



Teachers' capability sets for implementing the teenage pregnancy policy in two selected high schools in the Tshwane district, South Africa

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Abstract—Teenage pregnancy is seen as a global problem, although various countries worldwide have policies and programmes in place, teenage pregnancy remains an issue. The South African government introduced the Policy on the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy in Schools (PPMLPS). This policy helps to manage and prevent learner pregnancies that may occur. This article seeks to identify the capabilities teachers need to overcome the challenges associated with implementing the PPMLPS. We opted for a qualitative research approach and generated data through semi-structured interviews. This study employed a purposive sampling technique and thematic analysis to analyse the data. The findings revealed that teachers lacked training, support, and an inclusive environment. The capabilities of teachers related to knowledge enhancement, relational collaboration, and inclusivity must be considered adequately to implement the PPMLPS.

Keywords: Teachers' capability, Policy on prevention and management of learner pregnancy in schools, Teenage pregnancy

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I. INTRODUCTION

TEENAGE pregnancy can be defined as when young women become pregnant before reaching the legal age, which varies across the world. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) views teenage pregnancy as occurring in girls who become pregnant between the ages of 13 and 19 years old (Cook & Cameron, 2015). Globally, teenage pregnancy is seen as a major concern (Mukuna & Aloka, 2021). The reason for this concern is that about 16 million teenage women give birth each year, with 95% of these births occurring in middle- to low-income countries (Cook & Cameron, 2015). Some causes of teenage pregnancy include a lack of education, limited access to contraceptives, and insufficient information regarding health and responsible decision-making (Chakole et al., 2022). During the time frame 2015-2020, the global teenage pregnancy rate was reported as 44 births per 1,000 adolescents aged 15-19 years old. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the birth rate was 99, while Western Europe had a rate of 8. South Africa's rate aligned with the global average of 41 (Barron et al., 2022). Sub-Saharan Africa exhibits the highest incidence of teenage pregnancies, while South Africa also faces challenges in this area, with 16% of girls aged 15-19 experiencing a teenage pregnancy (Amoateng et al., 2022).

Teenage pregnancy could negatively impact education (Mathebula et al., 2022) and a girl's socio-economic development, as it perpetuates the cycle of poverty (Ajayi & Ezegbe, 2020). The education and living standards of teenage mothers may be hindered, as girls who become pregnant may drop out of school, which can affect their employment opportunities. Additionally, teenage pregnancy can have a social impact on girls, resulting in stigmatisation, early marriages, and rejection from the community and family members (Barron et al., 2022). Furthermore, discrimination and inconsistent policy implementation in schools

further exacerbate the issue (Groves et al., 2022), with studies indicating that between 50 % and 65 % of adolescent mothers do not return to school after childbirth (Jochim et al., 2020).

South Africa introduced the Policy on Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy in Schools (PPMLPS) (Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2021), which aims to facilitate learners' return to school and establish an inclusive environment (Mukuna & Aloka, 2021). Furthermore, the policy also aims to reduce pregnancy rates and ensure affected learners are not excluded from education (DBE, 2021). However, Twala et al. (2022) identify several challenges regarding implementing the policy, inter alia, that the School Management Team (SMT) faces difficulties in identifying pregnant learners, as these students often try to conceal their pregnancies. Furthermore, teachers are not trained health professionals and therefore lack the necessary skills to handle unplanned deliveries that may occur at school. Parental involvement is also seen as a barrier, as parents may feel too embarrassed to engage and instead shift the responsibility to the school. Given the high rates of teenage pregnancies, South Africa has also introduced the subject of Life Orientation, aimed at focusing on the holistic development of learners and equipping them with the skills and knowledge necessary to understand sexual behaviour and reduce unwanted pregnancies and related health risks (Khau, 2022). Furthermore, to address the risky sexual behaviours of adolescents, technical guidelines were produced by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) (2018) to guide the implementation of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) in schools. The CSE is aimed at engendering attitudes, beliefs, and values regarding safer sexual practices, desire and pleasure, gender power relations, and sexual diversity (UNESCO, 2018).

