

**EXPLORING INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES WITHIN THE
CONTEXT OF MULTI-GRADE TEACHING: EXPERIENCES OF PRINCIPALS AND
TEACHERS**

By

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore experiences of principals and teachers in enacting instructional leadership within the context of multi-grade teaching. Attempting to realise the study purpose a qualitative research design was employed using a case study of four principals and four teachers purposefully selected in four schools practicing Multi-Grade Teaching. The study was conducted in a sparsely populated deep rural area of Pinetown District. The common factor amongst these schools was that their enrolment was dwindling and it was above ninety and below one hundred and eighty. The research instruments included semi-structured interviews, document reviews and classroom observation.

The findings indicated that Multi-Grade Teaching is accustomed by challenges including the absence of policy on MGT, lack of training on MGT, the paucity of support from the officials of the Department of Basic Education, work overload and the inability to cover it due to time constraint, language of learning and teaching and lack of content knowledge as a barrier. Schools use various strategies to overcome them. The strategies included encouraging teachers to work hard to achieve the school vision and mission, delegation, team-work, monitoring their work and providing feedback. They work beyond the call of duty and rely on the assistance of support staff and volunteers to teach learners.

DECLARATION

The work presented in this dissertation is my own. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any University. The University of KwaZulu-Natal has certified ethical clearance for this study.

Signed: -----

Date: -----

Abigail Nelisiwe Gasa

STATEMENT BY SUPERVISOR

As the candidate's supervisor, I agree to the submission of this dissertation.

Signed: -----

Date: -----

Dr T.T. Bhengu



26 May 2016

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Dear Ms Gasa

Protocol reference number: HSS/0513/016M

Project title: Exploring instructional leadership practices within the context of multi-grade teaching: experiences of principals and teachers in four primary schools in KwaZulu-Natal.

Expedited Approval

In response to your application dated 06 May 2016, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol have been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. Please note: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to God Almighty for the strength and courage He has granted me to complete my study.

To my late parents Enock Dodo Gasa and Grissel Sibusisiwe MaMkhize Gasa for laying a solid foundation on the importance of education and making our living environment homely enough for us their children to learn.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ANA	Annual National Assessment
CAPS	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
DBE	Department of Basic Education
EMIS	Education Management Information Systems
LOLT	Language of Learning and Teaching
LTSM	Learner Teacher Support Material
MGT	Multi-grade teaching
NCS	National Curriculum Statement
NSNP	National Schools Nutrition Programme
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PAM	National Schools Nutrition Programme
PPN	Post Provisioning Norm
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SA-SAMS	South African Schools Administration and Management Systems
SGB	School Governing Body
SMT	School Management Team
TA	Teaching Assistant
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

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CHAPTER ONE

AN ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

In South Africa education is a fundamental basic right enshrined in the Constitution of the country, Act No. 108 of 1996 (RSA, 1996a). To achieve this fundamental basic right, children must have access to education (Department of Basic Education, 1996). Education takes place in the schools. Schools implement different teaching practices and operate under different contexts; hence, there are mono-grade class teaching and multi-grade class teaching schools, which will be explained later on in the study (du Plessis & Subramanien, 2014, p. 21). Though school teaching practices are different, all schools are managed by principals, who are expected to be instructional leaders (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008). Hoy and Hoy (2006) concur with the above statement by emphasising that schools are about teaching and learning; hence the main focus of the principal should be on instructional leadership. This study explored instructional leadership practices of principals and teachers within the context of multi-grade teaching. The focus is on the experiences of principals and teachers in four primary schools in Pinetown District of KwaZulu-Natal Province in South Africa. This study is also not located in positivist approach where it is believed that there is distance between the researcher and the researched. The first person approach I, will be used throughout the study instead of the third person approach, the researcher. This chapter is an orientation to the study and it starts by providing the background to the study as well as rationale and motivation to the study. Research questions and the purpose of the study are also outlined.

1.2 Background to the study

Instruction plays a pivotal role in schools to improve classroom practices (Murphy & Hallinger, 1986, p. 2). As it is highlighted in the introduction that schools are managed by principals who are expected to be instructional leaders. Leadership at school level is mandated to improve teaching and learning by amongst other things, setting directions, developing people and by making the organisation work (Leithwood, 2004, p. 1). Effective teaching and learning takes

place in a manageable number of learners where individualisation takes place (Leithwood, 2004, p. 27). Mulford, (2003, p. 25) concurs with Leithwood that large classes are difficult to manage and they are not conducive for learner participation, hence a reduced class size with a small number of learners is recommended for effective teaching and learning, as well as to improve learner academic achievement. While large classes pose a threat to good quality teaching and learning in South African schools, a new phenomenon in the form of multi-grade teaching (MGT) classes has come to the fore in the South African debates (Aksoy, 2008; Brown, 2010; Joubert, 2010; du Plessis & Subramanien, 2014).

Increasingly there are findings that suggest that there are many schools in South Africa that are impacted by this phenomenon called MGT classes. Multi-Grade Teaching (MGT) means grouping learners of different age, ability and grades in one classroom to be taught simultaneously by one teacher, at times of a different culture and background to that of learners as a matter of choice or necessity (Aksoy, 2008; Joubert, 2010; Joyce, 2014). Research indicates that MGT becomes a choice in mostly developed countries using it to improve learning, with resources and policies designed to suit it. However, in developing countries it is a necessity; it is used to address shortage of resources (Aksoy, 2008, p. 218; du Plessis & Subramanien, 2014). In South Africa MGT usually refers to the situation where one teacher teaches simultaneously all the learning areas or some of the different learning areas to learners often of distinct cultures and different languages, who are in two or more grades, or in different grades in a combination of different phases (Joubert, 2010). Expectations are that quality effective teaching happens on one-on-one encounter, when a single teacher teaches a single grade all the subjects or different teachers teach various subjects to a single grade in one class, using policies of the Department of Basic Education. However, the situation in South Africa is that there are 5153 schools practising MGT as a necessity and not as a choice (Department of Basic Education, 2015). This study sought to understand the experiences of principals and teachers in enacting instructional leadership within the context of MGT in four primary schools.

1.3 Rationale and motivation for the Study

This study was triggered by my observation as a principal in rural primary school where I identified two teacher schools including the principal, practising MGT. Others were teaching

across phases, meaning that it is not only multi-grade but multi-phase teaching as well. This virtually means that if teachers are attending a meeting or a workshop, the school is closed because all the teachers would be absent from school (du Plessis & Subramanien, 2014).

In South Africa the curriculum policy and duty load for teachers is determined by the Minister of Education (Department of Basic Education, 1996). The curriculum policy used is National Curriculum Statement (NCS) comprising Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) with all approved subjects and time allocated per subject per grade, starting from Grade R to Grade 12. Promotion and progression requirements policy for all grades from Grade R to Grade 12, as well as National Protocol for Assessment for all grades are contained in the CAPS document (Department of Basic Education, 2011). The duty load of teachers from Post-level One educators up to the rank of Principal at school level is determined in terms of the Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM). The duty load allocated to the principal ranges between 5% and 92% in primary schools depending on the size of the school. The size of the school is determined by the number of learners enrolled in the school and the number of educators the principal is appointed to manage.

Almost all the principals that manage schools practising MGT have their teaching load in class equal to that of teachers or Post-Level One educators. On top of that their job description is the same like the other principals who are running mono-grades schools (Department of Basic Education, 1998; du Plessis & Subramanien, 2014). Principals are responsible for the general administration, personnel management, teaching, extra and co-curricular activities, and to also interact with all stakeholders and communication (Department of Basic Education, 1996; Department of Basic Education, 1998). Looking at the CAPS policy specifying curriculum according to grade and time per subject, the duty load and job description of principals who are supposed to be managers but full time class teachers, I developed an interest to understand the experiences of principals and teachers to enact instructional leadership within MGT context.

1.4 Research Questions

The study was underpinned by one main question and four sub-questions, and these are listed below.

Main question:

- What are the experiences of principals and teachers of instructional leadership practices within the context of MGT?

Sub-Questions:

- How do school principals and teachers who practise MGT enact instructional leadership?
- What challenges (if any) do teachers and principals encounter when managing teaching and learning within the context of MGT?
- How do the teachers and principals overcome the challenges they face?
- What implications do MGT have on learner academic achievement?

1.5 Significance of the study

The findings of the study could assist to provide insights about how schools that operate within MGT environment are expected to implement curriculum designed for schools practising mono-grade teaching. Experiences and insights from principals and teachers who work within MGT could assist in developing strategies that might contribute to improving learners' academic achievement. It could also inform the principals to strike a balance between their dual role as principals expected to be instructional leaders and that of being full time teachers. In addition, the findings could also be useful to the Department of Basic Education officials in terms of understanding in-depth the experiences and challenges confronting the schools practising MGT.

1.6 Research design and methodology

The research that is reported here adopted a qualitative research approach within interpretive research paradigm. This approach was deemed suitable and fit for this study because the intention was to gain an in-depth understanding of instructional leadership practices and experiences of principals and teachers within the context of multi-grade teaching. Qualitative research is an umbrella term referring to a social inquiry on how people interpret and make sense of their lived experience (Atkinson, Coffey & Delamont, 2001). The objective is to get individual views of their nature of reality and what they know about the research topic. Henning, van Rensburg & Smit (2004) define qualitative approach as a strategy that concede distinct views

of the theme that is studied and in which the participants have an open-ended or unrestricted way of giving their views and demonstrating their actions. The interpretive framework, which is in concord with qualitative research methodology was used as the theory that underpins the qualitative inquiry. It promotes the generation of thick descriptive data on participants' understanding and attribution of meaning to the inquiry under study through a personal interactive process with them (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). The study allowed me to develop an understanding and interpretations of instructional leadership practices and experiences of principals and teachers within the context of multi-grade teaching. The focus was on the experiences that participants created through their comprehension of the research topic, what the world means to them, how they construct, understand and interpret the social reality of the world around them.

1.7 Demarcation of the study

The study was conducted in the deep rural context area of Pinetown District in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. The socio-economic context of the people around these schools was characterised by poverty, high levels of illiteracy, unemployment and dependency on social grants. As it is typical of rural areas, there were no industries around these communities and the local economy centred on selling craftwork and vegetables that the community grows in its small garden plots. The study was conducted in four primary schools, referred to in this study as School A, School B, School C and School D for anonymity purposes.

1.8 The structure of the study

The study is made up of five chapters. The overview of each chapter follows below.

Chapter One

This chapter provided the background, the purpose of the study, the rationale and motivation for the study. Research questions are outlined. The significance of the study, research design and

methodology as well as the demarcation of the study follows. It concludes with the layout or structure of the study.

Chapter Two

Chapter Two is a review of literature of multi-grade teaching from both the national and international perspectives. The theories and models that provide a framework for the study are also explained in details.

Chapter Three

This chapter unpacks the research design and methodology that was used in conducting the study. Issues of the research paradigm that underpin the study are discussed before the methodology is presented. Limitations to the study are also highlighted together with measures taken to address the limitations.

Chapter Four

This chapter is dedicated to the presentation and discussion of the data that was generated from school principals and teachers who taught in the four multi-grade schools. Chapter Four begins by giving an overview of the targeted sites I visited and used as research sites. The overview of the community they serve is also presented. The data that was generated is then discussed thematically.

Chapter Five

This chapter presents the findings and makes recommendations drawn from the findings.

1.9 Chapter summary

This chapter was an orientation to the study and it provided the background and other critical components of the research as outlined in the layout of the study above. The next chapter will provide insight on literature review that was explored for this study project.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter an orientation in which the study was introduced was given. This chapter reviews local and international literature pertaining to the study topic on exploring instructional leadership practices within the context of MGT. The study focuses on the experiences of principals and teachers. Key concepts are defined in terms of their application in the study. The challenges facing the schools that practise MGT; the strategies of teaching MGT classes as well as link between MGT and learner academic achievement are elaborated on. Towards the end of the chapter, an account about a model that underpinned the study is discussed.

2.2. Key concepts

The concepts that are going to be clarified are instructional leadership, multi-grade teaching, and multi-grade schooling.

2.2.1 Instructional leadership

Various authors define instructional leadership in a variety of ways but they all point emphasise similar aspects and these include the direction, support and resources that the school leadership provides to educators and learners to improve teaching and learning. The common trend in their conceptualisation of instructional leadership is on the instruction given by the instructional leader to influence the behaviour of educators thus leading to the learners learning. For instance, Yu (2009, p. 723) defines it as the type of leadership made up of direct or indirect behaviour that significantly affect the educators' instruction and as a result, student learning. The view of Leithwood (2009) also suggests that instructional leadership is an approach to leadership that emphasises the behaviour of teachers as they engage in activities directly affecting the growth of the learners. Sim (2011), on the other hand, defines it as the process where principals provide guidance to the teachers on curriculum and pedagogy, encourage the learners to analyse

weaknesses and guide teachers and students. Bush & Glover (2003) suggest that its emphasis is on the process of influence, focused on teaching and learning, and on teacher behaviour in working with the learners. Spillane, Halverson & Diamond (2004) also share the same sentiments that instructional leadership is the identification, acquisition, allocation, coordination and the use of social, material and cultural resources necessary to establish the conditions for the possibility of teaching and learning. Drawing from the above definitions by these different authors, one can argue that instructional leadership is about all the endeavours that the instructional leader applies in order to influence the learning of a learner.

2.2.2 Multi-grade teaching (MGT)

Various authors use distinct names to refer to MGT. Some use terms such as combination classes, mixed age grouping, multi-age classes as well as non-graded or ungraded education (Joubert, 2010; Kucita, Kivunja, Maxwell & Kuyini, 2013). MGT refers to a group of learners doing different grades but taught in the same classroom by one teacher (Taole, 2014). MGT means the grouping of learners with different ages, abilities and grades in the same class through choice or as a need taught by one teacher (Aksoy, 2008). Drawing from the above definitions, I regard MGT as the provision of education to all learners of school going age as a result of choice or necessity which might warrant grouping learners with different abilities, age, grade levels and curriculum to be taught by one teacher in one classroom.

2.2.3 Multi-grade schooling

Multi-grade schools are small schools with one, two or three teachers offering mostly a complete cycle of primary education, leading to multi-grade classes (Berry, 2001). Bacani (2011) is of the same view with Berry more especially on school size but further divide them into either complete primary, incomplete primary and integrated primary and secondary schools, combining classes. Brown (2010) on the other hand contends with the above definition by defining it as a graded school where each grade has its own teacher responsible for it. Taking from the above definitions multi-grade schooling means attending a small graded school, each class can be

occupied by one or different grades because of infrastructure but taught by different grade level teachers which might warrant a platooning system.

2.3 Rationale for multi-grade teaching

Berry (2001) identified three reasons for the existence of MGT which are small schools especially in sparsely populated areas, uneven learner enrolment and a response to educational problems. Small MGT schools exist to bring mostly a complete cycle of primary school education near the communities. For uneven learner enrolment two or more different grade levels are combined to make up class size, and one teacher becomes responsible for that class. To address educational problems developed countries intentionally group learners of different ages to stimulate social development and to motivate learner participation.

Brown (2009 & 2010) asserts that it is as a result of two things namely demographic constraints as well as administrative or pedagogical problems. Demographic constraints are caused by migration of communities from rural to urban areas. Administrative or pedagogical problems caused by teacher shortages due to a lack of interest of trained teachers to teach in sparsely remote rural areas, rationalisation, redeployment, teacher absenteeism ill-health, uneven numbers in different grades and competition for schools seen as offering quality education by parents. Reports indicate that MGT is practised worldwide. According to the research conducted by the education Policy Consortium (Centre For Education Policy Development, 2011), MGT is more predominant in Latin America, Asia and Northern Countries but less prevalent in Africa, neglected, under researched, its data not systematically collected, unpopulated, occult, uncomplicated or complicated but not resolvable. Du Plessis & Subramanien (2014) also converge that MGT is under researched. Amongst the literature that I studied this is the latest statistics I could find indicating MGT schools in Caribbean countries:

Country	Percentage of multi-grade teaching schools
Turks and Caicos Islands	30%
Belize	51%
Dominica	38%
Guyana	47%
Trinidad and Tobago	12%
Jamaica	43%

Table 2 .1 Source adapted from Berry, 2001, p. 2

A report on rural education by the Department of Basic Education Portfolio Committee indicates the number of schools practising MGT according to provinces (DBE, 2015). In terms of this report Eastern Cape is leading in terms of schools practising MGT followed by KwaZulu-Natal where this study was conducted, then Limpopo. The table shows that MGT is more prevalent in provinces with more rural areas although some are found in urban and suburban (Brown, 2009; Joubert, 2010; Kucita, et al., 2013; du Plessis & Subramanien, 2014; Joyce, 2014). The following diagram indicates the number of schools practicing MGT per province in South Africa:

Name of Province	Primary school	Combined school	Sec. school	Total No. schools
Eastern Cape	1008	758	45	1811
Free State	282	30	4	316
Gauteng	33	1	0	34
KwaZulu-Natal	877	176	80	1133

Limpopo	591	50	35	676
Mpumalanga	246	57	23	325
Northern Cape	138	10	1	139
North West	318	21	37	376
Western Cape	303	39	1	343
Total	3795	1142	226	5153

Table 2.2 Number of schools practising multi-grade teaching in South Africa

2.4. Challenges facing schools practising multi-grade teaching

The study conducted by du Plessis and Subramanien (2014) in South Africa, Eastern Cape Province, Uitenhage District regarding challenges facing teachers in MGT schools identified and group the challenges into three typologies as per the table below:

TYOLOGY	CATEGORIES
First order challenges relating to intrinsic challenges or teacher related challenges, also called micro level challenges (self)	<p>Perceived uncaring attitude of the DBE hurts teachers</p> <p>Unpreparedness for multi-grade teaching demotivates teachers</p> <p>Negative perceptions about the multi-grade learners</p>
Second order challenges relating to extrinsic challenges or school level challenges, also called meso level challenges (school)	<p>Isolation and distance impacts on communication and teaching</p> <p>Time constraints and work overload as a result of multiple roles</p>

	Lack of resources Curriculum challenges Learner related challenges
Third order challenges relating to system challenges, also referred to as macro level challenges (system wide, beyond school and self)	Lack of support from parents Lack of external curriculum training Lack of departmental support from officials

Table 2.3 MGT challenges adapted from du Plessis and Subramanien (2014, p. 25)

2. 4.1 Perceived uncaring attitude of the DBE hurts teachers

There is a perception in South Africa that the DBE does not provide support to the MGT schools; hence the narrative of uncaring attitude of the Department of Basic Education. It is seen as doing nothing to deal with the negative conditions they encounter (du Plessis & Subramanien, 2014; Brown, 2010). Joubert (2010) concurs with the views expressed by various scholars above and further cites the absence of national and or provincial policies on MGT. Teachers and school principals are left to fend for themselves regarding management, administrative and curriculum issues they find themselves in. The lack of close monitoring and supervision by District Officials due to incapacity is also cause for concern for teachers who strive on their own to implement MGT without departmental support (Kucita, et al., 2013). The situation in South Africa is the direct opposite of what is happening in other parts of the world where MGT is planned for and supported.

