Learning Support Zones: The Unheard Voices of Students exhibiting Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties

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ABSTRACT

This research sets out to examine the Learning Support Zone (LSZ) initiative, introduced in Maltese state secondary schools to promote the inclusion of secondary students exhibiting social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD). A mixed-methods research design was employed with the purpose of exploring the level of application and implementation of LSZ provisions across colleges in Malta, as well as eliciting the students' views about their experience of the service and the influence this initiative has had on their life at school. The participants included in this study consisted of 18 LSZ co-ordinators and nine secondary students exhibiting SEBD. The findings stemming from this research indicate that a significant number of state secondary schools in Malta have subscribed to the LSZ initiative, and have thus assimilated this provision in their respective schools. The students enrolled in LSZs highlighted the pivotal role such provisions occupy in their education. They also emphasized the effective contribution LSZs are providing to students exhibiting SEBD, in terms of the support that is offered in coping with the difficulties they experience, in mainstream educational settings.

Key words: Learning Support Zones, SEBD, Inclusive Education, Secondary Schools, Malta.

DEDICATION

It gives me great pleasure to dedicate this work to my family and fiancée. I would like to express a special feeling of gratitude to my parents, Ray and Doreen and my brother, Brian, for the unconditional support and encouragement they have shown me throughout my entire life. Above all, I would like to dedicate this work to my fiancée, Samaria, for being there for me throughout the entire doctorate programme, each step of the way. It would not have been possible to complete this programme of studies and doctoral thesis without her dedicated support, love, encouragement and inspiration.

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Abbreviation	Term
BESD	Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
DfES	Department of Education and Skills
EBD	Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties
EP	Educational Psychologist
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
LSA	Learning Support Assistant
LSU	Learning Support Unit
LSZ	Learning Support Zones
MEE	Ministry of Education and Employment (Malta)
MEYE	Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment (Malta)
NG	Nurture Group
RQ	Research Question
SEBD	Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SPS	School Psychological Services
TEP	Trainee Educational Psychologist
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

1.1 Rationale

Previous research in the area of inclusion and special educational needs (SEN) suggests that an increase in incidence rates of students exhibiting SEBD in schools is being reported (Cefai and Cooper, 2006). Students experiencing SEBD are usually identified as being part of the 'vulnerable' and/or 'at risk' school population, primarily due to socio-emotional problems and social-skill deficits (Spiteri, 2009). A gradual move towards the inclusion of students with SEN has inevitably posed a challenge for schools that are required to cater for such diverse needs within a mainstream setting. Young people who have been identified as exhibiting social, emotional and behavioural related difficulties have been reported to experience serious challenges in engaging with their education (Macleod and Munn, 2004).

An *'Education for All'* campaign, mandated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has inspired many governments across the globe to develop and introduce inclusive educational policies in the promotion of social inclusion and equality, as well as a fulfilment of every individual's right to a quality education, in pursuit of opportunities to develop children's full potential (UNESCO, 2000). By the year 2015, more than 160 governments worldwide, including Malta, have pledged to accomplish a number of goals outlined in the Framework for Action agreed upon during the World Education Forum of 2000 in Dakar, Senegal (UNESCO, 2000). This settlement pledges that the countries subscribing to this movement will ensure that a quality education for all students will be provided in their respective countries. In line with the Framework for Action agreed upon during the Dakar 2000 convention, the Ministry of Education and Employment (MEE) in Malta has issued the revised edition of the National Curriculum Framework, which correspondingly advocates a 'quality education for all'; recommending that in pursuit of this objective all educational institutions in Malta should be committed to supporting students in developing their academic and personal potential through holistic education, without prejudice and discrimination against minorities, 'vulnerable' and 'at risk' students (MEE, 2012).

This researcher is currently employed as a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) with the School Psychological Services (SPS), forming part of a network of psycho-social support services offered to state schools, which are managed by the Maltese MEE. The position of a TEP involves working closely with children and young people identified as experiencing SEBD and supporting the systems around them. Within the Maltese educational context, LSZs have come to represent one of these sub-systems, inhabiting an important role in the students' life, as it is responsible for helping them cope with the difficulties they experience in school. One aim of the current study is to strengthen our understanding of how such mainstream-based provisions function and how students with SEBD perceive this intervention to be impacting on their educational experience. Thus, this study aims to gain some insight into the level of assimilation and implementation of state-run provisions for young people exhibiting SEBD in secondary schools, known in Malta as LSZs. Following the completion of a pilot project aimed at setting-up a LSZ provision in a small sample of Maltese state schools, the Ministry of Education Youth and Employment (MEYE) encouraged all state secondary schools within the Maltese educational system to integrate this initiative in their mainstream schools (MEYE, 2009). However, since the completion of the piloting programme and subsequent publication of the LSZ national guidance (MEYE, 2009), no research has been carried out to enquire into how the LSZ initiative was taken up by local state schools and the effect it was having on secondary students exhibiting SEBD. In order to shed light on this understudied area, this research aims to investigate the extent to which LSZs have been assimilated in state secondary schools across all colleges in Malta. This study also aims to elicit the views of students identified as experiencing SEBD with regard to the impact their enrolment in such a provision has had on their life at school.

1.2 The Maltese Educational System

Compulsory education in Malta starts at the age of five, with the assimilation of pupils into co-educational primary schools. Prior to integrating their children into primary schools, parents can opt to introduce their children (aged between three and five) into kindergarten classes. According to the Commission of the European Communities (2008) more than 90% of children in Malta participate in pre-primary education. The educational system in Malta is predominantly catered for by state-managed schools, which according to Cefai and Cooper (2011) accommodate approximately two-thirds of the student population across the Maltese

Islands, whilst Church-run schools and Independent schools assimilate the remaining one-third of the pupils. Between the age of five and 10 children are expected to have completed their first educational cycle, which ultimately leads to their transition from primary to secondary education, which has been compulsory in Malta since 1970. A recent educational reform has witnessed the introduction of a college system, whereby state primary and secondary schools are clustered together into 10 regional colleges. Thus, all students attending primary schools in a particular college are assimilated into one of the two secondary schools available in each college (MEYE, 2005). Presently, co-education is not available at secondary level within state-run college systems. Thus, upon entry into secondary school, students are streamed into separate schools, one for boys and another for girls. Attendance at secondary school is expected to continue to the age of 16, after which students are encouraged to further their education at a tertiary level.

1.3 Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties: An Overview

Cole, Visser and Upton (1998) mention that children and young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD) during the nineteenth and early twentieth century were looked down upon as social outcasts and delinquents and their problems were understood to arise from 'within', seen as a mental health issue that required psychiatric attention and care. It was not until the publication of the Warnock Report (Department of Education and Science, 1978) and the Education Act issued in 1981 in the United Kingdom (UK), that terminologies such as 'maladjusted', 'handicapped' and 'educationally sub-normal', were abolished as they were deemed to be stigmatising. Instead they were replaced with what might be described as more appropriate labels, such as 'learning difficulties' and SEN.

Notwithstanding that educational policy in relation to SEBD has seen significant developments over the years, a clear and unified description of what SEBD actually constitutes, continues to be elusive. SEBD is often seen as a multi-dimensional construct that encompasses several areas of difficulty and in turn is indicative of various potential areas of need. As Cross (2011) points out, numerous definitions and classifications for SEBD are used in different disciplines. Macleod and Munn (2004) stress the fact that SEBD is frequently used as a 'catch-all' concept, an umbrella-term which constitutes a myriad of behaviours. Kavale, Forness and Mostert (2004) remark that stakeholders in the field encounter

considerable difficulties in arriving at a universally accepted definition for SEBD, due to the subjective manner in which such a label is assigned, generally designated by cultural rules which evidently vary to different degrees across different political, legislative and cultural contexts. Macleod and Munn (2004) stress that the meaning attached to the SEBD label is socially constructed, thus can be perceived as fulfilling a social function. The act of labelling a problem, difficulty or condition, is understood to serve as a gateway, a route one must take to gain access to supposedly needed resources or services that are expected to be of benefit to the said individual. In fact, according to Trevell (1999), youngsters with SEBD in the 1996 Education Act were classified as students who as a result of 'undefined factors' merit the allocation of additional resources to assist them in their development and education.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), originally enacted in the United States in 1975, uses the term 'serious emotional disturbance' in reference to social, emotional and behavioural type difficulties in children (US Department of Education, 1997). Forness and Knitzer (1992) suggest however, that no research evidence is available that can support the claim that the criteria for 'serious emotional disturbance' are a valid representation of subtypes of children with EBD. In their study, Forness and Knitzer (1992) set-up a workgroup with the purpose of proposing a new definition for children experiencing EBD. The proposed criteria are outlined in Table 1.3.1 below.

Table 1.3.1

Proposed Criteria of Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties

Criteria	Description
1	The term emotional or behavioural disorder means a disability characterized by behavioural or emotional responses in school so different from appropriate age, cultural or ethnic norms that they adversely affect educational performance. Educational performance includes academic, social, vocational, and personal skills.
2	Such a disability is more than a temporary, expected response to stressful events in the environment.
3	It is consistently exhibited in two different settings, at least one of which is school-related.
4	Is unresponsive to direct intervention in general education or the child's condition is such that general education interventions would be insufficient.
5	They can co-exist with other disabilities.
6	This category may include children or youth with schizophrenic disorders, affective disorders, anxiety disorders or other sustained disorders of conduct or adjustment when they adversely affect educational performance.

Note. From Forness and Knitzer (1992)

This definition takes into account a wider spectrum of difficulties that relate to educational performance, namely areas involving social, vocational and personal skills, in contrast to the IDEA, which limited itself to the progress in academic areas as the sole indicator of educational performance.

Cooper (1994) describes SEBD in the light of manifestations of inappropriate behaviour, which are but a reflection of what are sometimes unidentified, underlying emotional difficulties arising from several potential factors. Cooper (1999) reinforces the notion that pupils with SEBD are generally depicted as individuals displaying oppositional behaviour and explains that such behaviour is often seen to interfere with the teaching process, which in turn tends to inhibit their learning potential in school. Sciberras (2006, p. 25), in reference to students with SEBD, argues that:

Children and young people with very challenging behaviour are those individuals who present a considerable management problem to the school...referring to severe disruptive, destructive or aggressive behaviour, which often involves actions that present a danger to the individual self and to others or significantly interferes with the general functioning of the class/school.

The SEN code of practice published in 2001 by the Department of Education and Skills (DfES) in the UK, identifies children and young people with behavioural, emotional, and social developmental difficulties (BESD) as belonging to one of the recognised areas of SEN, and states that such difficulties impact on the child's ability to function, learn and succeed in an educational setting. This guidance (DfES, 2001, p. 93) suggests that individuals identified as having SEBD demonstrate a range of difficulties, namely individuals who:

- are withdrawn or isolated,
- are disruptive, disturbing, hyperactive and lack concentration,
- have immature social skills.

This definition implies that the behaviours that individuals with SEBD exhibit can be allocated to two different categories, usually referred to as 'internalised' and 'externalised' behaviours. Gresham, Lane, MacMillan, and Bocian (1999, p. 234), describe the aforementioned categories as behaviours that constitute an 'acting-out' or 'acting-in' style which is described as: "*aggressive, impulsive, coercive, non-complaint and withdrawn, lonely, depressed, anxious*", respectively. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, fourth edition (American Psychiatric Association, 2000), describes externalising behaviour as one that is disruptive, hyperactive and aggressive. On the other hand, Goodwin, Fergusson and Horwood's (2004) study involving school-age youngsters with internalised behaviour patterns, describe such individuals as typically scoring high on levels of anxiousness, fear, shyness, as well as inhibited or withdrawn behaviours. Smith (2006) identifies an additional category within the SEBD spectrum, which she classifies as 'low incidence disorders' which refers to conditions such as schizophrenia that may occur in childhood and early adolescence. According to Smith (2006), such children have serious difficulties with mastering their school work and often require special educational settings in order to meet their educational needs.

As outlined earlier, the present research is directed towards exploring the functioning and impact of LSZs within the Maltese educational system. In view of the above, the researcher deemed it appropriate to propose a working definition that stands in recognition of the political and legislative framework pertaining to the Maltese educational system, and one which is representative of the national guidelines that officially delineate the functioning and rationale of LSZs in state secondary schools, in Malta.

Table 1.3.2, detailed below, outlines the behaviours of secondary students who fit the profile for SEBD as recommended by the LSZ policy guidelines (MEYE, 2009). Like the definition of EBD outlined in the SEN code of practice (DfES, 2001) the criteria outlined in the LSZ guidance envisage students with SEBD as displaying a range of behaviours, which can be categorised as: disruptive, confrontational, aggressive, disaffected, withdrawn and educationally disengaged.

Table 1.3.2

Characteristics of Secondary Students with SEBD eligible for provision in LSZs

Eligibility Criteria	Exclusionary Criteria
• Lack of self-worth or confidence	• Students who persist in presenting extremely challenging behaviour
• Poor anger management skills	• Those who are not benefiting from LSZ services
• Experience difficulties with accepting sanctions	• Students who can be of harm to self or to others
• Aggressive, insolent and quarrelsome	
• Lack respect towards others	
• Have poor social and communication skills	
• Are shy, withdrawn or anxious	
• Find difficulty in adjusting to new situations	
• Have difficult family or social circumstances	
• Are long-term absentees	
• Are bullied and those who bully	
• Engage in truancy	
• Long term absentees for gradual reintegration	

Note. From MEYE (2009)

The aforementioned UK and Maltese policies both make reference to external and internal behaviour difficulties and note how such factors impinge on the educational experiences of students with SEBD at school. Therefore, the proposed working definition of SEBD for the purpose of this study is the following:

> Students who are identified as exhibiting SEBD are those whose behaviour is characterised by one or more of the behaviours delineated in the LSZ guidelines, as detailed under the 'eligibility criteria' in Table 1.3.2, above. Such behaviours will be reported to have been persistently present for a significant period of time and the intensity of the individual's behaviour is such that it inhibits the individual's ability and/or motivation to adequately engage with others on a social and emotional level, in a culturally appropriate manner. Individuals who are identified as having SEBD will also be reported to have been reluctant or unable to appropriately engage in learning and interventions provided through general education which have been ineffective in catering for their social, emotional and academic needs.

1.4 Inclusive Education

Article 26, of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly, marked an important stepping stone on the road towards inclusion as it is known today. This proclamation declared that each individual will have the right to a proper education without any prejudice towards race, gender, religious beliefs and ethnicity in the hope of promoting tolerance, understanding and respect for all peoples (UN General Assembly, 1948). UNESCO (1990, p. 33) published the '*World Declaration on Education for All: Meeting Basic Learning Needs*' document which above all called for the basic education of all children, youth and adults with the purpose of, "giving every individual the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning". The Salamanca Statement endorsed by a total of 92 different countries reaffirmed;

> *the right to education of every individual, as dictated in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and renewing the pledge made by the world community at the 1990 World Conference on Education for All to ensure that right for all regardless of individual differences* (UNESCO, 1994, p. vii).

This document recognises the necessity to inform and guide governments in promoting inclusive principles in educational policy, adopting frameworks that can accommodate all children and youths, regardless of their disabilities, learning difficulties and conditions. According to the Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994, p. 6) Inclusive education refers to policy and educational institutions that:

> *should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. This should include disabled and gifted children, street and working children, children from remote or nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic or cultural minorities and children from other disadvantaged or marginalised areas or groups.*

In 2003, UNESCO recognised that the strategies and programmes that had been implemented thus far were insufficient with regards to meeting the needs of those children who were vulnerable to marginalisation and exclusion. This report also highlighted that the programmes which had been setup to cater for the educational needs of these students, were generally located outside the mainstream school setting, in the form of specialised programmes run by trained educators in specialised institutions. UNESCO (2003) also reports that such initiatives were ineffective in preventing exclusion, due to the 'second rate' educational facilities and opportunities that they offered. UNESCO (2005, p. 12) stated that the;

> *move towards inclusion is not simply a technical or organisational change but also a movement with a clear philosophy; a dynamic approach of responding positively to pupil diversity and of seeing individual differences not as problems, but as opportunities for enriching learning.*

As Allan (2010) points out, the concept of inclusion is still elusive in many educational institutions and educators as there is much uncertainty about what inclusion actually represents and how it translates into pedagogy and a renewed educational culture. UNESCO (2005, p. 13) redefines inclusion to be:

> *A process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision which covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children.*

This definition of inclusion offers an amplified understanding of what the grand narrative of inclusive education is all about. UNESCO (2005) explains that inclusion is for 'all' students (with and without SEN) and educators alike, stressing that inclusive practices should aim to enable teachers and pupils to feel comfortable with diversity. This definition also stresses that inclusion requires participation, acceptance and achievement within a mainstream educational setting. UNESCO (2009), whilst reaffirming that the scope of inclusion is qualitatively much more far reaching than the practice of integration, also mentioned that full inclusion of students with SEN requires attendance and continuation in school, access to the curriculum and educational activities that address the students' needs and empower them to voice their opinions and participate in decisions that affect their lives. Equally significant is the support given to each student to learn according to their ability, in order to fulfil what is required with respect to their personal, social and academic development (UNESCO, 2009).

Inclusive education is usually viewed as a framework that functions in order to safeguard the rights and interests of all students in terms of quality education and stands for practice that promotes equality and diversity within educational systems. According to Press and Rowan (2010) some research studies report that full inclusion of students with SEN is not always as successful as originally intended, referring to teacher training, competence, commitment, motivation, and accountability, as influencing factors that impinge on the degree to which inclusive policies are implemented.

1.5 The Inclusion of Students exhibiting SEBD.

The benefits of inclusive education for 'typically' developing children and young people have also been widely reported in literature and its positive effects on the general school population and culture have been noted in previous research (MacMillan, Gresham and Forness, 1996; Tarver-Behring, Spagna and Sullivan, 1998; Salgado, 2001; Yona and Rea, 2004; Graham and Harwood, 2011). Inclusive education primarily seeks to promote appropriate educational opportunities to traditionally marginalised and excluded students.

Students who have been identified as experiencing SEBD are usually associated with this category of pupils with SEN. As Cole and Knowles (2011, p. 13) explain, SEBD pupils *"often cause highly challenging disruption in lessons, break-times or in residential-*

provision... and that a single child's actions can cause extreme and long-lasting stress to staff, introducing feelings of inadequacy, anger and, at times, despair". Pisani (2006) reported that during the period 2000-2005, 1.5% of the total number of children and young people between the age of 10 and 18 attending school in Malta, have been identified to be experiencing SEBD. A large-scale research study conducted by Cefai, Cooper and Camilleri (2009), involving 10% of the Maltese school population was carried out in order to explore the nature and distribution of SEBD in Maltese schools. This study has been a benchmark in this field, both locally and internationally due to the size of the database and its representativeness of the SEBD population. The results reported by Cefai, Cooper and Camilleri (2009) on the prevalence rates of SEBD in Maltese schools, suggest that it is more likely for SEBD to be found in boys than girls across primary and secondary schools.

The Elton Report (1989, p. 65) noted that: "*bad behaviour in schools is a complex problem which does not lend itself to simple solutions*". Inclusion of students with SEBD in general educational settings has, over the years, been reported to represent a major challenge for educators (Knitzer, Steinberg and Fleisch, 1990; Shapiro, Miller, Sawka, Gardill and Handler, 1999; Mowat, 2009). In Maltese state secondary schools LSZs are currently the sole specialised educational provision located within the mainstream school setting, which is available to young people exhibiting SEBD. Driven by the inclusive ethos which presently dominates educational discourse and policy in the Maltese Islands, the provision for students with SEBD has shifted from off-site 'opportunity centres' to LSZs which ideally should be operational within mainstream school settings, offering educational and therapeutic programmes that cater for the individual needs of students. The MEYE (2005, p. 44) remarked that: "*these new facilities can also provide an education to students showing significantly challenging behaviour*", with the hope of reintegrating them back into the mainstream school system. In fact, the LSZ guidelines (MEYE, 2009, p. 4) stipulate that: "*the LSZ should be an integral part of the school behaviour policy and should reflect the inclusive philosophy and practice as defined in the National Minimum Curriculum giving all the students the opportunity to succeed*".

According to this report, LSZs are driven by the aspiration to offer "*support to students who are, at risk of exclusion due to SEBD*" (MEYE, 2009, p. 1). The national policy on LSZs (see appendix A) states that the responsibility and duty of managing a LSZ provision lies within

the remit of the Headteacher and thus offers no clear example of the manner in which LSZs should be implemented on a day-to-day basis, but rather offers an account of the general principles guiding the overall purpose and role of such provisions. Reference is also made to the physical setting of LSZs and the essential facilities that are required to adequately equip such a provision, as well as the programmes expected to be offered in the LSZ for students exhibiting SEBD (MEYE, 2009).

1.6 Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the rationale behind the present study. The purpose and aims of this research were introduced and a brief summary of the educational system in Malta was presented. The concepts of SEBD and inclusive education were also explored. In the next chapter a systematic literature review will be presented, outlining the previous research conducted in the area of inclusion of students exhibiting SEBD at a secondary level of education, both in Malta and the UK. Due to the absence of previous research studies directly focusing on LSZ provisions, the literature reviewed will also seek to include research publications which focus their attention upon similar services for secondary students in the UK, namely Learning Support Units (LSUs) and Nurture Groups (NGs), in order to understand the influence such provisions are having on the education and well-being of secondary students with SEBD.

CHAPTER TWO
Literature Review

2.1 Procedure

In order to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the published research on the area of inclusion of students identified as having SEBD, a systematic review of research articles, studies and publications was conducted. The systematic review was conducted through the EBSCO search engine which was utilised to conduct a systematic search using the following databases as sources:

- *Academic Search Complete*
- *Education Research Complete*
- *PsycARTICLES*
- *PsycINFO*

The search for publications was narrowed down to the databases outlined above since they provide an extensive and comprehensive resource-base which is focused specifically on the areas of concern for the present research, namely; Psychology and Education. In addition to the articles sourced through the database searched, articles and publications from secondary sources were also included in the review. The first systematic search strategy included several searches using key terms relevant to the area of research being explored in this study, namely;

- *Learning Support Zone / Learning Support Unit,*
- *SEBD / EBD / BESD,*
- *Inclusion / Inclusive Education.*

Several searches were conducted using the key terms in all possible combinations, however this first search proved unsuccessful, as no articles could be sourced that were directly related to the LSZ provision, or to similar initiatives in education. As a result of the ineffective database search, the researcher decided to review the key terms used in the first search, and thus conduct an alternative systematic search. The key terms *'Learning Support Zone / Learning Support Unit'* were removed from the list of key words used for the second database search, thus broadening the search with the aim of sourcing articles related to the

area of study, even though not directly focusing on the LSZ provision. Thus, the following key terms were included in the search:

· *SEBD / EBD / BESD,*

· *Inclusion / Inclusive Education.*

The systematic search for articles on the databases selected was carried out by the researcher between the dates: 11/07/12 and 13/07/12. The total number of articles resulting from the electronic database search, utilising all possible combination of the key terms outlined above, was 593. At this stage the researcher removed all duplicate articles resulting from the separate searches conducted, which resulted in a total of 403 articles. The titles and abstracts of the shortlisted articles were reviewed and evaluated against the inclusion and exclusion criteria, formulated to guide the researcher through the process of retaining or withdrawing articles from the review (refer to table 2.1.1 below).

Table 2.1.1

Systematic Review: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
The articles included in the systematic review were those that;	*The articles excluded from the systematic review were those that;*
- Discussed issues pertaining to Inclusive Education for students with SEBD.	- Related to provision of support services to students in non-educational facilities.
- Focused on the provision of services for students with SEBD, within educational settings.	- Were related to young people attending for their education in primary, post-secondary or tertiary educational institutions.
- Were related to students attending at a secondary level of education.	- Studies related to children with SEBD attending primary school.
	- Were not related to SEBD.

Following the application of the inclusion and exclusion criteria outlined above, six articles were deemed to be eligible to be included in the final review. An additional five hand-searched publications were also included. This resulted in a total of 11 articles which were included in the systematic review. This process is illustrated in Figure 2.1.1 below.

2.2 A Systematic Literature Review

The research articles presented and reviewed in this section will explore several areas of interest, relating to the inclusion of secondary students with SEBD in education. Amongst others, the articles reviewed provide some insight into teachers' and students' views on the inclusion of students with SEBD and the impact of inclusion for such students. In view of the fact that no previous research publications could be sourced, neither manually nor electronically, which were specifically related to the LSZ service, research articles which focused on similar provisions within secondary school settings, such as LSUs and NGs were included in this review. A summary table is included in appendix B, outlining the research articles reviewed in this chapter.

The experiences of educators working closely with students experiencing SEBD can provide an insight into the process by which inclusive principles can be applied to the education of pupils with SEBD. Goodman and Burton (2010) conducted a study aimed at eliciting teachers' views about their experiences and approaches in including students with SEBD in mainstream classrooms. Semi-structured interviews were used with a total of nine school teachers (eight of whom taught in secondary schools and one in primary) across schools in the UK. The participants were purposefully selected on the basis of the subject they taught, their teaching experience, and where they practiced. Interesting findings were reported that indicate that teachers felt that they shouldered most of the responsibility when it came to bridging policy and practice and that little access was available to external professionals, who could assist them by recommending the best ways to approach and successfully include students with SEBD. Teachers expressed their concerns with regard to a shortage of external support and also reported that they implemented a range of strategies which positively contributed to the inclusion of secondary students with SEBD. Positive feedback, humour and respectful student-teacher relationships were reported to promote inclusion of students with SEBD. Specialised training in inclusive practices was another area of need, highlighted by the teachers interviewed by Goodman and Burton (2010). As the former researchers noted in their study, their research was carried out on a very small scale which limits its generisability. However, the fact that the participants selected represented a wide geographical spread, added value to the representativeness of the study.

IDENTIFICATION

Articles that have been identified through the systematic electronic database searches using the key terms: SEBD/EBD/BESD; Inclusion/Inclusive Education

(n =593)

Total number of records following removal of duplicates: (n =403)

SCREENING

Total number of records screened:

(n=403)

Total number of records excluded, as they do not meet the inclusion criteria.

(n=397)

ELIGIBILITY

Total number of records screened and deemed to be eligible:

(n=6)

Additional publications that were hand-searched:

(n =5)

INCLUDED

Total number of research studies included for review:

(n=11)

Figure 2.1.1. Systematic Review Overview.

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Pupil's views also offer a unique and insightful outlook on the way they experience inclusion from a 'service-user' perspective. Cefai and Cooper (2010) noted that students should be regarded as a source of knowledge and expertise. In 2007, a research study was conducted in Malta to elicit the views of Maltese students on significant school and life experiences. Abela and Smith La Rosa (2007), authors of this study, interviewed 14 youngsters between the age of 10 and 18, some of whom were registered in mainstream school, while others attended special school settings designed for students with SEBD. The findings linked to this research, highlighted some interesting points, namely that SEBD students who felt included, particularly enjoyed the positive relationships with their teachers. Bullying, negative experiences with senior school staff, peer pressure and excessive homework were reported to be major contributing factors to the social and academic exclusion of these students. As noted by Abela and Smith La Rosa (2007), their research does not take into account the views of other stakeholders involved in the education of these students.

In a small-scale study, authored by Spiteri (2009), a sample of 12 participants who attended secondary school during the year 1995/1996, and identified as having experienced SEBD during their time at secondary school, were interviewed about their experiences in school. The participants of this study were reported to have attended a specialised school which catered for children with disruptive behaviour and long periods of absenteeism. This research used a grounded theory approach and unstructured interviews were used to elicit information about how the participants perceived their schooling. The findings of this study reported that the '*Head of School's Influence*', '*Personalised Attention*' and '*Peer Relationships*' were the major themes developed through the analysis of the interviews carried out. The participants emphasised that the Head of school's flexibility in providing a diverse curriculum based on vocational learning and his/her readiness to exceed his/her official duties in the process of supporting the students, was a major contributing factor to their success. The individual attention given to students through the student-centred approach used by the school and the teachers' "*pedagogic knowledge integrated with the students' values and expectations*" was reported to be a determining factor that contributed to their readiness to learn and develop skills, which ultimately helped them find purpose in their life as adults (Spiteri, 2009, p. 62). The participants also stressed that peer relationships within the provision helped them develop their interpersonal skills and pro-social interactions with others. As the researcher

himself has noted, this is a small-scale study which inevitably places limits on the extent to which such findings can be generalised, especially due to the fact that only male ex-students were interviewed. Moreover the findings of the study were based on ex-students' recollections of school-related events and not recent lived experiences within the present educational system. Nonetheless, such findings are useful in providing information about the factors that positively influence the students' well-being and engagement in education. Readiness for inclusion is not only determined by the interplay of the variables highlighted in other studies, but also by peer attitudes in the mainstream and their outlook on fellow students who exhibit SEBD. Visser and Dubsky (2009) carried out a school based study with the aim of understanding how a range of behaviours traditionally associated with SEBD students are perceived by their peers. A three-staged method was used with a cohort of year 7 pupils (aged 11-12). During the first Term, the students were presented with six case studies, depicting experiences of pupils with SEBD and were asked to complete a questionnaire based on the given case studies. During the second Term, students were split into a control group and an intervention group, where the latter received additional opportunities to discuss and explore behaviours related to SEBD. In the third Term, the pupils were re-administered the questionnaire originally handed over in Term one and pre and post questionnaires were analysed. The findings emerging from this study indicated that the majority of the participants would be unhappy to be in class with other SEBD students displaying either externalising or internalising behaviours. Moreover 61% of the participants also claimed that they expected adults to manage incidents in which such behaviours are manifested. Post questionnaire results from the intervention group evidenced an increase in understanding and empathy for SEBD pupils. This study highlighted the need for providing further opportunities for interventions with peers of children with SEBD, which could potentially facilitate inclusion in mainstream settings.

Mowat (2009) suggests that when it comes to students with SEBD, apart from displaying difficulties in social, emotional and/or behavioural areas, they generally also portray difficulties in their ability to learn. Whether this is due to limited exposure to opportunities for learning or due to individual cognitive abilities or both, is not certain. In a research study authored by Mowat (2009), an intervention using support groups was set-up which involved 69 secondary school pupils. The participants were asked to attend for 20 one-hour sessions

which aimed to develop a number of socio-emotional skills. Mowat (2009), reported that the post-intervention data collected suggested that no significant improvement had been recorded, in terms of the students' attainment levels on national tests; however a change in the disposition towards learning and learning-related behaviour was reported for some students. This study has shed some light on the difficulties that children with SEBD experience with their learning at school. As the author of this article noted, some positive results were reported which indicated that a flexible and differentiated approach can be useful in supporting SEBD students to build upon their previous learning effectively, which raises expectations of what students with SEBD can achieve when adequately supported.

As noted earlier, the systematic search conducted for the purpose of this research did not yield any research articles related to studies on LSZ provisions. Thus the database search was widened with the intention of including research publications which focused on exploring and/or evaluating similar provisions for students with SEBD in secondary schools, namely; LSUs and NGs. A two-year research endeavour was carried out across all LSUs in Nottingham City secondary schools as part of a project, which aimed to map the therapeutic services offered in LSUs, as well as the range of difficulties encountered by students with SEBD enrolled in the provision (Becker, 2004). This research also aimed to elicit the views of the major stakeholders involved in LSUs, namely; parents, professionals and the students themselves, with the purpose of exploring how the programmes and initiatives catering for students in LSUs have impacted on their education and well-being. A mixed-methods approach was used, whereby surveys were conducted to gather quantitative data about the level of implementation of LSUs. This inquiry was also aimed at gathering preliminary evidence of the LSU managers' opinions about the effectiveness of the therapeutic interventions offered by the LSUs in secondary schools. Qualitative data deriving from 'in-depth' interviews with educators, parents and students involved in LSUs, was also obtained in view of establishing what the major stakeholders think about the LSU provision itself and the benefits of attending for therapeutic programmes and activities made available through the LSU initiative. Findings stemming from Becker's (2004) study indicate that interventions delivered in LSUs were designed based on each of the students' specific needs. These would commonly involve behaviour and anger management programmes, group and individual work, as well as the input of a learning mentor. Becker's (2004) report mentions that students

enrolled within the LSU service, found such programmes helpful and stated that most of the students found their relationships with LSU staff to be supportive. Parents who participated in this study, also made reference to the important role of relationships fostered between students with SEBD and LSU staff and the beneficial effects the students' involvement in LSUs is having on their education. The positive outcomes of attending LSUs were reported by Becker (2004) to be related to the fact that students were better able to concentrate on their schoolwork and increasingly foster better relationships with school-based staff, which ultimately helped them re-engage with their learning. An improvement in students' overall behaviour was also reported by Becker (2004) which amongst others, prevented students from being excluded or suspended from their school. Becker's (2004) study provides an 'in-depth' analysis of the implementation of LSUs and the impact they were having in supporting students with SEBD within mainstream settings. Nonetheless, it is important to note that only secondary schools in Nottingham City were included in this research and thus the findings reported in Becker's (2004) study cannot be generalised to other LSUs operating in other regions and Local Authorities in the UK.

An Ofsted report, published in 2006 was concerned with evaluating the functioning of LSUs in mainstream secondary schools in the UK. Ofsted (2006) carried out a survey with a total of 12 LSUs which, similarly to LSZs in Malta were defined as school-based centres for pupils with SEBD, who were at a risk of exclusion from mainstream settings. The aim of the study was to evaluate how these provisions were functioning in terms of their ability to cater for the social and emotional developmental needs of the students attending the provision and the extent to which these students were successfully being reintegrated into the mainstream. The findings indicated that in all 12 LSUs, pupils with SEBD were being successfully re-engaged in their education, by which incidents of inappropriate behaviour, exclusion and irregular attendance were reduced. Mixed results were reported in terms of academic achievement, quality of teaching and curriculum provision. Reintegration was reported to be the major weakness of five LSUs, in which pupils were not always able to cope independently within the classroom setting. Following its evaluation, Ofsted (2006, p. 4) stated that in an effective LSU:

> *There was a clear focus on the core subjects of the National Curriculum, with good resources and effective access to information and communication*

technology. The Academic curriculum was given the same emphasis as the work done with pupils on their social, emotional and behavioural skills, and on improving their ability to learn. As a result, pupils' achievement, standards, personal development and well-being were good.

Hill and Ryan (2010) carried out a small-scale qualitative research study, which was designed to elicit the views of four young people attending secondary school, regarding their experience within a LSU. The authors of this study reported in their findings that overall the participants felt very much supported by the provision, especially through their participation in an anger management programme, as well as through the supportive relationships fostered with the staff in the LSU. Another key finding arising from Hill and Ryan's research study refers to the academic system around the child. The participants mentioned that they thought it was important for the LSU co-ordinator to foster collaborative working relationships with their teachers, based in mainstream classrooms. The implementation of activities that encourage students to talk about their problems was also mentioned as a salient factor which contributed to the participants' well-being in the LSU. This study offered an opportunity for students attending LSUs to voice their views about their experience of such a service and the impact it has on their educational experience. However, as the authors themselves recognised, the validity of such findings are limited due to the fact that all four participants were also enrolled in the 'Lunch Club' provision (another support service available to vulnerable students in mainstream secondary school) during the same period of attendance in the LSU. In this event, it is difficult to confidently attribute the changes experienced by the participants directly to the support received as part of their involvement in the LSU, given that the 'Lunch Club' programme might have equally contributed to the reported outcomes. Moreover, being a small-scale study, only four students were interviewed, and all were reported to be attending the same LSU, based in one particular secondary school. This poses a limitation to the extent to which the reported findings can be generalised to the general student population attending LSUs across secondary schools in England.

A pilot study carried out by O'Connor, Hodkinson, Burton and Torstensson (2011), aimed at exploring strategies that empower the voice of pupils with SEBD. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with students aged 14 to 16 in order to elicit the young people's views about their educational experience, including the provision they attended in the mainstream school.

O'Connor et al., (2011) reported that the participants of this study expressed their frustration about the fact that access to a placement within a provision designed to support students exhibiting SEBD, was dependent on vacancies and the availability of funding at the time of referral, which sometimes was reported to be problematic. Sample sizes and inclusion criteria for students who were selected to participate in the study were not reported, which limits the replicability of the study. This study however, sheds some light on the issue of 'access' to provision and how this can be a significant factor in determining the 'when', 'which' and 'if' support is given to students with SEBD.