From a policy point of view, we argue that the Department of Basic Education (DBE) should imagine different pathways regarding implementing PPMLPS (DBE, 2021) to address teenage pregnancies. To

contribute to the renewal of thoughts, this article explores which capability sets are needed for teachers to effectively apply the PPMLPS (DBE, 2021) in South African schools. We therefore ask the following question: How can identified teachers' capability sets contribute to the effective implementation of the Policy on the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy in Schools?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Teenage pregnancy could negatively impact a teenager's life, affect their self-esteem, and their social and educational experiences (Nkosi & Pretorius, 2019). As teenage pregnancy is viewed as a global challenge, Brazil is identified as a country where it is a significant issue, with an estimated 500,000 teenage pregnancies reported in 2019, despite the Adolescent Health Program that has been implemented (Cruz et al., 2021). The United Kingdom is considered one of the European countries with the highest teenage pregnancy rates, attributed to poor social and health outcomes (Cook & Cameron, 2015). Uganda faces challenges with a high school dropout rate due to teenage pregnancies and has introduced the initiative to allow pregnant learners back to school; however, stigmatisation remains a problem, and government policies on health systems, Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE), and affordable and safe contraceptives need to be strengthened and re-evaluated (Tushabe, Asiimwe & Fasco et al., 2024). South Africa is regarded as one of the countries with the highest teenage pregnancy rates globally; Statistics South Africa indicated that 90,037 girls between the ages of 10 and 19 years gave birth in all nine provinces from March 2021 to April 2022, with Limpopo, the Eastern Cape, and KwaZulu-Natal reporting the most cases (Mbongwa et al., 2024).

The PPMLPS aims to reduce the learner pregnancy rate through the implementation of comprehensive sexuality education and providing access to adolescent and youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services (DBE, 2021). Furthermore, implementing this policy should uphold constitutional rights by providing pregnant learners with an inclusive school environment (DBE, 2021). The PPMLPS faced numerous challenges during its implementation in the South African education system (DBE, 2021; Jochim et al., 2021). Next, we will elaborate on the challenges teachers experienced during the PPMLPS implementation (DBE, 2021).

A lack of training

A lack of training was identified as a barrier, as South Africa faces challenges in understanding the policy and ensuring its proper distribution. This problem can result in insufficient policy implementation (Commission for Gender Equality, 2023). The Commission for Gender Equality (2023) also indicated that the lack of training experienced by educators tends to lead to feelings of inadequacy, leaving teachers unsupported in managing situations related to teenage pregnancy. Half of the countries in the African Union have national laws and policies in place to protect pregnant learners and uphold their right to education. However, the goals of these policies remain problematic due to inconsistent implementation and a lack of control and monitoring strategies (Jochim et al., 2021). Teachers face challenges when they need to counsel pregnant learners, as some teachers do not have the capabilities or are unwilling to do so due to additional pressures related to their subjects. It is also evident that teachers lack the necessary skills to teach sex education (Segalo, 2020). It appears that some school managers are unaware of the PPMLPS (DBE, 2021), which can be seen as a challenge to why the school management team struggles to manage teenage pregnancies (Ramulumo & Pitsoe, 2013). This policy is implemented unevenly in schools, as they do not follow the same protocol as stipulated in the policy. This leads to problems such as suspension and expulsion, poor academic performance due to pregnancy, limited childcare options, and a lack of support from peers, families, and the school (Ramulumo & Pitsoe, 2013). Arguably, training in policy is important, as the effectiveness of a policy's goals relies on proper training and effective monitoring of the process. Sex education is part of Life Orientation and is intended to

enrich learners with the necessary knowledge and life skills across various areas of human development, including the promotion of health, human rights, culture, psychological and physical well-being, gender equality, sexual health, and diversity (Commission for Gender Equality, 2023). Although sex education is viewed as a component that provides learners with essential knowledge on sexual health, it can also be perceived as a barrier due to teachers lacking sufficient training to teach CSE.

Lack of an inclusive environment and support structures

An inclusive education environment can be defined as a setting where all students feel valued, ensuring that education is accessible to all citizens (Jardinez & Natividad, 2024). The Commission for Gender Equality (2023) views the creation of an inclusive environment as a challenge, as it is still shown that there is discrimination and stigmatisation in schools concerning pregnant learners. The lack of an inclusive environment can result in school dropout, as a lack of support from educators in terms of academics and psychosocial support, and the attitudes of educators and other learners can also be seen as reasons why pregnant learners do not return to school (Commission for Gender Equality, 2023). It is essential that learners remain in school, as dropping out can lead to many negative outcomes; one can be seen as struggling to find a stable job (McClinton et al., 2024).

