at community events provided opportunities to collect documents (Goldstein & Reiboldt, 2004, p. 246). Document analysis, therefore, is a form of qualitative research in which documents are interpreted by the researcher to give voice and meaning around an assessment topic (Bowen, 2009, p. 31).

Nieuwenhuis (2007, p. 82) elaborates that document analysis is a data gathering approach that uses written documents, whether published or unpublished, which provide information on the topic of research and these include: "memoranda, agendas, administrative documents, letters, reports, email messages, newspapers articles" etc. Denzin, (1970, p. 291) add that document analysis is often used in combination with other qualitative research methods as a means of triangulation; that is, "the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon". Triangulation of data is done when the researcher attempts to provide a confluence of evidence that breeds credibility (Eisner, 1991, p. 110). Another advantage of documents is that they are stable, "non-reactive" data sources, and as such they can be read and reviewed multiple times and remain unchanged by the researcher's influence or research process (Bowen, 2009, p. 31)

To this extent, Silva (2012, p. 141) argues that document analysis should focus on "...the meaning of the document, the situation in which it emerges, and the importance of the interaction that results from the document. This data collection method entails careful,

focused reading and re-reading of data, as well as coding and category construction. Then the emerging codes and themes may also serve to “integrate data gathered by different methods” (Bowen, 2009, p. 32). The author opines that the overall concept of document analysis is a process of evaluating documents in such a way that empirical knowledge is produced, and an understanding is developed (Bowen, 2009, p. 33).

5.8 DATA ANALYSIS

The current study involved qualitative data analysis which is primarily an inductive process of organizing data into categories and identifying patterns among the categories (McMillan & Schumacher 2006, p. 364). Thus, data analysis process entailed “working with the data”, organising them, breaking them into manageable units, synthesizing them to discover patterns, concepts, themes, perceptions, values, experiences etc. (Nieuwenhuis 2007, p. 99; Lemmer, 2012, p. 89; Ngulube, 2015, p. 131). This is called coding process which further entails discerning identified data patterns that point to a theoretical understanding of the phenomenon under study (Babbie, 2014, p. 409). Similarly, Patton, (1987, p.149) adds that qualitative data analysis involves identifying coherent and important themes and patterns in the data and the researcher looks for quotations or observations that go together, that are examples of the same underlying idea, issue, or concept. Basically, qualitative data analysis is essentially about detection, and the tasks of defining, categorising, theorizing, explaining, exploring, and mapping the analysis role (Huberman & Miles, 2001, p. 309).

Influenced by phenomenology, the study used Interpretative Phenomenological Analyses (IPA) as an ideal approach for interpreting qualitative data. Guest, Namey and Mitchel (2013, p. 10) understand phenomenology as the study of people’s understanding and feelings of their reality. Furthermore, Thomas (2006, p. 241) observes that phenomenology “Seeks to uncover the meaning that lives within experience and to convey felt understanding in words”. Creswell (2012, p. 76) notes “a phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon.” Similar to Creswell (2012, p. 76), Kawulich and Holland (2012, p. 238), note that phenomenological analyses begin with a single unit of analysis such as individual and gradually build the analysis to reflect a group which shares characteristics.

Then, according to Smith and Osborn (2008), Interpretative Phenomenological Approach (IPA) involves detailed examination of the participant's lifeworld; it attempts to explore personal experience and is concerned with an individual's personal perception or account of an object or event, as opposed to an attempt to produce an objective statement of the object or event itself. In addition, Smith et al. (2009, p. 4, 33), posit that IPA started in psychology and researchers who used it were concerned with examining subjective experience of a phenomenon under study. IPA is premised on the view that human beings are sense-making creatures, and therefore accounts which study participants reflected attempts to make sense of their experience (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009, p. 4). Furthermore, Eatough and Smith (2015) point out that IPA captures diversity of opinions, and is concerned with the detailed examination of personal lived experience of study participants. Thus, it provides an in-depth account of each case before moving to look for patterns of convergence and divergence across cases (Eatough & Smith, 2015, p. 1).

Using IPA, I was able to make sense of every participant's experiences of how low SES affects access to education (Smith et al. 2009:35). Moreover, a study using IPA focuses on gaining an insider (subjective) perspective of the phenomenon being studied, whilst acknowledging that "... the researcher will therefore be the primary analytical instrument" ...who focusing on context analysis, exploring the deeply-rooted causes of phenomena, and highlighting the explanations of what transpires during data collection (Fade, 2004, p. 648; Wu & Wu, 2011, p. 1305). That is, on one hand, the researcher is like the participant, is a human being drawing on everyday human resources in order to make sense of the world. On the other hand, the researcher is not the participant, only has access to the participant's experience through what the participant reports about it, and is also seeing this through the researcher's own, experientially lens (heuristic phenomenology) (Smith et al. 2009, p. 435-36).

5.8.1 Data analysis procedure

The aim of this study was to explore in detail how participants made sense of their world and I made sense of how participants make sense of their world (Smith 2004, p. 41; Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 5; Smith 2011, p. 103). Literature reveals that, there is little standardisation with no absolutes where a specific type of qualitative data relates to a specific type of analysis (Partington 2003, p.113; Neuman 2011, p. 518). As Schurink et

al. (2011, p. 403) observe, there are always variations in the number and description of steps (procedure) for the same process of data analysis by different authors. For this study, analysis of data was carried out according to a Creswell's (2013, p. 182-188) qualitative data analytic procedure, equally described by Marshall and Rossman (1999, p. 152-159) and Watling and James (2012, p. 385-395). Furthermore, the analysis aligned to comments offered by Gibbs (2007, p. 1) and Creswell (2009, p. 184-185) and recommendations by Henning et al (2004, p. 104- 109); Roberts et al. (2006, p. 43); Davies (2007, p. 181-184); Gall et al. (2007, p. 257); McMillan and Schumacher (2010, p. 322-323;3 66-377); Greeff (2011, p. 359) and Schurink et al. (2011, p. 403-404) as outlined below:

Verbatim transcription of the responses from an interview commence as soon as interviews start as Baxter and Jack (2008, p. 554-555) observe that in qualitative research, data collection and analysis are done simultaneously. As suggested by Henninget et al. (2004, p. 76-77), transcription notation symbols, comments and the taking of field notes were used in this study to capture non-transcribable text to gain as much of the complete picture as possible. There was also note taking which entailed recording of recurring phrases, my questions, subjects' emotions, and descriptions of or comments on, the language use (Biggerstaff & Thompson 2008, p. 217). I drew a table that depicted themes in a summary, while also aligning the themes with transcripts of experiential claims, my comments, and emerging themes (Smith et al. 1999, p. 220). As a way of ensuring the qualitative reliability and validity of the data (Stake 1995, p. 88), the verbatim transcribed interviews were presented to the respondents to verify and sign off.

Then the entire transcribed text and field notes were read thoroughly at first to obtain an overall and comprehensive impression of the content and context before the process of coding began where units of meaning were identified or labelled. Scott and Usher (2011, p. 89) posit that coding involves classifying field notes, observations or interview transcripts by either inferring from the words being examined what is significant, or from the repeated use of words (phrases) whether a pattern is developing (i.e. that all activities which have been recorded were being understood in a similar way).

5.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

I considered and abided by the following ethics throughout the research process:

5.9.1 Informed consent

According to Stevens (2013, p. 19), informed consent entails a mindful selection of decision or give the right to do something, in this case it means agreeing with an understanding to take part in the research study without any pressure or force. In conducting a social research, such as the current study, the requirement for informed consent mandates researchers to provide adequate information to research participants on what the study is about, the risks and/or benefits of participating and the information should be communicated in simple and clear language (American Psychological Association 2014, p. 1; King 2010, p. 99).

Israel and Hay (2006, p. 61) highlight that the word “informed consent” explicitly emphasises that the study participants must have adequate knowledge and it is the responsibility of a researcher to ensure that adequate information is given to their participants, about the research project. Additionally, Sieber, (2012, p. 64) asserts that informed consent should make it clear to the participant what their participation entails, that is, the potential benefits as well as the risks. Adequate written information was given to the Ministry of Education, participants from the Ministry, teachers, parents and learners before they participated. I went further to explain the reasons for conducting the study and its possible benefit before every interview and focus group discussion.

5.9.2 Confidentiality

Cooper and McNair (2015, p. 100) defines confidentiality as the agreement to limit access to a subject’s information through agreement about how such information is handled. Guided by Confidentiality as one of ethical considerations in research, I ensured that there were proper safeguards in place to protect the privacy of participants and their information from unauthorized access, use, disclosure, modification, loss, and theft (Research Ethics Board of Ryerson University, 2017 p. 202). During debriefing sessions, I assured study participants some confidentiality and used a locked cabinet to put a laptop that store sensitive information about study participants. As a backup store, I stored a duplicate of the data collected on goggle drive online that is password protected.

5.9.3 Rewards and benefits (Beneficence)

The principle of beneficence emphasizes the professional mandate to do effective and significant research to better serve and promote the welfare of our constituents. As Fouka and Mantzorou (2011, p. 5) suggest, before partaking in a study, all participants must be told if there are any potential benefits associated with that research. Moreover, Gibbs (2007, p. 149) advises that the process of obtaining the voluntary agreement of individuals to participate in research that is based on their full understanding of the possible benefits and risks to themselves. Accordingly, I explained to participants that even though there were no tangible rewards for participating in the research, if MoET would consider and fulfil the recommendations made following the identification of some gaps in the access to inclusive education, inclusive education would be effectively enhanced and needs of vulnerable learners would be fully taken care of.

5.9.4 Reduction of harm

According to King (2010, p. 102), harm in research may result from exposing informants to environments and situations that could induce physical pain or cause distress, embarrassment etc. or exposing epileptics to flashlights. As per Kumar 's (2011, p. 282) proposal, study participants were asked to disclose attitudes they felt would be unpopular or demanding personal traits in this case, welfare receipts payments, low income and so on as divulging such information usually make them feel threatened or uncomfortable.

UNAIDS 2004 advises that

“...in the event of any harm the nature, magnitude and probability of all potential harms resulting from participation in any research should be specified in the research protocol as fully as can be reasonably done, as well as the modalities by which to address these, including provision for the highest level of care to participants who experience any harm, compensation for injury related to the research and referral to psychosocial and legal support as necessary” (UNAIDS, 2004, p. 27).

Furthermore, even though I had to build rapport and make the participants relaxed and feel comfortable to answer the interview questions, study participants seemed to show some personal humiliation and emotional pain as they expressed their hurting

experiences of living in poverty. In the light of the above ethical caution, I gave the study participants debriefing sessions before and after each interview to establish if they need further professional and/or counselling intervention (Stevens, 2013, p. 19). Debriefs revealed no need for further intervention for all participants.

5.9.5 Right to withdraw

Study Participants were assured of the right to withdraw from a study at any time and of their right to request withdrawal of their data after they had taken part in the study (King 2010, p. 101).

5.8.6 Fabrication and falsification of data

Flynn & Goldsmith, (2013, p. 1) posit that fabrication of data is a research misconduct whereby a researcher makes up either data or results then records or reports them, whereas falsification is when the researcher manipulates materials, process, equipment or changes or omits data such that the research is not represented accurately. On the other hand, data alteration is when a researcher manufactures data for imaginary participants if they run short of a few of them (Wilson, 1993, p. 181). I was therefore careful not to commit any of these misconducts.

5.10 TRUSTWORTHINESS

Enhancement of quality of findings is done through validity and reliability. Qualitative validity, according to Stake (1995, p. 88) means that the researcher checks for the accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures, while qualitative reliability indicates that the researcher's approach is consistent. However, the terms Reliability and Validity are essential criterion for quality in quantitative paradigms (Nieuwenhuis 2007, p 80, Kimu, 2012, p. 116; Johnson 1997, p. 282, Eisner, 1991, p. 58 while in qualitative paradigms the terms Credibility, Neutrality or Confirmability, Consistency or Dependability and Applicability or Transferability are to be the essential criteria for trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). According to Nieuwenhuis (2007, p. 80), credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability are qualitative synonyms for the quantitative terms internal and external validity, reliability and neutrality. In this regard, to ensure trustworthiness of the findings of the current study, I was cognizant of the following:

5.10.1 Credibility

McMillan, (2012, p. 302) defines credibility as the extent to which the data, data analysis and conclusion are accurate and trustworthy. For the current study credibility of the findings was done by triangulating data sources, using member checking processes, and applying a data auditing technique (Creswell, 2009, p. 326). I used the same data collection tools and collecting data using more than one tool (triangulation or crystallization (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). According to Nieuwenhuis (2007, p. 81), the use of different researchers and/or multiple sources of data such as interviews and document analysis gives various dimensions to a problem and improves trustworthiness of study findings. Furthermore, Johnson, (1997, p. 284) argues that in order to improve the analysis and understanding of construction of others, triangulation is a step taken by researchers to involve several investigators or peer researchers' interpretation of the data at different time or location. For the current study, various sources of data were triangulated, and these sources include semi-structured individual interview with learners and officers from MoET, and FGDs with teachers, and document analysis involving policies, annual reports, learners' performance report, curricula and strategic plans.

Furthermore, credibility of the study findings was ensured by member checking. Principle of member checking dictates that after transcribing data participants be sent their transcribed interviews to validate what they said (Creswell 2014, p. 201). According to Guba, (1981, p. 85), member checks mean that the data and interpretations are continuously tested as they are derived from members of various audiences and groups from which data are solicited.

5.10.2 Neutrality (confirmability)

Kimu (2012, p 116) conceptualizes neutrality (confirmability) as the degree to which the findings are a function only of the participants and conditions of the research and not of other biases, motivations and perspectives. Further, Tobin and Begley (2004, p. 392) indicate that confirmability is "concerned with establishing that data and interpretations of the findings are not figments of the inquirer's imagination but are clearly derived from the data". Thus, the way of nonconformity from bias in research procedures, results and whether the findings would be consistent if the inquiry was to be replicated with the same participants or in a similar context.

5.10.3 Consistency (Dependability)

Consistency in qualitative also known as dependability (Lincoln & Guba 1985, p. 300) carries an element of reliability which is the extent to which the findings would be consistent if the study were to be repeated in similar contexts or with the same subjects (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p. 207). Stenbacka (2001, p. 551) asserts that the notion of reliability is one of the quality concepts in qualitative research which needs to be ensured in order to claim a study as part of proper research. To ensure dependability of the study findings, I used constant comparison whereby one piece of data, for example, an interview, was compared with previous data and not considered on its own, as Anderson (2010, p. 4) argues that it enables researchers to treat the data as a whole rather than fragmenting it. I therefore constantly checked and rechecked the consistency of the findings from different as well as the same sources. As observed by Duneier (1999, p. 345–347) and Creswell, (2009, p. 191) it is triangulating or establishing converging lines of evidence which makes the study findings as robust as possible.

5.10.4 Transferability (Applicability)

Kimu, (2012, p. 116) defines transferability/applicability as the extent to which the findings apply to other context settings and groups. However, Kimu, (2012, p.116) warns that in qualitative research, the purpose is not to generalize findings to a larger population but rather to describe a phenomenon or experience. The current study regards generalizability as the transferability of data findings to a similar context. McMillan (2012, p. 304) posits that transferability refers to the appropriateness of applying the results to other contexts and settings. Furthermore, Gibbs (2007, p. 149) views transferability as the degree to which it is justifiable to apply to a wider population explanations and descriptions that research has found apply in a particular sample or example.

5.11 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

The current study assumed interpretivist paradigm with a qualitative approach which is suitable for investigating the influence of socioeconomic disadvantage on access to secondary education as lived experiences by research participants. The study was a single case design study that used in-depth description of participants' perceptions on how socioeconomic factors affects learning and development. In generating data, the study triangulated tools such as using semi-structured interviews, focus group discussion

and document analysis and data were analysed through IPA which also gave attention to participants' unique realities. IPA is concerned with examining subjective experience of 'something' or phenomenon under study as it is premised on the view that human beings are sense-making creatures, and therefore the accounts which study participants provide reflect their attempts to make sense of their experience. Ethical considerations were followed keenly when engaging learners and their families as participants in data collection because the subject matter for the study is a sensitive matter. Finally, trustworthiness of the study findings was ensured using such techniques as triangulation, member checking, constant comparison, thick description, and purposeful sampling.

CHAPTER SIX: DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents and analyses the findings of the study. Data generated from 32 participants, 10 learners, their 10 parents, 3 MOET officials, and 9 teachers, are presented according to themes identified from the analysis. Findings from analyzed documents such as strategic plans, policies and reports from the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) are presented along those from interviews to establish an understanding of the way the ministry and schools provide access to secondary education for vulnerable learners. Results of the study are captured under seven themes namely: 1. Understanding equitable access to education ; 2. Experiences of access to education; 3. Exposure to family distresses; 4. Parental support for vulnerable children; 5. Teachers' preparedness to support vulnerable learners; and 6. Focal areas for improving access to education. Details shared about the participants' descriptive features are real except for the pseudonyms which help the study adheres to anonymity and confidentiality ethical principles.

6.2 UNDERSTANDING EQUITABLE ACCESS TO EDUCATION

This study argues that understanding equitable access to education is imperative in the business of ensuring that no child is left behind as a mandate of inclusive education. Therefore, it was critical for this study to establish how participants understood equitable access to education. The following are views of teachers and MoET officials about equitable access to education:

Sesotho teacher shares his own understanding:

I understand that it it means accommodating all learners who are from rich and poor families alike but special priority should be given to those with disabilities... thus they should be given a chance to study with their normal counterparts.

On the same note Biology teacher says:

Equitable access to education means accommodating every student regardless of their disabilities...such that those with disabilities are taught together with those without disabilities.

Other similar sentiments include that of Woodwork teacher:

I think the term equitable access to education is when education system allows children with disabilities participate and learn together with those without disabilities in the same classroom.

The principal expresses her understanding:

By equitable access to education I understand that it is a practice whereby a school admits all learners who are from rich and poor families alike.

She continues

For example, there was a time when we had a learner with physical disability and he was struggling to learn and some of the teachers were reluctant to make efforts to help him. I talked to those teachers but all in vain... eventually their parents came and took him out of school, even now I feel very guilty and wished I could do something different to support and ensure full access to education for that poor boy.

As indicated above, the principal mentioned socioeconomic status as one of the aspects that has to be considered when thinking of equitable access to education but as she adds some emphasis on her experience of inclusiveness, she alludes to disability.

In the same tone, Mathematics teacher makes the reflection of socioeconomic status but associates it with the issue of disability in his explanation of equitable access to education:

Equitable access to education simply means accepting every child at school regardless of their physical appearance, financial status or family background...for instance, a student whose parents struggle financially may not be in the position to purchase assistive devices for their physically disabled child.

While two teachers who were said to be experts in inclusive education say that equitable access to education is a situation whereby every child is afforded an equal opportunity to learn, they limit the meaning of diversity to differences in learners' disabilities. These were reflected in their interview responses.

In her responses Life skills teacher says:

In my own understanding, equitable access to education is the context of teaching and learning whereby that accommodates learners of different backgrounds, that is, schools should give admission to children irrespective of their disabilities or talents.

She continues:

Efforts should be made by school authorities to ensure that all learners with disabilities are given equal opportunities to learn in regular classes without any sort of discrimination.

A social science teacher pronounces:

Our understanding of equitable access to education does not differ from MOET's proclamation that every school should respect learner diversity and welcome every child regardless of disability, gender or religious background.

She continues:

As it's the mandate of our ministry that calls for all children to be taught together in the same classroom regardless of individual's types of disabilities, what we do in this school we accept every child, and we make sure that they become part of our school at all angles from physical presence to having every opportunity to participate in learning process.

The Deputy Principal also shares his understanding of equitable access to education:

I understand it to be a kind of education system whereby a school gives admission to every child and the classrooms should be such that the composition of the learners includes both learners with and without disabilities.

He expands:

Yes... (he pauses a bit) in accepting every learner we have to make sure that they partake of the same subject matter taught, no segregation nor any labelling

on the basis of gifted or non-gifted features of learners...in other words there has to be an element of integration, and that in itself promotes inclusion.

Other teachers like Development Studies teacher describe equitable access to education as:

an initiative whereby a school makes sure that a classroom accommodates all learners including those who are normal... they have to be taught together with those with special education needs like those with physical, sensory, intellectual or multiple impairments.

Teachers' views were echoed by those of MOET officials who note:

...indeed promoting equitable access to education means that schools should give admission to every learner, in this case gender, social class or disability does not matter (An official at central level).

She continues:

As a matter of fact, one could understand equity in education from the history itself...that in 1989, our ministry (MOET) drafted a policy on special education which advocated the integration of people with disabilities into the mainstream school system to promote the element of inclusion in schools, both primary and high school level.

An education official at the regional level states:

Indeed, equitable access to education is characterised by educational system whereby every learner is accepted at school regardless of his/her family background, disability of any other outstanding feature...like... as the ministry we encourage the removal of learners with disabilities and/or special educational needs from special schools to mainstream schools as special schools are otherwise perceived to promote segregation, and as such we are promoting inclusion.

An official at district level shares her understanding as follows:

Ensuring equitable access to education means to put measures in place to make sure that our schools, it being primary, secondary, or tertiary afford learning opportunity to all school age children and should make sure that no feature like disability, gender or family background should act as a barrier to education.

She expands that their effort as the ministry is to:

...encourage that integrated schools should accept all kind of learners regardless of their disability or family background but what is crucial is that the schools should try to main learners with disabilities together with their normal counterparts so as to avoid stigmatization.