Numerous research studies have been carried out to test the effectiveness of NGs, which according to Boxall (2002, p. 202) are *"an effective intervention that appears to meet the criteria for supporting children exhibiting social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, who are at risk of exclusion from mainstream school"*. Bani (2011) explains that NGs represent a small supportive class, generally located in mainstream primary schools which above all, aim to provide children with the opportunity to re-visit the 'nurturing' experiences that they potentially missed out on and offer a safe and predictable environment, which aims to help children and young people develop their social and emotional needs. Colley (2009) reported that more than 1000 nurture groups were functioning in the UK in 2009. NGs were originally set-up in mainstream primary schools but recent research articles included in this review indicate that NGs based in secondary schools are growing in number. The Welsh Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (2010, p. 20) stress that the provision of NGs for Key Stage 3 students is a new venture and aims to offer support in terms of:

- Support to aid transition of pupils identified in year 6.
- Supporting pupils at the beginning of the day and during unstructured times of the school day, such as lunchtime.
- Offering a number of sessions of support, but not available throughout every school day.
- A consistently staffed service which should be available throughout the day, with support given to individuals and groups in a secure setting within the mainstream classroom.

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A small scale case study, carried out by Cooke, Yeomans and Parkes (2008), sought to explore the impact of NGs that operate in secondary mainstream schools. Cooke, Yeomans and Parkes (2008) provided a description of how a NG in secondary school is said to function and presented a successful case study of a girl in Year 7, who had been referred to the NG following experiences of domestic violence and sexual assault. In this case, the NG focused on promoting activities that aimed to develop her self-image and engagement with others. The authors of this study reported that following her involvement in the NG, the participant showed a marked improvement in social engagement and made significant academic progress. The findings of this study provide an indication of the effectiveness of NG provisions in secondary schools, however due to the small sample size of this study such results cannot be considered to be representative of the impact other NGs across other secondary schools in the UK. Nonetheless, the reported research findings indicate the potential positive impacts of NGs in secondary educational settings.

A recent study published by Garner and Thomas (2011) was conducted with three NGs in secondary school settings. Focus groups with parents, NG teachers and mainstream school staff were carried out in conjunction with individual interviews with students exhibiting SEBD, who were benefiting from the provision at the time of the study. Using a thematic analysis to analyse the collected data, the authors of this study reported that relationships built on principles of equality and respect were fostered within the NG, and were a source of security and protection for the youngsters involved. Such relationships were reported to provide the students with the coping skills they required inside and outside of school. The findings of the study also reported that the sessions and activities carried out in the NGs might have had a positive impact on the youngsters' self-esteem, both in terms of their confidence in socialising with others and in context of their approach to learning. Data collected from NG teachers and other mainstream school staff, highlighted a divergence of understanding between the two stakeholders, in terms of the function and practices served by the NGs. NG teachers stressed that more exposure to the provision is needed by mainstream school staff, in order to foster a better understanding of the way in which such services operate. Moreover, as the authors stress, additional exploration of the views of parents would be warranted due to the small sample of parents interviewed for the purpose of this research.

The research evidence available at present on the application of LSZs, LSUs and NGs in secondary mainstream school settings is still premature and frequently limited to small scale studies. Research investigating the degree to which such provisions are effective in catering for the needs of secondary students exhibiting SEBD is not conclusive and further inquiry into this area is warranted.

2.3 Educational Provision for Students with SEBD: Theoretical Underpinnings

Within Educational settings, SEBD represents a multi-faceted spectrum of difficulties which impact on the educational engagement and performance of such individuals. Bio-psycho-social theoretical models such as the one proposed by Cole and Knowles (2011, p. 47), suggest that three major factors influence the emergence of SEBD; namely the interplay between:

a) Biological factors (e.g. genetic inheritance and imbalances in the body's biochemistry).
b) Psychological factors (e.g. distorted thought patterns and emotional damage).
c) Social factors (e.g. attachment and separation difficulties).

Of special significance to the present study, are those factors and conceptual models which directly influence the development and implementation of educational support provisions for children with SEBD. Several theoretical frameworks come into play and might be of relevance in an attempt to understand how such educational support initiatives are conceptualised and the manner in which the function they serve, addresses the needs of youngsters exhibiting SEBD.

John Bowlby (1969) introduced 'attachment theory' which provides a major theoretical explanation for understanding how SEBD develops. In his publication, Bowlby (1953, p. 47) states that:

> *It is submitted that the evidence is now such that it leaves no room for doubt regarding the general proposition that the prolonged deprivation of the young child of maternal care may have grave and far-reaching effects on his character and so on the whole of his future life.*

The aforementioned quote figuratively summarises what attachment theory proposes, that is, that the quality and pattern of the interactions which characterise the child's relationships with his/her primary caregivers leaves a long-lasting effect on the manner in which an individual relates to and engages with others in later life. Thus, as Cefai and Cooper (2006, p. 20) note; "*at the core of attachment theory is the idea that individual's feelings towards and engagement with the wider world is mediated by the psychological effects of their earliest experiences of being nurtured by their primary carer*". Bowlby's theory (1969) is founded on the concept of 'behaviour systems', which in turn is rooted in evolutionary theory. Behaviour systems are representative of patterns and categories of behaviours which are species specific and which according to Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters and Wall (1979) serve the purpose of survival. Evolutionary theory suggests that behaviours which contribute to the survival of a species are inherited by successive generations, in order to secure the future preservation of that same species. Anisworth et al., (1979) suggest that 'attachment behaviour', such as crying, calling or smiling, form part of a behavioural system which supposedly serves to encourage proximity and attention by the primary caregiver. In the event that such attention is not handed down to the child, Anisworth et al., (1979) remark that the child is at risk of developing an 'insecure attachment', which generally corresponds to one of different clusters of behaviour, identified as either ambivalent, avoidant or disorganised attachment patterns. Thus, according to attachment theory, parent-child relationships impact on a child's perception of his/her sense of self in relation to others and have an important influence on the child's expectations, in terms of support and acceptance during times of stress. Garner and Thomas (2011), point out that in educational settings, children and young people look out for their teachers to fulfil their need for care, safety and security which are essential ingredients for learning new skills.

Cooper and Whitebread (2007) suggest that provisions such as NGs are strongly influenced by Bowlby's attachment theory (1969). Cooke, Yeomans and Parkes (2008, p. 292), illustrated the criteria necessary for such a provision to be able to appropriately cater for the needs of youngsters with SEBD (refer to Table 2.3.1 below).

Table 2.3.1

Criteria for development of secure attachments as part of SEBD provision in secondary schools

- Maintaining consistent staffing.
- Modelling positive behaviour and social skills by adult staff.
- Providing predictable outcomes.
- Limiting the numbers of pupils to no more than 12.
- Providing developmentally appropriate activities, where curriculum is matched to the developmental level of the child.
- Providing a secure base.
- Considering the importance of transition in children's lives.

Note. From Cooke, Yeomans and Parkes (2008, p. 292).

The criteria mentioned in Table 2.3.1 indirectly make reference to another two major theoretical models which are of considerable significance in understanding the nature and rationale behind provisions, such as LSZs, LSUs and NGs, namely; 'social learning theory' (Bandura, 1986) and Vygotsky's (1978) 'theory of social development'. Bandura's (1986) social learning theory suggested that many behaviours exhibited by people have been learnt and acquired through the process of observation, retention and replication of the observed behaviour. Bandura (1986) describes this process as 'modelling' which according to Ormrod (1999) can be used to teach new behaviours, influence frequency of previously learned behaviours and discourage forbidden behaviours. Vygotsky (1978, p. 86) referred to his theory of 'the zone of proximal development' in an attempt to explore the relationship between learning and development and defined it as; "*the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers*". This theory suggested that learning can occur if an individual is mentored by a more competent person, who through adequate guidance and support can assist the individual through a process he referred to as cognitive 'scaffolding', by which a given task is broken down into simpler steps, enabling the learner to use previous knowledge to learn new skills.

Maslow's (1943) 'theory of motivation' offers an additional perspective on the way a nurturing process, such as the one offered in the aforementioned provisions for students

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exhibiting SEBD, can be useful in satisfying the individual's psychological needs (Cooper and Whitebread, 2007; Cole and Knowles, 2011). Malsow (1943) presents a conceptual framework that is known as the 'Hierarchy of Needs', through which he illustrated that in order for an individual to reach and satisfy his/her ultimate need ('self-actualisation') he/she needs to strive to fulfil the more basic needs (e.g. physiological needs). Through the interactions, relationships and activities promoted within specialised provisions, the psychological needs for belongingness, esteem, acceptance, care and affection of students with SEBD are fostered. According to Cooper and Tiknaz (2007) these are essential factors in achieving a healthy psychological state, without which each individual cannot adequately and effectively function, learn and progress in his/her education.

2.4 Summary

This chapter aimed to provide an account of the systematic literature review carried out for the purpose of this study, highlighting previous research, concerned with the inclusion of secondary students with SEBD in mainstream school. A total of 11 research publications were reviewed and the present gaps in this research area were identified. A considerable amount of research has been conducted with regard to the inclusion of primary students with SEBD. However, similar studies focusing on students with SEBD at a secondary school level are limited. Moreover, the present literature review did not identify any published research with regards to the LSZ provision within the Maltese educational context. Studies that aim to elicit students' views about secondary school provisions for young people with SEBD are also limited. The next chapter will set out to revisit the aims and purpose of this study in context of the methodology used for this research. The next section will also make reference to the research questions (RQs) formulated for this study and provide a thorough description of the research design, the ontological and epistemological positions held by the researcher, as well as the measures used throughout the data collection procedures.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

3.1 Research Purpose and Aims

Since 2005, the Maltese educational system has been subject to a nationwide reform which aimed to invigorate the quality of education for all children and young people (Dooly and Vallejo, 2008). This reform has been inspired by the nation's need for sustainable development, as well as the need to ensure the efficient allocation of necessary resources in supporting each and every individual in reaching his/her full potential (MEE, 2011). In 2009, the MEYE in Malta was committed to the process of drafting and developing a policy with regard to LSZs, in view of promoting such services within mainstream secondary schools (MEYE, 2009). As mentioned in the previous chapter, the literature review identified gaps in the research with regard to LSZs. Since the introduction of this initiative within the Maltese educational system, no research has been published with regard to the extent to which this provision has been adopted by state secondary schools. Furthermore, to date, no initiative has been taken to 'listen' to what young people with SEBD have to say about LSZs and the manner in which such provisions are contributing to their educational experience. In acknowledgment of such gaps in this research area, the overall objective of the present study, is therefore to explore the way LSZs are currently being assimilated into the Maltese educational system and simultaneously furthering our understanding of how such initiatives are impinging on the life of youngsters with SEBD, in secondary mainstream school settings. This study aims to investigate the manner in which LSZs are functioning in different schools across all colleges in the Maltese Islands. Moreover, it also aims to listen to the voices of students enrolled in LSZs.

One element of this research study aims to give a descriptive account of the way LSZs are set-up across state secondary education institutions. This aspect of the study has a descriptive purpose, which as Fox, Martin and Green (2007) explain, strives to obtain information with regards to the status of a particular situation, context or system. Thus, one of the main purposes driving this research aims to provide a clear description of the elements and variables that make up a LSZ provision, within Maltese secondary state schools. According to Bickman and Rog (2008, p. 16); "*the overall purpose of descriptive research is to provide*

a picture of a phenomenon as it naturally occurs...thus it is appropriate when the researcher is attempting to answer 'what is', or 'what was', or 'how much' questions".

This descriptive approach was not meant to establish any 'cause and effect' relationships but simply present reported facts gathered through descriptive measures of inquiry. An exploratory approach was adopted by the researcher, which aimed to elicit the views of secondary students, who attended LSZs, upon the impact such provisions had on their educational experience. According to Engel and *Schutt, 2008* (p. 9) exploratory research;

> *seeks to learn how people get along in the setting in question, what meanings they give to their actions, and what issues concern them. The goal is to learn 'what is going on here' and to investigate social phenomena without expectations.*

According to Fox, Martin and Green (2007), exploratory research is usually directed towards the research of an understudied phenomenon, whilst Bickman and Rog (2008) suggest that it focuses on gaining insight and familiarity into new areas, where investigations are at a preliminary stage.

3.2 Research Questions

In summary, the primary goal of the present research is therefore to elicit the views of secondary students, identified as having SEBD, in an attempt to gain a better understanding of their experiences within LSZ provisions in mainstream state schools, in Malta. Moreover, as previously mentioned, this study also seeks to further our knowledge of how the LSZs are contributing towards including youngsters with SEBD in general educational settings. Furthermore, little is known about the degree to which the LSZ initiative has been taken up by state secondary schools and how existing LSZs are presently being utilised. In pursuit of the aforementioned research aims, the following RQs have been formulated for the present study:

1. *How many Learning Support Zones have been assimilated in Maltese state secondary schools, and how are they functioning across colleges in Malta?*
2. *How do students who exhibit SEBD, view their experience within the Learning Support Zone?*
3. *How do students with SEBD, perceive their involvement within the Learning Support Zone to be impacting on their experience at school?*

3.3 Ontology and Epistemology

Research design is also inevitably linked to the philosophical assumptions the researcher holds about his/her views of the world, the nature of knowledge, how it can be sought and construed. DeWitt (2009, p. 7) refers to worldviews as a; *"system of beliefs that are interconnected in something like the way the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle are interconnected...that is, not merely a collection of separate, independent, unrelated beliefs, but is instead an intertwined, interrelated, interconnected system of beliefs"*.

Wiggins' (2011, p. 45) views on what constitutes a 'worldview', builds on DeWitt's (2009) former description, and suggests that a 'worldview' is manifested through a; *"framework of foundational beliefs, assumptions and philosophies through which one experiences, interacts with, and makes sense of the world"*. The research design adopted by the researcher for the purpose of this study subscribes to a 'critical realist' worldview. Lakoff (1987, p. 265) describes this type of realism as one that acknowledges that; *"the world is the way it is, while acknowledging that there can be more than one scientifically correct way of understanding reality"*. Zachariadis, Scott and Barrett (2010) refer to critical realism as the 'middle way' in between positivistic and interpretivisitic philosophical approaches to research. Maxwell (2012, p. 5) maintains that critical realists;

> *retain an ontological realism (there is a real world that exists independently of our perceptions, theories, and constructions) while accepting a form of epistemological constructivism and relativism (our understanding of this world is inevitably a construction from our own perspectives and standpoint).*

Bannister (2005) argues also that critical realism implies that multiple perspectives of reality need to be considered. These include an external reality, which is what actually occurs in the physical world, and internal realities, which are subjective and unique to each individual. The research design chosen by the researcher for the purpose of this study utilises a mixed-methods design. According to Fox, Martin and Green (2007), the process of combining two research methods rooted in different philosophical paradigms can be conflictual, unless the researcher has an understanding of what the different paradigms are set to accomplish.

In the context of the present research, both quantitative and qualitative methods were used as part of a mixed-methods design. Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) point out that taking a

critical realist perspective can offer a valid contribution to mixed-methods research as it supports and validates the key aspects of both qualitative and quantitative approaches, and facilitates the integration of these two methods, at the same time acknowledging that there are limitations to each method. Thus, a critical realist position accepts the existence of mechanisms and structures that belong to the physical world, such as those pertaining to LSZ provisions. This position simultaneously acknowledges the existence and validity of multiple perceptions of reality, represented as internal realities, which are subjective and unique to each individual student. In the context of this study and in recognition of such multiple perceptions of reality, a critical realist epistemology seeks to gather students' views of their experiences within the LSZ, thus complementing the information gathered from the quantitative method mentioned earlier. According to Zachariadis, Scott and Barrett (2010, p. 2) from a critical realist standpoint;

> *We take research methods that are usually kept separate within interpretive and positivist approaches and propose mixing them using the distinct underlying philosophical approach...In this way, we try to address key philosophical concerns that often deter more extensive use of multiple methods, encourage openness to innovative methodological choices, and deepen practical understanding.*

Thus, the researcher, in subscribing to a critical realist epistemology, was concerned with taking note of the mechanisms embedded within the LSZ service, at an infrastructural, individual and group level, which contributed to the manner in which the students perceived their experiences about the provision and the way these were perceived to impact on their life at school.

3.4 Research Design

The research aims and questions identified previously in sections 3.2 and 3.3 respectively, have been designed according to the descriptive and exploratory nature of this research endeavour. Fox, Martin and Green (2007), denote that the process of identifying the purpose of a study is essential in developing an appropriate research design which adequately serves the aim of the study. Bickman and Rog (2008, p. 11) attest to the notion that the design which is selected and developed for a particular study; *"serves as an the architectural blueprint of a research project, linking design, data collection, and analysis activities to the research questions and ensuring that the complete research agenda will be addressed"*.

Morse, 2003 (as cited in Mertens, 2010, p. 294) suggests that a mixed-methods approach can be useful to educational and psychological research in;

> *combining and increasing the number of research strategies used within a particular project, by which we are able to broaden the dimensions and hence scope of our project. By using more than one method within a research study, we are able to obtain a more complete picture of human behaviour and experience. Thus, we are better able to hasten our understanding and achieve our research goals more quickly.*

The surge in interest in mixed methodology, as evidenced by the increased number of publications on the topic, has inevitably contributed to the evolution of multiple definitions of mixed-methods research. For the purpose of this study, the researcher adopted Creswell and Plano Clark's (2011, p. 7) definition of mixed-methods which refers to this methodology as one that;

- *"collects and analyses persuasively and rigorously both qualitative and quantitative data based on research questions;*
- *mixes, integrates or links the two forms of data concurrently by combining them or merging them, sequentially by having one build on the other or embedding one within the other;*
- *gives priority to one or to both forms of data in terms of what the research emphasizes;*
- *uses the procedures in a single study or in multiple phases of a program of study;*
- *frames these procedures within philosophical worldviews and theoretical lenses; and*
- *combines the procedures into specific research designs that direct the plan for conducting the study".*

This mixed-methods research was designed as a single study split in two phases, which were conducted in a sequential and connected design. The initial phase was concerned with gathering quantitative data in a descriptive format, in view of obtaining data which can assist the researcher in answering the first RQ, namely; '*How many Learning Support Zones have been assimilated in Maltese state secondary schools, and how are they functioning across colleges in Malta?'* This phase was also aimed at gathering the necessary information that would allow the researcher to select the required participants for the successive stage of the study. According to Hesse-Biber (2010), mixed-methods create a synergic effect, whereby

the results from one particular method influences the development, design and/or implementation of the second. Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) argue that the fundamental difference between a multi-method approach and a mixed-methods design is the 'mixing' factor, whereby the latter goes a step further in connecting the two methods. The aforementioned quantitative phase will thus inform the qualitative method by providing the required data to select the participants for the second phase of the study. The qualitative method will address the second and third RQs, namely; *'How do students who exhibit SEBD, view their experience within the Learning Support Zone?'* and *'How do students with SEBD, perceive their involvement within the Learning Support Zone to be impacting on their experience at school?'* Mixed-methods research varies not simply on the basis of the way it is 'mixed' but also on the 'weight' the quantitative and qualitative methods carry in respect to each other. Thus, it is noteworthy to clarify, that the present research was equally focused on gathering information pertaining to the level of application of LZSs, as well as on eliciting the views of students exhibiting SEBD with regard to LSZs, across Maltese state secondary schools. Such a position signifies, that both the quantitative and qualitative phases of the design were equally dominant. Furthermore, the two methods were connected in a sequential manner, symbolised as 'QUAN + QUAL', thus attributing equal dominance to both methods employed within this study.

Figure 3.4.1 below gives a more detailed and illustrative account with regard to the mixed-methods design undertaken for the purpose of this study.
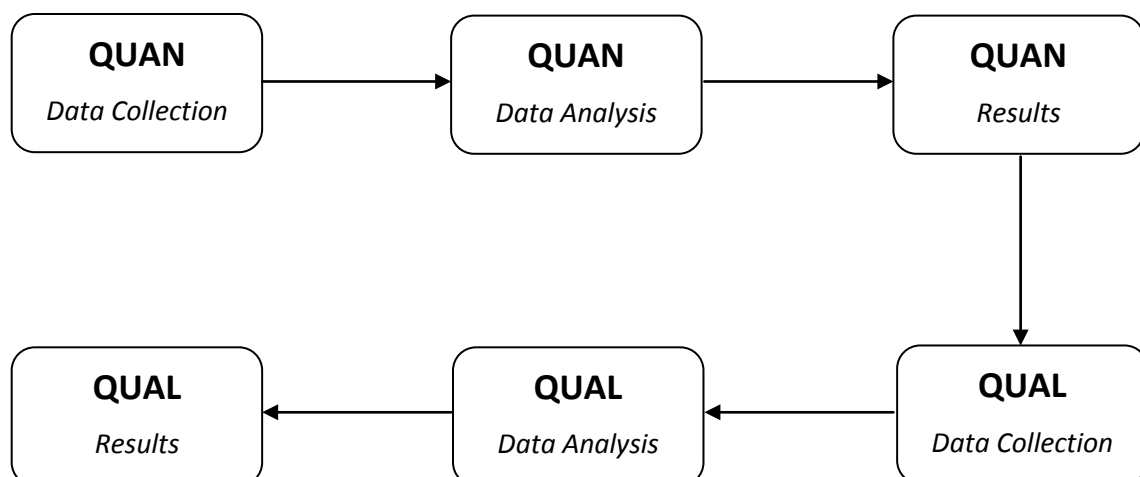
Figure 3.4.1. Mixed-methods Design (QUAN + QUAL)

3.4.1 Participants

In view of gathering the required information on the LSZs presently operating in all state secondary schools, a total of 28 secondary schools in the 10 colleges, were purposefully sampled, and questionnaires were distributed to them accordingly.

A total of 18 secondary schools returned the completed questionnaire and were thus included in the final sample of schools selected to participate in the quantitative phase of this study. In cases where secondary schools reported that no LSZ was established within their school, the Headteacher was responsible for filling in the first section of the questionnaire and returning it to the researcher (Refer to appendix E). However, in the event that a LSZ was reported to be in operation within the school, the questionnaire was filled in by the appointed teacher who held the co-ordinating role within the LSZ provision.

The descriptive information gathered, following the completion of the quantitative phase, enabled the researcher to map the population of students with SEBD, who were enrolled within the LSZ provisions across the state secondary schools. In accordance to the inclusion and exclusion criteria used to select participants for the qualitative phase of this study (refer to Table 3.4.1.1 below), students reported to be attending in a total of 11 distinct LSZs, pertaining to eight different colleges, were found to be eligible to participate in the qualitative phase of the study. Discussions were held between the researcher and the LSZ staff allocated to all 11 LSZs which met the aforementioned inclusion criteria, in an attempt to purposefully sample a total of 12 students to participate in the qualitative phase of the study.

Table 3.4.1.1

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria (Qualitative Phase)

Inclusion Criteria

1. Students (boys and/or girls) aged 11 to 16 years who attend mainstream state secondary school, in one of the 10 colleges in Malta.
2. Students will be chosen from LSZs which have been in operation for at least one scholastic year.
3. Students who have been identified by the school to exhibit SEBD.
4. Students who have been attending the LSZ for a minimum of one month.
5. Students providing parental and informed consent.

Exclusion Criteria

1. LSZs which have been in operation for less than one scholastic year.
2. Students not attending mainstream school.
3. Students not enrolled in the LSZ provision at the time of the study.
4. Students who have been enrolled in the LSZ provision for a less than one month.
5. Students do not provide parental and informed consent.

LSZ co-ordinators from all 11 LSZs (pertaining to six boys secondary schools and 5 girls secondary schools) were asked to recommend students attending their LSZ provision who had been identified to be eligible to take part in this phase of the study, in accordance to the inclusion and exclusion criteria outlined in Table 3.4.1.1. LSZ co-ordinators were asked to shortlist students with diverse types of difficulties related to SEBD and to base their recommendations on the basis of whether they thought the students being shortlisted would be comfortable with participating, and that they were not thought to be at risk through their participation in this exercise. 12 students (six boys and six girls) provided their parental and informed consent to participate in this study. It is important to note however that during the data gathering process, three participants chose to withdraw from the study. Thus, the final sample consisted of nine students, six of whom were boys and three girls. The ages of the participants ranged from 11 to 15 years old. Table 3.4.1.2 below, provides a summary of the main difficulties for which each participant was referred to the LSZ provision.

Table 3.4.1.2

Description of Participants and Main Reasons for Referral to LSZ

Participant	Age	Form (Grade)	Gender	Main Reasons for Referral
P-01	13	3	Male	- Difficult family circumstances - Poor anger management skills - Aggressive behaviour - Lack of respect towards others
P-02	15	5	Male	- Difficult family circumstances - Low self-esteem - Poor anger management skills
P-03	15	5	Male	- Difficult family circumstances - Low self-esteem - Shy and withdrawn
P-04	13	3	Male	- Bullying - Poor anger management skills - Aggressive behaviour
P-05	14	4	Male	- Difficult family circumstances - Low self-esteem - Withdrawn - Bullied
P-06	11	2	Male	- Poor anger management skills - Aggressive behaviour - Absenteeism - Defiant
P-07	14	5	Female	- Poor anger management skills - Aggressive behaviour - Lack of respect towards others - Poor communication skills - Defiant
P-08	15	5	Female	- Poor anger management skills - Defiant
P-09	12	2	Female	- Bullied - Low self-esteem - Shy, withdrawn and anxious - Poor social skills

Note. The information outlined in this table was obtained from the participants' LSZ referral forms.

3.4.2 Data Collection

a) Quantitative Method

A self-completed questionnaire was designed and piloted by the researcher for the purpose of this study. The questionnaire was designed using the information outlined in the Maltese national LSZ guidance (MEYE, 2009). The questionnaire focused on gathering information that revolved around the key elements pertaining to LSZs, which were indicated by the LSZ guidance (MEYE, 2009) to be essential factors in setting up such a provision. The original version of the questionnaire was revised and changes were applied following the piloting of this measure. Both versions of the questionnaire are included in appendix E. The revised questionnaire designed for this study was split into three sections:

1) **Section A**: This section included two items. These aimed to gather information in order to obtain details about the school and inquired about the status of the school with regard to the implementation of a LSZ provision.

2) **Section B**: This section included 12 items. These were directed towards gaining a better understanding of administration and infrastructural factors, impinging on the application of the provision and the resources available to the LSZ.

3) **Section C**: This section was designed using only one item, in the form of an open-ended question, with the aim of soliciting the participants' views about service development.

b) Qualitative Method

The researcher used a mosaic approach during the qualitative phase of this study, with the aim of gathering qualitative information that assisted the researcher in addressing the second and third RQs outlined in section 3.2. This multi-method approach was adapted from Clark and Moss' (2001) framework to listening to young children. This approach was chosen due to the rich data it elicits, providing 'a living picture' of what it is like to be in a particular setting (Clark and Moss, 2001). According to Clark and Moss (2001, p. 2):

> *The mosaic approach is a practical method that contributes to the development of*
> *services that are responsive to the 'voice of the child' and which recognise young*

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children's competencies...purposefully using tools by which children and young people can participate actively.

The tools employed for this study involved documentation such as maps and photographs (refer to appendix F). Clark and Moss (2001) suggest that this framework for listening is driven by an integrative approach, combining visual and verbal modalities which serve as a 'springboard' for more talking, listening and reflecting. Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999, p. 150) emphasise that documentation in all its different forms represent an extraordinary tool, which is not only representative of an important learning process, but is also as "*a process of communication, that presupposes the creation of a culture of exploration, reflection, dialogue and engagement*". Through the utilisation of a mosaic approach the researcher seeks to promote methods that position children as the 'experts' of their own lives and as Clark and Moss (2001, p. 8) stress, such an approach is aimed at looking at the "*lives lived*" by the students themselves rather than focusing on the knowledge gained, shedding light on the students' views of their everyday experiences in the institutions they attend, as active members of the service rather than simply users of a service.

For the purpose of this study the researcher only subscribed to activities which could be adequately implemented, and causing no significant disruption to the running of the LSZs involved in the study. Thus, the supplementary methods used in conjunction with semi-structured interviews were namely; mapping and photography. According to Clark and Moss (2001), the process of producing maps and photographs, set and influence the agenda for later conversations which took place during the semi-structured interviews. The participants were thus involved in producing maps as two-dimensional representations of the physical setting in the LSZ. These drawings were further supported by actual photographs of the facilities and/or significant areas within the provision. Maps and photographs were thus, two pieces of the mosaic that formed part of the qualitative inquiry of this study.

The third and final piece of the mosaic took the form of one hour, face-to-face interviews which were conducted in a semi-structured format which each participant. According to Robson (2002) the act of interviewing usually involves a dyadic process in which the researcher engages in the process of asking questions, expecting to receive answers from the interviewee. Robson (2002, p. 270) further explains that semi-structured interviews in particular, use "*predetermined questions, but the order can be modified based upon the*

interviewer's perception of what is most appropriate". Table 3.4.2.1 below illustrates the list of predetermined questions used by the researcher in order to elicit the views of the participants who, at the time of the study, had been regularly attending and benefiting from the services within the LSZ in their school.

Table 3.4.2.1

Semi-Structured Interview questions

1) How do you see yourself in this school?
2) What do you understand a LSZ to be?
3) Why do you think you have been asked to attend to the LSZ?
4) How long have you been attending the LSZ?
5) How is the LSZ different than the typical classroom?
6) How do you spend your time at the LSZ?
7) What do you like about the LSZ?
8) What, if anything, do you dislike about the LSZ?
9) How do you get along with your teachers in the LSZ?
10) How to you get along with your peers in the LSZ?
11) What has changed for you, ever since you started attending the LSZ?
12) What do your classmates think about the LSZ?
13) How do you think the LSZ could support you better?

3.4.3 Piloting

The quantitative inquiry pertaining to the initial phase of this study involved the distribution of self-administered questionnaires to state secondary schools in Malta. No previously utilised measure could be identified, which could be administered by the researcher in order to elicit the information required for the purpose of this study. In view of this, a questionnaire was designed by the researcher (see appendix E) and subsequently piloted with two LSZs from two distinct state secondary schools. During the piloting procedures the participants were asked to bring to the researcher's attention any items that they deemed to be inappropriately presented, or those in which the content or wording was not adequate in eliciting the information sought by the researcher. As a result of this process, the content and

presentation of several items were changed, some items were added and others were removed. The LSZ staff who participated in the piloting procedure were not asked to complete the questionnaire as part of the piloting process.

The semi-structured interview schedule (refer to Table 3.4.2.1) used during the qualitative inquiry was also created for the purpose of this study. In order to ensure that the content of the questions was appropriate in eliciting the information sought by the researcher, and also adequately and meaningfully worded, the researcher piloted these questions with two students enrolled in different LSZs. The students chosen had been attending in their respective LSZs for more than a month. Upon the presentation and review of the questions originally formulated by the researcher, no changes were recommended by the students attending the LSZ provision. It is important to note that none of these students were involved in the data gathering process of this study.

3.4.4 Procedures

The initial phase of this study involved briefing meetings and/or telephone conversations between the researcher and the Headteachers responsible for state secondary schools, in Malta. The former were informed about the purpose and aims of the research, as well as the process involved in gathering the required data. Subsequently, the questionnaires, together with a covering letter (refer to appendix C), were distributed to each school accordingly. In cases where LSZs were not yet set-up, the Headteachers were instructed to complete only Section A of the questionnaire, before returning it to the researcher. Each school was given the option of delivering the completed questionnaire through e-mail or post. On the other hand, in cases where a LSZ provision was in operation, the Headteacher was asked to handover the questionnaire directly to the LSZ co-ordinator, who was asked to provide the requested information. Upon completion, LSZ co-ordinators were also asked to return the questionnaire directly to the researcher either through e-mail or post. A four week time period was given to participants in order to complete and return the questionnaire. In order to ensure that an adequate response rate was achieved, following the distribution of the questionnaires, the researcher opted to follow up on the progress made by individual schools and offered any support required in completing the questionnaire.

Following the completion of the quantitative data collection procedures, students enrolled within the LSZ provisions were selected to participate in the qualitative phase of the research. Throughout this phase, each participant was asked to meet with the researcher on two separate occasions. During the first session participants were briefed on the data collection procedure and were also introduced to the map-making and photography tasks which they were meant to complete as part of this qualitative inquiry. In the former task, the students were required to draw a map indicating the basic layout of the LSZ in which they attend, marking any relevant objects or spaces, using written labels or shading with colours. In view of completing the photography task, the students were asked to take up to a maximum of five photos of any objects or spaces within the LSZ, that they thought were of some significance or relevance to their experience within the provision. During the second session, each participant was also asked to participate in a semi-structured interview which lasted approximately one hour. The maps and photographs produced by the students were re-introduced during the interviewing process to facilitate and assist the interviewee with providing a rich account of their experiences within the LSZ. The interviews were carried out in Maltese since all the participants felt more comfortable and fluent using their native language. All interviews were recorded, transcribed and translated into English. Upon completion the finalised transcripts were read back to the participants in order to confirm with them that the text quoted in the transcripts is a true and accurate representation of what was said and discussed during the interviews themselves.

3.4.5 Analysis

The quantitative data analysis aims to provide a descriptive account related to the functioning of LSZs in Maltese state secondary schools. As Boushey, Harris, Bruemmer and Archer (2007, p. 9) denote, descriptive research studies are designed to "*describe the state of nature at a specific point it time and are useful for generating hypothesis*". A descriptive analysis was used to summarise all the data collected from the LSZ co-ordinators. Different items featured in the questionnaire were reported, using different descriptive tools. The descriptive data analysis pertaining to the quantitative data collected was carried out using Microsoft Excel (2010). The results obtained are presented, amongst others, through the use of pie

charts, histograms and line graphs which aim to illustrate and describe the quantitative data set.

As indicated earlier by the researcher, a multi-method design, referred to as a mosaic approach adapted from Clark and Moss (2001) was selected in order to elicit the views of secondary students who attend state schools. Supplementary methods, such as, maps and photographs were used solely to facilitate the interviewing process, and as such do not form part of the data *corpus* included in the qualitative analysis. Nine transcripts produced from the interviews represented the data *corpus* used for the qualitative data analysis. Following this process, a thematic analysis was carried out with a view to identifying and reporting the participants' views within the textual data set. In recognition of the exploratory purpose of this research phase, the researcher adopted an inductive approach during the said analysis. Guest, MacQueen and Namey (2012, p. 36) suggest that such an approach is data or content-driven, whereby the main focus is on "*what emerges from the interaction between the researcher and the respondent...it is the content of that interaction that drives the development of codes and the identification of themes*". In view of the fact that the area of research being investigated is one that is significantly under-researched, especially within the Maltese context, the researcher decided to provide what Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 83) describe as a "*rich thematic description*" of the entire data set, thus highlighting the predominant themes, and those that the researcher considers to be relevant to the RQs posed for this phase of the study. Thus, the stage approach formulated by Braun and Clarke (2006) was chosen by the researcher as a model to guide this qualitative analysis. Each stage involved will be described in further detail in chapter four.

3.4.6 Validity

Golafshani (2003, p. 599) suggests that validity of a measure is equivalent to the degree to which it is "*actually measuring what they are intended to measure*". The questionnaire used for the purpose of gathering the descriptive data was developed by the researcher due to the unavailability of other measures designed to explore the functioning of LSZ provisions. In view of maximising the external validity and generalisability of the results obtained through the administration of this questionnaire, all state secondary schools in Malta were invited to participate in the study. A good response rate, equivalent to 64% was obtained. This is

expected to positively impact on the population validity of the results obtained. A piloting process was also conducted to ensure that the content and face validity of the employed measure was improved.