2. 4.2 Unpreparedness for multi-grade teaching de-motivates teachers

The lack of training either at a tertiary level or through in-service training; ill-equipped educators to handle the phenomenon of MGT are indications of unpreparedness of teachers to deal with MGT schools. Because of these challenges, they do not even complete the syllabus for the year

(du Plessis & Subramanien, 2014). Looking at teacher qualifications and experience most educators are either unqualified or under qualified. While some of them have 4 year degrees and other similar educational qualification (Brown, 2010), they are not equipped with skills to handle MGT as alluded to elsewhere in this document. Professional qualifications exclude training in MGT in most countries I have studied. However, in countries like Bhutan a module on MGT is included on the Bachelor of Education teacher qualification. Turkey is another one where course on teaching in MGT classes in their teacher professional training are provided (Beukes, 2006; Aksoy, 2008; Brown, 2010; Kucita, et al., 2013; Joubert, 2010; Joyce, 2014; du Plessis & Subramanien, 2014).

Inexperienced teachers is also another challenge facing these schools because teachers do not want to work in these schools because of MGT situation, remoteness, ruggedness and rural context of the areas in which these schools are located. Experienced teachers are mostly those who teach in their village and it is difficult to get new staff due to perceived unfavourable living conditions in rural areas (Brown, 2010, Kucita, et a., 2013; Joubert, 2010; Joyce, 2014; du Plessis & Subramanien, 2014). From the literature I have read, Bhutan is the only country with a policy to deploy and retain teachers trained to teach in MGT schools for two years, although their policy is not followed and monitored by their Human Resource Directorate. The lack of monitoring has resulted in some of these teachers being taken up in mono-grade teaching schools, thus exacerbating the scarcity of properly qualified teachers in MGT schools. Therefore, obtaining and retaining teachers who are experienced in MGT remains a challenge (Kucita, et al., 2013).

2.4. 3 Negative perceptions about learners learning in schools practicing multi-grade teaching

Frustrations and negative attitude that some educators have about MGT can have negative attitude towards learners that they view as uneducable, unable to match with their peers in urban areas who were exposed to libraries, computers and different role models in addition to their educators (du Plessis & Subramanien, 2014). Joubert (2010) asserts that the education that the learners receive does not prepare them well; they lack or do not match even the basic skills.

2. 4.4 Isolation and distance impacts on communication and teaching

One of the challenges encountered by educators and school principals in rural multi-grade schools is the isolation and distance which impacts on communication and teaching. A distance of about 180 kilometres from the schools to the District office became a communication hindrance when it comes to attending meetings and or workshops. On top of that, learners are either released early or else no schooling takes place on meeting or workshop days (du Plessis & Subramanien, 2014). Schools need support, either from one another or from the circuits and district offices. Distance and communication is a barrier to educative teaching to both educators and learners who need to travel long distances from homes to schools. Distance between schools and between schools and circuit or district offices as well as lack of network for telephones and internet negatively affect support and communication efforts. For example, information reaches the schools so late that at times outdated circulars are received (du Plessis & Subramanien 2014). Distance, geographical remoteness and inaccessibility are also issues in South Africa, but not in all schools (Brown, 2010). According to du Plessis and Subramanien (2014), student teachers do not practise in these schools because of distance, thus, depriving them the disposition of the context and at the same time these schools are robbed of the new perspectives which might come with these students from tertiary institutions; hence the outcry about isolation.

2. 4.5 Time constraints and work overload as a result of multiple roles

Time is another factor where educators had to teach more than one grade level in one period. Time tables developed by educators are for single grade levels but they use it to teach three grade levels and above (du Plessis & Subramanien, 2014). Brown (2010) is of the same view as du Plessis and Subramanien (2014) on the issue of work overload and time constraints to implement MGT.

2.4.6 Lack of resources

Dependence on Norms and Standards for School Funding which is regulated by the learner enrolment in each school impinges negatively on physical resources like infrastructure (du

Plessis & Subramanien, 2014). Infrastructure includes basic resources in the schools and area surrounding it. Some schools experience a shortage of floor space or classrooms such that an overcrowding of between 60 and 110 learners of different grade levels are found in one classroom and are taught by one teacher (Aksoy, 2008; Brown 2010; Kucita, et al., 2013). The situation in some schools is the opposite because classrooms are big and enough with few learners found in each class or school (Joubert, 2010; Joyce, 2014). Some of the reasons for big schools without learners in the classrooms are the migration or exodus of communities to cities as a result of basic infrastructural shortages like water and electricity and employment opportunities (Joubert, 2010).

The same applies to human resources; teachers stay for few months and quit because of the uninviting environment in the rural communities (du Plessis & Subramanien 2014). Human resource in terms of post provisioning norm (PPN) is a challenge in most of these schools. In South Africa the creation of educator posts is the responsibility of the Minister of Basic Education (Department of Basic Education, 1998). The model that is used to create posts is Peter Morkel Norm which provides that educators must be allocated according to the number of weighted learners in that school (Department of Basic Education, 1998). Learner enrolments in schools practising MGT is usually low leading to a small number of educators allocated to these schools.

2. 4.7 Curriculum challenges

Curriculum policies are not aligned to MGT classes but are designed for mono-grade teaching classes in South Africa (Brown, 2010; Joubert, 2010; du Plessis & Subramanien 2014). Bhutan is distinct from South Africa in that all subjects except English for class 5 are aligned to curriculum policies (Kucita et al., 2013).

2. 4. 8 Learner related challenges

Learner enrolments are also affected by fluctuating attendance as a result of drop outs or new registrations caused by parents who are seasonal workers, weather conditions, long distances,

which also impacts on school funding allocation as it relies on annual survey statistics (du Plessis & Subramanien 2014). In Turkey discrepancies amongst learner access to education exist as a result of gender, social and economic classes and geographic locations (Aksoy, 2008). Statistics in Turkey indicates that 10% of children who are not enrolled for primary basic education and amongst them 70% are female; 67% live in rural areas and 53% are poor (Aksoy, 2008). Boarding schools and transporting learners from homes to school is another alternative to provide and bridge education gap, though several challenges from these learners like poor self-concept, depression, low self-respect, family longing, nervousness and reluctance were identified and reported by researchers (Aksoy, 2008). Joubert (2010) shared the same sentiments with Aksoy (2008) on the usefulness of learner transport but further express that its insufficiency deprives schooling to other learners who drop out in winter.

2. 4.9 Lack of support from parents

The other challenges relate to the lack of support from parents due to employment conditions, poverty and illiteracy level (du Plessis & Subramanien, 2014). Illiteracy level of parents in most communities with schools practising MGT is so high that others do not know the type of schools their children attend, whether mono-grade or MGT school; some do not understand why their children will be promoted and still learn with learners doing the previous grade level and they are unable to support their children (Kucita, et al., 2013).

2. 4.10 Lack of external curriculum training

The lack of external curriculum training is according to du Plessis and Subramanien (2014), also a challenge because teachers were not only untrained for MGT but workshops as well, policies and procedures did not address their unique circumstances. There is a lack of support from departmental officials due to a lack of skills and experience. Although many studies had reported about ineffectiveness of MGT classes, countries that practise them as a pedagogical choice and those that recognise them as a pedagogy that needs to be considered in uniqueness as a way to deliver effective educative teaching recommend them. They view trained teachers using adjusted curriculum to suit MGT classes as motivated and performing better (Aksoy, 2008;

Kucita, et al., 2013). The challenge becomes more evident when teachers are left to fend for themselves as they implement mono-grade designed curriculum in MGT environment. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that time allocated for a single grade is used for MGT and there is no pre-service or in-service training, or any other relevant support from departmental officials (Joubert, 2010; du Plessis & Subramanien, 2014; Joyce, 2014).

The study reported in this dissertation focused on first-hand information on the instructional leadership practices within the context of MGT. It is drawing from the experiences of principals and teachers. It is hoped that the results of the study will reveal information that might be useful in shaping policies and interventions that need to be made in schools practising MGT for these schools to receive the unique attention they deserve, and for educative teaching to take place.

Other challenges reported by researchers are those which are firstly related to Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT) where mother tongue is used in the early years of schooling or Foundation Phase then English in the following upper or senior grades which makes it difficult to teach in MGT classes (Kucita, et al., 2013; Aksoy, 2008; Joubert, 2010). Most of these schools combine grades that follow each other in a chronological manner like Grade 1 and Grade 2, starting from a combination of two grades. The second aspect relates to teaching different grade levels separately (gradedness) as grades in a MGT class (Mulryan-Kyne, 2007; Joyce, 2014; Kucita, et al., 2013; Brown, 2010). Some schools combine learners of different grade levels and thereafter teach them as grade level groups or class. The third and last aspect pertains to merging different schools to be one school to address learner and educator shortage (Kucita, et al., 2013). Joubert (2010) concurs with Kucita, et al., (2013) that merging and closing schools is not a solution but a challenge; the best option is to support MGT. Long distance became an issue when schools are merged and some communities are robbed the benefit of having a school in their area with all its advantages.

2.5 Experiences of principals and teachers of instructional leadership practices within the context of multi-grade teaching

Principals and teachers experience instructional leadership within the context of MGT in different ways; others feel positive about it and others view it in a negative way. Those who experience it in a positive manner cite advantages of providing access to education to a large number of learners living in remote areas with sparse population and schools, promoting learner independence, affording opportunities for interdependence amongst learners when assisting one another. An example of this is when the higher grade level learners assist the lower grade level and that creates more learning opportunities where reinforcement occurs in the higher grade level when the lower grade level is taught and the lower grade level hears what is taught to the higher grade level (Kucita, et al., 2013). Principals and teachers who feel negative about it view MGT as an unavoidable nuisance which is frustrating because of its hard work, demand for more preparation and planning, time consuming and the pressure it puts on them as they are expected to teach differentiated curricula in different grade levels (Brown, 2010; Joubert, 2010; du Plessis & Subramanien, 2014). Work overload is one of the things that make principals and teachers dislike MGT because principals are usually the only managers at a school and is also a full time teachers, yet responsible for the daily administration and management of the school without secretaries (Joubert, 2010). Teachers on the other hand perceive MGT as of poor quality as there is no policy guiding it; the curriculum is designed for mono-grade teaching and they are expected to teach 12 subjects a day depending on the number of combined grade levels in class without any training or support on it, and also using the time table of a single grade level (Joubert, 2010; du Plessis & Subramanien, 2014).

2.6 Strategies of teaching in multi-grade teaching classes

Joubert (2010) identifies four main strategies that teachers use in multi-grade classes, and these mainly entail the involvement of stakeholders to support MGT schools. The identified strategies are the involvement of district officials who must be specialists for MGT in order for them to be capable of supporting and ensuring the sustainability of the interventions that the Department of Basic Education may, from time to time devise to enhance the quality of teaching. The second strategy focuses on the role of the community in sharing and supporting the norms, values and vision of the school; the third revolves around the role of the government in the provision of infrastructure needs like buildings, water and electricity, electronic media and the last deals with the emphasis put on conducting research on MGT to intervene for development purposes.

Brown (2010) on the other hand proposes three curriculum adaptation strategies on curriculum issues in MGT which are a multi-year curriculum spans whereby the learners across two or three grades tackle the same topic and activities divided into units rather than teaching all subject content in one grade. The second entails adopting a differentiated curricula whereby each grade level focuses on its relevant curriculum level but the topics are the same for all grades in that class. The third is a; quasi mono-grade which has elements of a mono-grade because each grade is taught separately as a group and it allows tackling different topics as well as learner and materials-centred approach where learner study guides are developed for learners to engage on them at their own pace. These strategies include the use of library corners, suggestion box for learners, integrated curriculum and in-service training and follow up for educators as well as a link between the community and school (Brown, 2010).

In the study conducted by Brown in the Eastern Cape Province, educators recommended a cross-grade group work as the best strategy of teaching in MGT classes (Brown, 2010). Mulryan-Kyne (2007) suggests eight strategies to consider for MGT classes of which Brown (2010) converges with some and those are curriculum development and planning which entails relevant grade level content, classroom organisation and layout encompassing an appropriate classroom set up to promote effective teaching and learning, the selection and use of appropriate materials and resources like self-study and available materials; the selection and use of a variety of appropriate teaching strategies including individualisation, ability, within and cross grade level grouping, effective time management meaning the use of realistic useful time tables that will allow the maximum engagement of all learners in class in fruitful beneficial activities, classroom management and discipline that encourages a conducive environment which promotes self-engagement with tasks in an orderly classroom, assessment and evaluation incorporating continuous assessment and evaluation, analysis of results to provide feedback and building block for development and catering of learner needs as well as parent and community relationships to share the school norms and values, tap and motivate their involvement and support for the school.

According to the report by UNESCO (2015), the strategies that can be used to teach classes practising MGT are teaching all groups together meaning topics that can be taught to all the grades can be taught together and assessed at different grade levels. The second one means teaching one grade level while others work independently which implies that teachers need to give themselves time to focus on individual grade levels. Group leaders or tutors need to lead their groups with discussions or group work or else individual work given like working in workbooks, notes taking or class work. The third strategy is teaching one subject to all grade levels at varying levels of difficulty. Learners of different grades, ages and abilities are taught simultaneously one theme and assessed differently, for example, difficult questions directed to older and high grade doing learners, then the easy supporting questions directed to low grades and young learners. In that way all especially the gifted students benefit, for higher grades it is reinforcement and the low grades learn new things. The fourth one involves developing activities for non-taught groups. Older learners or those doing higher grades can be instructed to conduct research, investigate and collect information on given themes or topics on their own whilst the educator caters for or focuses on supporting the young or those in lower grades. The lesson objectives must be indicated to students before the commencement of the research. The fifth one incorporates developing peer, cross age and cross grade teaching strategies. Students of different age and grade are grouped together to perform certain tasks on their own assisted, lead or taught by their peers. The peer teacher or tutor assesses the group knowledge and understanding by questioning them in order to move from the known to the unknown. Allocated tasks to be performed must range from the easiest to the difficult to accommodate different ages and grades. The last strategy is relating learning with the daily experience of the learners. The educator's teaching must be related to the learner's experiences, tradition, culture and environment to enhance their lesson understanding.

2.7 Implications of multi-grade teaching on learners' academic achievement

Current research on this issue suggests diversity of views regarding the effect of MGT on learner academic achievement. In a nutshell, there is no agreement among scholars whether mono-grade teaching yield better results compared to MGT or not. For instance, a study conducted in Latin America revealed that learners in MGT schools perform poorly and achieve low scores in

international tests of academic achievement (McEwan, 2008). A similar situation was found in Bhutan where learners in MGT schools were discovered to have poor learner academic achievement and receiving poor education compared to schools practicing mono-grade teaching (Kucita, et al., 2013). Similarly, a study conducted in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa indicated that 33.3 % of schools practising MGT performed better in learner academic achievement as opposed to 66.7% learners attending schools practicing mono-grade teaching in class (Department of Basic Education, 2010). However, according to Coskun, Metin, Bulbul and Yilmaz (2011), there seems to be no agreement on learner academic achievement between mono-grade and MGT schools. Other scholars see MGT in class as producing learners who achieve better academically as opposed to schools practicing mono-grade teaching and for other scholars it is *vice versa*. Coskun, et al., (2011), asserts that learners in MGT schools develop more self-confidence, leadership skills, self-concept, emotional and social qualities compared to mono-grade because of its mixed age, group and grade level nature.

The opposite of the above was reported by Mulryan- Kyne (2007) who asserted that there is no difference in cognitive achievement between learners in mono- grade and MGT schools. The views expressed by Brown (2010) converge with those of Coskun et al (2011) on the issue of improvement of learner self-esteem and further indicates that it decreases drop-out rates and repetition of classes, improves civic behaviour and academic achievement after interventions like Escuela Nueva Programmes implementation. Joubert (2010) also asserts that MGT schools show poor results. Having looked at what researchers denote about MGT, the challenges faced, strategies to be used as well as its link with academic achievement, it becomes imperative to look at what the models of instructional leadership entails in order to understand the manner in which principals and teachers enact instructional leadership within the context of MGT.

2.8 Models of instructional leadership

Different scholars have developed various models on instructional leadership to guide its practices in order to improve academic performance of the learners. A model is a broad framework or guideline which is used to give a more visual representation of a particular phenomenon (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Some of the models, although not limited to

them are Hallinger and Murphy (1985) model on instructional leadership (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985); Weber's Model on instructional leadership (Weber, 1996) and Wallace Model on instructional leadership (Wallace, 2013).

2.8.1 Wallace Model

The model that impacts on this study is Wallace Model (Wallace, 2013). This perspective identified five domains of principals as leaders of learning; namely, shaping the vision of academic success for all students, thereby setting high standards and goals for student achievement; creating a climate hospitable to education that is ensuring a supportive conducive environment to all stakeholders; cultivating leadership in others by encouraging collegiality, collaboration, shared responsibility and team work of all stake-holders with the objective of achieving educative teaching; improving instruction by monitoring the work of teachers and developing them professionally as well as managing people; data and processes to foster school improvement (Wallace Foundation, 2013).

Wallace Model is relevant to this study due to its congruence with the roles and responsibilities of school principals as instructional leaders. The duties of a principal as an instructional leader includes among others, the general administration, personnel, teaching, extra and co-curricular, interact with stake-holders and communication (Department of Basic Education, 1996; Department of Basic Education, 1998). This Model would enable us to look at the extent to which principals in the study are able to interact with staff and learners in a way that supported endeavours to facilitate effective teaching.

