TEACHERS COLLABORATED UNDERSTANDING OF BULLYING AS A WIDESPREAD HARM IN SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOLS: A VISUAL PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

by

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DECLARATION

I, Ntobeko Mtshali, hereby declare that this research report was completed and submitted by the researcher to the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, Bachelor of Education Honours in Educational Psychology**.** This is my original work that has not been submitted to any other university for any diploma or degree purposes.

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ABSTRACT

Bullying in schools is a global concern with significant implications for learners' well-being and academic outcomes. In South Africa, policies such as the National School Safety Framework (2016) and the South African Schools Act (1996) address school violence. However, many teachers lack sufficient training to intervene and to support affected learners effectively. The study aimed to explore teachers' perceptions of bullying and the strategies they employ to support bullied learners. The research was conducted at a public primary school in Mtubatuba, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, where bullying is a common phenomenon. The study employed a qualitative case study approach, collecting data through visual participatory methods, including collages and drawings. An interpretive paradigm was used to capture the subjective experiences of participants. The Theory of Planned Behaviour guided the theoretical framework, and the thematic analysis used assisted in identifying relevant themes. Teachers acknowledged the detrimental effects of bullying but reported feeling underprepared to address it effectively. Findings highlighted a need for specialised training and resources to enhance teachers' capacity to intervene in bullying situations. The study underscores the importance of equipping teachers with adequate resources and training to address bullying effectively. Schools prioritising these resources can create safer learning environments, promoting both social and academic development. Future research should focus on developing tailored intervention programmes that empower teachers to manage bullying in schools.

Keywords: Bullying in schools, Qualitative approach, and interpretive paradigm.

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DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to my family, whose love, support, and encouragement have been my foundation. Their unwavering belief in me has been a constant source of strength, and this work reflects their dedication to my growth and success.

List of acronyms

NSF – National School Safety Framework

SASA – South African Schools Act

SAIRR – South African Institute of Race Relations

SGB – School Governing Body

TPB – Theory of Planned Behaviour

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

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Chapter 1

Background and Introduction to the Study

1.1 Introduction

This chapter offers a comprehensive overview of the study. It begins by discussing the background of the study, followed by the focus, the purpose, and the rationale of the study. That led to the statement of the problem, followed by the research objectives and questions. Later, the theoretical framework, followed by the research design methodology, trustworthiness and the ethical issues are discussed.

1.2 Background of the study

According to UNESCO (2017), the prevalence of bullying is increasing globally, with an estimated 246 million children experiencing this issue in various forms. This staggering figure highlights the urgent need for effective measures to combat bullying and create safer educational environments. In South Africa, the situation is particularly concerning, with Wolhuter (2017) reporting that around 80% of children encounter bullying both during their commutes to and from school and within the school environment itself. These statistics underscore the critical need for targeted interventions to address bullying and protect learners from its harmful effects.

In response to the challenges posed by bullying and violence in schools, several policies have been introduced to support learners and enhance school safety. The National School Safety Framework (2016) is the policy that aimed at improving the school environment, specifically Safety and Security Measures and Preventative and Supportive Interventions. This policy offers a comprehensive strategy for enhancing school safety by advocating for the establishment of School Safety Committees. These committees are responsible for developing and implementing safety plans, conducting risk assessments, and ensuring adherence to safety protocols. Equally important, the South African Schools Act (1996, with amendments) provides a legal framework for maintaining a safe learning environment by mandating clear disciplinary measures for violence and misconduct and involving the School Governing Body

(SGB) in enforcing safety policies. However, despite these measures, studies by Yoon and Bauman (2014) suggest that teachers are often perceived as ineffective in intervening during bullying incidents.

Teachers often fail to comply with safety policies such as the National School Safety Framework (2016) and the South African Schools Act (1996, with amendment**s)** due to several critical issues. Lynch and Behr (2018) contend that inadequate training prevents teachers from effectively conducting risk assessments which is a key requirement of the National School Safety Framework., That leads to incomplete or inconsistent implementation of safety measures in many schools. Smith and Robinson (2019) further note that resource constraints, including limited funding and materials, hinder teachers' ability to fully comply with safety protocols and enforce policies effectively. Additionally, Jones (2020) points out that a lack of awareness regarding the specific roles of the School Governing Body (SGB) in overseeing and enforcing these policies contributes to ineffective policy application and inadequate support for ensuring a safe school environment.

1.3 Focus and purpose of the study

The study focuses on teachers understanding of bullying in a public primary school. It explores the support that teachers provide to the learners who are affected by the phenomenon in primary schools. The study is located at one public primary school in Mtubatuba, located in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. The school is multi-racial, with most black African learners and teachers. The study further explores teachers' perspectives, and the strategies used for the prevention of bullying. That includes their interventions to address bullying incidents and the underlying factors contributing to learners being targeted in schools. The intention is to find solutions for the learners to be assisted as they are affected by bullying.

1.4 Rationale of the study

My motivation for this study stems from firsthand experiences of witnessing bullying as a widespread issue in the school environment where I conducted my teaching practice. During my teaching practice experience in 2022, I encountered learners who were bullied by other

learners at school. Older learners bullied younger learners, including physical aggression and threats. As student teachers we were unable to effectively provide support and protect the learners who were the victims of bullying. This was the case as we observed that even their full teachers ignored learners who were bullied.

As a student teacher, I realised that bullying has a negative effect on the teaching and learning process and on the school environment. Learners who experienced bullying found it difficult to engage in class, felt demotivated and lost confidence. Certain learners attempted suicide due to experiences of bullying. These issues highlight the urgent need for effective supportive interventions. Addressing bullying is essential for fostering a positive and productive educational atmosphere.

According to Buhs, Ladd and Herald (2006), longitudinal evidence suggests that learners who experience bullying in primary schools continue to face victimisation into middle school and are at high risk for school disengagement. Sidibe et al. (2019) found that boys with low academic performance are more likely to engage in bullying behaviours in many schools. While they are still in schools, they do not concentrate as they are victimised. Therefore, the academic engagement is influenced by bullying victimisation (Ladd et al., 2017). Experiences of being bullied lead them to negative school-related attitudes and motivations, while also discouraging their propensity to initiate and actively participate in classroom activities.

It is usually noted that teachers lack skills and intervention ideas to prevent bullying in schools. According to Kokko and Pörhölä (2009) and Oldenburg, Bosman and Veenstra (2016), teachers often lack the necessary skills to prevent bullying and to support learners who are bullied at schools. Bosman and Veenstra (2016) noted that teachers require awareness of bullying behaviours, understanding of the detrimental effects on victims, confidence in managing bullying incidents and familiarity with effective intervention strategies. Therefore, this study aims not only to address immediate concerns within the specific school where I conducted my teaching practice but also to contribute to broader discussions on the prevention of bullying. Through enhancing teachers' understanding and skills, this research attempts to foster safer and more supportive learning environments where all learners can thrive for better education.

1.5 Problem statement

Bullying remains a significant issue, impacting learner well-being and academic achievement in South African primary schools. It is a critical concern to be addressed to ensure a secure and supportive learning environment for all learners in schools. However, very little is known about teachers' understanding of bullying and the strategies used to combat it in schools. Teachers lack understanding of bullying, "despite various efforts to combat bullying, there is still a lack of comprehensive understanding and effective strategies among teachers" (Mncube & Harber, 2013, p. 45). Bradshaw et al. (2013) highlight the critical need for improved teacher training in effective bullying prevention strategies and school-wide policies. Additionally, data from the South African Institute of Race Relations (Mncube & Harber, 2013) indicate that only 23% of learners feel safe at school, underscoring the urgency to understand teachers' perspectives and practices in addressing bullying. This study aims to explore teachers' approaches to bullying prevention, their perceptions of factors that contribute to bullying, and to inform the development of targeted interventions that create safer and supportive learning environments in South African primary schools.

1.6 Research objectives

- To examine teachers understanding of bullying in a primary school
- To identify factors that contribute to bullying in a primary school.
- To explore the support that teachers provide to bullied learners in a primary school.

1.7 Research questions

- What are the teachers understanding of bullying in a primary school?
- What are the factors that contribute to bullying in primary schools?
- How do teachers support learners who are bullied in a particular primary school?

1.8 Theoretical framework

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), proposed by Icek Ajzen in 1991 and expanded in 2002, framed the research study to explore teachers' collaborative understanding of bullying and bully-victimisation among learners in schools. TPB posits that behaviour is influenced by behavioural intentions, which are shaped by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived

behavioural control. This theory helps elucidate why bullying occurs by examining how attitudes towards bullying, social pressures, and individuals' perceived ability to control actions contribute to both perpetration and victimization. Attitude in one of the important concepts of TPB towards bullying which refers to how positively or negatively teachers and learners view bullying behaviours plays a crucial role in shaping the behavioural intentions of both perpetrators and victims. perceived behavioural control is one of the important concepts of the theory, which reflects individuals' beliefs about their capacity to influence bullying situations, influences their engagement in or resistance to bullying. By applying TPB, this study uncovers the underlying factors driving bullying behaviours and aims to inform more effective interventions within the school context.