The Commission for Gender Equality (2023) viewed a lack of support from the DBE as a challenge, as the DBE has implemented Learner Support Agents (LSAs) to assist schools. The problem faced is that the LSAs lack the necessary training to provide the required support; an LSA is a person hired by the DBE to provide care and support to learners and has a Grade 12 certificate. Challenges encountered include teachers facing difficulties, as the policy is unclear to them and is seen as inconsistent in its implementation, with pregnant learners remaining expelled from schools despite the policy stating that schools need to support pregnant learners and motivate them to continue their education. Studies have shown that if a policy is unclear or lacks guidelines, it allows for ambiguous implementation, potentially hindering it through discrimination, stereotyping, and concerns that babies might be born at school (Jochim et al., 2021). A study conducted by Segalo (2020) illustrates that schools still suspend pregnant learners despite what is stipulated in the policy; it appears that schools struggle to create an inclusive environment, leading to pregnant learners feeling emotionally unsafe, which can be a reason for their dropping out of school.

Looking through the lens of the capability approach

The improvement of education is seen as an essential part of school policies, with teachers regarded as important role-players in implementing these policies (Ferizi-Miftari & Rexha, 2018). Education policy regulates the consistency of educational achievements and is viewed as a framework for educational outcomes (Dhungana & Gnowali, 2023). Education provides a platform for its members to play an active role in learning, thereby generating new knowledge and understanding (Gracia-Clandín & Tamarit-López, 2021). The capability approach emphasises the importance of capabilities to function, particularly in controlling the judgement of equality and well-being. Sen further posits that human capabilities are essential for addressing inequalities, as they offer a variety of goals for the full development of human dignity (Walker, 2006). According to Sen (2023), functioning is what a person can achieve or manage to do or be. Achieving functioning depends on a person's personal and social factors. Therefore, functioning refers to how a person manages these factors to ensure they oversee their lives. A capability is seen as how a person can function, and a capability set is seen as achievable.

Hoffman (2017) indicates that capability sets can be utilised as a criterion to evaluate what an individual or an institution can be. Anderson (1995) identified the following capability sets Sen (1992) outlined. Firstly, personal diversities: people are different in many ways, such as talents, abilities, circumstances, and social identities. These differences can produce needs, interests, and desires at a

particular time; people adapt their desires according to their circumstances and knowledge. People can have the same resources, but their needs and desires may differ at a particular time (Anderson, 1995). Second, the relationship between primary goods and well-being freedoms. The relationship between primary goods and well-being is that personal diversity enables the primary goods to be converted differently because of personal diversity (Anderson, 1995). Finally, spatial inequalities: people's knowledge differs based on the community they come from, and thus, they will have different opportunities regarding what they can and cannot do (Anderson, 1995). The capability approach offers a distinct perspective on education, framing it as a means through which individuals can expand their freedoms, thus creating real opportunities.

Regarding this study, the PPMLPS is subject to varied interpretations and applications influenced by factors that influence its implementation (DBE, 2021). Accordingly, this study explored teachers' views to identify the specific capabilities teachers require to address these implementation challenges. By foregrounding such capabilities, the study seeks to ensure that, despite the barriers that may impede implementation, the PPMLPS can be enacted effectively in ways that advance freedoms for teachers and learners (DBE, 2021).

III. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

This study aims to identify teachers' capability sets and how they can contribute to the effective implementation of the Policy on the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy in Schools.

IV. METHODS

Research approach

This study used a qualitative research approach focused on capturing the meanings or representations of data (Flick, 2018). It addresses aspects of reality that cannot be quantified, emphasising the understanding and explanation of the dynamics of social interactions (Queirós et al., 2017). This approach is relevant to the study, as we will ask teachers questions about implementing the PPMLPS and their experience (DBE, 2021). The approach will provide us with data to determine what capability sets teachers need to apply the policy PPMLPS effectively (DBE, 2021).