2. 8.2 Shaping the vision of academic success for all students

Leadership and envisioning cannot be separated as leading is the ability to convert vision into action and reality (Ramsey, 2003). The principal needs to spell out and communicate the vision of the school and set high, clear, achievable standards to all stakeholders and motivates them all to share and work towards the achievement of that vision (Wallace, 2013). The set expectations must be that all learners can achieve. This means that the educators will teach the learners to

their maximum capability and the learners will do whatever is possible to achieve high standards; the same applies to all other stakeholders for the support they render at school. The shared vision can be spelled out in whatever communication amongst the stakeholders which might be symbolical, through celebrations or ceremonies, in academic reports or newsletters and stories, and feedback must continuously be provided on how far the school is to achieve its vision (The Education Alliance, Brown University, 2008). A shared school vision directs stakeholders regarding the allocation and management of resources, personnel deployment, organisation of schedules, professional development activities in the order of priority and denotes decisions about teaching and learning (Murphy & Lick, 2005). According to the Wallace Foundation (2013), setting high expectations for all the students bridges the achievement gap between the advantaged and the disadvantaged learners. Leithwood (2012) asserts that progressive leaders build a shared vision by inculcating commitment to a vision for work with staff, students and other stake-holders, developing understanding of the specific implications of the schools' vision for its programmes and the nature of classroom instruction, motivating the advancement of organisational norms that promote openness to divert towards the direction of that vision and assisting staff and other stakeholders to comprehend the relationship that exist between the vision of their schools and broad provincial policy initiatives and priorities.

2. 8.3 Creating a climate hospitable to education

The notion of school climate refers to how individuals or stakeholders feel about the culture of the school (McEwan, 2003). Creating a climate hospitable to education entails ensuring that the environment at school is safe, blameless thus allowing opportunities to take positive risks, professional, supportive, conducive to teaching and learning to achieve academic standards, characterised by trust and collaboration amongst stakeholders, inviting and welcoming to all students and teachers physically, cognitively and emotionally as well as stakeholder involvement in school activities (Wallace Foundation, 2013). To promote an enabling conducive climate the principal must play a pivotal role in boosting stakeholder morale for them to feel worthy and capable of contributing positively in teaching and learning.

2.8.4 Cultivating leadership in others

Wallace Foundation (2013) asserts that effective principals work with others, develop and share leadership skills and practices across the organisation and believe in stakeholder involvement. Research conducted at the universities of Minnesota and Toronto indicates that schools with positive climate and where leadership is accelerated to other stakeholders proves to have higher academic achievement than schools that work in silos (Wallace Foundation, 2013). The research findings stated that principals, influential teachers, staff teams and others are associated with better student performance on Mathematics and reading tests (Wallace Foundation, 2013).

2.8.5 Improving instruction

To improve instruction the principal works directly with the teachers; bridges seclusion gap amongst the educators and between the teachers and the school management team, thereby providing classroom support (Wallace Foundation, 2013). Teachers are motivated by the principals to deliberate on continuous professional learning, engage on research based skills and instructional approaches to improve teaching and learning despite their preference to work in isolation (Wallace, 2013). Research conducted at the University of Minnesota and the University of Toronto reveals that 83% of school principals converge that the following practices conducted continuously improve teaching and learning, that is, classroom visits, monitoring work of educators in class, tracking teacher's professional development needs, time spent together by professional adults with students to provide support and providing feedback after classroom visits on strengths and weaknesses.

Effective principals understand that team-work plays a pivotal role to improve instruction; hence they rely on heads of department (HODs) or subject heads as experts for instructional support to perform the above mentioned duties (Wallace Foundation, 2013). Opportunities are created and scheduled for teacher collaboration and professional development through peer support, observation of each other's classroom whilst teaching, team planning and grade meetings (Mendels, 2012). Lunenberg (2010) is of the same view as that of Wallace Foundation (2013) that teacher collaboration through team work yields positive results such as clear knowledge on

what students should know and be able to do per unit instruction; design curriculum and instructional strategies to achieve desired results; initiate substantial assessment strategies to measure student achievement and analyse results for development and improvement purposes.

2. 8.6 Managing people, data and processes

Managing people, data and processes entails making appropriate, diplomatic and maximum use of resources at hand, hiring good people, using information correctly and ensure systems for administration are in place to manage schools (Wallace Foundation, 2013). Managing people commences with a positive, good, correct recruitment strategy, empowerment for staff development, retaining good hard and smart working staff as well as weeding out incapable unwilling to grow staff, not deviating from policies agreed upon with labour organisations. Leithwood (2012) identified five strategies to manage, capacitate and build trusting relationship with people which are providing support and demonstrating consideration for individual staff members, stimulating growth in the professional capacities of individuals, modelling the school's values and practices, building trusting relationship with and among staff, students and parents and establishing productive working relationships with teacher federation representatives.

Managing data involves gathering statistics and information, analyse it to determine strengths, weaknesses, what works well for the organisation and what does not work; thereafter strategise about how to make use of that information to ameliorate the performance of the organisation. The Wallace Foundation (2013) suggests that an inquiry must be conducted to understand the challenges, their nature and causes at school, and collaboration of staff promoted for that inquiry and to respond to it. Lunenburg (2010) suggests three ways of using data to improve instruction namely, the existence of each student performance data, the public nature of the assessment system and gauging the gap of low achieving students by targeting those schools to provide support. Performance data needs to be simplified and matched with objectives and clear curriculum targets to connect what is taught to what is learned (Lunenburg, 2010). Individual learner performances should be analysed for individualised intervention, and assessment should be aligned to the curriculum (Lunenburg, 2010). The public nature of the assessment system incorporates the annual analysis and ranking order of schools according to their academic

achievement, award high performing schools for motivation purposes and to expose them as role models to low achieving schools (Lunenburg, 2010). Individual and school development plans are invented from resolute data which must be apportioned according to race, gender, socio-economic status, language proficiency and disability to focus curriculum and instruction. Gauging the gap of low achieving students implies targeting those schools to provide support by for instance, twinning high with low achieving schools, pairing low achieving schools with a team of principals, subject specialists, instructional coaches and researchers to observe current practices, engage in student performance data with staff and assist in developing and implementing improvement plan (Lunenburg, 2010).

Managing processes according to Wallace Foundation (2013), incorporates six steps, namely planning which accommodates the framing of scrupulous targets for learning improvement; implementation which entails getting the schools to assimilate what is good for the organisation, do or implement it to necessitate improvement in learning; supporting involving motivating teachers and students to work towards the achievement of the school goals; advocating which includes challenging minimal financial support to schools by the DBE and low expectations; communicating encompass stakeholder involvement and awareness of the school goals and monitoring denotes control to guarantee good results.

2. 9 Chapter summary

In this chapter an overview of literature pertaining to MGT and instructional leadership was provided. Theoretical framework employed in the study discussed. In the following chapter the research design and methodology as well as rationale for the use of methodology will be described.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter the national and international literature on instructional leadership within the context of Multi-Grade Teaching (MGT) as well as experiences of principals and teachers who are expected to play a pivotal role in learner success and the improvement of progression academic results was discussed. This chapter aims to provide a detailed description of the research design and methodology that was used to generate data on this topic which is exploring instructional leadership practices within the context of Multi-Grade Teaching: experiences of principals and teachers. Data generation methods used are explained in detail. Data analysis procedures, ethical issues as well as trustworthiness issues are expounded on.

3.2 Research paradigm

The research adopted a qualitative research approach which is located within interpretive research paradigm. Willis (2007) defines a paradigm as a comprehensive belief system, world view or framework that guides research and practice in the field, focusing on the nature of truth (axiology), the nature of reality (ontology) and what it means to know (epistemology). Maree (2011) shares the same view with Willis that paradigm is a set of assumptions or beliefs about fundamental aspects of reality which gives rise to a particular world-view, addressing ontology, epistemology and methodology. Cohen, Manion & Morrison, (2011) suggest that paradigm is having three parts, namely ontology, axiology and epistemology which lead to the methodology used to arrive at the latter three. From the above definitions paradigm can be conceived as a person's way of thinking, explaining and doing things, with a special focus on ontology, axiology, epistemology and methodology. In human sciences, there are different paradigms. The most dominant ones are positivism, post-positivism, interpretive and pragmatism.

3.3 Research Design

For the purpose of this study a qualitative approach using an interpretive paradigm has been adopted. Qualitative research is an umbrella term referring to a social inquiry on how people interpret and make sense of their lived experiences with a focus on the nature of reality (ontology), how the researcher knows (epistemology) and methodology (Atkinson, Coffey & Delamont, 2001). Creswell (2003) shares the same sentiments with Atkinson, et al., (2001) that qualitative research focuses on ontology, epistemology and methodology, but continue to add axiology (the role of values in the research) and rhetoric (the language of research) to the discussion. Creswell (2003) is of the view that qualitative research aims to make sense of how other people understand the world. The aim of the research was to understand the principals and teachers' experiences of instructional leadership within the context of MGT. Different study methods were employed in order to better understand this phenomenon from different angles. In this paradigm, it is believed that there is not just one reality of the participants' experiences and how they arrive at what they know (experiences). Most researchers converge on that the elements of qualitative research is on data primacy, meaning that data generation is prioritised before the research design, hypotheses or underlying assumptions and theoretical frameworks; context-bound meaning, culture; economy and politics of the participants shape them and should be considered when conducting the research. The researchers immerse themselves on the setting which means that the researchers must be part of the setting and should be sensitive to it. The use of emic perspective, meaning that the researchers consider data (experiences, feelings and perceptions) from the point of view of the participants is emphasised; thick descriptions are used, meaning that the researcher exhausts everything to get and describe deeply the data generated from the participants; research relationship is important, meaning that an honest and unbiased relationship must exist between the researcher and participants. The study was able to abide with the above elements and a qualitative research design was used as it is a subjective and inductive process; the focus was also on non-statistical inquiry (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011).

This study was used within interpretive paradigm which is in concordance with qualitative design, and the focus was on the participants' understanding and attribution of meaning to the inquiry under study (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Willis (2007) concurs with the above

statement that interpretive paradigm is based on what the world means to others; how they construct, understand and interpret the social reality of the world around them. The purpose of the study was on the experiences that participants created through their comprehension of instructional leadership within the context of MGT. The interpretive paradigm was deemed relevant for the study to understand the participants' thinking, explanations and the way of doing things through their own experiences. The study was also influenced by the elements in figure 5 as adapted in Nieuwenhuis (2007, p. 61) as characteristics of interpretive paradigm.

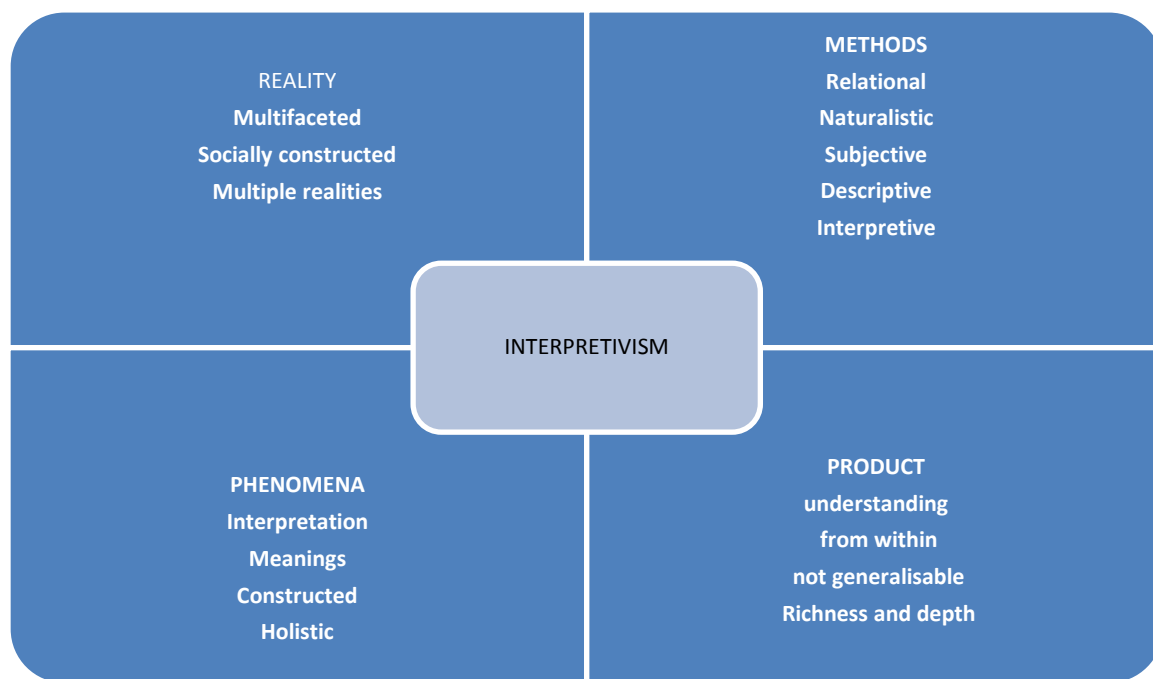


Figure 3 Representation of interpretivism adapted from Nieuwenhuis (2007 p. 61).

3.4 Methodology

The preceding section dealt with issues of research design and this one deals with issues of research methodology. The two concepts are closely related. Methodology refers to the description of study design, procedures for data generation, methods for data analysis, selection of subjects and details of the specific treatment (Willis, 2007). Henning, van Rensburg & Smit (2004) concur with the above definition by referring to methodology as a group of methods that

complement one another and have the “goodness of fit” to deliver data and findings that will reflect the research question and research purpose. Naidoo (2006) also concurs with the above definitions by defining methodology as a range of approaches and techniques that are used to gather data, to be the basis of description, inference, interpretation, explanation and prediction. To comply with the above definitions the approach and research paradigm contextualising the study, methodology sampling technique, site selection, tools used to generate and analyse data are illuminated. Trustworthiness, ethical considerations and limitations are also discussed in greater details. The reasons for the choice of research approach and methods, together with the advantages of the research methods have been expounded. The theoretical framework underpinning the study has been presented.

A case study was adopted as a research methodology to conduct qualitative research in order to get naturalistic, credible, trustworthy data (Maree, 2011; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). A case study is an examination of a specific phenomenon such as a programme, an event, a person, a process, an institution or a social group (Merriam, 1988). Case study entails participants’ rich in-depth understanding or perception of events pertinent to the case under study (Yin, 2014). Three different types of case studies exist, namely exploratory, explanatory and descriptive case studies (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). For this study I chose a descriptive case study as it would provide a narrative account and allow me to probe deeply the understanding and experiences of the principals and the teachers; how they practised instructional leadership within the context of MGT.

3.5 The context of the study

The study aimed to investigate the case of instructional leadership within the context of MGT bounded in place and time (McMillan, 2010). The research sites were schools where MGT had been practised for four years or more. Participants had worked in those sites for the same period or more.

3.5.1 Selection of participants

A purposive selection of four primary schools and eight participants was used because it is often an aspect of qualitative research where people assumed to be knowledgeable about the study topic are handpicked (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). The data generation sources were four principals and four teachers, one principal and one teacher from each of the four selected primary schools that practised MGT. These participants were deemed appropriate because they were assumed to be rich in information in as far as instructional leadership within the context of MGT is concerned (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Individual interviews using semi-structured interviews were employed. Participants in individual interviews were teachers in the four selected schools and principals of the same selected schools.

3.5.2 Venue for interview and atmosphere

In this study the fields of research were deep rural primary schools offering MGT in the rural area of Pinetown District. The reason for selecting these research sites was to explicate the way people in particular settings came to understand, take action, account for and manage their day-to-day activities in as far as the way schools with MGT classes experience instructional leadership. Different venues were used for interviews to allow for privacy, comfort, relaxed and conducive environment. Principals were interviewed in their own offices where they carry out their daily activities. Teachers were interviewed in their own classrooms. Interviews took place after tuition time to avoid disruptions and to eliminate interrupting teaching time.

3.6 Methods of data generation

Three data generation methods were used, namely semi-structured interviews, classroom observation and documents reviews. Semi-structured interviews were used because the intention was to understand the experiences, observe their behaviour, verbal and non-verbal cues and attach meaning to how the principals and the teachers explored instructional leadership practices within the context of MGT (Seidman, 1998; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Classroom observations were conducted to get live-data on what happens at a classroom level and to

conduct reality check or authenticity of the information gathered during interviews on the phenomenon under study (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Documents were reviewed to get an insight on what happened in the past, interventions made if any to mitigate the past as well as the present situation about the topic under review (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011).

Principals were given a questionnaire about the biography of the school in advance and were requested to complete it within a period of five days. Data was generated twice in each school. Interviews were conducted once in each school. Documents reviews and classroom observation were conducted once in another day, for one day in each school. An interview schedule of questions was used as an instrument for data generation. Data generation was descriptive because it was in the form of words rather than numbers (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). The focus was on the process or way in which schools practising MGT enacted and experienced instructional leadership rather than outcomes or products (Biklen & Bogdan, 1992). Data was studied inductively in order to reveal unanticipated outcomes (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011).

3.6.1 Semi-structured interviews

Interviews are a constructed, purposeful, planned event for data generation (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p. 409). Two interview schedules, one for the teachers and one for the principals were constructed as a guide for data generation. Each interview schedule contains one critical question with sub-questions totalling to five. The focus of the interviews was on addressing the research topic on what the experiences of principals and teachers of instructional leadership practices within the context of multi-grade teaching are. The research instrument contains forms or templates to be completed by the participants on their biographical, as well as school information apart from the interview schedules. According to Seidman (1998), the purpose of the interview is to understand the deep experience of individuals and the meaning they make out of those experiences. The semi-structured interviews were used because it allows flexibility, emergence and probing of new information to understand participants' perspective and experiences (Nieuwenhuis, 2011; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011).

Interviews were recorded with a tape recorder, allowing time to focus on the participants' responses, and an opportunity to probe for clarity and more information. Critiques of interviews mention that they are time consuming, too much costly, open to interviewer bias and makes anonymity difficult (Seidman, 1998; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Participants were informed in advance and before the commencement of the interviews about the anticipated time for interview process, how their privacy would be protected (Seidman 1998). The anticipation was that interviews would last for one and a half to two hours. Interviewer bias was protected in a manner that will be deliberated on at length where trustworthiness issues are discussed.

