Developing schools with secure bases for learners from insecure parental attachments in South Africa

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Abstract

This study explored the strategies for developing schools with secure bases for learners from insecure parental attachments in South Africa. The study employed a multiple case-study research design. The sampling frame comprised 27 participants, including 6 life orientation teachers, 18 grade 10 learners, and 3 deputy principals from 3 specifically chosen secondary schools in the Sedibeng West district. A purposive sample strategy was used to select grade 10 learners, with 6 learners selected from each school. Data collection for this study involved the utilization of open semi-structured interviews. The data obtained from semi-structured interviews was evaluated and analyzed thematically. The findings indicate social support to include fighting against poverty, social development initiatives, life development initiatives, teamwork and teacher trainings. The study concludes that a significant number of learners who have insecure attachments have not gotten adequate psychological and social support from their homes and schools to help them enhance their attachment and social competence. The study recommends that train parents on best parenting programs and increase awareness in the community on secure homes.

Keywords: developing; schools; secure bases; learners; insecure; parental attachments; South Africa

Introduction

Attachment refers to the inclination of young children to actively seek out and establish a connection with one or more reliable caregivers, finding comfort in their interactions (Fearon & Roisman, 2017). Stanojević and Nedeljković (2020) define attachment as a psychological connection formed between a mother and child during early development, which last throughout their lifetime. The term "attachment" was introduced by John Bowlby and further developed by Mary Ainsworth. Attachment refers to a collection of work that explores the human social attachment phenomenon. The initial idea posited a psychobiological foundation and purpose for the child's attachment to their caregiver. The attachment elucidates the importance of the emotional connection between children and their main caregivers. It also highlights the impact of these early experiences and emphasizes the infant's

requirement for seeking closeness to the attachment figure to obtain protection and security (Rawatlal, Kliewer & Pillay, 2015). Furthermore, attachment emphasizes the infant's requirement for engaging in proximity-seeking behaviour towards the attachment figure to primarily get protection and security (Rawatlal, Kliewer & Pillay, 2015). Attachment has been demonstrated to offer significant understanding into emotional functioning and relationships in adulthood. Research highlights the importance of a child's attachment figure in providing a solid and stable foundation for the kid to rely on, while also being highly attuned to the child's physical and emotional need (Fearon & Roisman, 2017). The fundamental concept that underlies attachment theory is to foster relationships that promote survival for the advantage of new born, who are the most susceptible individuals in the community, and to form a strong connection with them (Bowlby, 1982).

Interacting with attachment figures who are present when needed, and who are attentive and receptive to requests for closeness, enables the attachment system to work at its best. This promotes a strong sense of inner security and helps learners develop social skills and self-assurance (Bretherton, 1992). Thus, if a guardian is not present, it is imperative for a child to have a caregiver at school who can assume a role like that of a comforting parent. This caregiver should be attentive, accessible, and capable of dedicating time to the child. Nevertheless, it has been previously stated that most children in township environments are raised in dysfunctional communities, child-headed households, or by abusive parents. Additionally, children who lack a primary caregiver, such as those raised in orphanages or by strangers, may struggle to develop the necessary trust required to form attachments (Tomlinson & Murray, 2010). This situation poses a risk to the emotional and social development of learners from unstable attachment backgrounds in township schools. Typically, this occurs predominantly in township locations.

According to Bretherton's (1992) research, insecure attachment representations have an impact on children's internal experiences and social adjustment, including their interactions with parents, teachers, and peers. Due to the prevalence of learners from insecure attachment backgrounds in township schools in South Africa, they are prone to encountering challenging relationships with their family members. Additionally, they lack the necessary skills and developmental experiences to establish positive and satisfying relationships with their peers, which hinders their social competence (Kennedy, 2008). These learners have an insufficient foundation for emotional and social exploration, making it more difficult for them to develop an independent sense of self and handle peer pressure. Furthermore, individuals who have experienced insecure attachment in their early years may develop a sense of emptiness within themselves and engage in detrimental behaviours with their peers, such as engaging in risky sexual activities, using illegal substances, participating in gang-related activities,

and committing crimes. These behaviours, which are actually distressing to them, can also lead to academic failure (Kennedy, 2008). Recent studies conducted in South Africa, such as Zaidman-Mograbi et al., (2020), Thandiswa et al. (2022), Ebere et al., (2022), and Schuitmaker et al., (2023), all emphasize the significance of examining the influence of insecure attachment styles on post-traumatic growth. However, there is dearth of literature in South Africa about attachment, social competence, and the potential for schools to serve as secure bases for learners who have experienced unfavourable attachments. Therefore, this paper addressed a significant research deficiency in the existing body of literature. Consequently, schools can offer an alternative environment to provide assistance for learners with insecure attachment backgrounds.