The findings reveal that while all the teachers and MoET officials understood equitable access to education as a state of education which accommodates learners from diverse backgrounds, however most of them seemed to limit it to disability inclusion. This way of understanding of equitable access to education is reflected in Lesotho Inclusive Education Policy (LIEP, 2018) which defines inclusive education as

...a process of addressing and responding to diverse needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities and reducing exclusion within and from education. It aspires for the conducive environment that best corresponds to learners' requirements and preferences which can maximise academic and social development. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision which covers all children of appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children (MOET, 2019, p.1).

Clearly, the above definition emphasises the 'process of responding to diverse needs of all learners' as encapsulated in teachers and MoET officials' responses in probing how they understand equitable access to education. The issue of learner diversity in this juncture should have been further elaborated so that one could see the wider scope of inclusive education target population. Furthermore, this dissonance resonates with report on implementation of SDG 4 by Mosia, Makatjane, Leseba and Malunga, (2019). The

consultants argue that while Lesotho Inclusive Education Policy 2018 is accepted as an imperative initiative in fighting the exclusion of marginalised groups such as learners with disabilities:

“... it fails to be prescriptive on how support services must be decentralised and managed. It also fails to detail assessment procedures and protocols that are acceptable for proper identification, assessment and deployment of resources for learners with disabilities” (Mosia, Makatjane, Leseba and Malunga, 2019, p.21).

When asked how they could link equitable access to education with poverty, three officials address the issue socioeconomic needs of vulnerable learners as follows:

An official at central level states:

Our unit mainly concentrate on learners with disabilities, the issue of socioeconomic conditions of the vulnerable learners is the mandate of social development (referring to MOSD).

An official at regional level expounds:

Even though we are not concerned much with poverty related challenges facing vulnerable learners, sometimes we receive food parcel and other hygiene amenities such as cosmetics from external donors and our role is to distribute them.

An official at district level adds:

Well, poverty...to some extent is a serious threat to inclusive education. You may find that learners with disabilities have assistive devices, but lack of food and income remain a barrier to their rehabilitation and academic growth.

In trying to establish how the understanding of equitable access to education is built within the education sector, Ministry officials and teachers were asked about measures that MoET puts in place to promote equitable access to education. The measures are reflected as below:

An official at district level says:

We go to the field and sensitize communities and schools on how to support learners with special education needs. This happens in the form of workshops, public gatherings and other community engagement programs like.

she adds:

We also disseminate policies, ministerial plans and other disability related information material.

An official at regional level states:

We also provide training to learners with disabilities on the use of assistive devices such as wheelchairs. Our training also covers the use assistive learning devices such as braille.

She continues:

Ministry also has a programme to train teachers on inclusive education and our main target is to provide teachers with skills to support learners with disabilities so as to increase their participation in the learning process.

Official at district level adds:

When offering such training workshops, we liaise with experts on disabilities from independent bodies such as Ministry of Social Development, NGOs and institutes of higher education like National University of Lesotho (NUL) and Lesotho College of Education (LEC).

Clearly, the MoET officials and teachers understand equitable access to education but their understanding is narrow as depicted from their verbatim responses. Their understanding ignores the effect of low socioeconomic status on learners' access to education. Much as learners with disabilities are vulnerable and should have equitable access to education, marginalised groups whose access to education may be impaired by poverty seem to be excluded. While it appears that the Ministry makes efforts to

sensitise schools on equitable access to education as embraced in inclusive education, some teachers feel the efforts are not sufficient.

Teachers have given their refuting responses on training from MoET.

The principal shares her stance:

I may not be that much conversant with what is going on with special education unit but two of my staff members here sometimes, though not often, attend workshops on disabilities. Yah, if I may say...that's how our ministry promotes equitable access to education but that's not enough as most of us are not conversant on issues of inclusion.

Deputy Principal shares his concern:

Yes... training of teachers is what the ministry claims to be doing, but truth be told here, that's not adequate, in my opinion at least half of our total teachers here should attend such trainings and that will be sufficient on empowering us to enhance inclusive education and ensure access to education to every Mosotho.

Woodwork teacher says:

I have more than 10 years teaching in this school but I would be telling a lie if I say I have attended any workshop or training on how to implement inclusive education or support learners with disabilities.

Sesotho teacher shares the similar sentiments:

You know... the problem is that even though we are expected to implement inclusive education, there is no even single day when we attend workshop on disability issues or inclusion matters. We just hear from the media that MOET wants us to pay special attention to inclusive issues.

Another teacher who is teaches Mathematics complains:

Only certain teachers here in this school are often nominated to attend such workshops...the criteria to select them is not known to anyone, only our

management knows and that's not fair because we are all expected to handle disability matters and those of inclusion versus exclusion.

Only two teachers indicated that they once receive training on inclusive/special education.

Life skills teacher claims:

Our management has once sent me to one university in South-Africa to attend a week workshop on special education and that's where I came to know about inclusive education. I also attended.... I think 2 if not 3 workshops on special education in my entire teaching career.

The second one, social science teacher shares her experience:

I once represented our school in one workshop in Motsekuoa organized by MOSD on issues of children with disabilities and I learnt about inclusion of learners with disabilities in regular schools.

The principal further indicates that her school often experiences insufficient support from MoET for implementing inclusive education for promotion of access to education:

The major challenge facing our school... in fact many secondary schools experience the same challenge, is that every year we submit our requisitions for workshop training on inclusion issues, but the ministry is very slow in responding, or responds very late towards the end of academic year.

In probing the teachers about inclusive education policies and/or ministerial plans they refer to in promoting equitable access to education, none of the them mentioned or knew of any.

Biology teacher says:

I don't know of any policy on inclusive education Sir.

Sesotho teacher concurs:

No, not to my knowledge, I often hear of those special education policies and plans, but our school has not been given a copy.

Even the principal indicated that she does not have or know of any policies or plans on inclusive education as she recounts:

...unfortunately I don't have such policies or the strategic plans but I guess my two staff members (referring to life skills teacher and social science teachers) who are assigned to handle problems of vulnerable children have them.

Social science refutes the principal's claim:

So far the ministry has not given us any policy or related documents on issues of inclusion Sir.

Life Skills teachers concurs:

From the workshops I attended, we were only given training materials in handling learners with disabilities. In other words, I not aware of inclusive education supporting documents.

Deputy principal also denies having ministerial policies:

Well we only try to be as inclusive as possible because it's the mandate of the ministry but do not yet have the related police manuals nor do we have any strategic plans.

Most teachers had more than 10 years of teaching experience, so one would expect that they might have undergone training in inclusive education but only two out of 9 teachers interviewed admitted that they received such training. Surprisingly, even life skills teacher, social teacher well as the principal and her deputy denied of having or knowing inclusive education related policies or strategies that promote equitable access to education. Accordingly, the study argues that measures should be in place to efficiently implement of ESP) (2016-2026) that reads: "To improve access to quality and relevant education and training at all levels" (MoET, 2016, p. 12). That means training of teachers should be efficiently substantiated and cover all secondary schools to enhance equitable access to education

6.3 EXPERIENCES OF ACCESS TO EDUCATION

Results of the study indicate a variety of barriers to participation of learners from low socioeconomic background in their studies. The barriers are discussed in seven subthemes namely: 1. Adequacy of resources at home; 2. Influence of role models at home/community level; 3. Availability of learning amenities; 4. Access and role of extracurricular activities; 4. Regularity of school attendance; 5. Influence on Learners' Self-concept; 6. Psychological trauma following bereavement; and 7. Exposure to family distresses.

6.3.1 Adequacy of resources at home

Results of the study revealed that access to education is not just about a learner being able to attend school but many home factors play a role as learners noted below:

Neo, a 17-year-old girl in grade 12, articulates:

Sir it's true that our school fees are paid by social development (referring to MoSD OVC bursary), we still have yet other challenges like lack of food, clothes and cosmetics.

Puseletso, a 17-year-old female in grade 12, concurs:

Our bursary (OVC bursary) does not cover uniform, food, money for transport and school trips. So we are still suffering.

Thato, a 17-year-old female in grade 12, shares life circumstances at her home:

My home is good and it remains home sir, but we have no electricity light for studying... it's true that we have been using candles all my life but my eyes sometimes become painful reading under candle light.

Another learner, Nthabeleng, a 16-year old female in grade 11, laments

There are 6 of us in our family and our two bedroomed house can accommodate all of us. The only challenge we face is that of studying space especially in the evening... there is no privacy in the house. I think it would be better if I were in boarding here at school, but our bursary does not cover boarding fees.

Keneuoe, a 17-year old female in grade 12 who lives in a rental apartment with her elder sister recounts:

Rentals are too high in Maseru that we can only afford one room at most. We would rather be overcrowded than spending my entire sister's meagre salary on two-roomed apartment on rent.

Keneuoe's sister concurs

If we spent all the money on fancy apartment, where do we get money to buy food? As long as we are not cold and no robbers disturbing us, we are fine Sir...at least for now that we are really struggling. However, I admit that this apartment is not proper for learning for it doesn't have electricity and heating system.

Lereko, a 17-year old male learner in grade 12 who is renting a dilapidated single room apartment also shares his worry:

Sometimes this apartment is worrying me, I have no desk or table to work on, and no electricity and sometimes noisy neighbourhood, especially from the unlicensed shebeens (referring to bottle stores) disturbs me when doing assignment.

He adds:

Apart from this ruined condition of my apartment, here in town many bad things are happening, like people of my age drink beer and smoke almost every day and become abusive to their families and those who have already married, they beat their wives and children alike. Nonetheless its better, such nasty things are happening in the neighbourhood not in my room here. Here is better than that home environment (referring to his grandmother's house back in the village).

On the other hand, Pule, a 17-year-old male learner in grade 12, shares his story despite him not staying at his home:

It's better because my uncle (referring to a volunteer who has given him free accommodation) understands and his house is warm and bright enough. We use electricity to light, cook and warm the house. Now my performance is better

compared to last year. I am motivated and look forward to pass and go to university.

While parents are making efforts to support children, inability to afford proper learning resources remains a scary condition at home as echoed by Nthabeleng's father:

As poor as I am, how can I afford building materials? Aeee! I wish... but their prices are beyond my capacity. Very few families in this village can afford proper building materials. I can barely afford to buy food, clothes and cosmetics. My biggest worry is that of lack of light and heating system which makes reading and studying difficult for my kids especially this one (referring to Nthabeleng) who is in high school.

Neo's mother shares her sentiments:

I am very poor Sir, no money and my family is struggling a lot and sometimes, especially during school breaks, Neo has to look for piece jobs to compliment my small wages and I personally hate it. She mostly does washing and rich neighbours would give her M30 or so, even M70 if she washes blankets. She will then come home tired and not able to study or do other home chores and this worries me a lot.

She adds:

As you can see I have a small house and my prayer is that God helps me build another house or extent this one, there is no privacy for Neo to study or do her assignment...hmmm (she seems to be emotional).

Palesa's mother laments:

I work very hard Sir...I don't rest...if I am not out there selling sweets, cigarettes, biscuits etc., I help our chief at her fields for wage to support my family but still I can't sufficiently provide for her.... learners need protein like meat and fish which I hardly afford to buy. Sometimes we eat papa and moroho (maize meal and cabbage) for months without meat.

Teachers also share their observations of un conducive home learning conditions as reflected in the responses below:

Principal laments:

Lack of food at home is the most serious challenge for these poor children, some come to school with empty stomachs, some travel long distance due to shortage of money for transport..., and it touches my heart to the extent that sometimes I personally give such a few identified learners my family food and grocery parcels.

Biology teacher pronounces:

These learners need support from their parents but... we know our parents are struggling and that put the children in difficult positions and there is no way they can pass at school. They need proper food, lighting and heating system for them to do their assignment.

Life skills teacher observes:

Sometimes we give our learners assignments that require them to watch television, refer to magazines or newspaper and/or listen to radios. Some of them would not do such assignment for they come from poor families which could not afford TVs, radios or cell phones, magazines and other extracurricular facilities.

Social science teacher shares similar sentiment

Unfortunately, most of the low-income families could not afford them, learners who come from families without such luxuries as TVs, smart cell phones even radios suffer from lack of updated information and therefore will not perform well at school.

The results of the study reflect slow progress Lesotho's National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS) 2014/15 – 2018/19 whose primary goal reads: "*To prevent and reduce the economic and social vulnerabilities of the most disadvantaged and socially excluded segments of the society*" (Kingdom of Lesotho 2015, p. 1). Thus, exclusion of access to

basic needs such as food, transport, boarding facility etc. in the OVC bursary is a major drawback. The OVC Bursary covers the following costs:

So far it has covered 23,845 children. Bursary varies by grade and type of school, but usually includes tuition fees, examination fees, registration cost, stationery, and books, special subject fees (e.g. science fees and boarding fees) (Government of Lesotho, 2019, p. 5).

Seemingly, the scope of items covered by the Lesotho OVC bursary does as yet address proclamations in the Education Sector Plan (ESP) (2016-2026) such as:

Special attention shall be given to the disadvantaged regions and underserved communities. Affordability: progressive policies will be put in place to reduce burden of school fees on parents with greater attention on vulnerable groups (MoET, 2016, p 24).

While inclusive education for persons with disabilities seeks to make reading materials accessible in Brail, making environments physically accessible for mobility impairments etc. It appears the burden for not accessing books or stationery due to costs, travelling long distance to school, not having energy due to hunger are not given the same emphasis as elements of exclusion and likely to impair learning as much or even more. This marks slow progress in Lesotho's educational policies and strategic plans meant to enhance access to education and welfare for all children.

6.3.2 The influence of role models at home and community levels

Learners give various experiences on how their readiness to school is influenced by home and community environments. While very few share positive home and community aspirations, most of them echo negative exposures. The following are examples of their comments:

Puseletso, a 17-year old female learner in grade 12 shares her stance:

Sorry to say, but I don't feel motivated by my parents because they are not educated, they don't know how much it takes to be learn at high school, however I appreciate the little they do for my education.

Another learner, Sekila, a 17-year-old male learner in grade 11 gives his experience:

Sometimes I wish my aunt and uncle were educated, in that way they would think for me and give me enough time to study but they don't. All they want me to do is to farming chores. The fact is that if "they walked the same path" as me, they would appreciate and acknowledge the importance of schooling.

For some learners, their neighbourhood equally does not inspire or provide support for them to learn as some learners reveal:

I am staying far from my classmates or any senior, so nobody helps me as there are no educated people in my village. My poor mother only did grade 5 (Palesa, a 16-year-old female in grade 11).

Palesa adds:

In our village, my age mates are married, some have children out of wedlock. Others drink alcohol and boys smoke dagga...this is not inspiring at all.

Lereko, a 17-year-old male in grade 12 shares his encounters:

Back home (referring to his own village in the rural community), the environment is pervaded with time wasting practices such as initiation of young boys, forced marriages and child labour like...boys are forced to herd livestock in return for very wages to support their families.

Another learner, Nthabeleng, a 16-year girl in grade 11, notes:

People who are educated in my village have left their parents for sophisticated town life. Professionals around here are the nurses, policemen and teachers who are from other districts and they have only come here for work.

On the other hand, Pule, a 17-year-old male learner in grade 12, shares a relatively inspiring encounter:

My uncle (referring a volunteer who has given Pule a proper accommodation) is my role model, he teaches me so many things in life and I look up to him. I really want to be like him in future.

Thato, a 17-year of female learner shares another inspiring stance:

Miss Sentle (pseudonym), my English language teacher is my mentor and my role model. She is like a mother to me. She stays near my home and she often encourages me to work hard at school.

The officials some of the challenges at community level, for example, an official at district level shares her fieldwork experience:

Yah, from our fieldwork experiences, there are so many factors that affect access to education...some include inability of parents to pay school fees for their children, tendency for some of the parents to have negative attitude towards education, in fact even community members carry greater influence to children to aspire for learning and in most cases they do not understand the issue disability and the importance of academically empowering children with disabilities.

Official at regional level share the similar point:

You know... our attitude of community towards disability. As you visit the villages you may find that some people, especially poverty-stricken families, still believe that disability is a curse or witchcraft. This could be poisonous to our children if they are exposed to such stereotypic beliefs.

Participants' stories show that learners' neighbourhoods and home environments generally do not provide inspiration for them to go to school. Lack of motivation and aspiration to schooling are negatively affected by factors such as low parental educational status, forced marriage, forced initiation practices, child labour, alcohol and drug abuse. Very few who are motivated, however, have persons who are not relatives as their role models.

6.3.3 Availability of learning amenities

Although the learners attend school with peers, each recounts challenges which distract them from achieving their academic potential as noted:

Our school is welcoming and I often feel better when I'm here than home....and our teachers care for us, but being poor make things bad I don't have all learning needs (Palesa, a 16-year old female learner in grade 11).

Another learner, *Puseletso*, a 17-year-old girl in grade 12, shares her experience:

We were once given a quiz in a class, and I didn't have a set of mathematics instrument and I failed that quiz.... yah it was not because I didn't understand what was taught but I couldn't do anything without Maths set. The teacher was very angry with us, and he said those of us who failed his quiz were careless. I felt bad that day and nearly quit school.

A third learner, *Sekila*, a 17-year-old male in grade 11, laments:

I am a hard worker even though I struggle to get all things I need. if I could have necessities like set of maths and science equipment, and other stationery I would perform far better than I do now.

Apart from stationery, learners cited to other economic needs which acted as barriers to their studies as one learner, *Lereko*, a 17-year-old male in grade 12 states:

Apart from school fees one needs food and cosmetics, our scholarship does not cover all our learning needs

Another learner, *Pule*, an 18-year-old male in grade 12 notes:

My shoes are worn-out and I get discouraged from going to school. I feel not prepared enough to go and be with my peers....

A third learner, *Neo*, a 17-year-old girl in grade 12 reveals:

I always cry when I look at my performance at school.... I still believe that if I can have all necessary learning material and proper uniform I can pass well and become a university student one day.

While learners feel that their access to education is difficult due to lack of their learning amenities, ironically their parents tend to opine that their children's access to education is easy as expressed in their excerpts:

Thato's grandmother shares her background:

I grew up in rural area where there was no electricity, public transport and proper infrastructure if general. My schooling was difficult because I could only

do standard 3. My family did not have everything we needed to attend school...like books and pencils. Sometimes we didn't have teachers or a school building; we took our books and sat on stones under the shade of a tree.

Palesa's mother also echoes her difficult up bringing:

Hmmm...in these days, things are easy, for us it was very tough. I used to go to school bare-footed and there was no money to buy shoes and uniform. Compared to us, Palesa and her friends get things the easy way. Anyway, times are different now. Indeed, as parent I save every cent for Palesa to go to school.

Pule's aunt recounts:

My parents were unable to secure better schools for us. Partly out of ignorance-they didn't know about other proper education for us, and we couldn't go far from our village, they didn't bother, let alone boarding schools. But for Pule we tried to look around and far from our village and found THS for him. Well, this is better than many secondary schools in my area. I think that was fair enough Sir, as a parent now.

Keneuoe's sister expounds:

The fact that I was unfortunate not to finish my senior secondary education has made me think twice, I don't want Keneuoe to go through the same difficulty I went through. That's why I work so hard to provide for her social and learning needs.

Other parents indicate that their childhood experiences differed dramatically from their children's, both in school and as *Nthabeleng's father puts it:*

In our days you didn't really have any free time as opposed to the school system now adays. Back then, I would go to school immediately after which I already had so many things lined up for me to do like herding livestock, collecting fodder for them. There was social time but not the kind of social thing that I'm looking at over here. But these days I give my children such a leisure time and chance for studies

Sekila's uncle pronounces:

Some of us learnt it the harder way, our elders really groomed us into who we are today despite the fact that I was raised in poor family. I remember by the time we started school, I would miss so much of schooling because I used to skip days for herding cattle...you had to work so hard to try to catch up with the classes when you go back. However, for Sekila, its different because he has almost all he needs for schooling though one cannot say enough. Yah... half loaf is better than none.

Mokhali's mother remembers the emphasis that her own parents placed on education:

My father was a really good role model. He was very supportive, and he was a hard worker. He was the only wage earner back home to care for 9 of us. He was always worried about us getting an education, reading with us every night, dealing with our homework every night, as hard as he worked out there in the fields. Unfortunately, he passed away while we were still young. I don't want my kids they experience the similar distresses we went through.

Nthabeleng's father articulates:

Compared to the past, nowadays you have to have good education to do anything in life. You even have to have some training to construct a toilet. School is important because you have to earn the living by working, unless you get into sort of business. So, I always encourage my children to go to school.

Neo's mother shares her stance:

I really like formal schooling, so I am desperate to see my kids educated. I hope that God will help me to provide for them in way that they get satisfied.

From the transcripts above, parents compare their own childhood experiences with those of their children. However, they seem to acknowledge that their life then was different from today's life. Thus, parents recalled how they grow up and role their own parents had played in their schooling and these experiences seem to provide a framework for thinking about school involvement with their own children. They seem to be stereotypic and ignorant of the 21st century education. This gives rise to the belief that their children have

access to education in the easy way whereas their children are struggling to the learning necessities.

Lack of learning resources becomes a barrier to teachers' efforts to support learners of low socioeconomic status. This is highlighted in the following responses:

Woodwork teacher says:

Really, we do not have adequate resources to go extra mile and help poverty-stricken learners. For example, these learners need extra learning facilities such as set of mathematics instruments, lab and woodwork tools and our school does not have those spare ones.

Life skills teacher recounts:

It's pathetic that circumstances force us to send those kids who do not have textbooks and other learning material home.... yes...it's hurting but we were trying to make their caregivers aware that there is no way a learner can pass when they do not have learning necessities ...well... the truth is that some of the families are so poor that they could not afford even simple exercise books, pen and pencils.