Research design

A phenomenological design was used as the research design. This approach focuses on outlining the meaning of experiences (Neubauer et al., 2019). In this study, teacher experiences provide information regarding capability sets for exploring implementing PPMLPS (DBE, 2021). Therefore, the chosen design is important as it supports the researcher's role not to impose meaning, but to facilitate the uncovering of meaning from the participants (Neubauer et al., 2019).

Research paradigm

The research paradigm used in this study is the transformative paradigm. Mertens views transformative theory as 'an umbrella term encompassing paradigmatic perspectives meant to be emancipatory, participatory, and inclusive' (Romm, 2015). The study determines how different teachers implement PPMLPS in two different schools and diverse communities, and how teachers' experiences indicate whether pregnant learners are gaining from implementing the PPMLPS (DBE, 2021). The paradigm is thus relevant as Romm (2015) states that this paradigm consists of the importance of the lives of oppressed groups, such as women, racial minorities, people who face disabilities, and people living in poverty.

Participants

The participants used for this study consisted of two teachers, two Head of Departments (HOD), and two deputy principals. Despite the managerial roles of the participants, all participants are still seen as teachers.

Data collection

Semi-structured interviews

The data for this study were obtained through semi-structured interviews with the six participants regarding implementing the PPMLPS (DBE, 2021). Semi-structured interviews were used to uncover knowledge through interactions, conversations, and factors related to the real-life experiences of the participants (Kakilla, 2021). The semi-structured interviews assisted the participants in elaborating on the experience and provided rich data regarding implementing the PPMLPS (DBE, 2021).

Research site

The research site included two high schools. The schools are classified as quintile 5. Notably, the schools are situated in communities with different socio-economic backgrounds, and the availability of resources differs. The interviews were conducted after school hours, on the school premises, providing a familiar environment and allowing participants to respond without interruptions.

Data analysis

The data was then analysed through thematic analysis. Thematic data analysis was used because such analysis conveyed the social phenomena through specific narration and allowed the complex description of data (Braun & Clarke, 2014). After conducting the interviews, transcripts were typed, and codes were used to identify different themes. As such, bias was avoided through the well-designed data collection and analysis processes. Furthermore, the interpretation of the results was validated with the participants to determine if the data accurately represented their perspective (Smith & Noble, 2025). This paper focused on teachers' capabilities to implement the PPMLPS (DBE, 2021).

Ethical considerations

The participants were verbally and non-verbally informed about their role in this study. Ethical clearance was obtained, and consent forms were provided to participants before conducting the interview.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Biographic results of the participants

Table 1: Biographic results of the participants

Participants	Gender	Age	Teaching Experience
Teacher A	Female	50-59	28 years
Teacher B	Female	50-59	5 years
HOD 1	Female	50-59	34 years
HOD 2	Female	30-39	15 years
Deputy principal 1	Male	40-49	26 years
Deputy principal 2	Female	50-59	28 years

The interpretation of the findings and the subsequent discussions were framed against the background of information derived from the interviews conducted with the participants. The content from the interviews, the literature review, and the theoretical underpinning guided the identification of themes related to needs, interests, and desires at a particular time. This capability set indicates that people can adapt their desires according to their circumstances and knowledge; while individuals may have access to the same resources, their needs and desires can differ at any moment (Anderson, 1995).

Thematic results

Needs of teachers at a particular time

The PPLMPS trains all stakeholders to implement the policy (DBE, 2021). A study by Twalo (2024) indicates a need for teachers to be trained to implement the policy in schools, and stakeholders are unclear about what is expected of them. Thus, some teachers are deprived of the opportunity to develop the professional knowledge and interpretive capacity needed to act meaningfully within policy frameworks. According to Ganal et al. (2019), addressing the needs of employees, specifically, teachers, is a foundational condition for expanding teachers' agency and enhancing their ability to make informed judgments in complex contexts.

In this study, the responses of participants regarding their training needs and the lack of training in the PPLMPS were as follows:

"No training was received in dealing with pregnant learners, and we were never trained as health care workers" (Teacher A).

"Teachers who are not trained to teach CSE" (Teacher B).