Literature Review

Children allocate a significant amount of their life to attending school, where they have valuable opportunities to form solid, dependable, and safe relationships with adults. These interactions have the potential to facilitate the development of a favourable self-perception in children, ultimately enhancing their self-esteem and confidence, as long as the school provides suitable assistance (Ubha & Cahill, 2014). The school environment has the capacity to significantly influence a child's emotional well-being, ability to adapt and recover from challenges, cognitive growth, social growth, and engagement in school. Gkonou, & Mercer, (2017) argues that educators have a duty to recognize their role in restoring secure attachment and assisting learners in changing related behaviours. Furthermore, the significance of schools in optimizing the capabilities of each learners and creating strategies to support learners who exhibit externalizing behaviours that disturb the school environment. Schools can choose to include curriculum elements or create specific settings that prioritize the development of personal freedom through collaborative efforts. Adegboyega, Okesina, & Jacob (2017) argues that the Ministry of Education is accountable for the welfare and progress of individuals, and should exhibit a resolute commitment to improving the growth of pupils. The study recommended the implementation of intervention programs that specifically target both teachers and learners in schools. In addition, a university's teacher education curriculum, which covers both general and special education, should include extensive understanding and skill in identifying antisocial behaviour and its long-lasting effects. Unfortunately, many educational institutions do not dedicate enough time to courses on child development. Castro and Pereira (2019) found that learners with anxious attachment frequently have a feeling of being misunderstood by their teachers. They have a pessimistic outlook and find it difficult to trust that others truly have concern for them. According to Maluleke (2021), creating a secure foundation for kids with low self-assurance in schools involves fostering a supportive and caring environment that addresses their emotional needs and sets the groundwork for their social and academic development.

Interventions such as social skills training, counselling, and support from educators, mental health professionals, and peers can be beneficial in addressing social ineptitude and promoting social development.

A study conducted in a large southern school district in New Jersey examined 357 learners from two middle schools in the southwest region. The study concluded that schools should prioritize creating a safe and welcoming environment that promotes diversity and inclusivity. This would ensure that every learner feels accepted and recognized. Furthermore, schools have the opportunity to integrate Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) programs into their curriculum. These programs aim to educate learners about emotional intelligence, self-awareness, and interpersonal skills, as well as provide practical exercises and real-life situations for learners to apply and develop these abilities (Green, et al., 2021). The participants in the study were exclusively learners enrolled in secondary academic institutions, without any additional sources of data triangulation. Thus, the present study addressed research gaps in the existing literature by focusing specifically on teachers and principals in secondary schools.

According to Duong et al., (2021), schools have the ability to provide consistent counselling services and ensure the availability of school counsellors to support children dealing with emotional and social challenges. Offer group therapy sessions or support gatherings for learners who have had similar experiences. This will guarantee that learners are responsive. In addition, schools can provide consistent and organized timetables, together with clear instructions, to create a sense of expectation for kids who lack confidence. It is also important to communicate any changes or disruptions in advance to boost learners' sense of security. According to several researchers (Oxley and Holden, 2021; Schieltz, et al., 2020), schools can promote positive discipline and encourage good behaviour by using positive reinforcement techniques. This involves focusing on teaching appropriate behaviour rather than relying on punishment. Schools can provide extra academic support and tailor education by offering supplementary assistance to learners facing academic challenges and collaborating with learning support services to effectively address the specific learning needs of individuals. Concurrently, engage parents and caregivers in their child's education and emotional well-being.