Lack of learning amenities makes learning and social life of poverty-stricken learners very miserable. Thus, study findings reveal that shortage of necessities such as cosmetics, proper school uniform and shoes lowers learners' aspirations to participate with full force at school. Moreover, lack of stationery and maths and science equipment school does not only negatively affect poor learners' participation in the learning process but also tempers with teachers' efforts to support such vulnerable learners. Again, this in dissonance with the OVC bursary which claims to cover prescribed texts, stationery and science equipment (Government of Lesotho, 2019, p. 5).

6.3.4 Influence and access to extracurricular activities

Learners are bothered by their inability to participate in extra-curricular activities. Their concerns are note below:

Neo, a 17-year-old grade 12 female puts it:

I am a member of English Fair group and I used to participate in English talk shows and debating sessions. But I no longer participate because when there are trips to other schools for competitions, my parents do not have money for transport and pocket money.

Another learner, Pule, a 17-year-old male learner in grade 12, also shares his experience:

I remember one day we were going to Maseru to participate in Maths and Science expositions and that time our school hired a bus and catered food for us. The challenge was that I didn't have a school blazer. All other boys were wearing theirs and I didn't have one. I felt so embarrassed and I nearly gave up but my teachers said that I may put on my usual uniform for they were really looking forward for demonstration of my science project.

Learners of low SES said that they are unable to take part in recreational activities due to inability of their parents to buy sports attire.

Mokhali a 17-year-old female in grade 11, echoes her touching concern:

I like sports and recreational activities in general but people like us to be less likely to spend time with friends outside school environment because we do not have facilities like training shoes, soccer boots and the likes...let alone money for gyms and cinemas.

Teachers also attest to the challenge of lack of resources facing learners from families of low SES. For example, Development studies teacher expounds:

Sports and gymnastics as recreational activities play a major role in reducing stress among learners... however, the challenge is that the most vulnerable learners who are susceptible to distresses caused by poverty and starvation could not access such activities.

Mathematics teacher concurs:

In most cases inability of poverty-stricken learners to afford sporting facilities such as soccer boots, truck suits, training shoes and money for transport make their

social life even more miserable and this in turn negatively affect their academic performance.

Learners do not only worry about learning facilities such as textbooks, uniforms and stationery but also low access to recreational resources such as training shoes, truck suits, outfits, bus fare and subscription money hinders their feeling of acceptance and meaningful participation, and this often results in poor academic achievement. This further makes their learning aspiration very low because having access to sporting activities means that one can refresh their minds and forget stress and feeling of shame caused by poverty related distresses.

6.3.5 Regularity of school attendance

In further sharing their experiences on access to education, learners recount various reasons for their irregular attendance at school as noted below.

Palesa, a 17-year-old female in grade 11, recounts:

My mum has no fulltime job and my brother is disabled, so sometimes I am unable to go to school because of lack of money for transport. That happens mostly when my brother is ill, and my mother would not go to the market to sell fruits....and we would like literally gut stuck.

Lereko, a 17-year-old male in grade 12, gives his side:

Sometimes I get so broke that I can't even afford R10 return money for transport to go to school like for two days when jobs are not there.

He adds:

Honestly I would just feel lazy... hehehehehe (laughing) and wake up feeling like not going to school...I mean it's possible for that I would not go to school because there is no one to wake me up or cares if I don't go. Well in other days I would oversleep and when I wake up late especially on Mondays following a lot of piece jobs over the weekend.

From the responses, other reasons for absenteeism relate to child-headed households experience.

Thato, a 17-year old female in grade 12, laments that:

There was a time when mama (grandmother) was sick and my aunt who live at the town took her to her house for almost a year and I literally became a mother to my siblings.

She further elaborates:

At times it would be so difficult to come to school every day as my younger brother Thabiso (pseudonym) was regularly ill and I would wake up late as I had a lot of work to do apart from caring for him. Hmmmk, that year was tough...I had to wake up very early and prepared for my younger siblings first and made sure that they went to school.

Pule, a 17-year old male in grade 12, also shares his experience:

When I was in grade 10, my aunt went to South Africa to look for a job and as young as I was I had to look after her children. Yes, I was their caregiver because I can't mention my own mother, she is also dependant on me because of her mental illness. In other days I would not go to school because I used to be so exhausted, and no taxis to take us to school because of difficult terrain in my village. During that year I nearly failed.

He continues:

In some days I would have sleepless nights and woke up late feeding my cousins...when I finished late, I would decide not to go to school because I am afraid of the corporal punishment that the teachers give in our school when we were late...

Mokhali, a 17-year old female in grade 11 narrates her story:

When my mom is at her boyfriend's apartment I would look after my siblings at the same time doing my assignments, so sometimes I just fell too tired to go to school. I would sleep late doing my homework and other house chores like washing, cooking and cleaning the house. Yah I mean I would fail to wake up early to go to school the following morning because I would be too tired.

Keneuoe, a 17-year-old female in grade 12 recounts:

My sister is a hard worker and will perform extra domestic labour like washing catering clothes and dishes and I often volunteered to help her make extra cash for our diverse needs as girls and sometimes I will not go to school because of those temporary works.

The study has revealed that absenteeism is one of the reasons why learners of low SES perform below average. Performing a lot of house chores by learners from home environment characterised by child-headed families remains a serious challenge. Such learners have responsibilities such as nurturing their younger siblings, caring for sick parents, cooking and cleaning are some of the reasons for their irregular school attendance. It appears that teachers are ignorant about learners' conditions because some fear being punished for late coming while reasons for being are genuine. This lowers learners' performance.

6.3.6 Influence on low self-concept

Experiences of low socioeconomic conditions vary from one participant to the next but a sense of dented self-concept was expressed in their responses from interview questions:

For example, Lereko, a 17-year-old male in grade 12 expresses his feelings as follows:

...even if you know the answer during classroom lesson, because one doesn't have a textbook, I feel unsure and decide to keep quiet.

Neo, 17-year-old female learner in grade 12 echoes her sentiments:

More often than not, I feel ashamed and out of place when I could not learn well due to lack of a tool box and science project equipment.

Another learner, Pule, a 17-year-old male in grade 12 puts it:

I feel left out and shy especially during those days when we wear private clothes I like good clothes because I like modelling, but my situation does not allow. Then I sometimes feel ashamed.

Even well performing learners such as Thato, a 17-year-old female learner in grade 12, sometimes have their self-esteem lowered because of inadequate social amenities as she expresses below;

Not only in the class do I feel a bit ashamed of myself, it is worse when there are school trips such as picnic. Learners put on their beautiful and smart clothes ... one would feel out of place.

The school context, especially how teachers react to learners' needs, also has influence on how learners perceive and carry themselves in their school. Learners shared their views as follows:

Nthabeleng, a 16-year female in grade 11:

Some of the teachers put it straight that if we don't have textbooks, we should not come to their classes. For me I feel scared and have no choice but step out during such teachers' class.

Another learner, *Palesa, a 16-year-old female in grade 11*, reveals:

One day Mrs Tate (pseudonym) asked me a question during History class, I raised my hand and got the answer wrong and she burst, 'How can you pass when your parents don't buy you books? What you do is buy data for your useless WhatsApp chats'. I felt so embarrassed and hurt; I don't even have a phone.

The feeling low self-concept is not only among learners but some parents and caregivers also tend to blame themselves for the difficulties that their parents go through. This is reflected in their responses as Palesa's mother recounts

Sometimes I feel like a loser for my children have not reached tertiary level...I mean my first born son and a girl who comes after him. That did not happen due to poverty that in my family throughout all these years i have been raising my kids... but with prayers I believe that Palesa will make it in high school up to the university.

Another parent, Nthabeleng's father, feels like he is not doing enough his children:

As a parent my stress never ceases because I am unable to provide for my children especially when it comes to the needs of the elder one (referring to Nthabeleng) ...honestly I have to take the blame because I did not like school yet my father was working and could afford my school fees.

Mokhali's mother expressed tearfully."

The love that I have for my kids is incomparable and but it's like something is missing...like if I was careful enough, Mokhali wouldn't fall pregnant. Hmmmk! May be that was also the reason why my husband has left me and these kids.

Pule's aunt laments:

To be born from a poor family often results in this dysfunctionality we experience. Now it looks like I and my siblings have abandoned Pule because he was born out of wedlock and his mother (her elder sister) has mental retardation.... eish (crying)... but one things will work out and Pule will go to the university.

Results of the study reveal that learners' poor socioeconomic background leads to development of low self-concept and learnt helplessness among those who underperform academically. There is observed relationship between Learners' experiences as influenced by their backgrounds and their development of self-concept as they seem to internalise the challenges as reflective of their worth as individuals. The families' inability to afford some necessities lowers their confidence and readiness to participate in class. Reflections on their experiences make them shy and socially excluded. Some claim that harsh treatment especially discouraging comments from teachers affect them emotionally. Evidently, parents alike seem to internalise the challenges as reflective of their worth as individuals and often feel that they are useless and not worthy of achieving in life.

6.3.7 Psychological trauma following bereavement

Six of the participating learners have lost at least one parent which has caused psychological trauma as they recount in their divergent experiences. For example

Keneuoe, a 17-year-old female in grade 12 recounts:

As I close my eyes, I can vividly remember seeing my mother crying out of pain till her tears were no more coming out of her eyes. At the time my sister and I were so young though the pain has lasted till now.... hmmm (taking deep breath trying to control her emotions).

Nthabeleng, a 16-year-old female in grade 11, could not control her tears when expressing how she lost her mother:

I saw her running out of breath, panicking like never before, trying to hold my hand and fighting for her life and I was holding her tight and shouted 'mummy don't go please, it's not yet time...we still need you' ehheh (she cries) ...

She continues:

I was holding her with my arms, and I cried a lot till she said 'ho boima ngoanaka' (it's too heavy my child') and she died. I was brave and quickly remembered that when people die we have to close their eyes and cover them with a white cloth which I did but that moment always come and hit me hard in my heart.

Pule, a 17-year-old male in grade 12 expresses his pain:

Every time when I remember the death of my parents, my heart bleeds and I cannot control my emotions.... this comes at any time and hurts me so much that I become helpless, let alone when I am in class or at home trying to study.

Pule continues:

...and When I look at myself, I am nothing because my parents died and sometimes people I put my trust in, turn against me and there's nothing I can do on my own. I am defenceless...this is more hurting when I am at home and things are difficult.

Thato, a 17-year-old female in grade 12 laments:

The day the body of my mother was carried to the grave yard, it was like a mad man dream, I am told I fainted and woke up after the burial only to find that it has happened and she was gone and would not come back. When life gets

tougher for us, all the memories of her sickness and her picture in a coffin play around my mind and everything become meaningless to me.

Thato further expresses her pain:

The memories of my late mother could not just vanish, and sometimes I just go to their graveyard, sit at my mother's grave and tell her all my problems and worries and that sometimes now gives me closure.

Keneuoe, a 17-year-old female in grade 12 shares her painful encounters:

Sometimes when other children at school talk about their parents, I just keep quiet and eventually leave them to go and cry in the toilet and say 'wow! Am I suffering like this because my parents are late? Is this a bad luck or a curse?'

The loss of parents has made learners susceptible psychological trauma which seems to silently torment them without support from teachers or adults. Some even today (at the time of interviews) still have panic attacks and unstable mood swings as they feel lost and vulnerable. The trauma affects their concentration in class, and this often results in poor academic performance.

6.4 EXPOSURE TO FAMILY DISTRESSES

Analysis of study findings has revealed several forms of family distresses encountered by learners of low socioeconomic status namely: Domestic violence, child labour, gender based distresses, and unplanned mobility from place to place as presented below:

6.4.1 Domestic violence

Some of the learners alluded to domestic violence as one of the barriers to their learning process. Their experiences were shared as follows:

Puseletso, a 17-year-old female in grade 12, says:

My father is very abusive.... He often beats my mother and sometimes us ... he doesn't work but if he happens to get some money from piece jobs, he spends all of it on beer.... He drinks heavily and he is vulgar when drunk.

Puseletso's mother expounds:

I remember one day my husband was very drunk and spent all our money on alcohol with his friends... he arrived in the middle of the night making a lot of noise and vomiting at the same time. He opened the door and pulled my blankets and started beating me and called me names.... hmmm! I felt bad and screamed and my kids woke up and also screamed. He beat me in front of them and asked me why I have slept without putting his food on the table...my heart bleeds as I remember all these things...and you can imagine the trauma that my children experience.

Another, Mokhali, a 17-year old in grade 11 learner recounts:

When my parents divorced I was young, but I still have recollection of all their fights, insults and other shameful things my father did to mum in our presence.

She continues:

Ehhh... I used to be worried when my parents were fighting...yes, I mean physical fight to the extent that the other time my mother was hospitalised for...I still remember well, almost a week. And that's when I started losing hope and motivation for schooling.

Mokhali's mother also shares her sentiments:

Hmmm.... I can say life is better now because my children no longer experiences domestic violence for their father I and are now apart.... fine with his money he would do things for us here and there when he was happy but he was a womaniser and very abusive.

Lereko, a 17-year-old male learner in grade 12, also echoes his experience of domestic violence:

I used to be beaten almost every day by my uncles, I was schooling and used to herd sheep and goats after school and over the weekends. When a very small mistake happened, say one sheep had an injury, Uncle Thabo (pseudonym) would beat me with a very big stick all over my body, especially when he was drunk. That used to hurt me a lot and I still have those memories even today Sir.

Keneuoe, a 17-year old female in grade 12, shares a similar experience:

After death of our parents, we were raised by my paternal grandmother and uncles. Joouo! (sigh of touching memories) our uncles are very traditional men who believe in whipping children as a way of reinforcing perceived good behaviour. Those guys would beat even on the bums to the extent that sometimes I would not go to school because I could not sit on a desk for a long time.

Apart from physical violence, learners also suffer emotional torture as their parents/caregivers fight and/or argue as reflected in their responses.

Pule, a 17-year-old male learner in grade 12 used to live with his mentally challenged mother, maternal aunt, and her boyfriend and her 2 children. He lamented that the aunt and the boyfriend used to quarrel and fight in his presence and the 2 kids:

Often my aunt would quarrel and fight with her boyfriend and I used to witness their fights and heard very vulgar words. When they fought my sick mother would sometimes get very upset and that used to worry about me a lot and even today I still become sad as I remember that bad experience.

Sekila, a 16-year-old male in grade 11 also shares his experiences:

I often get more worried when my uncle and aunty quarrel... my uncle is a fighter. It's even worse when they fight over me. The reason is that auntie sometimes understands my needs, but uncle would not be convinced.

Mokhali, 17-year-old girl in grade 11 shares her experience:

Whenever my parents were quarrelling, apparently I would side with my mother because I knew my father caused troubles...and in turn I would be would be in conflict with him.... that became so serious that even now my father does not love me that way he loves my siblings and this emotionally tears me down.

After witnessing numerous violent conflicts between his father and his mother, Puseletso, a 17-year-old female learner laments:

When my parents fight ... I fear that one day, when she loses all her patience, she will leave us with our abusive father. The thing is she often says it... that she always tells my father that she will leave him one day.

Children who grow up in families where there are fights and quarrels are likely to become violent and abusive as reflected in teachers' reactions below:

Biology teacher expresses it:

if parents often quarrel with each other, a child from such a family is likely to be like them in future. He would say 'they [my parents] are always arguing with each other why shouldn't I be like them'. He then starts to argue and fight other children at school. He talks in class and get out of control.

Development studies teacher concurs:

Every child is the true reflection of the family they come from...so a child who witnesses or experiences violence or abuse is highly likely to become violent and abusive in future. I mean we have such children here...some of them we know their parents in person.

Emotional torture for witnessing fight between caregivers lowers learners' academic performance as Mokhali, a 17-year-old female learner in grade 11 reflects:

I can still remember vividly that one day parents argued over buying household goods for the house. My mother wanted to buy a kitchen table and chairs and other goods for the house. She says 'if a guest comes to our house where shall he sit. My father told her that she wastes money. My mother bought them without his consent.... errr! that night was a small hell for us as my father was all over the place, insulting mum and telling her to return the bought items to the shop and I think this, and many others have contributed to their separation and since then my performance is declining day by day.

Sekila, a 16-year-old male in grade 11, also discloses that his uncle and aunt often quarrel:

I really don't know how to put it... I have a very difficult Uncle and he is different from my late father. Once he is drunk; he disturbs everybody in the house and hits my aunt accusing her of small things. This drastically affects my studies as I sometimes can't concentrate on my take-home assignments.

Deputy Principal concurs:

Usually when a learner is from a family where there is a frequent fight between caregivers, he worries a lot...as a result it is difficult for him to concentrate in class. Such learners perform badly.

A Social science teacher articulates:

Whenever the learners feel that their relationship with their parents becomes sour, they tend to become emotionally vulnerable, and this lowers their self-esteem in the face of their socially jubilant counterparts.

Life skills teachers also observes:

We often listen to touching stories of squabbles between our learners and parents, that's very common. This doesn't only adversely affect their self-esteem but lowers their academic performance.

In some cases, parents /care givers discriminate against vulnerable learners as reflected in their responses:

Lereko, a 17-year-old male in grade 12 describes his unhappy memories:

My grandmother used to show some favouritism towards my uncle's boy and discriminate me, for example, when I asked for money for school trips, she would complain that I and my sister are nagging and too much demanding yah that's how most people describe orphans. I used to get very upset and used to cry when I looked at my then little sister.

Lereko continues:

The worst part was that my uncles used to beat us without clear understanding of the cause of the quarrel between us, our grandmother, and our cousins (referring to his uncle's children).

Keneuoe, a 17-year-old female also shares her story

After the death of our mother, there was a time when I felt like my grandmother and father favour our cousin over me and my sister. For example, they would buy her new shoes while ours were also worn out. When I told them, they did not listen and instead they told me that my sister and I were stubborn just like our late mother and unfortunately our father died shortly afterwards. That's when I began to realise that we were on our own on this earth.

The findings indicate that domestic violence is rife and learners are exposed to physical assault and insults that are common among households of low socioeconomic status. The violent behaviour is exacerbated by alcohol abuse and patriarchal practices whereby men are the ones that physically and emotionally abuse spouses and minor children. This threatens learning and development of the children. Conflict between learners and caregivers makes the learners feel that their relationship with their parents gets permanently damaged and their subsequent emotional vulnerability is detrimental to their schooling.

6.4.2 Child labour

Being forced to do domestic chores denies learners time to study and the results of the interviews yields various encounters. For example, Sekila, a 16-year-old male learner in grade 11, articulates:

I do a lot of work at home, So, I don't have enough time to do my assignment at home. My cousin (daughter to his uncle and aunt) is my age mate but is lazy. She disappears and is always out, comes home very late and my aunty keeps silent about it. However, if I happen to come home late from school or church she would scold me and use very harsh words.

On contrary, Sekila's uncle says:

Sir children of today do not want to be socialised to be tough future husbands and wives.... I like education, it's just that my parents did not afford my school fees...Sekila is playful and often disguises behind school work. He has time to read ...I only ask him to send my horses to the stream for water, collect fodder for them and my sheep, that's all. But I don't ask him to do these things everyday... just like his late father Sekila has to man upon like an initiated man.

In his newly found freedom of renting a room away from home, Lereko, a 17-year-old male in grade 12, states:

During weekends I go to town to help people carry parcels to raise money for my food and cosmetics. After these errands I am usually very tired to read or do assignments, so I just go to bed... life is very challenging, but it has taught me a lesson.

Watching parents struggle to make ends meet also brings distress as learners reveal in their responses. Palesa, a 16-year-old female in grade 11, laments:

The death of my father left us and our mother in difficult situation. I was heavily distressed. Sometimes I lose track on my studies when I think of how my mother is struggling financially and I usually go to the Chief's house to help her with her wage based domestic work load.

Keneuoe, a 17-year old female learner in grade 12, laments:

Out of pity for my sister who has become my mother and works hard for my schooling, I usually help her with extra chores in different households in order to supplement her meagre wages as domestic worker. If orders are many, we would be working for the whole weekend and no time for my studies.

Poor socioeconomic circumstances seem to force schooling learners to engage in domestic labour in order to help supplement their livelihoods. From their responses, child labour denies them time to do their school work efficiently. Some of the learners do the labour out of pity for their caregivers who work hard to secure their social and learning needs.

6.4.3 Gender based distresses

While life circumstances of poverty-stricken learners force them to engage in child labour, gender plays a major in determining the kind of labour a learners undertake, and this is reflected in the responses below:

Development Studies teacher puts it straight:

Another critical gender issue is that compared to males, female learners often perform badly at school because of patriarchal belief that they are needed more to support their household with labour.

Geography teacher observes:

When a female learner is absent at school, common reasons would include caring for sick parents or minor siblings.

Principal expresses her observation:

Health related issues like period pains, household cleaning, bathing minor siblings and cooking are some of the challenging factors that make female learners more susceptible to stress compared to their male counterparts... all these is because of orphan hood or unstable incomes of their parents.

Life skills teacher has observed that:

Distresses such as falling pregnant at young age often causes stress for learners especially those whose parents are struggling economically as one learner.

Mokhali, a 17-year-old female in grade 11, attests to the teachers' observation above:

I got pregnant at a young age... Well, that was unplanned; I just fell into a trap. The man was 13 years older than me... I guess he deceived me with money.

One Keneuoe's sister, laments:

The situation at our homes is disadvantaging us as females. There is too much work to do and lot responsibility especially for us first born female children. Sometimes I wouldn't go to school because of pressure of work at home such that we cannot and in our culture you cannot refuse.

Palesa a 16-year-old female in grade 11 boldly articulates:

As girls we do all the household chores like washing clothes, cleaning the house, feeding young ones, looking after sick relatives and parents, cooking for the entire family, fetching firewood and water before we go to school. We do not have time to study and to do our homework.

