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Beyond the classroom: how parents view motivation as a key to self-directed learning in township schools

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Numerous researchers have emphasized the critical role of self-directed learning (SDL) in education, particularly in township schools, where academic challenges contribute to high failure and dropout rates. Learner struggles are often associated with a lack of motivation and self-direction. In SDL, motivation is related to more than just doing well in school. It is also linked to being resilient, being able to solve problems and being able to change to different learning settings. Recent studies on academic motivation among South African learners reveal the adverse impact of low motivation on energy levels, perseverance, and the pursuit of academic goals. Research on the influence of motivation on SDL in township school contexts, particularly from the perspective of parents, is limited. In response to the imperative for lifelong learning, researchers advocate for the integration of SDL into classrooms. This research investigates the nexus between motivation and the development of self-directed learners in township secondary schools of the lower quintile. Situated within an interpretivist research paradigm, this qualitative study engages parents or legal guardians to explore their perceptions of the role of motivation in the development of learners' SDL in township schools. The study explores both internal and external motivators that influence learners' SDL skills to ensure that effective learning can take place. Using a purpose-orientated and convenient sampling, 10 parents or guardians of two schools in Gauteng were selected. Semi-structured face-to-face interviews facilitated data collection and inductive thematic analysis was used. The findings revealed that parents have high expectations of their children's academic success, believe in their children's intrinsic drive, and provide comprehensive support. However, motivation alone does not ensure SDL; rather, it must be supplemented by properly defined learning techniques, access to resources, and organized help (from parents and teachers). Hindered by factors such as late working hours and limited educational knowledge, parental involvement was limited. Teacher-learner and parent-child relationships supporting motivation for self-directedness were also lacking. These imply that to improve SDL in township schools, a comprehensive approach is important that combines parental direction, teacher participation, and learner-driven strategies. The findings of this study contribute to a broader discourse on motivation and SDL, highlighting the need for targeted interventions to support learners in township schools.

KEYWORDS

parental involvement, motivation, township schools, self-directed learning, role models

1 Introduction

The 2020 results of the National Senior Certificate, disclosed by the Minister of Basic Education, Mrs. Angie Motshekga, highlighted the substantial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on learners from school districts of the lower quintile. Numerous studies indicate that learners in poor and under-resourced educational institutions, such as community schools in South Africa, face greater challenges in achieving academic success. Problems are exacerbated when learners lack motivation to learn or do not possess adequate self-directed learning skills (Department of Basic Education (South Africa), 2021; Blignaut and du Toit-Brits, 2022; Van Zyl and Mentz, 2019). Self-directed learning is a crucial academic competency and a method of addressing structural challenges in education, such as those presented by the COVID-19 pandemic (Mahlaba, 2020), highlighting the importance of this research. These learners faced significant challenges during stringent lockdown, being forced to participate in an independent study (Mahlaba, 2020). This shift/change revealed the differences in the preparation of SDL among learners in urban and township schools, therefore, stressing the need for motivational support systems. The pandemic prompted schools to adopt remote teaching and learning, a transition that proved difficult for many township school learners, mainly due to their unfamiliarity with self-directed study methods. Consequently, this situation has reinforced the need to explore and investigate sustainable SDL interventions that can prepare township school learners for future disruptions. A considerable number of learners in lower-quintile township schools lack the essential skills for SDL, making it difficult to navigate academic tasks without direct teacher guidance. Motivation plays a crucial role in the promotion of SDL, which is essential for the academic success of learners.

This research serves as a valuable contribution to educators' understanding of motivation and SDL. While studies on learner motivation in general and SDL in higher education institutions exist (Beard and MacTavish, 2022; Bull, 2017; Conrad et al., 2020; Song and Bonk, 2016), little attention has been paid to investigating the role of motivation in nurturing self-directed learners in primary schools, specifically within lower quintile schools in townships (Yiga et al., 2019). The primary objective is to provide information on the influence of motivation on the skills of township learners on SDL, drawing perspectives from parents or legal guardians. In doing so, this research article aims to contribute valuable information that can assist the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in formulating effective strategies to encourage and support learners. Furthermore, it seeks to educate parents and legal guardians about the pivotal role of motivation in nurturing the growth of self-directed learners. Ultimately, this study aims to be instrumental in the cultivation of self-directed skills among township learners, fostering an environment that facilitates their academic success and personal development.

2 Background and problem statement

Geduld (2017, p. 6) notes that learners from low socio-economic backgrounds, predominantly represented in township schools, often lack positive role models who exemplify self-directedness and emphasize the value of education. The lack of parental and institutional support could cause learners to lose interest in learning activities

(Nasri, 2019; Herawati et al., 2024). There has to be more research done on SDL's role in desire. There is a lack of research on the importance of motivation in low-income neighborhoods where learners learn on their own (Du Plessis and Mestry, 2019; Yiga et al., 2019; Zhu, 2022). It is important to understand how the learning environment, both at home and in school, influences motivation to learn and the capacity for independent study. This absence of role models, combined with limited exposure to SDL, hinders the ability of learners to perceive education as a transformative path beyond their socioeconomic limitations (Nasri, 2019). In the South African context, where inequalities persist, the lack of role models for SDL can contribute to a cycle of educational disengagement. Mahlaba (2020) observed that learners in lower-quintile schools struggle to adapt to university systems and embrace SDL. This transition challenge highlights the importance of developing SDL skills at the foundational school level to ensure a smoother academic progression and transition.

Township school learners often exhibit lower levels of motivation and SDL skills due to a lack of exposure to self-directed behavior modeled by teachers, parents, or legal guardians (Zhu, 2022; Mokoena, 2022). Mokoena (2022) further illustrates the challenges that township schools face in fostering self-directed and motivated learners. These difficulties contribute to low motivation and insufficient SDL skills, negatively impacting learners' academic progress and potentially leading to demoralization (Riaan, 2018). Given the difficulties presented in the background, it is essential to investigate how motivation affects learners' potential for autonomous learning. To bridge this gap, stakeholders must identify strategies that not only improve motivation but also equip learners with SDL skills.

3 Self-directed learning

The concept of SDL has historical roots dating back to 1800 in England, where terms such as self-help, self-education, and self-improvement were commonly used. According to Collier (2022a, 2022b) and Houle's (1961) publication, *The Enquiring Mind*, played a crucial role in bringing the concept of self-directed learning to the forefront. However, the current definition of SDL extends beyond adult education and now includes strategies for school learners, especially in marginalized communities. Although Houle did not frequently use the term SDL in his book, his definition laid the foundation for considering SDL a legitimate form of adult education (Collier, 2022a). The work of Houle (1961) paved the way for the term SDL. To gain a comprehensive understanding of SDL, influential research has been conducted by various scholars, including Knowles (1975), Tough (1966, 1968, 1979, 1982), Hiemstra (1976, 1982, 2002, 2011), Guglielmino et al. (2001), Guglielmino and Hillard (2007), Guglielmino (1978, 1991, 1996, 1997, 2013), Houle (1961), Durr (1991), Kop and Fournier (2011), and Douglas and Morris (2014), among others. Although SDL has been defined in various ways, this research adopts the well-known definition provided by Knowles (1975). According to Knowles, SDL is a process in which "individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes" (Knowles, 1975, p. 18). SDL is essential for learners to acquire essential skills. For township school learners, SDL is not just a learning

approach, but a means of survival to overcome socio-economic and educational barriers. Research by [Du Toit-Brits \(2019\)](#), [Morris \(2019\)](#), and [Robinson and Persky \(2020\)](#) emphasizes the need for the implementation of the SDL in education to prepare learners for lifelong SDL, crucial beyond secondary school. The research on the importance of [Mahlaba \(2020\)](#) SDL in South Africa during the COVID-19 pandemic further underscores its significance. According to [Mahlaba \(2020\)](#), self-directed learners perceive learning as a way of life and a survival mechanism, making any change in their normal learning space challenging but manageable ([Murniati et al., 2022](#)).