3.6.2 Structured observations

According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011, p. 456), observations refer to looking and noting systematically people, events, behaviours, settings and routines, affording the researcher the opportunity to generate "live data" occurring in its natural setting. Observations enable the researcher to gather data on physical, human, interactional and programme settings (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Nieuwenhuis (2007) affirms that observations are a data generating technique providing individuals or group dynamics and behaviours insider perspective in different settings. Three types of observation exist namely, structured observations which are used to test hypothesis; hence its observation schedule is prepared in advance; then there are semi-structured observations which generate data to elucidate certain issues and unstructured observation which gather data before deciding its relevancy to the research (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Structured observation was opted because the intention was to confirm the reality of what was said during interviews, enabling me to see, hear and experience what was said by participants on their experiences in the topic exploring instructional leadership practices within the context of multi-grade teaching. Classroom observations using an observation schedule were conducted for one day in one class in each of the four purposefully selected schools to get first-hand information that would help supplement and prove or refute what was said during the interviews.

Different types of observers exist, namely, complete observer where the observer looks at the situation at a distance without comprehending what is observed; observer as participant where there is no direct involvement, but concentration is on observing behaviour patterns to understand assumptions, values and beliefs in the situation; participant as observer where there is direct involvement and participation in the research process as well as complete participant where the observer immerses completely in the field without the participants' knowledge that they are being observed (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011; Nieuwenhuis 2007). For this study I completely immersed myself in the research process hence I became a participant as an observer to understand behaviour patterns of instructional leadership practices within the context of MGT.

Field notes were taken on whether the teacher taught and manage one grade level or different grade levels at a time, classroom arrangement and management, use of teaching aids, the tasks given to learners, whether they were independent, peer or group tasks, assessing learners as individuals in a group or as a group as well as teacher motivation to learners. A single period which is one hour was allocated for each classroom observation but each time spent depended on the number of grade levels taught in class and whether similar or different topics were taught in each grade level.

3. 6. 3 Documents reviews

An interpretive outlook views documents as being socially constructed (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). A document is a record of an event or process, produced by private or public institution and divided into primary or secondary documents (Maree, 2007; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). According to Cohen, et al., (2011), documents created by public include minutes and reports. Documents like the vision, mission, communication book, minutes of meetings with special focus on curriculum delivery and academic progression schedules were analysed in the four selected schools.

3.7 Data presentation and analysis

To analyse the data interviews were transcribed; for classroom observation field notes were taken and reviewed documents were analysed for crystallisation purposes (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). When interviewing the participants the spoken words were analysed. Data was analysed using qualitative content analysis. In content analysis verbatim transcripts are coded, organised into categories of meaning Nieuwenhuis (as cited in Maree, 2011). When processing data, possible transcription mistakes were checked for trustworthiness (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). After organising data into categories I came out with the themes that will answer how principals and teachers experience instructional leadership within the context of MGT.

3.8 Measures to ensure trustworthiness of the findings

During data generation process trustworthiness, credibility and dependability were considered. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), trustworthiness includes credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. These four terms are a delineation of the original categories of internal and external validity, reliability and objectivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) in terms of quantitative research. For trustworthiness crystallisation of various sources of data were individual interviews, classroom observation and document analysis. Data was generated in its natural setting without any manipulation. Tape recorder was used during data generation and field notes were taken during observations to substantiate data generated during interviews. For confirmability, notes were kept on decisions taken during data generation, inclusion of direct quotes from participants and findings were shared with participants for stakeholder checking and credibility (Maree & van der Westhuizen, 2007). For transferability thick description on data generation and interpretation was used (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011).

3.8.1 Credibility

For credibility of data I conducted a preliminary visit to the research sites to familiarise myself with it, observe their daily engagements and to establish rapport with the participants. I also employed member-checking. Member-checking implies the continuous testing of data by the original provider to allow opportunity for corrections and additions to be made as well as ownership of what is reported (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). After data generation each participant was given a transcript to check the correctness of what was captured. Final versions of data presentations and analysis were also sent to participants, their comments and contributions invited for credibility purposes. All these steps were taken in order to ensure that my interpretations are checked for accuracy, and thus do away with personal biases which might obfuscate the findings.

3.8.2 Transferability

Transferability refers to a situation whereby the research findings can be replicated or implemented to other similar contextual situations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Since this study employed qualitative approach, whose results cannot be generalised because of its sample size, thick description of the inquiry under investigation was provided (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Thick descriptions refer to the provision of detailed account of the processes undertaken during the course of study (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). For the purpose of this study, detailed information about the area where research sites or schools are, the description of schools and their profiles, the profiles of the participants involved, the methodology employed and the time consumed to generate data were elaborated on.

3.8.3 Dependability

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), there is a close connection between credibility and dependability, with the former affirming the latter. Dependability includes a number of techniques such as member-checking, debriefing by peers, triangulation, prolonged engagement in the research site, persistent observations, the use of reflexive journals, the negative case analysis, as well as the independent audits (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A detailed report on research design and data generation method was provided, namely member checking as presented under

credibility and crystallisation of various data generation methods to assist the readers of this inquiry to comprehend application and implication of methods.

3.8.4 Confirmability

Confirmability means affirming the findings through audit trails of research process and product (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The focus is on the objectivity of the results, ensuring that they are not as a result of the researcher bias, but a reflection of what was generated from the site and a resemblance of the participants' experiences and views. Evidence of decisions taken during data generation, field notes taken, recorded tape and inclusion of direct quotes from participants and findings were shared with participants for stakeholder checking for confirmability (Maree & van der Westhuizen, 2007). The admission of a predisposition as a criteria to confirmability mentioned by Miles and Huberman (1994) is that I knew principals who are participants in the study and they played a role in identifying teachers who participated in the study, though guided by sample selection (participants must have worked in the site for four years and above), but it can still compromise objectivity.

3.9 Ethical considerations

It is absolutely important that research is conducted in an ethically responsible way. For instance, issues of autonomy, anonymity, non-maleficence and beneficence were observed (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). For autonomy, permission to conduct research in the targeted schools as well as consent from participants was asked (Maree, 2011). Participants were given adequate information on the aims of the research, the procedures that were followed when conducting the research, the credibility of the researcher and how the results would be used so that they make an informed decision to participate in the research or not (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Participants were told about their right to quit any time they want or else declare their contribution null and void, such that it must not be used (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Permission from the University of KwaZulu-Natal schools of ethics to conduct the study was requested. Permission was also requested from KwaZulu-Natal Department of

Basic Education to conduct research study in its institutions. They were informed that the generated data would be kept in a safe place in the locked cabinet of the supervisor.

To observe anonymity, the privacy of the participants was protected, and they were told the truth when writing and reporting findings (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Codes were to protect the identities of the participants. For instance, teachers were referred to as Teacher A, B, C, D; Principal A, B, C, D and School A, B, C, D. The permission was asked from the participants to take notes and use a voice recorder in generating the data (Schulze, 2002). All the steps highlighted above were taken in order to protect the identity of the participants. The reason for hiding their identities is to ensure that they are protected from possible harm. Research principle of non-maleficence has to do with ensuring that no participant should be exposed to any harm as a result of participating in the study. No physical, emotional, psychological and professional harm, taunt or force was inflicted on them when generating data (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). The principle of autonomy and voluntary participation were acknowledged through the fact that all the participants were informed of all their rights including the fact that they were free to participate on their own willingness

3.9 Limitations for the study

Any study has its limitations; similarly, every study has to be designed in such a way that any design limitation should be addressed. One major limitations of the study was that its findings cannot be generalised across the whole population. That is due to the fact that it was a qualitative study where data were generated on only four selected sites using a small group of participants. This limitation was eliminated through a number of processes that have been explained in the section dealing with trustworthiness considerations. For instance, I had to ensure that any person who wishes to conduct a similar study can follow the processes I followed. Through thick and detailed descriptions of the case study sites, and the contexts of the schools, it is possible for any researcher to do the same.

3.10 Chapter summary

In this chapter I explained in details the research paradigm, design and methodology employed and its relevance for the study. Sampling procedures and rationale for the choice of the sample was expounded on. A case study conducted in four purposeful selected research sites and purposeful selected participants was elaborated on. The context of the study, the venue for interviews as well as in-depth description of research instruments used was discussed. Issues on data analysis, trustworthiness and ethical considerations were explored. The next chapter presents data analysis, its interpretation and discussion.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter captured the research design, paradigm and methodology used in the study in order to generate data that would answer the research questions. The purpose of this chapter is to present and discuss the analysed data from the semi-structured interviews, classroom observations and document reviews. Before I present and discuss thematically what emerged from my initial analysis, I firstly present the overview of the profiles of these schools. The reason for presenting the profiles in the data section is to ensure that the picture that results from my interpretation and analysis of data is not stripped off its context. I believe that by so doing, it will be easier to understand the picture that emerges and the context.

This chapter is divided into four themes which are as follows (a) How the principals and the teachers enact instructional leadership within the context of multi-grade teaching (b) Challenges encountered by the principals and the teachers when enacting instructional leadership within the context of multi-grade teaching (c) Strategies used by the principals and the teachers to mitigate challenges they face, (d) Implications of multi-grade teaching in learner academic achievement and the chapter is concluded by a summary.

4.2 Profiling of participants and schools

The data that is presented and analysed in this chapter was generated in each of these rural case study sites which are called School A, School B, School C and School D for anonymity purposes. Participants were also selected from these schools and they are called Principal A, Principal B, Principal C and Principal D; Teacher A, Teacher B, Teacher C and Teacher D also for anonymity purposes.

4.2.1 Profiling School A

School A was a primary school situated in a rural area that was characterised by poverty. It had 6 classrooms excluding the Grade R class and recently been fenced. It had clean piped water and electricity, but there was no telephone facility. It was ranked as Quintile 3. Quintile system is a funding formula used by the DBE to rank schools in terms of economic conditions of the population around it. “This is done to assist the Department of Basic Education in determining the level of financial support it will provide. Therefore, the lower the quintile to which the school belongs the higher the level of funding it will get, and *vice versa*” (Bhengu, 2013, p. 68). School A started from Grade R to Grade 7. Learner enrolment at school was 94 including Grade R class. The school practised MGT in some grades. Grade 1 was taught as a mono-grade class by a Teaching Assistant. A Teaching Assistant is practitioner with Grade 12 certificate and is hired by the DBE to undergo some courses and thereafter qualifies to work as a Teaching Assistant to assist a Grade 1 teacher in reinforcing reading and counting as well as the collection of exercise books in their class.

Grade 2 and Grade 3 are combined in one MGT class and are taught by one teacher. Grade 4, Grade 5 and Grade 6 are taught by one teacher in one MGT class. Grade 7 was taught by the principal with the assistance of a student teacher who volunteered to work full time at school until she completed her teaching qualification, and she received a stipend that would help fund her transport expenses while also developing experience in teaching.

The Post Provisioning Norm (PPN) of the school consists of just 2 educators (that is, a teacher and a principal). In practice there are three educators if you include the other teacher who was awaiting placement to another school at any time because she was a surplus teacher (above PPN). The principal is the only manager at school. All the teaching staff members at school were females including the Teaching Assistant (TA) and Volunteer educator. There was also a Grade R practitioner who was also a female and one non-educator staff, a cleaner who is a male. The LOLT at school was IsiZulu for the Foundation Phase and English for Intermediate and Senior Phase.

4.2.2 Profiling School B

School B is similar to School A in terms of socio-economic status of the community and the type of fencing it had. It had 12 classrooms excluding Grade R class. It had electricity supply but no water supply and no telephone facility. It was ranked Quintile 2. Learner enrolment at school stood at 92 including Grade R class. It also practised MGT in some grades level teaching classes and Foundation Phase was taught and combined the same way as School A. Grade 4 was taught by a volunteer who was doing his final year as a student teacher. Grade 5 and Grade 6 were taught by one teacher in one MGT class. Grade 7 was taught by the principal. The volunteer teacher in this school received no stipend but only benefitted in terms of experience and motivation letters that he received from the principal and he submitted them to his tertiary institution.

They are also the same with School A in terms of PPN. The teaching staff at school consisted of four females, two professionally qualified teachers; a Teaching Assistant and a Grade R practitioner. There are also two males, that is the Principal and the Volunteer educator. There was one non-educator staff, a security who is a male. The school is the same as School A in terms of the Language of learning and teaching (LOLT).

4.2.3 Profiling School C

School C was also similar to School A and School B in terms of socio-economic status of the community and the type of fencing used in the school. It had 8 classrooms excluding Grade R class. It had electricity supply, clean piped water and telephone. It was ranked Quintile 3. Enrolment at school was 153 learners including Grade R class. It practised MGT in similar grade level classes as School B. Grade 5 and Grade 6 were taught by a Teaching Assistant. The school's PPN is 5 educators. The teaching staff consists of 6 female teachers including the Teaching Assistant and Grade R practitioner plus a male principal. There is 1 male non-teaching staff which is a security guard. The LOLT at school was IsiZulu for the Foundation Phase and English for Intermediate and Senior Phase.

4.2.4 Profiling School D

School D was similar to School A, B and C in terms of socio-economic status of the community and the type of fencing used. It had 4 classrooms excluding Grade R class and a hall which was also used as a classroom. It had electricity but did not have piped water supply and had no telephone. It is ranked Quintile 2. It also practised MGT in Grade 2 and Grade 3 as well as Grade 5 and Grade 6. Grade 1 was taught by the principal, assisted by the TA as per her (TA) job description. The school PPN is four educators including the principal, but in practice there are five educators. The fifth educator was awaiting placement as a surplus, just like in School A. The principal is the only manager at school. The teaching staff members at school are seven females including the TA and grade R practitioner. There is one non-educator staff male member, who is a security guard. They also use LOLT in a similar way as School A, B and C.

4.2.5 Profiling of the principals

	Principal A	Principal B	Principal C	Principal D
Gender	Female	Male	Male	Female
Age category	<40>50	<40>50	<50>60	<40>50
Qualifications	Diploma	Bachelor's degree	Diploma plus other certificates	BED honours
Teaching experience	23 years	23 years	34 years	23 years
Teaching experience in mono-grade	18 years	12 years	24 years	14 years
Teaching experience in	5 years	11 years	10 years	9 years

multi-grade				
Experience in the current school	23 years	15 years	18 years	23 years
Experience as a principal	4 years	11 years	14 years	4 years

Table 4.1

The four principals who are participants were two males and two females, meaning there was gender representation. Their age was more than 40 years and less than 60 years. Three of them had 23 years of teaching experience and the fourth one had 34 years. Their teaching experience in schools that practise multi-grade teaching ranged between 5 and 11 years. All of them have got teaching experience of between 12 and 24 years in a school that practised mono-grade teaching, and a range of between 4 years and 14 years' experience as principals. Their professional qualifications range from a teaching diploma to a bachelors' degree. Their teaching experience in the current schools is between 15 and 23 years.

4.2.6 Profiling Teachers

	Teacher A	Teacher B	Teacher C	Teacher D
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Female
Age category	<50>60	<40>50	<50>60	>40
Qualifications	Diploma	Diploma plus other certificates	Diploma plus other certificates	Bachelors' degree
Teaching experience	22 years	20 years	23 years	5 years
Teaching	17 years	10 years	13 years	Nil

experience in mono-grade				
Teaching experience in multi-grade	5 years	10 years	10 years	5 years
Number of combined grade levels in class	3 combined grade levels, Grade 4, 5 and 6	2 combined grade levels, Grade 2 and Grade 3	2 combined grade levels, Grade 2 and 3	2 combined grade levels, Grade 5 and Grade 6
Number of learners in class	26 learners	27 learners	44 learners	31 learners but also teaching 5 Grade 7 learners

Table 4.2 Profiling of educators

All Post Level One educator participants were female. Three of them were above 20 years of teaching experience and the fourth one has 5 years. They all complied with criteria of selecting participants that they must have 4 years and above teaching experience in a school that practises multi-grade teaching. All phases at a primary school were represented for classroom observation and educator interviewing, that is foundation and intermediate phase. There was no multi-phasing in terms of combining grade levels in class although School A and B once practised it. Three schools combined two grade levels each, of which two of them were in the foundation phase and the third one is in intermediate phase. The fourth school combined three grade levels which were in intermediate phase. The learner enrolment in their combined classes ranged between 26 and 44 which was equitable to a class that practise mono-grade teaching.

4.3 How the principals and the teachers enacted instructional leadership within the context of multi-grade teaching

Drawing from the responses of the participants using the semi-structured interviews, supported by classroom observations and documents reviews, five sub-themes emerged on how the principals and the teachers enacted instructional leadership within the context of multi-grade teaching. The elicited sub-themes are (a) shaping the vision to achieve academic excellence to all learners, (b) creating an environment conducive to teaching and learning, (c) cultivating leadership in others, (d) improving instruction and (e) managing people, data and processes. Collectively, the above themes were believed to be contributing in assisting them in ensuring that educative teaching was realised within their contextual factor of MGT.

4.3.1 Shaping the vision to achieve academic excellence to all learners

Participants regarded the act and or the process of shaping the vision of the school to be an imperative aspect of achieving academic excellence among all learners. They regarded the school vision as a guide that directs them on what they want to accomplish at the end of a certain period. The ultimate outcome was educative teaching and academic excellence among all learners; hence they expressed a view that they needed not to deviate from the vision of the DBE. Principal B made the following comments about the importance of the school vision:

We discuss how the vision of the school should look; what it is that we aim to achieve at the end of five years. When we develop it we are also being guided by the vision of the DBE as we cannot deviate from it (Principal B).

The school visions were confirmed to be available in their schools and evidence was that they were displayed in the offices of the principals. When reviewing documents in the form of minutes of various meetings, I became aware of the steps that were followed when developing their school visions. One critical element of the steps was consultation with all relevant stakeholders and ensuring that its adoption was widely supported by everybody. Regarding the development of the vision one participant had this to say:

We brainstorm ideas as staff on how our vision should look; the same applies to parents. The SGB which is represented by all stakeholders sat down in a meeting and consolidated those ideas. Thereafter, it came up with a common vision and presented it to the Annual General Meeting of the parents for adoption. It is displayed in the principals' office and I gave teachers some copies to put on their files (Principal A).