Another female learner, Neo, a 17-year-old female shares her experiences:

As a girl I wake as early as 5.00 am, cook porridge and sweep the house, prepare my siblings for school. If I arrived very late from the discussions, I would fetch water late in the evening from a long distance...wow... I would be like afraid in that dark dongas.

Neo goes on to share her sentiments:

Sometimes I wish I were a boy or something...hmmmk. My mom never rests because she is always busy somewhere making money and goes to the hospital twice to visit my father and help him with his need as a patient. So I have to cook, clean and study at the same time Monday to Monday. It's even worse when I am on menstrual period ...I become a flat patient and sometimes I do not go to school.

Thato, a 17-year-old female in grade 12, articulates:

I have to make sure that at 19:00 hours I am at home so that I help granny with insulin injection. That's really stressful because I also have to help my younger sisters with cooking. Well, I cannot say I am forced per se but, I mean as a girl child, one has to be responsible and performs house chores more especially when mama (referring to her grandmother) is too old to fully perform such tough chores.

Social science teacher observes:

In more rural communities with much patriarchal thinking, many parents and/or caregivers see the benefits of educating boys as more tangible and economic than spending money on a girl child who will eventually get married.

Child marriage also cuts girls' school lifespan short as Keneuoe's sister describes their experience:

We had to leave our home to stay in this rented apartment so that I would be near her work and my school. Hahahaha! (Laughing) again we ran away from our home village because boys in the village abduct girls. Some guardians like our grandmother force young girls to get married without their consent and as a result they often drop out of school and this is a serious threat to the life of an innocent girl with future dreams.

On the other hand, three male learners share their encounters of gender based distresses. Sekila, a 16-year old male learner in grade 11 says:

I was forced to go to initiation because my uncles and peers perceived initiation practices as life experience of 'real' men, and they would say it's not for women (implying weaker men). On that connotation, I was compelled to go initiation after writing grade 10.

Lereko, a 17-year old male learner in grade 12, says:

In my village, a boy should herd livestock, should be beaten and get initiated in order to make him tough. But for me that is not the essence of being a tough man, so I left such barbaric practices.

Sekila's uncle boldly expresses his understanding of being a male:

Sir I think a real man should endure tough times such as herding cattle, collecting fodder and going to initiation. So that's what I always wanted my boys including Sekile to go through as I did in my up-bringing.

The findings reveal that vulnerable learners have unique experiences that demand differentiated understanding if teachers were to mount any support. From the responses it was revealed that female learners are often associated with nurturing tasks such as caring for the sick, cooking, washing, and raising minor siblings while boys are associated with herding livestock, enduring beatings, and getting initiated. These experiences affect the learners differently. Long subjection to these gender-based encounters may act as barriers to their social freedom and impair their full attention and capacity to study.

6.4.4 Unplanned mobility from place to place

Four of the participating learners have indicated that harsh life circumstances forced them to leave their places of origin. Each of them shares their experiences.

The first learner, Lereko, a 17-year old learner laments:

At home I was often physically and emotionally abused after our parents passed away. My uncles were forcing me to leave school and go to initiation and I left. Well, it's not a nice experience but I guess life is better here although I don't have support from my grandmother or my uncles, everything is on me, ... I am schooling, doing temporary jobs here and there, and in fact fend for myself in everything.

He continues:

Well, I came here through the help of a friend whose story is almost similar as mine but what worries me is that he is no longer going to school. I stayed with him for a year and the following year I forced matters to get OVC bursary after which I searched a cheap apartment till I got this place (referring to his one roomed dilapidated apartment).

Keneuoe, a 17-year-old female learner in grade 12 shares the similar sentiments as those of Lereko:

Following the death of our parents, our lives have been full of frequent moves as I and my sister felt the need to protect ourselves from rural life sorrows such as domestic violence and forced marriages. First, we left our father's house for that time we were still minors and stayed with our grandmother and our cousins whom we felt were more favoured than us and our maternal aunt offered to stay with us and we went to her home.

Keneuoe's sister continues:

Life was relatively better but her (aunt's) husband used to make silly moves towards us, and they were always quarrelling sometimes fought in our presence. That was when I dropped out of school and came to town to look for job as a

domestic worker and I took my sister afterwards. I then had to find a new school and it took me time to get used to my new school mates.

Mokhali, a 17-year-old female learner in grade 11 shares her experience:

After my parents separated, we moved from place to place ... we were never at one place renting one apartment to another as our mum changes jobs until she got this one at textile factories... I was always stuck with my mum and my siblings ... like our father was very abusive. I changed schools twice and that give me tough time get used to the new schooling environment.

Pule, a 17-year-old boy in grade 12 also shares his experience:

Its only god who removed me from my village and my home...I met Uncle (referring to a man who volunteered to give him accommodation) when my life was very complicated. There was no money for transport, no proper food and my aunt would fight with his boyfriends. For that matter I accepted Uncle's offer of giving me free association.

The study reveals that some learners left their biological homes in the remote areas due stereotypic circumstances such forced labour, underage marriages, abduction, and initiation. They are also forced to change schools and as such they find it hard to acclimatise to the new schooling environment and their access to education is impaired.

6.5 PARENTAL SUPPORT FOR VULNERABLE CHILDREN

In responding to how they support their vulnerable children, parents indicate that they are willing to take part in their children's education but spend most of their time in making money to sustain their families:

Nthabeleng's father laments:

Sir, honestly I am unable to assist my children since I don't have adequate education and I am always moving from one place to another in search of work for income. As it is, I just accept everything and become happy when teachers work hard to make our children work hard and pass.

Neo's mother expresses her stance:

It's true that I am busy with my street vending hustle, like any reasonable parent, I feel that I have to create time to assist my kids with their assignments, but my busy schedule denies me that significant parental role of at least cheering my children when doing school work.

Palesa's mother explains:

The fact that I am busy looking for this small income, I don't have enough time to help my children with their school work or to go to school meetings like I should. Well, if the teachers call me up, or if it's a special meeting that I need to go to, I try to go...But truth be told, I am worried if I miss those meeting because they are important.

Pule's aunt shares similar sentiments:

As a broke person, there are a lot of interesting things I am trying to do in order to make money and most of them are done during weekdays. And if I go to all the meetings, I might miss something, something important. I can go only when there is a very serious problem involving Pule otherwise I would seriously want to take part in all matters affecting Pule's schooling.

Parents also allude to their low level of education as a barrier to their participation in their children' schoolwork.

Mokhali's mother recounts:

I cannot help with homework because I don't understand English. I can only help my little daughter with numbers and her ABCs. I can help my other daughter with some of the mathematical problems. Most of the time I tell them to ask their teachers because of my low level of education.

Thato's grandmother gives her views:

My child I am not educated, I only did standard 3 and unfortunately none of my children (referring to Thato's uncles and aunts) are not educated enough to help Thato with her schoolwork. However, I strongly believe that it is the responsibility

of her teachers to impart knowledge on them as learners...really I know nothing about these things.

Similar to Thato's grandmother, other parents feel that it is solely the responsibility of the teachers to help their children do well academically.

For instance, Sekila's uncle echoes his view:

My role is different from that of the teacher because the teacher teaches our children. She gives them homework and as a parent I teach them the values of life, that's all Children have to know what to do and what not to do. That's I give them moral standards.... I put them on the right track.

Mokhali's mother expounds:

I think teachers are the ones that have bigger roles in children's education. Apart from teaching, a teacher has to learn what's going on in the child's both social and academic life. Once teachers understand what's going on in the life of the child, then they have a better idea how to approach the child in question, and this will holistically help a learner. Ours as parents is to provide foods, clothes and other necessities for children's education.

Palese's Mother articulates the similar sentiments:

The teacher is like the second parent. School is where their behaviour is formed, apart from the home. The school is perhaps more important because I cannot be at home all the time...I mean I must go work. So the school plays an important role in doing what I cannot. However, every morning we pray and I always tell Palesa that she should not forget that she going to school to learn so that she becomes a teacher and have her own money.

Additional to the above views, parents also feel that their failure to cater for their children learning amenities and participate in their education make them feel less worth as encapsulated in their responses below:

Neo's mother expresses her worries:

It's like we don't have time for our children, I always tell my kids that I need to know more about their homework or something like that...I often feel ashamed of myself if I fail to resourcefully support my children with their learning needs.

Pule's aunt says:

I am very much eager to help Pule and my own children with their assignment but since I am not educated and poor. This worries me a lot because I don't want this kids to be like me...I want them to have brighter future.

Even though parents express their busy schedule in searching and carrying out waged labour, they give contradicting responses on how they collaborate with the participating secondary school.

Palesa's mother shares her sentiments:

Our school is good, there are learners who go to university and they are the products of the very same school but parents are not recognized and fully involved in their children's education.... yah maybe because most of us poor parents are not educated.

Sekila's uncle expresses his concerns:

Only rich or well-known parents become member of school board. No, not to our satisfaction, we come to school when our children have violated school regulations, and not talk about our children academic progress. Our opinions are not incorporated in measures to improve learners' academic success. Perhaps our ideas are not constructive because we not educated.

Another parent, Mokhali's mother concurs:

I remember I was only called to school when Mokhali was pregnant and many other parents only go to school when there is a problem with their children, and that's not just to us.

She continues:

To help children to pass and maintain good behaviour, I think it would be better if there is regular communication and on-going interaction between us as parents and school not only via letters but regular meetings would do.

Neo's mother further stresses:

As parents we have to feel that we are part of our children's education. As a parent ... trying to communicate more with their teachers should be both ways. Thus, we have to have back and forth communication about our children's academic progress. Besides, some of us would be happy to be provided with basic skills on how best we can handle our teen children.

Thato's grandmother conversely said:

THS teachers are good communicators...you know! and very kind towards our children but still as a mentor and caregiver I want to be involved in everything about my granddaughter.

Pule's aunt concurs:

I personally trust THS teachers and in my family they have done wonders and help me a lot as they facilitated the process of getting bursary for granddaughter...and I believe that on-going communication between parents and school authorities on learners' matters should be maintained.

Parents indicate that they need both communication and coaching on life skills in supporting their schooling children. Keneuoe's sister gives her opinion

We need both communication and skills from the teachers and inform us on how to handle the behaviours of learners and effectively support them at home...that could be in the form of a meeting or sort of open days.

Sekila's uncle expresses his complaints:

One should not wait until a child has misbehaved; I don't want to wait until I get a call that my child has broken school rules. Yes, parents we might not be aware

that we are a problem to our children because we are not experts. It's so worrying when just hear people here in our village gossiping that we are mistreating our kids. While we are here. Anyway, I want to believe teachers can help us where we go wrong... look they don't.

The above excerpts are contrary to teachers' perceptions of parent's responsiveness to their children's education as expressed in the extracts below:

Life skills teacher puts it:

Some of the parents are not collaborating, for example there is learner here by the name of Tahleo (pseudonym) who is bright but seems to have family problems...it's like her mother is negligent of Tahleo's younger siblings. The principal wrote a letter inviting her to the school concerning her daughter's grievances; he even called her but all in vain.

Social science teacher expounds:

On our side, we are really trying to support these kids but lack of responsiveness from their caregivers remains a challenge because some of decisions and measures taken against learners require their caregivers' consent.

Deputy Principal suggests:

I think law should take its course against people like Puseletso's father...the man is just a problem to his family, very abusive and that does not only severely affect their social life but even their learning life is adversely affected and the worst part is that there is never a time when he comes when we want to talk to him and probably give him some tips as we have our two teachers here whom we trust in such matters.

The responses above indicate that parents understand that it is the responsibility of teachers to help their children pass while they should pay school fee and spend time earning some income. However, all of them say that they are unable to help their children with schoolwork due to their lack of education. Only few mentioned assisting with

homework. They further indicated that most of the time, they do not have time to attend their children's schooling. Failure to fulfil this prescribed role produced feelings of guilt, inadequacy, and regret. Despite the fact that parents complain of lack of time to participate in their children's school work for they are busy earning income to sustain their families, they express contradicting perceptions that the participating secondary school does not regularly involve them in matters affect learners as their children. Communication and collaboration needs to go beyond simply updates about school and children's academic performance and cover many more issues such as learners' behaviour. The above responses indicate that some of the parents are negligent, ignorant and not cooperative. In the long run this makes the work of teachers difficult.

6.6 TEACHERS' PREPAREDNESS TO SUPPORT VULNERABLE LEARNERS

Teachers shared various ways of creating welcoming and harmonious school culture to promote inclusive education thereby paving access to vulnerable learners.

The principal pronounces:

As you enter our gate, we make sure that you feel welcome and that starts with the very language we use here, greeting is a key, even our learners know. In other words, we believe that inclusive school culture compels us as teachers to commit ourselves to using a welcoming language.

A Social Science teacher says:

We avoid labelling and bullying as much as possible. We use no names like 'sekooa' (a disabled person) or 'mofutsana' (a poor person). Thus, we teach our learners and teachers about no judgemental attitude and encourage solidarity.

The deputy principal concurs:

Respect, friendliness, and non-bulling culture counts a lot in making our school inclusive and as such those learners from poor families feel at home in this school.

Qualification and expertise of teachers is very crucial in enhancing access to quality education as encapsulated in the following transcripts:

Deputy Principal proclaims:

In the past we used to hire teachers with qualifications as low as COSC and experience was not much an issue, but these days we feel and believe that we need qualified teachers with experience in order to produce quality education that carries an element of inclusiveness...I mean knowledge is power.

In the same note Social Science teacher says:

As teachers, we need to have relevant expertise so that we are in the better position to understand the needs of all our learners ... I mean if we have proper people in place and we know how to deal with diverse teaching challenges.

Principal expands:

Having trained teachers is crucial not only to including disabled learner within the classroom, but also to apply suitable pedagogical strategies that will otherwise cater the needs of every learner. We make sure that teachers we hire are people who can give their utmost to the school.

A life skills teacher articulates:

For supporting at-risk learners like those coming from poor families requires the management to be proactive when recruiting teachers... first and foremost, you have to make certain that you've got the staff who know exactly what to do and not expect the management to tell them what to do.

Despite the claim that they were not trained in inclusive education, teachers believe that school culture is one of the determinants of inclusion and as such they make efforts to welcome and treat every learner with warmth and harmony thereby affording everyone equal opportunity to learn. Although in this section, school management believed that hiring qualified staff with experience is one of those strategic ways to pedagogically meet the diverse needs of learners, both management and teachers have shared similar concern in the previous sections that they feel unprepared to enhance inclusive education due lack of expertise in inclusive matters.

Teachers have also highlighted the importance of peer support and mutual assistance in enhancing inclusive classroom participation as the development studies teacher shares:

Peer groups help learners to share learning facilities and skill, thus there are mutual gains for all learners, gifted or less gifted, poor or affluent. From experience, group work promotes cooperation and sharing of creative skill, thus learners often are willing to help out. Again, with time slow or shy learners and even those who appear to be withdrawn show an improvement in their interactive styles and perform better.

Another teacher, Mathematics teacher pronounces:

I still maintain that the use of strategies, such a peer tutoring, co-operative group learning and team projects, benefit learners and prevents social isolation. One feels part and parcel of the team.

Sesotho teacher adds;

Teamwork among learners work very well but one needs to maintain supervision and make sure that all learners participate and there is sharing of learning facilities.

Woodwork teacher shares his encounter:

My subject is practical, and I always do my very best to involve all learners during group work. learners may contribute verbally through discussion, creatively by producing a drawing or by acting. Most of the time group work involves a hands-on activity and success rate is always high.

Biology teacher says:

Normally every Wednesday, I conduct group presentation in class. I assign different topics in biology and groups use the same textbook to prepare for presentation. This help those without textbooks and other science facilities benefit at equal basis with others.

Teachers have indicated that one of the ways to meet learners' needs, emanating from shortage of learning amenities, is through establishment of peer groups whose

membership does not consider disability or one's socioeconomic background. Through group work, all learners, whether gifted or not, poor, or affluent, with or without disabilities are able benefit from each other and share learning facilities. This also helps in promoting social inclusion but the claim contradicts learners views that they always feel out of place and unprepared to learn, and subsequently lag behind those with sufficient learning amenities. Seemingly teachers do not know how these vulnerable learners feel for they are not given such latitude to express their feelings as expressed in learners' excerpts in the previous sections.

Developing and maintaining positive mind-set and attitude is one of the ways to improve access for every child as the Principal puts it:

I encourage staff to try and develop positive mind set and also instil such it into learners. That our teaching strategies should recognise and respond to the diverse needs of all the learners. I mean we need to include everyone, both the gifted and the disabled student who is difficult to see where he is gifted.

Life skill teacher expands:

We should value every learner and search for every talent and positivity in them by accommodating both the different styles and rates of learning, whilst ensuring quality education for all learners "nurturing the learning of all students.

She continues

Yes... for real, I mean for education is for all as it is the universal convention, but one has to make sure that all the learners get all they need or the maximum they need for them for both academic and social advancement. That's a motivation and triggers positive thinking and aspire to achieve more. But the challenge of shortage of resources is a barrier for us to do that.

Principal vehemently declares unity among her staff:

Indeed, we are one team, we always join hand... we as individuals are part of the system, a system of 'catchment.' For example, in an event whereby one programme, one person, one structure is not reaching a learner, then there

should be a second layer, which would do a better job. If that is not enough, ideally set up another layer. However, in an ideal situation everybody should be reached in one way or another, ideally on time and there have to be clear ways to do that.

The above responses indicate unity, common goals but three teachers share their reservations. Mathematics teacher articulates that teaching style should be suitable for individual needs of every learner as he vividly puts it:

Unless one is in the position to apply teaching styles that target certain needs of learner, access would not be achieved in its fullest potential. We truly acknowledge and realize that every learner has a right to be included, but a right to something that is beneficial to individual learner. That is, you cannot give diverse learner on thing while their capacities to use it differ. The system has to provide for differences, so it cannot provide the same for all.

Development studies teacher encourages the school to ensure that there is assessment and periodical inventory among teachers.

It's true that we are encouraged to collaborate and join hands to assist learners, but our system lacks assessment and feed backing. We need to share skills and approaches in order to get to the real needs of these diverse learners.

The third teacher, who teaches Development studies laments:

We are trying but we are not there yet.... I mean specifically for social needs of learner there are only few of us who are entrusted to do that and normally they are the ones that are given opportunities to go for workshops.... I think that should be corrected and all of us be granted such opportunities.

From their responses, teachers differ on how they make sure that the way they conduct classes is inclusive.

Life skills teacher articulates that she does class room analysis:

During the first couple of weeks, in fact at the beginning of every academic year, as a class teacher I focus on getting to know as much about the learners as I

can, about their abilities, weaknesses, personal fears etc.... well it's not a simple nor is it once off exercise but with time you can master it and become proud to say 'I know my learners. This helps to identify those with personal problems or those who lag behind in terms of performance.

Biology teacher points out that she makes herself 'approachable' to learners as she puts it:

Just like at home, I mean, if a parent is warm and become a friend to her daughter it's a sure case that the daughter will be open and tells the parent her concerns. Similarly, if the teacher's door is always open for learners to come and speak to her, both they usually do so and tell her both personal and learning related challenges they encounter. Yah... So this works for me more often than not.

Sesotho teacher concurs:

Most of the time I find myself being a friend to many learners during class even on social media I interact with them and I think they feel warm around me. I am trying and it work even though their some whom I fail to understand their character. Indeed, it not our field to counsel them but obviously it is very important to listen to their complaints and understanding their background and position and link them with relevant resources or at least offer some words of motivation. However, I still believe that we need more training on those psychosocial issues.

Principal elaborates more and articulates that caring and supportive relationship are key components of accessible and inclusive school as she passionately puts it:

If there are healthy and friendly teaching and learning relationships, then at the end of the day we would be in the position to identify and address the needs of all learners, poor or rich, gifted of disabled.

In a similar version, Social science teacher says:

I strongly believe that creation of atmosphere of relaxation, friendliness and faith will help us try and manage classroom participation, confidence and in the long run each child will feel that when they come to school there's a helping

relationship waiting for him. The relationship can be with, and preferably should always involve somewhere down the line, a member of staff and other learners though keeping the rules of professionalism.

Additionally, Biology teacher assets that:

Team building is one of the key and successful components school's provision for the preparation and planning towards responding to diverse needs of learners.

She continues

As a matter of fact, individuality should be totally abolished in class. As a matter of fact, I really like the idea of the team; I think it is fantastic, the learning team, we've put a lot of work into it. We have to make it the point that is always a team of say, three to five learners working together, they see eye to eye and their personalities match, their skills and abilities should make one such unity...

From the above perspectives, establishment of warm relationship, group and allocation of time to know and engage with learners create inclusive classroom management that ensure everyone's full participation. Teachers have indicated that they work hard to put strategies in place that increase student attention, participation and on task behaviour so as to create inclusive classroom environment. Although teachers have indicated their perceived ways of responding to the needs of marginalised learners, some have indicated some reservations. This signifies lack common understanding of how they should protect the fundamental rights of the vulnerable children. More imperatively teachers lack self-perception and this makes them less relevant to understanding and responding to the needs of diverse learners.

6.7 FOCAL AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT OF ACCESS TO EDUCATION

This section entails concerns and suggestions of study participants on how policies and practices on inclusive education could be improved so as to ensure access to secondary education. The concerns and suggestions are encapsulated in the following sub-themes:

1. Strengthening collaboration between school and parents; 2. Psychosocial support and learner engagement, 3. Creation of inclusive learning environment, 4. Improvement on stakeholders' engagement; and 5. Seeking external support and partnerships.