1.9 Research design and methodology

1.9.1 Research design

According to Creswell (2014), research design is the overall plan that connects conceptual research problems with relevant and feasible empirical methods. It provides detailed guidance on the procedures to be followed in a study. Yin (2018) argues that the qualitative case study is a research design used with an aim of exploring and understanding complex issues in their real-life contexts. He emphasises that case studies are valuable for their ability to provide detailed insights and contextualized understanding. A qualitative case study uses text instead of quantitative study that use numbers. In this study I adopted qualitative case study as a research design, a case study is ideal for researching bullying in schools because it offers detailed insights into specific instances, revealing the impacts of the issue.

1.9.2 Research Methodology

According to Igwenagu (2016), methodology is about the design process for conducting research. This study used visual participatory approach as the methodology for the collaborated understanding of bullying in one particular primary school.

1.9.3 Research paradigm

According to Mackenzie and Knipe (2006), the word "paradigm" has its etymology in Greek, where it signifies a pattern. In educational research, this term is utilised to indicates a researcher's worldview. In this research study I adopted interpretive paradigm to understand the subjective experiences and perceptions of teachers regarding bullying situations in schools. Teachers freely share their experiences using visuals such as drawings.

1.9.4 Sampling

According to Shorten and Moorley (2014), sampling involves selecting a smaller, representative group from a larger population to study and draw conclusions from. To ensure the effectiveness and credibility of research. In this research study I adopted purposive sampling to select specific participants that will increase validity in this study.

1.9.5 Participants

Purposive sampling used in this study. As a researcher I worked with 5 teachers that have enough knowledge and willing to share their experiences about bullying in schools.

1.9.6 Visual participatory approach

Visual participatory approach allows the participants to use visuals as data collection methodologies. According to Waller (2016) visuals are any form of imagery or representation that conveys information, ideas, or emotions through visual means. Teachers collaborated to share their experiences about bullying. In this study teachers used collages and drawings to capture and share their lived experiences a of bullying in school settings. Teachers created collages using magazine pictures to further examine contextual challenges. As a researcher, I provided guidance for the teachers to create collages and drawings they used to share their experiences and knowledge about bullying in schools.

1.9.7 Data generation methods

Drawings

According to Vince and Warren (2012), drawings are a visual participatory method that allows participants to express and explore their perceptions and experiences in a nuanced way. In this study, teachers used drawings to illustrate their understanding of bullying, including scenario illustrations of various bullying incidents, such as verbal abuse or physical aggression, and emotional impact drawings that represented the psychological effects of bullying on learners, such as feelings of isolation and sadness. These visual methods provided a richer, more detailed perspective on the teachers' experiences and insights, capturing aspects that verbal methods might not fully convey.

Collages

The word "collage" comes from the French coller meaning to stick and referring to the cutting and sticking of objects onto a flat surface (Butler-Kisber & Poldma, 2010). Collages are a valuable qualitative research method that combines various materials such as images, text, and drawings to allow participants to express and explore complex experiences. In this study, teachers created collages to represent their experiences with bullying, incorporating drawings, and text to illustrate factors contributing to bullying and their effects on their ability to support bullied learners. This method facilitated a collaborative dialogue, enabling a deeper understanding of the teachers' understanding of bullying.

1.9.8 Data analysis

According to Lochmiller & Lester (2017) Data analysis in qualitative research involves examining non-numeric data to identify patterns, themes, and meanings. The approach to data analysis can vary based on methodology, theoretical perspective, and research tradition. For instance, thematic analysis systematically identifies and organises themes across a data set, focusing on collective meanings and experiences. Content analysis, by contrast, categorizes and quantifies content to reveal patterns. The choice of method depends on the study's objectives and the nature of the data, ensuring that the analysis aligns with the research goals and provides meaningful insights.

Data obtained for this project was analysed using thematic analysis method. Thematic analysis is perhaps best defined as "an umbrella term, designating sometimes quite different approaches aimed at identifying patterns across qualitative datasets" (Braun et al., 2019, p. 844). It focuses on understanding collective or shared meanings and experiences rather than unique, individual insights. Thematic analysis helps researchers identify common themes and understand how a topic is consistently discussed or described across the data. Data analysis is a complex and contested part of the qualitative research process, which has received limited theoretical attention. Researchers are often in need of useful instructions or guidelines on how to analyse the mass of qualitative data but face the lack of clear guidance for using analytic methods.

1.10 Trustworthiness

In this study, I worked with five teachers who used drawings and collages to share their experiences. I encountered an issue when I realised that the visual data could be interpreted in different ways, making it difficult to capture the teachers' true intentions. To address this, I asked each teacher to explain their drawings, ensuring I accurately understood and represented their experiences with bullying. In ensuring the trustworthiness of the research, several strategies were employed. Credibility was demonstrated through triangulation by integrating multiple data sources, such as collages and drawings, and through member checking, where preliminary findings were shared with participants for validation. Transferability was ensured by providing detailed contextual descriptions of the research setting and participants, offering thick descriptions of the findings, and comparing results with existing literature to highlight their relevance to similar contexts. Dependability was addressed by maintaining clear and thorough documentation of the research process, including data collection and analysis methods, allowing for replication and consistency. Confirmability was achieved by practicing reflexivity, reflecting on how researcher biases might have influenced the study, and ensuring that findings were grounded in the data. These practices collectively contributed to the overall trustworthiness of the research, ensuring that the findings were credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable.

1.11 Ethical considerations

In this study, ethical considerations were meticulously addressed to ensure the integrity of the research process and protect participants. Informed consent was obtained through detailed consent letters that outlined the study's purpose, the participants' roles, and their rights, ensuring they were fully aware and voluntarily agreed to participate. Privacy was maintained by using pseudonyms to protect participant identities. Data were analysed using thematic analysis, a method that facilitated a thorough exploration of the data and enhanced the study's credibility by systematically identifying and interpreting key themes and patterns. The study ensured transferability by providing detailed descriptions of the research context and process, which allows others to assess the applicability of the findings to different settings. Reliability was achieved through consistent application of analytical procedures, while confirmability was reinforced by maintaining a clear audit trail of the research process and decisions. These measures collectively upheld the ethical foundation of the study, safeguarding participant confidentiality and trust while ensuring robust and trustworthy findings.

1.12 Overview of the research

Chapter One outlines the study's background, purpose, and rationale, and presents the problem statement, research objectives, and questions. It introduces the theoretical framework, research design, and methodology, and addresses ethical considerations, aiming to develop strategies to reduce bullying and improve school safety.

Chapter Two reviews literature on teachers' varied perceptions of bullying, factors contributing to bullying, and their support for victims. It highlights gaps in addressing different bullying forms and discusses the theoretical framework.

Chapter Three details the research design and methodology, using a qualitative case study to explore teachers' perceptions of bullying and their support for learners. It explains the visual participatory methods, participant selection, data generation, data analysis, and steps taken to ensure trustworthiness and ethical compliance.

Chapter Four presents the data, analysis, and discussion of findings from the visual participatory methods used to explore teachers' perceptions of bullying in primary schools. Key themes include the multifaceted nature of bullying, contributing factors, and support

strategies. The findings are analysed through thematic analysis and the Theory of Planned Behaviour, highlighting teachers' attitudes and interventions.

Chapter Five presents the conclusions, discussion, and recommendations of the study on teachers' understanding of bullying and support for affected learners. It highlights key findings, study limitations, and suggests strategies for improving bullying prevention and intervention. The chapter concludes with a call for a collaborative approach to address bullying in schools.

1.13 Conclusion

In this chapter, the purpose was to provide a comprehensive overview of the study on bullying in South African public primary schools. The chapter begins by outlining the background, focus, and rationale of the study, emphasizing the urgent need to address bullying through teachers' perspectives and interventions. It highlights the problem statement, research objectives, and questions, and introduces the theoretical framework of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) to explore the dynamics of bullying. The research design and methodology are discussed, including the use of visual participatory methods and thematic analysis. Ethical considerations, such as informed consent and privacy protections, are also addressed. The key message is the critical need for effective teacher training and intervention strategies to create safer learning environments. The next chapter will delve into the literature review and theoretical framework that support the study.

<center>**Chapter 2**</center>

<center>**Literature review and the Theoretical Framework**</center>

2.1 Introduction

Bullying is a situation where someone repeatedly hurts or picks on another person, either physically or emotionally. It often involves a power imbalance, where the bully feels stronger or more powerful. This behaviour can make the victim feel scared, sad, or alone. Bullying in primary schools is a pressing issue that necessitates a comprehensive approach to effectively address and mitigate its impact. This chapter begins by discussing teachers' understanding of bullying, which is pivotal in shaping effective prevention and intervention strategies. It discusses school policies in relation to the phenomenon, followed by different types of bullying. It discusses factors contributing to bullying, the essential role of teachers in supporting bullied learners and discusses the strategies and practices to foster a safer and more inclusive school environment. After that the theoretical framework underpinning the study is discussed in detailed providing a structured lens through which to understand and address the multifaceted nature of bullying in primary schools.