Carcary (2009, p. 14) suggests that validity can also refer to the degree to which "*the researcher gained full access to informants' knowledge and meaning*". As outlined in the qualitative data collection procedures above, multiple methods were used to elicit the students' views about their experiences in relation to LSZ provisions. This process of 'piecing pieces of the mosaic together' through the various forms of documentation collected enabled the researcher to recognise "*individual viewpoints and experiences ... and, ultimately, create a rich picture of the attitudes, needs or behaviour*" (Shenton, 2003, p. 66). Golafshani (2003) advocates that engaging in multiple methods, such as; observations, interviews and recordings will lead to more valid, reliable and diverse construction of realities. Such a process ensured that the data gathered through the semi-structured interviews, could be cross-referenced and validated with documentation produced by the participants themselves. Therefore, the additional methods used to elicit students' views about the LSZ provisions, also acted in the interest of enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of the data collected during this phase of the research.

3.5 Ethics

The present study was designed and conducted in adherence with the ethical guidelines put forward and illustrated by the British Psychological Society's code of ethics and conduct (2009), the Health and Care Professions Council's standards of proficiency (2012), the Malta Psychology Profession Board's code of ethics and conduct (2012) and the legislative act for the regulation of the psychological profession in Malta (2004). The present section will offer a review of the ethical implications that were identified and addressed by the researcher during the course of this study:

Institutional Approval

Prior to the commencement of the study, the researcher submitted the necessary ethical application to the University of East London University Research Ethics Committee, in view of obtaining ethical consent for carrying out the proposed research. Following the submission

of this application, the researcher also submitted the research proposal pertaining to this study to the Quality and Standards in Education Directorate within the Education Ministry in Malta, in order to receive their ethical consent to carry out the proposed study in Maltese state schools. Both ethical consent forms are included in appendix G.

Competence

At the time of the study the researcher was enrolled in a Professional Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology and was also on placement as a TEP within the Ministry of Education in Malta. As such, it is important to note that the researcher was not in possession of a Maltese psychologist warrant. Nonetheless, in ensuring an adequate level of preparation and competence in undertaking the present research study, the researcher was closely supervised by his research tutor, to ensure that all procedures and research activities were conducted in a manner which safeguarded the rights and interests of all those involved in the study. Moreover the researcher also undertook efforts to engage and participate in on-going training to maintain and enhance his professional competence in the area of research.

Parental Consent

Prior to any involvement with the students the researcher contacted the parents or legal guardians of the students involved in order to brief them about the aims and procedures of the study as well as the nature of the researcher's involvement with the students themselves. The parents were briefed through a parental consent form (refer to appendix D) which was distributed to them prior to the students' engagement in the study. The parents or legal guardians of the students were provided with the necessary contact details of the researcher in case further clarification or information was required by the said parents or guardians.

Informed Consent

Following the receipt of the parental consent forms mentioned previously, every student selected to participate in the qualitative phase of the study was briefed during a meeting with the researcher, during which the researcher personally informed them with regards to the aims and procedures involved in the study as well as the nature of the tasks he/she was expected to carry out to be able to participate fully in the study. During the meeting each participant was presented with an 'Informed Consent Sheet' (refer to appendix D) to sign, in

which details concerning the purpose and scope of the research were delineated together with the activities that they were expected to perform during their engagement in the study. Each participant was also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage of involvement and of the consequences attached to their potential withdrawal. In agreement with the stipulated conditions the letter was signed by the students and countersigned by the researcher. Each participant was given a copy of the signed letter for his/her own future reference.

Right of Withdrawal

All the participants who have provided the researcher with written parental and informed consent and have thus decided to assist the researcher through their participation in the study have been notified and debriefed on their right to withdraw from the study at any time during the course of their involvement in the research. Moreover, participants were advised by the researcher that in the event that a formal request was submitted to withdraw from the study, such a request was respected and endorsed by the researcher. The participants were also informed that upon withdrawal from the study they could opt to exclude the data they provided during the study from the analysis.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

The limits of confidentiality and anonymity were presented and thoroughly explained during the initial meeting, in which each participant was briefed with regards to their right for confidentiality and anonymity as participants of this study. Teaching staff that were responsible for coordinating the LSZ provision together with the students who participated in this research were advised that their names and contact details were known exclusively to the researcher, who in turn guaranteed that any information pertaining to their identity was not be divulged to any third parties. The participants were also informed at the outset of their involvement, that the information they provided during the data gathering procedures of this study, namely; questionnaire data, audio recordings, transcripts, along with any other documentation produced by the said participants, was used for the purpose of completing this doctoral thesis and any future research publications associated with this study.

In order to safeguard the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants, all the documents and digital records produced during the course of study by the researcher and/or participants themselves were kept safely in a locked cabinet and a password protected computer, respectively, allowing sole access to the researcher himself. Participants were also reassured that any records pertaining to their involvement in the study will be appropriately disposed of after a period of five years.

Protection of Participants

To ensure the safety of the participants, the data collection process pertaining to this research study will take place within the school setting. This should minimise any potential risks for participants as they will have prompt access to the support of school-based staff and services, in the eventuality that they are needed.

3.6 Summary

This chapter sought to outline the purpose and aims of this research, along with the RQs formulated for this study. The ontological and epistemological position of the researcher was outlined, together with the research design used for this study. A mixed-methods research design was adopted for this study, in the form of a sequential and connected design, whereby the results obtained through the initial quantitative phase were used to address the first RQ and simultaneously inform the sampling procedures of the qualitative phase. The participants, measures and procedures pertaining to the research design of this study were outlined. Finally, issues related to validity and the ethical implications of this research were also mentioned. The next chapter will focus on presenting the findings stemming from the quantitative and qualitative data collection procedures of this study.

CHAPTER FOUR

Findings

4.1 Introduction

As outlined in the previous chapter, the main purpose of this research was to gain a better understanding of the degree to which the LSZ initiative has been taken up by secondary state schools, within the Maltese educational system. The study also aims to elicit the views of students with regard to how such provisions are being run and how they are impacting on their life at school. The following section illustrates the results obtained from the questionnaires administered to LSZ co-ordinators, who gave their consent to participate in the study. A descriptive analysis of the participants' responses will be presented using the data collected during the quantitative phase of this study. Section 4.3 in this chapter gives an account of the thematic analysis carried out using the data contained in the transcribed interviews, carried out with secondary students enrolled in LSZ provisions across state-run colleges in Malta.

4.2 Quantitative Data Analysis

This section aims to provide a descriptive account of the data obtained following, the distribution of the questionnaire designed and piloted for the purpose of this study, as outlined and described in chapter three. The questionnaire was distributed to all secondary state schools in Malta and Gozo. Thus a total of 28 schools in a total of 10 colleges across the Islands of Malta and Gozo, were invited to participate in the study. As indicated in the previous chapter, the scope of this inquiry was to shed light on the extent to which the LSZ initiative has been taken up and promoted in secondary state schools, as well as to give an indication of the manner in which such a service is being implemented and applied throughout the colleges.

During the quantitative phase, a total of 28 questionnaires were distributed to secondary state schools, across all colleges. As illustrated in the pie chart below (see figure 4.2.1), a 64% response rate was achieved, equivalent to a total of 18 schools. 36% of the schools eligible for participation in the study did not respond to the questionnaire.
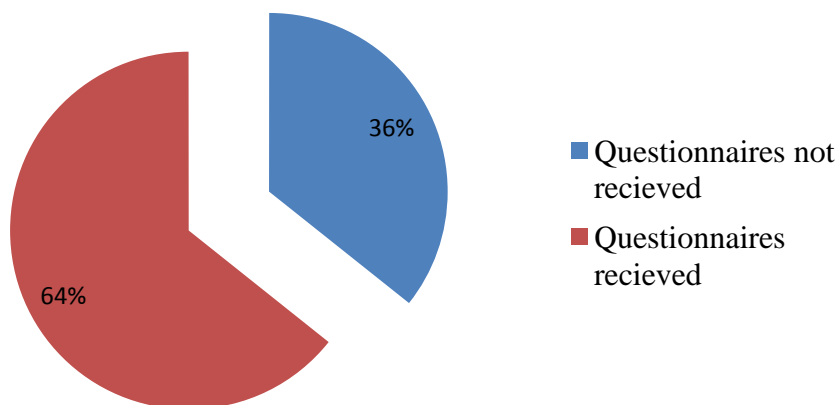
Figure 4.2.1. Response Rate.

Figure 4.2.2 below illustrates the level of implementation of LSZ provisions as reported by the participant schools. The data obtained from the questionnaires that have been submitted, indicated that the vast majority of secondary schools have already set-up a LSZ in their school.
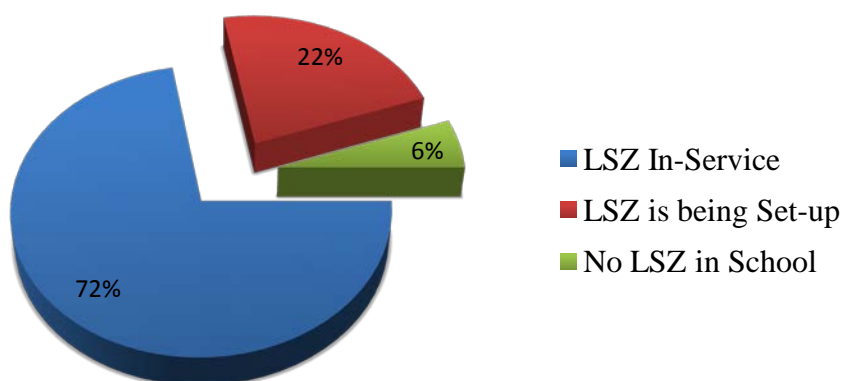
Figure 4.2.2. Current Level of LSZ Implementation.

At the time of the study, a total of 13 secondary schools reported to have a LSZ in service; 72% of the original sample who chose to participate in the study. The remaining schools

either reported being in the process of setting up such a provision (22%), or gave no indication of having or intending to set-up a LSZ provision (6%).

The participants were also asked to indicate how long the LSZ in their school had been in operation. 53.8% of the participants reported that their LSZ provision had been in operation for a period ranging from 1-2 years. 15.4% claimed to have set-up a LSZ which had been running for a period of more than 6 months but less than 12 months. As outlined in chapter three, students attending at LSZs which have been in operation for less than a year, were no longer eligible to participate in the qualitative phase of the study. As illustrated in Figure 4.2.3 below, the remaining 84.6% of the schools (11 schools) were included in the second phase of the study.
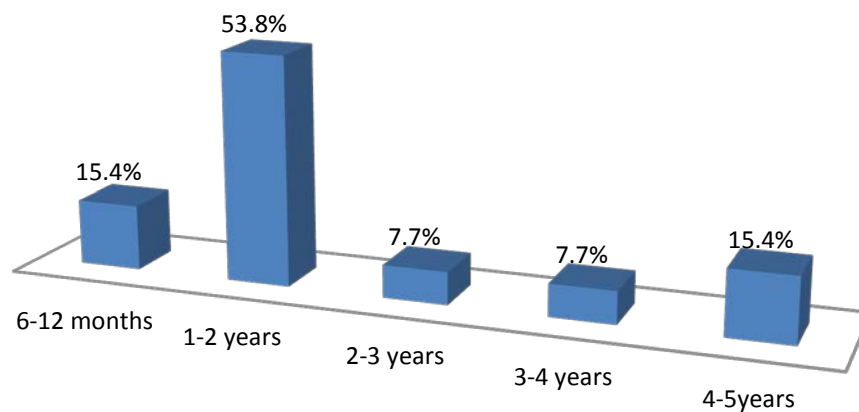
Figure 4.2.3. Duration of LSZ Operation.

The line-graph presented below (Figure 4.2.4) indicates the number of students referred to the LSZs in their respective schools, ranging from the scholastic year of 2008 until 2012.
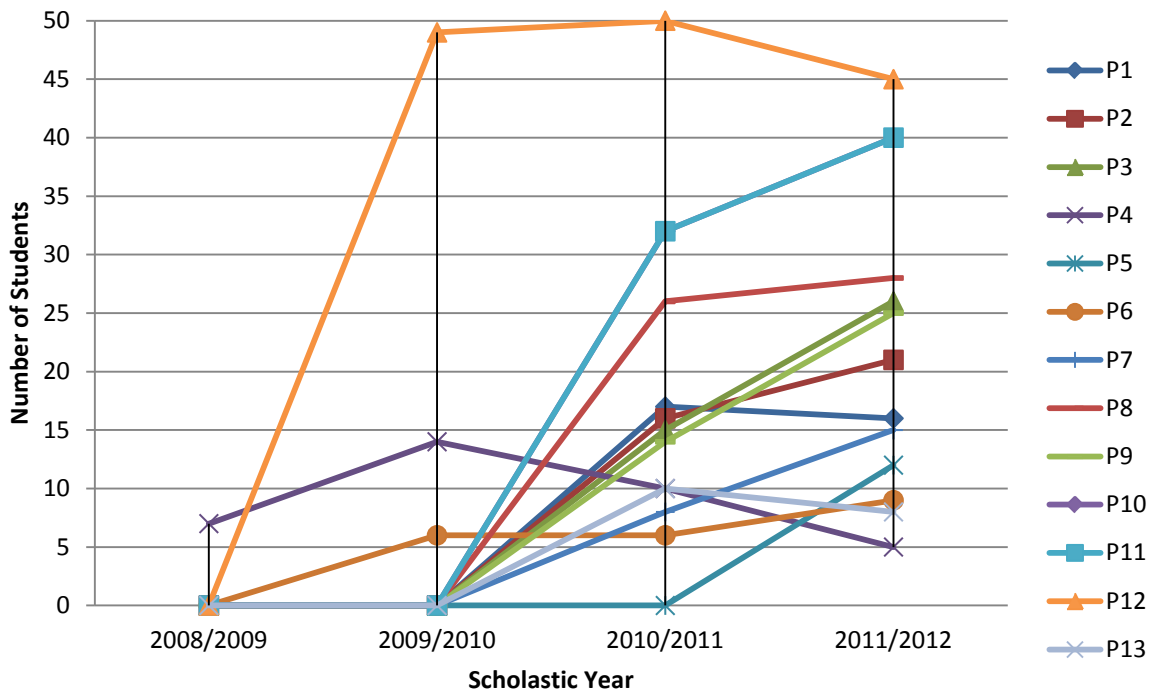
Figure 4.2.4. Number of Referrals Received (2008-2012).

As the line-graph featured in Figure 4.2.4 indicates, the majority of LSZ provisions reported a growth in the number of referrals forwarded to their respective LSZ, across different scholastic years. The data collected and illustrated in Figure 4.2.4 suggests that in 2011/2012 the number of referrals submitted to LSZs varied significantly, ranging from a minimum of five referrals (e.g. P4) to a maximum of 45 referrals (e.g. P12). The mean number of referrals forwarded to LSZs during 2011/2012 was found to be equivalent to 21 referrals. This shows a 30.1% increase over the mean number of referrals received by LSZs during the previous scholastic year (2010/2011).

Figure 4.2.5 below, outlines the number of students who were reported to have been enrolled in each respective LSZ during the last four scholastic years. A similar pattern in the data represented in figure 4.2.3 emerged, whereby an increase in the total number of students attending the respective LSZs could be observed across many provisions. The data featured in figure 4.2.5 is however incomplete due to the fact that two participants, namely 'P7' and 'P13', neglected to report on the number of students who have attended their provision, since 2008.
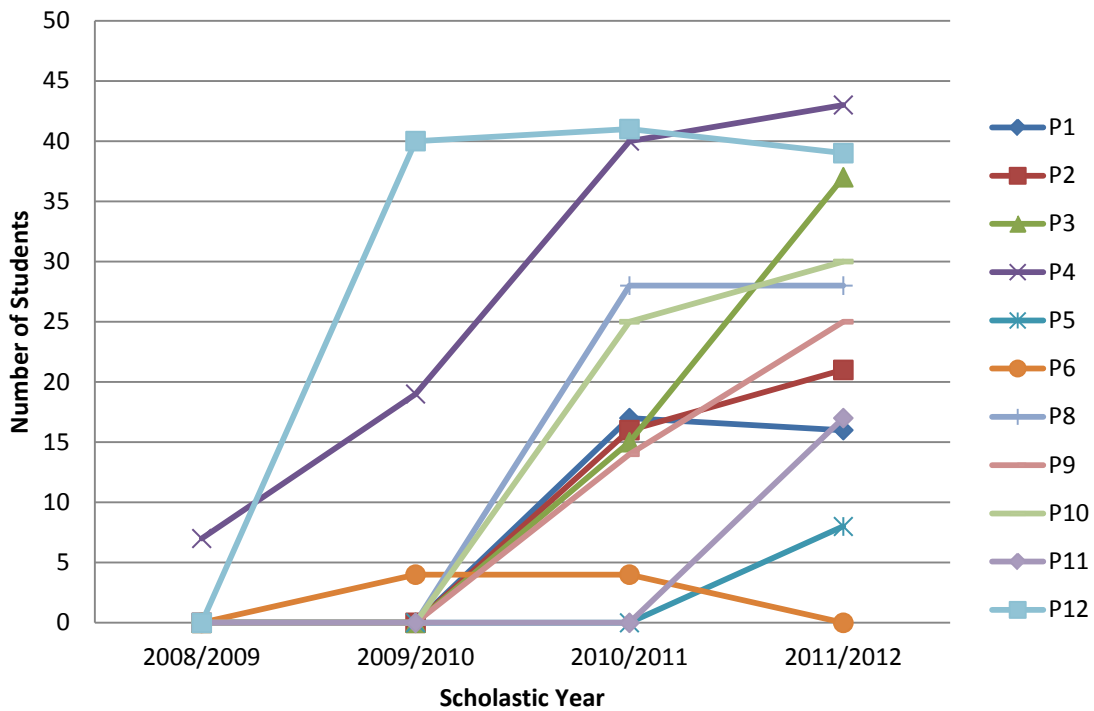
Figure 4.2.5. Total Number of Students Enrolled in LSZs (2008-2012).

Figure 4.2.6 illustrated below, compares the total number of referrals forwarded to LSZs in the present sample, during four consecutive scholastic years, starting from 2008, with the total number of students actually enrolled in the service during the same period. As Figure 4.2.6 suggests, the differences between the two data sets is minimal. In fact only slight differences of 2% and 1.1% were reported during the year 2010/2011 and 2011/2012, respectively.
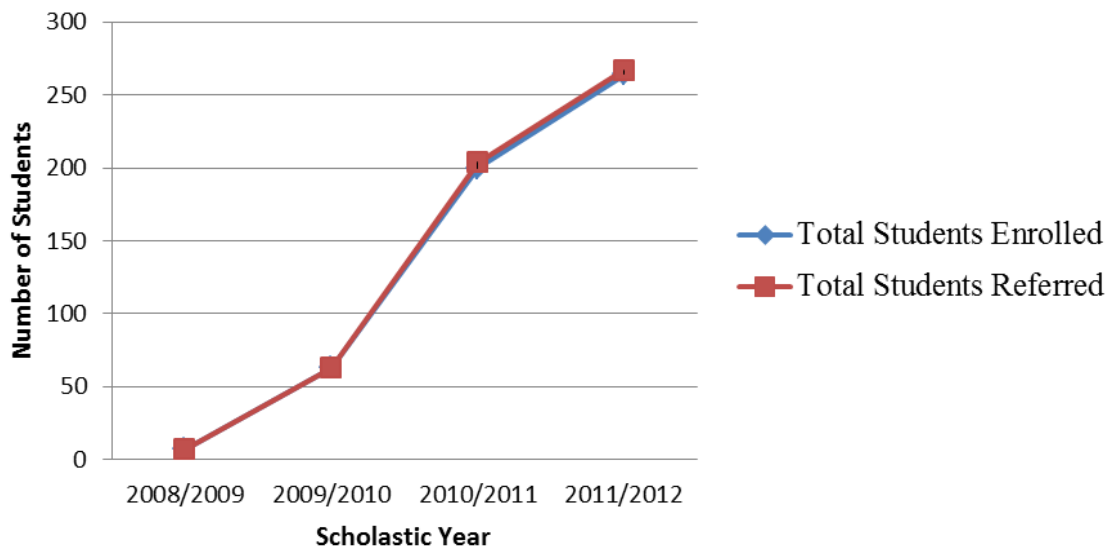
Figure 4.2.6. A Comparison between Number of Students Referred and Students Enrolled.

The data collected from the participants also gave an indication of the number of students attending in their respective LSZs, during the time of this research. As Figure 4.2.7 below clearly illustrates, significant variability exists in the data set. The scores obtained, range from a minimum of four students to a maximum of 39 students, reported to be benefiting from the LSZ provision during the scholastic year of 2012/2013.
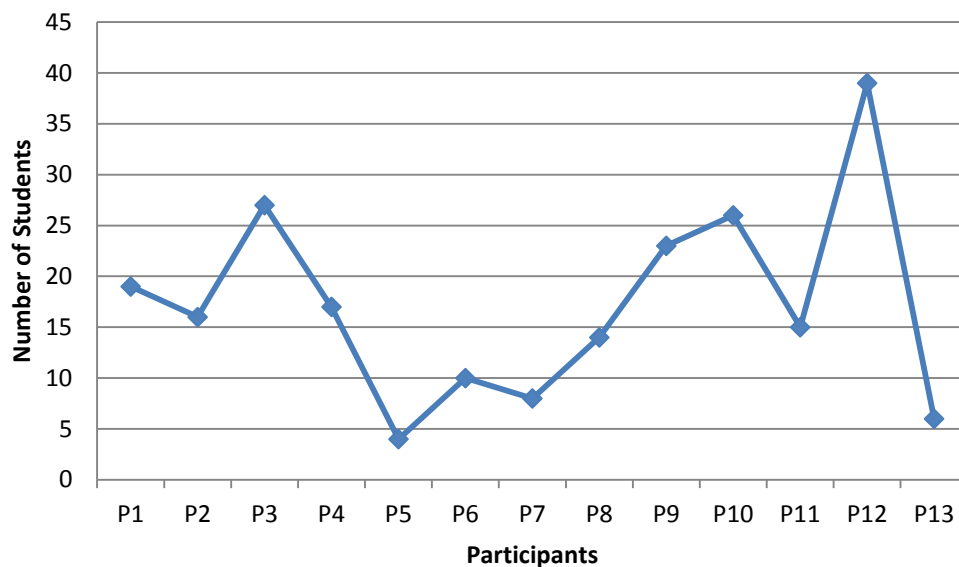
Figure 4.2.7. Students Attending LSZ during the Scholastic Year 2012/2013.

Participants were asked to indicate the origin of the referrals that were received by their service during the scholastic year of 2011/2012. The highest percentage of referrals were presented to the LSZ by the school Senior Management Team (42.29%) followed closely by Teachers (36.36%). Learning Support Assistants (5.53%), School Counsellors (3.95%), Inclusive Co-ordinators (3.95%) and Prefects of Discipline (3.56%) were the next most common source of referrals for LSZs.
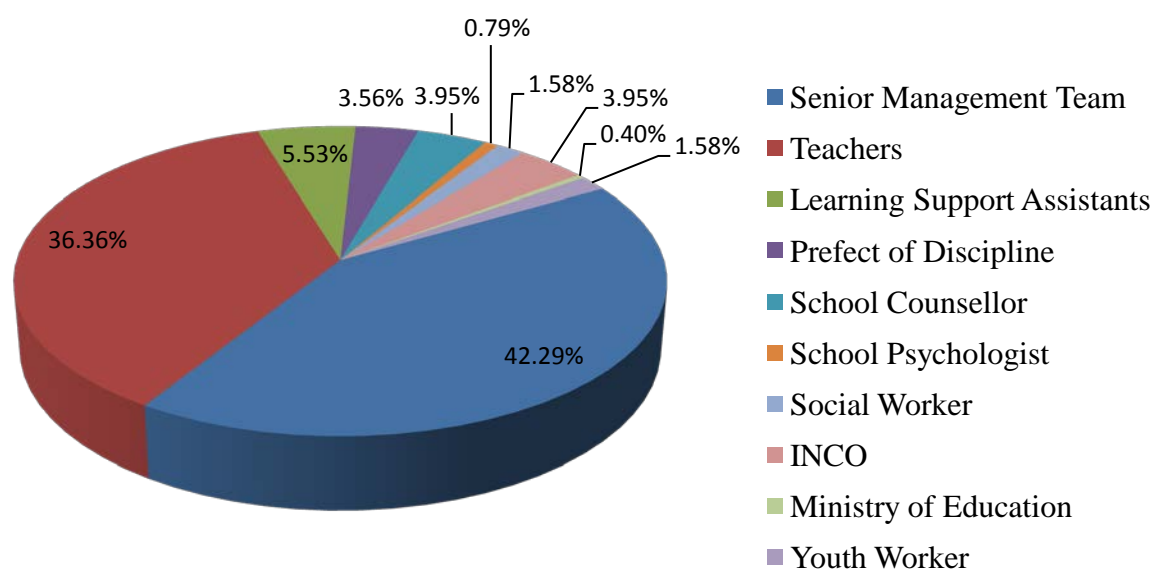
Figure 4.2.8. Origin of Referrals to LSZs (2011/2012).

School Psychologists (0.79%) and other professionals from within the Ministry of Education (0.40%) are amongst those reported to be least involved in the process of referral to LSZs, across secondary schools in Malta and Gozo.

LSZ co-ordinators were also asked to give an indication of the duration of attendance for each student in the provision during the scholastic year of 2011/2012. As Figure 4.2.9 exemplifies, the majority of the students (48.03%) who were referred to a LSZ, continued receiving support for a period that extended beyond three months. Only 15.35 % of the students were reported to attend in the LSZ for a period of less than a month. Students who attended the LSZ for periods in between 1-2 months and 2-3 months are representative of 18.11% and 18.50%, respectively.
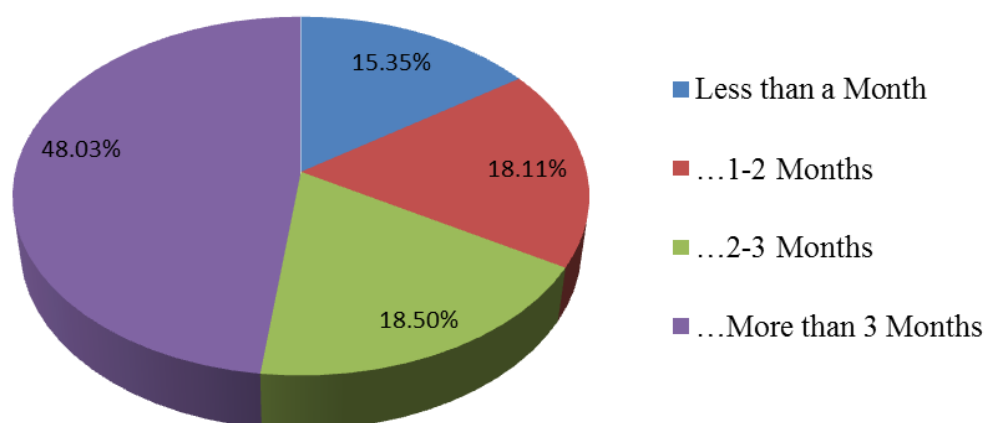
Figure 4.2.9. Duration of Attendance in LSZ (2011/2012).

The participants also reported that in several LSZs a number of students were reported to have discontinued their attendance in the LSZ for reasons other than the formal completion of the programme being followed. The results obtained are featured in Figure 4.2.10, which indicate that a total of seven LSZs reported that a number of students had discontinued their attendance during the scholastic year of 2011/2012. The data obtained ranged from a minimum of one student in five LSZs to a maximum of four students from one LSZ.
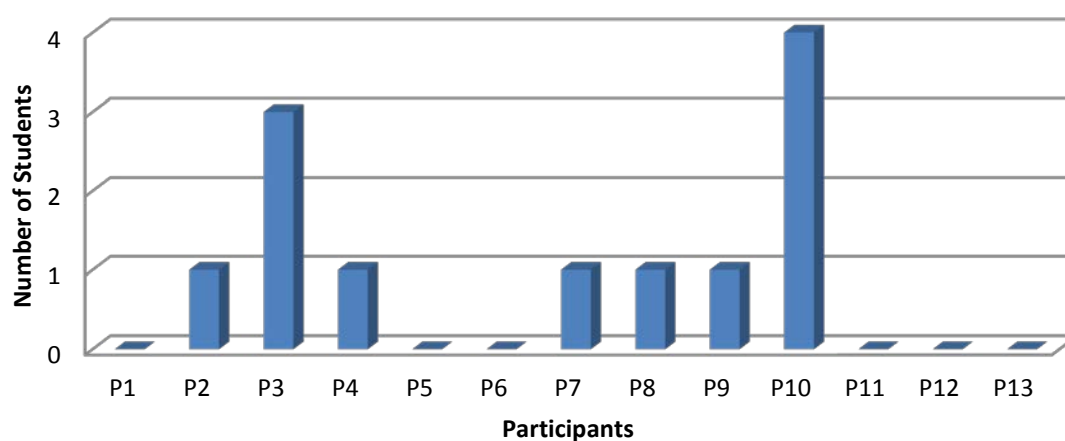
Figure 4.2.10. Number of Students who Discontinued their Attendance (2011/2012).

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Some participants offered explanations with regard to the reasons behind the discontinued attendance of students in their respective LSZs. Four students were reported to discontinue their attendance due to being transferred to an off-site Learning Centre, due to severe behavioural difficulties which the LSZ could not manage effectively. Another four students were reported to have been unable to continue attending for their sessions in the LSZ because they were suspended from school. Reasons for their suspensions were not detailed in the questionnaire. Two students expressed their reluctance to attend for the sessions and the support offered by their respective LSZs. Another student was similarly unwilling to attend the LSZ due to his/her reluctance to join a particular group of students, currently attending the LSZ. This participant reported that due to the fact that other groups were not available, the student could not be given an opportunity to attend in another setting. Finally, an additional student with mental health difficulties was reported to have discontinued his/her attendance after the LSZ provision was not seen fit to adequately cater for his/her needs.

The participants were also asked to identify the difficulties experienced by students who have been referred to the LSZ during the scholastic year of 2011/2012. The data collected indicates that there is a wide spectrum of difficulties which are being encountered by students referred to LSZs. Figure 4.2.11 gives a clearer picture of the difficulties reported to be experienced by students referred to the LSZs, during the academic year of 2011/2012. The results obtained indicate that the most prevalent difficulty encountered by students referred to LSZs, stem from 'Family Difficulties'. The data collected suggests that 13.08% of the students referred to the service, have been identified as experiencing some sort of distress or dysfunction emerging from family-related difficulties. This is very closely followed by 'Poor Anger Management Skills' (12.47%), difficulties with being 'Aggressive / Insolent / Quarrelsome' (12.07%), 'Difficulty in Accepting Sanctions' (11.97%), 'Lack of Self-Worth / Confidence' (11.56%) and 'Poor Social and Communication Skills' (10.85%), respectively. Other difficulties were reported to a significantly lesser degree.
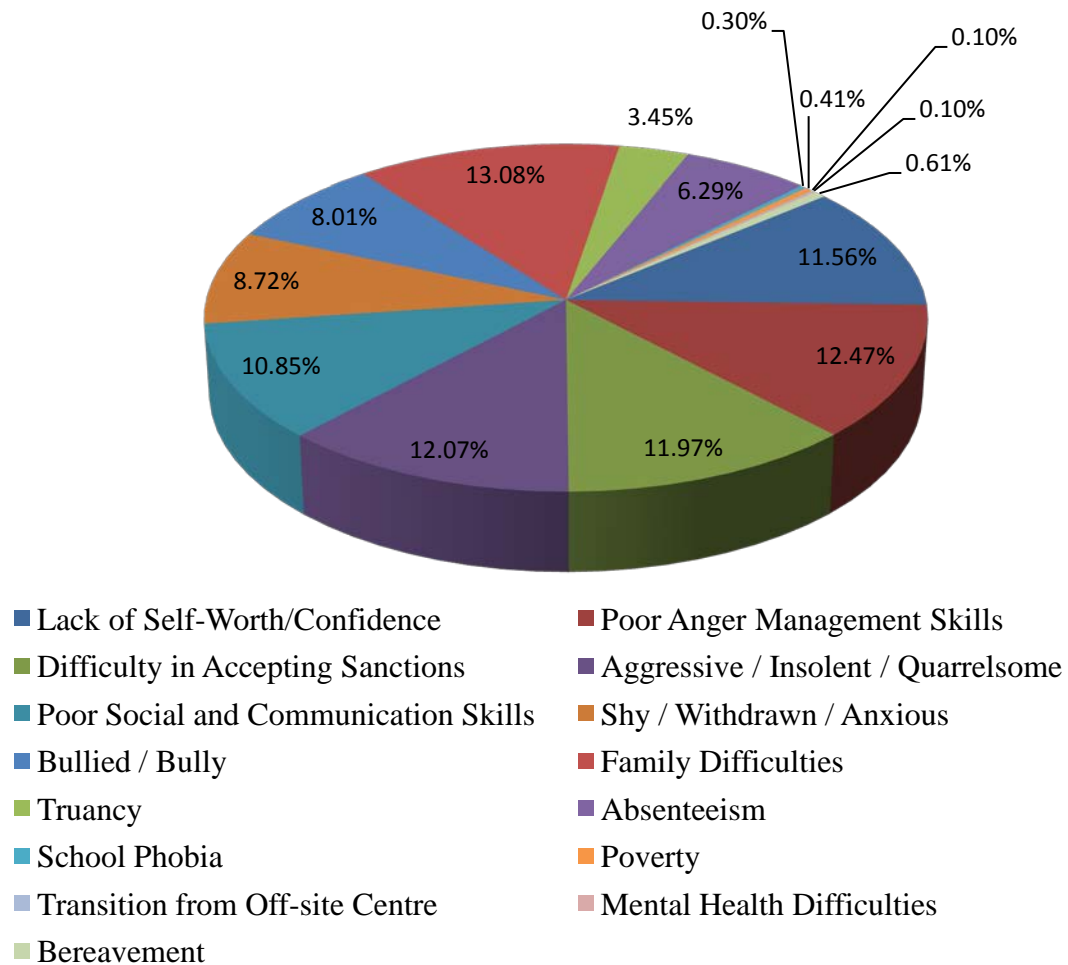
Figure 4.2.11. Reasons for Referral to LSZ.

Amongst the least reported reasons for referral to the LSZ were 'Bereavement' (0.61%), 'Poverty' (0.41%), 'School Phobia' (0.30%), as well as 'Mental Health Difficulties', 'Transition from Off-site Centre' which were representative of only 0.10% of the participants' responses.