6.7.1 Strengthening collaboration between school and parents

Responses of study participants on promotion of access to secondary education have given suggestion on strengthening of collaboration between school and parents as reflected in the responses below: An official at central level opines:

I think full support or learners could be reached through regular involvement of parents or caregivers in school-learner related matters that would otherwise create a caring atmosphere.

Sesotho teacher echoes his recommendation:

Mutually supportive environment for teaching and learning environment could be harnessed by strengthening relational trust between community leaders, teachers, students, and parents at all angles.

Maths teacher suggests that parents should be involved at all angles:

You know...eh... support system for these poor learners would be better through regular involvement of parents, not only in teaching and learning matters but also in behavioural aspects. This it also benefits us as teachers and will in the long run enhance positive teaching and learning attitudes.

Life skills teacher suggests the involvement of parents, school as well as community:

In my opinion when addressing poverty related distresses that learners of low SES are subjected to, it is important that education authorities consider how to tighten family and community collaboration around which a child's life centres.

Even learners have expressed a serious need for schools to engage parents in all schooling matters:

Sekila, 16-year-old grade 11 male in grade 11 states:

I think our school should try by all means to engage our caregivers in teaching and learning process so that they (caregivers) would fully understand the importance of education.

Pule, a 17-year-old male in grade 12 concurs:

If our caregivers are often consulted and engaged in our (learners) matters, they will be in the position to understand what it takes to be a learner and the kind of support we need.

MoET officials also share their opinions on school-parent collaboration. For example, an official at regional level articulates that

...teaching and learning is a multi-stakeholder phenomenon, so I think there should be regular teacher parent-teacher meetings, parent-learner picnics, and other social unity promoting activities could play a role of “community building” as for example, teachers should take time to build relationships with parents, creating an attitude of openness and trust, and the presence of a supportive teaching and learning environment.

An official at central level shares similar suggestion:

There should be strategies in place to promote teacher-parent engagement which would in the long run build mutual trust and establishing harmonious relationships for the betterment of a learner’s social and academic life.

Participants have made suggestions that secondary schools should develop and strengthen collaboration between them (schools and parents) in order to ensure holistic support for learners. As evident from the study findings, parents know learners better, and so if there is partnership between them (parents) and teachers, learners are sure to succeed. *Yes, but how would the collaboration help with. The summary is there but get an interpretive element*

6.7.2 Psychosocial support and learner engagement

Teachers, learners and MoET officials have indicated some initiatives that could enhance welfare of learners while ensuring their full participation in the learning process. Their suggestions are highlighted in various responses as presented below:

Deputy Principal pronounces:

As teachers we have to become proactive and engage our learners in such activities as the systematic use of literature that demonstrates hopefulness, optimism, success, and resiliency.

Development studies teacher

Perhaps schools should establish emotionally uplifting activities that may heighten installing spirit of competition among learners and then celebrating their success in a big way... integrating art, talent show, dance, and media as alternative ways of demonstrating learning while also reducing stress.

Woodwork teacher highlights:

As teachers...I understand, we are 'parents away from home', as such our comments should express hope, motivation and belief that learners need to work hard and make some efforts without being pushed or verbally attacked.

Maths teacher advices:

I think our school has to make sure that such vulnerable learners get psychosocial support in the form of counselling in order to address the social emotional needs of these learners living in poverty, I strongly believe that counselling could help...in fact we need a full time psychologist.

He adds:

We once divided our learners into groups and assigned a mentor for each group... We realised the importance of providing mentorship support for vulnerable learners and allowing learners to have positive learning experiences that are related to academic achievement. We would go extra mile to talk to learners

through one-on-one session, motivate and coach them...that increase performance amongst them...unfortunately we stopped due to understaffing.

Biology teacher echoes:

That learner mentorship was very effective... with those small groups and one on one session, our learners were able to talk freely and expressed their problems and find possible solutions... yah we stopped because time and other resources could not allow.

Life skills teacher proposes:

I strongly suggest that we resuscitate the mentorship groups, you know...that used to create atmosphere of acceptance and cultural affirmation. we can even become more creative and formulate dance clubs and talk shows, sports that allow daily teacher student interactions.

Learners also feel that they need psychosocial support:

Thato, a 17-year old female learner in grade 12 pronounces:

We need to someone to talk to a life coach or a counsellor here at school.

Lereko, 17-year-old male in grade 12 laments:

Sometimes I feel like, I need to air out my stressful experiences and challenges to someone I can trust, I mean someone I don't have a day to day business with...not my teacher and not my relative.

Sekila, a 16-year old male in grade 11 concurs:

We need a person who can talk and guide us through our high school journey.

The study findings suggest that as way of improving access to education, teachers should engage learners in extracurricular activities such as talent shows, drama and sports. This will promote sense of belongingness, social engagement while also reducing stress and self-isolation. Emotional and psychosocial support in the form of counselling, coaching

and mentorship are important to welfare of learners and this means parents and teachers should ensure that learners have access to them so as to promote effective participation and academic achievement.

6.7.3 Creating of inclusive learning environment

In further exploring how school should support low SES learners in order to enhance their full access to education, teachers have given various responses as presented below:

Principal suggests:

Of course, low SES learners face many challenges, and I think as teachers we need to create a very welcoming and inclusive school environment so that these learners feel at home.

Deputy Principal expresses their efforts:

Although as teachers we face many challenges, we work diligently to mitigate the negative effects of poverty by being caring and attentive to every learner by creating inclusive classroom environment.

The central manager expands on the enhancement of inclusion:

To reach a stage whereby everyone is included, I think we as policy implementers, should make education industry meaningful thereby meeting the needs of the learners coming from poor socioeconomic background... thus, the that one that does away with stereotypes held against people with disability. Yes...truth be told, poverty is the main threat to inclusion of everyone.

Official at district level concurs

Our education system should also promote understanding of poverty, build on the strengths of the learners, fosters hope, and sensitive and responsive to address multiple skill levels regardless of learners' diversity or type of disability. In that way we can achieve inclusive education.

Official at central level has also emphasised that more resources are needed to enhance access and inclusion:

As a unit (Special Education Unit) we feel that enhancement of inclusive education especially for poverty-stricken learners require more resources from our government, that are human, financial, emotional, or physical resources, as well as access to support systems like health services, and health relationships with significant others like parents, teachers and peers who are entrusted to care for vulnerable children as those with disabilities and at the same time affected by poverty.

The principal believes that government initiatives such as feeding programme could come to the rescue of poverty-stricken learners:

I think we can opt for a number of effective ways to promote welfare of for at-risk learners such as those from poor families... such strategies may include feeding schemes here in our secondary schools.

The Biology teacher also recommends:

I think there is a need for supplemental reading programmes here at school, sizable number of learners per class, and guidance and counselling programmes. This is serious issue for currently we do not have any of these initiatives.

Official at district level suggests:

Apart from resources such as assistive devices, food and stationery schools should establish effective resilience approaches, for example mentoring, goal-setting, and counselling sessions and these should be allocated enough time be part and parcel of curriculum.

Official at district level adds:

I think the other important issue is that our schools should try by all means to make their curriculum as inclusive as possible thereby. By that I mean it the curriculum that is accessible, flexible, and relevant, and by covering the needs of everyone. Thus it should be in the best interest of every learner regardless of their disability and/or social background.

Learners suggest that their teachers should be warm and friendly to them:

Neo, 17-year-old girl in grade 12, speaks:

Some of our teachers are very rude and hard to approach, so I think if they can be more friendly and show parent-like character to us, we will also be open and tell them challenges we face not only in the classroom but even in social life.

Mokhali 17-year-old girl in grade 11, echoes out a similar opinion:

I think a classroom should be like a home or sort of household with teachers as parents. I mean.... they have to understand that we are their children and we make mistakes. They should be eager to reprimand us if need be, but at the same time they should be caring and friendly to us, then we will be determined and immense ourselves to the studies.

Results indicate that they create a supportive, welcoming and inclusive classroom environment. Teachers should show more friendly and caring attitude to learners so as to, make them (learners) more relaxed and comfortable around them. This will make classrooms more vibrant and participative and in the long run access to quality of education n will be achieved.

6.7.4 Improvement on stakeholders' involvement and information dissemination

Participants suggest that educational authorities should try as much as possible to improve the engagement of every potential stakeholder.

An official at regional level shares her recommendations:

Substantiating inclusive education and ensuring access to education means enhancing ties between our school, parents and community at large because a learner belong to this "trio" so it's high time that we get out of our offices to go to communities and unite them with schools and the entire ministry in order to holistically improve access as this is the cornerstone and pillar behind inclusive education.

Official at central level concurs:

I think inclusive education calls for clear strategies to ensure collaboration and cooperation of all relevant stakeholders. That is to say we as SEU, we need to increase partnership with other ministries like social development and development planning, not only in the form of workshops, community outreach or seminars but it has to go to the extent of going to the communities together.

The officer at district level as well shares the importance of efficient involvement of stakeholders:

Involving as much as possible other partners both internal and outside government ensure efficiency that you Sir has just highlighted in your question. That would also help in the information dissemination about who does what, where and with whom. By far... everywhere, information helps people to make proper planning and prioritizing and helps them to develop strategies to overcome to meet the set targets.

She further elaborates:

We still have a long way to go sir. Our communities need to be educated on matters of child support disability and poverty related challenges in we are to achieve this aspect of inclusive education that everybody is talking about. For example, we need to go as far as distributing IEC material written in our native language (Sesotho) to parents and community members several ways. These may include, for example printed material, pitso (public gatherings), newspapers and television programs, face-to-face meetings with families etc.

Official at central level her continues to share her worries:

But due to lack of resources especially human and financial one could tell that we are too much far behind in achieving such features of IE (referring to inclusive education) whereby everybody is educated and fully understand his or her effort to care for educational needs of our diverse learners.

She recommends:

We as ministry have to look for potential donors in who can help us with the challenge of understaffing, transport shortage and well as funds to build inclusive secondary schools.

The official at regional level shares her worries:

It is very worrying that when you go to districts and to the communities, officers and local authorities do not have government policies and plans. Yah... for sure it is the responsibility of the central government to distributes resources and decentralise services from top to the grassroots level but my argument would still remain that our staff and other partners are ignorant of getting copies of these documents. How can you implement mandates of the policies while you don't refer to such policies?

She therefore recommends that:

Every MoET staff member, it being officials, teachers and even learners should have copies of policies and pans governing the vision of the ministry. I therefore suggest that we commit funds in multiplying our informative material and policies.

Mathematics teacher admits that they are ignorant:

To be honest with you, we don't have any of those policies or strategic plans that talk about inclusion, not even our principal has any cope in her office, unless I am just speculating. Partly, I agree that we have to take the responsibility and buy those policies from government printing or bookshop.

He continues:

I therefore recommend that every teacher should have inclusive education policies and legal document for our growth and professional development.

Social science teacher recommends:

Even the parents at home should be up-to-date about what is the best interest of the child in so far as teaching and learning is concerned. Therefore, my opinion is

that parents, caregivers and other local authorities should be given access to the government policy manuals and plans on poverty and inclusion matters.

Life skills teacher articulates that:

Involving and training of parents, community members as well as local leaders on how to support children could help to make them realise and understand the importance of their role in inclusive education, the scope of education provision and support services suitable and available for the welfare of their children are the pillars in inclusive education. I always say information is power.

Principal supports and commit to increase ties between the school and parents:

I think and admit that we no longer have regular meeting with parents and care givers. I strongly believe that could also work for us in promoting taskforce for ensuring access and inclusion for every child. So I think it's high time I make sure that those regular meetings taken place. This will strengthen our ties with the parent and we will together fully support at-risk learners.

Study participants strongly recommend that engagement of stakeholders should be improved as to enhance holistic approach in promoting access to education. Each stakeholder should understand their roles and report to the entire team so as to enhance efficiency and avoid duplication of efforts. There should be more efforts to distribute inclusive education informative material and policy manuals not only to teachers and community leaders, but even to the poverty-stricken community members with low level of education and unreliable sources of income in dear native language.

6.7.5 Seeking external support and partnerships

Participants have indicated that schools and ministry as whole should also seek support from independent and external bodies such as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Community Based Organizations and health sectors.

Development studies teacher shares her proposal:

I understand that inclusive education is a multi-faceted phenomenon that needs a very serious taskforce. I therefore think it is worth doing seek external help, especially financial assistance from independent bodies like non-profit making organisations such as NGO, churches and other organizations in our communities. Indeed, this will enable us to meet parents half way when it comes to social and learning amenities of our learners.

Development studies teacher concurs:

It's true that parents and caregivers have the 'insider perspective' and are the experts as far as their own children are concerned and I understand that they have unique strengths, knowledge and experience for contributing to the shared view of a child's needs and the best ways of supporting them but this may not be a sufficient fact. I believe that if they are given training and mentoring from independent bodies such as NGOs, that will increase their capacity in handling their teenage children.

Maths teacher also concurs:

I also believe that parents know our learners as their children more than we do, so the establishment of parent-teacher links or unions can result in a joint effort enhancing full access to education not only to the poverty-stricken learners but also to their affluent counterparts.

Woodwork teacher share views:

I strongly agree with the idea of parents' engagement in teaching and learning business, however due to their level of education for example, they are always out there to look for income to sustain their families. Again, from our experience, some parents lack enough resources including proper skills to meet the psychosocial needs of their children.

He continues:

In this case NGOs can remedy the situation and provide some training on child related matters, parenting skills through capacity building programs targeting both parents and learners at school and community levels. This this would be supplementary and add value to good work the parents are doing.

Official at district level emphasises community members' involvement in capacity building programs:

Capacity building training programmes would in the long run promotes mutual respect and understanding between home, school, and community at large including local authorities like chiefs and local government councillors.

She continues:

Engagement and empowerment of all potential stakeholders in childcare and support would not only provide them with technical know-how in critical matters such as poverty and disability, but also contribute to children's positive attitudes towards education in general.

A biology teacher shares her honesty:

It's true that our professional qualifications help us to some extent to support at-risk learners, but I personally think it's not enough, I mean we are not counsellors nor are we psychologists. I would therefore suggest that capacity building and training programs should also involve us as teachers if we are to build a strong kind of 'coalition' force in substantiating inclusive education.

Official at central level echoes:

I think unit mandate that teachers should be equipped with skills for helping or dealing with such learners who have special educational needs and those affected by poverty should be covering the whole country not just a target few...if you just take a normal teacher, thus the one without special education skills], some of them will not be able to offer the necessary assistance to these miserable kids.

Mathematics teacher shares his effort:

To meet those whose parents could not afford to buy them textbooks, I normally sacrifice my leisure time, like after school not very early hours of the day, in order to make up for the time lost and I encourage them to borrow Maths textbooks and sets of instruments. This takes much of my time, but I do it anyway.

Woodwork teacher shares the similar initiative:

You know I teach a practical subject that requires one to go extra mile. That's the reason why I have divided my classes into manageable groups for my workshop space and tools and this caters for the slow learners and those who do not have prescribed tools because of poverty related issues. Sometimes I come on weekends to ensure efficiency and timeous completion of their research projects.

While teachers feel competent to teach learners, they are of the view that some of the needs of learners from low SES require support from professionals such as psychologists whose skills are outside the remit of schools and Ministry of Education.

6.8 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

The findings of the study revealed that teachers and MoET officials understand inclusive education as the process accommodating all learners from diverse backgrounds. However, most of them limit the meaning of diversity to differences in learners' disabilities. The study notes that much as learners with disabilities are vulnerable and should have meaningful access to education, learners from families of low SES form another remarkable marginalised group whose access to education should be championed using clear inclusive policy strategies.

MoET promotes inclusion of learners with disabilities by sensitising schools and communities in the form of workshops and distribution of informative material and ministerial policies and plans. However, MoET officials indicated that the issue of socioeconomic challenges of learners is not SEU's focal area, even though they acknowledge that home challenges such as lack of food, cosmetics, stationery, and money for transport affects the education of learners of low SES negatively. Moreover, the learners live in dilapidated households without running water, electricity, and other facilities such as televisions, radios and smart cell phones. Apart from lack of these

necessities, absence of proper lighting and heating system, and a quiet reading space remains a challenge and a barrier to learning and development. Learners do not only worry about learning facilities such as textbooks, uniforms and stationery but also low access to recreational resources such as training shoes, truck suits, outfits, bus fare and subscription money affecting their feeling of acceptance and meaningful participation resulting in poor academic achievement.

Child-headed families are characterised by children performing a lot of house chores subsequently affecting their studies. While girls are required to nurture their younger siblings, care for sick parents, cook and clean, their male counterparts mostly do livestock herding and heavy duties like ploughing and collecting animal fodder. These are some of the factors that account for their irregular school attendance. Moreover, some learners engage in these domestic chores for money to help their caregivers and parents. These child labour practices deny learners a sufficient time to do their school work.

The study also found that learners' poor socioeconomic background leads to development of low self-concept and learnt helplessness among those who underperform academically. Contributing factors to low self-concept include lack of prescribed textbooks which lowers the learners' confidence and readiness to participate in class, inability to access proper clothes and sporting facilities which make them feel shy and socially awkward. Some claim that harsh and discouraging comments from teachers emotionally hurt and demotivate them. Learners and parents alike seem to internalise the challenges as reflective of their worth as individuals and often feel that they are useless and not worthy of achieving in life. Aside from their poor socioeconomic circumstances, loss of parents makes the learners susceptible psychological trauma with some experiencing panic attacks and unstable mood swings years after the passing away of a parent. The trauma affects their concentration in class, and this often results in poor academic performance.

The study found that learners from households of low socioeconomic status are exposed to domestic violence with detrimental effect on their emotional wellbeing. There were conflicts between some learners and caregivers resulting in the learners' emotional vulnerability while other learners were fearful of cultural practices such as early marriage

and initiation which endangered their schooling opportunities. However, parents/guardians felt that the learners' educational opportunities were better off than their own experience when they were children. Parents took it to be the responsibility of teachers to help their children pass while their duty is only to provide household necessities such as food, cosmetics, and clothes. However, they noted their inability to effectively help their children with schoolwork due to their lack of education and busy schedule on earning income. For some parents, the failure to support their children with schoolwork produces feelings of guilt, inadequacy, and regret.

Despite alleging that they were not trained in inclusive education, teachers believed that school culture was one of the determinants of inclusion and as such they made efforts to welcome and treat every learner with warmth and harmony thereby affording everyone equal opportunity to learn. They maintained that through group work, all learners, were able to benefit from each other and share learning facilities. However, this was refuted by learners' concern that they felt unprepared to learn and were socially excluded in their classes due to lack learning facilities and maltreatment by the teachers. Basically, participants made suggestions that secondary schools should develop and strengthen collaboration between them (schools and parents) to ensure holistic support for learners. Further, teachers must engage learners in extracurricular activities such as talent shows, drama and sports to promote a sense of belongingness, social engagement while also reducing stress and self-isolation. Correspondingly, emotional and psychosocial support through counselling, coaching and mentorship were acknowledged as important to the welfare of learners. The study also found the need for both schools and MoET to engage stakeholders so as improve a holistic approach in promoting access to education. While secondary school teachers try to create inclusive learning atmosphere, school authorities should find external support through engagement of multiple stakeholders such as NGOs, FBOs and foreign donors who could supply MoET with both human and financial resources.

CHAPTER SEVEN: DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS, CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The chapter discusses the findings of the study. First, it describes the theoretical lenses used to interpret the findings. Then, the discussion covers sections reflecting themes presented in the previous chapter namely, understanding inclusive education, experiences of access to education, exposure to family distresses, parental support for vulnerable children, teachers' preparedness to support vulnerable learners, and focal areas for improving access to education. Conclusions are drawn from the results to explain contribution of the study. Then, the limitations of the study are highlighted before the chapter draws recommendations from the findings for further research, to influence educational practices and improve inclusive education policy.

7.2 THEORETICAL LENSES

To unpack inequalities in educational opportunities resulting from learners' socioeconomic disadvantage, the study is underpinned by social justice theory and capability approach as widely influential perspectives in promoting social justice in education, stressing equity as the key principle in educational access. Rawls (1971) proposes social justice theory as the philosophy that should be embraced to promote fundamental human rights for marginalized people to access vital services such as education. The current study found that learners from families of low SES are currently not accommodated in the LIEP and teachers' practices despite legislation such as the Children's Protection and Welfare Act that points to education as a human right. The LIEP does not outline SES as a dimension of special education needs and to mandate schools to identify and support such learners thereby enhancing access to education for them.

Among other proponents of social justice theory, Nussbaum (2009, p. 232) advocates the capability approach as encompassing a 'partial theory of social justice' and a normative framework for the assessment of human development and fair distribution of resources. The core characteristic of the capability approach is its focus on what people

are effectively able to do and to be. That is, to attain their capabilities or potentials (McClintock, 2016, p. 5). Terzi (2005, p. 449) describes capabilities as tangible opportunities afforded to people so that they can achieve desired outcomes. Related to capabilities are functionings which are referred to as actions and states that people want to achieve and engage in (Terzi, 2014, p. 485). Both capabilities (opportunity freedoms) and functionings (achievements) as viewed by Sen (1985, p.10), are influenced by individual circumstances, relationships with others, social and economic conditions, and contexts which create spaces for opportunities to be realised (Wilson-Strydom, 2011, p. 412; Saith 2001, p. 10). The current findings indicate that in recognising education as a human right the Ministry of Social Development is mandated to pay school fees for vulnerable learners at secondary school level while the Ministry of Education Training subsidises book fees. However, the initiatives do not seem to provide sufficient safeguards for learners from families of low SES and the lack of amenities for learning such books, transport and meals have effects for learners to experience their education differently from peers who come from higher wealth quantile. The capabilities of learners from low SES are constrained and they may not attain their functionings.