2.2 School policies in relation to the phenomenon

In schools, there are policies designed to address and mitigate bullying, such as those outlined in the National School Safety Framework (Department of Basic Education, 2016). The National School Safety Framework is a policy initiative aimed at enhancing safety in educational environments by addressing bullying through a comprehensive approach. This framework includes physical security measures, such as secure entrances and surveillance systems, as well as preventative interventions, like anti-bullying programmes and mental health support. By integrating these strategies, the framework seeks to create a safe and supportive school climate conducive to student well-being (Hoglund, Klingle, & Hosan, 2015).

A comprehensive approach to school safety that combines physical security measures and supportive interventions is essential for effectively addressing bullying and fostering student well-being (Holt, 2016). These include Safety and Security Measures, which enhance physical security with features like secure entrances and surveillance systems to protect students.

Additionally, preventative and supportive interventions focus on proactive strategies, including anti-bullying programmes and mental health support, to prevent bullying and address its root causes. By implementing these policies, schools aim to create a safer environment, tackle immediate threats, and address underlying issues associated with bullying, ultimately enhancing student safety and well-being. In schools, Safety and Security Measures might include secure entrances and surveillance systems (McGuire, 2017). Anti-bullying programmes in schools include the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, mental health support such as school-based counselling and the Thrive Approach, which help to create a safer environment and address the root causes of bullying.

2.3 Different types of bullying

There are different types of bullying, including relational bullying and verbal bullying, each with unique characteristics and impacts. Relational bullying, or social bullying, involves harming someone's social connections through tactics like exclusion, cyber bullying, rumour-spreading, and manipulating friendships, leading to feelings of isolation and significant mental health issues (Crick & Grotpeter, 2014). In contrast, verbal bullying uses harmful language, such as name-calling, threats, and derogatory comments, to demean and intimidate others, often resulting in long-term psychological effects like anxiety and depression (Hymel & Swearer, 2014). Both forms of bullying significantly affect individuals' well-being, emphasising the need for proactive measures in schools and communities to combat these harmful behaviours.

2.4 Teachers understanding of bullying

In schools, teachers identify bullying as an incident where a learner repeatedly call another learner using derogatory or insulting names and physically pushing in the playground (Smith et al., 2016). According to Rigby (2014), bullying involves ongoing aggressive actions that exploit power imbalances, encompassing both verbal abuse and physical intimidation. These insights emphasise the importance of implementing strategies to combat bullying and foster a safe, supportive atmosphere in schools. Power imbalances often make victims targets, as they are perceived as weaker or more vulnerable. Peer influence also plays a significant role;

students may bully others to fit in with a group or to gain social status, reinforcing negative behaviours.

Addressing these factors is crucial for developing a more comprehensive approach to managing and preventing bullying in schools, as effective interventions must also consider the role of institutional policies and community involvement (Smith et al., 2016). Effective interventions for managing and preventing bullying in schools include clear institutional policies with established procedures for addressing incidents, support systems like counselling for victims and perpetrators, and community involvement through parent engagement and local partnerships. Educational programs that promote awareness and empathy, along with ongoing monitoring and evaluation, are essential for creating a comprehensive and effective anti-bullying approach.

2.5 Factors that contribute to bullying

Teachers predominantly relate bullying to family-related factors, such as a lack of parental involvement or family dysfunction. Rudolph et al. (2014) argues that learners who experience low levels of parental support are at a heightened risk of engaging in bullying behaviour. This underscores the significant impact that family-related factors can have on a leaner's social interactions. Most of the time learners from unstable or conflict-ridden home environments are more likely to exhibit aggressive behaviours in school settings (Patterson et al., 2010).

According to Shih (2913) teachers views are influenced by their personal experiences and the perspectives of other education professionals, often highlighting a perceived lack of family involvement in learners' education. Consequently, families or related issues are seen as the primary problem faced by schools (Olweus, 2013). Furthermore, Lereya et al. (2013) and Ding et al. (2020) emphasise the role of family and peer factors in influencing the likelihood of becoming a victim of bully. Effective parental supervision and monitoring is identified as protective factors that can reduce the risk of involvement in bullying. For instance, Lereya et al. (2013) highlighted that learners with attentive and engaged parents are less likely to be involved in bullying situations.

According to Goldweber et al. (2013) and Alikasifoglu et al. (2007), several factors significantly contribute to the risk of severe bullying among primary school learners, include ethnicity, media consumption, physical aggression and mental health issues. Bullying can have

profound effects on learners, extending beyond immediate physical and emotional harm to impact their academic performance. Victims of bullying often experience a decline in concentration and increased absenteeism due to the stress and anxiety associated with being targeted. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive approach that not only targets the behaviour of bullies but also supports the academic and emotional needs of victims to help mitigate these adverse effects.

2.6 Teachers support to bullied learners

The victims of bullying feel helpless or unable to effectively manage their situation, which increases their risk of further exposure to violence. Teachers, being the most accessible and influential figures in a primary school setting, are often in a key position to offer essential support and intervention (Tremblay et al., 2020). For instance, when learners were consistently targeted by their peers, teachers who identified these situations often intervened by addressing the issues directly and implementing strategies to prevent further incidents. In several cases, teachers facilitated regular meetings with school counsellors to provide emotional support and developed action plans in collaboration with parents to address the bullying. Additionally, some teachers organise peer mediation sessions to resolve conflicts and promote a more inclusive classroom environment. These interventions not only help learners manage immediate bullying situations but also contribute to creating a safer and more supportive school environment.

According to Cairns et al. (2003), primary school teachers were found to be less likely to offer support to learners facing relational bullying compared to those experiencing physical or verbal bullying. Relational bullying, which encompasses behaviours such as social exclusion, spreading rumours, and manipulating peer relationships, often remains less visible and harder to detect than more overt forms of aggression. Consequently, teachers may find it challenging to identify and address these subtle forms of bullying effectively. This gap in support underscores the need for enhanced training and awareness for teachers, so they can more effectively recognise and intervene in cases of relational bullying, ensuring that all types of bullying receive the necessary attention and assistance within the school setting.

While the National School Safety Framework outlines important policies to address and mitigate bullying through a comprehensive approach, their effectiveness is often undermined by inadequate implementation (DBE, 2016). Physical security measures, such as secure entrances and surveillance systems, are essential, but they alone do not ensure a safe school environment. Hoglund, Klingle, and Hosan (2015) contend that preventative interventions, including anti-bullying programmes and mental health support, must be fully integrated. However, many schools struggle with resources and training, which affects the consistent application of initiatives like the Olweus Bullying Prevention Programme and the Thrive Approach. Without proper implementation, even well-designed policies can leave students vulnerable to bullying, ultimately hindering their well-being.

According to Bauman et al. (2016) teachers often perceive relational bullying as less serious or more normalised compared to physical or verbal bullying, which leads to them being less supportive of victims of relational bullying. This perception may result in insufficient intervention and support for learners experiencing social exclusion, rumour-spreading, or manipulation, as these forms of bullying are less overt and harder to detect. Therefore, this study provides valuable insights into how teachers' support varies across the types of perceived bullying.

2.7 Theoretical framework

This study is underpinned by Theory of Planned Behaviour. The theory of planned behaviour is an extension of the theory of reasoned action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) made necessary by the original model's limitations in dealing with behaviours over which people have incomplete volitional control. The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) was developed by Icek Ajzen in the 1980s. According to TPB, there is a certain sequence where individual factors affect humans' attitudes toward behaviour, their subjective norms, and their perceived behavioural control. Subsequently, these factors such as subjective norms influence someone's intention of behaviour and finally ends in the display of actual behaviour (Ajzen, 2012).

Three concepts of the theory: attitudes, perceived behavioural control and subjective norms related to the research study are discussed below.

2.7.1 Attitudes

Attitudes refers to an individual's beliefs and feelings about a particular behaviour, including how positively or negatively people view it. Positive attitudes, such as believing in the benefits or importance of a behaviour, can enhance motivation and willingness to engage in that behaviour (Conner & Sparks, 2015). The TPB posits that teachers' willingness to engage in anti-bullying efforts is influenced by their beliefs about the seriousness of bullying and their empathy towards victims (van Verseveld et al., 2019). Research indicates that when teachers recognise bullying as a serious problem and feel a personal connection to the victims, they are more inclined to take proactive measures (Dedousis-Wallace et al., 2014; Yoon, 2004). Therefore, teachers who perceive bullying as a significant issue and have a strong empathy for the victims are more likely to view intervention as important and necessary

2.7.2 Perceived Behavioural Control

Perceived Behavioural Control involves an individual's confidence in their ability to perform a behaviour, including their perception of how easy or difficult it is to achieve. High perceived behavioural control indicates that individuals feel capable and equipped to perform the behaviour, which influences their likelihood of following through (Ajzen, 2021). Perceived behavioural control, which relates to self-efficacy, also plays a critical role in the context of maintaining bullying situations. According to Ajzen (2012), higher self-efficacy is where teachers feel confident in their ability to manage bullying situations leads to greater persistence and more effective performance. Teachers with high self-efficacy are more likely to intervene in bullying situations because they believe in their capability to address these issues effectively (Dedousis-Wallace et al., 2014; Yoon et al., 2016). This confidence influences their likelihood to act and sustain their efforts in confronting bullying.