"We were not trained how to deal with a child that is going into labour, there was no training on the PPMLPS (HOD 1).

"No training on implementing the PPMLPS" (HOD 2).

According to the participants, a lack of training is a challenge. Sepadi and Molapo (2024) state that teachers must have the capability to understand the policy and possess the necessary knowledge and skills to implement the policy. Arguably, understanding and having the knowledge and skills to implement the policy can assist teachers in ensuring successful implementation thereof. Furthermore, in agreement, the deputy principals both viewed a lack of training regarding implementing the PPMLPS (DBE, 2021).

"No, the policy was actually mailed to schools, but there was no formal training for us" (Deputy Principal A).

"There is a lack of understanding among educators regarding this policy" (Deputy Principal B).

The voices of teachers, Heads of Departments (HODs), and deputy principals consistently point to the absence of formal training. This lack of support for the needs of teachers limits their capability to adapt to new responsibilities, interpret the expectations of the PPMLPS (DBE, 2021), and build the practical knowledge and skills needed to support pregnant learners effectively. Teachers should not only be trained in the content of the PPMLPS (DBE, 2021) but also in the interpretation and contextual application of the policy. Similarly, McDowall and Saunders (2010) emphasise that continuous professional development is essential for improving practice and achieving policy goals.

Teachers' interest at a particular time

Interest development begins in a specific situation, but when those interests are well developed, individuals make conscious choices and pursue them autonomously (Renninger & Hidi, 2016). The state of interest indicates that affective reactions, perceived value, and cognitive functioning are intertwined, resulting in attention and learning feeling effortless (Hidi, 2006). External support can foster interest. Harackiewicz et al. (2016) suggest that without external support, interest can go dormant or even be abandoned, and that different stages of interest development may benefit from various types of support.

In terms of the support provided to the participants, they revealed that:

"But there is no support from the Department of Education" (Teacher A).

"There was no support from the educators; the District-Based Support Team (DBST) does not support" (Teacher B).

"At our school, we are lucky we have someone who was here, a psychologist, but not all schools do" (Deputy Principal A).

The above views of participants indicate that they cannot manage without the needed support and rely on the DBE's support. However, one school has the external resources of a psychologist. As such, the prevailing opinion is that teachers find it challenging to implement the policy due to insufficient support. Teacher support can be viewed as mentoring, coaching, feedback, and professional development. Furthermore, it is considered that the SMT and development support groups provide internal support to teachers (Nkambule & Amsterdam, 2018). Additionally, teacher support is regarded as an important factor in assisting teachers with policy implementation (Nkambule & Amsterdam, 2018), and the PPMLPS makes provision for the Department of Education to support schools (DBE, 2021).

According to Segalo (2020), although teachers are expected to assist and counsel learners who become pregnant at school, not all are capable or willing to do this. Sepadi and Molapo (2024) argue that capability-enhancing conditions must include enabling structures such as supportive school leadership and external resources to foster teacher autonomy and professional judgment. To overcome the challenge of a lack of support, it is essential that teachers can adapt where necessary (Sepadi & Molapo, 2024) to meet the needs of the child despite the lack of resources.

Desires for teachers at a particular time

In South Africa, education policies were developed to convert the

education system into a more inclusive one (Mahlaule et al., 2024). In an inclusive education environment, diverse learning accommodates all learners' needs. Inclusive education promotes lifelong learning opportunities (Walton & Engelbrecht, 2024).

This section explores the participants' responses based on their experiences creating an inclusive environment. The participants indicate that:

"The challenge of implementing the PPMLPS is to inform teachers about inclusive education" (Teacher A).

"The facilities that we have are also a huge challenge because we cannot accommodate a pregnant learner; that child is sitting in my class, she is nauseous, she does not feel well, she does not fit into her school uniform anymore, and the table is too small. The space in the classroom is small" (Teacher B).