The study advocates to bridge the two perspectives together premised on the argument that opportunity to access to education is not a guarantee that a learner will achieve the desired educational outcome despite their determination to do so. According to Sen (2009, p. 401), social justice that can serve as the basis of practical reasoning, must include ways of judging how to reduce injustice and advance justice, rather than aiming only at the characterization of perfectly just societies. Therefore, Rawls (2001, p. 43) asserts that fair equality of opportunity should require not merely that learning institutions and social opportunities be open in the formal sense, but that all learners should have a fair chance to access and participate in them. It is therefore mandatory that while major social institutions like schools ensure equal consideration to all and provide equal entitlement of every child to education, they should as well recognise, acknowledge, and respect individual differences with socio-economic status being one of the significant differences (Terzi, 2014, p. 484). In this regard, social justice and capability approach enlighten and inform the discussion of the study findings.

7.3 UNDERSTANDING EQUITABLE ACCESS TO EDUCATION

Exploration of teachers and MOET officials' understanding of equitable access to education was based on the study's argument that enhancing access to education is one of the predominant mandates of inclusive education. This argument is rooted on UNESCO's (2005, p. 29) argument that education for all and inclusive education are both about access to education, however, inclusion is about access to education in a manner that eliminates discrimination or exclusion for any individual or group within or outside the school system. The study findings reveal that while all the teachers and MoET officials understood equitable access to education to mean accommodating all learners from diverse backgrounds, most of them seemed to limit it to disability inclusion and ignore the effect of low SES on learners' access to education. As encapsulated in teachers and MoET officials' responses, Lesotho Inclusive Education Policy's (MOET, 2018) definition of inclusive education emphasises the process of responding to diverse needs of all learners thereby educating everyone, (MOET, 2019, p. 1). In this definition ensuring access to education is encapsulated and 'all learners' could be assumed to include learners of low SES. However, the definition was cited from Article 24 of UNCRPD (UN, 2006) and this justifies the argument that 'all learners' in this case refers to all learners with disabilities. While various types of disabilities are mentioned in the policy, there is no mention of SES as a barrier to learning and development.

The study findings indicate that MoET promotes access to education for learners with disabilities by sensitising schools and communities in the form of workshops and distribution of informative material and ministerial policies and plans but there is no evidence of documentation about learners whose access to education is hindered by poverty. It can be argued that the Ministry promotes a narrow access to education agenda which focuses only on disability inclusion. Thus, while inclusion of learners with disability is embraced by both participants and the policy there is no provision of a systematic framework for identifying and dismantling barriers to equitable access to education for poverty-stricken children in adhering to the principle, 'every learner matters and matters equally' (UNESCO, 2017, p. 12).

According to UNESCO (1994, p. 15) inclusive education should be revised to include, besides people with disabilities, all those who are experiencing difficulty on a temporary or permanent basis, who are repeating continually their school years, who are forced to work, who live in poor household conditions, who live far from any school, who are extremely poor, who suffer abuses, or who are simply out of school, for whatever reason. However, the current study found that there are neither relevant strategic practices for responding to diverse needs of learners from poor socioeconomic backgrounds nor are their basic human rights to education spelled out by LIEP (2018). This is the violation of social justice's principle that public institutions such as schools are duty-bound to champion and distribute fundamental human rights to ensure that marginalised learners have access to resources that that would enable them to participate in education (Rawls, 1971, p. 6).

Recently, the Global Education Monitoring (GEM) report has maintained that promoting equitable access to education is not only about learners with disabilities who are excluded through discriminatory mechanism, but also about addressing discrimination based on wealth, remoteness, gender, and attitudes that deny learners the right to be educated with their peers or to receive education of the same quality (UNESCO, 2020, p. 14). In the context of the current study, neglecting learners' needs could come from the fact that the Constitution of Lesotho (Kingdom of Lesotho, 1993) does not provide socioeconomic rights as enforceable by law. Socio-economic rights are stated in chapter 3 of the Lesotho Constitution which provides for principles of the state policies not protected by law. Accordingly, if Lesotho was to attain sustainable development goal four of an inclusive and equitable quality education schools and other centres of learning would need to be transformed to cater for all children of both genders, those from rural populations, and of diverse socioeconomic backgrounds (UNESCO, 2017, p. 13). This resonates with Terzi's (2014, p. 486) assertion that the level of justice in social and institutional arrangements should be evaluated based on their recognition of individual differences, and the extent to which they provide everyone the opportunity to benefit from resources.

Correspondingly, the study found that teachers acknowledged no knowledge on any school policy or regulation nor national policies and strategic plans on equitable access to education. The findings show that access to education for learners from low SES is very low. In this regard, Santiago et al. (2008, p. 49) contend that in order to promote equity in access to education as encapsulated in the principles of inclusive education (UNESCO, 2021, p. 29), there should be clear formal and institutionalized arrangements governed by educational policies in schools and increased opportunities for disadvantaged learners such as those who are from families of low socioeconomic status. Similarly, Maringa et al. (2014, p. 28) state that inclusive education is the process of restructuring of school policies and practices to respond to the diversity of learners with diverse needs in their localities. Accordingly, the findings confirm Dalkilic and Vadeboncoeur (2016, p. 128) view that Inclusive education as a social arrangement created on behalf of marginalised children and youth, may be difficult if children and youth are often not perceived to be equipped with the ability to decide and communicate their own valued functionings.

Despite the assertion by MOET officials that the Ministry offers training to teachers on inclusive education, most of the participating teachers denied getting any training on inclusive education. The lack of training casts doubt as on whether teachers can promote equitable access to education and implement LIEP in its current form or extend their support to learners from low SES as Izard (2016, p.19) argues that inclusive education obliges teachers to be prepared to teach learners from poverty-stricken contexts and work with those who have been traumatized by socioeconomic distresses. Moreover, equal educational outcomes can only be achieved if more educational resources are equitably devoted to the less talented and those from a socially and economically impoverished background (Rawls, 1971, p. 73). The findings compare with Mosia and Lephoto's (2015, p. 87) study which stated that while MOET reports indicated that the Ministry trained teachers on counselling to support vulnerable learners, teachers in the sampled school denied ever being trained on counselling. Similarly, Mateusi et al., (2014, p. 267) revealed that one of the barriers to implementing inclusive education at primary level in Lesotho is the lack of adequately trained teachers for inclusive education. This study has further substantiated that to date, there is dissonance between measures taken by MOET to train

secondary school teachers on inclusive education and the actual experiences by teachers, and teachers are oblivious of policies and strategic plans for inclusive education.

Basically, the study argues that access to education for vulnerable learners as mandated in legislation and LIEP, is loadable but this must extend beyond disability inclusion to other groups such as the socioeconomically disadvantaged as the current study argues. The Save the Children (2017, p. 1) argues that poverty and discrimination weaken access to education and particularly leads to learners of low SES being excluded from education that is enjoyed by their affluent counterparts. Similarly, Elder (2015, p.25) observes that apart from violation of rights of people with disabilities, equitable access to education in Kenya is blocked by poverty which translates to lack of food. Moreover, Hausstätter and Jahnukainen (2014, p. 119) argue, as also UNESCO, (2020, p.29) does, that if successfully done, transformation of schools with consideration of diverse learners' social and economic circumstances, could not only promote access to and inclusive education but also quality of education.

7.4 EXPERIENCES OF ACCESS TO EDUCATION

The findings of the current study indicate a variety of barriers to access to education for learners from poor socioeconomic background. The barriers are discussed in seven subthemes namely: adequacy of resources at home; influence of role models at home/community level; availability of learning amenities; access and role of extracurricular activities; regularity of school attendance; influence on learners' self-concept; psychological trauma following bereavement; and exposure to family distresses.

7.4.1 Adequacy of resources at home

While inclusive education for persons with disabilities seeks to make reading materials accessible in Brail, making environments physically accessible for mobility impairments etc. the current study found that inaccessible education due the burden for not accessing books or stationery due to costs, travelling long distance to school, not having energy due to hunger are not given the same emphasis as elements of exclusion and likely to impair learning. Inaccessible education due to poverty has been documented by previous studies (Ntho, 2013, p. 40; Lekhetho, 2013, p. 404; Moshoeshoe, 2015, p. 38; and World

Bank, 2016, p. 2). Although these studies mostly focused on access to primary education, the current study was looking at the secondary education and it is after enactment of LIEP. The findings show that neither the Ministry of Education staff, its inclusive education policy nor teachers emphasise socioeconomic status as sufficiently critical barrier to education hence no intervention since results of the previous studies.

As the study found, socioeconomic barriers make secondary education inaccessible relative to free primary education. Similarly, Lesotho's national report on MDGs indicates that secondary education has remained the least financially supported level in the country with parents unable to afford school fees and learning amenities such as uniform, bus fare and prescribed textbooks as key barriers for young people (Kingdom of Lesotho, 2015, p.24). This marks slow progress of Lesotho's educational policies and strategic plans that are meant to enhance access to education and welfare for all children.

The studies' results on effects of low SES on access to education compare studies in other African countries such as Kenya where Gariel et al. (2016, p. 54) found that parents' low ability to finance education, coupled with the poor status of physical and instructional resources inhibit learners' academic achievement. Similarly, Onyancha, Njoroge and Newton (2015) point out that low parents' socio-economic status leaves children in unfavourable starting position and result in low motivation to continue with studies. The study found that a family's inability to afford a meal, heating, electricity for lighting etc. negative influence learners' opportunities to study. These results compare with results of a study by Karue and Amukowa (2013, p. 105) in Kenya which found the same negative effects. In this regard, Otero & McCoshan, (2005, p. 17) Terzi (2014, p. 486) maintain that access to education for such poverty-stricken learners is compromised if their participation and academic achievement are low.

The study has established that inadequacy of home resources makes learners susceptible to poverty which Sen (2001, p. 5) defines as lack of capability to function effectively in society, and inadequate education can thus be considered a form of poverty. From the capability approach point of view, poverty is also the absence or inadequate realization of certain basic freedoms, such as the freedoms to avoid hunger, disease, illiteracy, and so on (United Nations 2004, p. 9). In line with Mosia et al.'s (2019, p. 22)

assertion, the current study argues that unless there is a major policy transformation to increase funding the most vulnerable such as learners from low socioeconomic background to access secondary education, Lesotho may not fulfil the mandate of “leaving no one behind” and that of ensuring access to inclusive and equitable quality education especially at secondary level (UNESCO, 2015, p.17). Thus, MOET needs to make major transformation to be responsive to the needs and rights of learners living in poverty if inclusive education is to reach its fullest potential in Lesotho.

7.4.2 The influence of role models at home and community levels

Parents seem to think their children learn in better and improved environments than theirs while learners recount challenges such as lack of learning amenities, hunger etc. The study also revealed that the parents or guardians had not done secondary school education themselves and may therefore not appreciate challenges their children go through. They were also less actively involved in their children’s education. The finding confirm assertion by the World Bank (2015) that above 60% of Basotho live in rural areas, are poor, less educated and less likely to support children’s education. The findings compare with those of Pufall, et. al. (2011, p. 32) which state that children of parents with greater levels of education in Zimbabwe continued to be more likely to have positive education outcomes. Additionally, in another study, Wei, Salama, and Gwavuya (2015, p. 28) found that household wealth status and parents’ education status are the main factors affecting access to education.

Unlike in the case of the current study where parents do not provide motivation to their children, studies in South-Korea show that highly educated parents tend instil educational aspirations in their children through their early and deep involvement in a long-term educational strategy (Ho, 2012, p. 247). They repeatedly teach their children to aspire for a competitive attitude in academic performance (Ho, 2012, p. 247) while parents in the current study believe that their children’s access to education is relatively easy. Smith’s (2004, p. 53) says that parents’ education influences a learners’ good performance through inspiration to such learners stemming from the message from parents that education is important. In addition, findings from this study show that learners’ neighbourhoods and home environments generally do not provide inspiration for them to go to school. This resonates with results from studies from elsewhere as Vellymalay

(2012, p. 16) points out, home is an environment where the child learns the skills, attitudes and behaviour which could mould them into a productive and successful learner. Rightly as Oyserman and Destin, (2010, p. 102) put it, family neighbourhood has potential to instill certain attitude towards learning by exposing learners to elders (parents) and even peers who have already given up on education child labour, alcohol and drug abuse.

Learners have also indicated that the few people who acquire tertiary education in their home communities leave to urban areas and they have no one to look up to. This resonates with Howley's (2006, p. 79) observation that for many rural youth, pursuing post-secondary educational opportunities also involve moving away from their home communities and this lowers youth's aspirations to maintain their connections to family and community. In this regard, Blackwell, Trzesniewski, & Dweck, (2007, p. 258) articulate that if children form their identity in a context that provides no example of how academic achievement might be relevant to their personal goals, they are likely to have a negative attitude towards education which is a robust predictive factor in academic success. As Murdock, (2009, p. 451) observes, contexts in which learners can view academic achievement as a realistic aspect of their group identity and develop positive images of that identity can foster motivation.

Therefore, if justice is to be done, Lesotho government has to allocate more resources to families with low socioeconomic status to empower them to be involved in the learning process of their children the same way as their affluent counterparts do to inspire and motivate their children (UNICEF, 2009, p. 85). In this regard, this study argues if parents are socioeconomically uplifted, there would be more resources dedicated to education leading to increased chances that those children will succeed in schools. Children need a social and emotional connection to a role model and in turn the role model needs to give the children an indication that they are loved (National Centre for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2004, p. 5). Accordingly, substantial long-lasting negative effects of early years of education on economic and social outcomes are particularly high for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, whose home environments may not provide them with the foundation skills necessary to prosper at later educational stages (Woessmann, 2010, p. 26). This is evident from the study findings that learners'

disadvantages were aggravated by discouraging stereotypic beliefs that girls must get married to earn prosperity and boys should get initiated and herd livestock to earn the living for their families rather than being inspired to go to school.

7.4.3 Availability of learning amenities

The study has established that lack of learning amenities such as food, money for transport, access to recreational facilities that should otherwise be secured by their parents, makes learning and social life of the learners very miserable and they ultimately perform badly. The findings compare with results of a study by Kyei and Nemaorani (2014, p. 86) in South Africa which revealed that parents' socioeconomic status affects students' academic performance in secondary schools.

Additionally, the study has found that at school, lack of stationery and maths and science equipment school does not only negatively affect poor learners' participation in the learning process but also tempers with teachers' efforts to support such vulnerable learners. A study by Royal Society (2008, p. 2) found that in England where there is free education system, learners in rural schools lose interest in taking science subjects for they could not afford expensive science equipment given their families' low SES. Conversely, the OVC bursary in Lesotho covers prescribed texts, stationery, and science equipment (Kingdom of Lesotho, 2019, p. 5). Nonetheless, the current study found that other amenities such as food, transport etc. are equally important in enhancing access to education. Learners believed that they could perform better if their learning necessities could be adequate. This implies that their functionings could be enhanced by redistributing more resources to them to enable them to compete on equal basis with their wealthy counterparts. The capability approach which recognises individuals' ability to convert resources into educational outcomes if resources are equitably distributed (Tikly & Barrett 2007, p. 3).

In addition to lack of learning amenities revealed by this study, shortage of teaching facilities tempers with quality input and ultimately that of education. This resonates with Oji's (2007, p. 90) study findings that the quality of input and the process determines quality of education and achievement. In this regard UNESCO (2005, p. 15) indicates that academic achievement should be based on well-defined learning accomplishments

(value functionings) as a major outcome of the education process of inclusive education. Equity is viewed by some proponents of social justice theory as fair equality of opportunity which governments could distribute educational inputs unequally to compensate the least disadvantaged learners and schools through redistribution process (UNESCO, 2018, p. 32, Barrett & Tikly, 2012, p. 7; Savage, Sellar & Gorur, 2013, p.162). Moreover, equitable access to education aids participation which leads to academic success (Gidley, Hampson, Wheeler, & Bereded-Samuel, 2010, p.146). Equitable access to and success in education for all can be achieved by redistribution of resources to increasingly benefit the least advantaged learners to compete with their affluent counterparts (Bankston, 2010, p. 174; Rawls, 1999, p. 12).

7.4.4 Influence and access to extracurricular activities

The study findings have established that learners do not only worry about learning facilities such as textbooks but their lack amenities to use for extracurricular activities such as truck suits, bus fare to school competitions etc. These result in negative feelings about self and lack of meaningful participation. This goes against the recognition that every learner, regardless of their socioeconomic status should be granted chance to full participation and to contribute in decisions that affect them (Fraser, 2007, p. 27). Thus study found that poor learners decide not to participate in extracurricular activities. As such, this undermines learners' capabilities which translates into opportunities (McClintock, 2016, p. 5) for them to showcase their potential functionings (achievements) (Sen 1985, p.10; Terzi, 2014, p. 485) in extracurricular activities such as gymnastics. Accordingly, participation of social justice should involve social arrangements that permit all learners to engage in social life equally as peers (UNESCO, 2005, p. 15). On the view of justice as participatory parity, overcoming injustice means dismantling institutionalized obstacles that prevent socioeconomically marginalised learners from participating at par with their affluent counterparts and as full partners in social processes such as learning (Fraser, 2007, p. 27).

Additionally, inability to participate in social activities result in feeling of social exclusion and as Jo (2013, p. 515) observes, shame and humiliation can result in isolation thereby corroding social relations and breaking down social capital. Thus, participating poverty-

stricken learners often feel lonely and unfit to befriend other learners whose socioeconomic conditions make them better-off fulfilled with adequate social connections and resources. Whether felt or anticipated, shame epitomises the threat to any social bond between a learner and their social learning environment (Chase & Walker, 2013, p. 752).

7.4.5 Regularity of school attendance

The study has revealed that absenteeism is one of the reasons why learners of low SES perform below average. Performing a lot of house chores by learners from home environment characterised by child headed families remains a serious challenge. As Jeynes, (2002, p.190) observes, parental absence reduces the access that a child has to his or her parent leading to the decline in a child's academic achievement. The findings of the study have revealed that even those learners whose parents are still alive, sometimes skip school due lack of guidance and support from parents of low occupational status despite the parents' aspirations and involvements (Jordan & Plank, 2000).

According to UNESCO (2005, p. 22-23) access to education as universal provision of equitable opportunities to participate in defined minimum level of education for all. However, the study found that some learners have responsibilities such as nurturing their younger siblings, cooking, and cleaning that contribute to their irregular school attendance. The irregular attendance among these learners from lower socio-economic status subject them to lower academic performances, completion of fewer years of schooling and lower career aspirations (Jordan & Plank 2000, p. 106). These factors were also accountable for underperformance among senior secondary school learners in South-Africa (Bayat, Louw & Rena, 2014, p.194). In Zimbabwe, Moyo (2013, p. 2112) notes that poverty-stricken learners walk long distances to school and arrive late for lessons and are usually suspended from attending lessons for failure to pay fees on time thereby losing valuable learning time. To this end, this study argues that irregular school attendance denies the poor learners such valued opportunities to learn on equal basis with other learners and this needs to be addressed by schools which are responsible for promotion and distribution of rights and relatively more resources to poverty-stricken learners (Rawls, 1971, p.6) through what Gewirtz (1998) calls positive discrimination.

7.4.6 Influence on low self-concept

The study found out that learners' poor socioeconomic background leads to development of low self-concept and learnt helplessness among those who underperform academically. This is observed from relationship between learners' experiences as influenced by their backgrounds and their development of self-concept as they seem to internalise the challenges as reflective of their worth as individuals. Families' inability to afford some learning necessities lowers their confidence and readiness to participate in class. The findings compare with literature that states that feelings of low self-esteem emanate from the learners' long exposure to higher levels of material constraints and fewer opportunities for influence, choice, and control (Stephens, Markus, & Phillips 2014, p. 615). Similarly, Horgan (2007, p. 66) states that this is evident in situations whereby children growing up in poverty perceive life itself as a struggle and tend to worry about non-educational issues.

Learners also claim that harsh treatment especially discouraging comments from teachers affect them emotionally. This violates acceptance as one of the cornerstones of inclusive education paving access to education for every child (Humphrey, 2008, p. 42). In this regard, acceptance is vital for the survival rate for learners of low socioeconomic status within an education system and this is dependent on the kind of treatment learners get from teachers and their affluent counterparts (Gomez, Allen, & Clinton, 2004, p. 112). As observed by Irajzad (2017, p.131), unequal allocation of teacher's attention has many reasons, one of which may be the learner's socio-economic status. Thus, if a learner comes from a family of low socioeconomic status, their confidence becomes lower if they are made to feel unaccepted and unfit to interact with teachers and their affluent counterparts (Parker, 2013, p. 43).

7.4.7 Psychological trauma following bereavement

The study also found that some learners lost parents but there were no mechanisms to support them go through their bereavement and were thus susceptible to psychological trauma which silently tormented them. As noted in literature, psychological trauma impairs behaviour, reduces attentional control, boosts impulsivity and impairs working memory thereby reducing cognitive capacity of learners (Evans & Schamberg, 2009, p. 6546; Patterson, 2002, p. 3). Going through prolonged periods of trauma adversely affects

learners' academic performance (Liston, McEwen, & Casey 2009, p. 914). The study findings compare with Adeyemo and Babajide's (2012, p. 8) study in Nigeria which found that a child who suffers parental and material deprivation and care due to divorce or death, or absconding of one of the parents, get their schooling negatively affected as one parent, especially a mother, may not be financially buoyant to pay necessities for their living and education thus adversely affecting school performance.