2.7.3 Subjective Norms

Subjective Norms are the social pressures and expectations from significant others, such as family, friends, or colleagues. Subjective norms affect an individual's motivation to engage in a behaviour based on how much they feel others expect or approve of it (La Barbera & Ajzen, 2020). Subjective norms, which involve teachers' perceptions of the expectations of others,

such as school principals and colleagues, further impact their behaviour. Participation in anti-bullying programmes and adherence to school policies also shape these norms, thereby influencing teachers' intervention practices and shaping the overall school climate regarding bullying (Cunningham et al., 2016; Roland & Galloway, 2004; Benítez et al., 2009).

2.8 Strengths of the theory

In this study, the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) was used to integrate three key concepts attitudes, perceived behavioural control, and subjective norms to explain how teachers' responses to bullying in primary schools were shaped. The TPB is particularly relevant for this study because it provided a comprehensive framework for understanding the factors that influence behaviour change. Its inclusion of perceived behavioural control allows for a more nuanced examination of behaviours that may be affected by external constraints, making it applicable to real-world settings where individuals might feel unable to act despite their intentions.

2.9 Limitations of the theory

The Theory of Planned Behaviour had several limitations when applied to this study of bullying. It assumed rational decision-making based solely on attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control, overlooking the emotional influences and social dynamics that often drove bullying behaviour. The theory did not adequately account for the contextual factors present in environments like schools, where peer pressure and situational elements significantly impacted decisions. Furthermore, while perceived behavioural control was considered, it had underestimated the real-life challenges individuals faced, such as fear of retaliation or lack of support, leading to a disconnect between intention and actual behaviour.

2.10 Conclusion

This chapter explored teachers' understanding of bullying in primary schools, revealing varied perceptions that influence their responses. It highlighted the gap in recognizing all forms of bullying, the factors contributing to bullying, and the importance of teachers' support for victims. The Theory of Planned Behaviour was used to frame how attitudes, perceived control, and subjective norms shape teachers' actions. The key takeaway is that comprehensive awareness and training are crucial for effectively addressing bullying. The next chapter will delve into the research design and methodology employed to further explore and address these issues.

Chapter 3

Research design and methodology

3.1 Introduction

According to UNESCO (2017), the prevalence of bullying is increasing globally, with an estimated 246 million children experiencing this issue in various forms. This staggering figure highlights the urgent need for effective measures to combat bullying and create safer educational environments. In South Africa, the situation is particularly concerning, with Wolhuter (2017) reporting that around 80% of children encounter bullying both during their commutes to and from school and within the school environment itself. These statistics underscore the critical need for targeted interventions to address bullying and protect students from its harmful effects. This chapter provides an overview of the study, detailing the research design and paradigm, along with the qualitative research approach and methodology. It describes the selection of participants, the methods used for data generation, and the processes involved in data analysis. Later the chapter addresses the measures taken to ensure the study's trustworthiness and ethical considerations.

3.2 Research design

According to Creswell (2014), research design is the overall plan that connects conceptual research problems with relevant and feasible empirical methods. It provides detailed guidance on the procedures to be followed in a study. Yin (2018) argues that the qualitative case study is a research design used with an aim of exploring and understanding complex issues in their real-life contexts. He emphasises that qualitative case studies are valuable for their ability to provide detailed insights and contextualised understanding. A qualitative case study uses text instead of quantitative study that use numbers. In this study I adopted qualitative case study as a research design, a case study is ideal for researching bullying in schools because it offers detailed insights into specific instances, revealing the impacts of the issue.

To achieve the aims of my study and address the research questions, the research was organised into three distinct phases. Phase One involved establishing connections with schools and recruiting five teacher participants using purposive sampling method. During Phase Two, from March 2024 to September 2024, five participatory visual methods workshops were conducted. These workshops utilised two specific visual tools: drawings, where teachers illustrated their experiences and perceptions of bullying, and collages, where they combined all drawings, text, and other materials to represent factors contributing to bullying and their impact on support for learners. Following these workshops, a participatory data analysis workshop was held to collaboratively review and interpret the collected visual data using thematic nalysis. The final phase, Phase Three, focused on applying the insights gained to develop teacher-led strategies and recommendations for addressing bullying in schools, empowering teachers to create effective, community-based solutions and policy suggestions.

3.3 Research paradigm

The research paradigm is a fundamental framework that shapes how research is conducted and interpreted, encompassing the philosophical assumptions and beliefs that guide the approach to data collection, analysis, and understanding of the research topic (Zireva, 2013). In qualitative research, the interpretive paradigm is often used, rooted in constructivist theory. This theory suggests that knowledge is subjective and shaped by individuals' varying perceptions and experiences within their environments (Zireva, 2013). As a result, this paradigm emphasises the importance of understanding phenomena from the individual's perspective, requiring detailed and in-depth descriptions and explanations to fully capture the complexity of their experiences.

In this study, I used an interpretive paradigm to understand the subjective experiences and perceptions of teachers regarding bullying situations in schools. Teachers freely shared their experiences using visuals such as drawings and collages. The interpretive paradigm was well-suited for answering these research questions as it focused on understanding the subjective experiences and perspectives of teachers. It allowed for an in-depth exploration of teachers' personal perceptions of bullying, the nuanced factors contributing to it, and the specific strategies they employed to support bullied learners. By emphasising individual viewpoints

and context, this paradigm provided comprehensive insights into the complexities of bullying in primary schools.

3.4 Qualitative research approach

A qualitative research approach is particularly suitable when you need to explore and understand complex phenomenon in a flexible and in-depth manner. It is ideal for developing new theories, enhancing existing ones, or applying theoretical frameworks to novel contexts, especially when current theories are inadequate or do not fully address specific issues (Creswell, 2018). This approach is also recommended when formal academic writing structures are too restrictive, allowing for a more narrative and descriptive style that captures the richness of participants' experiences, stories, and contexts. By focusing on detailed and contextual data, qualitative research provides insights into settings and phenomenon that might otherwise be overlooked, helping to uncover new understandings and potential solutions to problems.

Qualitative data is a type of data that is collected and analysed in a non-numerical form, such as words, images, or observations. It is generally used to gain an in-depth understanding of complex phenomena, such as human behaviour, attitudes, and beliefs (Wright, 2016). This study adopted a qualitative approach because it aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of teachers' subjective experiences and perceptions regarding bullying in primary schools using qualitative data. Qualitative data allowed for rich, detailed insights into how teachers perceive bullying, identify contributing factors and implement support strategies, which quantitative methods might not fully capture. The flexibility of qualitative research enabled the exploration of complex and nuanced issues in a narrative and contextual manner, essential for developing comprehensive strategies to address bullying.

3.5 Research methodology

Research methodology s is a set of systematic technique used in research. This simply means a guide to research and how it is conducted. It describes and analyses methods, throws more light on their limitations and resources, and clarifies their pre-suppositions and consequences, relating their potentialities to the twilight zone at the frontiers of knowledge (Igwenagu, 2016).

This research project employed a visual participatory approach to collaboratively understand the bullying faced by South African school learners in the 21st century. Lorenz and Kolb (2009) contend that the visual participatory approach is a methodological approach where participants actively engage in the research process by producing visual materials such as drawings, photographs, murals, or videos. This approach emphasises the involvement of participants not just as subjects but as contributors to the research output. This method facilitates a deeper engagement with the research topic, allowing participants to express their perspectives and experiences through visual means.

In my role as a facilitator, I guided teachers through the process of utilising visual tools. I supported them in creating and interpreting their own drawings and collages to ensure that their depictions of bullying were both accurate and insightful. This approach aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of bullying impact and to inform the development of effective interventions to support teachers dealing with these challenges.

3.6 Selection of participants

In qualitative research, selecting participants involves choosing a specific subgroup or sample from a larger, defined population to provide in-depth insights into the research topic. Participants are the individuals or groups who take part in the study and whose experiences or perspectives are central to understanding the research question. According to Miles et al. (2013), this selection process focuses on identifying and accessing a small, targeted group from the broader population to ensure that the participants are directly relevant to the research objectives and can provide meaningful, detailed information.

Phase 1

For this study on bullying faced by learners, I selected 5 teachers from a primary school who have witnessed or experienced bullying in their school environment. The recruitment process involved reaching out directly to the school to identify and invite teachers who had relevant experiences with bullying. This approach ensured that the selected participants could provide in-depth and contextually rich insights into the impact of bullying on learners. All participants were informed about the study's objectives and provided their voluntary, informed consent.