A contrasting view came out in School D in terms of stakeholder involvement when developing the school vision. The school vision was available in this school but there was no evidence of stakeholder involvement in its formulation in the form of minutes and the principal expressed some difficulties to share it with stakeholders. Evidence of this was shared by Teacher D who had been at that school for five years but did not know it. She put it clearly that as much as the vision and mission statements were available at school, she had no idea about how it came into being. Nevertheless, she said that what motivated her most was the fact that she had come to the school to teach and that she would like to do justice in teaching as she believed that if one teaches well, one can make a difference in the community. Her principal attested to some of the difficulties in sharing it by saying that:

... it becomes difficult to share it with educators because some of them think it is just for the principal (Principal D).

Developing a school vision is not an end in itself but the principal needs to share it with different stakeholders that are affected by it in one way or another thus positioning it to achieve academic excellence among all learners at school. Responding to the question about how they shaped the school vision to achieve academic excellence, one participant mentioned that they communicated it by displaying it in the principals' office, their classrooms and files. They also read it to the learners and they reflect back to check whether they were still on track towards the achievement of the school vision. Stakeholders like parents supported the school and also teachers supported one another to be in line with it. This view was supported by The Education Alliance (2008), Wallace Foundation (2013) and scholars like Leithwood (2012), Murphy and Lick (2005) when they acknowledge that the role of the principal is to involve all stakeholders to develop the school vision and mission.

Various participants in the study acknowledged the significance of setting clear achievable goals, frequently communicating and selling it to stakeholders in different ways including official communiqué. Their view was that the vision can be communicated using academic report cards given to learners or parents and by reflecting back on whether they are working towards its achievement or not. The following excerpt reflects the manner in which schools communicated the school vision and what stakeholders did in order to be in line with it:

Yes, we do have a school vision which was developed by all stakeholders and adopted in a parents' meeting. The vision is displayed in the wall of our principals' office, in our classrooms, as well as our files. Learners do not have copies but we read it to them now and again to encourage them to learn. At the end of the year we reflect back and check what is it that we were able to cover as per our school vision and we devise some means to infuse what we were unable to cover. An example is that I sometimes request a Grade 1 educator to take learners to complete previous grade level work; she comes after break to learn Mathematics and she helps me with that. The community especially parents support the school by attending meetings and they also groom the learners on cultural activities (Teacher C).

Sharing the same sentiments on how the principal communicated the school vision to encourage them to work towards its achievement and how it motivates her to ensure that learners achieved excellent academic performance another participant had this to say:

Our principal keeps on reminding us about the school vision and encourages us to work hard to achieve it and ensure that our learners' education and academic achievement matches that of learners in single grade teaching schools. In my class I try my best to give the learners the best possible education I can give to them. Even if they are writing standardised tests like ANA, they get in the region of 70% or 80% which is what I try to achieve. I am motivated by the love for teaching and learners to do that on top of the school vision (Teacher B).

Stakeholder involvement in the development of a school vision for ownership and communicating it for visibility purposes motivate those affected by it to work towards its achievement.

4. 3. 2 Creating an environment conducive to effective teaching and learning

The second perspective that participants considered as imperative when enacting instructional leadership was that of creating an environment conducive to effective teaching and learning. Almost all participants were in agreement that they have a responsibility to create an environment that is conducive to effective teaching. However, the data generated from Principal D was silent on the matter. What was common amongst the participants in creating a hospitable environment was the use of policies and codes of conduct to ensure a safe environment characterised by discipline. The manner in which they grouped learners in class as well as working as a team was the other technique they used to ensure effective teaching and learning environment. Evidence of policies like the school policy, learner code of conduct and educator code of conduct were reviewed in all schools and the minutes reflected that these schools were doing something to prepare physical spaces to support teaching. Wallace Foundation (2013) also affirms this by asserting that an environment must be safe, professional, supportive, inviting and welcoming such that it allows opportunities for taking risks, and must be characterised by trust and collaboration amongst stakeholders. Talking about the environment at his school Principal B mentions that:

I ensure that teachers are always present at school and encourage learners to attend school. Fortunately for us, we also have a national schools nutrition programme (NSNP) which also acts as a motivator for learners to attend. I also involve parents through parents' meetings ... explain to them the importance of learners attending school; punctuality except when there are strong reasons for learners not to come to school; parents reporting as to why the learner could not come to school. We support educators by providing learner teacher support material (LTSM) like resources, stationery and books. We also ensure that the school is safe, not only for educators, but also for learners as well through the security personnel, using policies and codes of conduct (Principal B).

The same statement was made by the principal of School A when she remarked that:

Team work to us as educators helps us. We use policies that state what is needed within the school premises and what is not needed and we review them yearly. ... Learners are grouped in rows according to their grade levels to attend to individual grade levels even if they are in a MGT class (Principal A).

A teacher from School C highlighted the importance of mixing learners in various groups according to their capability to encourage competition. She used and displayed class rules in the wall which stipulates what is wrong and what is right for discipline purposes. However, Teacher D found no difficulty in creating an environment conducive to teaching and learning and she asserted the following in this regard:

There is no difficulty in creating an environment that will be conducive to teaching and learning. In addition, there is already this social cohesion spirit among the learners that they are sisters and brothers and there is harmony in both grade level groups. I tell them that this work is for this grade level but sometimes I ask a question and I know that the level of the question is for Grade 6. I have found that there is even healthy competition amongst them. I always try to make a class conducive even if they are Grade level 5 and Grade 6 in the same class (Teacher D).

From the above statements I concluded that participating schools did not find insurmountable difficulties in creating a hospitable environment to teaching and learning. The issues of learner discipline did not pose a challenge for these schools. Scholars such as Brown (2010); Kucita, et al., (2013) and Joyce (2014) suggest that learner indiscipline within this context of MGT pose a challenge and a barrier to student learning as a result of poor classroom management skills by the educators. The views expressed by the participants above were also shared by Teacher B. This participant argued that as much as she agreed with other teachers and principals about the importance of creating an enabling environment, she had encountered difficulties in creating such environments and she highlighted the following:

The teacher must not be too harsh ... must love the learners; be friendly to learners so that it will be easy for them to come to you for support. Discipline is difficult in MGT class because they are still young, even if you tell them “do not make noise”, they are quiet for ten minutes after that they are playing, shouting, talking. The only way to keep

them busy is to give them extra work now and again. The red groups always finishes early and demand my attention, I give them another work to self-teach themselves but the challenge is that when they encounter a problem or get stuck in an activity they want me to leave everything and explain it to them, I end up moving up and down attending this grade level group and that group (Teacher B).

The view was that the creation of a positive environment is imperative in schools. That was accomplished by making sure that the school is safe, policies are available to direct the behaviour of individuals within the school and harmony prevails amongst them. Team work amongst staff characterised by professionalism, trust and cohesion makes it possible for individuals to venture into new things without fear of failure which enhance learning performance.

4.3.3 Cultivating leadership in others

The penultimate sub-theme that emerged from the participants during data generation phase was that developing leadership in others contributed positively when enacting instructional leadership and that such practices tended to result in good learner academic achievement. It came out from them that principals cultivate leadership by developing the teachers through workshops and meetings. They provided feedback after work monitoring and supervision such as after class visits or written work submissions. They also involved stakeholders in the activities of the school and delegated duties to them. They also encouraged team work amongst the staff. This is also echoed by the Wallace Foundation (2013) that effective principals work with others, they develop and share leadership skills and practices across the organisation and they believe in stakeholder involvement. The research that was conducted at the University of Minnesota and University of Toronto respectively, affirmed that schools with positive climate and where leadership was shared with other stakeholders proved to have higher academic achievement than schools that worked in silos (Wallace Foundation, 2013). It further stipulated that principals, influential teachers, staff teams and others were associated with better student performance in Mathematics and reading tests (Wallace Foundation, 2013). With regards to the issues raised in this section, Principal C had this to say:

I try to develop teachers, check positive things they do and praise them. I communicate with the teachers through meetings where I give feedback after monitoring their work for example checking learners' work and lesson plans. I encourage them to attend workshops and network with others (Principal C).

Principal A indicated that they had designed professional development plan that they used to develop leadership in others and she delegated duties to other teachers for development purposes. The following excerpt illustrates this assertion:

We conduct meetings or staff development workshops... using our professional development plan....Colleagues support me by performing the work that I delegate to them through different committees that we have. When I attend meetings or workshops they look after the school and I delegate the senior teacher to manage it (Principal A).

It also emerged from almost all the participants that as much as personnel development took place, there was none dedicated to MGT from the principal to educators, Subject Advisors or even the Circuit Manager. That was attributed to the lack of policy on it and the fact that no one was trained in MGT, and no one had clarity about what should be happening in terms of MGT. Attesting to this Principal B had this to say:

I would say yes I develop teachers, but when it comes to practicing MGT I don't because I, too need to be developed ... it is not that I come with information, I also have to learn from them because they are the ones doing the actual teaching in a MGT class . From what they say we then discuss and come up with solutions to whatever might be a challenge ... there is no policy on MGT, but teachers teach as professionals... as the only school manager educators will also be involved in some form of management and I delegate some duties to them to ensure that the school is functioning properly ... in that way they are also developed (Principal B).

Development in some schools took place amongst educators. This was confirmed by both Principal A and Principal B that they sat down as colleagues and negotiated whenever there were challenges especially in MGT. Thereafter, a solution would be found. When I reviewed the documents evidence of school improvement plans was found in all the participating schools. However, there was minimal evidence of the implementation of such plans, and such

discrepancies were also attributed to the lack of time. That raises questions about the motivation for and wisdom in developing plans if such plans are not implemented. Evidence available was that of unscheduled developmental meetings to attend to crises, and such evidence was in the form of minutes and attendance registers. This was also highlighted by Teacher B when she said:

Yes, we develop each other as peers, in foundation phase they usually ask me because I am experienced, the Grade R teacher and TA ... have less experience. We usually use break times and ours is not scheduled development. They come as and when they encounter challenges (Teacher B).

Affirming peer development through consultations and provision of resources Teacher D said that:

We also develop each other, we are in the same ship... we are just all lost., if there is something I do not understand I go to my senior teachers for assistance. There are two MGT classes in this school, its Grade 2, Grade 3 and then Grade 5 and Grade 6. I started in Grades 2 and 3. When I left it I supported that teacher by telling her what I was doing and I gave her the books and learning programme I was using; I am not sure whether she is following it or not (Teacher D).

Peer development and support was reported to be difficult in some schools as the opposite was highlighted by Teacher A when she said that they were unable to develop one another at her school because there was one educator in each phase. This was affirmed by her principal when she mentioned the challenges that will arise at school when the surplus educator is redeployed to another school because teachers at school were trained for the phase they are in; they were unable to teach in other phases. Teacher A raised it like this:

There is no support from the colleague because she teaches Foundation Phase (Teacher A).

From the above statements it is clear that schools recognised the importance of development although it did not take place in MGT due to a number of reasons I have alluded to in other sections of this report. Evidence of this were unscheduled developments on MGT when

participants encounter challenges, they sit down and negotiate to come up with solutions meaning that they devised their own strategies peculiar to their situation.

4.3.4 Improving instruction

Improving instruction was another facet that almost all participants converged on and they emphasised its necessity and importance. They mentioned team-work, classroom visit, thorough planning, experience, support and reflection as instructional leadership practices that they believed contributed to improve effective instructional environment. This is in accord with what Lunenberg (2010); Mendels (2012) and the Wallace Foundation (2013) maintain. These scholars and institutes argue that class visits and the provision of feedback, team-work and collaboration play a pivotal role in improving instruction. One participant has this to say when asked how she improves instruction:

*As a teacher and principal, I advise teachers to work on their pace because even when we attend workshops the facilitators or subject advisors tell us they do not know how we must teach, but we must follow the curriculum and policies ... we work on our own ... they do not support us. We use to do planning. I plan which class I am going to visit, is it a normal class visit or learners' work check-up. I also motivate teachers to be leaders in their classrooms. We also work as a team. If a teacher encounters a problem we sit down and negotiate for example one teacher has a challenge in Mathematics, I leave my learners and teach for her **(Principal A)**.*

Principal C also mentioned that networking, reflections, experience, support from his seniors and team work amongst staff assisted him to improve instruction and he expressed this as follows:

*I network with principals of neighbouring schools. Reflection and experience also assist me to improve instruction. The Circuit Manager phone at times when she is going to do school visit, she conduct workshops quarterly and monthly meetings. As colleagues at work ...we help one another. The SGB attend meetings and they are capable of doing their work **(Principal C)**.*

In trying to express a similar view, Teacher D affirmed this by maintaining that preparation, changing different instructional strategies and work experience assisted her to improve instruction and this is what she had to say:

I think its preparation, I sit down and take different books, prepare and plan using CAPS document and it really helps me ...for example in a class practicing MGT you cannot use one and the same strategy. I reflect back to say last week I did it this way, next week I need to do it in a different way, may be last week we encountered some challenges then I need to change the strategy, but I also learn from my experience because I started teaching in a MGT class from 2012, experience also assist me (Teacher D).

Emphasising on the importance of work experience, monitoring and support from the supervisors to improve instruction Teacher B had this to say:

... then in the middle of the year he conduct meetings as well and check to monitor how far are we in terms of curriculum coverage (Teacher B).

The emphasis was that thorough planning; work experience and working as a team, classroom visits for support, monitoring work and using different strategies to improve instruction enhance teaching and learning.

4.3.5 Managing people, data and processes

All the participants were in agreement that they were engaged in the activity of managing people, data and processes like mono-grade teaching schools. The only major difference is that MGT has become a contextual factor that they referred to as abnormal. They made an example that they manage the teachers as individuals despite the number of grade levels they had to teach. They also had to manage learners separately as individual grade levels. Participants were unanimous that in recruiting staff they work with what they have because the enrolment had kept on dropping, which minimised opportunities for them to appoint other staff members, perhaps who have better teaching skills. They have to develop one another where possible and have to ensure that systems are in place for school management. All participating schools used time books to keep records of teachers coming to work and leaving school. They are supposed to sign when

arriving and departing from school on daily basis. If absent they fill-in leave forms and a leave register is completed; thereafter, quarterly returns are submitted to the circuit and district offices. To administer learners they highlighted that they encouraged learners to be present at school on daily basis. They mark learner attendance registers on daily basis separately according to grade levels not class. They also used SA-SAMS programme for administration purposes, for example, participants articulated that it directed them on assessing learners by indicating the tasks and the number of tasks to be assessed per grade level. Thereafter, they did separate grade level mark lists, separate grade level academic progression schedules and issue academic progression report cards. This is in accordance with what Wallace Foundation (2013) maintains has to happen when managing people, data and processes. Managing people entails making appropriate, diplomatic and maximum use of resources at hand, hiring good people, in schools. The following excerpt highlighted this:

There are minimal chances to recruit new staff educator members, we work with what we have because of the dropping learner enrolment which makes staffing and recruitment of staff difficult. Managing people is not fundamentally different from other schools. What I am always mindful of is that I am managing an abnormal situation. The fact that a teacher is teaching a MGT class is always a contextual factor that I need to consider. ... In managing data there are no problems because we use time book for educators, separate learner attendance registers for each grade level, and we record their work like mark lists separately, make quarterly returns to the department when a teacher is absent I give her a leave form. We also use SA-SAMS which tells us at the beginning of each term how many assessments do we need to record, we do that and feed it to the system, tally it with other formal assessments and then we get results, From that we develop academic progression schedules and then issue academic progression report cards which are given to learners and parents (Principal B).

All participants were unanimous on the importance of generating data, analysing it and using it to their own advantage. The data also provided evidence in the form of academic results analysis and minutes of meetings to that effect. Examples of trying to fill in the gaps have been highlighted above that the participating schools even went to an extent of teaching for one another to mitigate lack of content knowledge on the side of educators in order to improve

learner academic achievement. Lunenburg (2010) suggests that learner academic achievement must be analysed, low achieving students identified and strategies developed to rectify identified gaps. Participants, however indicated some challenges of using data to gauge gaps and ameliorate those that are identified at times, for example, solutions that require staffing became a problem even when doing their school improvement plan because they could not change it. Principal C stated this as follows:

... We analyse information like learner academic achievement every quarter but using it to our advantage is usually difficult for example if the identified gap requires staffing we are unable to change it, we work with what we have (Principal C).

The findings were that the starting point of managing people was recruiting and hiring good people which proved difficult in schools practising MGT because of the dwindling learner enrolment. Ensuring systems were available to manage them when they arrive till they depart at school using time books, learner attendance registers and issuing leave forms if absent was a necessity. Making maximum use of generated data, analyse it to gauge gaps and develop strategies to overcome them through teacher development was highlighted as of utmost importance.

4.4 Challenges encountered by principals and teachers when practising instructional leadership within the context of multi-grade teaching

It has become very clear that school principals who operate within MGT environment face enormous challenges. Participants in this study became emotional when talking about the challenges that confronted them when practising instructional leadership within the context of MGT. Words like abnormal situation, boring and the department does not care about us kept on coming when referring to MGT. They highlighted various challenges that they encountered when performing their duties but the main which was common amongst all of them included the lack of policy on MGT; lack of training on multi-grade teaching; work overload and the inability to cover it due to time constraint, and Language of learning and teaching, and lack of content knowledge as a barrier. These challenges are discussed below.

4.4.1 Lack of policy on multi-grade teaching

The lack of policy on MGT emerged as a big challenge in all the participants. They kept on highlighting that they were treated like mono-grade teaching schools and no one seemed to know about MGT. The participants attributed the lack of support, irrelevant workshops and resources to their context to the lack of specific policy on MGT issues. du Plessis & Subramanien (2014), Brown (2010) and Joubert (2010) concur with the above statement by citing the absence of National and Provincial policies, as well as textbooks on MGT. This means that teachers and managers need to fend for themselves regarding management, administration and curriculum issues. Attesting to this Principal B has this to say:

MGT is not what educators have been prepared for, there is no policy on MGT, but teachers teach as professionals... It is not that there is something wrong that there are no workshops on MGT, the system itself on multi-grade teaching is abnormal. Workshops ought to be in line with the policy. Teachers only rely on their optimism to teach. Teachers including myself do attend workshops organised by the department through the subject advisors but they are not for classes practising MGT, most of them are content based that is what is supposed to be taught to learners and the methodology to be used, which in all do not assist in teaching a multi-grade class, but single grades (Principal B).