7.5 EXPOSURE TO FAMILY DISTRESSES

This section discusses the findings on several forms of family distresses encountered by learners of low socioeconomic status namely: domestic violence, child labour, gender based distresses, and unplanned mobility from place to place as presented below:

7.5.1 Domestic violence

Evans, Kim, Ting, Teshar, and Shannis, (2007, p. 349) argue that distress such as physical assaults affects psychological readiness to learn and academic success as well as social competence which is ability and freedom to socialise with other peers. Some of the learners are adversely affected by other distresses such as death, conflict among parents leading to separation and divorce. As McLanahan & Sandefur (1994, p. 45) Ku, 2003, p. 17), have observed, the absence of one parent because of divorce or death has a negative influence on a child's degree of educational achievement. This poses threats to learning and development of children (Leach, 2012, p. 370). The findings indicate that some learners are exposed to domestic violence which is rife in families of low SES. Learners are exposed to physical assault and insults. For example, one female learner was ashamed to go to school after her uncle whipped her with a sticks on her buttocks. Some of the violent behaviour is exacerbated by alcohol abuse by male figures in the families.

The study has also established that conflict between learner and parents makes learners feel that their relationship with their parents (caregivers) might get forever damaged, and they tend to become emotionally vulnerable. This poses threats to their schooling. Buschkuehl and Jaeggi, (2010, p. 478) argues that victims struggle cognitively, may shut down and show learned helplessness. To this extent, poorly performing learners often get unmotivated because of lack of hope when dealing with parents whom they see as

monsters instead of protectors (Odéen et al., 2012, p. 249), and often show depressive symptoms (Butterworth, Olesen, & Leach, 2012, p. 370).

7.5.2 Child labour and Gender based distresses

Poor socioeconomic circumstances force some learners to engage in domestic labour in order to help supplement their livelihoods. From the responses it was established that female learners are often associated with nurturing tasks such as caring for the sick, cooking, washing, and raising minor siblings while boys are associated with herding livestock, enduring beatings and getting initiated. This finding compares with Lekhetho's (2013, p. 404) study which established that because of grinding poverty especially in the rural areas in Lesotho, young boys of school-going age look after livestock or engage in other forms of child labour to support their siblings. Another study by World bank (2005) has revealed that boys in Lesotho are less likely to attend school and more likely to repeat and dropout than girls. Correspondingly, child labour denies them time to do their school work efficiently in violation of Children Welfare and protection Act of 2011 which protects the rights of children from distresses such lack of educational opportunities and child labour (Kingdom of Lesotho, 2019, p. 43-44).

Furthermore, the study has established that long subjection to these gender-based encounters act as barriers to access to education and social freedom and this affects both genders differently. Nyabanyaba's (2009, p. 52) study indicates that many children, particularly boys in the rural areas, are forced to drop out of school because of poverty or the loss of one or both parents while girls were reportedly forced to interrupt their schooling to look after younger siblings or ailing members of their families or eventually opt out of school into early marriage to escape extreme poverty. Moreover, Urwick (2011, p. 242) observes that boys drop out of school due to forced initiation while some engage in herding as means to care for their families.

7.5.3 Unplanned mobility from place to place

The study reveals that some learners left their homes in the remote areas due circumstances such forced labour, underage marriages, abduction and forced initiation. In this regard, Spilt, Hughes, Wu and Kwok (2012, p. 1193) postulate that learners from such discouraging poor home environments are likely to drop out or their school failure increases because they are exposed to relational adversity at home. One male learner

left his home in rural areas to look for wage to meet his learning needs while also running away from forced initiation and physical assault. Accordingly, children growing up in such conditions usually find it difficult to do well in school and are susceptible to dropping out of school (UNICEF, 2014, p. 12-13). The move forces them to change schools and as such they find it hard to acclimatize to the new schooling environment to the extent that they perform badly compared to their urban based counterparts. As Nadeem (2011, p. 221) observes, learners from rural areas attain low academic achievement relative to their urban counterparts.

7.6 PARENTAL SUPPORT FOR VULNERABLE CHILDREN

The current study has found learners are expecting their parents to fully take part in their education, however, their poor socioeconomic conditions force them to spend most of their time working in order to earn the living. Standing (1999, p. 58) has articulated that parental role in education is an activity that involves a range of pedagogical and educational tasks including the provision of a positive learning environment, and the organisation of routine household tasks that fit the school day. The study has established that the participating parents fail to assist learners with assignments due to among others, the parents' low educational status. Literature indicates that parents with better social, human, and financial capital provide more instrumental resources for their children to succeed (Crosnoe & Schneider, 2010, p. 95). This shallow involvement of parents in education denies the poor learners a vital aspect as Deslandes and Bertrand, (2005, p.164) postulate that parental involvement leads to a child being educated both at home and in school. Moral motivation from parents could also mean that parents should create time to play with their children to enhance parent-child connection and to make children feel supported and aspire to work hard at school. In this regard, Ohanele and Nwafor (2016, p. 18) indicate that parents with high socio-economic status voluntarily get involved in extra curricula activities of their children while those of middle-income status are less involved, and this contributes to children's failure to perform well at school.

Even though parents feel guilty when they could not spend quality time with their children, the findings indicate that some parents think it is the responsibility of teachers to help their children pass while they should pay school fees and spend time earning some income. This perception is not justifiable as Heyneman and Loxley (1983) point out that academic

development is influenced by both out-of-school and in-school conditions. Correspondingly, the current study argues that both parents and teachers should have mutual involvement in academic life of a child but teachers are better placed to initiate and structure such involvement.

Although the evidence shows that parents express a lack of time to participate in their children's schoolwork, they seem to make contradicting complaints that the participating secondary school does not regularly involve them in matters affecting their children. It can be noted that due to low socioeconomic status, parents feel sceptical to fully take part or may not know how to be involved in their children's education. To this end Machen et al., (2005, p. 334) postulate while parents may want to participate in their children's education, they are less comfortable around teachers due to inability to afford good clothes, cosmetics and hair making that would otherwise heighten their confidence. Moreover, poor parents do not only lack the experience of higher education to give specific advice to their children on how to succeed academically, but they also do not have a helpful social network as such they think that educational issues are solely the teacher's responsibility (Lareau, 2003, p. 239-243).

Basically, the study found that parents seem to internalise their SES challenges as reflective of their worth as individuals and often feel that they are useless and not worthy of achieving in life. The results compare with literature which reveals that such parents usually succumb to such discouraging statements such as "I give up...I am useless" resulting from learned helplessness (Robb, Simon, & Wardle, 2009, p. 386). To this end, it could be safely argued that such statements are symptoms of a learnt helplessness.

7.7 TEACHERS' PREPAREDNESS TO SUPPORT VULNERABLE LEARNERS

Despite their claim that they were not trained in inclusive education, teachers believe that school culture is one of the determinants of inclusion and as such they make efforts to welcome and treat every learner with warmth and harmony thereby affording everyone equal opportunity to learn. A conducive learning environment which involves loving, caring and motivating learners is noted in literature (Jensen, 2013, p.1) and refers to stimulating constructive behaviours, emotions or affect, and cognitions (Furlong, 2014, p. 1). Inclusive education is about creating an environment of acceptance so that learners

are free to engage with each other and teachers in culturally appropriate settings (UNESCO, 2015, p. 12). Nevertheless, the school management saw the need to have qualified staff with experience as one of those strategic ways to meet the diverse needs of learners. Both management and teachers have shared similar concern that they feel unprepared to enhance inclusive education due lack of expertise in inclusive matters and this was felt by learners who were humiliated by teachers for not having learning amenities.

Most teachers indicated that they had not received any training on inclusive education. This compares Mosia's (2014, p. 301) observation that barriers to inclusive education in Lesotho include, among others, lack of support and resources dedicated for inclusive education as well as lack of proper skills among teachers especially in relation to assessment/placement mechanisms. The training is important for sensitising staff on the right values and attitudes for an inclusive environment, but most critical for acquiring skills in assessment and support for socioeconomically vulnerable learners. Arguably, in an education system characterized by poorly trained and ineffective teachers, learners are unlikely to gain quality education and sufficient learning opportunities due to inequities among learners (UNICEF, 2016, p. 61). As Bennett (2008) points out, if teachers training programme does not focus on multicultural education regarding poverty and its impact on education, there will always be a gap in pre-service teachers' understanding of the needs of learners in poverty (Bennett, 2008, p. 252).

Further, teachers have indicated that one of the ways to meet learners who lag behind in class because of shortage of learning amenities is through establishment of peer groups whose membership does not consider disability or one's socioeconomic background. Through group work, all learners, whether gifted or not, poor or affluent, with or without disabilities are able benefit from each other and share learning facilities. This also helps in promoting oneness and social inclusion; however, this is the violation of Rawls's (1971, p. 5) social justice principle that individualism should override group convention and cooperation does not guarantee that every member of the group is satisfied. This also refutes learners experience that they always feel out place and unprepared to learn and

lag behind those with sufficient learning amenities. While a good approach, learners' individual contexts must be considered before applying it as solution

The school does not have a platform to enable vulnerable learners state how they feel. The inability to engage learners about what and how they are taught violates article 12 of the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of a Child which proclaims that "...even very young children – given the time and opportunity, demonstrate not only that they have views, experiences and perspectives to express, but that their expression can contribute positively to decisions that affect the realization of their rights and wellbeing" (UNICEF, 2011, p. 8). Moreover, as UNESCO (2020, p. 14) argues, the efforts of policymakers and educators should not override the needs and preferences of those affected. That means learners of low SES must be given latitude to express their concerns and preferences in relation to their inclusion.

Inclusive education as a social arrangement for children and youth, may be difficult if learners are denied opportunity to decide and communicate their own valued functionings (Dalkilic & Vadeboncoeur, 2016, p. 128). Writers advocating for education within the capabilities framework (Terzi, 2007), often overlook the support of children in determining valued functionings in favour of adult decision-making on the matter. However, beneficiaries of the inclusion project should all have their voices heard (Haug's, 2003b, p. 9) as inclusive education aims to secure the right of children to access, participation and success in local regular schools (Slee, 2019, p.9). Enhancement of such rights should go hand in hand with equity which emphasizes learner diversity but as this study maintains, that despite globally recognised slogans such as 'leaving no one behind' mandating education systems to respond to learner diversity, schools remain ill-equipped to implement inclusive education (Gayle & Pimhidzai, 2013, p. 10-11).

Additionally, teachers have indicated their subjective and individual ways to increase student attention, participation and on task behaviour to create inclusive classroom environment but none of them have alluded to how their school offers policy mandated support as an institution. The participating school does not have any written policy that teachers embrace to conventionally promote inclusive education. As Engelbrecht and Green (2007, p. 42) rightly point out, inclusive education is about changing and

transforming the education system to accommodate all children, regardless of the strength or weakness in any area and have them become part of the school community. In so doing, diverse needs of learners, including those of low socioeconomic status, would be met (Gidley, Hampson, Wheeler & Bereded-Samuel, 2010, p. 123).

Despite teachers' claim to accept and treat learners equally, learners indicated that some of the teachers use harsh words and discouraging comments when they do not have learning amenities and when they have performed badly. This violates the principle of acceptance which McCowan (2016, p. 1) describes as involving the use of harmonious language of instruction to every learner, prohibition of corporal punishment, recognition and respect of social, economic and cultural diversity as well as preferential access. That is, acceptance of learners of low socioeconomic status education is the one that is free from discrimination. Moreover, Beiter (2005, p. 19) asserts that access to education is an indispensable measure of education system which is free from all sorts of discrimination and maltreatment. As the findings indicate teachers are ignorant cognitive component of acceptance which Jimerson et al. (2003, p. 23) describe as the initiative to acknowledge learners' sense of self-efficacy, level of motivation, perceptions as well as beliefs towards learners. Accordingly, schools as institutions should have values and beliefs cherished to supplement efforts of teachers in teaching learners from poor living conditions (Bandura et al. 2001, p. 206).

7.8 FOCAL AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT OF EQUITABLE ACCESS TO EDUCATION

This section entails discussion on the concerns and suggestions of study participants on how policies and practices on inclusive education could be improved to ensure access to secondary education. The concerns and suggestions are discussed in the following sub-themes: strengthening collaboration between school and parents; psychosocial support and learner engagement; creation of inclusive learning environment, improvement on stakeholders' engagement; and seeking external support and partnerships.

7.8.1 Strengthening collaboration between school and parents

Participants have made suggestions that secondary schools should develop and strengthen collaboration between them (schools and parents) to ensure holistic support

for learners. As evident from the study findings, parents know learners better, and so if there is partnership between them (parents) and teachers, learners are sure to succeed. Al-Matalaka, (2014, p. 146) attest to the observation that parents who do not get involved in their children's educational process are capable of repressing and destroying the motivation and ability of their children through neglect and indifference to their achievements. On the other hand, Ferrara and Ferrara, (2005, p. 77) articulate that parental involvement in school promotes increased achievement, less aggression, increased attendance, and increased passing rates.

Similarly, Van Roekel, (2008, p. 1), pinpoints that parents and family members play pivotal role in a child's education and the broader community too has a responsibility to assure high-quality education for all learners regardless of their socioeconomic status. Engaging parents in their children's education as suggested by the current study is a way of enhancing a learner human capital. As defined by Coleman (1968, p. 98-99), human capital refers to parent's education, and financial capital means parents' income while social capital is related to interaction, networking and bonding among learners and parents as well as community at large.

7.8.2 Psychosocial support and learner engagement

The current study has established that emotional and psychosocial support through counselling, coaching and mentorship are important to the welfare of learners, and this means parents and teachers should ensure that learners have access to them to promote effective participation and academic achievement. By coaching and mentoring them, learners would feel psychosocially supported and have a sense of belongingness. As the current study argues, a feeling of belongingness at school enhances academic adjustment and is especially beneficial for youth experiencing poverty and other family hardships (Finn, 1989, p. 141; Juvonen 2006, p. 273).

The study findings suggest that as way of improving access to education, teachers should engage learners in extracurricular activities such as talent shows, drama and sports. This will promote sense of belongingness and social engagement while also reducing stress and self-isolation. As Furlong, (2014, p. 4) rightly states it, learners who perceive teachers and peers as caring tend to develop a positive sense of academic self-efficacy and have

future aspirations coupled with clear, developmentally appropriate expectations and are more likely to be engaged in school and other social contexts. Other theorists refer to this caring relationship as teacher-learner trust that makes schools better places for learners to learn, perhaps by enabling and empowering productive connections between families and schools, and thus enhancing poor learners' performance (Goddard, Tschannen-Moran, & Hoy, 2001, p. 14). The current study argues as Yell (1995, p. 403) does, that the value of trust between teachers and learners has potential of fostering equality of opportunity for every learner even those who come from lower socioeconomic strata. Moreover, trust and belonging promote academic motivation and retention of learners (Finn, 1989, p.142).

7.8.3 Creating of inclusive learning environment

Teachers should show more friendly and caring attitude to learners so as to, make them (learners) more relaxed and comfortable around them. This will make classrooms more vibrant and participative and in the long run access to quality of inclusive education will be achieved. In this regard Bierman (2011, p. 2) asserts that a classroom environment created by the teacher through goal setting, appropriate challenges, and empathy for the learners may bring some major factors contributing to learner achievement as learners experience the classroom as not just an intellectual space, but also as a social, emotional, and physical environment which affect their academic achievement and subject anxiety. Moreover, Cuthrell, Stapleton and Ledford, (2010) rightly argue teachers should make inclusive lesson plans, initiate activities that are appropriate and meaningful, and create a classroom that is high in challenge and low in threat for every learner.

The current study has established that as way of ensuring justice to all learners, teachers should be cognizant of diversity that exists among learners especially based on their socioeconomic circumstances that translate into poverty (UNDP, 2006, p. 3; Wadsworth, et al. 2008, p. 310). In his research on approaches to inclusive education, Mugambi, (2017, p.102) articulates that success of inclusive education depends upon the ability of teachers to respond to diversity in the classroom. Expanding on the similar stance, Haberman (2010, p. 82) avows that there should be "pedagogy of poverty," which he refers to as a form of teaching poor learners that has become accepted but most of

education authorities give it least attention. Accordingly, Haberman (2010, p.34) has identified the following effective ways of teaching learners in poverty: involving learners with explanations of human differences, helping learners see major concepts as opposed to isolated facts, allowing learners to be involved in planning their activities, grouping learners heterogeneously, and actively involving learners in their own learning. Moreover, as Izard, (2016, p.19), suggests, pedagogy of poverty should be congruent to inclusive education and oblige teachers to be prepared to teach learners from low SES and work with those who have been traumatized. The current study maintains that access to education is not only hindered by inadequate teacher-learner relationships, inadequate resources and facilities but also by an irrelevant pedagogy that fails to meet the needs of individuals' vocational aspirations, intellect as well as socioeconomic aptitudes (Mandina, 2013, p. 88).

7.8.4 Improvement on stakeholders' involvement

Study participants strongly recommend that engagement of stakeholders should be improved to enhance holistic approach in promoting equitable access to education as a mandate of inclusive education. In this regard, it is imperative to highlight that central to the creation of the necessary context for the development of inclusive education are national policies on inclusion that strategize the involvement local support systems or stakeholders (UNESCO, 2009, p. 18). The study findings have indicated the importance of all stakeholders surrounding education of a child living in poverty in a social context of which education is part. Thus, inclusive education for a poverty-stricken learner, is part of the process of social inclusion and therefore the whole community with different but complementary stakeholders has an essential role to play in the growth and development of its young people (Van Roekel, 2008, p. 1).

As evident from the study findings, each stakeholder, whether a learner, teacher, parent, ministry, church etc should understand their roles and report to the entire team so as to enhance efficiency and avoid duplication of efforts. In this regard, Barrett and Tikly (2012) argue that good quality education arises from interactions between three overlapping contexts, namely the policy, the school and the home and community context. Each context should be analysed to ensure that enabling inputs and processes have the effect

of closing the gaps that sometimes exist between learning and social contexts and creating greater synergy and coherence in child development (Barrett & Tikly, 2012, p. 5).

Furthermore, as stakeholders interact, they form social relationships that collectively serve as social capital of a learner. As Ostrom (2001, p.172) postulates, regardless of whether intended, social capital is viewed as an investment in social relationships that make available to learners, a stock of resources raising capabilities from individual and joint efforts. Thus, as stakeholders interact, they tend to share livelihoods through resources and other necessities such as education. Accordingly, inclusive education should embody the principles of dialogue, participation and openness, bringing all stakeholders together to resolve emerging tensions and dilemmas (UNESCO, 2020, p. 14).

7.8.5 Seeking external support and partnerships

While teachers feel competent to teach learners, they are of the view that the needs of learners from low SES require skills they do not have, and support can be acquired from psychologists. As Chirume and Chikasha (2014, p. 202) observed, factors affecting achievement include socioeconomic resources, school-based causes, teacher competency, socio-economic forces, examination systems and students' perceptions. As such, education authorities should engage into social and participatory actions that are visible indicators of the degree to which a poverty-stricken learner could be connected to school and other significant units such as community and family neighbourhood for a holistic care and support for vulnerable children (Jimerson, Campos, & Greif, 2003, p. 23).

The study suggests that apart from MOET and MOSD secondary schools should take initiatives to seek additional aids from independent bodies such as NGOs, FBOs and foreign organizations. The suggested aids can be in the form of funding, psychosocial support and life skills training for parents. This would add major contribution of a human rights approach to poverty reduction whereby poor learners would be empowered and their freedom of choice would be expanded (United Nations 2004, p. 14). Freedom to choose what one desires to do or become, and the ability to do or become so is

determined by one's access to relevant resources or services pertinent to learning process (Sen, 1992, p. 46; Bakhshi, Hoffman & Radja, 2003, p. 2-3). Moreover, equal educational outcomes can only be achieved if more educational resources are devoted to the less talented and those from a socially and economically impoverished background.

7.9 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

Underpinned by the two lenses, social justice theory and capability approach, the chapter has discussed the key findings presented in Chapter Six. The findings reveal that while all the teachers and MoET officials understood inclusive education as a means to accommodate all learners from diverse backgrounds, most of them seemed to limit it to disability inclusion. Thus, understanding of inclusive education in Lesotho ignores the effect of low socioeconomic status on learners' equitable access to education. To attain equitable access to secondary education in Lesotho, the concept of inclusive educational needs should be revised to include learners who experience socioeconomic and health-related barriers to education in addition to the current focus on inclusion of persons with disabilities.

As revealed in the findings, learners from families of low socioeconomic status qualify as LSEN must be the target for inclusive education in Lesotho. The study has also established that there is dissonance between efforts by MOET to enhance equitable access to education as the teachers denied of being trained in matters of inclusion, and also, they are oblivious of policies and strategic plans for inclusive education. While secondary education remains the most inaccessible level of education relative to free primary education, it is the gateway to tertiary education, yet Lesotho OVC bursary falls short of learners' basic needs for learning. The inadequacy of learning resources lowers some children's ability and motivation go to school and perform well. This undermines Lesotho's educational policies and strategic plans that are meant to enhance access to education and welfare for all children.

Learners' neighbourhoods characterised by initiation, alcohol, and drug abuse, forced marriages, child labour and home conditions such as lack of proper lighting and heating facilities generally are not conducive for their learning and development. Unlike educated parents who convey their expectations and beliefs more effectively and influence their

children to adopt a more positive view of education, the participating parents still have expectations, but fail to guide their child properly or direct them to aspire for high academic success because of their low level of education. Furthermore, lack of learning amenities such as textbook, stationery, science equipment makes learning very difficult. Learners' access to education have be improve through redistribution of resources that would increasingly benefit the least advantaged learners to compete on equal bases with their affluent counterparts.

Furthermore, irregular school attendance denies the poor learners such valued opportunities to learn on equal basis with other learners and this needs to be addressed by schools which are responsible for promotion and distribution of rights. In the long run some of the poor learners do not perform well and the develop feeling of low self-concept due to exposure to higher levels of material constraints and fewer opportunities for influence, choice, and control over their education. Moreover, distresses such as physical assaults, conflicts, child labour and bereavement trauma make both social and academic lives of the poor learner even more difficult.