Phase 2

Three workshops were conducted to help the participants understand what was expected. In the first workshop, an overview of the study and its objectives was provided, along with a detailed explanation of the visual tools to be used. The second workshop focused on guiding the teachers through the process of creating their drawings and collages, offering practical tips and support. The third workshop was dedicated to interpreting and discussing the visuals, helping participants articulate their insights and experiences related to bullying. This series of workshops ensured that teachers were well-prepared and fully engaged in the research process.

3.7 Data generation methods

Data generation methods refer to various techniques employed to collect and analyse data for research purposes. These methods include both quantitative approaches, such as surveys and experiments, and qualitative approaches, such as interviews and observations (Creswell, 2018). The following methods were used to generate data:

3.7.1 Collage

The word "collage" comes from the French coller which refers to the cutting and sticking of objects onto a flat surface (Butler-Kisber & Poldma, 2010). collages are a valuable qualitative research method that combines various materials such as images, text, and drawings to allow participants to express and explore complex experiences. In this study collage was chosen to address the question of teachers' understanding of bullying and the factors contributing to it because it allows for a multi-dimensional representation of these complex issues. For understanding bullying, collages provided teachers with creative ideas to visually represent their perceptions of different types of bullying such as physical, verbal, and relational by using various materials and images that symbolise these experiences. This approach facilitated a comprehensive depiction of how bullying is perceived and its impacts on learners. For exploring the factors contributing to bullying, collages enabled teachers to assemble visual elements representing various influences such as classroom dynamics, peer relationships, and

family backgrounds. By visually organising these factors, collages helped to illustrate how they interact and contribute to bullying, offering a clearer understanding of the underlying causes.

3.7.2 Drawing

According to Vince and Warren (2012), drawings are a visual participatory method that allows participants to express and explore their perceptions and experiences in a nuanced way. Teachers created collages to explore their understanding of bullying and the factors contributing to it. They used collages to visually represent their perceptions of various types of bullying, such as physical, verbal, and relational, through images and materials that symbolised these experiences. This method allowed them to depict the emotional and psychological impacts of bullying on learners in a comprehensive manner. Equally important, teachers assembled collages to illustrate the factors contributing to bullying, including classroom dynamics, peer relationships, and family backgrounds. By visually organising these elements, the collages provided a clear depiction of how different factors interacted and contributed to bullying in primary schools.

Table 3.1: The table showing the data generation methods

Source: Author

Research Question	Data generation activities	Participants	Data Sources
What are the teachers' understanding of bullying in a primary school?	Collage was used to visually represent different types of bullying and teachers' perceptions of bullying through various materials and images.	Teachers and I created a collage.	Transcription of collages.

What are the factors that contribute to bullying in primary schools?	Collage was used to visually represent factors contributing to bullying in primary schools by allowing teachers to assemble materials and images that symbolise influences such as family issues.	Teachers and I created a collage.	Transcription of collages.
How do teachers support learners who are bullied in a particular primary school?	Drawings were used to explore how teachers support learners who are bullied in a particular primary school.	Teachers and I created drawings	Transcription of drawings.

3.8 Data analysis

Lochmiller and Lester (2017) describe data analysis in qualitative research as the process of examining non-numeric information to uncover patterns, themes, and meanings. This analysis

approach can differ depending on the methodology, theoretical framework, and research tradition used. For instance, thematic analysis involves systematically identifying and organising themes within the data to understand collective meanings and experiences. In contrast, content analysis focuses on categorising and quantifying content to identify patterns. The selection of a particular method is guided by the study's objectives and the nature of the data, ensuring that the analysis aligns with research goals and yields insightful results.

In this study, thematic analysis was used to analyse data collected from collages and drawings. The process involved familiarising oneself with the visual data, which included elements such as images of learners in distress, symbols of isolation such as empty seats or groups excluding others, and representations of aggressive behaviour. Specific codes were developed for various types of bullying depicted, including physical bullying such as drawings of learners fighting, verbal bullying such as speech bubbles with hurtful comments, and relational bullying such as images of exclusion. These codes were organised into broader themes: types of bullying, capturing the different forms of bullying; contributing factors, highlighting elements such as classroom dynamics, peer pressure, and family issues; and support strategies, depicting methods such as teacher interventions, anti-bullying programmes, and counselling. The themes were reviewed to ensure they accurately reflected the data, and the findings were integrated into the research narrative to address the study's questions about bullying among learners.

3.9 Trustworthiness

The degree to which a study can yield the same results or conclusions if it is repeated using the same people, in similar conditions, and with the same research methods is known as dependability, (Bradshaw & Stratford, 2010). According to Guest et al. (2012), reliability revolves around providing accurate and straightforward information regarding the study. This study began with clearly stated research questions and provided explanations of the research strategy and analysis to ensure reliability. In addition, rather than highlighting the traits and inclinations of the researcher, this study's descriptions of the findings reflect how the participants described the phenomenon they studied. To receive ethical approval from the institution and participant consent, the study also took ethical considerations into account, which are crucial in qualitative research.

3.9.1 Credibility

According to Cope (2014), one of the main indicators of the reliability of participant original data in qualitative research is its credibility. Credibility indicates that the research was conducted in a way that accurately recognised and reported the phenomenon (Guest, MacQueen, and Namey, 2012). Credibility was ensured by allowing participants to use collages and drawings to express their experiences of bullying, followed by individual discussions to verify that the visual data accurately captured and represented their perspectives.

3.9.2 Confirmability

A measurement of confirmability is how strongly the generated data supports the research findings (Cope, 2014). Gunawan (2015) states that for research to be considered reliable, participants must attest to the findings as accurate representations of their responses following the use of multiple data creation techniques which lessens the impact of the bias in the research. Confirmability was ensured by validating the teachers' experiences through member checking, where participants reviewed and confirmed that their collages and drawings accurately reflected their responses.

3.9.3 Dependability

The degree to which a study can yield the same results or conclusions if it is repeated using the same people, in similar conditions, and with the same research methods is known as dependability, (Bradshaw & Stratford,2010). According to Guest et al. (2012), reliability revolves around providing accurate and straightforward information regarding the study. This study began with clearly stated research questions and provided explanations of the research strategy and analysis to ensure reliability. To ensure dependability, the data collection process, including the use of collages and drawings, was documented in detail, allowing for the study to be replicated under similar conditions with comparable results.

3.9.4 Transferability

Transferability is the extent to which the findings of the study can be applied or transferred outside of the setting of the project being studied (Houghton et al., 2013). To ensure transferability, this study gave sufficient information about the research context. This was done to assist the reader in determining whether the current setting is comparable to another scenario that they are familiar with and if the results remain true in the alternative context (Gunawan, 2015). Transferability was supported by providing rich descriptions of the context in which the collages and drawings were created, enabling readers to assess the applicability of the findings to other educational settings.

3.10 Ethical considerations

In this project on bullying in schools, ethical clearance was obtained from the UKZN ethical office to ensure that the study adhered to research standards. One key ethical consideration involved ensuring informed consent from the participating teachers, so they fully understood the purpose of the study and their role in it. I needed to guarantee confidentiality, protecting the identities of both the teachers and their schools. Another important consideration was ensuring that the teachers felt no pressure to alter their views or depictions of bullying due to any potential power dynamics or relationships within the school environment. Lastly, I was mindful of ensuring that participation was voluntary, allowing teachers to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence.

3.11 Chapter summary

This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the research on bullying in primary schools, detailing the study's design, methodology, and ethical considerations. It highlights the critical need for understanding and addressing bullying, given its widespread impact globally and locally. The chapter describes the use of a qualitative case study approach and interpretive paradigm, which were chosen to explore teachers' subjective experiences and perceptions in depth. Through visual participatory methods, specifically collages and drawings, the study aimed to gain nuanced insights into the nature of bullying, its contributing factors, and the

strategies teachers employ to support affected learners. The chapter also addresses the processes for ensuring the study's trustworthiness and the ethical considerations upheld throughout the research. Overall, it underscores the importance of this research in informing effective interventions and strategies to create safer and more supportive educational environments for learners.

Chapter 4

Data Presentation, Analysis, and Discussion of Findings

4.1 Introduction

This research study employed a visual participatory approach to explore teachers' understanding of bullying in public primary schools. It examines the factors contributing to its prevalence and the support mechanisms available for bullied learners. Using drawings and collages, teachers expressed their perceptions and experiences in a creative insightful manner. These data generation methods not only allow for a deeper and more nuanced exploration of bullying dynamics but also facilitate a richer understanding of the support strategies employed by teachers. By analysing these visual representations, the study aims to uncover key factors influencing bullying and enhance strategies for creating a safer and more supportive educational environment. This chapter provides data presentation, analysis and the discussion of findings. It briefly discusses the key research findings. Later, the chapter presents the critical research questions and discusses the themes that emerged from the data collected.