Checking the understanding that participants had about what MGT was all about, it became clear to me that they did not apprehend it the same way. For instance, Teacher D defined it as a combination of two grade levels to make up a class size emanating from the shortage of grade level learners to make that class size. She went further to mention that if it is a combination of three grade levels or more she did not understand whether it was still a multi-grade class or a triple grade teaching. She believed that it was no longer a MGT. It appears to me that the meaning of the term 'multi' had eluded her altogether. Principal B defined it as the combination of two or more grade levels in one class to be taught by one teacher the same or different topics at different grade levels. The definition that was mentioned by Principal B was consistent with that offered by Joubert (2010), Joyce (2014) and Aksoy (2008). What I can highlight in all these definitions is their silence on issues of age, ability, culture, whether combined grade levels

follow each other or not, whether specialisation occurred or not and whether they were taught as single grade levels in one class or simultaneously. Teacher B mentioned that she was forced by the employer to teach MGT class, which created an impression that MGT was by force and not a choice as articulated by Aksoy (2008).

4.4.2 Lack of training on multi-grade teaching

All participants were professionally qualified with four years degrees and above teaching qualifications. That was consistent with the views of Brown (2010) who accentuated that the highest qualification for teachers teaching in schools practising MGT is four years. Qualifications of participants excluded training on MGT, and that was the opposite of what happens in countries such as Bhutan and Turkey where they include a module or a course on MGT in their four years teacher qualification (Beukes, 2006; Aksoy, 2008; Brown, 2010; Joubert, 2010; Kucita, et al., 2013; Joyce, 2014; du Plessis & Subramanien, 2014). Participants were emotional when they expressed the lack of formal training at tertiary level, in service training through workshops by DBE and development by the principal at school level. The following excerpt stated this:

I was not trained to teach and manage a MGT class but I was forced to do it by the employer, I use my own thinking to teach ...even the subject advisors do not know how to teach it. Workshops are there but they are not for MGT, they are meant for a normal classroom, that is, the Grade 2 class alone and the Grade 3 class alone. I cannot say he (principal) is not developing us on MGT because he is also not clear. He does not develop us on it because he lacks information and he was also not trained on it. ,, We are doing it alone and we are left alone to do it (Teacher B).

As much as participants complained about the lack of training, some of them also highlighted a seminar that they attended 5 to 10 years ago. According to them that seminar did not assist them because few learners were in that class which is the opposite of the number of learners in their classes. Pointing to this Teacher C had this to say:

There was a seminar on teaching a MGT class...about ten years ago where a demonstration of seven learners sitting around the table was made. That seminar did not assist us because it was a combination of a small number of learners...for example my grade two is twenty seven and my Grade 3 is seventeen, forty four learners which is above class size...it is different, difficult and it does not work (Teacher C).

Reference was also made by participants that they were invited by subject advisors in a certain Saturday where they were given some documents in certain subjects that did not help them at all. Teacher D illuminated this by saying:

I would not say it was support from the Department of Basic Education when they invited us last year on a Saturday. I think they were trying to create a learning programme for MGT and they gave us papers, no explanation and there was no follow up in the form of a workshop or else cluster or school visit to check if we are implementing it, is it working... and the rest. It did not work at all and it is not according to CAPS or Jika Imfundo. That is why I develop my own learning programme which goes according to CAPS. I took my time reading that thing, learners will do and learn nothing, that is why I left it and develop my own learning programme (Teacher D).

The same sentiments about the irrelevance of the workshop and material that was provided were also shared by Teacher B who maintained that:

... Subject Advisors once organised a meeting where they gave us some documents... but looking at them they are totally different from Jika Imfundo, then I decided to live it, they were trying ... but it was not right... in Jika Imfundo and CAPS task one is for all grades but in their document it is not there, It tells me to teach something and I am expected to assess something else according to Jika Imfundo and CAPS (Teacher B).

From the above statement it is clear that participants acknowledged some attempts made by the subject advisors when they referred to them as trying and they conceded their support for developing them on content to be taught in each grade level and the methodology to be used did not assist them in MGT.

Teacher B was tempestuous when talking about teacher training in MGT. She stated it categorically that at times she did not attend workshops because they were conducted during learners' tuition time by subject advisors who were themselves not clear about what they were doing as they were also not trained in MGT. Hence, they only focused on issues affecting schools practising mono-grade teaching. This is in accord with what was echoed by Mulryan-Kyne (2007) that teacher trainers in countries that train teachers in MGT are also unfamiliar or inexperienced about it. A similar situation was highlighted by Kucita, et al., (2013) that in Bhutan experienced teachers and specialists in MGT are excluded in curriculum development, hence curriculum reformers are responsible for the curriculum development of both mono-grade and MGT schools. Raising her concerns and proposal this is what Teacher B had to say:

I think if the department can give us a full course which must be done by the experienced multi- grade teachers from somewhere, not these subject advisors, it can be effective. There must also be planned programmes for grade one, grade two and grade three to follow, the same topic but different activities, totally new programmes developed by experienced teachers and it worked for them. There must also be workbooks for each term for these grade levels (Teacher B).

The times during which these workshops were conducted were also a cause for concern for the participants. They raised their concerns by highlighting that sometimes, workshops were conducted during tuition time and they usually received invites or hear about them on the day of the workshop because they were far from the circuit office where subject advisors left their invites. They indicated that they left learners with work to do if workshops were announced well in advance, but when they were informed on short notice, they left the learners with no work to do. Distance and communication was also highlighted by du Plessis and Subramanien (2014) as a hindrance to teaching when educators attend meetings and workshops. That constituted a hindrance because learners were either released early to go home or they were kept in school while no teaching was actually going on during meeting or workshop days. One participant mentioned that at times learners stayed at home when they attended meetings or workshops and this is what Teacher C said:

We attend workshops if there is correspondence that invites us. Workshops do not assist us. The Department of Basic Education organise them during tuition time. When we

attend workshops learners are split to different grades ...grade three goes to grade four ...and grade 2 goes to grade one...educators leave learners' work behind. At times learners are kept at home and we write to parents because at times workshops demand three teachers at a time (Teacher C).

Sharing the same sentiments Principal B had this to say:

These workshops are conducted during tuition time, at times in the morning till the afternoon or at times start at twelve o'clock. When workshops have been properly planned in advance educators leave learners with work to do ... you know even if MGT is abnormal but it has its advantages that it develops a sense of independence to learners ... so we tap on that and encourage educators to leave a lot of work for learners to do. Other teachers left behind will at times go and check if learners are doing that work, otherwise there is nothing that we can do. If we hear in the morning about workshops as it mostly happens learners are left with no work to do. We hear with other teachers in the morning about workshops because we are far from the circuit offices, let alone being stuck in the classroom and we are unable to check pigeon holes now and again (Principal B).

Teacher A raised another different aspect about training where workshops of different subjects or grade levels coincided with each other on the date and time yet conducted at different venues and demanding the same educator to attend them. She pointed to this as another contributing factor depriving an opportunity to get content knowledge and methodology as she was the only educator responsible for Grade 4, Grade 5 and Grade 6. Commenting on this issue she said:

At times workshops of different grade levels and subjects are conducted on the same day and time but in different venues, and I attend one workshop and I lack information for the other grade levels and subjects (Teacher A).

Unplanned programmes which were not communicated in advance and conducted by less knowledgeable people on MGT to capacitate teachers were identified as a challenge. The obstacle was to be unable to leave learners with work to do whilst attending capacity building programmes and the fact that they did not develop them on MGT.

4.4.3 Work overload and the inability to cover it due to time constraint

All the eight participants were unanimous in maintaining that they were overloaded with work in MGT. Participants expressed the view that they were the only managers at school and were also full time teachers with no support staff like administrators. On the other hand they were expected to plan and teach all grade level subjects in more than one grade level using the same time allocated for schools practising mono-grade teaching. This view was also supported by du Plessis & Subramanien (2014) as well as Brown (2010) who asserted that educators including school managers are overloaded with work as they perform multiple roles within a limited time. Time was emphasised as another major challenge hindering participants to cover the work of the day and the year. Participants expressed this through the following excerpts:

As a principal of a MGT school I monitor the school, monitor curriculum delivery; I am a full class teacher for Grade 7 who also teaches all learning areas; work as an administrator because we do not have an administrator; do the work of a departmental head; a deputy principal as the only manager at school and motivate teachers as they teach in MGT school. So, all school work has to be monitored by myself ... (Principal A).

Similar sentiments of work overload were echoed by the educator from School A when she mentioned that she taught three grade levels meaning 18 learning areas using the same time allocated for a single grade level and this is what she said:

I teach three combined grade levels, that is Grade 4, Grade 5 and Grade 6 using curriculum in a MGT class. It is difficult to teach them all in the same class. I teach six learning areas per grade, meaning eighteen learning areas (Teacher A).

Participants were in agreement about the inability to cover the work in each period, day, week and year. They attributed this to multiple roles including teaching different grade levels at times different topics to each grade level; teaching learners with different capabilities; hence different topics in each grade level in a single period yet they are expected to do administrative work. Echoing this situation, Teacher C had this to say:

It is difficult to do it (teach similar topics at the same time) in IsiZulu because Grade Two might be doing double consonants and Grade Three triple consonants. Within the same grade level, that is Grade Two at times there are different groups who are doing double consonants for example “bh”, “kh”, “ph” and “th”, the same applies to Grade Three. At the same time there are groups of slow learners who did not finish even the work of the previous grade level and they still do single consonants “b”, “t” and “k”. “P”. Each grade level load is not covered, it takes time and the one hour period is prolonged to other learning area periods. We use break times and continue even after school trying to cover the load of the day, but curriculum and the syllabus is not covered. I do not use the actual time table, I teach according to learner pace (Teacher C).

Participants were unanimous in arguing that integrating similar topics and teaching them as one lesson at various grade levels, but being mindful of difficulty levels between grade levels saved time. Sharing the same sentiments Teacher B raised a complex challenge that when they integrated topics, at times they skipped certain topics, and according to CAPS document, they are expected to assess every aspect of the syllabus, including what they may have skipped, and not what they have taught when integrating topics. She commented on this as follows:

It is very difficult, because we are doing CAPS as per Jika Imfundo program which is a planned program, I have to follow this program, the given tests and tasks for assessment. ... the two grades in term one have got different topics which have to be taught in one day, at the same time, in one period. If I change these topics, the term has got two or three assessments, meaning if I have to teach the shapes in Grade Three, Grade Two is not doing the shapes the shapes are at the end of the term or second term according to the programme, so if I give them the test on task one according to the programme, it tests the other tasks that I have skipped... (Teacher B).

Commenting on the shortage of time to cover curriculum and the absence of a catch up plan Principal B had this to say:

... when teachers are away attending workshops, instructional time is lost ... at times the teacher would not even have a catch up plan to recover the lost time, curriculum coverage is also a problem (Principal B).

Following the CAPS compliant time table was also a thorny issue to all the participants who were unanimous in stating it categorically that the CAPS compliant time tables were just a display, just to produce to officials of the DBE but they did not follow it. They used their own time tables and special arrangements. This is in accord with what du Plessis & Subramanien (2014) maintain. These scholars emphasise that time tables developed by educators are for single grade levels but were being used to teach two grade levels or more grade levels. Their arrangements forced them to teach two learning areas a day at times, rotate subjects they teach a week and other learning areas were given more time taken from the time of other subjects. Echoing this, Teacher D commented about being behind the entire KZN Province on curriculum coverage because she could not skip certain topics and compromise learners. She emphasised that the time table was just a display and the EMIS sub-directorate tried to intervene but the computer turned red and indicated that she, alone must be at school for 28 hours a day to cover her workload. She highlighted that she specialised in teaching a MGT class of Grade 5 and Grade 6, as well as Grade 7 where they rotated classes and subjects. Their arrangement was done to mitigate lack of content knowledge, but it also had negative repercussions on the learners that they learn two subjects a day at times. The following excerpt indicated that:

We specialise in Grade 5 and Grade 6 trying to bridge the lack of content knowledge. We tried to follow the time table and it did not work at all. We rotated the classes, she teaches Grade 5 and Grade 6 today, I teach Grade 7 and vice versa. That meant all the six subjects that I teach in Grade 7 are not taught in that entire day. I teach my two subjects in Grade 5 and Grade 6, one lesson before break and the other one after break, the following day I go to Grade Seven class for my six subjects. I try to teach at least four of them. I teach languages daily on my day, for example IsiZulu has got five or six periods, meaning a normal school teaches it daily. The other important subjects like Natural Sciences and Social Sciences have two periods a week, so I swap them;, if I teach Natural Sciences today then the following day for me to teach that class, I teach Social Sciences. If I lose my day may be I have to attend a workshop it means I am left behind All subjects are important but there is a shortage of time (Teacher D).

Teacher B shared the same sentiments for not following CAPS compliant time table, circumventing and not teaching other learning areas as well as using time for Life Skills to teach

and reinforce Language due to time limits. This was echoed by her supervisor, Principal B when he stated that due to time constraints he focused on managing fundamental learning areas which form the basis of a primary school learner; that is a learner must be able to read, write and count. School B mainly focused on the subjects they assumed to be fundamental at the expense of other learning areas. In support of each other Principal B stated as follows:

... as a manager I check and manage those learning areas that are fundamental in ensuring that a learner at a primary school need most because a learner at a primary school must be able to read, write and count ... so I manage mostly Mathematics, Languages, Natural Sciences and Technology to ensure it is properly done. Those subjects form the backbone of what should be done at a primary level. Other subjects ... yes we do them but the main focus is on the ones I have mentioned, and they are the ones I manage (Principal B).

Echoing the above sentiments regarding teaching three grade levels in a MGT class, teaching two or three subjects a day, rotating subjects and inability to cover the curriculum in a short space of time. Teacher A added that she rotated submitting work for different grade levels. She also highlighted another issue that when teaching different topics the other two grade levels do nothing. This was also witnessed during classroom observation when the educator was teaching three different topics in IsiZulu. She taught Grade 6 and gave them the activity, then moved to Grade 5 and lastly Grade 4. Whilst teaching each grade level others were doing nothing and the IsiZulu lessons for all three grade levels took 2 hours 13 minutes with some learners having not finished writing. Teacher A stated as follows:

If it is different topics I teach one grade level at a time using different books. It is time consuming. When I explain to one grade level others do nothing (Teacher A).

Time limits prohibited participants to do individualisation for both slow and highly gifted learners as well as to provide feedback after monitoring work even if they have identified mistakes. Principal A pointed at teachers teaching the same topic at the same level and her lack of time to provide feedback which lead to negative impact to learners' education. This is what one participant had to say:

I overlook some of the mistakes that I find after monitoring work. At times I find that the content taught in three grade levels is of the same grade level for example in English you find that all the grade levels are doing the comprehension, the other grade level must look at the words, others at the sentences and others at the pronouns, but they do the same thing at the same level. I have to comment to the educator positively about that as it has a negative bearing to learners' education but I do not have time to do it because I am a full time teacher (Principal A).

Commenting on the lack of time for individualisation Teacher C highlighted it this way:

... no enough time is given for individualisation for both slow learners and the highly gifted learners (Teacher C).

The issue of work overload was raised by all participants and the views expressed in the excerpts above were applicable in all four schools, and it clearly showed that leading teaching and learning processes in MGT environments was extremely difficult.

4.4.4 Language of learning and teaching and lack of content knowledge as a barrier

The language of learning and teaching (LOLT) was identified as a major barrier to learners learning, especially Grade level 4 which was attributed to the transition of learning in mother tongue in Foundation Phase to English in the Intermediate Phase. Participants stated that the greatest challenge was that such a change did not allow time for the learners to adapt to the new LOLT because it used to take place in a class practising MGT. Learners ended up memorising the work without understanding. Transmuting from mother tongue teaching to English as LOLT in classes practising MGT when learners progress from Foundation to Intermediate Phase was also emphasised as a challenge prohibiting learners to perform excellently (Aksoy, 2008; Brown 2010; Joubert 2010; Kucita, et al., 2013; Joyce, 2014). The second issue which complicates this problem further is that Foundation Phase learns 3 Learning Areas in their mother tongue and they move to Grade 4 to use English as LOLT in 5 Learning Areas in a class practicing MGT. Sharing this view Principal A said:

The LOLT is a barrier especially in intermediate phase. When these learners are in foundation phase they learn in IsiZulu, then the Grade 4 learners remains lost when grouped with Grade 5 and 6 because the LOLT is English and they become lost till they reach Grade 7, when Grade 5 and Grade 6, start to catch up, Grade 4 remain confused and demand much attention. They do not understand but simply memorise the work when you teach the content. Most of the time Grade 4 becomes bored and play whilst teaching, worse they were doing three learning areas in foundation phase and they are exposed to six learning areas. There is no bridge for Grade 3 to move swiftly to Grade 4; hence they become confused and loose attention (Principal A).

The lack of content knowledge in all the subjects by some educators was a thorny issue raised by three schools in the study. The challenge was that the schools needed to work with whoever they had because of staff shortage. Staffing became difficult when they develop their school improvement plan. Recruitment of other teachers was impossible because of the decreasing rate of learner enrolment worse newly appointed educators lacks experience of working in a school practising MGT. Opportunities of what Wallace Foundation (2013) maintains that a good principal is the one who is able to recruit good staff are slim for them. Referring to the challenge they face Principal B has this to say:

The fact that a teacher is teaching a MGT class is always a contextual factor that I need to consider. Eh... the difference is that in MGT class a teacher teaches all learning areas, meaning the assumption is that teachers know the content in all learning areas, which is not true, educators' knowledge might not be the same in all learning areas which impact negatively on the teacher's ability to deliver subject content to learners appropriately. This also impact on the long run on the learner's ability to do well in assessments. If the educator is lagging together with the learners because she is not well vest with that subject, it becomes very difficult to manage that teacher whose expert knowledge is not up to scratch (Principal B).

Similar sentiments were shared by Principal A by highlighting the fact that she sometimes left her Grade 7 class unattended to teach Mathematics in the Intermediate MGT class because the educator lacks information; she last did it in Grade 8 as a learner.