This HOD viewed that it is a challenge to inform teachers about an inclusive environment, indicating: *"I think informing educators about inclusive education toward the pregnant learner is to be sensitive to discrimination by other educators or the teacher herself, or by other learners, for instance, bullying, and how to deal with that".*

In the case of the PPMLPS (DBE, 2021), it can be argued that teachers are not adequately informed about managing pregnant learners' physical, emotional, and social needs. When teachers feel unprepared and unsupported, they cannot foster inclusive learning environments. Consequently, the lack of guidance on issues such as bullying, stigma, and facility access reveals a significant deficiency in knowledge and skills, as indicated below:

"Sensitivity to discrimination, and you know that this policy addresses the fact that she must come to school, but it does not address bullying and labelling" (Deputy Principal A).

"Our facilities cannot accommodate a pregnant learner" (Deputy Principal B).

The principals' views are similar in their failure to create an inclusive environment that accommodates pregnant learners and eliminates discrimination. Although the PPLMPS provides an inclusive environment, it is unclear what steps schools can take to ensure its implementation (DBE, 2021). The creation of an inclusive environment remains problematic, as Twalo (2024) indicates that both teachers and learners hold negative attitudes towards pregnant learners and tend to stigmatise them. In the case of the PPLMPS (DBE, 2021), teachers report not being adequately informed about how to manage pregnant learners. The lack of guidance on issues such as bullying, stigma, and facility access exposes a significant capability gap. Teachers cannot foster inclusive learning environments when they feel unprepared and unsupported. Sepadi and Molapo (2024) indicate that transparency is essential to ensure an inclusive environment, as it relates to teachers' morals and beliefs based on CSE.

Against the background of the findings, we derived and recommend the following framework that indicates the capability sets needed to implement the PPLMPS (DBE, 2021).

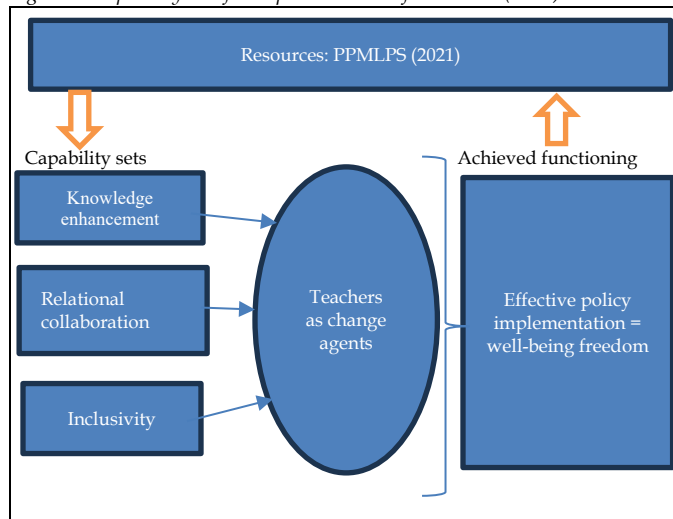
Capability sets for policy implementation

Drawing on Amartya Sen's capability approach, the link between teachers' capability sets and their well-being freedom in implementing the PPMLPS (DBE, 2021) lies in the distinction between potential opportunities and real freedoms. Teachers' capability sets represent the range of opportunities available, inter alia, as access to training, professional support, resources, and agency in decision-making. However, teachers' well-being and freedom to implement the policy will remain constrained unless these capabilities are effectively expanded and supported. When capability sets are thus limited, teachers face restricted choices in responding to implement the PPMLPS and therefore also neglect pregnant learners (DBE, 2021). In the context of teachers implementing the PPLMPS (DBE, 2021), we argue that, as deduced from the findings, the three key capabilities, knowledge enhancement, relational collaboration, and inclusivity, constitute their capability sets. Therefore, we argue that the capability sets enable them to translate policy into meaningful practice. When adequately

supported, these capability sets expand teachers' well-being and freedom, which are defined as their genuine ability to apply policy in contextually relevant, ethically grounded, and professionally sustainable ways. Conversely, when these capabilities are absent or constrained, teachers' well-being freedom is restricted, resulting in reduced effectiveness and inconsistent policy implementation.

Below, we give a framework layout of the identified capability sets.