4.2 Research findings

The findings of this study provide insights into teachers' perceptions of bullying and their approaches to supporting bullied learners. Together with other five teachers, I engaged in a creative, participatory process involving collages and drawings to visually represent teachers' collaborative understanding of bullying in schools. Through these visual methods, we explored the teachers' experiences and strategies for identifying, addressing, and mitigating bullying, highlighting their commitment to fostering a safe and supportive school environment for all learners.

4.3 Presenting and analysing data

Teachers collaboratively shared their understanding of bullying within primary school settings and the factors contributing to it. Teachers view bullying as a multifaceted issue involving various forms of harm, including physical, verbal, and emotional abuse (Smith et al., 2016).

They creatively used different images to illustrate their experiences where learners engage in verbal bullying. In certain situations, learners shout at others in ways that clearly cause discomfort. Moreover, teachers witnessed physical bullying with scenes of learners fighting both in the classroom and on the playground. In some instances, older learners bully younger learners, underscoring the power imbalances that frequently occur in schools. Different types of bullying lead to significant emotional struggles (Crick & Grotpeter, 2014), as represented in the collage in Figure 1 below. There are cases where some learners appear isolated, walking alone and reflecting signs of loneliness as presented in the collage that the teachers created together as seen below.

The data was analysed using thematic analysis, a qualitative method that identifies and interprets patterns within the data. This approach allowed for a comprehensive understanding of teachers' perceptions of bullying, the factors contributing to it, and the support mechanisms they employ for affected learners. By systematically coding the data and organising it into themes, the analysis revealed key insights into the multifaceted nature of bullying in primary schools and the challenges teachers face in addressing it (Braun et al., 2016).

The collages created by teachers illustrate their attitudes towards bullying, reflecting their recognition of its seriousness and the empathy they feel for victims, which aligns with the Theory of Planned Behaviour. These visual representations underscore the subjective norms within the school environment, demonstrating the collective understanding among teachers regarding the importance of addressing bullying effectively. According to TPB, there is a certain sequence where individual factors affect humans' attitudes toward behaviour, their subjective norms, and their perceived behavioural control. Subsequently, these factors such as subjective norms influence someone's intention of behaviour and finally ends in the display of actual behaviour (Ajzen, 2012).

4.3.1 What are the teachers' understanding of bullying in a primary school?

In response to the first critical question, four themes emerged illustrated teachers' perspectives on the manifestations and complexities of bullying in a primary school setting.
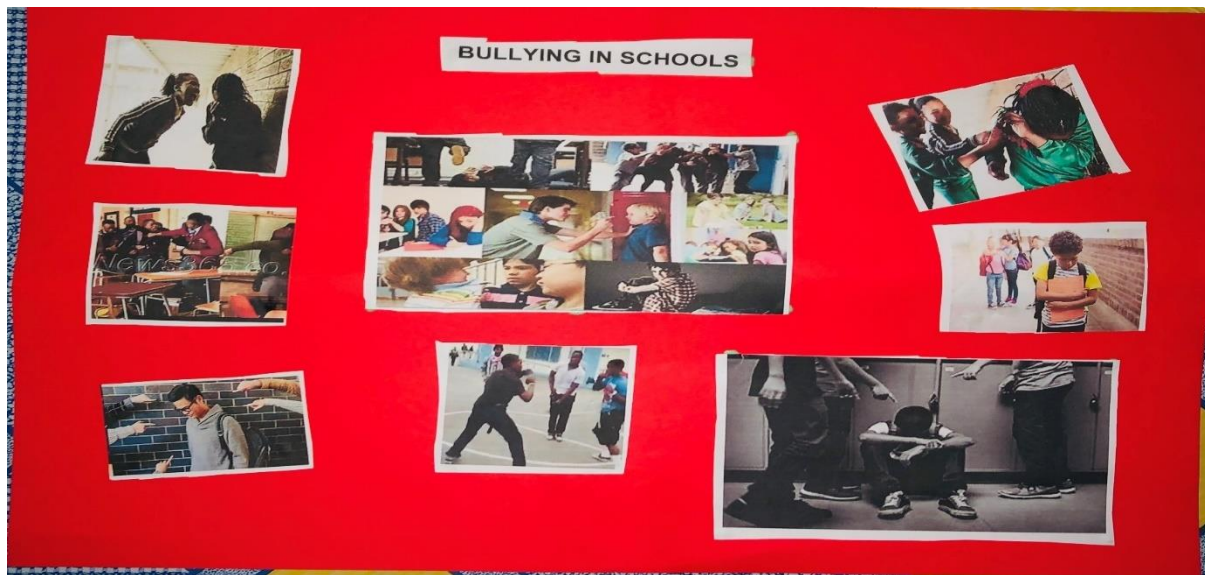
Figure 4.1: Collage

Source: Author

4.3.1.1 Theme 1: Multifaceted Nature of Bullying

The findings revealed that teachers perceive bullying as a complex issue involving various forms of harm, including physical, verbal, and emotional abuse. This aligns with findings by Saldiraner and Gizir (2021), who argues that teachers recognise bullying as a multifaceted issue involving diverse forms of harm, including physical, verbal, and emotional abuse. The collage in Figure 1 illustrates different manifestations, highlighting that bullying encompasses not only visible acts of aggression but also subtle emotional manipulation. For instance, the collages depict learners shouting at one another, which exemplifies verbal bullying, as well as scenes showing learners in distress, emphasising the emotional impact. All teachers, as depicted in Figure 1, shared similar perspectives, showing that while physical bullying is alarming, the lasting effects of verbal and emotional bullying often cause deeper emotional harm. Teachers used different images showing different types of bullying, highlighting that it is not limited to physical acts but also includes emotional and verbal abuse, which can be equally damaging.

4.3.1.2 Theme 2: Power Imbalances

A significant insight is that teachers recognise bullying as often rooted in power imbalances within the school (Rigby, 2014). Figure 4.1 shows scenarios of dominant learners exerting

control over younger or more vulnerable peers, including illustrations of older learners intimidating younger ones. This dynamic is depicted through images of learners pushing or excluding others, which reinforces the need for strategies that empower all learners to help balance these dynamics. Teachers used these images to represent the societal hierarchies within the school environment, encouraging discussions on how to address and mitigate these power dynamics.

4.3.1.3 Theme 3: Verbal Bullying and Its Effects

The prevalence of verbal bullying was a notable finding, with teachers emphasising common behaviours like name-calling and teasing in primary schools. According to Ariyanti (2024), verbal bullying is a deviant behaviour that is common in primary schools. Figure 1 shows scenarios where learners experience relentless verbal attacks targeting their appearance or abilities, illustrated by pictures of learners being mocked. This behaviour not only harms self-esteem but also fosters an atmosphere of fear and anxiety among learners. As shown in the collage, one learner in a green uniform is seen name-calling another learner while another learner is visibly crying. This image illustrates instances of verbal bullying, highlighting the emotional distress experienced by targeted learners. Teachers used these images to convey the harmful effects of verbal attacks, fostering empathy among teachers towards affected learners.

4.3.1.4 Theme 4: Emotional Consequences

The emotional consequences of bullying emerged prominently, as teachers emphasised the profound psychological impact on victims. According to Piñuel and Oñate (2008), "those affected by bullying may experience a variety of negative emotions, such as anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and feelings of loneliness" (p. 73). Figure 4.1 depicts learners feeling isolated and fearful, illustrated by an image of a learner walking alone, holding an exercise which symbolises his loneliness. These illustrations reflect how the emotional toll of bullying can hinder academic performance and social engagement, leading to anxiety and withdrawal from school activities. Teachers used this image to illustrate the emotional consequences of loneliness and stress, as it depicts a learner who feels isolated and on the verge of tears.

4.3.2 What are the factors that contribute to bullying in primary schools?

In response to the second critical question, three themes emerged, as captured in Figure 1, the teachers' observations about the contributing factors to bullying in primary schools.

4.3.2.1 Theme 1: Lack of Supervision During Break Times

One significant factor contributing to bullying is the lack of supervision during break times. Teachers observed that unsupervised breaks frequently become hotspots for bullying, with vulnerable learners targeted without adult intervention. According to Salgado et al. (2020), a lack of adult supervision in schools makes it easier for bullying to occur, as there is no one to step in Figure 1 where learners play without supervision, illustrating how crucial adult presence is for maintaining a safe environment. Teachers used this image to visualise the environment that enables bullying, giving a clear contrast between spaces with and without supervision, Highlighting the need for adult presence to maintain a safe environment, and helping readers understand that supervision directly impacts learner safety.

4.3.2.2 Theme 2: Insufficient Enforcement of Anti-Bullying Policies

Another critical factor is the inconsistent enforcement of anti-bullying provisions within the South African Schools Act (1996). Teachers expressed concerns that, while schools may have policies, they are often applied inconsistently. This inconsistency, they observed, confuses learners about the consequences of bullying, allowing the behaviour to continue. Research by Gaffney, Ttofi, and Farrington (2021) reinforces the necessity of both clear policies and their consistent enforcement for effective bullying prevention. Figure 4.1 reflects teachers' frustrations over the lack of resources and training necessary to manage bullying incidents effectively, highlighted by images depicting teachers struggling to intervene in bullying situations. Teachers used this image to illustrate the disconnect between policy and practice, helping readers understand the emotional toll on teachers who feel unsupported.