... if there is a challenge in the educators' knowledge of subject content or methodology in foundation phase I have to go there, the same applies to intermediate phase and it is difficult because I have not specialised in all phases, and there is nothing that I can do if the challenge of a teacher is a lack of subject content because we are short staffed. Team work assist us but it is time consuming for example some of us left Mathematics in grade eight and when they come to this school they are forced by the situation to teach Mathematics, they lack content knowledge, so I need to go there and teach for her, then the challenge is that my Grade 7 learners are left behind (Principal A).

The lack of content knowledge was witnessed during classroom observation in School A. The Learning Area (LA) was IsiZulu and the topic was demonstrative pronouns. When the teacher presented the lesson there was no concordial agreement in the examples she gave. For instance, learners gave her a noun “umuntu (person) and she referred to that as umuntu lo, loyo, loyaya instead of umuntu lo, lowo, lowaya. Demonstrative pronouns are formed by using demonstrative formative ‘la’ plus subject class concord plus demonstrative ending meaning it was supposed to be ‘la+u’ which changes to ‘w’ as a semi-vowel separating two vowels then o resulting to ‘lowo’. This problem was corroborated by what was raised by Principal A, Principal B and Teacher D on the lack of content knowledge. Since, devising strategies to deal with that problem was deemed by the participants as time consuming, they argued that alternative was to leave it unaddressed, and doing that would have negative effect on the education of learners.

4.5 Strategies principals and teachers use to mitigate challenges they encounter in enacting instructional leadership within the context of multi-grade teaching

Different strategies were used by principals and teachers to mitigate challenges they encountered in enacting instructional leadership within the context of multi-grade teaching. The challenges which were raised above were the lack of policy on multi-grade teaching, the lack of training on MGT, work overload and the inability to cover it due to time constraints, language of learning and teaching and lack of content knowledge as a barrier to effective teaching. The strategies which are employed to deal with challenges raised above are discussed below.

4.5.1 Mitigating the lack of policy on multi-grade teaching

All the participants in the four schools were unanimous in that they used the CAPS policy to organise their teaching. They indicated that they also followed a pilot programme called Jika Imfundo which is CAPS compliant and designed for schools practising mono-grade teaching. They articulated that CAPS and Jika Imfundo guide them on the content to be taught in each grade level and the methodology to be used. The participants also argued that such a programme had limited assistance to them because it did not accommodate their peculiar circumstances as multi-grade teaching schools.

4.5.2 Mitigating the lack of training on multi-grade teaching

Participants were unanimous in their views that they had not received any form of training in MGT. Therefore, they relied on their experience and optimism as professional teachers. They cited experience as their greatest teacher to bridge the gap of their lack of training on MGT. They were all in agreement that they got support from different stakeholders with the exception of support on MGT. Teachers emphasised that their respective principals supported and developed them in all aspects from the provision of resources, monitoring and encouragement. The principals motivated them to realise the school vision and mission by being at school on daily basis, teaching and assessing learners. Subject advisors were mentioned as another stakeholder that provides capacity to teachers on subject content to be taught to learners and methodology to be used. The Circuit Manager assisted the principals to manage schools and that they are also informed about new developments in education through quarterly workshops and monthly meetings. The SGB responded positively on their governance side and parents attended meetings, helped the learners with their homework, extra-mural activities and gardening in schools.

Parents assist by attending and training our learners in cultural activities and sports after school, attend parents' meeting and some cater for meals in parents' meeting. Parents also have a vegetable garden here at school where they plant vegetables to contribute to our NSNP. In homework some do help the children, but most of them are illiterate they don't even understand the codes that we put in learners' report cards, they

ask us to put raw marks so they can't assist their children they went to an extent of soliciting the expertise of high school learners to help their children (Principal A).

Stakeholder involvement and support as well as work experience and optimism of educators was suggested as an explication to remedy the situation. Although stakeholders were assisting in doing their part but there was none on MGT.

4.5.3 Mitigating work overload and the inability to cover it due to time constraints

Three of the participating schools, excluding School D, were relied heavily on the support staff and volunteers to teach mainstream classes to mitigate staff shortage and minimise workload. These schools used full time volunteers who were studying towards a teaching profession and also utilised the services of Teaching Assistants to teach some of the grade levels in their schools. For instance, School A used a Teaching Assistant and a volunteer teacher whom the school gave a stipend to help fund transport costs. The same scenario was applicable in School B. However, in School B, the volunteer teacher did not receive a stipend as it was the case in School A. The only benefit he got was the experience and motivation letters he received from the principal and submitted them to his tertiary institution. School C used Teaching Assistant to teach a MGT class. Attesting to this, Principal A had this to say:

We sat down with the SGB because there are student teachers who were attending in our school and they like to help us. One of them volunteered to assist us full time. I give her transport money from my pocket as a principal, not from norms and standards. I even take her to attend CAPS workshops. She is studying part time (Principal A).

Principal B affirmed what was presented by Principal A on using a volunteer and TA and that they offered no stipend to the volunteer teacher except experience and motivation letters.

We have a Volunteer Educator in this school who teaches grade level four full time and we do not give him anything in monetary value; he only gets knowledge in teaching a

class which is valuable to him as a student teacher because some of the practical problems they ask in his lectures relate to his experience. He is able to respond to them because he is hands on person. He is better off than a student that has theory knowledge only. He also receives some credits because I also write some letters to his learning institution that he is teaching full time, so they do not have to come and monitor him for teaching practice. We also use a TA to teach Grade One full time (Principal B).

Participants unanimously agreed that to try and cover workload they did thorough planning to identify similar topics, integrate and teach them simultaneously, considering the level of difficulty in different grade levels and assess them differently. They taught different topics separately; give certain tasks to other grade levels to do whilst focusing to teach the other grade level *vice versa*. These strategies are also supported by the report of UNESCO (2015) that number one, topics that can be taught to all grade levels should be taught together and assessed at different grade levels. The second one means teaching one grade level while others work independently which implies that teachers need to give themselves time to focus on individual grade levels. Group leaders or tutors need to lead their groups with discussions or group work or else individual work given like working in workbooks, notes taking or class work. The third strategy is teaching one subject to all grade levels at varying levels of difficulty. Educator D indicated that she wrote her own notes and gave it to one grade level to read whilst teaching the other grade level and *vice versa*. Educator C also shared similar sentiments when she highlighted that she gave learners DBE workbooks to do some tasks whilst teaching one grade level. Learners of different grades, ages and abilities were taught one theme simultaneously and assessed differently. For example, difficult questions directed to older and high grade doing learners; then the easy supporting questions would be directed to low grades and young learners. In that way all, especially the gifted students, benefit and for higher grades it is reinforcement and the low grades learn new things. This is what Educator D had to say in this regard:

I use the CAPS document to my own advantage, compare the two multi-grade levels, see what they will be doing in that week in each subject and then check the other grade level as well, if there is something more similar. Then I have to combine it and do one lesson, for example in a Mathematics subject if Grade 2 is doing addition and Grade 3 is also doing addition. I combine the lessons and make them one lesson. The only difference will

be the level of difficulty that is Grade 2 work can be the addition of two digit numbers and Grade 3 will be the addition of three digit numbers. If there was no integration because the topics differ I teach them separately because I cannot teach addition and subtraction at the same time, but it is time consuming. I sometimes teach two subjects a day in such a situation, one before break and one after break (Teacher D).

Principal B expressed a similar view and continued to add that teachers acted as facilitators and the classroom must be learner centred to develop independence to learners using self-discovery method so as to provide space for the teacher to focus on teaching one grade level whilst others are doing other tasks and this is what he stated:

One of the strategies is to be more prepared; thorough planning and implementing your plan, align topics that are common in those grade levels and teach them but bear in mind that the scope must be at the grade level of the learners. Eh it also requires that the classroom must be learner centred meaning a lot of work is done by learners which creates a sense of independence to the learners so that when you are dealing with or focusing on other learners, other learners have something to do. You act as a facilitator. The methodology used must encourage self-discovering and a lot of participation from the side of the learners (Principal B).

Agreeing with the strategies explained above, all participants acceded to the fact that as much as they used these strategies, they were time consuming. The issue of time has already been highlighted by Teacher B and Principal C. Additionally; this is what Principal C said:

We end up teaching similar topics simultaneously but ensuring that there is differentiation in the level of difficulty according to grade levels. We teach different topics separately but all in all we end up not doing justice because of the shortage of time to cover the work (Principal C).

The same sentiments were shared by Principal A about the strategy and its time consumption issue. This is what this participant had to say:

We plan and teach similar topics simultaneously and different topics separately. It is time consuming and we end up teaching few subjects than expected because of time and the large number of grade levels taught in one period (Principal A).

Participants stated above that they ended up teaching few subjects as expected which made it difficult to follow the time table. They taught according to learner pace. To mitigate that, they developed different time tables, one which is CAPS compliant for formality purposes but not followed and another personal one which each participant in the respective school followed. Remarking on this Teacher B said:

Let me tell you the truth, the time table you see there is just a display, it is not working at all, I follow my own personal time table ... (Teacher B).

Educator D converged with the other schools on the issue of having a personal time table but she further highlighted the fact that in her school they further rotated days because they specialise in subjects trying to bridge knowledge gap; hence two educators were responsible for teaching a MGT class of grade level five and six, and a single Grade 7 class. According to her on day one she teaches Grade 7 and the other teacher teaches Grade 5 and Grade 6 and *vice versa*. She agreed that not following the time table and rotating days was the best option they could do but despite all that, they further minimised periods of certain subjects, and rotated subjects they teach. They focused on what she called important subjects. Excerpts from Teacher D, Teacher B and Principal B have been inserted to highlight the strategies used by schools when dealing with the challenges they faced pertaining to work overload. **Refer to Chapter 4, Section 4.4.3.**

Participants were in agreement that doing administrative work in a school practicing MGT was somehow impossible and they resorted to using break times, afternoon times and also did it at their respective homes because they were engaged in teaching the entire day at school. They indicated that they always work beyond the call of duty and they did not have free time. Principal B articulated that view and was supported by Teacher B as follows:

I spend more time teaching because I am rushing to finish the syllabus and less time on administration because I can do it at home but I have no time of my own at home, even when I drink tea or watching television the papers of learners are there for marking from Monday to Sunday... I keep on doing administrative work and reading Grade 2 and

Grade 3 work from January to November. There is no free time if you practice MGT (Teacher B).

Principal A highlighted the fact that as much as she did administrative work at home but she sometimes used Physical Education and projects' time and instructed learners to do it on their own. She expressed fears for her safety while remaining alone after school with her car outside the gate because there were only two houses headed by females closer to the school. Strategies of relying on support staff and volunteers, combining similar topics in different grade levels and teaching them simultaneously as well as working beyond the call of duty were used.

4.5.4 Mitigating challenges raised by the language of learning and teaching and lack of content knowledge to educators

The LOLT was mentioned as a serious challenge that hindered effective teaching and learning especially when learners moved from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase. The school that encountered the biggest problem was School A because their Intermediate Phase was taught in a MGT class, meaning Grade Four starts a new LOLT in a MGT class. The school indicated that they struggled with LOLT till they reached Grade 7. The strategy they used was to code switch from English to IsiZulu to accommodate them. Teacher A had the following to say in this regard:

For Grade 4 I code switch from English to IsiZulu in Term 1 and Term 2. In Term 3 I try to make them talk English. I attend them more and I did not finish the curriculum for all grade levels (Teacher A).

To mitigate the lack of content knowledge in all the subjects School D engaged on subject specialisation as stated previously, and that is the opposite of what was obtaining in School A and School B. The only difference in School B is that they taught for one another in special aspects which the subject teachers could not. Principal B revealed this as follows:

We work as a team for example to bridge the gap of a lack of subject knowledge we come together in a meeting and each one declares that I am good in this subject may be in this

aspect then I can take sections in Mathematics or Language. We share the approach of tackling it or give those who are good to teach those aspects (Principal B).

Similar sentiments were shared by Principal A, who happened to be the only teacher who could teach Mathematics up to Grade 7 in the school. Teacher A highlighted that her principal could teach it in all grade levels but unfortunately, she did not have sufficient time to provide that kind of support. The following excerpt reveals it:...

We also work as a team. If a teacher encounters a problem we sit down and negotiate for example one teacher has a challenge in Mathematics, I leave my Grade 7 learners and teach for her (Principal A).

Code switching from one language to another seemed to be the only solution to ameliorate the LOLT barrier. Team work, teaching for one another those aspects that the subject teacher encountered a challenge on and subject specialisation were approaches used by participants to mitigate the lack of content knowledge.

4.6 Implications of multi-grade teaching for learner academic achievement

Participants were resolute that MGT had negative effects on learner academic achievement. The reasons for poor academic achievement put forward by the participants were that the syllabus could not be completed and there was no time for them to devote individual attention to the learners. This is in accord with the study conducted in Latin America and Bhutan that learners who study in schools practising MGT in class performed poor academically and they received poor education (McEwan, 2008; Joubert, 2010; Kucita, et al., 2013). Commenting on this issue, Principal C had this to say:

Learners do not get quality education; they do not finish the work they are supposed to finish in terms of syllabus. The quality of education they receive is inferior to that of schools practising mono-grade teaching. For example, few of them finish high school and go to tertiary education institutions to do professional qualifications. Learning in a MGT class has negative consequences to learners' education due to staff shortage and the

department must do away with Peter Morkel Norm when allocating educators (Principal C).

Similar sentiments came out from School B where participants agreed on the notion of negative consequences of MGT in learner academic achievement. However, these participants also had positive views about MGT to say that if teachers work hard beyond their call of duty the effects of the MGT environment can be mitigated and good academic achievement results. They made an example about their school where learners achieved excellently in internal tests as well as standardised tests like ANA. Evidence of what these participants were saying was also observed during document reviews in academic progression schedules where the schools' pass percentage ranges between 90% and 100% in three consecutive years as well as in ANA examination in both the language and Mathematics. The following excerpt highlighted this as follows:

In my class I try my best to give the learners the best possible education I can give to them. Even if they are writing standardised tests like ANA they get 70% and 80% which is what I try to achieve. ... When I look at our learners who go to high school and tertiary education ... our learners are doing very well due to the hard work of educators. All I can say is that MGT has a negative impact because it demands hard work by teachers; if teachers are not working very hard, the impact is bad in learners. We must always be present in class doing our work all the time. No struggling... no work and there is negative impact (Teacher B).

Echoing the above views, the Principal of School B went further to mention that MGT promoted self-reliance because of self-teaching. The clever ones do the work of higher grade and assist the others and this leads to reinforcement. He mentioned positive reports they received from high schools about learners that were in his school and that some performed better than learners that were in mono-grade teaching schools and some passed matric in bachelors and proceed to universities. He attributed this to hard work done by teachers, independence on the side of learners to do the work and reinforcement when they teach one another. This is supported by the views of Coskun, et al., (2011) when they assert that learners in MGT schools develop more self-confidence, leadership skills and self-concept compared to learners in mono-grade teaching schools because of its mixed age, group and grade level nature.

4.7 Chapter summary

Data generated through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations and documents reviews has been presented. The next chapter will be the summary, findings and recommendations.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the analysed data that was generated through semi-structured interviews, documents reviews and classroom observations. Being mindful of qualitative research designs, I presented evidence of my claims using relevant *verbatim* excerpts from the participants. Based on the data presentation thematically in Chapter Four, I now present the summary, findings and recommendations which might have a bearing on research and practice. Therefore, this chapter attempts to present the answers to the research questions posed in the first chapter, on ‘How principals and teachers enact instructional leadership within the context of multi-grade teaching’. The chapter is very short and directly speaks to the main issue of the study which is about how school principals and the teachers in multi-grade schools enact instructional leadership. Before the findings that speak directly to the theme of the chapter are presented, I thought it would be useful to provide an overview of the whole study.

5.2 Overview of the study

The study sought to understand the strategies that the principals and the teachers used in enacting instructional leadership within the context of MGT from their own vantage points. Chapter One elaborated the background to the study and other related aspects of the study as a whole and the chapter in particular. The second chapter reviewed on literature on multi-grade teaching and explained what it is and how it is implemented in various parts of the world. Review postulates that enacting instructional leadership within the context of MGT is fraught with challenges rather than opportunities, particularly in the context of South Africa. The review has also indicted that the existence of multi-grade teaching is experienced differently depending on whether you live in a developed economy or in a developing one.

Chapter Three has detailed the steps that I undertook in search of clues and evidence that would help me obtain answers to the questions posed in Chapter One. The fourth chapter provided an analysis and presentation of data that emerged from the analysis, which would ultimately lead us

to the findings. This chapter, which is the fifth and final chapter, attempts to paint a picture about how the school principals and the teaching staff within their schools enacted instructional leadership given the context of multi-grade teaching. The next section is dedicated to the presentation of findings and research questions that are used as a strategy to organise the discussion. Therefore, the research questions are first re-stated before they are used as sub-headings.

5.3 Research questions reiterated

In presenting the findings research questions have been restated and the degree to address each one of them has been contemplated when discussing each of them.

Main question:

- What are the experiences of principals and teachers of instructional leadership practices within the context of MGT?

Sub-Questions:

- How do school principals and teachers who practise MGT enact instructional leadership?
- What challenges (if any) do teachers and principals encounter when managing teaching and learning within the context of MGT?
- How do the teachers and principals overcome the challenges they face?
- What implications do MGT have on learner academic achievement?

5.4 Presentation of findings

Research questions are used to present findings because I believe they would enable me to extract clues from data to answer critical questions. It will also make it easier for me to assess if research questions have been adequately addressed or not.

5.4.1 What are the experiences of principals and teachers of instructional leadership practices within the context of multi-grade teaching?

Findings of the study seem to suggest that experiences of principals and teachers of instructional leadership practices within the context of MGT differ amongst individuals. Their experiences were largely characterised by frustration and feeling of neglect by the government authorities and policy makers. Without any fear of contradiction with what I have just mentioned above, I can also say that the picture was not overly gloomy as there were participants who, despite negativities that prevailed, still believed that something positive could result from MGT scenario. Those who held positive views based them on their experiences. They believed that MGT created education opportunities to many learners, and promoted learner independence and interdependence. For a detailed discussion on this matter, please read **Section 4.3.1 of Chapter Four**.