[Merriam et al. \(2007\)](#) outline three main SDL goals. First, to foster transformational learning, emphasize critical reflection as an intrinsic component of SDL that leads to transformational learning ([Gibbons, 2020](#)). Second, to promote the liberation of learning and social action as integral to SDL. Third, to improve the determination of learners in their studies. These goals are crucial for learners in township schools to set their own goals, formulate their learning paths, and learn independently. Critical reflection supports the second and third goals and is essential for transformational learning ([Gibbons, 2020](#)). The work of [Freire \(2005\)](#) also aligns with the idea that SDL and critical reflection empower learners to equip themselves and take positive actions. Problem-based education that recognizes the true components of SDL is vital to promote self-determination and self-direction, ultimately leading to transformational learning ([Blignaut et al., 2023](#)).

Furthermore, transformational learning and critical reflection enhance and support the second and third goals ([Merriam et al., 2007](#)). These goals, outlined by [Merriam et al. \(2007\)](#), are crucial for developing SDL in township learners, as they contribute to fostering, liberating, and intensifying learners' abilities to be self-directed. [Merriam et al. \(2012\)](#) categorize learning into five approaches: cognitivist, humanist, constructivist, behaviorist, and social learning. Among these, the cognitive and constructivist approaches are related to SDL. In the cognitivist approach, learners develop critical thinking, creative thinking, self-awareness, and self-monitoring, improving their learning styles. The constructivist approach, according to [Merriam et al. \(2012\)](#), emphasizes SDL as one of its most significant features. [Malison and Thammakoranonta \(2018\)](#) identify key characteristics suitable for self-directed learners, including the ability to apply knowledge in real life, critical thinking, and accountability for their learning ([Murniati et al., 2022](#)). [Suknaisith \(2014\)](#) adds that self-directed learners are independent thinkers. They perceive learning as an integral aspect of life and development, not restricted to specific periods. [Timpau \(2015\)](#) highlights the importance of SDL in cultivating independent thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills, especially in the 21st century. SDL plays a crucial role in teaching learners how to acquire knowledge independently ([Loeng, 2020](#); [Timpau, 2015](#)).

3.1 The importance of self-directed learning for township learners

Self-directed learning has been a subject of increasing interest in recent years, and the COVID-19 pandemic has underscored its critical importance in education. [Mahlaba \(2020\)](#) contends that the pandemic has introduced numerous disruptions to people's lives, compelling those in the education sector, particularly South African learners and

learners, to rely on their capabilities. Given the socio-economic difficulties encountered by township schools, having the ability to participate in SDL is not only beneficial but also essential for overcoming systemic educational hurdles. Remote learning, an unfamiliar concept for many, became a necessity during the pandemic and [Mahlaba \(2020\)](#) suggests that without SDL skills, learners would have struggled to adapt to this new mode of learning ([Blignaut and du Toit-Brits, 2022](#); [Loeng, 2020](#)). [Mahlaba \(2020\)](#) further reveals that the lack of SDL skills posed a significant challenge for both learners and teachers during the pandemic, emphasizing the crucial role of SDL in navigating unexpected disruptions in education. After the pandemic, SDL is essential to equip township learners with the skills needed for higher education and to adapt to future career changes in a constantly changing job market.

In SDL, the onus of learning rests with the learner rather than the teacher ([Mahlaba, 2020](#)), shifting the focus to empowering learners in the educational process. [Van Zyl and Mentz \(2019\)](#) highlight SDL as an essential skill for 21st-century learners, emphasizing the need for deeper learning, competence in interpersonal and intrapersonal domains, and adaptability to various learning modalities, including remote and online learning. The ability to adapt is especially important for township learners, who may have restricted access to formal learning environments and need to develop independence in their educational pathways. [Van Zyl and Mentz \(2019\)](#) stress that strong SDL competencies enable learners to unlock their full learning potential. However, motivation acts as an intermediary in facilitating learners' successful engagement with SDL techniques, necessitating the investigation of methods to enhance both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators within township educational settings. SDL is considered a vital skill in the modern world, where individuals must take charge of their learning, adapt to change, and plan their educational journey in digital environments ([Brandt, 2020](#); [Murniati et al., 2022](#)).

[Van Zyl and Mentz \(2019\)](#) highlight that SDL not only enhances the confidence of the learner but also contributes to increased competency. [Long \(2000\)](#) underscored that learners are unlikely to be self-directed if they feel incompetent, emphasizing the importance of SDL in boosting learners' confidence and fostering critical and creative thinking skills. This highlights the necessity of developing SDL skills for learners, as it not only promotes academic integrity by discouraging cheating but also encourages a thorough understanding of learning activities and assignments ([Mahlaba, 2020](#)). Furthermore, [Mahlaba \(2020\)](#) argues that SDL is transformative in how learners perceive learning, helping them recognize the importance of education and, subsequently, the importance of SDL in their educational journey. Considering the widespread exclusion of digital technologies in schools in the lower quintile, it is crucial to design SDL strategies that incorporate affordable technological solutions to close the educational gap.

3.1.1 Application and relevance of self-directed learning to school learners

Although SDL was initially applied to adults, emerging evidence indicates that younger learners, particularly adolescents, may require it to a greater extent. [Mahlaba \(2020\)](#) asserts that high school learners in South Africa, especially those in rural and community schools, developed the skills required to navigate the challenges presented by COVID-19. [Blignaut et al. \(2023\)](#), [Collier \(2022a, 2022b\)](#), [Cronin-Golomb and Bauer \(2023\)](#), [Gonzalez-DeHass \(2019\)](#), [Nasri \(2019\)](#),

Robinson and Persky (2020), Sebotsa (2020), and Van Deur (2018) investigated SDL through the eyes of teacher educators and learners (primary and secondary schools). This article examines SDL from the parent's perspective, highlighting how parents view motivation as a key to self-directed learning in township schools.

3.2 The role of motivation in self-directed learning

Despite initial struggles, as learners progress into their second year of university, many begin to adapt and take responsibility for their learning. Peer influence and learning culture within universities play a crucial role in motivating these learners (Tullis and Goldstone, 2020, p. 1). This observation suggests that to develop SDL skills in township schools, learners need sustained motivation within a conducive environment and a supportive community. This underscores the importance of developing SDL readiness in schools so that learners begin higher education equipped with basic skills that facilitate autonomous learning. Township schools face numerous challenges, including insufficient resources such as books, smart boards, and computers, as well as inadequate infrastructure, including classrooms and laboratories (Geduld, 2017). These suboptimal conditions significantly dampen learners' motivation, leading to academic underperformance (Du Plessis and Mestry, 2019). Additionally, resource limitations often transfer the responsibility for learning to the family, increasing the importance of parents and guardians in cultivating SDL practices. The role of schools as learning environments cannot be overstated, as appropriate resources and infrastructure correlate with higher motivation levels (Herawati et al., 2024). A supportive and distraction-free environment stimulates the interest of learners and allows them to reach their academic potential (Labahn, 2019; Chindanya, 2020).