Lang, Jeon, Schoppe-Sullivan, and Wells (2020) conducted a study in the United States involving 90 families and children aged 12-36 months. The study found that regular communication within the family helps to create a strong support structure for the children's learning. Finally, schools can promote programs aimed at addressing poverty and creating a peaceful atmosphere conducive to nurturing social and personal development. These activities should prioritize social and life skills development (Ferreira, Martinsone & Talić, 2020). Provide a calm and safe space for learners

to rest and relieve stress, and provide this room with sensory devices or activities that encourage relaxation. In essence, a study conducted in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Mboyo (2019) found specific strategies that schools might use to provide a secure and nurturing environment for all pupils. The study emphasized the significance of understanding the needs of others, participating in discussions, and prioritizing those needs, assessing the available resources, and offering support to all learners in order to fit with organizational goals. The above reviewed study exclusively focused on primary school learners, and it did not focus on learners in secondary schools. Consequently, the present study filled this research gap by involving teachers, secondary school learners, and principals.

Methodology

The study employed a qualitative research methodology that is closely associated with the interpretivism paradigm, which is inherently subjective. A qualitative research methodology involves systematically understanding an issue and then constructing a narrative case to address it (Creswell, 1998, as referenced in Fouche 2005). Thus, qualitative research places importance on authentic environments, comprehension, and spoken accounts. The qualitative research methodology proved valuable for this study because to its emphasis on comprehending the participants' experiences inside their authentic and routine environments.

Research Design

The study employed a multiple case-study research design. McMillan (2014) defines a case study as a comprehensive examination of a singular occurrence, non-experimental event, or object, which is characterized by its specific context and duration. A multiple-case study involves the investigation of a specific occurrence or group of phenomena at numerous places or locations (Stewart, 2012). The utilization of a multiple case-study research design was pertinent to this investigation due to its capacity to enable the researcher to gather a greater amount of data that would be challenging to get through other designs. Utilizing multiple case studies enables the researcher to comprehensively understand concepts and generate information that may be utilized for future hypothesis development.

Study Participants

The sampling frame comprised 27 participants, including 6 life orientation teachers, 18 grade 10 learners, and 3 deputy principals from 3 specifically chosen secondary schools in the Sedibeng West district. Six Life-Orientation teachers, two from each school, were chosen using purposive sampling technique. The criteria for selecting teachers required a minimum of 3 years of teaching experience, preferably within the same school or in general. The choice of the 6 teachers was made using purposive sampling

technique, based on the belief that Life-Orientation teachers have a significant impact on the overall development of learners.

A purposive sample strategy was used to select grade 10 learners, with 6 learners selected from each school. The participants were chosen based on their attachment histories in their homes and their display of antisocial behavior in schools. This selection was marked by learners who exhibited explicit hostility, deliberate aggressiveness towards others, and learners with a family history of social and antisocial behaviors as well as parental alcohol and drug misuse. The deputy principals were asked to provide the profile of learners. The selection of the 6 learners took into account the gender aspect. A total of six participants, consisting of three males and three females, were chosen for the research investigation. Gender consideration is crucial in learner selection due to the differential rates and patterns of emotional and social development experienced by boys and girls, which have been substantiated by research. In addition, deputy principals were chosen using purposive sample technique to gather information on how schools provide assistance to learners with insecure attachment.

Data Collection Methods

Data collection for this study involved the utilization of open semi-structured interviews. Data from learners, deputy principals and teachers were collected using semi-structured interviews. According to McMillan (2014), semi-structured interviews are characterized by their flexibility and the use of clear questions to get insight into participants' perceptions and to examine themes in a thorough and detailed manner. The duration of the interview sessions for each research participant ranged from 35 to 45 minutes. This allowed for thorough questioning and provided participants with the chance to ask clarifying questions when needed.

Data Analysis

Data analysis involves the systematic arrangement of gathered data from participants, dividing it into manageable sections (McMillan, 2014). The data obtained from semi-structured interviews was evaluated thematically, using research questions as a framework (Cohen et al., 2011). Thematic analysis involves the process of recognizing and evaluating patterns of significance derived from collected data. The process of thematic analysis consists of several stages, including becoming acquainted with the data, coding, generating and searching for themes, reviewing the themes, defining the themes, and producing the final report.