Those who held negative views experienced MGT as an abnormal, frustrating and an unavoidable nuisance. They attributed that to the absence of policy, lack of training, work overload demanded of them and believed that MGT yielded poor learner academic achievement. This is despite literature evidence which also paints a mixed picture, arguing that MGT does not necessarily equate poor learner academic achievement. De-motivation was observed during classroom observation that Teacher A was just teaching learners for the sake of doing it but the lack of interest was visible in her eyes, body and verbal discussion. **Section 4.4.3 of Chapter Four** presents a detailed discussion about how some teachers felt about MGT, particularly those who viewed it in negative light.

5.4.2 How do school principals and teachers who practise multi-grade teaching enact instructional leadership?

The findings which are succinctly discussed below indicate that school principals and teachers enacted instructional leadership within the context of MGT by engaging in a number of activities, and these included shaping the vision to achieve academic excellence to all learners;

creating an environment conducive to teaching and learning; cultivating leadership in others; improving instruction and managing people, data and processes.

This study has found that, from the perspectives of the participants, shaping the vision and admission of the schools was a fundamental component to achieving academic excellence to all learners. The motive behind shaping the vision was that it guides and direct stakeholders at school to be on track with whatever they have planned to achieve within a specified period of time. Various models of instructional leadership emphasise this aspect if schools are to move from their current situations to a better scenarios in the future. Stakeholder involvement in the construction of the school vision was also highlighted by all participants as another strategy that they used to enact instructional leadership in their context. For more details on this issue, please read **Section 4.3.1 and Section 4.3.3 of Chapter Four**.

Another strategy through which principals and teachers enacted instructional leadership was the creation of an environment that is conducive to effective teaching and learning. The issue of enabling others to practice leadership was another way in which they enacted instructional leadership. **Section 4.3.2 and Section 4.3.3 of Chapter Four** provide detailed discussion of this matter. The notion of improving instruction lies at the heart of why schools exist in the first place. This aspect was found to be very strong in the researched schools as well. The issue of managing people is very important as no organisation can exist without people. It is, therefore, important that such a resource is well looked after. Similarly, all organisations set up system through which they can operate. A detailed discussion of these two issues can be found in **Section 4.3.4 and Section 4 3.5 of Chapter Four**.

5.4.3 What challenges (if any) do teachers and principals encounter when managing teaching and learning within the context of multi-grade teaching?

In the context of South Africa, the mere existence of MGT is rooted in challenges. The review of literature has indicated that MGT occurs where there is sparse population or the learner enrolment is dwindling due to migration. Such migration is largely due to both push and pulls factors. In the context of South Africa and the communities where the study was conducted,

there were more pull factors than push factors. Job opportunities in urban areas contribute more to the migration. Among push factors are living conditions in rural areas that are characterised by the dearth of basic infrastructure and various amenities highlighted in the first and second chapter. Therefore, the findings indicate that there were numerous challenges that faced the school principals and the teachers. These ranged from a complete absence of policy on MGT to the lack of support from the officials of the Department of Basic Education. Due to the seriousness and intensity of the feelings surrounding the challenges, many participants became emotional when talking about the challenges that confronted them when practising instructional leadership within the context of MGT. Words such as ‘abnormal situation’, ‘boring’ and ‘the department does not care about us’ kept coming when referring to MGT. The main challenges that they encountered when performing their duties were the lack of policy on MGT, the lack of training on MGT, work overload and the inability to cover it due to time constraint, language of learning and teaching and lack of content knowledge as a barrier as well as emotional aspects of both learners and educators. For more details on these issues, please refer to **Section 4.4.2 of Chapter Four**.

Another finding was that although the participants were largely well-qualified as teachers in terms of qualification structure in the country, all of them were not specifically trained to deal with issues relating to MGT. Unlike other countries such as Bhutan, there is no provision in the teacher qualifications for MGT. The issue of overload is the direct result of one teacher teaching many grades simultaneously and unless the government, through its Department of Basic Education attend to this situation nothing is going to change. What is becoming clear is that the Department of Basic Education is turning a blind eye towards the appalling situation in MGT schools, particularly in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. When the Department of Basic Education makes plans to train and/or upgrade the qualifications of its teaching corps, they hardly ever pay any attention to the needs and plights of MGT schools. Therefore, it appears that for the foreseeable future, there is no plan to alleviate the situation. A detailed discussion on these issues can be found in **Section 4.4.3 of Chapter Four**.

5.4.4 How do the teachers and principals overcome the challenges they face?

The findings indicate that MGT schools used various strategies to overcome the challenges they faced. Such strategies included the principals mobilising some resources, and motivating the

teachers to work hard and to stick to the school vision and mission. Emphasising time on task was one critical issue that principals as instructional leaders engaged in. In addition, school principals monitored the work of the teachers and they provide feedback through meetings, workshops and using communication book as well to capacitate them. To a limited extent, Subject Advisors also supported schools with regards to content to be taught in each grade level, although the methodologies they advocated did not suite MGT schools. Strategies used by the principals and the teachers to mitigate work overload and the inability to cover it due to time constraints are discussed in **Chapter Four, Section 4.5.3**. Data shows that schools depended largely on the assistance of support staff, like Teaching Assistants and Volunteers to teach certain grade levels full time to decrease workload and reduce staff shortage. Although there was a good story that came through in one school regarding high levels of academic achievement, that cannot be regarded as the change of fortunes of these schools. Nevertheless, it indicates that MGT in rural primary schools cannot and should not be equated with mediocrity despite enormous challenges faced by leadership in such schools.

5.5 What implications do multi-grade teaching have on learner academic achievement?

The findings of this study paint a gloomy picture about MGT and learner achievement. In fact, there was a broad agreement among the participants that MGT was disastrous in terms of learner academic achievement. Findings presented in **Chapter 4 Section 4.5** accentuated that MGT has negative consequences on learner academic achievement except developing independence on them. They associated negative implications in learner academic achievement to non-completed syllabus and the lack of time for individualisation to both the gifted as well as slow learners. Chances of being taught and learn to achieve to their maximum capability were slim for them because of work overload and the lack of time. Notwithstanding, I must also say that there was an isolated incident where in one school (School B) there were improvements in the learner academic achievement. The school even received positive feedback from neighbouring high schools about their learners that they performed excellently. They attributed their good learner academic achievement to hard work by educators. Evidence was shown that learners achieve excellently in internal tests as well as standardised tests like ANA where the pass rates ranged between 80% and 100%.

5.6 Lessons for further research and practice

It has been highlighted in this study that the lives of people who work in the conditions of multi-grade teaching schools is relatively new in South Africa although the phenomenon is not necessarily new. It is therefore imperative that various dimensions of life in these conditions need to be understood. In particular, there is a need for a study that attempts to understand how successful schools that practise MGT have achieved it and how they maintain such high levels of achievement. In a nutshell, a study on a successful Multi-Grade Teaching school or on a number of successful Multi-Grade Teaching schools should be conducted. Such a study might shed new lights about how such schools have made it to where they are, and what keeps them going despite inherent difficulties. From a research of that kind we might draw lessons about teaching strategies and perhaps how they mobilise resources of various types. Evidently, from such a study we might draw substantive issues relating to good practices.

Besides research on successful MGT schools, there is another need to conduct a quantitative study on MGT whose findings will be generalisable across the whole population. Various dimensions of Multi-Grade Teaching might be targeted and the findings will be useful for policy makers. I am saying this because the tendency among policy makers and officials who manage various departments of government, including education is that of thinking in terms of the whole system and not just about small scale studies. Therefore, a large scale study of Multi-Grade Teaching schooling is opportune.

5.7 Chapter summary

The Chapter has presented the findings emanating from what emerged in the data analysis of the study. The discussion of the strategies employed by the principals and the teachers, as part of their instructional leadership practices, has provided some insights about multi-grade teaching. There are lessons to be learned from such experiences and hopefully, practices from other countries that experience the same phenomenon will enable researchers and policy makers alike to seriously review MGT. At the moment, it does not appear as if the officials of the department pay any particular attention to this phenomenon. Lessons for further research have been

highlighted and these point to the need for both a qualitative and quantitative study. The qualitative one would unearth nuanced insights about what works in multi-grade schooling.

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Appendix 1 Letter requesting permission from the principal

72 Bell tower Road

Nagina

Pinetown

3610

8 December 2015

The Principal

Sample School

Dear Sir/Madam

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT YOUR SCHOOL

I am Miss A. N. Gasa (student number 211552912). I write this letter to request permission to conduct research at your school. Currently I am enrolled as a Masters of Education student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Edgewood Campus), specialising in Educational Leadership, Management and Policy. As part of the Masters degree, I am required to conduct research.

The topic of my research is: **EXPLORING INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF MULTI-GRADE TEACHING: EXPERIENCES OF PRINCIPALS AND TEACHERS**

The confidentiality of participants will be protected. In this regard, pseudonyms will be used instead of school and participants names. Participation will always be voluntary, meaning withdrawal can be done at any time without any harm.

You may contact my Supervisor or me should you have any queries.

Supervisor is Dr T.T. Bhengu

Telephone 031-2603534

Cellular phone number 0839475321

e-mail: bhengutt@ukzn.ac.za

My contact number is 0823556839

e-mail: neliey1@yahoo.com

Your positive response in this regard will be highly appreciated.

Thanking you in anticipation

Yours faithfully

A. N. Gasa (Miss)

.....DETACH AND RETURN.....

CONSENT FORM

I,..... (full names of participant) hereby confirm that I have been informed and I am fully aware about the purpose of the study: **EXPLORING INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF MULTI-GRADE TEACHING: EXPERIENCES OF PRINCIPALS AND TEACHERS**, its nature and procedures that will be followed. I consent to participate in the study. I understand that I can withdraw at any time from the research should I so wish.

Signature of educator

Date

.....

Thanking you in advance

A. N. Gasa (Miss)

Appendix 2 Letter requesting permission from the principal/teacher

72 Bell tower Road

Nagina

Pinetown

3610

8 December 2015

Dear Sir/Madam

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH

I am currently a Masters student in Education Leadership, Management and Policy at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Edgewood Campus. At present I am engaged in a research study which aims to explore how principals and teachers working in the context of multi-grade teaching experience instructional leadership. The topic of my research is: **EXPLORING INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF MULTI-GRADE TEACHING: EXPERIENCES OF PRINCIPALS AND TEACHERS.**

Anonymity will be observed in accordance with the code of ethics as stipulated by the University of KwaZulu-Natal. I undertake to uphold your autonomy as the participant and you will be free to withdraw at any time without harm. You will be asked to complete a consent form. Should you be interested on feedback, you will be given during and at the end of the study.

You are free to contact my supervisor or myself should you have any queries.

Supervisor is Dr T.T. Bhengu

Telephone 031-2603534

Cell 0839475321

e-mail: bhengutt@ukzn.ac.za

My contact number is 0823556839

e-mail: neliey1@yahoo.com

Thanking you in anticipation

Yours sincerely

A. N. Gasa (Miss)

.....DETACH AND RETURN.....

CONSENT FORM

I,..... (full names of participant) hereby confirm that I have been informed and I am fully aware about the purpose of the study: **EXPLORING INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF MULTI-GRADE TEACHING: EXPERIENCES OF PRINCIPALS AND TEACHERS.**, its nature and procedures that will be followed. I consent to participate in the study. I understand that I can withdraw at any time from the research should I so wish.

Signature of educator

Date

.....

Thanking you in advance

A. N. Gasa (Miss)

Appendix 3 Letter to DBE requesting permission to conduct research in KZN schools

72 Bell tower Road

Nagina

Pinetown

3610

8 December 2015

Attention: The Superintendent-General (Dr N.S.P. Sishi)

Department of Basic Education

Province of KwaZulu-Natal

Private bag x9137

Pietermaritzburg

3201

Dear Sir

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

My name is Abigail Nelisiwe Gasa, a Masters student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Edgewood Campus), specialising in Educational Leadership, Management and Policy. As part of the Masters degree I am required to conduct research. I therefore seek permission to conduct research in four Primary Schools under your jurisdiction in Pinetown District. The schools are Primary schools.

The topic of my research is: **EXPLORING INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF MULTI-GRADE TEACHING: EXPERIENCES OF PRINCIPALS AND TEACHERS.**

This study aims to explore how principals and teachers working in the context of multi-grade teaching experience instructional leadership. The results of the study could provide insights

about how schools that practise within multi-grade teaching context operate but are expected to implement curriculum designed for schools practising mono-grade teaching. Strategies used might be useful to the department of basic education officials in understanding in-depth the experiences and challenges facing these schools. Participants will be principals and teachers in the purposive selected schools. Semi-structured interviews that will last approximately 45-60 minutes will be used at a convenient time for participants to avoid interrupting teaching time. Interviews will be voice recorded.

In analysing data, responses will be treated with confidentiality. Pseudonyms will be used instead of school and participants names. Participation will always be voluntary, meaning withdrawal can be done at any time without any harm.

You may contact my Supervisor.

Supervisor is Dr T.T. Bhengu

Telephone 031-2603534

Cell 0839475321

e-mail: bhengutt@ukzn.ac.za

My contact number is 0823556839

e-mail: neliey1@yahoo.com

Your positive response in this regard will be highly appreciated.

Thanking you in anticipation

Yours sincerely

A. N. Gasa (Miss)

Appendix 4 Interview Schedule for principals

***NB:** The following questions will guide my discussion with principals and teachers. Probes and follow up questions will be posed depending on their responses.*

What are your experiences of instructional leadership practices within the context of multi-grade teaching?

1. Tell me about the duties you perform at school? (probe) Why do you think these duties assist you in the work you are doing?
2. How do you conduct teaching in a class that practice multi-grade teaching? (probe) What do you do to maintain a balance in teaching amongst different grade levels in a class that practice multi-grade teaching? (further probe) How much time do you spend on teaching and how much on administrative management duties? When do you do management duties?
3. What assist you to improve instruction in a school that practice multi-grade teaching? (probe) What is your understanding of instructional leadership?
4. Does your school have a school vision? (probe) If yes, how do you shape it to achieve academic excellence for all learners in your school?
5. How do you create an environment conducive to teaching and learning in a school that practice multi-grade teaching in class?
6. How do you manage learners, data and processes in a school that practice multi-grade teaching?
7. What challenges (if any) do you encounter when managing teaching and learning within the context of multi-grade teaching?
8. How do you overcome the challenges you face?
9. What implications do multi-grade teaching have on learner academic achievement?
10. Is there anything that you wish to say that I may not have asked you?

Thank you very much for your participation and spending time with me which you would have used for other things of utmost importance for you.

Appendix 5 Interview Schedule for teachers

What are your experiences of instructional leadership practices within the context of multi-grade teaching?

1. Tell me about the duties you perform at school? (probe) Why do you think these duties assist you in the work you are doing?
2. How do you conduct teaching in a class that practice multi-grade teaching? (probe) What do you do to maintain a balance in teaching amongst different grade levels in a class that practice multi-grade teaching? (further probe) How much time do you spend on teaching and how much on administrative management duties? When do you do management duties?
3. What assist you to improve instruction in a class that practice multi-grade teaching?
4. Does your school have a school vision? (probe) If yes, how do you shape it to achieve academic excellence for all learners in your class?
5. How do you create an environment conducive to teaching and learning in a class that practice multi-grade teaching?
6. Do you get any instruction from your principal? (probe) Do you consider him / her as an instructional leader (if yes) how and if no why not? (further probe) What is your understanding of instructional leadership?
7. How do you manage learners, data and processes in a class that practice multi-grade teaching?
8. What challenges (if any) do you encounter when managing teaching and learning within the context of multi-grade teaching? (Probe) what do you think is the reason?
9. How do you overcome the challenges you face?
10. What implications do multi-grade teaching have on learner academic achievement?
11. Is there anything that you wish to say that I may not have asked you?

Thank you very much for your participation and spending time with me which you would have used for other things of utmost importance for you.



education

Department:
Education
PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

Enquiries: Phindile Duma

Tel: 033 392 1004

Ref.:2/4/8/792

Miss AN Gasia
72 Bell-Tower Road
Nagina
Pinetown
3610

Dear Miss Gasia

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: "EXPLORING INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF MULTI-GRADE TEACHING: EXPERIENCES OF PRINCIPALS AND TEACHERS IN FOUR PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN KWAZULU-NATAL", in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education Institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from 03 May 2016 to 30 June 2017.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Miss Connie Kehologile at the contact numbers below
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report / dissertation / thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Office of the HOD, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education.

Pinetown District

Adv. MB Masuku
Acting Head of Department: Education
Date: 19 May 2016

KWAZULU-NATAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

POSTAL: Private Bag X 9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200, KwaZulu-Natal, Republic of South Africa
PHYSICAL: 247 Burger Street, Anton Lembede House, Pietermaritzburg, 3201. Tel. 033 392 1004
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CALL CENTRE: 0860 596 363; Fax: 033 392 1203 WEBSITE: www.kzneducation.gov.za

Originality GradeMark PeerMark

Exploring Instructional leadership practices within the context of multi-grade teaching

BY NELISIWE GASA

craftwork and vegetables they plant in their small gardens. The study will be conducted in 2016, in four primary schools, namely School A, School B, School C and School D for anonymity purposes. It will last for two days in each school.

1.8 The structure of the study

Chapter One

This chapter provided the background, purpose of the study, rationale and motivation for the study. Research questions are outlined. I concluded the chapter by providing the layout or structure of the study.

Chapter Two

Chapter two is a review of local, national and international literature as well as reports and presentations of some scholars on instructional leadership and MGT. The theoretical framework informing the study is explained in details.

Chapter Three

This chapter unpacks the research paradigm, design and methodology used in conducting the study. Processes followed prior and during data generation like ethical considerations, participant sampling, site selection, research instruments and trustworthiness are elaborated on in detail. Limitations to the study are also indicated.

Chapter Four

Chapter four begins by giving an overview of the targeted sites I visited and use as research sites as well as the community they serve. Data relevant to research questions is discussed and the spoken words of participants are transcribed verbatim. Themes that emerge after data generation and analysis are presented and discussed. Findings on the study topic are presented.

Chapter Five

This chapter presents the findings, recommendations to indicated experiences on the topic and conclusion.