Figure 1: Capability sets for implementation of PPMLPS (2021)



Knowledge Enhancement as a capability

Knowledge enhancement is a capability teachers need to effectively implement the Policy on the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy in Schools (DBE, 2021). Without adequate training and professional development, teachers' opportunities to act meaningfully will be severely limited. According to Pantić and Florian (2015), educators must commit to education and can understand how to integrate theoretical and practical knowledge and skills. The PPMLPS emphasises in section 6.5.6 that "teachers will be trained through Continuing Professional Teacher Development provided by the DBE to cover adolescent sexual and reproductive health education and learner pregnancy prevention, including contraceptive methods" (DBE, 2021). The PPMLPS Section 4 indicates how role-players, including the school's teachers, must implement the policy (DBE, 2021). Therefore, the conversion factors, such as lack of policy clarity, uncertainty about procedural steps, and gaps in knowledge around adolescent health and rights, constrain teachers' capability sets. By contrast, access to workshops, guidelines, and continuous learning opportunities expands their capacity to respond confidently and accurately (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022).

Aligned with the literature in this paper, we argue that the enhancement of knowledge capability will directly strengthen teachers' well-being freedom, as it provides them with the real freedom to make informed decisions, support learners appropriately, and integrate policy requirements into their teaching practice without fear or hesitation (Hamilton & Doss, 2020). Arguably, if learners do not gain the required knowledge and support from teachers regarding PPMLPS, they may fail to complete the learning process and, subsequently, not obtain valuable knowledge (DBE, 2021). Therefore, as indicated by The Dialogue Knowledge Hub (2020), it becomes essential that investing in teacher development supports the broader objectives of the SDGs by enhancing educational outcomes and promoting lifelong learning opportunities. The teachers' knowledge needs for effective policy implementation must be addressed to foster the emergence of sustainable societies. This requires identifying and tackling the obstacles that hinder successful policy enactment. Targeted training on policy implementation can equip the teachers with the essential knowledge and skills to fulfill their roles in accordance with PPMLPS requirements (DBE, 2021). From Sen's perspective, development involves removing

the barriers limiting what individuals can achieve in life, including illiteracy, poor health, restricted access, or the absence of civil and political freedoms (Chikunda, 2013). We argue that initiatives to enhance teachers' knowledge would enable them to navigate the challenges more effectively and exercise their professional responsibilities more confidently by implementing the PPMLPS (DBE, 2021).

Relational collaboration as a capability

Relational collaboration is the capability of teachers to work in partnership with school management teams, parents, healthcare providers, and other stakeholders in the education system. Collaboration is a dynamic process influenced by multiple factors, including curriculum requirements, educational policies, and teachers' diverse dispositions and beliefs about teaching and learning (Hattie, 2012). Arguably, collaboration can be understood as active engagement and interaction within a group to achieve a common goal (Nokes-Malach et al, 2015). As such, a positive impact can be attained through fruitful collaboration among actors of different educational organizations in a particular region by enabling collective problem-solving (Whiteford et al., 2017). Thus, the policy implementation around learner pregnancy cannot be realised in isolation; it requires a network of supportive relationships. The PPMLPS, Section 6.2.2, outlines that pregnant learners require support beyond the school environment, including access to healthcare and social services (DBE, 2021). School stakeholders, particularly the school principal and the SMT, should thus collaborate closely with health and social sector partners to ensure pregnant learners have access to necessary services. Although the purpose of collaboration is to support learners, it is also said to improve child performance, alleviate school dropout, and enhance positive behaviour and self-esteem (Mehta et al., 2022).

We therefore argue that relational collaboration should strengthen the implementation of the PPMLPS (DBE, 2021). This is because their capability sets shrink when teachers are denied collaborative structures or face fragmented support systems, leaving them with limited options for meaningful action. Moreover, Lyytinen et al. (2017) emphasise the importance of integrating the interests of both internal and external stakeholders to achieve a balance between academic goals and external needs, which is crucial for maintaining educational quality. In terms of this study, the findings indicate that teachers and other elected school personnel should be skilled and proficient to provide comprehensive sexuality education and information on the prenatal period or pregnancy and motherhood (Van Schalkwyk, 2021). Moreover, strong professional relationships will expand the capability set by offering avenues for resource sharing, joint problem-solving, and coordinated interventions. Collaboration will enhance teachers' well-being and freedom, empowering them to act as policy implementers and facilitators of a holistic support system for pregnant learners. In line with PPMLPS (DBE, 2021), offering a humanitarian and compassionate environment is essential by providing care, counselling, and support for pregnant learners and establishing a collaborative relationship among teachers and learners (Van Shalkwyk, 2021).