Findings

The findings of the study indicated that there is need for schools to provide social support to make them secure bases for learners from insecure parent-child attachments. The themes reported on social support include fighting against poverty, social development initiatives, life development initiatives, teamwork and teacher trainings could be most suited for their schools to overcome their negative experiences with insecurities and pave way to secure attachment. The themes are presented and discussed as follows:

Theme 1: *Fighting against poverty*

Poverty reduction refers to a comprehensive combination of economic and humanitarian actions aimed at permanently elevating individuals out of poverty (Rea & Zinskie, 2017). The interview results from the participants revealed that initiatives to fight against poverty play a huge role of providing learners with basic needs. Learner participant 12 claimed that feeding schemes as one of the initiative against poverty plays a huge role in school as they are never without food. The interview excerpt is reported: *"Feeding scheme plays a big role in our school. There is always food and apples for everyone. We also get to save pocket money or have no worry to go to school in days we don't have pocket money."* Moreover, one deputy principal reported that township schools experience a high level of poverty where learners are from single parent households where there is a lack of basic needs. The interview excerpt is reported below: *"Is feeding scheme a programme ? This is very helpful for all learners to eat and just bond*." (Learner participant, 11).

Moreover, one deputy principal participant revealed that learners come from poor homes and there are programmes in line that aim to assist learners:

> *"The school experiences a large number of single parenthood where some learners are orphans and are raised by grandmothers, which gives birth to low parental involvement. The government has a help a girl project where girl learners receive toiletries every quarter and a large number of learners depend on that."* (Deputy principal participant, 3)

Taking into consideration the findings presented above, it is clear that the multifaceted requirements of learners living in poverty must be handled in a comprehensive and equitable manner in order to alleviate the complex barrier of learners being affected both at home and at school. According to the statistics, the most prevalent programs that are implemented in schools to combat poverty are those that have the distribution of food and sanitary towels.

Theme 2: *Social development initiatives*

Social development refers to the act of allocating resources towards the improvement and advancement of individuals within a society. Social development projects aim to

enhance the overall welfare of individuals in society, enabling them to achieve their maximum capabilities. The statement contends that individuals residing in poverty will perpetually be impoverished (Drolet, 2014). The interview results from the 5 learner participants revealed excursions, sports and culture as social development initiatives that could help them enjoy school and also reach their full potential. What was common about the findings was that learners desire for these activities to be established in their schools as they are experiencing none. Learner 6 reported that *"I think my school should start a dance club like schools in Johannesburg. We want to express ourselves through music and dance and have a lots of events."* (Learner participant, 6). Two learners revealed that they participate in debate and need more support *"The debate competitions with other schools help us challenge other schools and we have been winning all tournaments and more support can be given."* (Learner participant, 7). *"Debate has to be the best thing that has happened to me and my friends. I now enjoy talking about any issue and sometimes I engage my family."* (Learner participant, 4). Another learner commented on athletics *"Athletics are fun and help us represent the school in all district. I am an athlete since grade 4 and I have been receiving more help from my teachers and the trips we have had but we only train in the first term."* (Learner participant, 3).

One more interview excerpt from learner 5 also revealed that sporting activities are no more:

> *"The only sport I enjoyed was netball however it was cancelled because of, I don't know. We just don't practice anymore. I wish this high school was like primary school. We used to play a lot every Thursday. Now, I do not do anything at school. There is no sport."* (Learner participant, 5)

In addition, both teachers and deputy principal were in agreement about establishing sports, culture and excursion opportunities for learners for them to experience a wholistic development. One deputy principal participant claimed that schools ought to invest more time in ensuring learners a better schooling experience, *"The deliberate attempt at sporting potential would also be spontaneous in most teachers if we could put in more effort in a cross field of other co-curricular activities. It helps if learners know they can do more than just academic learning at school and in later life"* (Deputy principal participant, 2). Moreover, two teachers also commented about the necessity of social development initiatives and this is what they had to say *"Debate opportunities, sports, girl and boy clubs, school camps and different intervention programmes can assist learners."* (Teacher participant, 6). *"The school should have social activities designed to build the self-development of learners."* (Teacher participant, 4).