On the contrary, an unsupportive and discouraged learning environment negatively affects learners' academic performance. Beyond the physical learning environment, teachers, parents, and legal guardians play a crucial role in the motivation of learners (Labahn, 2019). Positive relationships between learners and teachers, together with successful strategies for classroom participation, can mitigate certain external discouragement factors in township educational settings. Unfortunately, many teachers in schools of the lower quintiles neglect to cultivate SDL skills, exacerbating the challenges of learners, including limited access to textbooks and internet connectivity (Labahn, 2019; Chang et al., 2021). Strategies that encourage teacher education in SDL facilitation methods can play a crucial role in overcoming these shortcomings.

3.2.1 Theoretical approach to motivation in this study

This article explores motivation from the perspective of self-determination theory (SDT) as proposed by Deci and Ryan (2020). SDT differentiates intrinsic motivation, which arises from inherent satisfaction, from extrinsic motivation, which is influenced by external rewards. Hafizoglu and Yerdelen (2019) demonstrated that intrinsic motivation factors significantly mediate the relationship between supportive learning environments and academic achievement in adolescents. Motivation dimensions, including intrinsic motivation (interest, enjoyment), extrinsic motivation (rewards, recognition), and psychological needs satisfaction (autonomy, competence, relatedness), are essential analytical categories in this research.

3.3 Parental participation in learning motivation and SDL

The lack of parental and teacher support significantly hinders township learners from becoming self-directed in their studies (Sebotsa, 2020). Transitioning from high school to higher education institutions requires a greater SDL, but many township learners struggle due to low motivation (Mahlaba, 2020). Fostering a supportive ecosystem that involves educators, parents, and peers is crucial to equip township learners with the skills necessary for success in higher education. However, considering the economic challenges that restrict parental participation, community-led mentoring initiatives could provide an alternative framework to support SDL.

Parental involvement is integral to the academic progress of learners (Yang et al., 2023). It manifests itself in academic and emotional support, such as helping with homework and attending school meetings (Yang et al., 2023). Gonzalez-DeHass (2019) highlights that parents and teachers play a motivational role in fostering resilience in learners when faced with challenges. Geduld (2017) emphasizes the psychological impact on learners in impoverished communities marked by crime, alcohol abuse, and lack of moral guidance, which further hinders their academic aspirations. Many township parents lack formal education, limiting their ability to provide cognitive support to learners (Bunijevac, 2017). Consequently, their educational limitations lead to minimal participation in school activities, as they lack the knowledge to assist with academic tasks (Geduld and Mdakane, 2020). Closing this gap requires organized guidance programs for parents that equip them with essential strategies to support self-directed learning. Additional barriers include high levels of noise in communities, time restrictions due to work commitments, and financial limitations that affect their ability to support their children's education (Bunijevac, 2017). Measures such as adaptable learning timelines, mobile educational apps, and self-directed learning support initiatives after school can help overcome these obstacles and increase learner motivation.

3.3.1 Dimensions of parental involvement relevant to this study

Parents' participation significantly influences both the motivation of learners and their readiness for the SDL. Epstein (2011) framework offers a comprehensive overview of various forms of engagement, emphasizing learning at home, where parents support their children's academic endeavors by helping with homework and fostering conducive learning environments. Furthermore, psychological support, including emotional encouragement and resilience development, improves learners' motivation and self-directed learning abilities, particularly in disadvantaged contexts (Geduld and Mdakane, 2020). This research specifically examines these variables to assess parental responsibilities in the educational outcomes of township learners.

3.4 The role of parental motivation in supporting their children to be self-directed learners

Bunijevac (2017) emphasizes that parental involvement extends beyond school settings, fostering a supportive learning environment at home. The Center on Education Policy (CET) (2012) highlights a strong correlation between family background

factors, such as parents' education level and income, and learner achievement. Engaged parents contribute to educational development and intrinsic motivation in learners, improving their academic success (Center on Education Policy (CET), 2012). Geduld and Mdakane (2020) note that learners acquire academic behavior and skills by observing their teachers, peers, and parents. Actions such as turning off distractions to help with homework help structure a productive learning environment. The Department of Education (South Africa) (2016) emphasizes that parental relationships and encouragement directly influence the motivation and academic performance of the learner.

Despite the benefits of parental participation, barriers such as financial restrictions, low educational attainment, and demanding schedules hinder active participation (Yang et al., 2023). Some parents refrain from participating due to negative personal experiences with education, which affects their confidence (Yang et al., 2023; Geduld and Mdakane, 2020). Schools can address these challenges by fostering open and welcoming environments where teachers support parents as partners in their children's education (Bunjijevac, 2017).

3.5 Summary and integration of the theoretical framework

This section of the article was driven by the findings of a literature review, which focused on the role of motivation in shaping learners' capacity for SDL in low-quintile secondary township schools. It laid the foundation by delving into two key motivational theories. SDT and SDL theory. Furthermore, the article explored the influence of parental motivation in supporting children's development of self-directed skills. Although indicating that ongoing work is needed to foster self-directed skills in learners, especially in low-quintile township schools, the literature also showed that achieving these skills and motivation is feasible, even if initially challenging.

4 Motivation for the study

This research serves as a valuable contribution to understanding motivation and SDL by teachers. Although there are studies on learner motivation in general and SDL in higher education institutions (Yiga et al., 2019; Yang et al., 2023; Nasri, 2019), little attention has been paid to investigating the role of motivation in nurturing self-directed learners specifically within schools of the lower quintile in townships (Yiga et al., 2019). Focused on the context of secondary schools in the lower quintile of townships, this study aims to unravel the intricate relationship between motivation and the development of SDL skills. The primary objective is to provide information on the influence of motivation on SDL skills of township learners, drawing the perspectives of parents or legal guardians. Therefore, this study explores how parental motivation contributes to the development of self-directed learning (SDL) in township schools. This is particularly relevant in the context of post-pandemic learning disruptions, where learner independence and resilience have become essential for academic success. Therefore, the purpose of the study is also to understand how parents perceive and support the development of learners' SDL and how motivation plays a key role in this support. The study

contributes to the growing field of SDL in developing contexts by investigating how parents in township schools experience and shape learner motivation.

The research objectives of this article are to:

- Investigate how parents or guardians support learners in developing SDL skills.
- Explore parents' perceptions about the influence of motivation on the SDL of learners in township schools.
- To identify how parents or legal guardians support the motivation of learners to become self-directed.

The main research question is:

How do parents perceive and support the motivation of the student in the development of self-directed learning among secondary school learners in township schools?

The research sub-questions are:

- In what ways do parents or legal guardians support their children's development of self-directed learning (SDL) skills?
- How do parents perceive the role of motivation in influencing their children's SDL in township school contexts?
- What strategies or practices do parents use to support and strengthen their children's motivation to become self-directed learners?

The study focused on secondary schools in the Sebokeng West District 8 townships in Gauteng, which face significant challenges, particularly in terms of resources and infrastructure [Department of Basic Education (South Africa), 2020]. These schools struggle due to socio-economic conditions, including high unemployment, crime, and vandalism, further exacerbating low motivation levels among learners [Department of Basic Education (South Africa), 2020]. Addressing these motivational challenges is critical to fostering SDL and improving academic outcomes in township schools.