Inclusivity as a capability

In the context of the PPMLPS, inclusivity means that pregnant learners must have the genuine opportunity to remain in school, access support systems, and participate fully in learning without stigma or discrimination (DBE, 2021). The PPMLPS, Section 6, indicates that the school responsibilities include encouraging pregnant learners to continue with schooling; preventing any discrimination against pregnant learners; taking measures against any hate speech against pregnant learners; providing counselling services and academic support (DBE, 2021). This statement refers to inclusivity. Teachers and the broader school system should thus play a pivotal role in shaping the schooling trajectories of pregnant learners, who need to be properly upskilled and empowered to promote a stigma-free, supportive, and enabling environment. According to Chinkondenji (2022), teachers are expected to provide support by actively listening, being empathetic,

advocating for them, ensuring positive educational outcomes, and addressing bullying. Dealing with a learner's pregnancy often brings emotional strain, moral dilemmas, and community pressures that weigh heavily on teachers.

We therefore argue that inclusivity as a capability should strengthen the implementation of the PPMLPS (DBE, 2021). Policy dialogue is an important means of ensuring that policy duty bearers and beneficiaries understand their rights and responsibilities (Runhare & Vandeya, 2012). Babedi (2021) argues that psychosocial support is imperative in terms of learner pregnancy, and it includes a range of interventions and resources provided to address the psychological and social needs of pregnant teenage girls. This support includes emotional care, counselling, guidance, encouragement, and assistance from family members, schools, and the community (Babedi, 2021). In this regard, the PPMLPS should provide for the training of educators with the skills needed to manage and prevent teenage pregnancy (DBE, 2021). Even though the policy states that training will be implemented once per phase, the PPMLPS (DBE, 2021) is silent on how the training is going to be implemented to ensure that all stakeholders are aware of their roles and responsibilities and that all role-players have the needed skills to implement this policy. Arguably, access to counselling services, peer-support groups, and safe spaces for reflection will expand teachers' inclusivity as a capability set. This, in turn, strengthens their well-being and freedom, enabling them to manage challenges with composure and continue to provide compassionate and professional support to pregnant learners.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to understand the capability sets teachers and SMTs need to implement the PPLMPS in schools (DBE, 2021). Harris and Jones (2017) view that the quality of policy implementation is more important than policy selection. Thus, this can be seen as the key to promoting and maintaining education improvements. The implementation process can be seen as a complex procedure, as this process involves many stakeholders and can easily result in failure if not well managed. It is therefore important to explore different ways and methods to ensure more transparency and effectiveness in implementing a policy (Viennet & Pont, 2017). Education policy must be thoroughly planned and monitored to ensure effective implementation.

The implementation of the PPMLPS aims to ensure that pregnant learners are retained in schools, can return to school, and are reintegrated into the schooling system after giving birth (DBE, 2021). This policy also focuses on CSE, which is integrated through life orientation. CSE aims to equip learners with the necessary age-appropriate knowledge and information, assisting them with the choices they will face in life and ensuring that learners make responsible choices.

Challenges identified regarding implementing the PPMLPS include that inclusivity remains a problem, as schools find it challenging to accommodate pregnant learners and ensure an environment free from discrimination and bullying. Furthermore, the stakeholders involved in the implementation of the policy lack the training needed to implement it, and teachers lack the skills and knowledge to assist pregnant learners who require medical care.

The applicable capability set encompasses the needs, interests, and desires at a particular time. We have identified that teachers need to adapt, interpret, and implement the policy through applying knowledge, collaboration, and inclusive capability sets. These capabilities can assist teachers in overcoming the challenges encountered in implementing the PPMLPS (DBE, 2021). It is important that teachers can adapt through the necessary support and training and be transparent when teaching CSE. The Department of Education needs to be more involved within schools to ensure that the necessary support is given to accommodate and support pregnant learners and to assist teachers in schools to ensure that the PPMLPS is effectively implemented.

VII. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There are no conflicts of interest in this article.

VIII. DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data are available upon request.

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