The data collected suggests that not all LSZs offered the same support to students with SEBD, in terms of the repertoire of programmes they offered within the provision. Similarities between LSZs however have been reported with regard to the variety of therapeutic, skills-based, recreational and educational activities they offered during the scholastic period of 2011/2012. Anger Management (13%) and Behaviour Modification (12%) programmes were amongst the most prevalent sessions reported to be offered by the

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LSZs across various colleges. Communication Skills (11%) and Emotional Literacy (11%) were the next most predominant activities to be included in the programmes being run by the LSZs. Classes which incorporate activities that promote Social Skills (4%), Creative Skills (3%) and Pastoral Care (2%) were the least prevalent overall. The overall results are illustrated in the bar graph featured in Figure 4.2.12 below.
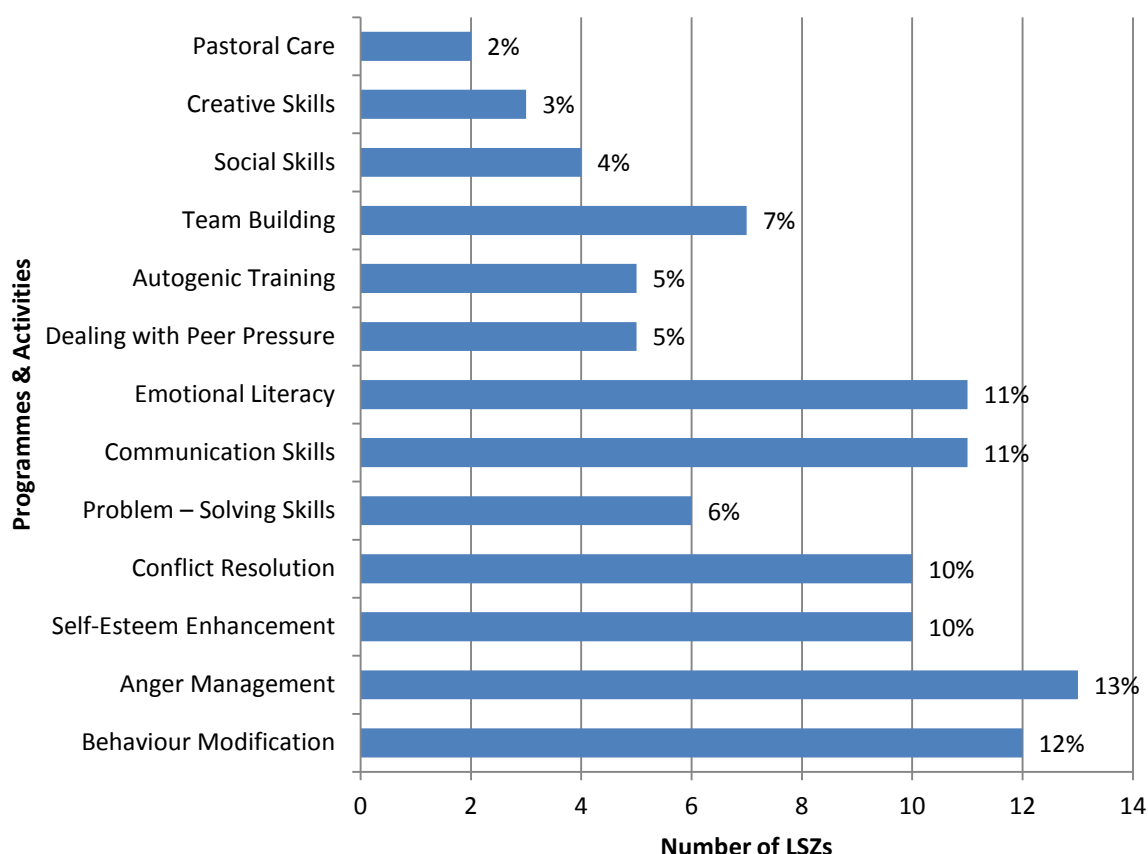
Figure 4.2.12. Programmes Offered in LSZs.

The participants were also asked to indicate how the LSZ in their respective school was staffed. All participants reported that their respective LSZ had at least one teacher and one learning support assistant assigned to the provision. Nonetheless, only one LSZ reported to engage a teacher on a full-time basis. The remaining 92% of the participants stated that the teacher allocated to the LSZ is on reduced hours. The participants mentioned that this is mainly due to the fact that they are also allocated teaching duties within mainstream classes, limiting their level of involvement within the LSZ. Figure 4.2.13 gives an overall picture of

the professionals who were reported to be involved in running the LSZs. As previously explained, teachers and learning support assistants are the most prevalent professionals allocated to LSZs. Nonetheless, reference was made to other professionals who were reported by some of the participants to be directly involved. A total of three participants indicated that youth workers were also involved in the programmes offered within their LSZ. A further two participants also made reference to college-based drama teachers and teachers who were responsible for organising job orientation experiences for students attending in their respective LSZs.
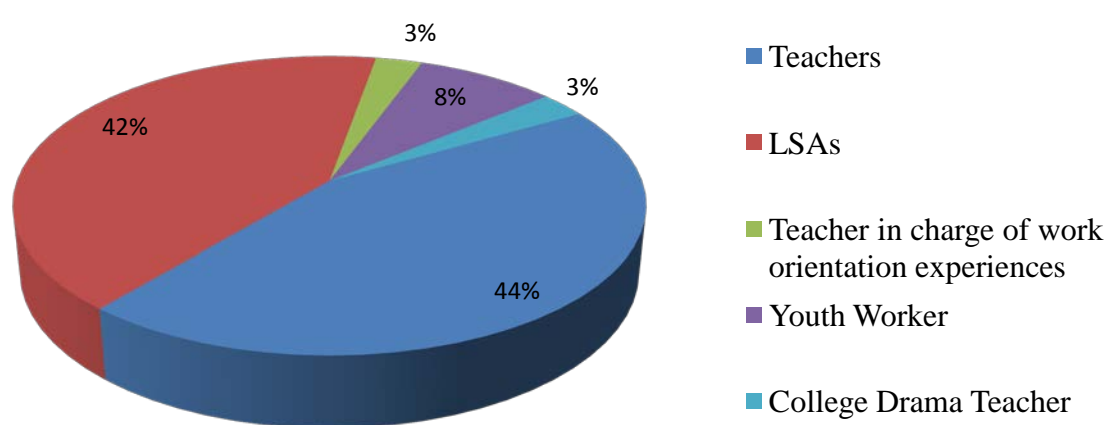
Figure 4.2.13. Staffing in LSZs.

When questioned on the availability of training, the majority of participants (69%) reported that training has been offered during the scholastic year of 2011/2012. Monthly meetings with the Service Manager for Inclusion were mentioned by some participants, as opportunities for professional development. Other training opportunities such as distance-learning courses in SEBD, seminars and conferences and accredited courses in SEBD were outlined by the participants, as training avenues which they have subscribed to through their own initiative. However, none of the participants has given an indication of any formal training provided by the Ministry of Education, in view of supporting their continuous professional development (CPD).
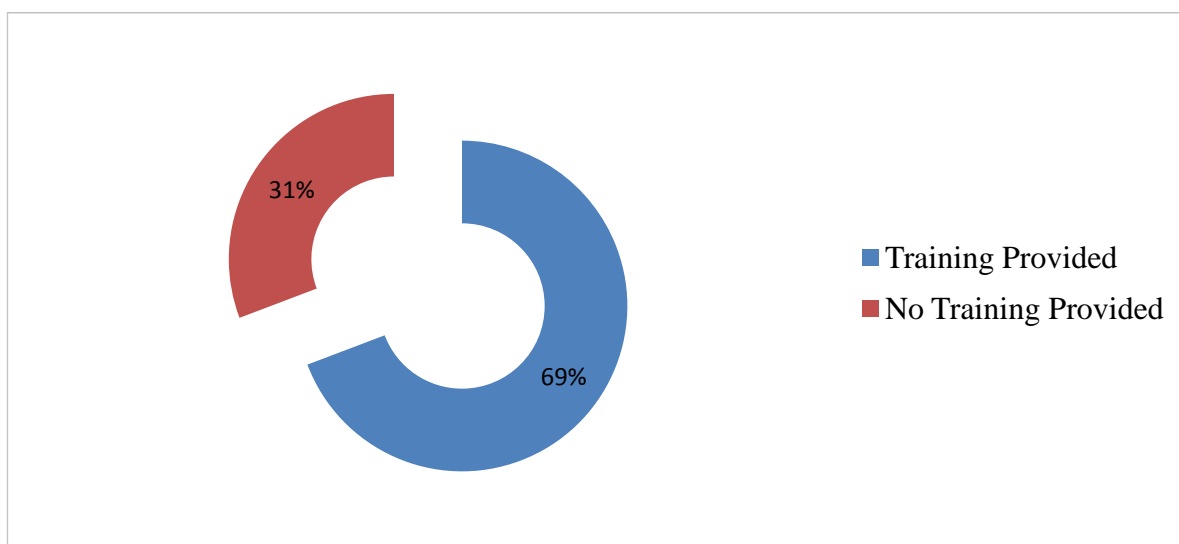
Figure 4.2.14. Availability of Training for LSZ Staff.

Data was also collected by the participants with regard to the availability of funding in view of covering the expenses related to running such a provision. 69% of the participants reported that funding was formally allocated by their school, while the remaining 31% indicated that no funds were distributed to the provision to cover its costs. These participants (31%) also reported that even though furniture, such as tables, chairs and sofas were provided by the school, costs related to the daily running of the LSZ were gathered mostly through fund-raising activities, carried out by the students attending the LSZ. Thus, it was clear from the responses given, that some of the schools hosting a LSZ do not provide any funding whatsoever for the provision. In such cases, participants mentioned that all funds must be raised through activities carried out by the LSZ itself. 15% of the participants also explained that on occasions where funding was not made available, the staff themselves covered the costs of the resources required to run the various programmes in their LSZ, through their own personal funds.

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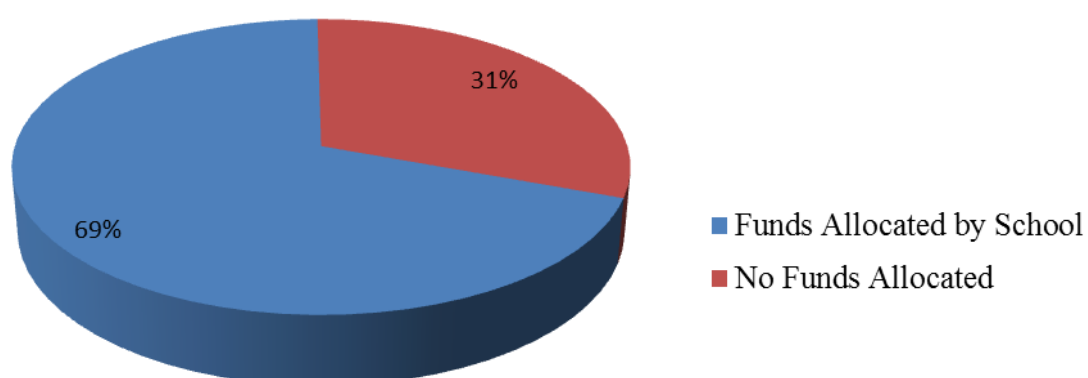
Figure 4.2.15. Availability of Funds for LSZs.

Participants were also asked to provide their recommendations with regard to how the LSZ provisions in their respective schools could be improved, to provide a more effective service. A total of 12 schools have presented their suggestions. On analysing their responses, nine different categories were identified. Figure 4.2.16 provides a graphic representation of these findings.
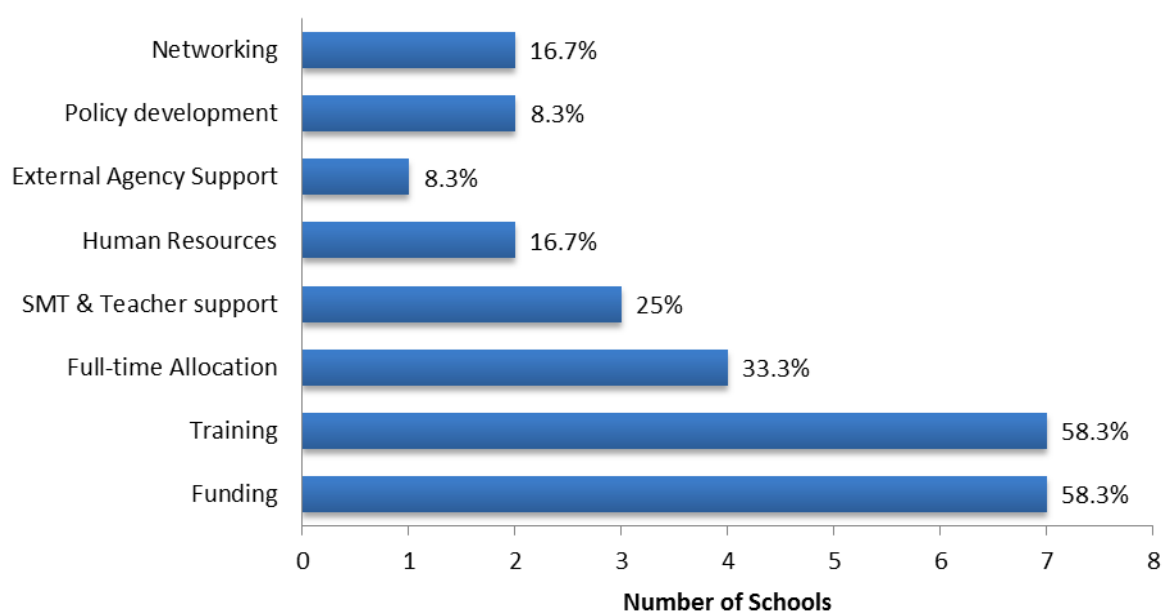
Figure 4.2.16. Future Recommendations.

As indicated in the data illustrated above, 58.3% of the participants have expressed their concerns with the present financial infrastructure that caters for the necessary expenses,

incurred by the LSZ provisions to run the service. One participant argued that; "*More funds are needed. The reason being that certain resources are very expensive*", while another commented that; "*Funding should be allocated specifically for the LSZ for the daily running of the LSZ. We need to buy supplies for breakfast as well as for various projects and outings*". Another participant also mentioned that; "*Just like other subjects there should be funds allocated to the LSZ*". This suggests that no official protocol is present in some schools that can guarantee the availability and access to funds, in a similar manner as other initiatives within the school. One of the participants recommended that; "*An allotted amount of funds would be of great help. We can plan better and also involve the students in budgeting*".

58.3% of the participants also stressed that CPD is necessary in order to improve the quality of support they provide to their students, attending in the LSZ. One participant mentioned that; "*Training in different areas by professionals is always a great help and gives an insight on how to help students*", hinting to the value added that other professionals trained in supporting students with SEBD can offer through training. Another participant recommended that; "*Training should be provided to all staff and explain what SEBD is, its meaning, how to identify students with SEBD, assessment, as well as the programmes carried out within the LSZ (e.g. Circle-time, social/emotional literacy)*", thus stressing the importance of continued training with regards to the salient aspects of their work with students identified as having SEBD. Furthermore, as evidenced earlier in this chapter, an increase in the number of students referred to the LSZ is being experienced in some schools. According to one of the participants; "*Students with SEBD difficulties are increasing. Consequently, teachers should be trained into handling these kids. Such training should commence while student teachers are reading a degree in Education*". Moreover, a participant also commented on the aspect that not all educators assigned to support students within the LSZ are equally qualified and/or have similar levels of professional training. In fact, a participant suggested that; "*Teachers who are not qualified find difficulties in the pedagogy to handle students who are vulnerable. Also the work carried out is not professional due to lack of knowledge and skills*". In recognition of similar provisions offered in other countries at secondary school level, such as LSUs and NGs, one participant also suggested that; "*If possible more training should be given overseas in order for us to gain experience and to broaden our knowledge in the learning support zones*".

As reported earlier in this section, 92% of the teachers allocated to the LSZ are still expected to participate and manage teaching duties within mainstream classroom settings. Several participants reported that they would prefer to shift their duties to the LSZ on a full-time basis, thus dedicate their time in school to their duties within the LSZ provision. One participant commented that; "A *smaller teaching load would be better. Sometimes it is difficult to maintain a certain flow because the LSZ teacher has to go for his lessons*", suggesting that parallel duties could be detrimental to the operation of the LSZ. Another participant explained that; "*Reduced lessons for the teacher would enable more disposition to work more freely with the students*".

Several other areas have been identified by some participants as requiring further improvement. Some respondents have suggested that human resources, in terms of the number of educational staff assigned to the LSZ, could be increased to better cater for the growing demand placed upon the provision. A participant suggested that;

> *Having two LSAs* (Learning Support Assistants) *in our school LSZ would definitely help us meet more of the students' needs. Due to the increase in number and severity of the cases, not much time is left for in-class support with particular students who would benefit from the latter.*

The participants also commented on how their relationship with the rest of the school, could be enhanced to improve the quality, effectiveness and outreach of the LSZ service. One participant explains that; "*Having a supportive and understanding Head of School and SMT as well as collaborative staff, we feel that the LSZ within our school could operate more effectively towards our SEBD students*". Another participant stresses on the value that they, as service providers, attribute to teamwork within the school, highlighting the importance of;

> *Respect and co-ordination with teachers in the school; Most teachers do not or are not aware of what the LSZs are so they have to be given the opportunity to understand better what this entails. It is important to understand that a student is referred because of his/her SEBD. Could be teachers are reluctant to refer because this might been seen as bad classroom management.*

As the participant quoted above is suggesting, promoting awareness of the role and function of LSZs, as well as establishing better ways of working together as a cohesive team could enhance the quality of the service provided by LSZs.

The participants also highlighted the area of policy development and networking as areas of potential improvement. Some participants emphasised the need for an updated guidance and policy. One participant explained that; "*Better guidelines for LSAs should be provided in order for them to know their duties/obligations*", hinting to the role differentiation of teachers and LSAs within the provision and the need of further elaboration and clarification of the responsibilities attached to such roles. Some participants also mentioned the possibility of further networking between LSZs located in different schools and colleges. As one of the participants explained: "*Sharing experiences in small groups helps us learn from each other. Every student is an individual with his/her particular character and difficulties and it (the provision) must not be taken as one size fits all!*" Finally, one participant emphasised; "*that all professionals working with these students should work together. I would prefer if social workers, counsellors, psychologists etc… give us feedback regarding our students, especially in deprived areas*". According to these excerpts, trans-disciplinary work within the LSZ is warranted, which could potentially prove to be a valuable asset for staff and students in the LSZs, with special reference to those LSZs operating in colleges with a high incidence of students, identified as experiencing SEBD.

4.3 Qualitative Data Analysis

This section aims to provide a thematic analysis of the data gathered from the participants, who consented to be included in the qualitative phase of this research. As outlined in chapter three, a mosaic approach was used to elicit the participants' views and experiences in relation to the LSZ setting in which they attended. During this process students participating in the study were asked to take photographs and draw maps of their LSZ. A sample of the students' work has been included in appendix F. The scope of using this integrative approach was to supply the participants with a variety of 'tools' that are non-reliant on spoken words, and which in turn facilitate the process of reflection, conversation and listening. Given that such documentation was introduced by the researcher only to facilitate the process of information gathering from the participants, the maps and photographs produced by the students will not be included in the present analysis.

Following the one-to-one semi-structured interviews carried out with all nine participants, the data collected in the form of digital-audio recordings were at a later stage transcribed by the

researcher himself. The interviews with all nine participants were carried out in Maltese, which is the native language in Malta. The audio recordings were transcribed and translated into English by the researcher. With the intent of enhancing the validity of the transcripts, the researcher took the opportunity to revisit each participant individually to present the finalised version of the transcript and check with each participant if the content of their transcript accurately concurred with what was said during the interview. It is important to note that no changes were asked to be made by the participants to the finalised transcripts. The feedback received from all the participants was, that to their knowledge and understanding, the content of their respective transcripts was an accurate portrayal of what was said during the interview and that the information contained in the transcripts was a correct and truthful representation of their reflections and conversations. The data *corpus* gathered in the form of nine transcripts amounted to close to 22,500 words of text which have been copied to the CD attached at the end of this research report.

The methodology outlined in the previous chapter made reference to the method of analysis chosen by the researcher to organise and interpret the qualitative data gathered from the nine interviews carried out with the participants. The process and findings stemming from the thematic analysis carried out will be outlined and presented in this section. Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework was chosen as a model to guide the researcher through this staged process, as outlined in the said model.

4.3.1 Familiarisation

Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that engaging in the process of analysis requires the researcher to be knowledgeable about the data gathered for the purpose of analysis. Several initiatives have been adopted in order to assist the researcher with familiarising himself with the data set. Primarily, the process of having directly participated in the process of gathering the data was a significant factor which helped the researcher become familiar with the data collected. Moreover, the researcher was solely responsible for the intricate process of transcribing and translating all nine interviews carried out. This provided ample opportunities for the researcher to scrutinise the gathered data and familiarise himself with the information enclosed within the transcribed text. Repeated readings were subsequently carried out to ensure that the text was properly transcribed and to create multiple opportunities for the

researcher to immerse himself adequately in the data. Furthermore, the process of seeking feedback from each participant on the quality of the content and presentation of the transcribed text, allowed for further familiarisation opportunities with the data set. The process of engaging in repeated readings of the finalised transcriptions also made it possible for the researcher to identify and develop initial codes across the entire data set.

4.3.2 Generating Codes

On completion of the transcription process, the data set was actively reviewed multiple times to seek out any strands of data that appeared to hold some degree of significance in relation to the information being sought by the researcher. All transcripts were given equal weight and attention and all were systematically revised with the aim of identifying any emerging patterns in the data. In an attempt to portray a rich thematic description of the whole data set, the process of identifying and generating codes was data-driven in its approach, notwithstanding that RQs were posed as part of this research study. Therefore, the initial coding process did not limit its focus to data which was deemed to be directly related to the RQs, but rather all data which was relevant to the 'phenomenon' being studied, that is, the LSZ provision, was systematically organised under distinct classifications or codes. During this stage of the analysis, a total of 15 codes were generated. Table 4.3.2.1 below, provides an overview of the codes that were developed during this process and provides a brief description of each. Table 4.3.2.1 also indicates under which theme each code was eventually included.

Table 4.3.2.1

Developing Initial Codes

Code Name	Brief Description	Theme
1. *Definition of a LSZ*	Accounts given by the participants with regard to their perception of the role and function of LSZs in mainstream schools.	Infrastructure
2. *Reasons for Referral to LSZs*	Participants' interpretations of the primary reasons why students such as themselves, become candidates who are eligible for being included in the LSZ provision.	Infrastructure
3. *Distinction of a LSZ from a Mainstream Classroom*	Comments put forward by the participants who make reference to the pedagogical and environmental differences noted in between mainstream classrooms and LSZ settings in their schools.	Infrastructure
4. *Attendance in LSZs*	Participants' descriptions of their formal and in-formal visits to the LSZ. This includes their commentary on their timetables and regularity of attendance to the provision.	Activities
5. *LSZ Activities*	This code was used to capture the participants' recollections of the activities in which they participated, during their attendance in the LSZ. The narratives of participants which offered a description of the activities held in the LSZ. The participants' opinions about the advantages and disadvantages of engaging in such activities, along with the descriptions of their emotional reactions in relation to these activities.	Activities
6. *Outlook on School*	Here, all excerpts which revolved around information about the participants' past and present attitude towards their school in general, were included.	Positive Outcomes
7. *LSZ Setting*	Participants' commonly made reference to the physical setting within their respective LSZs. Data encompassing their descriptions or opinions in relation to the manner in which the LSZ is set-up, including comments on the furniture, equipment and resources used, were assimilated.	Infrastructure
8. *Perception of*	Participants' comments about the perceptions of	Relationships

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Mainstream Students about LSZs	their peers in mainstream school settings with regard to the LSZ provision and/or those who are members of the LSZ community.	
9. Perception of Mainstream Educators about LSZs	Participants' comments about the perceptions of their teachers and other school-based staff in mainstream school settings with regard to the LSZ provision and/or those who are members of the LSZ community.	Infrastructure
10. Referral Process	This code was used to capture all the references made by the participants with regard to their experience of the process of referral in terms of the procedures, feelings and people involved.	Infrastructure
11. Positive Outcomes	The data which was related, or made reference to, the positive changes that took place at different levels in the participants' life at school, including their personal well-being and education following their placement within the LSZs. These comments and reflections were grouped under this code.	Positive Outcomes
12. Relationship with Students in LSZ	Remarks concerning the participants' relationship with other students attending in the same provision, with whom they share a variety of activities and experiences as part of the programme they attend in the LSZ, have been included under this code.	Relationships
13. Relationship with Educators in LSZ	References to the experiences and feelings in connection to the relationships fostered by the participants with members of staff in the LSZ, have been collocated within this code.	Relationships
14. Negative Experiences of the LSZ	Any remarks on negative perceptions or experiences related to the LSZ provisions' infrastructure, service, organisation or management having been grouped under this code.	Infrastructure
15. Improvements to LSZ Provision	Any recommendations or observations shared by the participants in relation to the potential ways forward in terms of improving the service or facilities offered as part of the LSZ provision.	Infrastructure

4.3.3 Searching for Themes

The process of coding the information contained within the data set into distinct codes, led to the third phase of the analytic process, by which the identification of overarching themes was carried out. According to Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 89) this phase is concerned with the process of; "r*e-focusing the analysis at the broader level of themes, rather than codes, this involves sorting different codes into potential themes, and collating all the relevant coded data extracts within the identified themes"*.

Having identified the aforementioned codes, the researcher revaluated the coded data extracts in order to generate candidate themes and sub-themes. Codes encompassing extracts of data which could be refined and condensed under an overarching theme were collated. The initial thematic map generated during this process is illustrated in Figure 4.3.3.1. This map indicates how the codes identified in the latter phase were condensed under four main candidate themes, enriched by a total of 19 further sub-themes. The main four themes identified within the data set were described as '*Infrastructure'*, '*Activities'*, '*Relationships'* and '*Positive Outcomes'*. Three of the mentioned themes, that is, '*Infrastructure'*, '*Activities'* and '*Relationships'* encapsulate data that relates to the experiences of students in LSZs at different levels, mainly inter-personal, pedagogical, educational, recreational and organisational. The '*Positive Outcomes'* theme however, related specifically to aspects of the data which dealt with 'change', namely; the impact elements pertaining to the LSZ provision had on the students' lives at school. All the coded data sets that connected to these candidate themes were systematically organised under each theme, bridging the potential connections between themes and sub-themes.
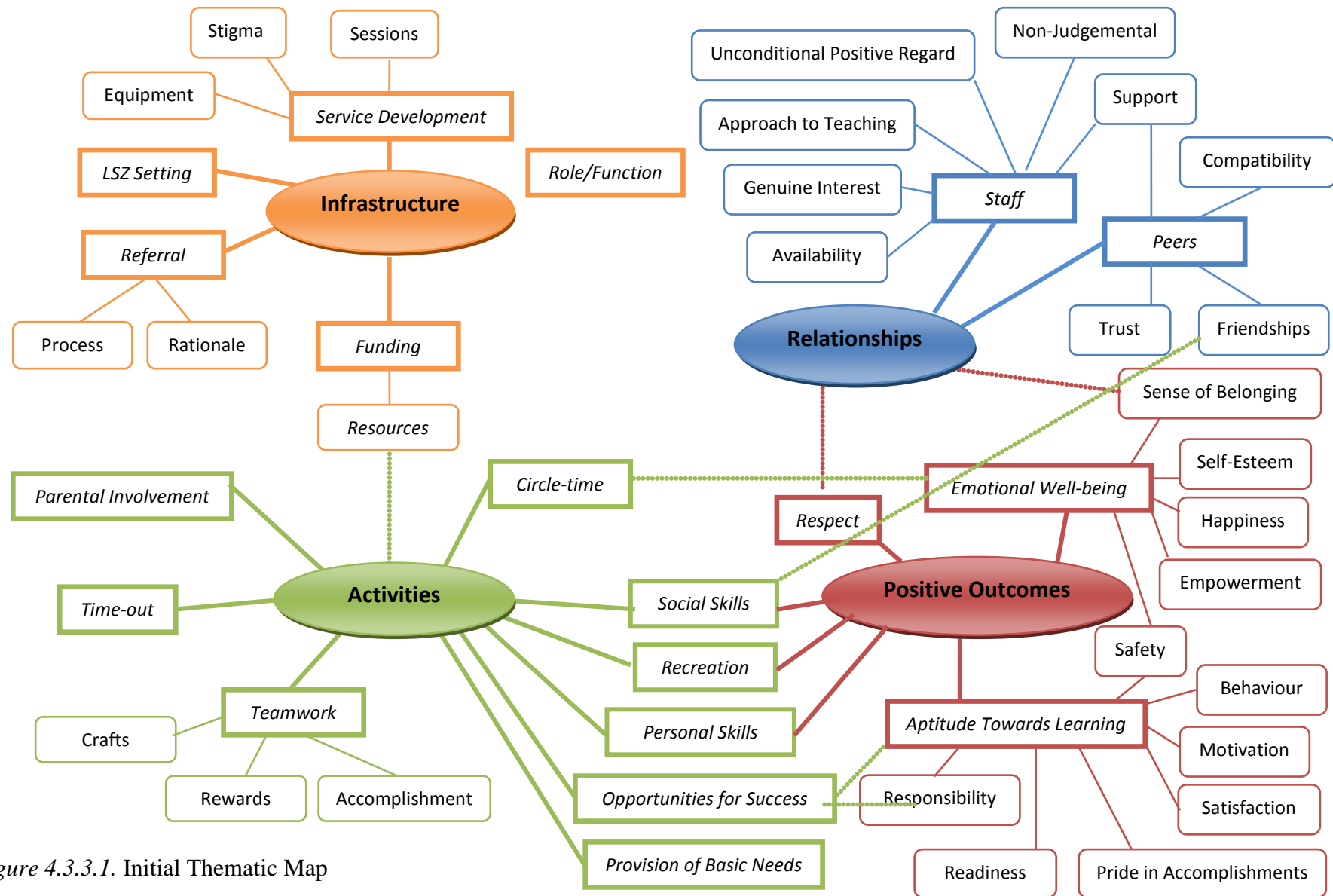
Figure 4.3.3.1. Initial Thematic Map

Infrastructure
- Stigma
- Sessions
- Equipment
- Service Development
- LSZ Setting
- Role/Function
- Referral
  - Process
  - Rationale
- Funding
- Resources

Relationships
- Unconditional Positive Regard
- Non-Judgemental
- Approach to Teaching
- Support
- Genuine Interest
- Staff
- Availability
- Peers
- Compatibility
- Trust
- Friendships

Activities
- Parental Involvement
- Circle-time
- Time-out
- Social Skills
- Recreation
- Teamwork
  - Crafts
  - Rewards
  - Accomplishment
- Personal Skills
- Opportunities for Success
- Provision of Basic Needs

Positive Outcomes
- Respect
- Sense of Belonging
- Emotional Well-being
  - Self-Esteem
  - Happiness
  - Empowerment
- Safety
- Aptitude Towards Learning
  - Behaviour
  - Motivation
  - Satisfaction
  - Responsibility
  - Readiness
  - Pride in Accomplishments

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4.3.4 Reviewing Themes

This phase of the analysis was geared towards reviewing the candidate themes identified during the previous phase. The candidate themes were re-checked based on the dual criteria of internal homogeneity and external homogeneity as suggested by Patton (2002), who described the former as the degree to which the data coded extracts subscribed to a particular theme hold together, and the latter as the extent to which a clear distinction exists between themes. This exercise demonstrated that the main four candidate themes identified during the initial stage retained their cohesiveness and relevance and were thus retained. However, at a sub-theme level changes were made, refining some of the sub-themes and thus condensing multiple sub-themes into overarching sub-themes, removing any overlapping data and eliminating sub-themes which were not supported by a significant amount of data.

The collated extracts attached to each theme were re-read several times to ensure that the data formed coherent patterns and that no further refinement was required at this stage of the analysis. This stage presented an opportunity for the researcher to assess the validity of the finalised themes, in terms of the degree to which they are an 'accurate' representation of the original data set. As Braun and Clarke (2006) clearly argue that the process of coding and refining themes is an organic, cyclical and on-going process which could potentially keep developing *ad infinitum*. The finalised themes were considered by the researcher to be sufficiently processed and refined and thus were deemed to be valid representations of the overall narrative contained within the data set. Following the process of re-visiting and refining the candidate themes and sub-themes a final thematic map was generated showing the four main themes and the related sub-themes. (Refer to Figure 4.3.4.1 below).
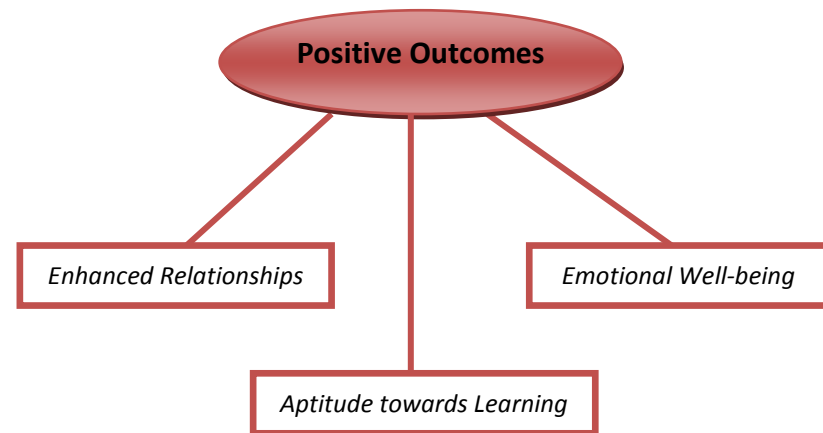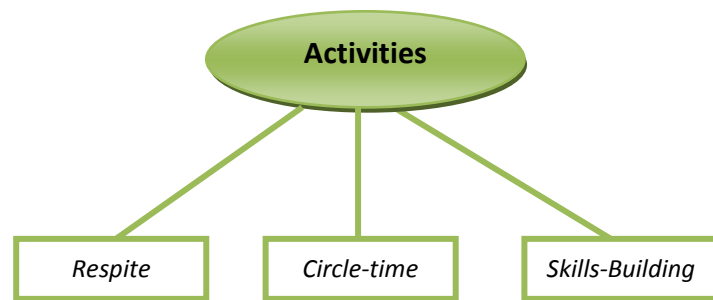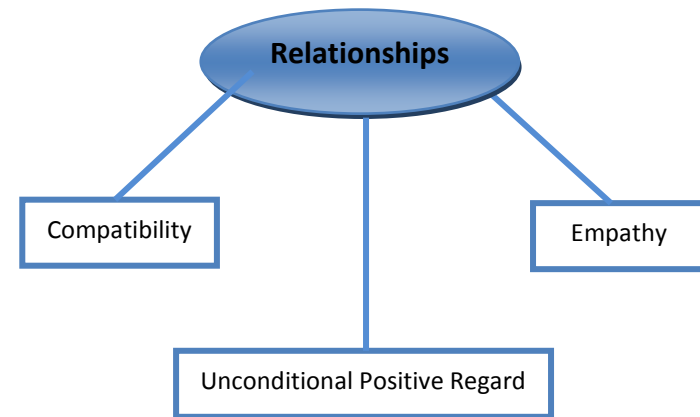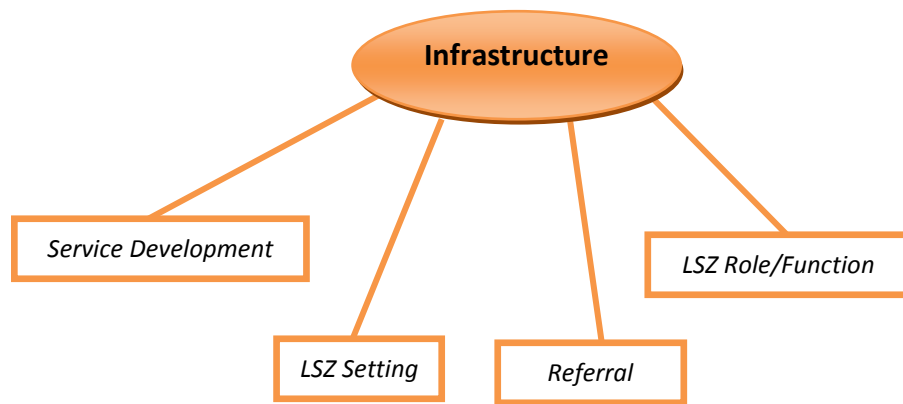
Figure 4.3.4.1. Final Thematic Map.

4.3.5 Defining and Naming Themes

The previous section was concerned with describing the process involved in coding the data set, as well as illustrating the steps taken in identifying and refining the themes for the purpose of carrying out the qualitative analysis of this research study. This section will now present the individual themes, illustrated in the finalised thematic map and provide the necessary definitions for each, portraying the essence captured by the individual themes. The present thematic analysis identified four predominant themes within the data set. The following table summarises the main four themes and their respective definitions. Reference to the sub-themes attached to each theme will be made. Sub-themes will however they will be explored and discussed in greater detail at a later stage.

Table 4.3.5.1

Description of Themes

Theme	Description
1. Infrastructure	This theme relates to a significant portion of the data which touches upon the physical and organisational structures of the LSZ provision. This includes information gathered by the participants with regard to aspects of protocol and policy within the LSZ, which they have experienced during different phases of their membership within the provision. Matters concerning the environment within the LSZ in relation to the services, facilities and installations that sustain the functionality of the LSZ provision were included. In addition to this, significant reference was made with regard to preferred scenarios in several of the aforementioned areas. The sub-themes informing this main theme have been identified to be *Service Development*, *Referral*, *LSZ Setting* and *Role/Function*.
2. Activities	This theme is related to the information contained within the data set that revolves around the participants'

accounts of the therapeutic sessions and activities that they experienced as part of their inclusion within the LSZ. The participants' stories about their participation in such tasks and activities were collated under this theme. This theme is supplemented by a series of sub-themes, namely; *Skills-Building, Circle-time and Respite*. Examples of each will be presented further on in this chapter.