4.1 Research design and methodology

This research adopted a qualitative research approach and a basic qualitative research design as the research strategy (Merriam et al., 2007). This approach helped to gain an understanding of how parents or guardians perceive the role of motivation in the development of self-directed learning. The research design enabled the researcher to understand the social experiences and perceptions of parents or legal guardians in the natural world and the lived context of township schools. This choice is in line with the nature of the basic qualitative research design, which explores answers to research questions by studying different social settings and understanding how the people in those settings make sense of their surroundings through social roles, rituals, and so forth (Creswell et al., 2010). In this study, a qualitative approach enabled the researchers to explore personal experiences and engagements with the phenomenon being studied. This study focusses on the lived experiences and involvement of parents. It also provides a naturalistic inquiry, which allows the study of the natural world as it unfolds naturally. The researchers chose a basic qualitative research study as a research strategy.

4.1.1 Population and sampling

The population included teachers, parents, or legal guardians of two secondary schools in Sebokeng District 8. Purpose sampling was used to select participants with direct experience related to the focus of the study. Purposive sampling ensures that participants provide relevant and experience-driven insights about motivation and SDL dynamics in township schools. The sample consisted of 10 teachers and 10 parents or legal guardians of township schools. Teachers provided information on the motivation of learners and SDL practices, while parents or guardians provided perspectives on motivational influences outside the classroom.

4.1.2 Inclusion criteria

The participants were drawn from the Sedibeng West District 8 Department of Education District. Eligible teachers were permanently appointed secondary school teachers teaching grade 10. This selection guideline guaranteed that the participating teachers had adequate experience with the educational and motivational difficulties encountered by learners in township schools. Parents or guardians had to have school-going learners in the further education and Training (FET) phase.

4.1.3 Data collection method and analysis

The data collection method used was face-to-face semi-structured individual interviews, where the participants conversationally shared their lived experiences. This method increased the credibility of the data. The researcher selected participants who were directly involved in the lives of learners and therefore had first-hand experience in teaching and learning. These were parents or legal guardians who worked with learners after school and teachers who worked with learners during school hours. This meant that parents, legal guardians, and teachers had direct or indirect involvement in the academic lives of learners. The researcher used purpose sampling to select participants. According to [Creswell et al. \(2010\)](#), purposive sampling is used in exceptional cases where a sample is selected for a specific purpose. The sample in this investigation consisted of parents or legal guardians who lived in the township.

The researcher used a face-to-face semi-structured individual interview with teachers, parents, or legal guardians as a data collection method. The purpose of using these interviews is to ensure that there is high-quality data and that researchers remain focused and understand the perceptions of the participants about SDL, where the participants had the opportunity to speak freely and explain their experiences with the phenomenon being studied. The interview guide helped the researchers prepare open questions. The researchers followed up the interview guide questions with additional questions to obtain detailed responses from the participants about their lived experiences with the research problem. The open-ended questions were guided by the research objective and the research objectives; for example, parents or guardians were asked about their perceptions of motivation influences on their children's SDL in township schools. The interviews were conducted in a secure place and at the convenience of the participants. This was done to ensure that the participants felt comfortable expressing themselves. The COVID-19 pandemic regulations were followed when interviews were conducted. Each participant was interviewed once and the interview lasted approximately 30 min. All interviews were recorded in voice with the participants' permission to ensure that information was not lost.

4.1.4 Data analysis

Data analysis in the research of this article followed an inductive content analysis process ([Elo and Kyngäs, 2008](#)). After transcription, researchers engaged in open coding, carefully reading the data to identify recurring ideas, words, and statements relevant to the research questions. These codes were manually grouped into categories based on similarity, guided by the constant comparative method. Through this iterative process, subcategories were created, followed by main categories, which culminated in broader themes that reflected the shared experiences and unique perspectives of the participants. To ensure analytical rigor, the researchers applied [Miles and Huberman's \(1994\)](#) data analysis model involving three flows of activity:

- a) Data reduction: Selection and simplification of relevant textual data.
- b) Display of data: The use of tables and thematic matrices to organize emerging categories.
- c) Drawing and verification of conclusions: Synthesis of findings and confirmation through triangulation with research questions and member checks.

Additionally, the researchers employed the following steps suggested by [Leedy and Ormrod \(2014\)](#):

- a) All recorded interviews were transcribed into typed text.
- b) The transcripts were organized chronologically.
- c) The data were read repeatedly.
- d) The researcher started categorizing the data.
- e) Themes were developed by interpreting and reinterpreting the data.
- f) The conclusion was drawn.

Inductive content analysis was the primary strategy, with theme development being one of its integral outcomes, not a separate approach. Unlike deductive content analysis, this inductive method allowed the voices of participants and parents to guide the construction of meaning without enforcing preconceived codes. Throughout the process, the researchers maintained an audit trail, documenting analytic decisions, and reflecting on positionality and potential bias. Member checks were used after transcription to confirm the intended meanings of the participants and to enhance the credibility of the findings. This analytical approach provided rich information on how motivation, as perceived by parents and teachers, contributes to the development of SDL by learners, especially within the challenging socioeconomic contexts of township schools. The following questions assisted in the data analysis process:

- a) What commonalities and patterns are there?
- b) What are the beliefs, values, attitudes, and emotions of the participants?
- c) What is the interpretation?
- d) What categories can be created?
- e) What are the generalizations and conclusions?

4.1.5 Trustworthiness, ethics issues, and clearance

Trustworthiness in qualitative research was maintained through credibility and confirmability. The study ensured precision and

integrity in data collection and interpretation. The member checking involved participants examining their transcribed responses to confirm precision, thereby ensuring the reliability of the findings. Furthermore, ethical clearance was granted by the EduRec committee of North-West University. Permission was also obtained from the Gauteng Provincial Education Department and the relevant school governing bodies. An independent individual facilitated the recruitment of participants and obtained informed consent. All data collected were securely stored for 5 years, with restricted access and password protection, according to North-West University policy. Paper documents and consent forms containing personal information were securely stored. Storage devices were encrypted and managed exclusively by the researcher and supervisors to ensure data security. The following ethical guidelines protected the confidentiality of the participants and strengthened the credibility and validity of the investigation.

5 Results and discussion

Data collected from semi-structured face-to-face interviews with participating teachers, parents, and legal guardians provided a wealth of in-depth information, allowing a profound understanding of their perceptions regarding the role of motivation in developing self-directed learners in lower quintile secondary township schools (Siziba, 2024). The themes were derived through inductive processes during the coding of the transcribed interviews. Eight themes were constructed. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, we employ codes such as P1S1 to denote Parent 1 of School 1, and P1S2 to signify Parent 1 of the second school coded as S2. This approach aligns with the principles of anonymity and confidentiality, ensuring that participants' identities remain concealed, as emphasized by Kang and Hwang (2021).

5.1 Theme 1: the participation of parents or legal guardians in supporting learners academically, mentally, and emotionally

This theme delves into the participation of parents or legal guardians in their children's education. Parent participants and legal guardians were asked about their participation in their children's education, leading to two subthemes: academic support and mental and emotional involvement. Academic support, as defined by the Department of Education (South Africa) (2016), includes parents who help with homework, provide the necessary materials, and participate in the overall educational journey of their children. Emotional and mental involvement is focused on protecting the psychological well-being of children [Department of Education (South Africa), 2016]. The ensuing subtheme will explore academic support.

5.1.1 Sub-theme 1.1: academic support

When asked how they contribute to the academic success of their learners, a prevalent approach among participants was the application of positive reinforcement to inspire, motivate, and reward improvement in the learning of their learners. Various supportive measures were described by participants. Participants (P1S1, P2S1, P3S1, P2S2, P3S2, P5S1) detailed their provision of school materials,

including books, calculators and Wi-Fi for Internet access. Some participants (P5S1, P5S2, and P3S2) stressed financial support for various needs, with P5S1 specifying:

I also make sure that they have whatever is needed at school, and if something is needed, I make sure that I get it for them. I try to get a fibre Wi-Fi, so they got their laptops to access more information, so the environment is friendly for learning. P1S1 also added that they use incentives in his family to encourage his children to work hard and achieve good academic results.