4.3.2.3 Theme 3: Lack of Teacher Training and Resources

Teachers also identified the lack of training and resources as a significant issue in handling bullying. Many teachers feel underprepared to manage bullying effectively, which can lead to

a school culture where bullying behaviours persist. According to Salgado et al. (2020), teachers often lack the necessary knowledge and training to effectively respond to bullying. The desire for professional development and support is evident in Figure 4.1, where teachers expressed the need for training to address bullying proactively, illustrated by images of teachers attending workshops and seeking guidance. Teachers used this image to visualise the gap in professional support, showcasing that teacher are willing to learn but lack the necessary opportunities and resources.

4.3.3 How do teachers support learners who are bullied in a particular primary school?

In response to the third critical question, teachers' methods of supporting bullied learners are presented through three main themes, as included in Figure 4. 2 below.
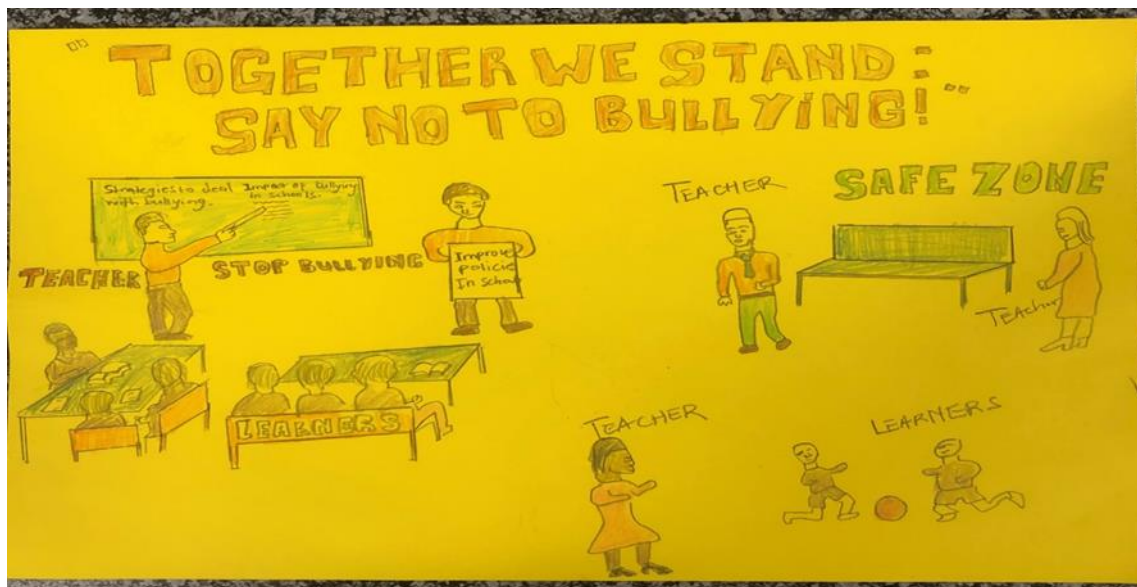

Figure 4. 2: Drawings

Source: Author

One drawing above shows a teacher conducting an anti-bullying workshop, educating learners on the impact of bullying and strategies to prevent it. This workshop activity, featured in Figure 4. 2, promotes empathy and positive interactions among learners, illustrating the importance of standing against bullying. The title of the drawings, *Together We Stand: Say No to Bullying*, reflects the teachers' commitment to ending bullying in the school. Another drawing highlights a safe space, marked "Safe Zone," where teachers are present to provide a sense of refuge and

support for learners experiencing bullying, showing that teachers actively create protected areas for those in need. Equally important, a scene in Figure 2 shows a teacher guiding learners during a soccer game, underscoring teachers' proactive role in monitoring playgrounds and encouraging positive behaviour, thereby reducing opportunities for bullying.

The drawings depict the proactive measures teachers implement, showcasing their perceived behavioural control in managing challenging situations as they feel equipped to foster a safe and supportive environment. According to the Theory of Planned Behaviour, these visuals highlight the influence of subjective norms, as teachers engage in anti-bullying workshops, reflecting the expectations from their colleagues and the school community to act against the issue.

4.3.3.1 Theme 1: Implementation of Preventive Strategies

Teachers actively conducted anti-bullying workshops to educate learners on the impact of bullying and promote positive interactions. Figure 2 includes scenes from these workshops, where learners engage in discussions and role-playing activities aimed at building empathy and understanding. The title "*Together We Stand: Say No to Bullying*" prominently featured in Figure 4. 2, reinforces teachers' commitment to ending bullying in schools and highlights the collaborative effort to create a culture of respect. Teachers used these drawings to emphasise teachers' active role in fostering a respectful culture and educating learners about the effects of bullying. The title teachers used in these drawings, "*Together We Stand: Say No to Bullying*," reinforces a sense of unity and collective action, appealing visually to the idea that all members of the school community have a role in combating bullying.

4.3.3.2 Theme 2: Creation of Safe Spaces

To provide immediate support for bullied learners, teachers established "*Safe Zones*" within the school where learners could seek refuge when feeling threatened or anxious. Figure 2 depicts teachers standing at designated safe spaces, clearly labelled as "*Safe Zone*," which are staffed by trained educators ready to offer guidance and emotional support. These spaces ensure that bullied learners have a safe place to regroup before rejoining their classes, fostering

a more inclusive environment. Teachers used this drawing to convey the school's commitment to creating safe, accessible areas for learners, which reflects a structured, intentional effort to make the school environment more inclusive.

4.3.3.3 Theme 3: Guidance During Play and Break Times

Teachers also provided support by actively supervising learners in playgrounds to prevent bullying incidents. Figure 4.2 shows scenes of teachers guiding learners during play, such as a teacher overseeing a soccer game, indicating their efforts to create a safe and structured environment during breaks. This active supervision helps prevent bullying and promotes inclusive interactions among learners, contributing to a positive school climate. Teachers used this drawing to visualise their presence or the value of guidance during play, helping prevent bullying incidents. This drawing also indicates a supportive, attentive school climate where teachers are engaged in nurturing positive social interactions, contributing to a safer and more cohesive school environment.

4.4 Discussion of Findings

In this study, I collaborated with five teachers to create collages and drawings that illustrate the understanding of bullying in schools. This creative process revealed that teachers perceive bullying as a multifaceted issue involving physical, verbal, and emotional harm. The collages serve as an effective method for sharing understandings, allowing individuals to visually represent complex ideas and experiences, thereby fostering deeper engagement with the subject matter (Simmons & Daley, 2013).

According to the collages in Figure 4.1, teachers highlighted that bullying is often rooted in power imbalances, where dominant learners use their influence to control or intimidate others. For instance, the collages depicted scenarios of older or stronger learners using physical threats or coercion to dominate younger learners. Other teachers focused on verbal bullying, illustrating common situations in primary schools where learners experience teasing or name-calling, often targeting their appearance or abilities. These collages emphasised how constant verbal attacks can damage a learner's self-esteem and create an atmosphere of fear and

isolation. This insight underscores the variety of bullying behaviours prevalent in primary schools, ranging from physical intimidation to emotional harm through verbal abuse.

Understanding the dynamics of bullying in primary schools reveals several critical factors that contribute to its prevalence. One major factor identified by teachers is the lack of supervision during break times. This unmonitored period often becomes a breeding ground for bullying, as vulnerable learners are targeted without adult intervention. As shown in the collages, scenes of learners playing without guidance highlight the essential role of adult presence in creating a safe environment. Teachers expressed concern that, in the absence of vigilant supervision, aggressive behaviours can escalate quickly, leaving victims feeling isolated and unprotected.

Another significant factor noted was the insufficient enforcement of the South African Schools Act (1996), particularly regarding its anti-bullying provisions. Although many schools have policies designed to combat bullying, teachers pointed out that these policies are often inconsistently implemented, leading to confusion among learners about the consequences of their actions. Gaffney, Ttofi, and Farrington (2021) argue that effective school-based programs require not only the establishment of clear policies but also their consistent enforcement to truly reduce bullying perpetration and victimisation. Additionally, teachers reported feeling inadequately trained to handle bullying incidents effectively, perpetuating a culture where such behaviours are tolerated. The need for comprehensive training and clearer guidelines was a recurring theme in the collages, with teachers seeking more resources and support to adopt a proactive approach to addressing bullying in their classrooms.

In this research employing visual participatory methods, I also worked with teachers to create drawings that illustrate their experiences supporting bullied learners, showcasing various interventions they employed to cultivate a safe and nurturing environment. These drawings, represented in Figure 4. 2, depict strategies such as implementing anti-bullying workshops, promoting peer mediation, and establishing safe zones where learners can seek refuge. The emphasis on safe zones in the drawings indicates that teachers actively create protected spaces for learners to regroup and receive support when facing bullying. This visual representation facilitated a meaningful form of communication, enabling teachers to articulate their thoughts and feelings regarding their interventions.