3. Relationships   This theme dealt with the participants' accounts of their inter-personal relations with other people from within the LSZ, namely staff and students and their appraisals of such interactions. The sub-themes augmenting this particular theme, namely; *Unconditional Positive Regard, Empathy* and *Compatibility* predominantly encompass the participants' perceptions of the positive contributions such relations conveyed. Examples of such ideas will be exemplified in more detail later in this section.

4. Positive Outcomes   This theme is related to the positive changes experienced by the participants, perceived by them to be a direct result of their attendance in the LSZ. As will be validated further on, using examples quoted directly from their respective transcripts, salient areas highlighted by participants in their accounts revolve around the sub-themes identified in connection to this theme, namely; *Aptitude towards Learning, Emotional Well-being* and *Enhanced Relationships*.

Following is an analytic narrative in which each main theme will be discussed along with the sub-themes that inform the respective themes. Examples in the form of transcribed extracts will be provided from the coded data sets.

4.3.5.1 Theme One: *Infrastructure*

The data informing this theme revolved around several sub-themes which predominantly deal with the organisational and logistical elements involved in running the LSZ, as well as the policies and procedures that guide the LSZ service and practice. The facilities and premises used to run LSZ services were also widely discussed by the participants.

a) <u>Referral</u>

This sub-theme refers to the extracts in the data which relate to the participants' experience of the referral process and the rationale justifying such course of action. The data presents inconsistencies in the experiences shared by the participants with regards to the process of referral. The referral proceedings which participants reported to have been involved in, prior to formal admission, vary significantly. For example a participant felt forced to obtain parental consent to join the LSZ following unsuccessful attempts to manage his behaviour within a mainstream setting;

> *Well they used to ask me in school about my behaviour and what induced it; however I never took any real notice of them! So I would usually just keep on doing what I was doing, and after they told me I was going to the LSZ ... She gave me a paper and asked me to give it to my parents to sign because they wanted me to start going to the LSZ* (P-03/66-72).

Participants also reported that in certain situations the idea of joining the LSZ provision was introduced as a punishment due to non-compliance with school authorities. For instance one participant remarked that;

> *First she wanted to put me in another class but I was unwilling to go. Then she put me in the LSZ. She told me "since you don't want to go to another class I'll sort you out, you'll see!' Then she sent me to the LSZ* (P-08/57-59).

Participants remarked however that their respective LSZs gave clear explanations on the reasons that prompted the school to seek their attendance in the provision and were given proper indications on what they should expect from their attendance to the provision. For example;

I was approached by one of the teachers and I was asked if I would like to attend, and gave me a paper for my parents to sign...I didn't really want to go, but when I asked what goes on there she told me that we can play games and that it will be interesting. So I decided to go (P-04/92-96).

Furthermore, the participants commonly made reference to the reasons or 'problems' which triggered the perceived need for inclusion within the LSZ provision. The participants generally remarked that students experienced a variety of difficulties, both in school and at home and explained that in most cases this lead to varying degrees of dysfunction in their life. As a participant explains;

It's like Caritas! But not only for drugs. For those who have family problems, drug related problems. Everything! Well, depends on the problem. Generally serious problems. Problems that can disrupt one's life. This sort of thing. But not everybody. For example broken family … you'll have a disjointed family and because of this you don't function well, problems like drugs. For example if you lack discipline it's also a problem. When I attend the LSZ I meet these kinds of people. Those who are not disciplined, those who have family problems and those who have drug related problems (P-02/21-27).

The participants stressed different problems areas including; family difficulties and abuse; e.g. "*At first I had some problems with my father and I was being followed by the guidance teacher. .... He used to hit me*" (P-03/54-55); misbehaviour and bullying; e.g. "*Because I used to misbehave...I picked on children. .. I was a Bully*" (P-04/84-86); learning difficulties; e.g. "*Those who don't know how to read. They can come here*" (P-05/67); socially withdrawn; e.g. "*Those that are too quiet also come to the LSZ. Often they don't even know how to comb their hair or what you can use to style your hair. They don't mix with others a lot*" (P-07/61-63).

b) Role/Function

Role/Function is one of the sub-themes that emerge from the data coded under this theme. It relates to the information found within the transcript that focuses on the participants' perceptions of the role LSZ services inhabit as well as the overall function such provisions are understood to be fulfilling. The participants' descriptions of the role of LSZs within schools appeared to be predominantly

problem oriented, commenting primarily on LSZ role as a 'problem-fixer' with respect to the difficulties they experience in school. For example; "*For those who are bad, to straighten them up!*" (P-05/65); and

> *Ehh .. We meet during school .. Ehh .. Normally we would have teachers with us to help us to check what our problems are. For example if you lose your concentration and such and they help. They focus on your problems* (P-03/32-34).

The participants stressed that being a 'problem-owner' is the main criterion in order to be eligible to be join the LSZ programme; "*Who has problems can attend for sessions there*" (P-08/52). The data suggests that owning a problem seems to grant exclusive 'membership' to the provision; "*For example during some lessons we have activities and I can go because I am a member. Sometimes students who are not members come as well but they cannot stay for the sessions*" (P-09/46-48).

This in turn grants access to a variety of activities, which seem to promote opportunities to relate to others and develop one's social skills;

> *Here sometimes if you have a problem or something of the sort, here is a place where you can talk, learn certain manners for when you interact with people, you also learn how to behave with people. Ehe, that's it! ..* (P-01/23-25);

as well as learn, achieve and enjoy; "*A place where we go and talk and share our feelings, where we play, where we communicate*" (P-04/65-66);

> *To me it's about learning. It pushed me forward … If a person had to step up to me and ask me what the LSZ was, I would tell her that it's a place where you feel good. We do everything there. We cook, crafts, you get to do new things and learn about things you don't know* (P-07/46, 49-52).

The role of LSZs as a service focused on the implementation of behaviour management policies, was frequently mentioned by participants; maintaining that a main function of LSZs is; "*To help you manage your behaviour. Not everybody is the same obviously but they help a lot of children*" (P-08/48-49).

Clear distinctions were drawn by the participants in terms of the differences they experience in a mainstream classroom setting when compared to their experience

within the LSZ, highlighting the uniqueness of the activities organised, the physical setting and layout and the people involved within the LSZs. For example;

> *In the LSZ there are children of different ages; .. Hmm .. and in class you go to learn a subject but in the LSZ you come to learn how to get along with people; ... Hmm ... you learn to talk if you have problems; ... well everybody has problem I mean but if you have problems they might be able to help you. You come here to talk; .. it helps. You don't just share your feelings though, there will he times where you can cook and other such activities (P-01/47-51);*

> *All you have in a classroom is a whiteboard, desks and chairs. All the desks and chairs are facing the whiteboard, therefore, the whiteboard is the main attraction, you know? In the LSZ however things such as the sofa are prominent (P-02/128-130);*

> *In the LSZ they help you and you help at the same time. You enjoy yourself more and you join activities not like when you are in class. Class is normal and you do not necessarily have your friends with you ... But in the LSZ I can meet with friends. In the LSZ they accept me (P-09/78-81).*

c) <u>LSZ Setting</u>

Another sub-theme termed as '*LSZ setting*', collates together the participants' views of the facilities provided, equipment, furniture and resources used, as well as the manner in which such materials where laid out within the LSZ premises. According to these accounts the physical setting in itself offered a significant contribution to their well-being within the service. For instance a participant exclaimed that;

> *The environment is everything. For example, when I came for the first time here, before the layout was a bit different. The sofa was in a different place. When I used to walk in the room I used to see a sofa! To see a sofa in a school, in a class; when you see a kitchen with a cooker and things like that in a class you immediately say: 'it's really nice!' (P-02/76-79).*

The participants' comments on this aspect of the LSZ appear to suggest that the setting in itself was usually conducive to learning. For example;

> *I really like the room; .. the furniture, the way the walls are painted. The tables and chairs are different from class. ... The colours are different than those used in class. The moment you step in you know it's not going to be a normal lesson. You know the lesson is going to be meaningful! ... Not because others are not but here you know you are going to learn something useful (P-01/86-90).*

d) <u>Service Development</u>

This sub-theme includes data derived from the participants' ideas about potential areas of development within the LSZ service. Several participants remarked that in some LSZs more careful consideration about the layout of the available furniture and equipment should be considered. Participants also made reference to the manner in which interior design, including furniture layout, plastering and basic room décor can impact positively on their sense of security and ease within the provision. For example a participant explained that after the layout in the LSZ was changed and the sofa in the room was shifted from its original position, he did not feel comfortable with the new layout, stating that the previous layout; "It *gives you a feeling .. I don't know .. It's like it feels warmer… Hmm safer … not as exposed*" (P-01/77-78).

The participants also felt the need to address the frequency and manner in which sessions in the LSZ were organised. Many remarked that notwithstanding that they could appreciate the importance of working with other students, in terms of the value added most of their fellow LSZ members bring; they also felt the need of individual time with their educators in the provision. For example a participant remarked;

> *We normally meet in groups, but it would be interesting to have at least once a week, or when you need it, a time when teachers can ask you about your feelings individually. You know? … she can check on you and know if something is not well* (P-03/284-286, 289).

An issue that appears to be of significant importance to the participants was related to their growing concern about the stigma attached to students being supported by the LSZ provision in their respective schools. Some participants mentioned that they felt the need for increasing awareness across the school population, including mainstream educators and staff about the role and function of LSZs, creating opportunities for joint activities between students attending the LSZ and those who are not, as well as inviting teachers along for observations of the work carried out by students within the provision. The following are some examples of the participants' observations with regards to the perceptions other students hold about students who attend LSZs;

- "*I imagine that they think that I come here to waste time but they don't know about the place*" (P-01/101-102);

- *"That's another big problem! Well. For example .. Hmm .. well some of them say nasty things about you because they don't know what's up here"* (P-02/290-291);

- *"Some of them ask me what I do here, but some others say things like 'Because that guy goes to the LSZ' and I get singled out because of that"* (P-03/209-210);

- *"Most of them envy us! They think that we come to the LSZ just to play and have fun and miss out on lessons!"* (P-04/220-221);

- *"At first they teased me a lot about it. Until I started going there, I also thought it was for stupid girls who have problems or can't get along with others. I heard others say these things about the LSZ so I believed them and I agreed with them"* (P-08/104-106)

Participants also expressed their displeasure with some of their mainstream classroom teachers who do not always manage to show the appropriate degree of sensitivity and respect towards the LSZ provision and those enrolled in it. For instance some participants explained that they used to get upset when teachers challenged the validity of their attendance at the LSZ, for example;

> *The teachers, as I said used to say nasty things to me sometimes and I hated the way they spoke to me! For example, they used to ask me: 'So why does a kid like you need to go to the LSZ?' Or sometimes when my session in LSZ finishes in the middle of a lesson and I go back to class they used to get really angry with me and they also used to look at me with anger. I used to get bothered by such things* (P-02/302-306).

The participants also suggest that occasionally teachers are intolerant of the disruptions created during the lessons when students need to journey to-and-fro from the LSZ room; e.g. *"Well, some teachers don't really like us because we leave during their lessons"* (P-04/228).

4.3.5.2 Theme Two: *Activities*

This theme collates together the stories told by the participants with regards to their participation in the activities organised within the LSZ. During the interviews, participants regularly made reference to the types of activities they used to engage in as part of the official programme they followed in the LSZ. There was a high degree

of consistency across the participants' accounts of the type and frequency of activities they were involved in. The following sub-themes illustrate in greater detail the information shared by most participants.

a) Circle-Time

The participants interviewed described structured activities in which they got an opportunity to share their feelings about any difficulties they might have been experiencing and also got a chance to discuss various topics and share their views about them. They referred to this activity as 'Circle-Time'. Participants explained that this activity helps them deal with the emotional toil they deal with in their lives. For example a participant, with reference to the circle-time activity, explained that;

> *It is very important I think. .. School is not easy for me and talking about my problems helps me. You cannot always talk to friends about your problems. They don't always understand. Not even teachers do. Not all I mean* (P-08/168-170).

Another participant also perceived this exercise to help her cope with her stress in school and makes reference to the importance of group rules to guarantee the participants' safety and confidentiality;

> *This is the sofa. We usually have circle time here…We sit here and they ask us how we are and about our feelings and share it with others. For example we write our feelings on a piece of paper the Miss gives us. Things like that…For me it's really good! ... Because I get to sit down! No, but really it's nice to share my feelings with others and talk to others. It is not like talking to my best friend but once you are there it's awkward not to say anything. I say something about me to others. I feel better when we do this. I feel relaxed afterwards. It's the same like when you have a best friend and share things with her. But not everybody has friends. The Miss tells us that what we say during circle time stays in the room and you cannot say it to anyone. So I feel safe. If you talk to a friend she can go and talk to everyone about what you said* (P-07/101,103-104, 106, 108-109,111-116).

Some participants also described this activity as one in which certain topics of relevance to their life as students and adolescents are discussed. For example; "*We used to come here and talk. She would show us videos for example some about internet bullying here with other children as a group. For example here we used to sit down and talk about our problems*" (P-01/53-55).

Overall, participants expressed their appreciation of such opportunities which reportedly helped them cope with their difficulties. Several participants have highlighted that sharing their feelings about their difficulties required trust. This seemed to be an issue with some students as the practice of sharing their feelings openly with others was not always something they felt comfortable with. For example;

> *I usually leave things that happen at home, at home! I don't bring them to school. For example, if something happened at home I will not .. talk about it .. because .. trusting is not easy .. you know. It's like you cannot be sure whom to trust. In the LSZ I could trust and I could talk about what was going on at home* (P-03/249-252);

> *But for example during circle time she asks us about how we are feeling today and if I tell her 'so and so'. I never say why in front of the others but wait and talk to her alone. But things like bullying I don't mind talking about it. As long as it is not a problem I have because if they go and talk about something I have said it's ok anyway* (P-08/178-182).

Further analysis of the coded extracts revealed that participants thought that circle-time was not only beneficial because they could have a space where they could share their feelings with others, but it also created an opportunity for them to be of assistance to others. The process of sharing their own experiences, feelings, insights and reflections with their friends in the LSZ, brought them closer to others who shared similar difficulties. Thus, they were in a better position for understanding and empathising with them. Furthermore, the act of listening to others' experiences about their difficulties helped them come to terms with their own problems, finding comfort in the experiences and hardships that were shared. For example;

> *I think it is good because you listen to others and try to understand their problem. Even though I don't share my feelings openly with them I still think it is important to listen. Sometimes they have problems like me and I can understand what they are going through. I try to talk to them but I don't know if it helps. If you help someone it gives you satisfaction because you make that person happy* (P-08/184-188).

b) Skills-Building

Participants reported that during their sessions in the LSZ they got involved in an array of activities which were dedicated to skills development in several areas, generally dealing with social skills and personal skills. Such initiatives were described to be incorporated in several activities which many participants' described as pleasurable and recreational. (e.g. "*learning is fun! You enjoy working on tasks*" (P-03/260). During such activities students were provided with opportunities to work together and learn basic living skills, such as cooking and meal preparation. Some coded extracts are included below as examples;

- "*They help us learn .. but not only about the subjects we talk about but also to work together. Teamwork and things like that*" (P-04/116-117);

- "*We do everything there. We cook, crafts, you get to do new things and learn about things you do not know!*" (P-07/51-52);

- "*Well sometimes when a village feast would be approaching we'll probably do some crafts related to the feast itself, or for example we would cook. I really like cooking activities. There are few that help to set the table and others that would cook or wash the dishes*" (P-02/160-163).

The participants also claimed that occasionally, such activities were directed towards generating funds that enabled the LSZ to purchase the required funds for the service. This appeared to have generated a sense of cohesiveness within the group which was driven by the joint effort to reach commonly desired goals. This, in itself, created opportunities for students to experience a sense of pride and accomplishment in their work which helped them appreciate the importance of a team effort as well as their unique and individual contributions to the task at hand. For example;

> *The Miss tells us what we have to do, step by step. For example another girl and I would spread the butter on the tin and others take care of the dough and others take care of decorating the cakes for example. Then we bake them and sell them! ... We use it for the LSZ. To buy crafts for example. We need the money ay! Or else we won't have money to buy the things we need for the things we do* (P-07/90-95).

c) <u>Respite</u>

Participants described the LSZ as a place where they received respite from their school and home life, which occasionally was reported to become too stressful and demanding for them to cope with. In certain instances participants talked about their attendance in a LSZ as an alternative to missing school. For example;

> *When I am not up for it now, I can come here instead of not turning up for school. Ms Butigieg told me that if on any day I should wake up and feel that I cannot cope with a day at school or if I am really unhappy, nervous and upset or I have a problem and I don't feel like attending for my lessons or even if I don't feel like facing teachers, she told me that I could come here and talk with her* (P-02/92-96).

Joining other students in the activities organised in the LSZ provided some students with the resilience to cope with on-going difficulties in different aspects of their lives as well as giving them the emotional support they required to master the difficulties they encountered in their life. For instance, one participant mentions;

> *Hmm … we really have fun working together and talking with each other .. Yes it's really nice to do these things with my friends in the LSZ. It feels good to do these things. It's like having a break from everyday life in school and at home. You can talk to your friends and teachers*
> (P-01/129-132).

Respite was not only limited to the provision of alternative settings or emotional support but also through the provision of what are usually describes as 'basic needs' which would typically be required for people to be able to function appropriately. A participant explained during the interview that such basic needs were not always met by his primary caregivers. In such situations, LSZs take on an even more significant role for students. A participant was asked for his opinion about the most significant aspects of the LSZ for him. He immediately and without any hesitation replied "*The fridge!*" (P-05/182) and added; "*Because sometimes I don't have food and I am very hungry*" (P-05/184).

4.3.5.3 Theme Three: *Relationships*

As the data in the transcripts suggests, interpersonal relationships with staff and students are pivotal aspects of the LSZ provision. The relationships participants

develop with staff and other students appear to carry a lot of importance for the students involved in the service. Participants made clear distinctions when referring to their relationships with students and staff, however similar themes were identified and will be described in greater detail below.

a) <u>Unconditional Positive Regard</u>

In their accounts participants mention that in most cases they relate differently to teachers and LSAs working in the LSZ when compared to teachers in mainstream classroom settings. For example;

> *You feel more comfortable to talk to them and share something with them. For example with some other teachers, when you do something wrong, they start grumbling and sometimes say nasty things about you but nice teachers such as those in the LSZ are more easy to get along with and are more readily interested to listen to you* (P-03/183-186).

This applies also to their friends who are not members of the LSZ. In their stories, participants highlight the non-judgemental approach used by teachers and peers within the LSZ. For example;

> *Much better than the way I get along with others! The children in class judge me immediately, sometimes if I do something bad they don't like they make fun of me and laugh at my face…They respect me and listen to me when I need them. Nobody laughs at me or judges me, even when I do a mistake. It's like a family to me…* (P-09/153-155, 173-174).

There is a general consensus amongst the participants that the staff in the LSZ, more often than not, go that extra mile to try and support them with their difficulties, portraying what participants believe to be, a 'genuine' interest in their well-being. For example, a participant remarked; "*Such teachers don't come here just to get paid. They come here to help us. I think it is something really admirable. I wouldn't be capable of doing it I think!*" (P-02/247-248).

b) <u>Empathy</u>

Across their transcripts, participants regularly remarked that they felt that LSZ staff and students were more inclined to listen to their problems and support them in an understanding manner. Speaking about his peers in the LSZ a participant said; "*When*

we talk I can understand what my friends are going through, some of them. And I think they understand me too. It helps" (P-04/217-218);

> *They were really down to earth and they also had problems which they talked about here. They used to share experiences about their problems that used to be the same or similar to what I experienced. They could understand!* (P-01/146-148).

When it comes to their educators, participants felt that they were more approachable, ready to listen and sensitive to their needs than other teachers in general. For example;

- *"It's different than with other teachers. They only care about the subject. They don't really understand. I am not saying that they are bad, but since I don't get to spend a lot of time with them I don't think I can feel comfortable with them. In the LSZ they try and come down our level and can understand us"* (P-07/188-192).

- *"Because the teacher in the LSZ talks and listens to you. For example, in class they are much more serious"* (P-04/207-208).

- *"When I want to read they tell me 'come, stay here' and they help me read"* (P-05/199).

c) Compatibility

Notwithstanding that the majority of participants described their relationship with other students as supportive and trustful, others explained that in certain groups there was too much diversity and that this hindered their attachment to the group. Incompatibility was generally reported to be due to significant differences in age or conflicting personalities. For example, one participant mentioned his reluctance to join with the group at times because he considered himself to be more 'mature' than his peers;

> *I expected that we would have more one-to-one sessions organised for us because sometimes I didn't really get on well with the other kids and you cannot imagine how much we used to fight!...I wasn't very fond of them. Some of them were immature* (P-02/219-221, 274).

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A participant in particular speaks about how his exposure to other students in the LSZ helped him develop a greater sensitivity and understanding towards students whom he might not get along with very well;

> *There are many things I have learnt through my group work. I always say this! If there is something that I have learnt from being here, it's that I shouldn't judge others. If I learnt something from here it's this. That if I see another kid, I never know if he is coming from a broken family, for instance .. so I don't judge him because I say to myself that I am not aware of what that kid went through or what his parents did or what happened to them and how this effected his upbringing* (P-02/224-229).

On the contrary, some participants felt that their peers within the LSZ were more prone to accept foster positive relationships with them. For example one participant remarked; "*They are all okay. No one excludes you. So it's okay. Sometimes getting along with students here is easier than those in class*" (P-03/190-191).

4.3.5.4 Theme Four: *Positive Outcomes*

This theme relates to the participants' reflections about how their experiences in the LSZ impacted on their life within the school setting. References made by participants about the beneficial outcomes following their attendance in the LSZ were collated under this theme. Areas of improvement commonly reported by the participants were collated into the sub-themes attached to this theme, namely; *'Aptitude towards Learning', 'Emotional Well-being'* and *'Enhanced Relationships'*. Each sub-theme will be described separately below and examples of each will be provided.

    a) <u>Enhanced Relationships</u>

The participants explained how the process of engaging in activities organised within the LSZ gave them the opportunity to work with other students on the tasks that were assigned to them during their sessions. During the interviews several participants commented on their preference to work individually rather than in groups when it comes to craftwork or other hands-on projects. Nonetheless, when prompted about the usefulness of such activities within their LSZ programme, many participants explained that participating in these tasks together with other students actually helped them learn to get along with others better. These opportunities were also beneficial

for the children to develop the inter-personal skills required to work in a team with others. For example;

> *It left a good impact. I learnt to get along better with people. For example when we used to cook we learnt how things needed to be done and how to do things independently here and at home … I think I work better with others now too. I wasn't good at working with others before*
> (P-01/106-109).

Participants also mentioned that their experience in the LSZ helped them develop an appreciation for the manner in which his peers can contribute to a common task. These also commented on the fact that even though being expected to work in a group has its limitations, having been exposed to other students' difficulties during group activities has helped them develop a greater sense of empathy, understanding and tolerance. For example;

> *It helped me quite a bit. It helps you mature and things like that. You can learn from others too. For example, not everybody is the same. Now I think you should look for the good in others not the bad* (P-01/111-113).

b) <u>Aptitude Towards Learning</u>

This sub-theme is related to the improvements participants mentioned in respect to their propensity towards learning. The participants explained that due to the difficulties they were experiencing prior to their admission in the LSZ, concentrating on their learning was not considered a priority. For example;

> *Yes I look at school differently now. For example before I used to come to school and do not do anything during lessons. Now I go into class and work and try to do well in my exams. (23 sec) I think that the teachers and students really helped me* (P-01/142-144).

In the transcripts, the participants made reference to various difficulties that impacted negatively on their learning in school. Self-confidence was one of these. One participant in particular describes how difficult it was for him to communicate with his peers at school, due to a stuttering problem he experienced prior and during the initial months of his attendance in the LSZ. During the interview he enthusiastically exclaimed that he had overcome these difficulties with the help of input from the LSZ;

For example if you lose your concentration and such and they help. They focus on your problems so they don-; well I am still quite a bit. Before when I used to speak with someone you wouldn't understand a word I say because I used to stutter a lot. Now this problem doesn't exist anymore! Well, it hasn't gone completely away but it is much better…I feel more confident, even during lessons. I feel less scared (P-03/33-37, 229).

The participants also mentioned that following their time in the LSZ they were better able to maintain their concentration in class which allowed them to focus on their learning more efficiently; for example: "*I am paying more attention in class too I think. I concentrate better*" (P-04/267).

Participants also report that the LSZ has made a drastic difference to their life in school. For example, one participant excitingly reports;

Everything is opposite of how it was!…I participate more in lessons and I feel like I want to work hard to show that I want to do well and show others that I can do well. Before I didn't believe in myself (P-08/223, 256-257).

c) <u>Emotional Well-being</u>

The social, emotional and behavioural difficulties experienced by the participants referred to the LSZ inevitably gave rise to a decreased sense of emotional well-being. Participants reported in their interviews that most had experienced stress-provoking events prior to and during their attendance in the LSZ, both at home and within the school setting. Behaviour difficulties were amongst one of the most prominent issues participants were reported to be experiencing, which sometimes prompted their referral to the LSZ. Most of the participants were originally referred to the LSZ primarily due to behaviour problems, reported to have experienced an improvement in this area. Students who frequently got told off and were even at risk of exclusion from school explained that not only their behaviour improved, but also that the school had proudly recognised their efforts. For example; "*I don't fight anymore and I try to do my work .. Not always! But much better than before. ... I don't have many disagreements with teachers now either. They are all happy with the improvements I've made*" (P-06/148-150).

A participant mentioned how the LSZ has helped her develop a less confrontational attitude with her teachers in school. As a result of her determination to work on her

difficulties in school and together with the support offered by her peers and staff in the LSZ, she was able to develop more positive relationships with figures of authority in school, as well as teachers, and has set her mind on doing well in school;

> *A lot of things. A lot of things have changed. For example my attitude. I am very different than how I used to be. I don't disrespect teachers as I used to and I don't misbehave in class. I get along well with teachers now. They are ok! I don't do things that I shouldn't be doing now. Now I have only 1 year left to go and I want to put my mind there maybe .. you know. It helped me a lot!…It wasn't one thing but many. Attending at the LSZ was fun. I started enjoying coming to school. I used to look forward to go to the LSZ. ... The teacher helped me a lot* (P-07/171-174, 176-178).

The participants explained that due to their hyperactive and inattentive nature, they often experienced difficulties with attending to their duties in school, especially when it comes to their learning and productivity of work. This inevitably had taken its toll on their academic progress, which in some cases appeared to have negatively impacted on their self-esteem. The following participant describes how hard it was for him to resist any distractions in the classroom and how such occurrences impinged negatively on his well-being. Nonetheless, through the support given by the LSZ he happily explains that things are much better for him now and that the positive feedback he is getting from school is helping him nurture his sense of self-esteem;

> *Yes, I used to get easily distracted .. now not any more .. I am also much less nervous than I used to be. Before, the moment I sat down and was required to concentrate on my work I didn't really manage .. sort of .. I would waste a lot of time playing with things or simply doing things that have nothing to do with the lesson. I wasn't being able to .. Now, I can do it better .. I mean .. yes, like that. Before I didn't believe in myself. I never used to do well at school. But now things are different. Better*
> (P-03/235-240).

Another participant explained how through the support he received in the LSZ in dealing with the problems he had at home; he could cope better in school, refraining from engaging in any form of bullying on others. He also reported to be less anxious. This allowed him to develop a more positive outlook about school and develop new friendships at school;

> *I think I have matured quite a lot now. I have changed. I am more quite now, calmer. ... I do not bully other children now. I am happy when I*

come here. .... I have more friends too...I talked about it in the LSZ and they understood me (P-04/243-245, 251).

Other participants reported that in addition to the sessions provided by the LSZ which focus on developing inter- and intra-personal skills, the provision also gave them the opportunity to receive support in their academic work through specific literacy input delivered by the staff in the LSZ. For example;

- *"Yes I am happy because since I have been in Form 1, I have been coming to the LSZ. I learned how to read and write"* (P-05/51-52).

- *"When I want to read they tell me 'come, stay here' and they help me read"* (P-05/199).

Participants also spoke about how the LSZ helped them become more resilient and develop the skills they needed to cope with adversity. For example;

"Before in Form 1, I was really nervous and I get angry and fight easily. I was going through some family problems and didn't have any support and respect from my friends. Now I am much friendlier and I try to help others that I think I can help. Today I learned not to take notice of those who don't respect me. I don't think that those people who don't respect me merit my respect. ... I am paying much more attention during lessons now than I used to before also" (P-09/164-169).

4.4 Summary

This chapter aimed to present the findings stemming from the quantitative and qualitative inquiries of this study. Descriptive statistics pertaining to the level of application of LSZs across state secondary schools in Malta were illustrated. The thematic analysis carried out by the researcher was also outlined in this chapter, providing an overview of the process involved in conducting this explorative inquiry. The major themes that were identified and developed by the researcher were defined and thoroughly described, with examples from the transcripts produced using the interviews carried out with nine secondary students enrolled in LSZs. The themes portrayed were predominantly related to the experiences of students with SEBD in their respective LSZs and their perceptions about the impact their inclusion in such

provisions has had. The next chapter focuses mainly to discuss the present findings and outline the impactions and limitations of this research.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

5.1 Introduction

The present chapter will focus its attention on discussing the findings stemming from the data gathered through the quantitative and qualitative measures used. This report will also provide an account on how the findings reported in the previous chapter inform the RQs formulated for this study. An attempt to bridge these results with previous research reviewed in chapter two, will be undertaken. Furthermore, this chapter will also outline the limitations of the present study, as identified by the researcher and the implications of such findings with regard to educational psychology practice and future research in this area.

5.2 The Implementation and Application of LSZ Provisions

RQ 1: 'How many Learning Support Zones have been assimilated in Maltese state secondary schools, and how are they functioning across colleges in Malta?'

Inclusion of students with SEBD in general educational settings, has over the years been reported to represent a major challenge for educators (Knitzer, Steinberg and Fleisch, 1990; Shapiro et al., 1999; Mowat, 2009). Pisani (2006) reported that during the period 2000-2005, 1.5% of the total number of children and young people between the age of 10 and 18 attending school in Malta, have been identified to have SEBD. A large-scale research study conducted by Cefai, Cooper and Camilleri (2009), reported that prevalence rates for SEBD in Maltese secondary schools (10.5%) was higher than that in primary schools (9.1%). In recognition of such a significant number of students experiencing SEBD, LSZs were introduced within the local educational scenario as part of a nationwide educational reform (MEYE, 2005). This section aims to address the first RQ formulated for this study, as indicated above.

The descriptive data gathered indicates that the majority of state secondary schools across the Maltese Islands have implemented a LSZ service. As could be inferred by the results reported in the previous chapter, 13 out of a total of 18 state secondary

schools who participated in the study report that they have set-up a LSZ provision. The introduction of LSZs in the Maltese educational system was originally pioneered by only four colleges, which were involved in the LSZ piloting project (MEYE, 2009). The findings of this study indicate that since the completion of this project, an increase in the number of LSZs across several colleges is evident. It is noteworthy to mention that even though only 13 schools reported to house a LSZ provision, an additional four schools reported to be in the process of setting-up such a service. Only one school indicated that there was no LSZ set-up in their school. Such results suggest that many colleges have welcomed the LSZ initiative and have taken the required steps in establishing this intervention for students with SEBD. Approximately half of the amount of LSZs found to be in operation, have only recently been set-up (between 1-2 years) which might suggest that the LSZ services in many secondary schools are still in their formative stage. Cefai and Cooper (2006) suggest that epidemiological studies and international literature are pointing to an increase in the frequency of students reported to be experiencing SEBD in schools. This trend is also reflected in the gradual overall increase in the number of referrals to LSZs, across most of the secondary schools which took part in the study. This is especially true for those LSZs who have been recently set-up. A significant variation was reported in the number of students attending LSZs across different schools. Such an occurrence might suggest that not all schools experience the same level of demand with regard to students with SEBD. More importantly however, the findings reported in the previous chapter indicate that the number of students who were referred to LSZs was almost equivalent to the number of students actually enrolled in the provision, suggesting that almost all students who have been referred have at some point been assimilated into the service. Regardless of the fact that the average waiting period for enrolment of referred students in LSZs could not be deduced, the present findings indicate that almost all students who are referred to the provision during a particular scholastic year are enrolled in the LSZ during the same year.

The present Maltese national guidelines with regard to LSZ provisions make reference to the referral procedures, which secondary schools must undertake in order to determine the students' eligibility to access the LSZ service (MEYE, 2009). This guidance only mentions school-based staff as potential referees of students with

SEBD. The findings reported in this study support this notion, as 91.69% of the referrals received by LSZs during the scholastic year 2011/2012, were forwarded by school-based staff. Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that 3.95% of the referrals to LSZs are handed over by 'outside' professionals, namely; social workers, youth workers and educational psychologists (EPs). Thus, this report suggests that so far, EPs are only marginally involved in the referral process of students with SEBD to LSZs.

The LSZ guidance (MEYE, 2009) does not offer clear guidelines on the expected duration of attendance for students enrolled in the provision and the criteria on which such a decision is based. The parental consent form issued by LSZs to parents of prospective LSZ candidates, makes reference to a period of approximately five weeks, in which the student is expected to attend at the LSZ on a provisional basis, in order to follow a specialised educational programme. The results obtained in this study suggest that only 18.11% of the students attending the LSZ service during the 2011/2012 scholastic year actually terminated their involvement with the provision within this five-week period. The results actually show that almost half of the students referred to the LSZ during 2011/2012 actually prolonged their involvement within the provision to a period of more than three months. This indicates that many students, regardless of the fact that they have completed their formal programme, still continue to receive on-going support from the LSZ. Several participants reported also to have had students discontinue their attendance in the provision. The participants reported that in certain situations, some LSZs are not successful in catering for the students' needs. This often results in the transfer or exclusion of the student from mainstream education into more specialised 'off-site' Learning Centres where a more individualised educational programme is introduced.

The LSZ guidance (MEYE, 2009) recognises that students with SEBD are at risk of experiencing multiple difficulties during their time at school. Similarly to Becker, McCrossen and Sempik's (2004) findings, anger management issues and aggression towards others, feature amongst the most prevalent reasons for referral to LSZs. The findings stemming from this study indicate that family-related difficulties feature significantly amongst students referred to LSZs. Such reports highlight the impact other systems around the child might be having on the students' well-being and

readiness for learning. According to Bronfenbrenner's 'Ecological Model of Development', the process of human development is inescapably influenced by the different systems existing and interacting with the individual, and implies that; "*the relations between these settings, and the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded*" are a contributing factor to the individual's functioning (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 21). Bronfenbrenner (1979, p. 25) also suggests that the family and school systems exist within a the child's mesosystem which he defines as; "*the interrelations among two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates*". This highlights the importance of recognising the potential impact immediate systems around the student have on his/her development, behaviour and emotional well-being, and stands in recognition of the potential implications such factors have on the LSZ provision, in terms of the services provided, and the quality of the relationships fostered between LSZs and other systems around the student.

LSZs are meant to be driven by the inclusive ethos which presently dominates educational discourse and policy within the Maltese educational context. The LSZ provisions are meant to offer a series of educational and therapeutic programmes that cater for the individual needs of students with SEBD. The LSZ guidance (MEYE, 2009, p. 4) stipulates that: "*The LSZ should be an integral part of the school behaviour policy and should reflect the inclusive philosophy and practice as defined in the National Minimum Curriculum giving all the students the opportunity to succeed*". In view of ensuring that the students attending LSZs are appropriately supported, LSZ co-ordinators and staff are expected to provide each student enrolled with intervention programmes that cater for their individual needs. From the descriptive analysis outlined in the previous chapter, it is clear that anger management and behaviour modification programmes are the most widely implemented programmes across LSZs. Most likely, this is in response to the most commonly reported difficulties experienced by students with SEBD, namely aggression and anger, as indicated earlier in this section. Although Becker, McCrossen and Waterstone (2004) research does not focus on LSZs, similar intervention programmes were reported to be made available to students attending LSU provisions in the UK. Almost all of the LSZs which took part in this study commented, that several other programmes are included in the service, such as;

emotional literacy, communication and social skills, to mention a few. Participants reported that many of these sessions were incorporated into other programmes or activities.