Another participant added:

We have incentives. We say a few let's say for months or whatever you will get a certain thing so she would set a certain target for herself in order for her to achieve whatever goals so yes they do set they own goals (T5S1).

This participant's response aligns with Zhu (2022) who notes that many individuals, including learners, are motivated by extrinsic factors or engage in an activity with the expectation of a reward. P5S2 expressed the practice of providing airtime and lending a cell phone for educational research, acknowledging the importance of improvising in areas where functional libraries or wireless facilities may be lacking in townships. On the other hand, challenges in financial means were evident among some participants, including unemployed parents (P5S2, P3S1, P2S1, and P4S1), who struggled to articulate how they supported their children academically. Furthermore, some parents who were educators (P4S2, P1S1, and P4S1) found it easier to support their children academically due to their professions. They emphasized monitoring their children's progress, occasionally checking their books, and signing them. However, it became apparent that the child of P4S1 relied more on her teacher and mother for support than on cultivating independent study habits.

P4S1 elaborated:

I think he relies on me as an educator because sometimes if you don't talk, you don't shout, they will just say everything is fine. Now when he sees his results are poor, it's when he's going to pick his socks and want to do better next time.

Geduld and Mdakane (2020) caution against parents taking over the responsibility for their children's learning. They emphasize that while parents should provide support, it is crucial not to assume learning responsibility, as learners need to develop the SDL. According to this advice, P4S1, an educator, shared that while helping with homework and experiments, they also take the initiative to check their student's books.

P4S1 also explained her involvement in the education of her child:

Checking his homework, helping him here and there when he needs help. If maybe, I don't have time I hire a tutor.

Some parents, such as P3S2, underscored the importance of attending school meetings and actively seeking feedback on their

children's performance from class teachers to engage academically and support their children. This perspective aligns with the guidance from the [Department of Education \(South Africa\) \(2016\)](#), which emphasizes that participating in school meetings and consistently seeking feedback from teachers are crucial ways for parents to be actively involved in their children's education.

P3S2 alluded to:

... yes I am involved sir with the help of home works I even go to their school to check, and I sign their books every day.

Parents play a crucial role in supporting their children academically by ensuring that they have essential study materials, such as books, stationery, and Internet access. Some parents face challenges such as lack of electricity, unemployment, and long working hours, which affect their ability to care for their children's academic needs. High levels of crime were also identified as a contextual factor that influences the motivation of learners to be self-directed. The involvement of parents in helping with homework and seeking help from knowledgeable tutors, neighbors, or relatives was highlighted as a strategy. This aligns with the guidelines of [Department of Education \(South Africa\) \(2016\)](#) to support parental participation. Therefore, the theme emphasizes the importance of extrinsic motivation in guiding learners toward academic success and avoiding failure. Here, parental support that satisfies learners' fundamental psychological need for competence is recognized ([Deci and Ryan, 2020](#)) in contributing to increased self-confidence and intrinsic motivation for SDL. The next subtheme will explore parents' mental and emotional involvement.

5.1.2 Sub-theme 1.2: parents' mental and emotional involvement

[Bunijevac \(2017\)](#) emphasizes that learners with involved parents perform well academically and are intrinsically motivated. Parents in this study were asked to share their perspectives on whether they could provide emotional or mental support to their children in education. Although some parents expressed confidence in their ability to support their children emotionally and mentally, others felt less equipped for this responsibility.

For example, P1S1 shared their approach to encouraging their child to aim high and foster self-belief. They observe study habits, promote attendance at additional classes, and motivate the child to set ambitious goals. This illustrates the parent's commitment to motivating the child by instilling confidence and emphasizing high aspirations. Such actions align with [Deci and Ryan's \(2020\)](#) notion of supporting the child's basic need for competence. Parents like P1S1, who encourage their children to set high goals, contribute to fulfilling their children's basic needs for relatedness and competence.

Another participant highlighted the challenges of providing academic assistance to their child while being unemployed.

I tried but it gets difficult for a child to be motivated because there are so many unemployed graduates that makes a learner to find it difficult to be motivated at school (P3S2).

The P3S2 perspective indicates that the socioeconomic status of the community, including high unemployment rates, affects the motivation of the learners. It can be inferred that elevated

unemployment rates have a detrimental impact on learners' motivation to be self-directed or to take responsibility for their learning, shaping their perception of school.

P3S2 added:

I get from work late sometimes I find the child sleeping and already late.

P3S2 said that work commitments, including long hours and early morning shifts, make it difficult to provide mental support to their child. This aligns with the findings of [Yang et al. \(2023\)](#) and [Labahn \(2019\)](#), highlighting that parental participation positively correlates with academic performance and motivation. The participant's limited involvement in their child's education due to work responsibilities is evident. Some parents highlighted their role in providing mental and emotional support by encouraging their children to concentrate during study time ([Geduld and Mdakane, 2020](#)). Furthermore, P3S2 mentioned seeking the help of an educated neighbor, illustrating the lengths that some parents go to ensure their children receive the necessary educational support and care.

P4S1 elaborated:

I never find it difficult because to motivate, when you motivate your child, you want them to be a better person. Responsibility is my job as a parent.

P5S1 actively motivates and encourages his child to complete daily homework, a practice supported by the literature that emphasizes the importance of parental motivation and encouragement for children to succeed ([Geduld and Mdakane, 2020](#)). The analysis underscores that most parents are involved in various aspects of their children's education, financial, mental, and emotional. However, it is also evident that certain parents face challenges due to their circumstances, which can lead to undesirable outcomes for learners. These outcomes include poor academic performance, psychological distress, school dropouts, and susceptibility to substance abuse. Lack of parental time and participation can contribute to demotivation and loss of interest in education and hinder learners' attempts to become self-directed, ultimately impacting their motivation.

The inconsistent parental participation observed implies that many township learners lack motivation and do not develop SDL characteristics. In the absence of monitoring and encouragement, these learners tend to engage in activities other than studying, such as playing and socializing. Participants who actively motivate their children by reminding them to study, encouraging responsibility for their learning, and helping set goals contribute to the development of autonomy in their children. This support addresses the basic psychological needs of learners for competence and relatedness, fostering self-determination and motivation for learning. The upcoming topic will explore the contextual factors that impede parental participation.

5.2 Theme 2: contextual factors that hinder parental participation to motivate their children to be self-directed

Parental participation is crucial, as demonstrated in Research Chapter 2; learners whose parents are interested in their schoolwork

and development are more likely to succeed academically (Schmid and Garrels, 2021). In this theme, the aim was to explore the perspectives of parents or legal guardians on the factors that hinder their active participation in their children's education. Several identified various issues that impede their participation. A parent (P1S1) mentioned that when their child experiences school pressure due to difficulty understanding the content of the topic, it creates stress for both the child and the parent. P1S1, who is a teacher, alluded:

When she feels the pressure from school, she usually complains about homework. When she doesn't understand a particular topic in class, I must now make sure that I teach her and we both get it correct which sometimes I also struggle to get the correct answer.

The analysis also revealed that certain learners created challenges for their parents' participation by exhibiting mood swings and negative attitudes toward both their parents and their education.

P1S2 is explained as follows:

I think because he is a teenage boy and you know teenagers go through their own phases and all that, so me trying to be there all the time might not be something that he is very fond of what he wants to do his own things but that's difficult but we do not have time, I would say that's the difficult part him trying to find out his teenage self.