Moreover, the drawings highlight teachers' proactive efforts to stop bullying, such as overseeing learners during playtime and fostering positive interactions among them. This commitment to active supervision is crucial, as it helps reduce bullying and encourages a more inclusive environment. The drawings also served as a therapeutic outlet, helping teachers reflect on their experiences and validate their efforts. Through these visuals, they identified patterns and themes related to bullying, which will guide their future interventions.

Smith et al. (2018) note that many teachers viewed bullying primarily as an individual behaviour and an interpersonal conflict among learners, focusing on direct forms of aggression like physical and verbal abuse. This perspective applies to the school where I conducted this study, where teachers frequently highlighted specific incidents, such as a learner repeatedly calling another derogatory name or pushing them on the playground, as clear examples of bullying that required immediate attention. However, this view may overlook broader systemic issues contributing to bullying, such as the overall school climate and inadequate support systems (Smith et al., 2018). Recognising and addressing these factors is crucial for fostering a safer and more inclusive environment for all learners in our school.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter presented findings based on the data from teachers using a visual participatory approach to explore bullying in primary schools. The theoretical framework of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) was instrumental in analysing the data, as it allowed for a deeper understanding of the attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control influencing teachers' responses to bullying. The findings indicate that teachers recognise the multifaceted nature of bullying, acknowledge the importance of empowering learners, and highlight the need for supportive interventions, ultimately reinforcing the TPB's relevance in shaping effective anti-bullying strategies. In the next chapter, I will address the concluding discussions and provide recommendations based on the findings of this research.

Chapter 5

Conclusion, Discussion, and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

The study explored teachers' understanding of bullying and the support they provide to learners affected by it in a public primary school in Mtubatuba, KwaZulu-Natal. It focuses on teachers' perspectives, their strategies for preventing and addressing bullying, and the underlying factors that contribute to learners being targeted. The goal is to find solutions to help bullied learners, with an emphasis on the role of teachers in offering support and implementing interventions.

The major themes of this study were all covered and presented in the preceding chapter. The present study encompasses the subsequent elements: the objectives and goals of the study, research questions, and an overview of the results followed by the limitations of the study. Lastly, this section states the need for further research, and possible recommendations to the issue and ends with a conclusion.

5.2 Discussion of findings

The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' understanding of bullying and how they support learners affected by it in a primary school setting. The study was guided by three research questions: *What are teachers' understandings of bullying in a primary school? What factors contribute to bullying in primary schools? And how do teachers support learners who are bullied in a particular primary school?* The use of collages and drawings as visual participatory methods revealed several key insights. Teachers identified bullying as a multifaceted issue that includes physical, verbal, and emotional abuse, with the emotional impact often being the most damaging (Smith et al., 2016). Teachers highlighted power imbalances as a common factor in bullying, where dominant learners target vulnerable peers, while others focused on verbal bullying, such as name-calling and teasing, which harms self-esteem and fosters fear (Crick & Grotpeter, 2014).

A lack of supervision during break times was seen as a significant factor contributing to bullying, as these unmonitored periods often become opportunities for aggressive behaviour to

occur without adult intervention. According to Salgado et al. (2020), a lack of adult supervision in schools makes it easier for bullying to occur, as there is no one to step in. Teachers also pointed to the inconsistent enforcement of anti-bullying policies as a concern, noting that the South African Schools Act (1996) provisions are not always applied effectively. Equally important, teachers expressed a need for more training and resources to manage bullying incidents, which they believe could help prevent a culture of tolerance towards such behaviours.

To support bullied learners, teachers implemented preventive strategies, such as anti-bullying workshops that promote empathy and positive behaviour. Teachers also created safe spaces within the school, where learners could seek emotional support and protection from bullying. The study highlights the importance of consistent adult presence, clear policies, and teacher training in addressing bullying in primary schools.

In relation to previous research, these findings echo the work of Gaffney, Ttofi, and Farrington (2021), who argue that consistent anti-bullying policies and active enforcement are critical to reducing bullying behaviour. Teachers in this study highlighted that while policies are often in place, inconsistent enforcement leads to confusion among learners regarding consequences. This inconsistency seems to foster an environment where bullying behaviours persist, suggesting the current policy framework requires reinforcement through regular training and clearer guidelines. Furthermore, teachers focused on contributing factors that exacerbate bullying in their schools, such as lack of supervision during break times, which often allows vulnerable learners to be targeted without adult intervention. This observation resonates with findings by Smith et al. (2018), who note that teachers frequently perceive bullying as an interpersonal conflict while overlooking systemic issues, such as the overall school climate and inadequate support systems.

The study is underpinned by the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), which highlights how teachers' attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control shape their intentions to foster supportive environments for learners. This theoretical framework provides a comprehensive understanding of the motivating factors behind proactive measures against bullying. Furthermore, the research emphasises the urgent need for schools to invest in comprehensive training and resources to empower teachers in implementing effective anti-bullying strategies. Enhancing positive attitudes and reinforcing supportive norms within the

school culture can increase teachers' confidence and ability to address bullying effectively. Ultimately, addressing the constructs outlined in the TPB may contribute to establishing safer and more inclusive school environments, benefiting all learners.

5.3 Limitations of the study

This study on teachers' understanding of bullying and their support for affected learners faced several limitations that impacted the research process. One significant challenge was time constraints. The limited timeframe for data collection made it difficult to arrange consistent meetings with teachers, as they often had busy schedules. To mitigate this, I prioritised flexibility in scheduling interviews, offering both in-person and online options to accommodate their availability. I conducted sessions during teachers' free periods or after school hours, ensuring I could gather the necessary insights without adding to their workload.

Another limitation was access to participants. Some teachers were hesitant to participate due to concerns about confidentiality and the topic's sensitive nature. To address these concerns, I communicated the ethical measures to protect their anonymity and built trust through informal discussions before the study. Lastly, resource limitations posed a challenge regarding materials for visual participatory methods. I provided basic supplies for creating visual aids and encouraged teachers to use readily available resources, ensuring inclusivity and accessibility in the research process. Recognising these limitations allowed me to implement strategies that strengthened the validity of the research and provided valuable insights into the issue of bullying in primary schools.

5.4 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study regarding teachers' understanding of bullying and their support for affected learners, several recommendations can be made to enhance the effectiveness of interventions in primary schools. First, it is crucial to implement comprehensive training programmes for teachers focused on bullying prevention and intervention strategies. These programmes should include workshops that promote empathy and equip teachers with practical tools to address bullying situations effectively. Additionally,

schools should consider establishing peer support systems where students can assist one another, fostering a culture of empathy and reducing the likelihood of bullying behaviours.

Future research on bullying in primary schools should consider expanding the scope to include the perspectives of learners themselves. By exploring how learners perceive bullying and the effectiveness of teacher interventions, researchers can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play and identify areas for improvement in support strategies. Qualitative methods, such as focus groups and interviews, can provide valuable insights into learners' experiences and empower them to share their voices in the conversation about bullying.

Future studies could examine the long-term impacts of bullying interventions on both victims and perpetrators. Investigating how various strategies, such as peer support programs and anti-bullying workshops, affect learner outcomes over time would provide evidence for the most effective approaches. It may also be beneficial to explore the role of technology in both facilitating and combating bullying, particularly with the rise of cyberbullying in recent years. Overall, a multi-faceted approach that incorporates diverse perspectives and innovative methodologies will enhance the understanding of bullying in primary schools and contribute to the development of effective prevention and intervention strategies.

5.5 Conclusion

Addressing bullying in primary schools requires a collaborative effort that involves not only teachers but also learners, parents, and the broader community. By fostering open communication and understanding among all stakeholders, implementing comprehensive training for teachers, and encouraging learners to share their experiences, we can create a safer and more supportive school environment. This holistic approach is essential for effectively preventing and addressing bullying, ultimately promoting the well-being and development of all learners.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

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APPENDIX B

UNIVERSITY OF
KWAZULU-NATAL ™
INYUVESI
YAKWAZULU-NATALI

29 January 2024

Dr Visvaranie Jairam
School of Education
Edgewood Campus

Dear Dr Jairam,

Protocol Reference Number: HSS/0057/017
Project title: Collaborated understanding of context-specific psychological challenges facing South African school learners in the 21st Century: A visual participatory approach

Approval Notification – Recertification Application

Your request for Recertification dated 25 January 2024 was received.

This letter confirms that you have been granted Recertification Approval for a period of one year from the date of this letter. This approval is based strictly on the research protocol submitted and approved in 2017.

Any alteration s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study must be reviewed and approved through the amendment /modification prior to its implementation. Please quote the above reference number for all queries relating to this study.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the school/department for a period of 5 years

This approval is valid for one year: 29 January 2025.
To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,

Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

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Founding Campuses: ■ Edgewood ■ Howard College ■ Medical School ■ Pietermaritzburg ■ Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

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