In order to understand better how LSZs are being implemented, this study also aimed to shed more light on the manner in which such provisions are staffed and what professional input is being given to the students enrolled in the provision, as part of the LSZ service. All LSZs reported that a minimum of one teacher and one LSA are generally available in the LSZ. Over 90% of the participants stated that the teachers responsible for managing their LSZ, were on reduced hours due to teaching commitments in mainstream classrooms, that they must attend to jointly with their duties in the LSZ. Such findings are not in line the LSZ guidance (MEYE, 2009), which states that proper staffing of LSZ requires a minimum of three members of staff, namely two teachers and an LSA. A few participants have mentioned however that professionals 'external' to the service, such as youth workers, drama teachers and job orientation teachers have been reported to be involved in providing their services, in liaison with the LSZs, suggesting that a move towards a trans-disciplinary approach is being adopted in some provisions.

Several participants have stressed that opportunities for state or school funded training, specifically targeted to address their needs for CPD, especially in the area of SEBD, is presently significantly limited. Monthly meetings which serve the purpose of sharing work experiences amongst LSZ staff, across different colleges, providing also an opportunity for LSZ co-ordinators to receive support through peer supervision, were the only sources of training reported by participants in this study. The LSZ guidance (MEYE, 2009) offers no explicit recommendations with regard to CPD for staff working in LSZs. The findings of this study clearly indicated that more than half of the participants were preoccupied by the lack of training opportunities which could otherwise help them with increasing their understanding of the difficulties faced by students with SEBD and further develop their skill-set to be able to support such students more effectively. Such statements could be corroborated with Shapiro et al.'s (1999) findings, which indicate that lack of training for educators on how to

adequately implement interventions, offered within specialised services for students with SEBD, was one of the major factors which hindered the inclusion of such students in mainstream settings. In their report, Ofsted (2006) suggested that LSUs, identified as being managed effectively were those that incorporated several opportunities for CPD of staff, in order to address the needs and weaknesses of the provision, hinting at the important role of CPD in the development and improvement of the service itself.

Ofsted's (2006) evaluative report also highlighted the importance of funding for LSU provisions to be able to function effectively and provide the intended services to students with SEBD. Funding policies and protocols were reported by participants of this study to be different across almost all schools. More than half the participants recognised that funding issues were creating significant difficulties, in terms of the LSZs' ability to acquire the needed resources. Such issues with funding were reported to be negatively impacting on the efficiency of LSZs, undermining the provision's ability to adhere to its objectives and maintain its support infrastructure.

In summary, this section has focused on comprehensively addressing the first RQ of this study, which aimed to explore how the LSZ initiative has been implemented across state secondary schools in Malta. This was done by reviewing the findings stemming from the quantitative inquiry of this study and discussing these results in the context of previous research. Several aspects pertaining to the LSZ infrastructure were discussed, including the assimilation of this provision across state-run colleges in Malta and the current level of functioning in multiple areas pertaining to LSZs.

5.3 The Experiences of Students with SEBD Enrolled in LSZs

RQ 2: 'How do students who exhibit SEBD, view their experience within the Learning Support Zone?'

The data collected through the semi-structured interviews carried out with nine students attending LSZs, sought in part to provide the researcher with some insight into their experiences within the provision. In order to address the second RQ

outlined above, the findings associated with this inquiry will be presented and discussed in the context of previous research in the area.

The transcribed interviews analysed in this study, provided a rich data set from which several aspects of the students' experiences in LSZs could be identified. Overall, all students spoke in recognition of the value added, their respective LSZs provided to their experience at school. Regardless of the fact that most participants were placed in different secondary schools, the accounts of their involvement in the LSZ, offered similar narratives and several common themes and sub-themes, which were identified by the researcher. The thematic analysis carried out in this study identified three major aspects pertaining to the LSZ initiative, that appeared to be especially relevant to the students' experience within the LSZ, namely;

- the physical setting of the LSZ,
- the activities held within, and
- the relationships fostered with the LSZ staff and other students attending the provision.

All students who participated in the study, referred to the physical setting of the LSZ to be one of the most attractive aspects of the provision. They made multiple references to the distinction between the LSZ setting and a typical classroom environment. When prompted about the basis on which such distinctions were made, most students argued that mainstream classrooms are generally all similar in terms of the layout and furniture they have, whereas LSZs were described to be very 'home-like' in their appearance, having furniture and facilities that were similar to those found at home. Several participants also referred to the LSZ's physical environment as being conducive to feelings of relaxation. One participant compared his experience in the LSZ with the feeling of relaxation he experiences whilst resting in a garden outside of school. Reference was made to the absence of traditional classroom furniture layouts (e.g. desks and chairs set in rows, facing a whiteboard) and the availability of house décor and appliances (e.g. teapots, stereos and fitness equipment). Some participants explained that finding themselves in the LSZ setting helps them experience a feeling of 'safety' and 'protection'. Such findings highlight

the important role LSZs are playing in meeting the 'safety needs' of students with SEBD; needs which might not be met in mainstream classroom settings. According to Maslow's (1943) theory of motivation, the physical, emotional and psychological safety needs of students need to be catered for prior to effectively reengaging such children in their formal education. The experiences of students who took part in this research are comparable to Hill and Ryan's (2010) research findings, that suggest that the set-up and layout of LSUs contribute to the students' ability to 'feel at home' in such an environment. Garner and Thomas (2011) also reported that such services can potentially provide students with the 'secure base' that they need, also serving as a space for respite from the difficulties they experience in coping at school.

The purpose of establishing LSZs within schools, is essentially to promote the inclusion of students with SEBD in mainstream education (MEYE, 2009). Upon referral, the nature and intensity of the students' difficulties are assessed and identified in order to formulate a plan of intervention, to provide the students' with the coping strategies needed in order to help them function effectively within the mainstream school setting. As mentioned earlier, therapeutic programmes are designed and implemented to cater for the needs of students enrolled in the provision. The findings stemming from this research suggest that this is done through multiple programmes, the most commonly quoted amongst students being; anger management, circle-time, as well as craft-making and cookery sessions, that encourage intra-personal and team building skills. Such programmes were reported by the participants to be delivered in group settings, even though additional support was given on an individual level, to varying degrees, depending on the intensity of support needed by the student. Even though each student had his/her own preferences in terms of the activities that they were involved in, all students explained that they could appreciate the value-added such activities contributed to their emotional well-being, inter/intra-personal development as well as their motivation to learn. Many students made reference to the activities in the LSZ as opportunities for receiving and providing support to others. Participating in activities with others and engaging in supported tasks, helped them develop a sense of confidence in themselves and their abilities, contributing to the development of an internal locus of control.

The students' accounts of their experiences of such activities also make reference to the role of relationships fostered with their educators and peers in the LSZ. All participants in this study mentioned that developing positive relationships with their teachers and LSAs in the LSZ was crucial in accessing the support they needed, in order to cope with their difficulties. Occasionally, the activities held in the LSZ appear to have served as a medium for students to develop a sense of accomplishment and success. One of the essential roles of LSZ staff was to some degree that of a mediator, whereby the learning of new tasks was facilitated in a manner which encouraged the students to develop their skills in different areas. In doing so, educators in LSZs appear to be focusing on the students' 'zone of proximal development', which according to Vygotsky (1978) involves a process by which the learning of new skills occurs through the guidance of somebody who has already mastered the skill being thought. This individualised approach ensures that students enrolled in LSZs receive the necessary support and attention which is ultimately conducive to their learning, promoting the realisation of opportunities to experience success and praise and develop a sense of empowerment. Garner and Thomas (2011) have reported similar findings with regard to the critical role of supportive relationships between students and staff, indicating that such positive relationships are likely to encourage a sense of 'security and protection' for the student and enable students to meet their social, emotional needs and nurture their capacity to learn. The accounts shared by the students about their experience in the LSZ, commonly make reference to the relationships fostered with LSZ staff and their peers attending the service, as a source of acceptance and respect. The participants highlighted the distress they experience when they feel rejected by their school teachers and peers due to their issues with misbehaviour.

Praise, positive feedback, unconditional positive regard and a non-judgemental approach were all salient factors which students mentioned to have had a pivotal impact on their ability to develop good relationships with LSZ staff and peers. Several students mentioned that initially they lacked trust towards others in the LSZ and explained that this was mainly due to the perceived risk of exclusion and rejection, which was often what they experienced in school. Nonetheless, the staff's consistency in providing the students with respect, empathy and understanding was

reported to be important in providing opportunities where trustful relationships could be experienced. Such claims are in fact consistent with Goodman and Burton's (2010) and Abela and Smith La Rosa's (2007) findings, namely, that positive feedback and respectful student-teacher relationships promote the inclusion of students with SEBD. According to Cooke, Yeomans and Parkes (2008, p. 294), "consistent staffing, modelling of positive behaviours and social skills by adult staff, providing predicable routines and providing a secure base", amongst others, encourage the development of secure attachments. Such assertions are also consistent with the findings of this study.

Criticism of the LSZ provision by the students interviewed during the course of this study, were very limited. None of the students could identify any negative experiences related to the activities that were held as part of the therapeutic programmes offered within the provision. Nonetheless, the students' experience of the manner in which the LSZ provisions function, in relation to the whole school, was not described to be satisfactory. The process of referral, as well as the interaction between the LSZ setting and the mainstream school, has been highlighted by the students as being a potential source of stress. Some students in this study made reference to the issue of 'choice', in relation to their perceived right to voice their opinions with regard to the endorsement of their referral to the LSZ. Some students also complained about the lack of opportunities to voice their concerns about joining the provision. This issue appeared to arise in situations where students were 'talked-into' attending for sessions at the LSZ against their own wishes or choice, being withdrawn from the decision-making process that would ultimately lead to their assimilation into the LSZ service. The findings of this study suggest that adopting a punitive-approach during the referral process could result in additional non-compliance by the student, making it harder for the student to engage with the LSZ effectively and thus further hindering the process of inclusion. In their study Becker and McCrossen (2004) reported that different referral procedures were implemented across the LSUs they evaluated. The degree of choice given to students about their enrolment in the LSU was reported to vary considerably across different LSUs. Their findings also suggest that some students 'give-in' to the pressure from the school and their parents to attend the provision, due to the risk of being excluded from school.

However, the present study suggests that in cases where students have been respectfully given the adequate explanations about the rationale pertaining to their referral to the LSZ, and also given the opportunity to discuss their concerns about this transition, students appeared to be better prepared to engage with the LSZ provision.

Findings stemming from this research also suggest that some students' reluctance to become members of the LSZ might also be related to the 'stigma' associated with the provision. Several students explained that on a general level, school staff and peers in mainstream school settings perceive the LSZ to be a place where students who have problems, most commonly related to non-compliant, oppositional and disruptive behaviour, are segregated from the rest of the school. The lack of exposure and awareness that is given to mainstream staff and students who do not have direct access to the LSZ, appears to be giving rise to misconceptions about the 'true' role and function of LSZs and is also reported by students to be having a negative impact on the disposition of potential candidates for the provision to join the LSZ. Similar difficulties were experienced by students enrolled in LSUs who according to Becker and McCrossen (2004, p. 25) explained that the stigma attached to such provisions stem from the fact that LSUs are; "*regarded as places to contain pupils with problems*".

This section aimed to address the second RQ, related to the experiences of students with SEBD in LSZ provisions. Overall, the students explained that the LSZ setting provided them with the opportunity to feel secure and relaxed, in what was described as 'home-like' surroundings. The students also made reference to the fact that the activities they were involved in and the relationships they developed following their assimilation into the provision, were pivotal in helping them address the difficulties they were experiencing in mainstream education, and that these factors were crucial in helping them develop the necessary skills to be able to cope effectively within school. Nonetheless, the students also identified that the stigma attached to the LSZ was having a negative impact on their experience at school.

5.4 The Impact of LSZs on Students' Life at School

RQ 3: 'How do students with SEBD, perceive their involvement within the Learning Support Zone to be impacting on their experience at school?'

One of the primary aims of this research was to address the third RQ proposed for this study. Essentially, this RQ aims to explore how the students' involvement in the LSZ initiative has impacted on their experience at school. Thus, this section will discuss the findings of this study in relation to the positive outcomes experienced by the students, as a result of their engagement with the therapeutic programmes and activities held during their attendance in the LSZ. As in previous sections, the findings will be discussed and presented in the context of previous research, which also focused on exploring the outcomes pertaining to the attendance of secondary students in specialised support provisions, for students with SEBD.

The positive outcomes identified by students who participated in this study revolved around three major themes, namely;

- enhanced relationships,
- aptitude towards learning, and
- emotional well-being.

All students made reference to the positive impact their involvement in group activities and tasks, organised in the LSZ, had on their ability to relate, interact and work with others. Many students explained that through the input of their peers and staff in the LSZ, they learned to adopt a non-judgemental disposition towards others, as well as developing a sense of empathy which helped them develop a more respectful attitude towards the difficulties other young people such as themselves experience. The process of sharing their experiences with others in their respective groups, and in turn listening to the experiences of others, was reported to help them develop a sense of trust and foster more positive relationships with others. Cooke, Yeomans and Parkes (2008) reported similar findings in their study on the impact NGs have on students with SEBD. In fact, they reported that through their involvement in the NG, some students showed considerable improvement in their ability to engage positively with others in school. Garner and Thomas (2011) also

found that following the enrolment of secondary students in NGs, they appeared to be more confident around others and more adept at socialising. Most students who participated in the present research mentioned, that through the skills they learnt in the LSZ they managed to foster friendships, in and out of the LSZ. Students also explained how anger and conflict management sessions within the LSZ helped them reduce incidents of aggression towards others in the school. Improving their skills in conflict resolution helped them in turn to foster more positive relationships with their friends and more co-operative relationships with their teachers in the mainstream school setting.

Through specific group sessions (e.g. circle-time) as well as individual sessions, the students were also given opportunities to share and discuss their feelings in relation to the difficulties they experience in school or at home. Receiving this support was reported to help them cope better with the demands placed upon them by the school. Overall, their attendance in the LSZ helped them feel safer, calmer and more relaxed at school. Several students mentioned that their time in the LSZ helped them 'mature', referring to their improved ability to adjust and cope with the difficulties they experience in their life at school. Many students appeared to be better able to control and manage their behaviour after having attended for sessions in the LSZ. Several students also maintained that through the LSZ, they learnt how to cope better with their predisposition for behaving and acting impulsively. Prior to gaining access to the support offered by the provision, such students reported that they had been subjected to considerable disciplinary action due to their disruptive and confrontational attitude in school. Following their participation in the LSZ, such students explained that they were much happier attending school since such incidents, involving punishment, had decreased. This helped them feel more accepted and included in school.

Another significant outcome reported to be experienced by students, related to their attitude towards learning. The students involved in this research reported that following their attendance in the LSZ they became better able to cope with the academic aspect of their education. Mowat (2009) reported similar findings following the provision of support groups for secondary students with SEBD, whereby a change in their disposition towards learning was noted. Through their

activities in the LSZ, students reported to have enhanced their self-confidence, in relation to their academic abilities. The students' accounts seem to indicate that the LSZ helped them develop their sense of resilience, which helped them actively re-engage with their learning. Some LSZs were also reported to provide support in the form of basic literacy sessions, to help students access the academic material delivered in class. One student in particular explained that learning to read and write was the best thing that had happened to him following his attendance in the LSZ. Many students also noticed that after having attended the LSZ, they feel more involved in their classwork and participate significantly more during their lessons. Some students noted also that following the encouragement and support they received in the LSZ, they were much more motivated to do well and achieve in their learning, feeling a sense of pride in their accomplishments. Some students also explained that the support given by the LSZ helped them sustain their attention more effectively on their academic tasks. Findings reporting better performance at school and improved concentration on academic tasks were also identified by Becker and McCrossen (2004) and Silburn, Silburn and McCrossen (2004) respectively.

In summary, this section focused on highlighting the findings stemming from this research which relate to the way in which the involvement of students in their respective LSZs contributed to the positive changes they experienced at school. Students who participated in this study could identify significant improvements at a personal, social and academic level. Many students have explained that the activities they participated in, and the supportive relationships they had developed within the LSZ helped them learn the skills they required in order to become more resilient individuals, thus were better able to cope with the stress they encountered in their lives, especially at school. Some students also mentioned that prior to their attendance at the LSZ, working constructively and co-operatively with their peers was not always easy, often due to their inability to manage conflict effectively. Learning how to work in teams and collaboratively with others helped them foster more positive relationships with their teachers and peers in the mainstream school setting. Moreover, the students who took part in this study also highlighted how the skills and support they received through the LSZ helped them cope better with the academic demands they were faced within mainstream school.

5.5 Limitations of the Research

This section will revisit aspects of this study, which have been identified by the researcher to pose potential limitations to the present research. The methodology and research design employed for this study will be reviewed and discussed in the light of any limitations identified during its application. As described in chapter three, a mixed-methods research design was adopted with the dual purpose of providing a descriptive account of the extent and degree to which the LSZ initiative was taken up by Maltese state secondary schools, as well as exploring the views of students with SEBD about their experience within the provision and the impact it has left on their life in school. This research design involved the application of quantitative and qualitative approaches to gather the required data in view of addressing the set RQs.

During the quantitative phase, a questionnaire was designed by the researcher to elicit information from each LSZ about the functioning of each respective provision. This was piloted prior to distributing it to all LSZs. In view of the fact that only a very limited number of LSZs were available, and that the study itself sought to include all LSZ provisions in Malta, the two LSZs identified to assist the researcher with the piloting procedure were also included in the final sample. This potentially represents one of the limitations of this study due to the fact that traditionally the respondents involved in the piloting phase are not included in the final sample of the study. According to Haralambos, and Holborn (2000) this might influence the participants' response during the formal data collection procedure itself.

For the purpose of recruiting participants for the quantitative phase of the study, prospective participants were contacted via telephone and e-mail, briefing them about nature and purpose of the study, as well as the procedures involved in gathering the data. This resulted in a satisfactory response rate, where over 60% of the LSZ co-ordinators opted to participate in the study. Due to time constraints, the researcher could not arrange school de-briefing meetings with each participant, which could have potentially resulted in a better response rate. As such, this could be identified as one of the shortcomings of this research.

One of the principal aims of this research was to shed more light onto the experiences of students enrolled in LSZ. During the course of the study 12 participants were

initially recruited, however three participants chose to withdraw from the study. This resulted in a small sample size of nine students. It is noteworthy to point out that although the experiential accounts of these participants retain their subjective validity, they might not necessarily reflect the experience lived by the general student population enrolled in LSZs. Moreover since these participants provided their consent to contribute to the study on a voluntary basis they could have been more likely to have had a positive experience or impression of the LSZ intervention. Therefore, the mechanisms involved in the qualitative sampling procedure, might have indirectly excluded students who were not coping well within the LSZ provision from participating in this study. Thus, the views of such students could not be accessed.

A further limitation pertaining to the present study is related to the sampling procedures involving the selection of participants for the qualitative phase of the study. In recognition of the fact that these participants (students exhibiting SEBD) are regarded as 'vulnerable' individuals, both the researcher and the LSZ co-ordinators adopted a cautious and purposeful approach to shortlisting potential participants for the study. Even though the researcher was aware that this was an important precaution to take, in view of ensuring that no student is put at risk, this inevitably meant that the LSZ co-ordinators had a direct influence on the selection procedures. This could have potentially encouraged a sampling bias, whereby only students who have been positively impacted by the LSZ were recommended to be included in the study by their respective LSZ co-coordinators.

Moreover, it might be noteworthy to mention that the data gathered from the participants could not be corroborated with data from other sources. Although there is no reason to believe that the students who shared their reflections about their experiences in the LSZ were not 'truthful' in their accounts, it is important to recognise the possibility of a the data being effected by a 'respondent bias', whereby the students would shape the responses they provide to the questions asked during the interview in a manner that they perceive would please the interviewer, or supply information that to their knowledge will protect the integrity of the LSZ provision and/or the people working within the service. The absence of observation records or

information gathered through other stakeholders of the LSZ provision inescapably poses a limitation in terms of the validity of the findings reported in the study.

As mentioned earlier in this report, the interviews held between the researcher and the students enrolled in LSZs, were carried out in Maltese. This is due to the fact that none of the participants felt comfortable and confident enough to converse in English. Since all participants were primarily fluent in Maltese, the interviews were carried out using their native language, which upon completion, were translated and transcribed by the researcher in English. Regardless of the fact that the researcher is fluent in both Maltese and English languages, he recognises that the process of translation might have influenced the content of the final version of the transcripts in a way that the participants' narratives might not have been recorded in an entirely authentic manner.

5.6 Ethics

In chapter three the researcher outlined a number of ethical considerations that were identified as salient to safeguarding the participants' interests during the study and afterwards. The steps taken to ensure the study was conducted in an ethical manner were found to be effective, and this was evidenced by the ethical approval obtained from the University of East London Ethics Committee, as well as the Maltese MEE; the regular supervision received; the parental and informed consent sought prior to the researcher's involvement with the participants; and the fact that participants' right of withdrawal from the study was respected and upheld. Confidentiality and anonymity of all the participants was also maintained and preserved throughout the course of the study and in the preparation of this report.

5.7 Reflexivity

The main focus of the present research revolved around the gaining some level of insight about the LSZ initiative across Maltese secondary state schools. Prior to and during the course of this study, the researcher was employed as a TEP within the Student Services department which falls under the MEE, in Malta. As such, it is important to note the researcher's job as a TEP inevitably involves working within the same schools which have been involved in this study. In recognition of this

factor, the researcher felt that it was imperative to reflect upon how his role as a TEP impinged not only on the findings of the study but also the manner in which the data collection procedures and the interactions with the LSZs themselves progressed.

In view of the fact that the researcher sought endorsement by the Maltese MEE, the researcher recognised that this might have encouraged LSZs to participate even though they might have not been willing to do so. Moreover, given that as a TEP the researcher is obliged to present the findings of the study to the senior administrators within the MEE, the quantitative results might have been subjected to a response-bias whereby the participants involved provided the researcher with data that might not be representative of the 'true' picture in their respective LSZ. In order to prevent such an effect, during the debriefing process each participant was reassured by the researcher through telephone conversations and e-mail correspondence about the standards of confidentiality and anonymity, adopted by the researcher to safeguard the participants' interests. Within the Maltese educational context, one of the main roles of TEPs is perceived by many educators to be that of an assessor and/or evaluator, at an individual or systems level. Upon reflection, the researcher was also aware of the potential impact such a perceived role could have on the present research. Regardless of the fact that participants where fully debriefed about the exploratory purpose of this inquiry, the researcher recognised that this study could be perceived by the LSZ staff to be an evaluative exercise, whereby LSZs which were not being implemented in line with the national standards, or not functioning at a satisfactory level, could be at risk of being singled out.

On a similar note, although each student was debriefed on the purpose of the study and introduced to the role of the researcher, some students still appeared to experience a degree of ambiguity and scepticism with regards to the 'true' purpose of the questions being asked. In some cases the researcher was aware that his role as an interviewer might have encouraged the students to think that aspects on which they were questioned were being evaluated and that the LSZ initiative itself was being appraised. Due to the critical role LSZs play for many young people enrolled in the provision, the researcher recognised that his role, and the act of asking questions with regard to the function and impact of LSZs, might have been perceived to pose a threat to the access the said participants held to this provision. In recognition of the

impact such dynamics could have on the validity of the data elicited from the participants, the researcher took multiple opportunities to reassure the participants about the 'true intent' of the study. Participants were reassured that the purpose of this study was not evaluative but exploratory, and one that seeks to highlight the areas of strength of the LSZ.

It is important to recognise that the findings of the study itself have implications for the role of the researcher. As will be outlined later in this chapter, a gradual shift towards a more integrated approach in working with LSZs would require the TEP/EP to become increasingly involved in the consultation about, and the design of, intervention programmes within the LSZ. Furthermore, the role of TEP/EP could also evolve in respect to the possibility of being involved in preparation, delivery and evaluation of training for LSZ staff, thus promoting a systemic way of working with students in LSZs.

Maintaining a reflexive stance throughout the course of the study has assisted the researcher's reflections about how his role as a TEP, researcher and interviewer in the educational context within which the present research took place, has contributed to the research process and outcomes, and how the outcomes of this study will potentially impact the future role of TEPs/EPs within the Maltese educational system.

5.8 Implications of the Research

The findings arising from the present research assisted the researcher in addressing the aims of the study. In the absence of previous research about LSZs in general, the aim of this study was to shed more light on the manner in which LSZs are operating, giving voice to the secondary students who are enrolled in such provisions across the multiple colleges within the Maltese educational system. Clearly, the findings stemming from this research provided useful insights into the functioning and impact of LSZs. This inevitably generates implications in several related areas, primarily with regard to the service development of LSZ provisions, as well as the role of the EP in regard to the LSZ initiative and the future research in this area. The data gathered through the quantitative and qualitative measures gave evidence of the positive contributions of LSZs provisions within mainstream secondary schools. Participants also drew their attention to aspects of the LSZ which they thought could

be improved. These points will be revisited in this section in view of highlighting the potential next steps in developing the LSZ service and enhancing its contribution to the inclusion of students with SEBD.

a) <u>LSZ Service Development</u>

Primarily, participants who took part in this study mentioned that the 'stigma' presently attached to those who attend LSZ services in most schools, is having a negative impact on the provision and the students enrolled within. A significant lack of awareness amongst the mainstream staff and student population was reported to exist with regard to the role and function of LSZs and the programmes held as part of the services provided. Some participants reported that LSZs are sometimes considered to be a place in school dedicated to the segregation of disruptive and misbehaving students, who cannot be appropriately managed in mainstream educational settings. The ambiguity amongst some mainstream staff and students about the 'true' function and contribution of LSZs is reported to be a source of stress for the students attending LSZs, and is reported to have an impact on their willingness to attend the provision. Participants of this study claim that more initiatives are needed to allow school-based staff and students to familiarise themselves more with the activities held in the LSZ. Some participants also suggested that activities involving their peers in the mainstream can be introduced in the LSZ, with the intention of enhancing their classmates' awareness about the provision. Such an initiative could potentially help LSZ students cope with their transition and inclusion in the mainstream classroom more effectively.

This study also indicated that in some schools, the LSZ staff felt 'cut-off' from the rest of the school-based staff due to their limited contact with other teachers and senior staff. LSZ staff complained about not having sufficient opportunities to consult and collaborate with 'outside' professionals in order to work more effectively towards meeting the needs of each student.
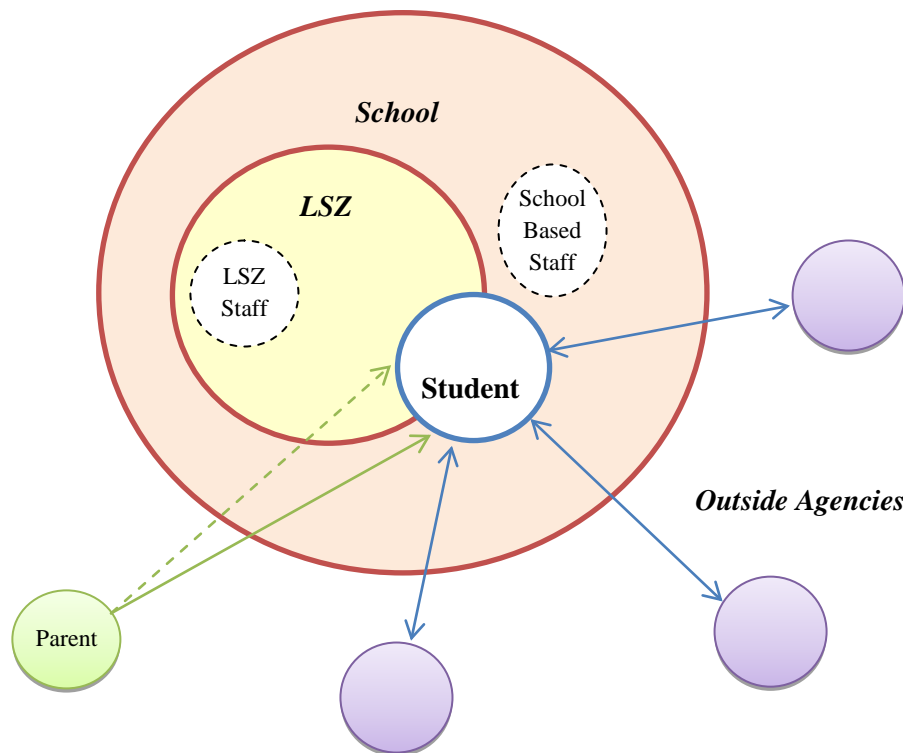
Figure 5. 8. 1. Fragmented LSZ Model (Adapted from Becker, McCrossen and Waterstone, 2004)

There were also mixed reports from LSZ staff and students on the level of involvement of parents, following the completion of the referral process. Whilst some students mentioned that their parent(s) were occasionally invited for meetings with the LSZ staff, others mentioned only having involved their parent at the point of referral. These findings suggest that in most cases, the existing links between the LSZ provision and other systems around the child is significantly fragmented. In fragmented systems the likelihood is that LSZs become increasingly isolated from the other systems around the child, thus hindering the process of inclusion. Becker, McCrossen and Waterstone (2004), also make reference to a fragmented model of communication and professional relationships between LSUs and other significant support systems around the child (Refer to figure 5.8.1 above). An integrated model could potentially provide better outcomes for the students due to a shift towards a more trans-disciplinary approach, which could encourage all the significant others around the child, including parents, educators and professionals from within and outside of school, to work jointly within the LSZ setting (Refer to figure 5.8.2 below).
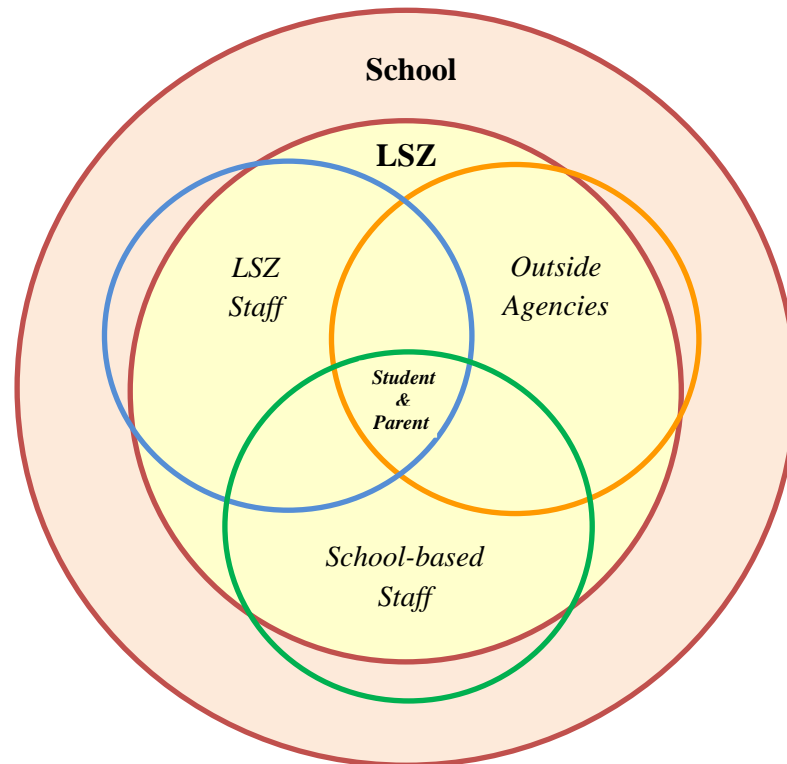
Figure 5. 8. 2. Integrated LSZ Model (Adapted from Becker, McCrossen and Waterstone, 2004)

Becker, McCrossen and Waterstone's (2004) integrated model, originally proposed for LSUs, could also be applied to the LSZ initiative, as it could potentially contribute to ameliorating the working relationships between the stakeholders involved in supporting the students. An enhanced communication network amongst LSZ and school-based staff could also make the transition, to and from the LSZ, more effective and less stressful for the student. Through an integrated approach, outside agencies are encouraged to work and consult directly with the educators working with the student, both in the context of mainstream school and the LSZ. This approach could also facilitate parental involvement in the LSZ and thus encourage a more active contribution on their behalf in supporting their child at school.

Following their appraisal of the LSZ provision, the participants of this study also highlighted a number of additional areas for improvement. These include:

- *Funding*

This appears to be an issue for several LSZs, as no formal protocol was set-up at a national level to guarantee access to any allocated funds required to equip and run the LSZ provision. In fact, several students mentioned that it was required of them to raise their own funds, through fund-raising activities organised by the LSZ in order to supply the needed resources. To facilitate the access to funding, the national protocols with regard to allocation and withdrawal of funds in support of the LSZ provision should be reviewed.

- *Training*

The LSZ staff also mentioned that they felt that their training needs were not adequately met and recommended that regular CPD opportunities could assist them in developing their practice.

- *Human resources*

The LSZ staff also suggested that in order to manage the LSZ provision effectively a minimum of two members of staff (usually one teacher and one LSA) should be allocated to the LSZ on a full-time basis. Having dual responsibilities, for instance having mainstream teaching duties and a co-ordinating role in the LSZ, was perceived to be significantly limiting the level and quality of input that could be given to the students attending the LSZ. Investing in human resources that can adequately cater for the increasing number of students being referred to LSZs is warranted.

b) <u>The Role of the EP</u>

The participants of this study indicated that only 0.79% of the referrals received by LSZs during the scholastic year of 2011/2012, were put forward by EPs. The findings of this study indicate also that LSZ staff would like 'outside' agencies, such as EPs to be more involved in the provision, especially in assisting the staff with supporting the students enrolled in the LSZ. EPs could contribute to the LSZ initiative predominantly;

- on a consultative level, with regard to the development of therapeutic programmes for the students enrolled in the provision.

- through the provision of training in areas and topics of relevance to LSZ staff, in order to further equip them with the skills they require to manage the LSZ service and effectively support students with SEBD in their areas of need.

- through the application of systemic work, with the aim of assisting LSZs to develop better working relationships with school-based staff, as well as parents and other professionals based outside the school setting, in favour of promoting an integrated model. This approach could be helpful in assisting LSZs in supporting students with complex needs.

- by assisting LSZs in establishing evaluative procedures with the aim of being able to monitor the effectiveness of the programmes being offered within the LSZ.

c) <u>Suggestions for Future Research</u>

The present research has contributed to a significantly understudied area, namely; the effectiveness of LSZs in Maltese secondary state schools. The findings stemming from this study provide 'base-line' data about this phenomenon within the Maltese educational context. Future research in the area could focus on addressing the limitations of the present study by using larger sample sizes and also including more stakeholders, involved in the LSZ initiative (e.g. parents, LSZ staff and School-based staff) in order to be able to triangulate the data obtained through multiple sources. Longitudinal studies that focus on evaluating the effectiveness of the interventions forming part of the programmes provided by the LSZs are also warranted. Moreover, this study has identified that several students who have been recruited into the LSZ provision were required to leave the service, because as reported, the LSZ could not effectively meet their needs. Access to those students' views and/or further investigation into this phenomenon would help shed more light on the manner in which LSZs can be improved to meet the needs of these students with more complex needs.

5.9 Conclusion

An *'Education for All'* international campaign (UNESCO, 2000) has spurred the drive towards increasingly inclusive educational policies and initiatives in Malta, with the aim of ensuring that a 'quality education for all' students is provided, especially with regard to those students identified as 'vulnerable' or 'at-risk' (MEYE, 2012). The present research study aimed to explore how LSZs are functioning and impacting on the lives of students with SEBD, in mainstream state secondary schools. The present research served a dual purpose, namely providing a descriptive account of the level of assimilation and implementation of LSZs across state secondary schools in Malta, as well as eliciting the views of students enrolled in such provisions with regard to their experiences.