P1S2 was also added:

At times, remember our kids are rebels especially the older one. I would tell her to work hard whenever she feels that she would and yell me "mom I struggle here" "my oldest child, 16 years old, she is a bit of a problem she is much to be honest about school she cares a lot about fashion.

The following encapsulates the views of participants who shared the same feelings about work and home responsibilities that hindered their involvement and support:

...I am a single parent, I do not have enough time because I have to cook, clean, wash their school uniforms and still have to clean the house sir (P3S1, P2S1, and P3S2).

P5S1 said that he often feels tired and unable to help his children, believing that his children understand that this fatigue results from his efforts to provide for them.

...I think my children understand that I cannot assist because every time I come home from work, I am always tired and cannot even prepare for tomorrow so I do not think I can assist.

Some parents or guardians, such as P2S1 and P4S2, who did not have the educational background to help their children, advised their children to wait for corrections from their teachers. Several parents cited their limited academic knowledge as a barrier to helping their children with homework, highlighting the impact of parental educational levels on their ability to support their children in becoming

self-directed learners. The next section will discuss an analysis of the contextual influences that enable parental motivation and support.

5.3 Theme 3: contextual influences that enable parental motivation and assistance for self-directedness

Throughout the interviews, parents/guardians shared their perspectives on contextual influences that enable or hinder parental motivation and support. Educated parents or those with a strong educational background, such as P1S1, P5S1, and P4S2, found it easier to support their children due to their knowledge and professional experience. These participants, who were educated or educators, were able to help their children with specific subjects such as mathematics and physical sciences, providing valuable guidance on studying techniques and modeling self-directed learning skills.

P1S2 stated as follows:

I think what makes it easy is that he is a very determined child and when it comes to his studies he puts more effort so that makes it easy for me.

P1S2 also highlighted the importance of providing her child with access to a quiet study room, echoing the findings of Labahn (2019). Schmid and Garrels (2021) further support the idea that having a quiet and conducive space for studying contributes to better focus and fewer distractions.

P1S1 added:

Is she studies and knows the concepts; my help is just to top on that so it is easier for me to help her unlike a person who does not study in their her own study room.

The participant said that helping a child who was already actively involved in his education was more manageable. This could be attributed to the child of P3S1 who already exhibits self-directed learning characteristics, such as the ability to initiate learning independently, understand concepts, and study autonomously. In such cases, parental participation becomes more about nurturing existing SDL skills. In contrast, a childless child involved in their learning can pose challenges to parents seeking to support their education.

Another participant added:

I think my children only comes to me when they have a problem they start their work; I only help wherever they want to be assisted. I don't like doing everything for them (P3S2).

P5S1 added:

My child only come to me only when she struggle not with all their schoolwork.

The accounts of the participants suggest that their children are motivated by a genuine love of learning. These learners exhibit

characteristics such as seeking help when faced with challenges, persistent effort, and taking responsibility for their work, all of which contribute to their motivation (Adamma et al., 2018). Furthermore, P4S2 highlighted the positive relationship their child has with neighbors, indicating that the child feels comfortable asking for help from them. Some participants, like P3S2, also mentioned relying on neighbors or their children for help, underlining the importance of community support and relationship building in townships. This emphasizes the communal spirit, the concept of ubuntu, and mutual care within township communities, where people come together to help each other. Furthermore, P1S2 noted that the ease of participation was influenced by the level of commitment of their child. This suggests that learners in townships who demonstrate a strong commitment to their studies make it easier for parents or legal guardians to actively participate and support them.

P1S2 elaborated:

I think what makes it easy is that he is a very determined child, when it comes to his studies he wants more, like he puts an effort so that makes it easy for me because if he is putting in the effort when I come it's like "Oh you had been doing good".

The findings suggest that some learners exhibit SDL skills, such as taking responsibility for their learning and demonstrating a willingness to persist and learn independently. However, it should be noted that only a few parents (P1S1, P1S2) explicitly mentioned that their children are dedicated and determined to study without external interference. In contrast, the majority of parents indicated that their children still rely on external regulation, studying only when directed by their parents, and taking their education seriously only when asked. This implies that for many learners, the development of SDL skills may be a gradual process influenced by various factors, including parental guidance. Furthermore, the theme highlighted the importance of parental education, and parents who have a higher educational background (tertiary education) are better equipped to help and encourage their children. This support contributes to fulfilling the psychological needs of relatedness and competence as outlined by Deci and Ryan (2020) and Geduld and Mdakane (2020).

This theme underscores the importance of community support, including the role of neighbors and teachers, in improving student education. Although some learners demonstrate certain SDL skills, the theme emphasizes the ongoing need for guidance. Furthermore, factors such as parental education level, community involvement, learners possessing SDL skills, parents who are teachers with subject knowledge, and financial means all contribute to enabling parents and legal guardians in this study to be involved and support their children's education. The next section will explore parents' perceptions regarding whether their children set their own learning goals.

5.4 Theme 4: perceptions of parents about whether their children set their own learning goals

In exploring the aspect of goal setting, parents were questioned about their children's ability to set their own goals. Some parents say that their children are capable of setting and pursuing their own goals

(P1S1, P3S1). In contrast, other parents indicated that their children do not actively set their own learning goals (P3S2, P4S1, P5S1 and P5S2). Furthermore, four parents expressed uncertainty about whether their children can independently set goals or not (P1S2, P2S1, P4S2, and P3S1). The implication is that for those learners whose parents state that they do not set learning goals for themselves; motivation might be adversely affected. This is noteworthy, as setting learning goals is recognized as a motivational factor that encourages individuals to exert effort toward goal attainment (Deci and Ryan, 2020, p. 3). Furthermore, it was observed that some learners rely heavily on their parents for setting goals rather than taking the initiative themselves. This dependency on parents could hinder the development of SDL skills and autonomy, as learners ideally need to be in control of their own goals (Deci and Ryan, 2020).

One participant elaborated:

My child relies on me much because I am educated, he/she does not set her own goals and I must be the one who helps (P4S1).

P1S1 alluded to:

Yes she does, and I try to set my own standards just to motivate her. When she targets 60% in certain subjects, I target higher and tell her to believe in herself because she is more than capable to achieve higher.

The statement from P1S1 suggests a dynamic where the parent holds a dominant role in goal setting, potentially limiting the child's autonomy in determining goals based on their potential. Although this approach may contribute to building the learner's competence and motivation for academic success, it is essential to strike a balance to foster the development of intrinsic motivation and SDL skills. Goal setting is in fact a critical element of intrinsic motivation and SDL. Township learners benefit from the ability to independently set their learning goals, contributing to their intrinsic motivation and fostering SDL characteristics (Adamma et al., 2018). Although parents play an important role in helping their children set goals, they must avoid dictating goals, allowing learners to develop autonomy in their academic journey. The next section will dive into parents' perceptions of their learners' academic success at school.

5.5 Theme 5: parent's perception of their learner's academic success at school

Parents and legal guardians' perspectives on whether they anticipate their children's academic success at school are crucial to understanding their expectations. These expectations, as indicated in the literature (Geduld and Mdakane, 2020), can significantly influence the motivation of learners. When exploring this, parents were asked about their beliefs about their children's potential success in school and the reasons behind their convictions.

P1S1 expressed confidence in his child's ability to succeed at school, even in the face of certain challenges.

Yes, but for now she's not happy academically because of the Grade 10 workload.

The following perception encapsulates the view of one parent when asked if their child was academically successful or not.