More interview excerpt from deputy principal 3 is reported below:

> *"We must yet increasingly expose our learners to the outside world of sports, commerce, industry and the trades which equally in demand in life beyond school. The school could organise for our learners to visit areas of interest to their career choices to have a first-hand experience of what happens in the life of a lawyer for example."* (Deputy principal participant, 3)

From above, an indication of the necessity of establishing social development initiatives in schools was provided by excerpts from interviews, which were based on the findings. In addition, the findings suggested that ensuring that learners get off to a strong start in their educational journey is a significant factor in determining the level of success they would have in the future. In conclusion, it is possible to draw the conclusion that sports have been seen as a platform that is conducive to the development of life skills and character, which can be beneficial to the personal growth of individuals and influence the way they view their educational experience.

Theme 3: *Life development initiatives*

A life development program outlines the process of enhancing an individual's knowledge, performance, abilities, and effectiveness (Koh and Camiré, 2015). The interview results from the participants revealed that life development programmes are necessary for equipping learners with life skills beyond schooling. One teacher referred to counselling as a life development initiative thar could be beneficial to the school *"Endeavours make the school a safety sanctuary for all and effective school based support teams to guide, counsel and assist teachers to effectively provide support to all learners experiencing learner barriers."* (Deputy principal participant 2).

Two deputy principal participants claimed that exposure to future work environments, real life experiences could benefit all learners. The interview excerpts are reported below:

> *"Life orientation curriculum should include programmes that relates to real life development programmes. Each subject should incorporate developmental content which is aimed at building the self-esteem and self-awareness programmes. Psychometric tests which will assist learners in learning about their interests and personalities. Expose learners to the work environment etc."* (Deputy principal participant, 1)

> *"Have real life experiences shared with learners. Not simply following the prescribed curriculum but taking learners through life lessons about, relationships, money, fashion, social media etc. More awareness on factors such as independence, decision making, how to avoid peer pressure."* (Deputy principal participant, 3)

Moreover, 3 learner participants highlighted their experiences with school counselling and how they are being equipped with life lessons. Learner participant 11 reported

that the free counselling they receive is helpful and life changing to them: *"During free counselling here at school, we speak about self-esteem and future goals, and that helps me see that I will have a big house and cars in the future"* (Learner participant, 11). Additional interview excerpt of learner participants 9 and 10 can be seen below: *"My LO teacher organises counselling for learners who have challenges at home and I think that is really good."* (Learner participant, 9). *"The quarterly meetings with social works are really helping me a lot. I wish they were every month."* (Learner participant, 10).

Life-Orientation as a learning area could be utilized intentionally as a subject to drive change and as a program for life development, according to the findings that were presented before. In addition, the excerpts from the interviews with the kids brought to light the significance of school counselling with trained social workers in terms of assisting learners with their personal development and growth.

Theme 4: *Teamwork*

Teamwork is the collaborative effort of a group of individuals who depend on each other to achieve a shared objective. Effective teamwork is dependent on the capacity of learners to engage in the process of negotiating authority within small peer groups (Thomas, 2002). The interview excerpts from two teacher participants revealed the importance of teamwork in class as an extension of learners also learning from one another and growing in their social competence. Teachers believed that working with others in a team could encourage learners to feel significant in the classroom. The interview excerpts can be seen below:

> *"Teamwork allows students to teach each other, learn and emphasize behavior management. It encourages learning from experience. I believe such of group works and team work are vital and necessary to assure and encourage all grade 10 learners to be secure and feel significant in the classroom."* (Teacher participant, 2)

> *"But most importantly, group assignments and involvement. Involvement, invitation and interaction. I call them the triple I's and I think interacting and being involved in groups play an important role in shaping learners because they get to learn from each other."* (Teacher participant, 6)

As a conclusion, this subject highlighted the significance of complete involvement and interaction as essential components of successful teamwork, and it emphasized the necessity of collaboration between teachers and pupils to guarantee that teamwork is effectively accomplished. Furthermore, the findings revealed that the process of working in teams should be appealing and that learners who are insecure should be encouraged to participate and offered help to complete tasks.