A descriptive analysis of the quantitative data collected, gave an overall indication of the growing number of LSZs being established in state secondary schools throughout the last five years. This phase of the study also revealed that almost half of the students referred to LSZs continue to attend the provision even when their official programme has been terminated indicating that 'full' reintegration within the mainstream is sometimes problematic, especially with regard to students with complex difficulties. This descriptive analysis also indicated that problems related to anger, aggression and difficult family backgrounds are amongst the main reasons for referral to LSZ provisions. In order to cater for the needs of such students, a wide variety of intervention programmes have been implemented by LSZs, where behaviour and anger management programmes seem to be the most commonly used interventions. Difficulties related to funding policies, human resources, training and trans-disciplinary work have been reported across several LSZ provisions.

A thematic analysis of the transcribed interviews carried out with nine students enrolled in LSZs, led the researcher to identify four main themes revolving around the nature of the students' experiences within the LSZs, namely; 'infrastructure', 'activities', 'relationships' and 'positive outcomes'. This analysis addressed two principal aims of this research, related to the experience of students in LSZs and the impact of this provision on their education. Overall, the aspects that students particularly liked about LSZ provisions were related to the physical setting, the

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relationships they developed within the provision and the nature of the activities they participated in. The manner in which LSZs were set-up helped them experience a sense of calmness, relaxation and security. The trustful and supportive relationships established with the LSZ staff and their peers enrolled in the provision, helped them enhance their self-esteem and foster new friendships. Moreover, the therapeutic interventions and activities they participated in, helped them develop their social skills and ability to work collaboratively with their peers. Improvements in the students' ability to; manage their anger and negative behaviour, cope with the demands of mainstream school, foster positive relationships with others and engage more effectively with their learning, were amongst the most commonly mentioned positive changes experienced by the students. The participants also recognised that the 'stigma' attached to individuals who attend LSZs, can be a potential source of stress for students enrolled in the provision, and a deterrent for prospective students who could benefit from the LSZ service. In order to effectively foster an inclusive educational setting for students attending LSZs, the participants appealed for further initiatives aimed at facilitating their inclusion in mainstream settings.

The researcher trusts that the findings of this study provide a valid evidence-base with regard to the positive contributions LSZs are delivering to students experiencing SEBD, in Maltese state secondary schools. The present study also stands in recognition of the value that LSZs are adding to the '*Education for All*' movement and the promotion of inclusive education within the Maltese educational context.

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Learning Support Zone
GUIDELINES
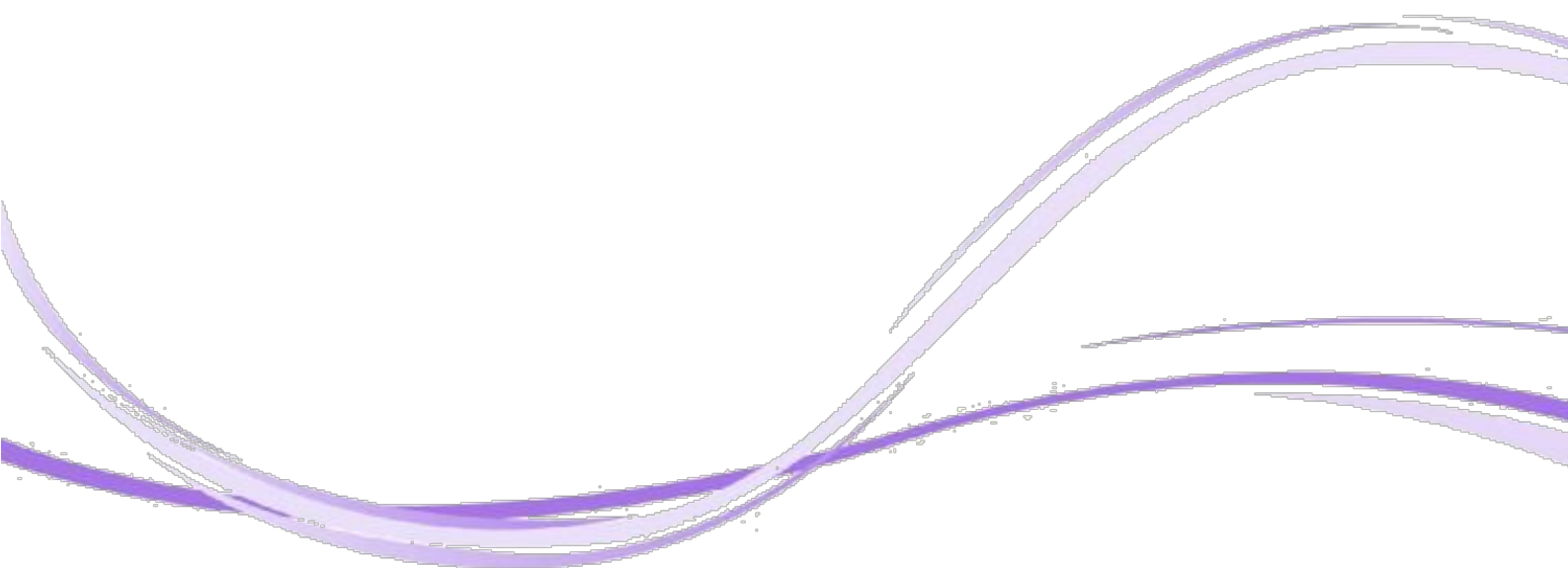
These guidelines have been compiled by the various staff working in the Learning Support Zones of the following colleges:

> Kulleġġ Sant' Injazju
>
> Kulleġġ Santa Klara
>
> Kulleġġ Santa Margerita
>
> Kulleġġ Santa Tereża

Notwithstanding the attempts made to produce a comprehensive document, it might still require further refinement and additions to it. Moreover, in respect of the action research model, this document should be regularly reviewed by practitioners to reflect new realities, findings and contingent circumstances.

October 2009

1. Introduction

The Learning Support Zones (LSZ) should be an **integral part of the school behaviour policy** and should reflect the inclusive philosophy and practice as defined in the National Minimum Curriculum (NMC) giving all the students the opportunity to succeed. The guiding principle is that every student has the right to receive the best possible education and be supported to achieve his/her full potential. The LSZ offers support to students who are, at risk of exclusion due to Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD). The LSZ should never be considered as a separate entity and should not be viewed as a means of excluding students.

As part of the institution, the ultimate responsibility and authority of the LSZ service lies within the Head of School.

The LSZ should:

reflect the particular school's context and ethos;

encourage documented exhaustion of interventions by all other support services prior to referral to the Learning Support Zone;

endorse referrals, make the necessary observations, assessments and devise an appropriate plan of action in collaboration with other professionals in the field;

offer a flexible, tailor-made educational setup to referred students;

provide opportunities for such students to engage in a behaviour modification programme;

support mainstream teaching by offering practical advice in managing challenging behaviour in class;

promote inclusive practices for students with social, emotional and behaviour difficulties.

As a result LSZs **is not and should not be considered as**: a
facility for long-term respite care
- a 'sin bin' or dumping ground for unwanted students
- a 'catch-all' facility to compensate for lack of other provisions a
- place of punishment
- a means of segregation
- a patch to fix inappropriate behaviour policies or lack of classroom management skills a
- quick route to exclusion.

The development of such a service presents several challenges which can only be overcome with the help and genuine commitment of the whole teaching community. The LSZ is a learning experience not only for students but also for all the professionals involved and can contribute towards building the capacity for a more comprehensive school as envisaged by the current national reform.

2. Set Up

> ### Secondary School
>
> #### Learning Support Zone (LSZ) on School Campus
> Functioning as part of a Whole – School Good Behaviour Policy
>
> The following list compromises the essential items needed to equip the learning zone room in order to start functioning.
>
> **Office space**
> 1) Desks (with underneath running drawers)
> 2) Computers preferably with wireless internet connection (one of which or both can be laptops)
> 3) High storage cabinets
> 4) Filing cabinets
> 5) A colour photocopier / printer
> 6) Laminator
> 7) Direct telephone line for internal and external calls
>
> **Learning area**
> 1) rectangular desk
> 2) conference chairs
> 3) 3/4-seater sofa
> 4) Storage cabinets
> 5) Carpets
> 6) Curtains
> 7) Notice boards
>
> **Resources**
> 1) A number of board games
> 2) A number of posters depicting social, emotional and behaviour skills
> 3) A number of resource and activity books
> 4) Other day-to day much needed resources
>
> LSZ Staff: A minimum of 2 teachers and a LSA
> Additional Support Staff:
>
> SMT Member to work in partnership in promoting positive behaviour management as a whole school initiative;
>
> Use of Behavioural and Educational Support Team (BEST) – consisting of: *psychologist, counsellor, youth worker, career guidance, social worker, psycho-therapist, INCO etc.*

3. Programmes with the LSZ

When planning the programme with the LSZ it is important to keep in mind that referred students will have multiple needs. The programme needs to reflect their social, emotional, and behavioural needs. A holistic approach is thus essential for the support of students to help them achieve their maximum potential within the mainstream school environment.

o **Support to Individual Students** (depending on needs):
- Integration and inclusion in mainstream;
- Individual Behavioural/Learning Plan;
  - o This could include:
    - Behaviour Modification & Anger Management Programmes;
    - Self-esteem enhancement
    - Conflict resolution
    - Problem-solving skills
    - Communication skills
    - Emotional Literacy
    - Dealing with peer pressure
    - Autogenic training
    - Team building

o **Support to mainstream Members of Staff:**
- Promotion of an inclusive community;
- Promotion of a Whole School Positive Behaviour Policy;
- Coordinating case conferences for students SEBD;
- Promoting effective reintegration of students;

o **General**

Continuous internal evaluation and development of LSZ programmes – in respect of Action Research Cycle;

Regular Case Conferences with stakeholders, on each student being closely followed by LSZ;

- Maintaining communication channels (phone calls, contact books etc...);
- Weekly Team meetings;
- Monthly National LSZ's staff meetings;
- Cultivating healthy and productive working relationships with various individuals (students' parents or relatives), and professionals (for example: university students, carers, social workers, nurses, youth workers, educationists, psychologists and psychiatrists) representing various entities.

4. Students referred to LSZ

It is important to conceptualise the LSZ is an integral part of a whole school approach when working with students. All members of staff need to understand from the outset that this provision is part of a wider strategy, not an answer or an end point for a small number of disruptive students.

LSZs must be designed to meet the needs of students in the secondary schools who may have a number of difficulties **effecting their learning,** thus supporting them and helping them to remain engaged in education for as long as possible. Students who would benefit from a LSZ would be those who:

- o lack self-worth or confidence
- o have poor anger management skills
- o find it difficult to accept sanctions
- o are aggressive, insolent and quarrelsome
- o lack respect towards others
- o have poor social and communication skills
- o are shy, withdrawn or anxious
- o find difficulty in adjusting to new situations
- o have difficult family or social circumstances
- o are long-term absentees
- o are bullied and are those who bully
- o engage in truancy
- o long term absentees for gradual reintegration

Students who persist in presenting extremely challenging behaviour, are not benefiting from LSZ services and can be of harm to self or to others should be referred to a **Learning Support Centre (LSC)**. This should be an independent educational institution with specialised individual programmes and trained professionals who work in close collaboration with LSZ staff members to facilitate reintegration into the respective school's LSZ and subsequently into mainstream.

Learning Support Zone Referral Form

Student Name:	Form:	Date of Birth:

Parental Contact Details:

Parents/ Legal Guardians –

Name : _____ Fixed line:_____ Mobile:_____

    : _____ Fixed line:_____ Mobile:_____

Home address: _____

    _____

Referred by:	Date:

Main Reason for Referral:

Are the parents aware of the child's social, emotional and behavioural difficulties? Yes/NO

How would you describe the student?

Strengths:

Needs:

What kind of behaviour causes most concerns? *(please tick 3 or less)*

PLEASE ATTACH RELEVANT REPORTS

❏ Shouting Out	❏ Continuous Interruptions	❏ Absenteeism
❏ Late to lessons/school	❏ No work	❏ Lack self-worth/confidence
❏ No equipment	❏ Abusive language	❏ Bullying
❏ Moving out of seat	❏ Aggressive towards others	❏ Non compliance

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_____

❑
  Other: _____

What triggers such behaviour:

Is there a particular time when the student is likely to misbehave? *(tick were applicable)*

❑
  Morning Lessons

❑
  Mid-Morning Lessons

❑
  Afternoon Lessons

❑
  Between Lessons

❑
  Beginning of Lesson

❑
  End of Lesson

❑
  Break time

❑
  Other: _____

How frequent is the difficulty?

❑
  All lessons

❑
  For particular subject(s) :

❑
  Are there particular subjects when the problem does not occur?
Please specify:

What strategies have been tried to overcome the behaviour problems: *(tick were applicable)*

PLEASE ATTACH RELEVANT REPORTS

❑
  Praise/Reward in class

❑
  Points/merit schemes

❑
  After-school/detention/exclusion

❑
  Behaviour Support Team

❑
  Contact Parents

❑
  Post of responsibility

❑
  Guidance Teachers (name) _____

❑
  College Counsellor (name) _____

❑
  other support professionals (name/s) _____

Which of these strategies have worked/been most effective?

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Area/s needing development:	
❑ **Behaviour**	❑ **Relationships with Adults**
❑ **Attendance**	❑ **To structure Time/Organisational Skills**
❑ **Learning**	❑ _____
❑ **Friendships**	

Any Major Incident:

Other Agencies Involved:

Other Information:

Has the College Principal been involved? YES/NO

Signature Head of School: _____ Date: _____

Signature LSZ Teacher: _____ Date referral reached LSZ: _____

Appendix B

Literature Review Summary

Appendix B

Literature Review Overview

Author(s)	Year	Country	Title	Participants	Methodology	Major Findings
Goodman and Burton	2012	UK	The inclusion of students with BESD in mainstream schools: teachers' experiences of and recommendations for creating a successful inclusive environment	Nine classroom teachers teaching in mainstream secondary schools across four regions of England	Qualitative (Semi-structured Interviews)	• Regardless of the limited BESD training offered to secondary school teachers they reported that they were still expected to provide the students with an effective education. • Teachers felt responsible for bridging inclusive policy with practice. • Positive feedback, humour and respectful student-teacher relationships were found to be useful tools in encouraging good behaviour in students with BESD.

Abela and Smith La Rosa	2007	Malta	Maltese youngsters with very challenging behaviour speak about school.	14 students, aged between 10-18 years, attending in a service catering for young people with challenging behaviour	Qualitative (Semi-structured interviews)	• Students who felt included in school consistently reported to experience positive relationships with their educators • Negative experiences with senior school staff, as well as peer pressure, excessive homework and bullying were reported to foster social and academic exclusion of students with SEBD.
Spiteri	2009	Malta	The Perspectives of Ex Students on Their Experiences at a School for Students with SEBD.	A total of 12 ex-students who attended a special school for young people with disruptive behaviour during the school year 1995/1996	Qualitative (Unstructured Interviews)	• Ex-Students with SEBD who attended at a special school during secondary school explained that the most positively influencing factors that helped them cope with their difficulties were related to the availability of a supportive Head of school and peers. • Individual attention given to the students through a student-centred approach was also highlighted to be especially helpful in addressing their needs.
Visser and	2009	UK	Peer attitudes to SEBD in	175 Year 7 pupils	Quantitative	• Most students who participated in the

Dubsky			a secondary mainstream school.	from a comprehensive school	(Questionnaires)	study explained that they would not be happy to attend in a class together with other students with SEBD. • More than half the students also explained that they expect school staff to manage incidents involving inappropriate behaviour. • Following their exposure to an intervention, some students were reported to show an increased tolerance and empathy for students with SEBD.
Mowat	2009	UK	The inclusion of pupils perceived as having social and emotional behavioural difficulties in mainstream schools: a focus upon learning	69 Pupils and their related stakeholders: Support Group Leaders, parents, class teachers, peers and senior management.	Mixed-methods (Questionnaires / Semi-structured interviews)	• Findings indicate that following the completion of the intervention, no effect on pupil attainment was recorded. • However some students showed an improved disposition toward their learning and learning related behaviours.
Becker	2004	UK	Improving Behaviour Through Therapeutic	LSUs across all Nottingham City	Mixed-methods	• This report identified the therapeutic programmes used by LSUs and the

| | | | Approaches: Research into Practice in Nottingham City Learning Support Units | secondary schools, involving pupils, parents and professionals as stakeholders of this provision. | (Survey / In-depth interviews) | range of difficulties experienced by students attending such provisions.

• The findings also indicated that several professionals were involved in the LSU service and all contributed to the implementation of the service.

• Pupils enrolled in the provision explained that the support given by LSU staff, their improved ability to cope with schoolwork and the activities they participated in were the most salient positive factors experienced in the LSU

• Stigma and dependency on LSU staff were amongst the most problematic aspects associated with pupils' enrolment in LSU services. |
| Department for Education and Skills | 2006 | UK | Evaluation of Learning Support Units | 12 LSUs in secondary schools. | Quantitative (Survey) | • All LSUs reported to have been successful in re-engaging disaffected students in their education.

• Improvements in students' proficiency in literacy, social skills and personal development were |

						reported following their attendance at LSUs. • Re-integration in mainstream classes was found to be a weakness in some LSUs.
Hill and Ryan	2010	UK	Eliciting students' perceptions of their experiences of a Learning Support Unit	Four secondary students attending a secondary school	Qualitative (Semi-structured interviews)	• Secondary students attending the LSU mentioned that they found the anger management programme effective. • The positive relationships developed with LSU staff were also helpful source of support for students with SEBD. • The students stated that when LSU staff work collaboratively with school-based staff they feel better included within the mainstream setting.
O'Connor, Hodkinson, Burton and Tortensson	2011	UK	Pupil voice: listening to and hearing the educational experiences of young people with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties	An unidentified number of students aged 14 to 16 attending mainstream secondary school.	Qualitative (Focus groups / Semi-structured interviews)	• Students felt that gaining access to support provisions for pupils with SEBD can be problematic due to the availability of funding and vacancies.

			(BESD).		
Cooke, Yeomans and Parkes	2008	UK	The Oasis: Nurture Group Provision for Key Stage 3 pupils.	One girl in Year 7 attending a Nurture group provision in mainstream school	Qualitative (Case study)	• Findings indicate that the following the participant's attendance in a NG in secondary school an significant improvement in social engagement and learning was noted.
Garner and Thomas	2011	UK	The role and contribution of Nurture Groups in secondary schools: perceptions of children, parents and staff	Six children attending three Nurture Groups in different schools, together with 12 school staff members and eight parents.	Qualitative (Focus groups / interviews)	• NGs were reported to provide a secure-base for secondary students enrolled in the provision. • The findings indicate that NGs had a positive impact on the students' self-esteem, self-confidence, social skills and aptitude towards learning. • NG staff emphasised the importance of identifying ways to increase awareness amongst school-based staff about the role and function of NGs in secondary settings.

Directorate for Educational Services
Student Services Department
School Psychological Services
Fra Gaetano Pace Forno Str,
Hamrun, HMR 1100.

Dear Sir / Madam,

I, the undersigned, am currently employed as a Trainee Educational Psychologist with the School Psychological Services, within the Directorate for Educational Services and Student Services Department. Presently, I am also enrolled in my 3rd year of studies, as I am following a doctoral programme in 'Educational and Child Psychology', with the 'University of East London'.

I am writing to brief you about the research I am presently in the process of conducting, which will inform my doctoral thesis. The aim of my research is to shed some light on the way the Learning Support Zone (LSZ) provision in local State Secondary Schools, has been taken up as an initiative to offer a range of support services to students with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD). My research also intends to give prominence to students' views about their experiences in the LSZs, and how the impact of their attendance to this provision is affecting their overall aptitude towards school.

May I kindly, remind you that this research project is being overseen by the 'University of East London' and the 'Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education' (DQSE). Ms. Marthese Cini, Service Manager for Inclusive Education, within the 'Student Services Department', has also been informed on the nature of this study. Dr. Mary Robinson, a professional and academic tutor based at the 'University of East London', will be officially supervising this research endeavour.

I am currently in the process of forwarding a questionnaire to all state secondary schools, with the aim of gathering information about the level of application and implementation of LSZs, across all colleges. Thus, I would like to give you the opportunity to contribute to this research, by completing the attached questionnaire. May I also bring to your attention, that all the information provided will be treated with strict confidence and will be solely accessible to the researcher. Kindly, answer all the questions as honestly and as accurately as possible, and return the completed questionnaire by **Thursday 18th October, 2012.** The completed questionnaire can be sent by post, sealed in an envelope and addressed to Mr. Andrew Borg, at the address indicated above, or via e-mail to andrew.borg@educ.gov.mt

Thank you for taking the time to assist me in my educational endeavours. If you require any additional information or have any questions, please contact me on the numbers listed below.

Yours respectfully,

Andrew Borg
Trainee Educational Psychologist
E-mail: andrew.borg@educ.gov.mt
Tel / Mob: 21242882 / 79728965

Appendix D
Consent Forms

a) *Parent Consent Form (English version)*

Directorate for Educational Services
Student Services Department
School Psychological Services
Fra Gaetano Pace Forno Str,
Hamrun, HMR 1100.

Dear Parents / Guardians,

I, the undersigned, am currently employed as a Trainee Educational Psychologist with the School Psychological Services, within the Directorate for Educational Services and Student Services Department. Presently, I am also enrolled in my 3rd year of studies, as I am following a doctoral programme in 'Educational and Child Psychology', with the 'University of East London'.

As part of my doctoral research study, I am interested to find out more about your son's/daughter's views on the Learning Support Zone, he/she is currently attending in school. The purpose of the study is to explore student's views of this provision in school, giving them the opportunity to make their voices heard. The results of this study, aim to shed light on the good practice currently employed within the Learning Support Zones in Malta and Gozo, and thus inform future developments in this area.

If you agree to give your consent for your son/daughter to participate in this study, kindly note that this will involve activities such as; taking photographs of the LSZ setting and facilities, producing drawings and giving a tour of the Learning Support Zone premises, as well as a one hour interview with the researcher which will be digitally audio-recorded. These activities will be conducted within the school setting. Anything that your son/daughter will say during the interview or produce during the study will remain confidential. Your son/daughter will have the right to withdraw his/her participation from the study at any time of his/her engagement.

May I remind you that participation in this study is on a voluntary basis. If you agree to give your consent for your son/daughter to participate, kindly sign the statement of consent as indicated below and return the completed form to the respective Learning Support Zone Coordinator.

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Thanking you in advance, for your contribution and support.

Yours respectfully,

Andrew Borg
Trainee Educational Psychologist
E-mail: andrew.borg@educ.gov.mt
Telephone: 21242882

I herby agree to give my consent to my son / daughter, _____ to particpate in the study
being conducted by Mr. Andrew Borg, in connection with the 'University of East London', in order to
complete his doctoral thesis.

_____   _____

Legal Guardian signature   Legal Guardian signature

Date: ___/____/___

b) *Parent Consent Form (Maltese version)*

Direttorat għal Servizzi Edukattivi
Dipartiment Servizzi għall-Istudent
Servizzi Psiko-Socjali tal-Edukazzjoni
Triq Fra Gaetano Pace Forno,
Hamrun, HMR 1100.

Għeżież Ġenituri,

Jien 'Trainee Educational Psychologist' fi ħdan id-Direttorat għal servizzi Edukattivi, fid-Dipartiment tas-servizzi għall-istudent u qiegħed nitħarreġ fil-psikoloġija, fil-qasam tal-edukazzjoni, sabiex inkun nista' noffri servizz ta' Edukazzjoni Psikoloġika ġol-iskejjel ta' Malta u Għawdex. Bħala parti mit-taħriġ tiegħi ta' 'Trainee Educational Psychologist', qiegħed nattendi kors fuq livell ta' Dottorat mal-Università ta' East London, ġewwa l-Ingilterra, kif ukoll naħdem mas-Servizzi Psiko-Socjali tal-Edukazzjoni fl-Iskejjel.

Issa li wasalt fit-tielet sena tal-istudji tiegħi, qiegħed infassal proġett ta' riċerka, taħt is-superviżjoni tal-għalliema tiegħi, Dr. Mary Robinson, sabiex insir naf iktar dwar l-opinjonijiet, il-veduti, u l-esperjenzi tat-tfal tagħkom fi ħdan il-*Learning Support Zone* (LSZ) li qegħdin jattendu bħalissa, ġol-iskola. L-għan ta' dan l-istudju hu li tfal li jattendu dan is-servizz jingħataw opportunitajiet li jaqsmu l-ħsibijiet tagħhom dwar il-LSZ. Din l-informazzjoni tista' tkun ta' benefiċċju sabiex ngħarfu ix-xogħol siewi li diġà qiegħed issir, kif ukoll jingħata kontribut sabiex jittejjeb is-servizz li diġà qed jingħata fl-iskejjel Maltin u Għawdxin.

L-istudenti li jagħżlu li jipparteċipaw f'din ir-riċerka se jkunu qed jipparteċipaw f'attivitajiet varji li jinkludu; fotografija u tpinġija. L-istudenti se jkunu qed jipparteċipaw ukoll f'intervista ta' madwar siegħa, fejn se jkunu diskussi l-veduti tagħhom dwar is-servizz provdut minn LSZ li qegħdin jattendu għalih. Dawn l-attivitajiet kollha se jkunu eżegwiti ġol-iskola, fejn jattendu il-LSZ. Nixtieq ukoll li ninformakom li l-attendenza għal dawn l-attivitajiet hija fuq bażi volontarja u għaldaqstant l-istudent għandu għażla li jwassal fi tmiem il-parteċipazzjoni f'din ir-riċerka waqt kwalunkwe fażi tal-istudju. Id-dokumentazzjoni kollha li tiġi mfassla minn dan l-istudju, waqt l-involviment tal-istudenti f'din ir-riċerka, se tiġi mħarsa b'mgħod kunfidenzjali.

Jekk intom interessati li tagħtu l-kunsens tagħkom sabiex it-tifel tagħkom ikun involut waqt din ir-riċerka, intom ġentilment mitluba li t'iffirmaw din il-formula fl-ispazju indikat hawn taħt.

Grazzi mill-qalb tal-kontribut tagħkom.

Dejjem Tiegħek,

Andrew Borg
Trainee Educational Psychologist
E-mail: andrew.borg@educ.gov.mt
Telephone: 21242882

Jiena nagħti il-kunsens tiegħi sabiex it-tifel tiegħi ikun jista' jipparteċipa fir-riċerka, taħt it-tmexxija ta' Mr. Andrew Borg, b'konnessjoni mal-kors tal- studju tiegħu, li hu mħejji mill-Università ta' East London.

_____   _____

         Firma tal-Kustodju Legali   Firma tal-Kustodju Legali

Data: ___/____/___

Directorate for Educational Services
Student Services Department
School Psychological Services
Fra Gaetano Pace Forno Str,
Hamrun, HMR 1100.

Dear Student,

I, the undersigned am currently working as a Trainee Educational Psychologist with the School Psychological Services, within the Directorate for Educational Services and Student Services Department. At present, I am also undergoing my training at the 'University of East London' with the intention of gaining a qualification as an Educational Psychologist.

I am now in my 3rd year of studies and as part of my doctoral research study, I am interested to find out more about your views and experiences in the Learning Support Zone, you currently attend in school. Your contribution to this study can be valuable to shed light on the ongoing good practice within the Learning Support Zone and can also be useful in informing future developments of such services.

I am pleased to inform you that you have been shortlisted to participate in this research study. Nonetheless, please note that your contribution is on a voluntary basis. In the event that you agree to the conditions detailed below, and thus decide to take part in this study, kindly sign the declaration form in the space indicated below.

o   I understand that I will be asked to carry out some tasks, such as; taking photographs of the LSZ setting and facilities, drawing maps and organising a tour, within the Learning Support Zone, in conjunction with taking part in a one hour interview which will be digitally audio-recorded.

o   I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any stage. In such an event, I can opt to have any document and digital recording made of the interview erased, and thus no transcript will be made of the interview.

o   I understand that, upon completion of the interview, the tape and information content of the interview, along with any visual material or document produced by me during the study, may be quoted and/or illustrated in research papers and the doctoral thesis of Mr. Andrew Borg.

o   I understand that during the course of the study, the documents produced, interview recordings and transcripts will be kept in a secure location and will only be made available to Mr. Andrew Borg.

o   I understand however that my comments will remain anonymous.

o   I understand that on completion of this doctoral research, the thesis might be kept for public use.

Statement of Consent

I hereby agree to participate in this study, being conducted by Mr. Andrew Borg, in connection with the 'University of East London', in order to complete his doctoral thesis.

Interviewee signature: _____

Interviewer signature: _____

Date: ___/____/___

Thank you for choosing to contribute to this study!

Direttorat għal Servizzi Edukattivi
Dipartiment Servizzi għall-Istudent
Servizzi Psiko-Socjali tal- Edukazzjoni
Triq Fra Gaetano Pace Forno,
Hamrun, HMR 1100.

Għaziz Student / a,

Jien 'Trainee Educational Psychologist' fi ħdan id-Direttorat għal servizzi Edukattivi, fid-Dipartiment tas-servizzi għall-istudent u qiegħed nitħarreġ fil-psikoloġija, fil-qasam tal-edukazzjoni, sabiex inkun nista' noffri servizz ta' Edukazzjoni Psikoloġika ġol-iskejjel ta' Malta u Għawdex. Bħala parti mit-taħriġ tiegħi ta' 'Trainee Educational Psychologist', qiegħed nattendi kors fuq livell ta' Dottorat mal-Università ta' East London, ġewwa l-Ingilterra, kif ukoll naħdem mas-Servizzi Psiko-Socjali tal-Edukazzjoni fl-Iskejjel.

Issa li wasalt fit-tielet sena tal-istudji tiegħi, qiegħed nagħmel proġett ta' riċerka, taħt is-superviżjoni tal-għalliema tiegħi, Dr. Mary Robinson, sabiex insir naf iktar dwar l-opinjonijiet, il-veduti, u l-esperjenzi tiegħek dwar il-*Learning Support Zone* (LSZ) li qiegħed tattendi bħalissa, ġol-iskola. L-għan ta' dan l-istudju hu li tingħata opportunitajiet li taqsam il-ħsibijiet tiegħek dwar il-LSZ. Din l-informazzjoni tista' tkun ta' benefiċċju sabiex ngħarfu ix-xogħol siewi li diġà qiegħed issir, kif ukoll ikun ta' kontribut sabiex jittejjeb is-servizz li diġà qed jingħata fl-iskejjel Maltin u Għawdxin.

Għandi pjaċir nagħarfek li inti ġejt magħżul sabiex tipparteċipa u tagħti l-kontribut tiegħek f'din ir-riċerka. Nixtieq niġbidlek l-attenzjoni li s-sehem tiegħek f'dan il-proġett ta' riċerka se jinvolvi u jinkludi il-kundizzjonijiet suċċessivi:

o   Li tipparteċipa f'attivitajiet, e.ż; tieħu ritratti, tpinġi mapep, u torganizza mawra madwar LSZ, kif ukoll tieħu sehem f'intervista ta' madwar siegħa li se tiġi irrekordjata fuq 'audio-tape' diġitali.

o   Bħala parteċipant volontarju inti għandek għażla li tirtira l-involviment tiegħek minn dan l-istudju. F'każ li dan iseħħ, għandek ukoll id-dritt li titlob li kull dokument jew 'recording' li inti tajt kontribut għalih, jiġi imħassar u ma' jintużax fil-proċess ta' skrutinju fl-ambitu ta' din ir-riċerka.

o   L-informazzjoni u dokumenti li se taqsam mar-riċerkatur (Mr. Andrew Borg) fil-kuntest tal-involviment tiegħek f'din ir-riċerka, tista' tiġi kwotata jew użata fit-tfassil tad-dokument tat-teżi ta' Mr. Andrew Borg.

o   L-involviment tiegħek f'din ir-riċerka se tiġi mħarsa b'mgħod kunfidenzjali.

o   L-informazzjoni, dokumenti u 'recording' li se tkun involut fit-tfassil tagħhom, se jiġu miżmuma fi gradenza imsakkra jew fuq kompjuter protett minn kodiċi numeriku, li se jkun aċċessibbli biss min Mr. Andrew Borg.

Formola ta' Kunsens

Nixtieq nipparteċipa fir-riċerka, taħt it-tmexxija ta' Mr. Andrew Borg, b'konnessjoni mal-kors tal-istudju tiegħu, li hu mħejji mill-Università ta' East London.

Firma tal-Parteċipant: _____

Firma tar-Riċerkatur: _____

Data:___/____/___

Grazzi tal-Kontribut Tiegħek!

a) Original Version

Learning Support Zone Questionnaire

Section A

i)   School: _____   College:
_____

ii)   Kindly indicate which statement best describes your school's present status with regards to the implementation of a Learning Support Zone (LSZ) provision in your school: *(Please tick where appropriate)*

      -   The school **does have** a LSZ currently in opertation ☐

      -   The school **does not** have a LSZ ☐

      -   The school **does not** currently have a LSZ but is in the process of ☐
establishing one

Note: - *If your answer to item (ii) indicates that your school <u>does</u> have a LSZ currently in opertation please <u>proceed</u> to complete Sections B and C.*

     - *If your answer to item (ii) indicates that the school <u>does not</u> have a LSZ <u>do not proceed</u> to complete Sections B and C.*

Section B

1. Kindly give an indication of how long the Learning Support Zone (LSZ) in your school has been running for: *(Please tick where appropriate)*

    - **Less than 6 months** ☐

    - **6 – 12 months** ☐

    - **1 – 2 years** ☐

    - **2 – 3 years** ☐

    - **3 – 4 years** ☐

    - **4 – 5 years** ☐

2. Please write the total number of students who have been formally referred to the LSZ in your school, since the scholastic year of 2008/2009 to date:

Scholastic Year	Total Number of Students
2008/2009	☐
2009/2010	☐
2010/2011	☐
2011/2012	☐

3. Kindly indicate the total number of referrals which have been received by your LSZ from the following list of professionals, during the present scholastic year (2011/2012):

Professionals	Total Number of Referrals
Senior Management Team	☐
Teachers	☐
Learning Support Assistants	☐
Prefect of Discipline	☐

4. Kindly indicate the total number of students who have been referred to the LSZ in connection with any of the difficulties identified below during the _present_ scholastic year (2011/2012): *(The same students can be listed under more than one category)*

Presenting Difficulty	Total Number of Students
Lack of Self-Worth/Confidence	
Poor Anger Management Skills	
Difficulty in accepting sanctions	
Aggressive / Insolent / Quarrelsome	
Poor Social and Communication Skills	
Shy / Withdrawn / Anxious	
Bullied / Bully	
Family Difficulties	
Truancy	
Absenteeism	

Other/s (Please Specify):

5. What is the total number of students who have attended the LSZ provision during the following scholastic years?:

Scholastic Year	Total Number of Students
2008/2009	
2009/2010	
2010/2011	
2011/2012	

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6. How many students are *presently* being followed by the LSZ?

Total Number of Students

[ ]

7. How many students, *presently* enrolled in the LSZ provision, have been attending for:

Total Number of Students

- **Less than a Month** [ ]

- **1 – 3 Months** [ ]

  3 – 6 Months [ ]

- **More than 6 Months** [ ]

8. Have any students who had been previously enrolled within the LSZ discontinued their attendance to the provision? *(If yes, kindly state the reasons for their withdrawal from the LSZ - e.g. LSZ not suited for student's needs, Student reluctant to attend etc…)*

NO [ ]

YES [ ]

Reasons: [   ]

9. Which programmes are presently offered within the LSZ at your school?:
   (Please tick where appropriate and list any other interventions that have not been identified below)

   Intervention Programmes

   Behaviour Modification ☐

   Anger Management ☐

   Self-Esteem Enhancement ☐

   Conflict Resolution ☐

   Problem – Solving Skills ☐

   Communication Skills ☐

   Emotional Literacy ☐

   Dealing with Peer Pressure ☐

   Autogenic Training ☐

   Team Building ☐

   Other/s (Please Specify):

   | |
   | |

10. Please describe how the LSZ in your school is staffed, by listing the total number of staff that are presently involved in supporting this provision:

Professionals	Number of Staff
Teachers	☐
Learning Support Assistants	☐

    Other/s (Please Specify):

	☐
	☐

11. Has any training been provided for professionals working within the LSZ in your school, during this scholastic year (2011/2012)? *(If yes, kindly give examples of the activities undertaken as part of your training)*

NO [ ]

YES [ ]

Examples: [   ]

Section C

12. Kindly suggest any recommendations that you feel would enable your LSZ to function more effectively as a provision in view of addressing the needs of children with SEBD, thus improving the quality of the service that is currently being offered: *(please fill in one or more boxes available below)*

i)

ii)

iii)

Thank You for Your Contribution to this Study

Learning Support Zone Questionnaire

Section A

1. School: _____   College: _____

2. Kindly indicate which statement best describes your school's present status with regards to the implementation of a Learning Support Zone (LSZ) provision in your school: *(Please tick where appropriate)*

   - The school **does have** a LSZ currently in opertation ☐

   - The school **does not** have a LSZ ☐

   - The school **does not** currently have a LSZ but is in the process of establishing one ☐

Note: *- If your answer to item (ii) indicates that your school <u>does</u> have a LSZ currently in opertation please <u>proceed</u> to complete Sections B and C.*

   - If your answer to item (ii) indicates that the school <u>does not</u> have a LSZ <u>do not proceed</u> to complete Sections B and C.