Looking at his previous results and the way his not committed in doing his school work I can see that he can be successful academically (P3S2).

Another participant alluded to the following.

Definitely, because I am an example to him and also my child likes good things. He is so ambitious, also, he likes money (P4S1).

The views of P4S1 are also supported by [Geduld and Mdakane \(2020\)](#), who state that learners can learn new academic behaviors and skills by watching their teachers, peers, and parents. A parent participant whose child was determined and possessed certain SDL skills asserted:

.... because as I said I think he is a responsible child, and he is very determined even with difficulties of him being a teenager and all that. But you can see that he is determined to do something with his life and the academics his academics are just superb. (P1S2) P5S2, P3S1 and P5S1 believed that their children would be academically successful at school but could not elaborate on why they believed that their children would be academically successful at school.

Another participant expanded:

... they will be academically successful at school because they are smart, they take from me (P4S2).

The perspective of P4S2 implies that the academic competence of her children can be attributed to the influence she has on their learning. Analysis of the collected responses reveals a prevalent belief among most parents or legal guardians that their children are poised for academic success at school. This confidence is rooted in various factors, such as their children's contentment at school, positive performance in previous report cards, the determination and focus exhibited by some learners, and the belief that they serve as positive role models. On the contrary, certain parents have reservations about their children's academic prospects. This skepticism is often linked to concerns that their children are not sufficiently dedicated to their schoolwork and display a greater interest in fashion and social media than in their education. The forthcoming section will delve into the perceptions of parents and legal guardians regarding their children's happiness at school.

5.6 Theme 6: parents' perceptions of learners' happiness at school

Recognizing whether their children are content at school is crucial for parents, as it engenders their active involvement in ensuring a sense of belonging and relatedness in their children's lives ([Deci and Ryan, 2020](#)). This awareness can serve as an indicator of the level of motivation that their children have to attend school. Moreover, understanding the sources of their children's happiness

or unhappiness in the school environment is of paramount importance. P3S1 emphasized that her child's presence at school is mainly influenced by social factors, such as friends and the company she keeps. The participant also disclosed that her child's underperformance in grade 9 had a consequential impact on her choices of subjects for grade 10. This highlights the interconnectedness between a learner's social experiences, academic performance, and subsequent decisions regarding their educational path. P3S1 elaborated:

The 16 year old it's more social because she is not doing subjects she wanted to do because she lacked in grade 9 she had then had to choose her second option of subjects but she is not academically entirely happy with the subjects, my youngest one she doesn't like school she knows that she had to but she gets excited to perform somethings or when doing sports but academically my child is an artist so I think she will preferably be an artist.

P3S2 similarly indicated that his child's contentment at school is solely attributed to the presence of friends. P3S2 "Well what can I say in most cases he talks about his friends but he does not talk about academics mostly so I can say his happy at school because of his friends."

Another participant stated:

I think they are because I have never received a complaint, no child of mine has ever come home with a problem (P5S1).

P5S1 elaborated on the perspective that her children lack happiness at school due to the way they are treated, citing discrimination based on their economic circumstances. The parent expressed concern that her children, who do not come from a financially affluent background and live in a shack, feel marginalized. However, the parents did not provide specific reasons for this perceived discrimination.

No, not at all. My child was sick and I wrote them a letter saying after he's done writing, they must release him. He says he took an hour before they assist him but where others are assisted quickly. They are discriminating, but whether he is happy or not, he must work very hard.

Some parents opted not to respond to inquiries about their children's happiness at school. The uncertainty surrounding their children's emotional state stemmed from limited time spent together and concerns about potential discrimination by teachers. In contrast, those who reported contentment attributed it to positive influences from friends, peers, and the general school environment, with no reported grievances about school management. In particular, the main identified need was relatedness, encompassing a sense of closeness to others and belonging to a social group, as highlighted by [Deci and Ryan \(2020\)](#). This sense of connection, or attachment, is crucial for children's motivation and overall well-being ([Van den Broeck et al., 2016](#); [Deci and Ryan, 2020](#)). In the subsequent subtheme, we explore parents' perceptions regarding actions that other parents can take to inspire their children to assume responsibility for their learning.

5.7 Theme 7: parents' perceptions about what other parents can do to motivate their children to take responsibility for their own learning

This study revealed that certain parents or guardians observed that their children showed a sense of responsibility for their learning, demonstrating SDL skills. To go deeper into the parents' comprehension of their roles in fostering motivation for SDL, I sought their advice for other parents. The following examples illustrate the recommendations they provided.

P4S1 alluded to:

They must follow up on their schoolwork and they mustn't pressurise their kids especially with on their subjects' choice, so allow your children to take something easy that will benefit him.

Another participant expanded:

I think parents should try and make their children have positive role models, their children must want to be somebody who achieve a lot, and somebody who is a singer cannot be a child's role model if the child does not have the talent to sing (P5S1).

The participant further alluded that township learners lack positive role models who have achieved success through education and encouraged parents to advise their children about having role models that are educationally orientated. P3S2 suggested that parents in the township should not give their children the opportunity to openly discuss their problems with them.

Some don't participate in helping their children. Parents need to know their children and they need to be part of the lives for their children. They must always check their books, always try to help where they can if they can't seek to someone who can help. They must come to school for the feedback about their children and take action and motivate, encourage them and make sure that they study at home (P1S1).

Another participant added:

As a parent you can always give out something like a reward to a child for the achieved results on every term, I think that will make the child want to improve more academically (P5S2).

Based on the aforementioned analysis, participants offered several recommendations to parents who want to support their children in taking responsibility for their learning. First, they proposed that parents consistently review their children's schoolbooks, a suggestion endorsed by the [Department of Education \(South Africa\) \(2016\)](#). Additionally, the participants emphasized the importance of allowing children to select subjects based on their strengths and weaknesses rather than imposing parental preferences. Although not extensively addressed in the existing literature, participants noted that many township learners face challenges when choosing subject streams, often influenced by peer pressure or parental expectations. Furthermore, participants underscored the importance of parental

involvement in their children's education, advocating for attendance at school meetings and the regular acquisition of performance feedback ([Bunijevac, 2017](#)). Another piece of advice was to ensure that children have positive role models, aligning with existing literature that encourages exposure to self-directed role models, including parents and teachers ([Tokan and Imakulata, 2019](#)). The subsequent subtheme will explore participants' recommendations for teachers at school to motivate children to assume responsibility for their learning.

5.8 Theme 8: parental advice on what teachers at school can do to motivate children to take responsibility for their own learning

This section analyses the advice provided by participants in parents/legal guardians to teachers on motivating learners to be self-directed in their learning and take responsibility for their education. The following is an example of the recommendations they offered:

P4S1 suggested that teachers should participate in the ongoing assessment of learners, provide training, and emphasize that achieving the desired results may take time, but is achievable.

.... As a teacher, you must keep on assessing your learners, it trains them to be used to studying you cannot assess them once in a month, you must do it continuously because they forget. Also show them their results at the end of the day so that they can be motivated (P4S1).

P5S1 recommended that teachers establish emotional connections with their learners. The participant also proposed that teachers share positive stories about people who achieved greatness through education. The belief is that such narratives could inspire learners to work diligently and foster a sense of self-direction in their learning.

P5S1 elaborated:

I think teachers have to try and come to the level of learners sometimes tell them stories of people who achieved something through education. I think by that some of learners might change their attitude, some learners can start to understand that education can help them to achieve whatever they want.