Theme 5: *Teacher Trainings*

Harris and Sass (2011) define "teacher training" as the process of strengthening the capacities of both pre-service and in-service teachers to increase learner achievement through professional support and the provision of resources. The findings of the interviews conducted with deputy principals revealed that schools do not receive any professional help or development trainings, with the exception of the subject areas that they are responsible for teaching, Deputy principal participant, 3 mentioned that their school is not developed in psychology *"We do not have any trainings at all except for subject related content knowledge, psychology is something that is not prioritised"*. Similarly deputy principal participant 1, also shared the same sentiments. *"There are no training programmes designed to train teachers on secure attachment. This is actually a foreign concept to many teachers in the township schools."*

Moreover, one more deputy principal also confirmed the lack of teacher development trainings, the interview excerpt is reported below:

> *"The school does not comprehensively independently have such programmes but those that are complemented by the GDE. We have committees such as the school based support team to help support secure attachments. Furthermore, the school has programmes such as the adopt-a-learner one in which learners with specific needs are addressed by the adoptee teacher. However, we have not begun implementing this. It is still a challenge."*(Deputy principal participant, 2)

According to the findings that were derived from the snippets of the interviews that were presented earlier, there is a knowledge gap in teacher trainings. This means that teachers and various stakeholders in schools receive less training on the knowledge of learners and more training on content subjects. It has been argued in the literature that learning about learners places a significant emphasis on expertise in the diagnosis of human learning, motivation, and child development (Nezhad & Vahedi, 2011).

Discussion

The study findings also indicated various solutions and recommendations that could assist schools to be a secure base for all learners. The findings revealed that township schools should offer social support to learners who have fragile parent-child ties. The findings indicate social support to include fighting against poverty, social development initiatives, life development initiatives, teamwork and teacher trainings. In agreement, Sørlie, Hagen, and Nordahl (2021) reported that the ongoing development of social competence in individuals with secure attachments is impacted by favourable social encounters. Therefore, it is hoped that these findings would provide a favourable social experience for all learners and help schools attain an improved atmosphere.

The study findings indicate that the most effective learning environment outcome is achieved by fostering learner motivation through positive reinforcement, such as praise, rather than solely focusing on identifying errors. The findings suggested a deficiency of positive reinforcement in classrooms. The findings indicated that employing positive reinforcement can effectively eliminate negative behaviour in learners and motivate them to acquire knowledge from their peers. The studies also demonstrated that positive reinforcement can effectively rectify expected behaviour from individuals. Therefore, it may be inferred that schools play a crucial role in fostering a culture of positive reinforcement within classrooms. This aligns with the existing literature. Several researchers (Oxley and Holden, 2021; Schieltz, et al., 2020) argue that schools can promote positive discipline and encourage desirable behaviour by implementing techniques that focus on instructing appropriate conduct rather than relying on punitive measures. It is implied that the school administration team must consistently provide training to educators on the use of positive reinforcement for learners in classrooms.

The study findings indicate that schools should cultivate a strong sense of self-worth and confidence by implementing positive psychology training. The discovery suggests that undergoing positive psychology training can provide assistance to learners throughout challenging periods of personal growth and enhance their self-assurance. The study suggests that schools can effectively cultivate confidence and competence by being purposeful and conscious of their role. Furthermore, based on literature, efforts that encourage teachers to engage in introspective activities and develop self-awareness can enhance their ability to recognize and treat learners' emotional needs. Teachers can improve their understanding by closely observing learners' behaviour and actively participating in reflective discussions (Mumford & Dikilitaş, 2020). The findings also suggested that parental advice and assistance are necessary to foster the implementation of psychological training. This aligns with the findings of Green et al. (2021), who emphasized the importance of schools creating a safe and inclusive environment that values diversity. The study findings indicated that teachers have the ability to support all learners by establishing a safe and stable foundation through active engagement and attentiveness. Research has asserted that being responsive might expedite the progress and social advancement of learners. In agreement, Castro and Pereira (2019) argued that teachers should deliberately endeavour to cultivate more intimacy and comprehension in their interactions. In addition, maintaining a regular level of responsiveness can serve as a source of motivation for learners and contribute to a sense of security inside the classroom, providing a stable foundation for all learners. According to Schiavon et al., (2020), schools should focus on developing positive relationships between individuals by providing training in positive psychology. Similarly, Duong et al. (2021) suggest that schools should establish regular and structured schedules, along with clear guidelines, to create a sense of anticipation for learners who lack confidence. The implication of this finding is that schools must

purposefully make themselves accessible to learners in order to foster a sense of trust and appropriately address their needs. Similarly, Gimbert, et al., (2023) also suggested that educators need to be properly educated to create secure and supportive learning environments. The implication of this finding is that teachers must be provided with support to accommodate individual learners and establish a healthy and inclusive classroom environment.