Section B

3. Kindly give an indication of how long the LSZ in your school has been running for: *(Please tick where appropriate)*

Less than 6 months	6-12 months	1-2 years	2-3 years	3-4 years	4-5years
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

4. Please write the total number of students who have been formally referred to the LSZ in your school, since the scholastic year of 2008/2009 to date:

Scholastic Year	Total Number of Students
2008/2009	
2009/2010	
2010/2011	
2011/2012	

5. Kindly indicate the total number of referrals which have been received by your LSZ from the following list of professionals, during the present scholastic year (2011/2012):

Professionals	Total Number of Referrals
Senior Management Team	
Teachers	
Learning Support Assistants	
Prefect of Discipline	
School Counsellor	
School Psychologist	
Social Worker	

Other/s (Please Specify):

6. Kindly indicate the total number of students who have been referred to the LSZ in connection with any of the difficulties identified below during the _present_ scholastic year (2011/2012): *(The same students can be listed under more than one category)*

Presenting Difficulty	Total Number of Students
Lack of Self-Worth/Confidence	
Poor Anger Management Skills	
Difficulty in accepting sanctions	
Aggressive / Insolent / Quarrelsome	
Poor Social and Communication Skills	
Shy / Withdrawn / Anxious	
Bullied / Bully	
Family Difficulties	
Truancy	
Absenteeism	

Other/s (Please Specify):

7. What is the total number of students who have attended the LSZ provision during the following scholastic years?:

Scholastic Year	Total Number of Students
2008/2009	
2009/2010	
2010/2011	
2011/2012	

8. How many students are *presently* being followed by the LSZ?

Total Number of Students

☐

9. How many students, *presently* enrolled in the LSZ provision, have been attending for:

Total Number of Students

- **Less than a Month** ☐

- **1 – 2 Months** ☐

- **2 – 3 Months** ☐

- **More than 3 Months** ☐

10. Have any students who had been previously enrolled within the LSZ discontinued their attendance to the provision? *(If yes, kindly state the reasons for their withdrawal from the LSZ - e.g. LSZ not suited for student's needs, Student reluctant to attend etc…)*

NO ☐

YES ☐

Reasons:

<table>
<tr><td></td></tr>
</table>

11. Which programmes are presently offered within the LSZ at your school?:
    (Please tick where appropriate and list any other interventions that have not been identified below)

Intervention Programmes

Behaviour Modification ☐

Anger Management ☐

Self-Esteem Enhancement ☐

Conflict Resolution ☐

Problem – Solving Skills ☐

Communication Skills ☐

Emotional Literacy ☐

Dealing with Peer Pressure ☐

Autogenic Training ☐

Team Building ☐

Other/s (Please Specify):

12. Please describe how the LSZ in your school is staffed, by listing the total number of staff that are presently involved in supporting this provision:

Professionals	Full-time Staff	Staff on Reduced Hours
Teachers	☐	☐
Learning Support Assistants	☐	☐
Other/s (Please Specify):		
_____	☐	☐
_____	☐	☐

13. Has any training been provided for professionals working within the LSZ in your school, during this scholastic year (2011/2012)? *(If yes, kindly give examples of the activities undertaken as part of your training)*

NO ☐

YES ☐

Examples:

☐

14. Has any funding been allocated to the LSZ in your school during this present scholastic year (2011/2012)? *(If yes, provide a description of how this funding is obtained and how it is distributed to cater for the requirements of the LSZ)*

NO ☐

YES ☐

Provide details here:

☐

Section C

15. Kindly suggest any recommendations that you feel would enable your LSZ to function more effectively as a provision in view of addressing the needs of children with SEBD, thus improving the quality of the service that is currently being offered: *(please fill in one or more boxes available below)*
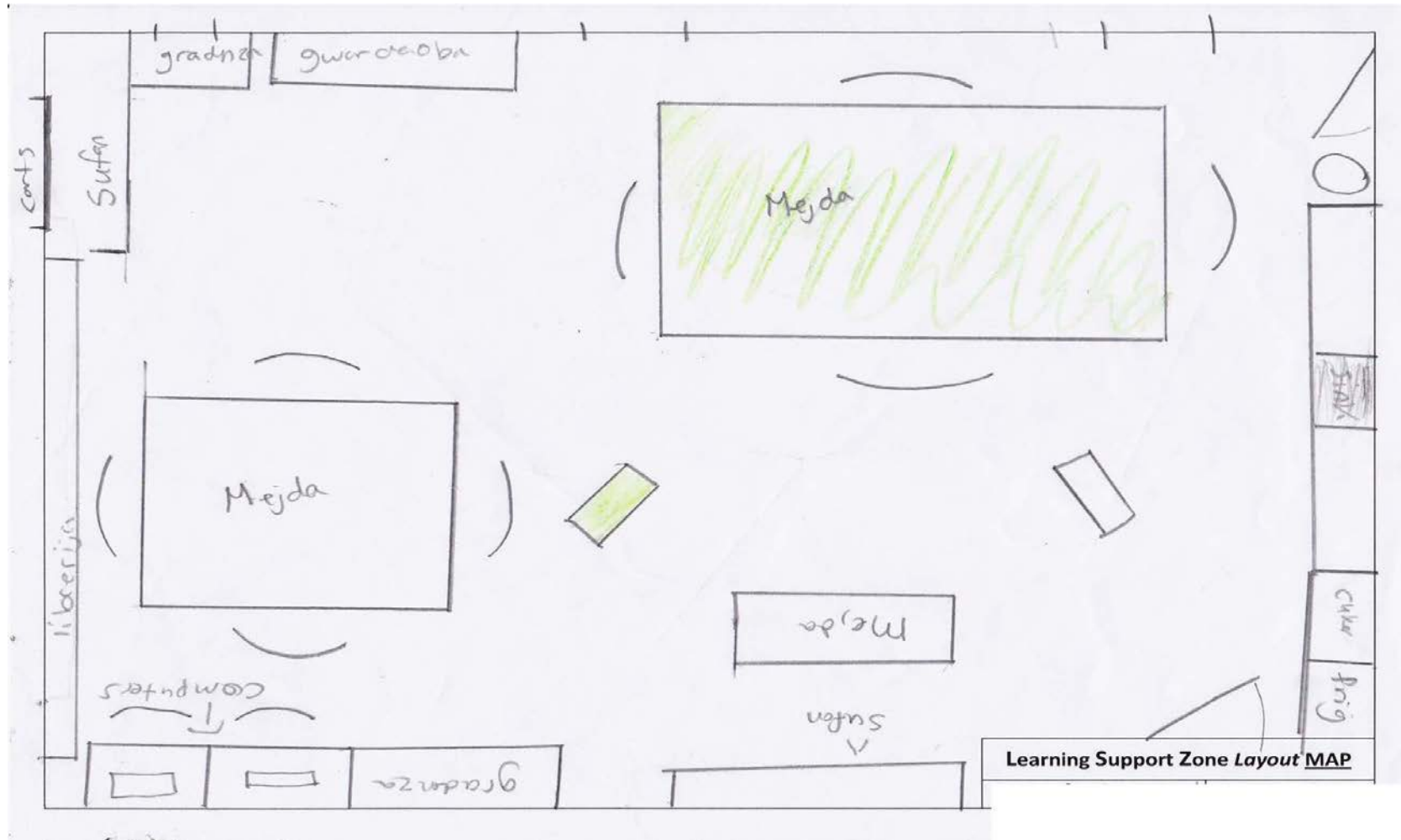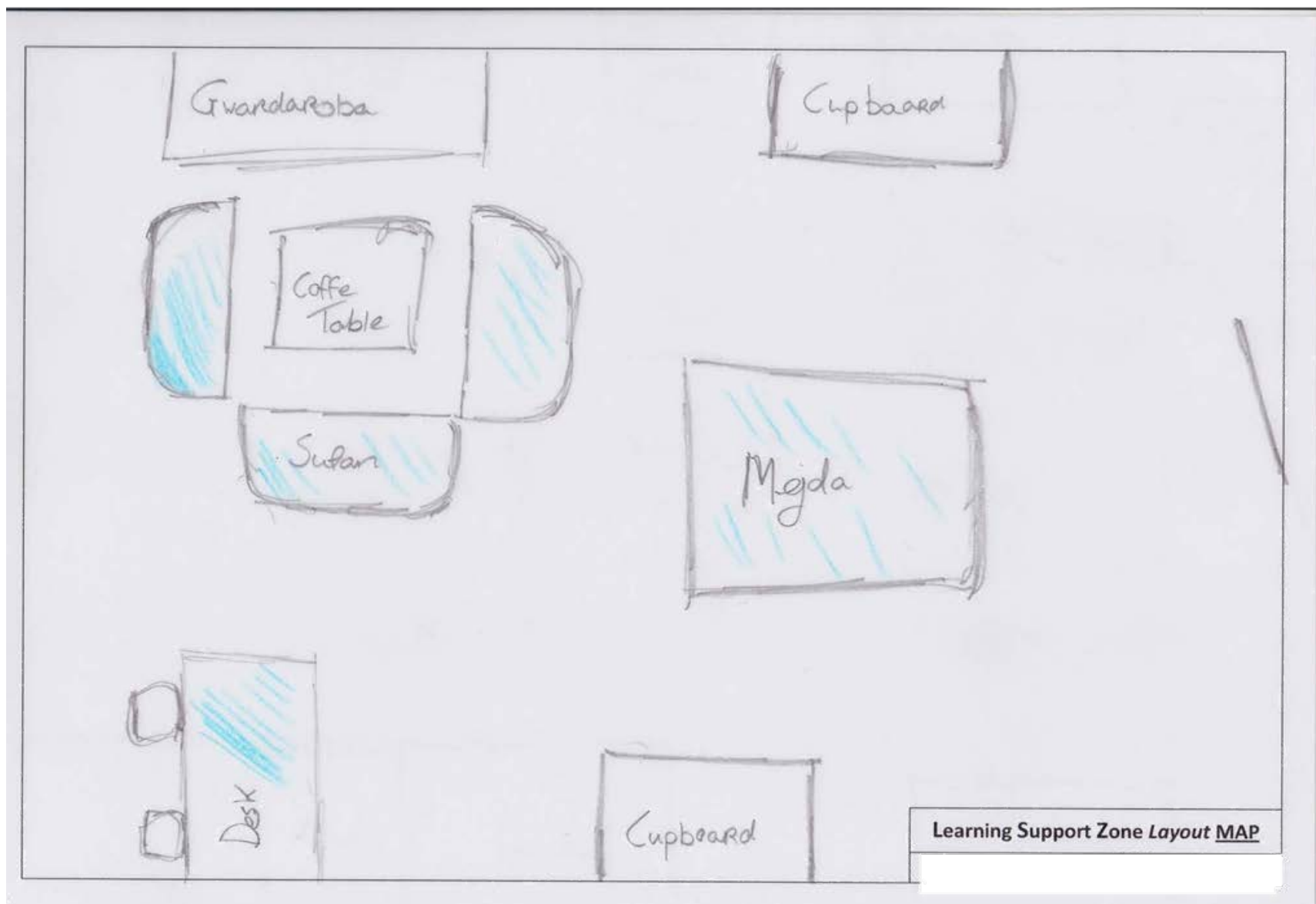
i)

ii)

iii)
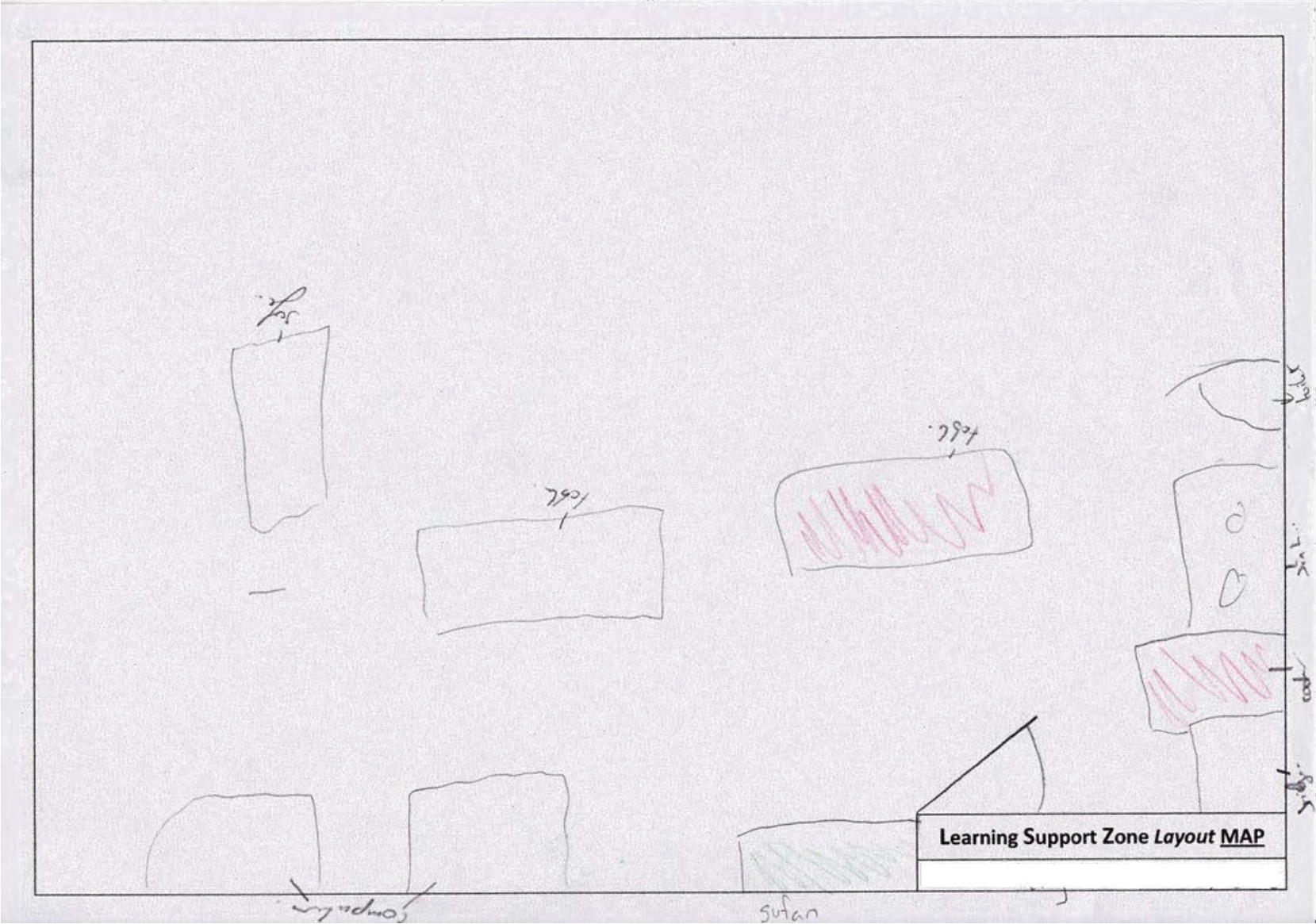
Thank You for Your Contribution to this Study

Map 1:

Learning Support Zone *Layout* MAP

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Map 2:

Learning Support Zone *Layout* <u>MAP</u>

Map 3:

Learning Support Zone *Layout* __MAP__

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Map 4:

Learning Support Zone *Layout* <u>MAP</u>

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Map 5:

Learning Support Zone *Layout* **MAP**
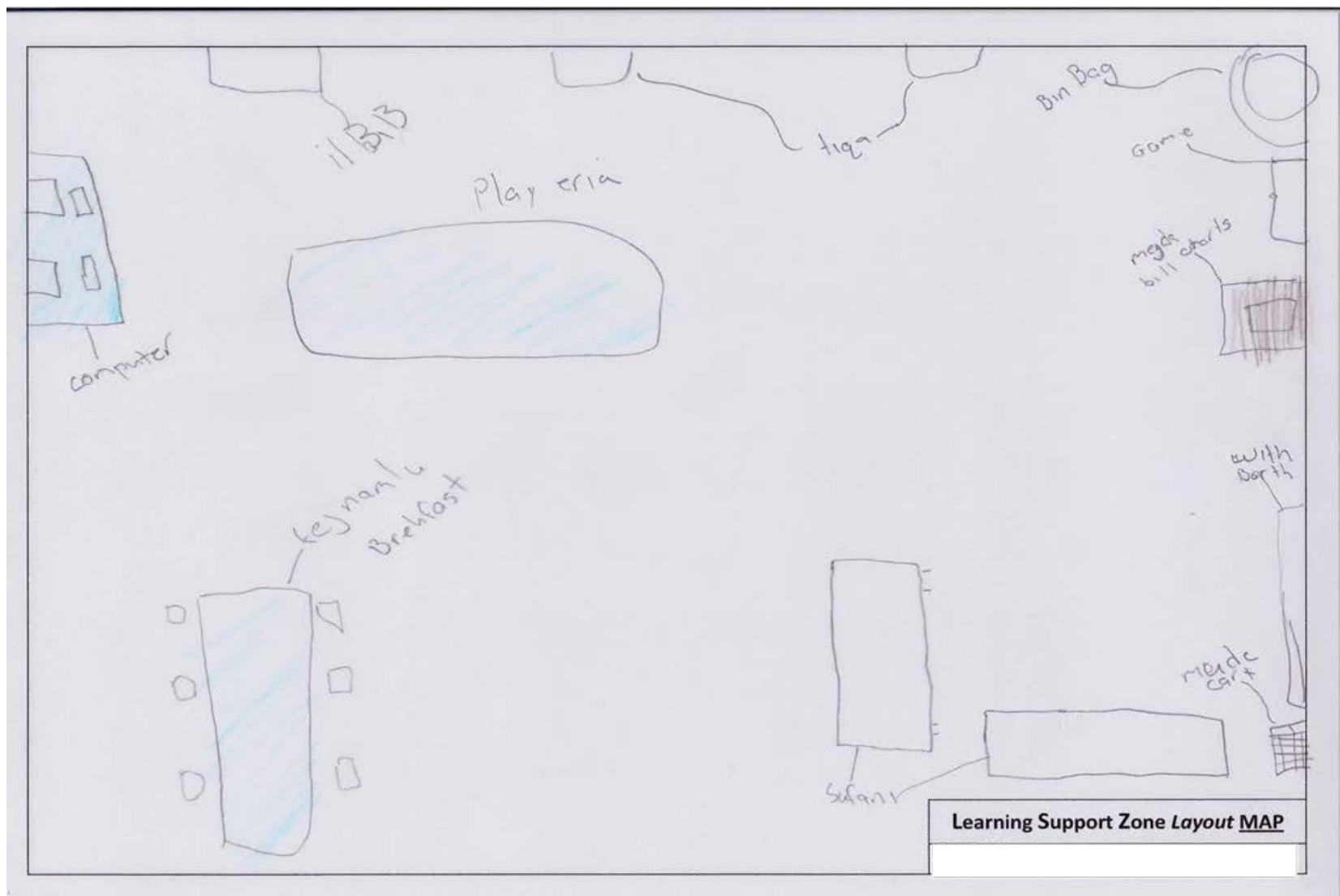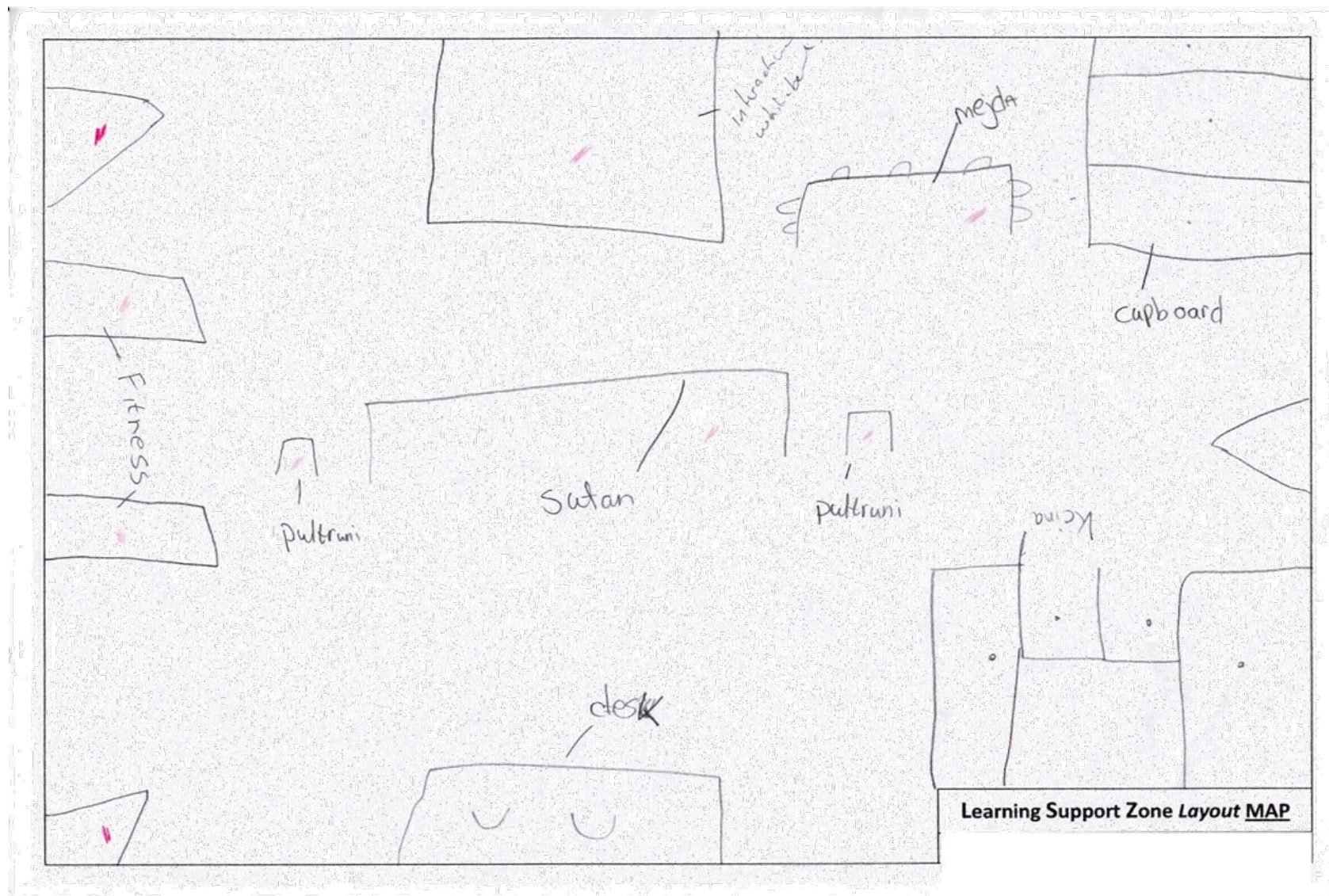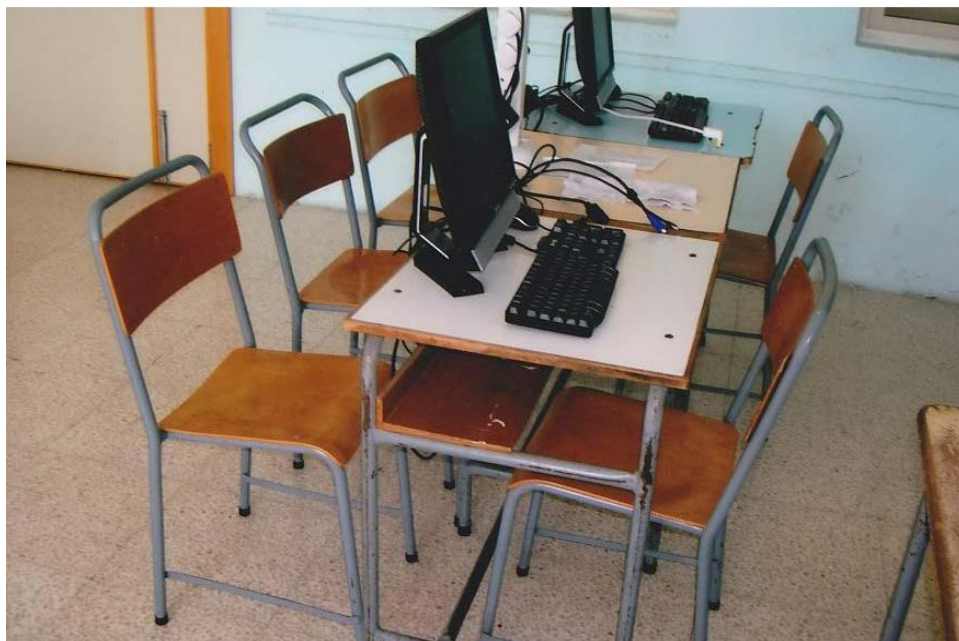
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Photograph 1: *Sofa area.*

Photograph 2: *Sofa area.*

Photograph 3: *Kitchenette*

Photograph 4: *Student's desk.*

Photograph 5: *Teacher's desk.*

Photograph 6: *Resources cabinet.*

Photograph 7: *Activity desk.*

Photograph 8: *Activity area.*

Ethical Consent Forms

A. *Ethical Consent Form issued by the School of Psychology Ethics Sub-Committee at the University of East London on 24/02/13.*

ETHICAL PRACTICE CHECKLIST (Professional Doctorates)

SUPERVISOR: Mary Robinson   **ASSESSOR:** James Walsh

STUDENT: Andrew Borg   **DATE (sent to assessor):** 18/01/2012

Proposed research topic: Learning support Zones: The Unheard Voices of Students Exhibiting Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD)

Course: Professional Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology

1. Will free and informed consent of participants be obtained?   YES

2. If there is any deception is it justified?   N/A

3. Will information obtained remain confidential?   YES

4. Will participants be made aware of their right to withdraw at any time? YES

5. Will participants be adequately debriefed?   YES

6. If this study involves observation does it respect participants' privacy? N/A

7. If the proposal involves participants whose free and informed

    consent may be in question (e.g. for reasons of age, mental or

    emotional incapacity), are they treated ethically?   YES

8. Is procedure that might cause distress to participants ethical?   YES

9. If there are inducements to take part in the project is this ethical?   N/A

10. If there are any other ethical issues involved, are they a problem?   NO

APPROVED

YES		

MINOR observation: In the letter to parents/guardians, it should be made clearer what sort of photographs will be taken by the students.

REASONS FOR NON APPROVAL:

Assessor initials: JW   Date: 24/2/2012

RESEARCHER RISK ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST (BSc/MSc/MA)

SUPERVISOR: Mary Robinson   **ASSESSOR:** James Walsh

STUDENT: Andrew Borg   **DATE (sent to assessor):** 18/01/2012

Proposed research topic: Learning support Zones: The Unheard Voices of Students Exhibiting Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD)

Course: Professional Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology

Would the proposed project expose the <u>researcher</u> to any of the following kinds of hazard?

1   Emotional   NO

2.   Physical   NO

3.   Other   NO

        (e.g. health & safety issues)

If you've answered YES to any of the above please estimate the chance of the researcher being harmed as: HIGH / MED / LOW

APPROVED

YES		

MINOR CONDITIONS:

REASONS FOR NON APPROVAL:

Assessor initials: JW   Date: 24/2/2012

Please return the completed checklists by e-mail to the Helpdesk within 1 week.

UEL
University of
East London
www.uel.ac.uk

School of Psychology

Professional Doctorate Programmes

To Whom It May Concern:

This is to confirm that the Professional Doctorate candidate named in the attached ethics approval is conducting research as part of the requirements of the Professional Doctorate programme on which he/she is enrolled.

The Research Ethics Committee of the School of Psychology, University of East London, has approved this candidate's research ethics application and he/she is therefore covered by the University's indemnity insurance policy while conducting the research. This policy should normally cover for any untoward event. The University does not offer 'no fault' cover, so in the event of an untoward occurrence leading to a claim against the institution, the claimant would be obliged to bring an action against the University and seek compensation through the courts.

As the candidate is a student of the University of East London, the University will act as the sponsor of his/her research. UEL will also fund expenses arising from the research, such as photocopying and postage.

Yours faithfully,

Dr. Mark Finn

Chair of the School of Psychology Ethics Sub-Committee

Stratford Campus, Water Lane, Stratford, London E15 4LZ
tel: +44 (0)20 8223 4966   fax: +44 (0)20 8223 4937
e-mail: mno.davies@uel.ac.uk   web: www.uel.ac.uk/psychology

The University of East London has campuses at London Docklands and Stratford
If you have any special access or communication requirements for your visit, please let us know. MINICOM 020 8223 2853

B. *Ethical Consent Form issued by the Research & Development Department at the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education on 16/02/13.*

Request for Research in State Schools

A. (Please use BLOCK LETTERS)

Surname: BORG   Name: ANDREW

I.D. Card Number: 341383 M

Telephone No: 21 410 242   *   Mobile No: 79 728 965 *

Address: 87 'LIMESTONE LODGE', ANTINNI STR. MOSTA.

Locality: MOSTA   Post Code: MST 4463

E-mail Address: andrewb083 @ gmail.com

Faculty: PSYCHOLOGY   Course: PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE IN EDUCATIONAL & CHILD PSYCHOLOGY Year Ending: 2013

Title of Research: LEARNING SUPPORT ZONES: THE UNHEARD VOICES OF STUDENTS EXHIBITING SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIOURAL DIFFICULTIES.

Aims of research: ☐ Long Essay   ☐ Dissertation   ☑ Thesis   ☐ Publication

Time Frame: 2012 - 2013   Language Used: ENGLISH / MALTESE

Description of methodology: DUAL METHOD APPROACH (QUANTITATIVE / QUALITATIVE)

School/s where research is to be carried out: ACROSS ALL SECONDARY STATE SCHOOLS THAT OFFER THE SERVICE OF A LEARNING SUPPORT ZONE IN MALTA AND GOZO

Years / Forms: FORM 1 - FORM 5   Age range of students: 11 - 17 years

* Telephone and mobile numbers will only be used in strict confidence and will not be divulged to third parties.
I accept to abide by the rules and regulations re Research in State Schools and to comply with the Data Protection Act 2001.
Warning to applicants - Any false statement, misrepresentation of concealment of material fact on this form or any document presented in support of this application may be grounds for criminal prosecution.

Signature of applicant: _____   Date: 12th FEBRUARY, 2012

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B. Tutor's Approval (where applicable)

The above research work is being carried out under my supervision.

(*LETTER ATTACHED*)

Tutor's Name: _____   Signature: _____

Faculty: _____   Faculty Stamp: _____

C. Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education - Official Approval

The above request for permission to carry out research in State Schools is hereby approved according to the official rules and regulations, subject to approval from the University of Malta Ethics Committee.

> Raymond Camilleri
> Director, RDD

Date: _16_ / _02_ / _2012_   Official Stamp

Director
(Research and Development Department)

Conditions for the approval of a request by a student to carry out research work in State Schools

Permission for research in State Schools is subject to the following conditions:

1.   The official request form is to be accompanied by a copy of the questionnaire and / or any relevant material intended for use in schools during research work.

2.   The original request form, showing the relevant signatures and approval, must be presented to the Head of School.

3.   All research work is carried out at the discretion of the relative Head of School and subject to their conditions.

4.   Researchers are to observe strict confidentiality at all times.

5.   The Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education reserves the right to withdraw permission to carry out research in State Schools at any time and without prior notice.

6.   Students are expected to restrict their research to a minimum of students / teachers / administrators / schools, and to avoid any waste of time during their visits to schools.

7.   As soon as the research in question is completed, the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education assumes the right to a full copy (in print/on C.D.) of the research work carried out in State Schools. **Researchers are to forward the copies to the Assistant Director, International Research, Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education.**

8.   Researchers are to hand a copy of their Research in print or on C.D. to the relative School/s.

9.   In the case of video recordings, researchers have to obtain prior permission from the Head of School and the teacher of the class concerned. Any adults recognisable in the video are to give their explicit consent. Parents of students recognisable in the video are also to be requested to aprove that their siblings may be video-recorded. Two copies of the consent forms are necessary, one copy is to be deposited with the Head of School, and the other copy is to accompany the Request Form for Research in State Schools. Once the video recording is completed, one copy of the videotape is to be forwarded to the Head of School. The Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education reserves the right to request another copy.

10. The video recording's use is to be limited to this sole research and may not be used for other research without the full consent of interested parties including the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education.

Statement of Consent

I hereby give my consent to the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education to process and record personal and sensitive data being given herewith in order to be able to render me with the service I am applying for.

I fully understand that:

a)   by opting out my application cannot be processed;

b)   authorised personnel who are processing this information may have access to this data in order to supply me with the service being applied for;

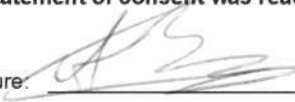c)   edited information, that would not identify me, may be included in statistical reports.

I know that I am entitled to see the information related to me, should I ask for it in writing.

I am aware that for the purpose of the Data Protection Act, the Data Controller for this Directorate is:

    The Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education
    Floriana, VLT 2000

I have read and understood this statement of consent myself _____

This statement of consent was read and explained to me _____

Signature: _____ ID number: _34158317_ (Data subject)

Signature: _____ ID number: _____ (Reader if applicable)

Date: _13/02/12_

Data Protection Policy

The Data Protection Act, 2001 regulated the processing of personal data held electronically and in manual form. The Directorate for Quality and Standard in Education is set to fully comply with the Data Protection Principles as set out in the Act.

a)   The Directorate will hold information you supply in accordance to your request to carry out research in State Schools and / or Directorates' documents.

b)   The information you give may be disclosed to other Departments of the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education, who may also have access to your data.

Your rights:

You are entitled to know what information the Directorate holds and processes about you and why; who has access to it; how it is kept up to date; what the Directorate is doing to comply with its obligations under the Data Protection Act, 2001.

The Data Protection Act, 2001 sets down a formal procedure for dealing with data subject access requests which the Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport follows.

All data subjects have the right to access any personal information kept about them by the Directorate either on computer or in manual files. Requests to access to personal information by data subjects must be made in writing and addressed to the Data Controller of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport. An identification document such as a photocopy of the Identity Card, photocopy of passport etc. of the data subject making the request must be submitted with the request. Such identification material will be returned to the data subject.

The Directorate aims to comply as quickly as possible with requests for access to personal information and will ensure that it is provided within reasonable time, the reason will be explained in writing to the data subject making the request.

All data subjects have the right to request that their information be amended, erased or not used in the event the data is incorrect.

13th January, 2012

To whom it may concern:

Re : Doctoral Research Supervision

Andrew Borg is a Trainee Educational Psychologist on the Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology here at the University of East London. He is currently engaged in research leading to the presentation of a Doctoral Thesis in May, 2013.

I wish to confirm that as Andrew's Director of Studies I will be supervising every aspect of the design, data gathering and analysis as well as providing feedback on drafts and presentations.

Yours faithfully,

Dr. Mary Robinson

Assistant Programme Director

Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology

Stratford Campus, Water Lane, Stratford, London E15 4LZ
Tel: +44 (0)20 8223 4966   Fax: +44 (0)20 8223 4937   MINICOM 020 8223 2853
Email: mno.davies@uel.ac.uk

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