This participant's suggestion holds particular significance for township learners who require role models, positive narratives, and motivation to persevere in their studies. P5S1 highlighted that teachers should serve as inspirations for learners, particularly if academic success is the goal. The participant emphasized the importance of teachers being aware of their learners' performance to effectively provide motivation.

If you need every learner in your class to pass, you should inspire them. You must also know the performance of your learners and try to motivate them.

P3S2, P1S2, P3S1, P5S2, and P2S2 collectively recommended that schools institute a system of recognition of hard-working learners. Specifically, P3S2 suggested honoring and providing incentives for the

top achievers, proposing a system in which the top 10 achievers per term are recognized to instill motivation in learners. This aligns with the understanding that extrinsic motivation, involving rewards for achieving desired results, can effectively encourage learners to exert effort. Furthermore, P2S1 proposed that schools should impart the skill of creating study schedules to learners. The participant, acknowledging personal limitations as an uneducated parent, emphasized the importance of teaching learners how to manage their study schedules, as parents may only be able to monitor whether the child is engaging in studying or not:

I think the school must help us by ensuring that our children have study timetables and adhere to it, I am not educated and therefore cannot understand some of these things (P2S1).

This theme brought to light several key recommendations from parents, emphasizing the importance of continuous assessment, positive reinforcement, teacher encouragement, providing positive feedback to learners, and offering practical guidance in creating study schedules. The participants also stressed the importance of teachers knowing and understanding their learners, fostering personal connections with them, and serving as sources of inspiration and motivation. In the context of township learners, motivation is of particular importance in shaping their educational journey.

Mahlaba (2020) further supports the claim that SDL is transformative for learners, altering their perception of learning, instilling an understanding of the value of education, and subsequently cultivating SDL skills. Viewing education through a positive lens is crucial for township learners, fostering enthusiasm for learning and the acquisition of SDL skills. The implementation of positive reinforcement, including rewards and certificates, serves as an initial step in cultivating intrinsic motivation and fostering a sense of responsibility for learning. Recognizing the collaboration needed between parents and teachers, particularly in creating study timetables, is crucial for supporting, encouraging, and monitoring children's learning. The following section will compare and discuss the perspectives of teacher-participants and parent/legal guardian-participants.

5.9 Findings regarding determining how parents or legal guardians could support the learners' motivation to become self-directed

Parental involvement is crucial for the educational development of a learner, creating a secure and nurturing environment that fosters learning. Parents who actively participate in their children's education led to better academic results, enhanced self-directed learning skills, and increased student confidence. The research underscores a strong association between factors from family history, such as parental educational level and income, and learning achievement. Actively engaged parents not only contribute to educational development but also stimulate intrinsic motivation. This discovery is important as it demonstrates that even parents without formal academic education can help /aid in the development of SDL by providing encouragement, structure, and emotional support. The literature consistently affirms that children are more likely to succeed, and their performance

improves when parents or guardians are actively involved in their education. By expressing interest in their children's academic pursuits, parents instill a profound appreciation for education and its significance in their children's lives.

It is essential to note that parental involvement should not be contingent on formal education; parents can provide valuable social and emotional support. Involvement may manifest itself through helping with homework, regular attendance at school meetings, or monitoring their child's academic progress. Additionally, support programs in which experienced parents' mentor new ones in navigating the school setting can enhance parental participation, particularly in resource-constrained communities. Establishing a robust teacher-parent relationship is paramount to allowing parents to understand how best to intervene and support their children. Despite the undeniable benefits of parental participation, several barriers can impede participation, including limited financial resources, educational attainment, and busy schedules. Some parents may refrain from participating due to past experiences with academic challenges, which can affect their self-esteem. To overcome these barriers, schools must cultivate an open and inviting environment in which teachers and staff respond to parents. Viewing parents as indispensable partners in realizing children's educational objectives fosters a positive parent-teacher relationship. This relationship empowers parents and promotes their active participation in their children's education.

5.10 Findings with regards to parents' or legal guardians' perceptions of the influences of motivation on their children's self-directed learning in township schools

The research findings highlight a prevalent positive attitude and belief among parents about their children's potential for success at school. Parents expressed confidence in their children's motivation to complete their academic journeys, attributing this motivation to positive outcomes such as self-directedness in learning. In particular, parents who perceived motivation as positively influencing their children's learning were those who actively ensured the fulfillment of their children's basic needs, autonomy, relatedness, and competence, and foster positive parent-child relationships.

Furthermore, parents who believed that motivation positively impacted their children's self-directedness were characterized by their proactive efforts to expose, support and maintain high educational expectations for their children. These parents consistently affirmed their children's strengths and competence in the classroom, emphasizing the pivotal role of support, motivation, parental beliefs, and ongoing involvement in shaping learners' motivation and SDL skills (Geduld and Mdakane, 2020). Most parents and guardians perceive their academic and emotional support to be a significant motivating factor for their children. Participants actively seek the help of tutors and knowledgeable individuals within their communities to motivate and support their children, with the goal of school success.

Conversely, a few participants acknowledge the impact of socioeconomic factors, such as unemployment and financial constraints, coupled with the challenges of meeting the cognitive demands of their children's schoolwork due to job responsibilities. These contextual factors are identified as affecting their children's

motivation to learn. In such cases, these parents rely on teachers to guide, motivate, and support their children. However, it was observed that some parents did not believe that motivation positively influenced their children's self-directedness. These parents were also uncertain whether their children were intrinsically or extrinsically motivated. The data collection process further revealed instances of limited or no child–parent relationships, negatively impacting the fulfillment of the children's three innate needs (Deci and Ryan, 2020). This underscores the importance of a positive parent–child relationship in fostering motivation and SDL skills in learners.

6 Recommendations on improving parental and community involvement and conclusion

This article concludes that the development of SDL among learners in township schools is influenced by motivation, intrinsic and extrinsic, as well as parental involvement and support. The findings reveal that while parents and guardians generally believe in the academic potential of their children, their ability to provide structured support is hampered by factors such as limited time, educational background, and access to resources. Research found that motivation requires the support of family and school environments, access to learning resources, and alignment with educational methodologies to be effective. The findings indicate that integrated interventions aimed at educators, parents and learners are essential to improve SDL.

Based on these conclusions, the following recommendations are made.

- a) To the Department of Basic Education (DBE): Provide targeted training and resources to support teachers in the promotion of SDL and implement policies that formalize parental participation as a key aspect of student development.
- b) To District Officials: Establish mentoring programs that train educators in SDL methodologies and support parental empowerment workshops.
- c) To teachers: Integrate SDL-promoting strategies into classroom practice, such as learner goal-setting sessions, progress monitoring tools, and peer collaboration techniques.
- d) To parents and guardians: Engage in simple and consistent practices at home that reinforce autonomy and responsibility, such as helping with homework, setting routines, and encouraging independent reading.

These recommendations are based on data and align with the conceptual framework of the article. They underscore the need for a systemic and collaborative approach to improve motivation and SDL among learners in disadvantaged educational contexts.

References

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Data availability statement

Publicly available datasets were analyzed in this study. This data can be found here: <https://repository.nwu.ac.za/handle/10394/42474>.

Ethics statement

The studies involving humans were approved by North West University EDU Rec Committee (NWU-00313-22-A2). The studies were conducted in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study. Written informed consent was obtained from the individual(s) for the publication of any potentially identifiable images or data included in this article.

Author contributions

TS: Methodology, Investigation, Writing – original draft, Formal analysis. CT-B: Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization. BG: Writing – review & editing, Supervision.

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The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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The authors declare that no Gen AI was used in the creation of this manuscript.

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