The findings revealed that township schools should offer social support to learners who have fragile parent-child ties. The findings indicate social support to include fighting against poverty, social development initiatives, life development initiatives, teamwork and teacher trainings. Furthermore, Sørlie, Hagen, and Nordahl (2021) corroborated these findings, demonstrating that favourable social encounters, conducive environments, and continuous social education have the potential to eradicate insecure attachment   patterns. Moreover, Ferreira, Martinsone and Talić (2020), schools should support programs that address poverty and provide a peaceful atmosphere to promote social and personal development. These initiatives should prioritize social and life skills development. The implication of this finding is that schools and community learners need to address poverty comprehensively and fairly in order to reduce the multifaceted obstacle of learners being impacted both at home and at school. The study findings indicated that trips, sports, and cultural activities are social development initiatives that can facilitate learners in experiencing comprehensive development and physical education. The study findings revealed a need for the implementation of social activities in township schools. The qualitative study findings suggested that sports provide a suitable platform for the development of life skills and character, which can enhance individuals' personal growth and positively impact their schooling experience. This aligns with the perspective of Maluleke (2021), who posited that interventions such as social skills training, counselling, and support from educators, mental health professionals, and peers can be beneficial in addressing social incompetence and promoting social growth. The implication of this finding is for school management teams to reinvigorate social development programs.

The study findings indicate that life development programs may be essential for providing learners with life skills beyond formal education, which can enhance their social competence. Furthermore, the study's findings indicated that Life-Orientation, as a learning area, might be deliberately utilized as a subject to facilitate transformation and serve as a program for personal growth. Moreover, the study findings emphasized the significance of school counselling involving proficient social workers in facilitating learners' personal development and advancement. This aligns with the findings of Duong et al., (2021) which advocated for schools to provide ongoing counselling services and assure the availability of school counsellors to support learners dealing with emotional and social challenges. The implication of this finding is that the department

of education should employ additional school counsellors and skilled social workers in each school to provide assistance to all learners and foster a conducive school atmosphere.

The study findings highlighted the significance of teamwork in classrooms as an expansion of knowledge acquisition from peers and the development of social skills. The findings suggest that teamwork can foster a collaborative learning environment, where learners actively engage with others and benefit from their interactions. In agreement, Noble and McGrath (2011), argued that social competence can be developed by actively engaging in social interactions with peers, motivated by a desire for positive findings and a lack of reluctance towards such situations. This aligns with the existing body of literature, which asserts that gaining knowledge about learners provides a significant emphasis on the ability to accurately identify and understand human learning, motivation, and child development (Nezhad & Vahedi, 2011). Furthermore, research suggests that providing teacher training improves understanding of attachment theory, specifically its impact on learners' socio-emotional development. It is crucial for educators to receive training on how early attachment experiences affect children's behaviour, interpersonal relationships, and academic advancement (Garcia-Rodriguez, Redín & Abaitua, 2023; Harlow, 2021).

Conclusion & Recommendations

The study concludes that a significant number of learners who have insecure attachments have not gotten adequate psychological and social support from their homes and schools to help them enhance their attachment and social competence. The qualitative study suggests that indicated that schools should provide psychological support to learners through comprehensive positive reinforcement, positive psychology training, attentive learners care, and tailored learning opportunities. The study findings suggest that the best way to create a successful learning environment is by promoting learner motivation through positive reinforcement, such as praise, rather than exclusively concentrating on discovering flaws in the classroom. The findings indicated that utilizing positive reinforcement is necessary to successfully eradicate bad behaviour in learners and encourage them to gain knowledge from their peers. The study showed that positive reinforcement can successfully correct anticipated behaviour in learners. The study concludes that a significant number of learners who have insecure attachments have not gotten adequate psychological and social support from their homes and schools to help them enhance their attachment and social competence. The study recommends that train parents on best parenting programs and increase awareness in the community on secure homes.

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