There is need to develop and strengthen collaboration between schools and parents to ensure holistic support for learners. As evident from the study findings, parents know learners better, and so if there is partnership between them (parents) and teachers, learners would be supported to succeed. The study has established that emotional and psychosocial support in the form of counselling, coaching and mentorship are important to the welfare of learners, and this means parents and teachers should ensure that learners have access to them to promote effective participation and academic achievement.

Furthermore, the current study maintains that access to education is not only hindered by inadequate teacher-learner relationships, inadequate resources, and facilities but also the extent to which curricula address learners' individual differences and vocational aspirations. Therefore, to achieve inclusive education, the study suggests that teachers should involve learners with explanations of human differences and allowing them to be involved in planning their learning activities.

7.10 CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions for this study are drawn in line with the objectives that guided the entire thesis and discussion of study findings.

7.10.1 First objective of the study

The first objective of the study was to describe how learners of low socioeconomic status explain influences on their access to education and academic performances. The study concludes that:

1. While Lesotho government pays school fees for vulnerable learners, access to secondary education is hindered by socioeconomic challenges such as lack of food, cosmetics, stationery, and money for transport.
2. Learners' underprivileged livelihoods including homes without running water, electricity, and other facilities such as televisions, radios and smart cell phones, are unfavourable conditions to support their education and these result in low motivation for learners to study hard.
3. Parents' low educational status, remoteness of communities and lack of role models in the neighbourhood also demotivate them and provide little to no aspiration to study hard and progress.
4. Family distresses such as domestic violence, death, child labour, forced initiation and child marriages act as barriers for vulnerable learners in accessing education equitably.
5. Poor socioeconomic conditions of learners make them feel ashamed, shy, and excluded relative to their affluent counterparts whose adequate amenities make their access to education smooth.
6. Learners feel socially excluded in their classes due to lack learning facilities and maltreatment by the teachers who ridicule them for their condition.

7.10.2 Second objective of the study

The second objective of the study was to explore how parents of low socio-economic status respond to the learning and social needs of their children. The study concludes that:

1. Parents fail to participate in their children's education due to their low level of education. Some parents think their children's education is better off than their own and find no need for active engagement; they do not seem to appreciate the demands of studying at that level and do not afford their children time, space and other resources that support their success.
2. Parents without secondary education spend most of their time carrying out temporary jobs to sustain their families and fail to attend parent-teacher meetings which support children's education.
3. Some parents noted their inability to effectively help their children with schoolwork due to their lack of education and busy schedule on earning income. This results in low academic achievement among the poverty-stricken learners.
4. Parents took it to be the responsibility of teachers to help their children pass while their duty is only to provide household necessities such as food, cosmetics, and clothes. This makes their children feel inadequately supported by the parents hence their enthusiasm to learn decreases.
5. For some parents, the failure to support their children with schoolwork produces feelings of guilt, inadequacy, and regret. This is detrimental to confidence and self-esteem of the learners for they succumb to learnt helplessness and their life could be overshadowed by generational poverty of both poor thinking and slow accumulation of socioeconomic resources.

7.10.3 Third objective of the study

The third objective of the study was to explore how secondary schools respond to the learning and social needs of learners of low socioeconomic status. For this objective the study concludes that:

1. Understanding of equitable access to education by MOET and teachers is limited to disability inclusion and does not include learners of low SES. LIEP which is supposed to be a guiding document for the implementation of inclusive is silent on how SES could be curtailed to enhance access to education. Understanding of inclusive education in Lesotho must be broadened to include SES as a key determinant access to education.

2. Despite alleging that they were not trained by MOET in inclusive education, teachers believed that friendly school culture of learner engagement and group work could enhance access to education for learners living in poverty.
3. The participating school does not have a policy or regulations that are meant to guide teachers on how to support learners of low SES nor are there organised services for psychosocial support.
4. Except for the payment of fees and book fee subsidies, the Ministry of education and Training and schools provide no inclusive education services for learners who are vulnerable due to socioeconomic conditions
5. There are no clear mechanisms for vulnerable learners to express their views on how the education services must be organised for their support. This is violation of their social and economic rights and this a potential barrier to access to education.

7.11 LIMITATIONS

The current study used one secondary school as a case study out of many in Lesotho and therefore its findings may not be generalised beyond experiences of this single secondary school. Furthermore, as a study which used qualitative approach, its findings may not be generalised to reflect experiences of other secondary schools. Data collection for the current study was conducted during covid-19 restrictions and this restricted me from having relaxed interactions with the study participants. Additionally, socioeconomic conditions of the participating families were probably affected by covid-19 pandemic, and this was not explored by the current study.

7.12 RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for this study are drawn for implementing three areas of focus, namely: policy, practice, and research.

7.12.1 Recommendations for policy improvement

1. The Ministry of Education must review LIEP to accommodate other groups of vulnerable children, especially learners of low SES.
2. The policy must explain how schools must render support services for learners of low SES.
3. The policy should explain strategic guidelines and processes MOET officials must follow to enhance equitable access to education for poverty-stricken children.

4. The policy should also explain how non-compliance to the policy would be dealt with by law.
5. Secondary schools must have their strategic guidelines governed by national policies for promoting inclusive education.

7.12.2 Recommendations for improving practice

1. Parents and teachers must collaborate to be in the position to identify and respond to the needs of vulnerable learners.
2. For holistic support for vulnerable learners, there should be engagement of every potential stakeholder at three main levels namely: local, central, and international.
3. Advocacy for poverty-stricken learners' rights to access to education must be made part of an annual planning both at ministerial and school levels.
4. The needs of learners of low SES and the relevant services must influence teachers' training needs and initiatives.
5. In collaboration with relevant ministries, MOET must establish monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to enhance responsiveness and efficiency for the implementation of child welfare and educational strategic plans.

7.12.3 Recommendations for future research.

1. There is a need for research that should explore the extent to which parenting style influences parents' role in education.
2. The study proposes a nationally representative study to investigate how secondary school curriculum addresses issues of SES.
3. There is a need for a longitudinal study on family characteristic of learners who survive socioeconomic challenges and perform well.
4. Lastly, the study identifies a need to investigate how socioeconomic conditions of poverty-stricken children affect their readiness to learn during covid-19 pandemic.

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APPENDICES

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR A LEARNER

Interview Protocol: Learner

Time of Interview: _____

Date: _____

Place: _____

Interviewer: _____

Interviewee: _____

Point of Query: How do learners from families of low socioeconomic status explain influences on their access to education and academic performances?

1. What is your ideal secondary school in Lesotho?
 - a. What characteristics of the school make it ideal?
 - b. Why are you attending this school?
 - c. How does your current school influence the way you perform?
2. What motivates you to attend school?
 - a. What challenges do you encounter as a result of your background? Or, how does your background affect your studies?
 - b. What/Who inspires you to stay longer and do well in your secondary school studies?
 - c. How do your parents' educational background affect your need to perform well and study further?
3. How have your home and social environment influenced your aspiration for learning?
 - a. What kind of support do teachers provide learners whose social/economic background make them struggle?
 - b. What support is provided generally for learners who struggle?
4. Which challenges are you facing in your secondary school?
 - a. Who inspires you to work hard in secondary school?

b. What support do you get in your secondary school?

5. How do think secondary schools in Lesotho could be improved in order to deal with the challenges you have mentioned?

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL: PARENT

Time of Interview: _____

Date: _____

Place: _____

Interviewer: _____

Interviewee: _____

Point of Query: How do parents respond to the learning and social needs of learners of low socioeconomic status?

Thank you for allowing me to interview you. As the researcher for this doctoral study, I want you to know that your participation in this study will not impact your relationship with the school or teachers in any way. This interview will take between 40-60 minutes. I will be tape recording this interview, and it will be transcribed verbatim for data analysis. The interview recording will be permanently deleted as soon as the transcription process is complete. No personally identifying information will be included in the published findings of this study. You have the right to withdraw your data at any time from this study.

This interview is focusing on access to secondary education for learners from families of low socioeconomic status.

I am aware that your child is attending this school.

1. What challenges have you encountered in educating X at secondary school level?
2. How do you think your challenges affect X's education/studies?
3. What do you think motivates/influences X's educational performance?
4. What kind of support do you provide for him/her?
5. What are the reasons you have sent your child to school X?
6. What engagement do you have with the school (teachers) about X's performance at school? Or, do you know any support that X gets from his school (teachers) to perform well?
7. How do you think Government of Lesotho should improve on inclusion of learners from families of low socioeconomic status?

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR TEACHERS

Interview Protocol: TEACHERS (in Focus Group Discussion)

Time of Interview: _____

Date: _____

Place: _____

Interviewer: _____

Point of Query: How do secondary schools in Lesotho respond to learning and social needs of learners from families of low socioeconomic status?

- a. What do you understand by inclusive education?
- b. How can you describe access to secondary education for learners from families of low socioeconomic status?
- c. How does your school respond to social and learning needs of learners from families of low socioeconomic status?
- d. How do you deal with challenges you encounter (if any) when dealing with learners from families of low socioeconomic status?
- e. To what extent do you feel your training has prepared you to identify and address learning of children from families of low socioeconomic status?
- f. How do you think Government of Lesotho could improve access to secondary school for learners from families of low socioeconomic status?

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR MOET OFFICIALS

Interview Protocol: MOET Official

Time of Interview: _____

Date: _____

Place: _____

Interviewer: _____

Interviewee: _____

Point of Query: What are the ways in which MOET ensures inclusive education for learners from families of low socioeconomic status?

- a. What do you understand by inclusive education?
- b. How does MOET ensure inclusion of learners from families of low socioeconomic status at secondary school level?
 - i. What policies enable inclusion of learners from low socioeconomic status at secondary level?
 - ii. How does MOET respond to social and learning needs of learners from families of low socioeconomic status?
- c. How do you think Government of Lesotho could improve access to secondary school for learners from families of low socioeconomic status?

CONSENT TO TAKE PART IN RESEARCH

I _____ voluntarily agree to participate in this research study titled: *Investigating the influence of socioeconomic status on access to secondary education in Lesotho*.

- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within two weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.
- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.
- I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.
- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.
- I understand that under freedom of information legislation, I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage. I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

Participant's consent statement

I have read the above information. I asked questions when I had them, and my questions were answered satisfactorily. I volunteer my consent for this study. I am aware that the discussions will be audio recorded and grant consent/assent for these recordings, provided that my privacy will be protected. I undertake not to divulge any information that is shared in the group discussions to any person outside the group in order to maintain confidentiality.

Participant Signature and Date _____

Researcher's consent

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study

Researcher Name and Date _____

Researcher Signature and Date _____

Nyaphisi B.M. (Mr.)

P. O. Box 105, Leribe 300

Date: 17/09/2020

The Principal

Morija

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: Seeking permission to engage teachers and learners in a research project

Purpose

This letter serves as a cordial invitation for all teachers and 10 learners at your good school to consider participating in a study that I, **Mokete Nyaphisi**, am conducting for satisfying requirements of obtaining a doctoral degree at National University of Lesotho (NUL). My study is titled "INVESTIGATING THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS ON ACCESS TO SECONDARY EDUCATION IN LESOTHO." Permission to conduct the study has been granted by the Department of Educational Foundation (EDF) of Faculty of Education at NUL. I have purposefully identified your good school as the best educational institution because of having some learners who are from families of poor socioeconomic status as identified by Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) under its Social Protection Programme (SPP) and vulnerable children bursary.

Procedure

Your staff's (teachers) and learners' participation in this study is voluntary. It will involve a focus group discussion of approximately **two hours** on a date and time convenient to you. Participants may decline to participate in the discussion if they so wish. Furthermore, they may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. As part of this study, participants will be placed in a group of 6 – 12 individuals respectively. Otherwise the discussion will involve every teacher. I, as

a moderator, will ask study participants several questions while facilitating the discussion. As approved by your good office and the study participants, this focus group will be audio-recorded and some notes will be taken. However, participants' responses will remain confidential, and no names will be included in the final report. They can choose whether or not to participate in the focus group, and may stop at any time during the course of the study. Please note that there are no right or wrong answers to focus group questions and a researcher wants to hear the many varying viewpoints and would like everyone to contribute their thoughts. Out of respect, study participants are requested to refrain from interrupting others. However, they are at liberty to be honest even when their responses counter those of other group members.

The 10 learners requested will be from families of low socioeconomic status screened by MOSD as indicated above. Of the 10 requested learners, 5 will be best performers while the other 5 will be 'bad' performers. They should all be in senior secondary level (combination of Grade 11 and 12). They will be interviewed using one-on-one interview on a date and time convenient to them.

Benefits and Risks

The study is central on the experiences of learners from poverty-stricken families on accessing secondary education as themed in inclusive education, and how policies and practices in Lesotho could be improved on enhancing inclusive education. This information can be used to improve the implementation of inclusive education in Lesotho secondary schools, while at the same time it is likely to contribute to relevant literature about inclusive education.

Please note that **no risks** are anticipated beyond those experienced during an average conversation and the researcher will observe and abide by Health (COVID-19) Regulations 2020 of Legal Notice No.41, 2020.

Confidentiality

Should the participants choose to participate, they will be asked to respect the privacy of other focus group members by not disclosing any content discussed during the study.

I will analyse the data, but, as stated above, participants' responses will remain confidential, and pseudonyms will be used.

Shortly after the audio records have been transcribed, I will send the study participants a copy of the transcript to give them an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our discussion and to add or to clarify any points. Data collected during this study will be retained on a password protected computer for 12 months in my locked room.

Contacts

I look forward to professionally cooperating with you, and thank you in advance for your assistance in this project. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, please contact me @ +266 58818291/58424647 or via e-mail at nmokete@gmail.com.

Yours sincerely,

Nyaphisi, B.M. Signature and Date

Nyaphisi 17/09/2020

Principal's Signature and Date

Likhakeng
P.O. Box 105
Leribe 300

Date _____

Re: Seeking permission from a parent to engage a minor child in a research.

Title of the study: *Investigating the influence of Socioeconomic Status on access to secondary education in Lesotho*

Dear Parent

I, Mokete Nyaphisi, am a registered PhD student in the Faculty of Education, Department of Educational Foundations, at National University of Lesotho (NUL). With this letter, I am humbly seeking your permission to have you and your child participate in this study. Please read the following information carefully before you decide whether or not to give your permission:

Purpose of the research: the purpose for conducting this study is to satisfy requirements of obtaining a doctoral degree in Inclusive Education. I am exploring the experiences of learners from poverty-stricken families on accessing secondary education as themed in inclusive education, and how policies and practices in Lesotho could be improved on enhancing inclusive education.

Procedure to be followed: Should you and your child agree to participate in this study, the content of this interview will be kept private and confidential.

Discomforts/risks: Please note that **no risks** are anticipated beyond those experienced during an average conversation and the researcher will observe and abide by Health (COVID-19) Regulations 2020 of Legal Notice No.41, 2020.

Incentives/benefits for participation: There are no direct benefits to you and your child for participating in this study. However, this study is believed to yield information

that can be used to improve the implementation of inclusive education in Lesotho secondary schools, while at the same time can contribute to Lesotho (or an African) relevant literature about inclusive education.

Time duration of participation: Participation in the study will not exceed 1 hour.

However, no risks are anticipated beyond those experienced during an average conversation.

Statement of confidentiality: All records are kept confidential and will be available only to the researcher and shared anonymously in reporting the findings and/or when writing an academic paper.

Voluntary participation: You and your child's participation is voluntary. If you feel that you or child has in any way been coerced into participation, please inform the Head of Department of Educational Foundations, NUL via these contacts: **+26652200000**.

Termination of participation: If at any point during the study you or your child wishes to terminate the session, due liberty is guaranteed to do so.

I look forward to your cooperation, and thank you in advance for your assistance in this project. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, please contact me @ +266 58818291/58424647 or via e-mail at nmokete@ymail.com.

Yours sincerely,

Nyaphisi, B.M. Signature and Date _____

Parent's Signature and Date _____

National University of Lesotho
Educational Foundations Department
P.O. Roma 180
25th August 2020

Principal Secretary
Basic Education
Ministry of Education and Training
Maseru 100

RE: Mokete Nyaphisi (200401495)

This letter introduces Mokete Nyaphisi as a student registered in the Faculty of Education for PhD in Inclusive Education. He is in the final stages of his study and has to collect data. His topic is: "*The Influence of Socioeconomic Status on Access to Secondary Education in Lesotho*"; and wishes to interview staff in the Ministry of Education, Teachers, 10 Learners at [redacted] High School located at Morija in Maseru District. He will share with you the following, information letter for participants, a letter of introduction to the school principal and a letter to parents asking permission for them (parents) and their children (learners) to participate in the study as well as consent forms for all participants.

Please note that **no risks** are anticipated beyond those experienced during an average conversation and the researcher will observe and abide by Health (COVID-19) Regulations 2020 of Legal Notice No.41, 2020.

I will be glad if he gets the support he needs to complete the study.

Yours Sincerely



Paseka A. Mosia (D.Ed.)
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National University of Lesotho
Educational Foundations Department
P.O. Roma 180
25th August 2020

Principal Secretary
Ministry of Social Development
Maseru 100

RE: Mokete Nyaphisi (200401495)

This letter introduces Mokete Nyaphisi as a student registered in the Faculty of Education for PhD in Inclusive Education. He is in the final stages of his study and has to collect data. His topic is: *"The Influence of Socioeconomic Status on Access to Secondary Education in Lesotho"*, and wishes to interview staff in the Ministry of Social Development, and 10 Learners at *S.S. 17* High School located at Morija in Maseru District. He will share with you the following, information letter for participants (consent letter), a letter of introduction to the school principal and a letter to parents asking permission for them (parents) and their children (learners) to participate in the study as well as consent forms for all participants.

Please note that **no risks** are anticipated beyond those experienced during an average conversation and the researcher will observe and abide by Health (COVID-19) Regulations 2020 of Legal Notice No.41, 2020.

I will be glad if he gets the support he needs to complete the study.

Yours Sincerely



Paseka A. Mosia (D.Ed.)
Senior Lecturer & HOD
Educational Foundations Department
National University of Lesotho
P.O. Roma 180
Lesotho
Cell: +26658969867
Email: pa.mosia@nul.ls / mosia296@gmail.com

Likhakeng
P.O. Box 105
Leribe 300

Date _____

Re: Letter of information for consent to participate in a research.

Title of the study: *Investigating the influence of Socioeconomic Status on access to secondary education in Lesotho*

Dear Fellow Research Participant

I, Mokete Nyaphisi, am a registered PhD student in the Faculty of Education, Department of Educational Foundations, at National University of Lesotho (NUL). With this letter I am cordially inviting you to participate in a study entitled as above. The purpose for conducting this study is to satisfy requirements of obtaining a doctoral degree in Inclusive Education.

In this study, I am exploring the experiences of learners from poverty-stricken families on accessing secondary education as themed in inclusive education, and how policies and practices in Lesotho could be improved on enhancing inclusive education. This information can be used to improve the implementation of inclusive education in Lesotho secondary schools, while at the same time it can contribute to relevant literature about inclusive education.

Please note that **no risks** are anticipated beyond those experienced during an average conversation and the researcher will observe and abide by Health (COVID-19) Regulations 2020 of Legal Notice No.41, 2020

Should you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to respect the privacy of other participants as individuals or as a group by not disclosing any content discussed during the study. I will analyse the data while also ensuring that your responses remain confidential, and no names will be included in any reports. Shortly after the audio records have been transcribed, I will send you a copy of the transcript so as to give you an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our discussion and to add or to clarify any points. Anonymous quotations will be used in reporting the findings of the study. Data collected during this study will be retained on a password protected computer for 12 months in my locked room.

I look forward to professionally cooperating with you, and thank you in advance for your assistance in this project. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, please contact me @ +266 58818291/58424647 or via e-mail at nmokete@ymail.com.

Yours sincerely,

Nyaphisi, B.M. Signature and Date

Participant's Signature and Date



THE KINGDOM OF LESOTHO
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

ED/E/31

24th September 2020

H.O.D Educational Foundations
National University of Lesotho
Roma 180

Dear Dr. Mosia

Re: Permission to involve MOET, teachers and learners from [redacted] High School in a research

Following your letter dated 25th August 2020, this letter serves to inform you that Mr. Mokete Nyaphisi who is your supervisee, is granted permission to conduct a research involving MOET staff members, teachers and learners from [redacted] High School.

MOET wishes you and your supervisee only the best in this imperative exercise.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mabakubung Seutloali'.

**MABAKUBUNG SEUTLOALI (MRS)
CEO-SECONDARY**

Email Address: ceo2.moet@gmail.com



Ministry of Social Development
Department of Social Assistance
Maseru 100
10th September 2020

H.O.D Educational Foundations

National University of Lesotho

Roma 180

Dear Dr. Mosia

Re: Permission to conduct a research involving vulnerable children

Reference is made to the above captioned subject.

Following your letter introducing Mokete Nyaphisi (Mr.) to Ministry of Social Development (MOSD), kindly be informed that, through the office of the Director Social Assistance, the ministry has granted Mr. Nyaphisi permission to involve vulnerable learners from [redacted] High School and the responsible MOSD staff in his academic research.

Please note that a list of all Grade 11 and 12 learners who are beneficiaries of MOSD vulnerable children Bursary is attached hereof. The Ministry wishes you and your supervisee only the best in this imperative endeavor.

Yours Sincerely

M.Mokhethi-Motlatsi

Director Social Assistance

Email Address: mokhethi.ic@gmail.com